Writing and (not) reading the Torah (and contrasting texts) in the Book of Isaiah

Archibald LHM van Wieringen
Tilburg University, The Netherlands

Abstract
On the basis of Edgar Conrad’s pioneering exegesis of the intra-textual function of the expression סֵפֶר הַתּוֹרָה and similar expressions in the Pentateuch, published in the Journal for the Study of the Old Testament 25 years ago this year, I will examine the intra-textual function of the written product, called תּוֹרָה, in the Book of Isaiah. Striking similarities can be found between the two intra-textual functions. The textual presence of תּוֹרָה in the Book of Isaiah highlights a semantic structure throughout the book. Moreover, the prophetic תּוֹרָה appears to be connected to the King character in a similar way to how the King is related to the Torah in the Pentateuch. However, the Book of Isaiah also contains two elaborations. The activity of reading (and not reading) is added to the activity of writing the intra-textual document. Furthermore, the Book of Isaiah contains a number of contrasting written products.

Keywords
Edgar Conrad, intra-textual exegesis, text-immanent reader, the Book of Isaiah, the Book of the Torah

1. Introduction
It is 25 years ago this year that Edgar Conrad (1942–2017) published his epoch-making article Heard But Not Seen: The Representation of ‘Books’ in the Old Testament.1 In this article, he discussed the intra-textual function of the phrase ספר התורה the book of the torah and similar expressions in the Pentateuch and the Books of Joshua, Samuel and Kings.

1. Edgar W. Conrad, ‘Heard But Not Seen: The Representation of ‘Books’ in the Old Testament’, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, 54 (1992), pp. 45-59. Cf. also Edgar W. Conrad, ‘Reading Isaiah and the Twelve as Prophetic Books’, in C.G. Broyles and C.A. Evans (eds.), Writing and Reading the Scroll of Isaiah: Studies of an Interpretive Tradition (VT.S 70/1; 1997), pp. 3-17.

Corresponding author:
Archibald LHM van Wieringen, Tilburg School of Catholic Theology, Tilburg University, PO Box 80101, 3508 TC Utrecht, The Netherlands.
Email: A.L.H.M.vanWieringen@TilburgUniversity.edu
This expression is used consistently from a synchronic perspective. The character Moses starts writing סֵפֶר הַתּוֹרָה the book of the torah in Ex 24.7. This writing activity is continued by the character Joshua in Josh 24.26, when the people once again confirm their loyalty to the content of the written product, but this time in the promised land. After Joshua, the text-immanent reader of the Enneateuch is no longer given any information about writing activity regarding סֵפֶר הַתּוֹרָה the book of the torah.

The result of this writing activity, the written product סֵפֶר הַתּוֹרָה the book of the torah, primarily functions as רֵע a testimony to the people, and especially to the King, for whom the text is crucial. This is why in Dt 31.26, Moses places סֵפֶר הַתּוֹרָה the book of the torah beside the Ark of the Covenant. Joshua does more or less the same during the renewal of the covenant at Shechem in Josh 24.

According to Dt 17.18, the King must have מִשְׁנֵה־הַתּוֹרָה a copy of the book of the torah, so he can easily consult all the prescriptions of the torah. However, סֵפֶר הַתּוֹרָה the book of the torah disappears from the text of the Enneateuch. The characters in the text have no knowledge of it any longer. Of course, the text-immanent reader is aware that the written product of סֵפֶר הַתּוֹרָה the book of the torah has been lost and knows that it must be somewhere. The first hint is given in 2 Ki 14.6. The character King Amaziah, one of the few good kings, acts rightly, that is, in accordance with the prescriptions found in סֵפֶר הַתּוֹרָה the book of the torah, albeit without knowing this himself. 2 Ki 14.6 quotes the prescription according to which King Amaziah acts unconsciously. The quotation from Dt 24.16 is therefore intended primarily for the text-immanent reader and is a preparation for the narration about King Josiah in chapter 22, where סֵפֶר הַתּוֹרָה the book of the torah is found in the temple. Where else could it have been, given that it was kept beside the Ark of the Covenant, which was also preserved in the temple? Now that סֵפֶר הַתּוֹרָה the book of the torah has been found, the King can consult it again. With the help of the prophetess Huldah, King Josiah is able to implement the prescriptions of סֵפֶר הַתּוֹרָה the book of the torah. In 2 Ki 23.22, the text-immanent author remarks therefore that the feast of Pascha had not been celebrated properly since the days of Joshua.

2. Written products in the Book of Isaiah: an overview

If we consider that the intra-textual role of a written product called תּוֹרָה torah is essential for the Pentateuch (and the Enneateuch) and study the Book of Isaiah from this perspective, we find a number of striking similarities:

- A (prophetic) written product called תּוֹרָה3 plays a role in the Book of Isaiah.
- In the Book of Isaiah, this written product is connected to the behaviour of the King.

2. In my view, Conrad could have elaborated upon this idea of the intra-textual function of סֵפֶר הַתּוֹרָה the book of the torah by also including the Book of Nehemiah. Сֵפֶר הַתּוֹרָה the book of the torah is mentioned several times in Nehemiah; in 8.18; 13.1 even in relation to Moses. The text-immanent author’s remark in Neh 8.17 that the liturgy had not been celebrated properly since the days of Joshua emphasises the continuity of keeping the prescriptions in סֵפֶר הַתּוֹרָה the book of the torah.

3. See also: Ronald E. Clements, ‘The Meaning of תּוֹרָה in Isaiah 1-39’, in J.G. McConville and K. Möller (eds.), Reading the Law (The Library of Hebrew Bible and Old Testament Studies 461; 2007), pp. 59-71, here 71; Christopher J. Fantuzzo, Torah in Servant-Form:
The Book of Isaiah furthermore contains two elaborations:

- To the activity of writing is added that of (not) reading.
- There are a number of minor written products, and some of them stand in contrast to the prophetic written product of תורת.

The presence of the activity of writing and (not) reading in the two main parts of the Book of Isaiah, the chapters 1-39 and 40-66, can be represented schematically as follows:

Isaiah 1-39

- A 4.3 divine activity of writing
- B 8.1-23b prophetic activity of writing as torah
- C 29.11-12 absence of the activity of reading
- B’ 30.8-11 prophetic activity of writing as torah
- C’ 34.16 absence of the activity of reading
- D and other written products: 37.14 ↔ 38.9 ↔ 39.1

Isaiah 40-56

- C” 44.5 presence of writing
- D’ and other written products: 49.16 ↔ 50.1
- B” 51.4,7 prophetic presence as torah
- A’ 65.6 divine activity of writing

These elements will be discussed in greater detail in the following sections.

3. The A and A’ element in Isaiah 1-66: the divine activity of writing

The first writing activity to be mentioned in the Book of Isaiah occurs in 4.3 and the last in 65.6. In 65.6, the Lord’s answer to his oppressed Servants contains the clause: ‘behold, it is כְתוּבָה written before me’. God apparently uses a written text טוּב to punish the enemies of his Servants and to justify his Servants. Where did this written text come from at the very end of the Book of Isaiah? Within the Book of Isaiah, this text alludes to 4.3. In this passage, the Lord records כל הכתוב among the living כָּל־הַכָּתוּב all that was written down in relation to the coming great purification of Zion. The people whose names were written down are the people who have escaped, the people who will remain, and the remnant that
will be called holy. In this way, the Book of Isaiah establishes a connection between the primacy of the act of writing and the fulfilment of what was written, on one hand, and the character of God, on the other.6

Neither 4.3 nor 65.6 mentions which written product is at issue.7 However, the combination of חַיִּים life and כּתב to write evokes the association with תורה torah.8 This association makes sense in the broader context of the chapters 2-5, which are preceded by the introduction in chapter 1. This introduction already contains an appeal in verse 10 to lend an ear to the torah of our God. Who will head this call? The shelter of Zion (1.8; 4.6).9 Only then can can the torah issue from Zion (2.3). Subsequently 5.24 deals with the opposite of life: decay and destruction become manifest whenever people dismiss the torah of the Lord.

4. The B and B’ element in Isaiah 1-39: the prophetic activity of writing as torah

Within this framework of texts written by the character God (the A element in the scheme above), other texts are written by other characters, first of all by the character of the prophet. Two passages are important here: 8.1-23b and 30.8-11 (the B elements in the scheme). These two instances of the prophetic activity of writing form a contrast with the misbehaviour of the people who act against the torah.

In 8.1, the character Isaiah writes as a prophet at God’s behest. This writing consists of a short, threatening text: יָרְשׁ בֶּן quick robbery. Because this text must attract the attention of all, it has to be written on a large tablet in a script that is legible to everyone.10 Thus, reading the text that must be read does not pose any problems. Moreover, God, the initiator of this instance of writing, procures two reliable witnesses to emphasise the importance of the text.11 The presence of these two witnesses is in accordance with the rules of the Pentateuch (Torah) that require at least two witnesses in trials involving life and death (see: Num 35.30; Dt 17.6; 19.15).

The narrative takes a tragic turn however, rendering the question of how the text must be read redundant: in fact, the text is not read at all. No one is mentioned in the narration

---

6. Cf. also: Jean-Pierre Sonnet, The Book within the Book: Writing in Deuteronomy (Biblical Interpretation Series 14; 1997), p. 262.

7. Based on texts from the biblical Umwelt, Shalom M. Paul, ‘Heavenly Tablets and the Book of Life’, in S.M. Paul, Divrei Shalom: Collected Studies of Shalom M. Paul on the Bible and the ancient Near East, 1967-2005 (Culture and history of the ancient Near East 23; 2005), pp. 59-70, here 61-62 interprets the texts 4.3; 34.16-17; 65.6 from the Book of Isaiah as examples of divine bookkeeping, without discussing their intra-textual relation.

8. Cf. Irmtraud Fischer, Tora für Israel—Tora für die Völker: Das Konzept des Jesajabuches (SBS 164; 1995), pp. 15 and 117 and, concerning 4.3, especially pp. 29-30, concerning 65.6, especially p. 52. Cf. also: Joseph Blenkinsopp, Opening the Sealed Book: Interpretations of the Book of Isaiah in Late Antiquity (2006), p. 4, although without mentioning the torah/Torah.

9. Cf. also: Francis Landy, ‘Torah and Anti-Torah: Isaiah 2:2-4 and 1:10-26’, Biblical Interpretation, 11 (2003), pp. 317-34, here 323-24.

10. See also: Archibald L.H.M. van Wieringen, The Implied Reader in Isaiah 6-12 (Biblical Interpretation Series 34; 1998), p. 94.

11. See: van Wieringen, Isaiah 6-12, especially p. 118. See also: H.G.M. Williamson, The Book Called Isaiah: Deutero-Isaiah’s Role in Composition and Redaction (1994), p. 96.
as reading the written text. The precise whereabouts of this tablet with the text in the Book of Isaiah are only revealed indirectly. After the command to write the text, and the absence of any reading of the text, Isaiah is commanded in verse 16 to seal the testimony and God’s teaching among God’s pupils.12

Because verse 16 is part of the direct speech which starts in verse 12,13 the pupils mentioned in verse 16 are not Isaiah’s disciples but God’s pupils. In other words, verse 16 is not about whether Isaiah acquires any followers (a so-called Jesaja Schule),14 but declares instead that God and his (written) message should have pupils.

God orders the prophet Isaiah to preserve something that is worth reading, but the people refuse to live by it or even read or consult (הָדַר) it. The prophet discusses this contrast between God’s written message and the people’s behaviour in a hypothetical dialogue between God’s pupils and the people.15 In this hypothetical dialogue, the clauses become increasingly short in order to express the emotional charge of the contrast between consulting the spirits of the dead and consulting God’s written message.

The dense text of verses 19-20a can therefore best be rendered as follows:

(The prophet Isaiah to God’s pupils:)

“And really, if they say to you: ‘Consult the forefathers and the mediums who lisp and whisper’, [then you should say to them:] ‘Should not a people consult his God?’; [but if they say:] ‘In favour of the living [one should consult] the dead!’; [you should say:] ‘[No, you should consult God] according to הָדַר the teaching and according to התוּדָה the testimony’.”

The words הָדַר and התוּדָה point to a twofold connection. On one hand, a connection is established with the rules in the Pentateuch that forbid the consulting of mediums and of the dead (see: Lv 19.31; 20.6; Dt 18.9-15). On the other hand, these words are a repetition of verse 16. The pupils must answer and act according to both the Torah (Pentateuch) and the prophetic torah, which essentially contain the same message.

It is on account of the people’s behaviour, which is diametrically opposed to the prophetic torah, that it is necessary to engage in the activity of writing, so that God’s message can be preserved for the future. In this manner, the prophetic torah is a witness against the people in the same way that the written book of the torah in the Pentateuch is a witness against the people.

Although chapter 8 focuses on the people who make the wrong decisions (הָעָם הַזֶּה this people in verse 6), the misbehaviour starts with the King in 7.1-17. The parallelism between the child in 7.14-15 and the child in 8.3-4, on one hand, and each child’s attitude to the pending threat from Assur, on the other hand, shows that the King is also implicated in not reading the written product. This alludes to the relationship between

12. See: van Wieringen, Isaiah 6-12, pp. 112-13.
13. See also: van Wieringen, Isaiah 6-12, pp. 95-99. Pace among others: Jaap Dekker, ‘Bind up the testimony: Isaiah 8:16 and the Making of the Hebrew Bible’, in R. de Hoop, M. Korpel and S. Porter (eds.), The Impact of Unit Delimitation on Exegesis (Pericope 7; 2009), pp. 63-88, here 66-68.
14. For this criticism see also: Patricia K. Tull, Isaiah 1-39 (Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary; 2010), p. 185.
15. Concerning the idea of a hypothetical dialogue in these verses, see also: Adam S. van der Woude, ‘Jesaja 8,19-23a als literarische Einheit’, in J. van Ruiten and M. Vervenne (eds.), Studies in the Book of Isaiah (BETHL 132; 1997), pp. 129-36, here 130.
the King and the torah mentioned in Dt 17.18-19, which mentioned the King’s key role in the reading of the torah and his duty to act accordingly.

A similar event occurs in 30.8-11.16 The writing has the purpose of preserving God’s prophecies for the future, when the text-internal audience that refuses to hear the torah will have been replaced by a different audience.17 The writing is performed before them (verse 8). The antecedent of the suffix third person plural masculine is mentioned in verse 1: the rebellious sons, who are making plans that do not come from God (confer the root עֵצָה which is also used for the enemies in 7.5-6). The expression rebellious sons is repeated with the synonym lying sons in verse 9, explained there as the people who refuse to listen to the torah. This torah is connected in verse 10 to people who see and to seers, meaning that the reference is once again to the prophetic torah (cf. also: 29.10).18 The future generation is connected to the temporal phrase לְיוֹם אַחֲרוֹן for the latter day in verse 8. The combination of the word אַחֲרוֹן and the noun יוֹם alludes to the temporal adjunct בְּאַחֲרִית הַיָּמִים the day beyond the days in 2.2, which is projected beyond the confines of the Book of Isaiah.19 This means that the future generation of 30.8 can also be understood as also lying beyond the scope of the Book of Isaiah. The text-immanent reader could also be involved in this way.

5. The C and C′ element in Isaiah 1-39: the absence of the activity of reading

To the activity of writing in the B elements is added the contrasting activity of (not) reading in the C elements. The writing as such raises the question of reading. This issue is discussed in two passages: 29.11-12 and 34.16.

In 29.11-12, reading and not reading are mutually opposed to each other.20 The Lord’s words are like a sealed book. It can be given to someone with the command that he should read it, but he will answer that he cannot do so, because it is sealed (verse 11). In one way, this reaction makes sense, but it can also be understood as an excuse to avoid having to read it.

The figurative language is continued in verse 12. There is a climax: the book is given to someone who is commanded to read it, but he answers that he cannot read. The issue is no longer whether the book is sealed (or not), but the fact that the addressee is illiterate. This relegates any prospect of reading to the realm of the impossible.21

---

16. For the relation between 30.8-14 and 8.16-22 see also: Christopher R. Seitz, Isaiah 1-39 (Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching; 1993), p. 218; Tull, Isaiah 1-39, p. 455.

17. See also: Blenkinsopp, Sealed Book, p. 13. Cf. I.W. Slotki, Isaiah: Hebrew Text & English Translation with an Introduction and Commentary (SBBS; 1949), p. 141; Marvin A. Sweeney, Isaiah 1-39 with an introduction to prophetic literature (FOTL 16; 1996), p. 394.

18. See also: Willem A.M. Beuken, ‘What does the vision hold: teachers or one teacher? Punning repetition in Isaiah 30:20’, Heythrop Journal, 36 (1995) pp. 451-66, here 457-60; Ulrich Berges, Das Buch Jesaja: Komposition und Endgestalt (HBS 16; 1998) p. 228.

19. See also: van Wieringen, Book Isaiah, p. 73; A.L.H.M. van Wieringen, ‘Reading Towards The Future In The Book Of Isaiah: The beyond the days (Isa 2,2) and the days of the Kings’, Gregorianum, 98 (2017), pp. 223-36.

20. See especially: Blenkinsopp, Sealed Book, pp. 8-11.

21. Cf. Slotki, Isaiah, p. 136.
What book does this verse refer to? Because of the repetition of the verb חתם to seal, it may be assumed that the ‘book’ refers to the תְּעוּדָה testimony and the תּוֹרָה torah, which Isaiah sealed for preservation in 8.16. The fact that it is sealed, therefore, is no impediment to the reading of the text, but rather functions as a way of preserving the content of the writing. The preservation of the testimony of the torah goes hand in hand with the preservation of Jerusalem.

The written tablet is also reinterpreted in these verses. The sealed written text is connected with the חיה vision. This word alludes to the noun חיה vision, which occurs in the superscription at the very beginning of the Book of Isaiah in 1.1 and, moreover, connects the verb חיה in 1.1 with the superscriptions in 2.1 and 13.1. For the text-immanent reader, the Book of Isaiah thus itself becomes equivalent, as it were, to the תְּעוּדָה testimony and the תּוֹרָה torah.

In 29.18 we find the image of the blind and the deaf who are given access to the words of the book, as a counterpart to those who refuse to read. The deaf will hear the words and the blind will open their eyes, so that they will be able to read.

In 34.16, the importance of reading the Lord’s book is emphasised once again. The book gives proof of the rightness of God’s words, a rightness that is accessible to everyone, on condition that they are willing to search (דר) for the correct text in the book.

The imperative רָאִישו look up! search! is important in 34.16, where it forms a contrast with the same imperative in 8.19. Who is the addressee? Seen from the perspective of verse 17, it is clear that it is the people who live in the land that was promised and given by the Lord, that is, the people that lives there for ever. The two adjuncts עַד־עוֹלָם for eternity and מִלְיָהְוָדוֹר from generation to generation open a perspective onto the future, probably a future in which the text-immanent reader is included. From this point of view, it is also possible to regard the text-immanent reader as the addressee of the imperative רָאִישו search!: whoever is able to find the correct text in the prophetic book and to read it will be assured of a lasting future in the land.

6. The D element in Isaiah 1-39: other written products

Following the alternation of the B and C elements about writing and (not) reading, chapters 1-39 conclude with a D element. This D element has two important aspects: it contains a number of written products and it brings the tendency of addressing the text-immanent reader to its completion. In this way, the D element forms the climax of the theme of writing and reading.

Three written texts are mentioned in the narrative chapters 36-39: two סְפָרִים letters, one by the King of Assur in 37.14 and one by the King of Babel in 39.1, and one writing by King Hezekiah in 38.10-20.

The סְפָרִים letters by the King of Assur in 37.14 boastingly try to force Jerusalem to its knees. Hezekiah, King of Jerusalem, not only reads the text but also opens it before the

---

22. See also: Tull, Isaiah 1-39, p. 442. Cf. also: Fischer, Tora, p. 46. Willem A.M. Beuken, Jesaja 28-39 (HThKAT; 2010), p. 121 interprets the verses 11-12 as the Ariel prophecy in the form of a metaphorical סְפָר book.
23. See especially: Blenkinsopp, Sealed Book, pp. 11-14.
24. See also: Fischer, Tora, p. 77; Berges, Jesaja, p. 228.
25. See also: Slotki, Isaiah, p. 162. Concerning סְפָר / תּוֹרָה, Franz Delitzsch, Commentar über das Buch Jesaia (BC III/1; 1889/4, 1866/1), p. 331 refers to Ex 17.14; Neh 7.5.
Lord in the temple, which implies that the Lord also reads the letters. The text-immanent reader, however, is not made party to the content, because it is not narrated in the text.

The third piece of written text is mentioned in 39.1, the סְפָרִים letters by the King of Babel, Assur’s successor. The narration does not say what it is about, nor whether Hezekiah reads it. But Hezekiah treats the King of Babel’s סְפָרִים letters differently than the King of Assur’s סְפָרִים letters; this is wrong, the narration seems to suggest, because he does not go up to the temple to open the letter before the Lord. In this passage, the character Hezekiah appears not as an ideal king, but as an ambiguous reader of written products that cannot be equated with the prophetic torah. Once again, the text-immanent reader cannot read this written product; its content is not divulged in the text.

In addition to the letters by the Kings of Assur and Babel, there is mention of another written product in 38.10-20, which is described in verse 9 as the מִכְתָּב writing by (or concerning?) King Hezekiah.

This written product functions as a parallel to the prophetic torah. The parallelism rests primarily upon the contrast with the two blasphemous written products, but other aspects point in the same direction. The prophetic torah in chapter 8 is connected to a crisis which is symptomatic of an underlying crisis: the threat posed by the kingdoms of Aram and Israel will be continued through an even more dangerous threat posed by Assur. The chapters 36-37 deal with a crisis in which Assur has become a threat to Jerusalem. On one hand, the מִכְתָּב writing in chapter 38 is the result of the resolution of this Assyrian crisis; on the other hand, in chapter 39 Jerusalem is confronted with the underlying threat posed by Babel, which is even more dangerous than Assur.

The prophetic torah in chapter 8 is a reaction to the people’s refusal to accept the word of God, starting with King Ahaz’ rejection of God’s message in 7.1-17. The מִכְתָּב writing in chapter 38 is also linked to the character of the King, but as an expression of taking the word of God seriously. By writing this text, the King always has the prophetic torah with him, just as the King does in Dt 17.18 after he had a written copy made of the תּוֹרָה torah.

Semantic parallels furthermore support the interpretation of the מִכְתָּב writing as torah. The key word is life (חַי) saved from the dead, which not only alludes to Isa 4.3 but also to many passages in the Pentateuch (Cf.: Lv 25.35-36; Dt 4.4; 5.3; 6.2; 12.1; 30.6,15,19,20; 32.47), especially to a passage concerning the King and מִשְׁנֵה־הַתּוֹרָה a copy of the book of the torah in Dt 17.19.

In respect of the text-immanent reader, this D element forms the climax of the Book of Isaiah. Whereas the preceding C elements only included the text-immanent reader implicitly, he becomes an explicit part of the מִכְתָּב writing in the D element. In addition to the first person plural, used in the מִכְתָּב writing, which reveals a movement from the ‘I’-figure who is speaking towards a broader community that exists even beyond the text of the writing and that includes the text-immanent reader,26 two other aspects play an important role. First of all, the מִכְתָּב writing is the only written document in 36-39 which the text-immanent reader is able to read, because it is the only one whose content is recounted. Whereas the content of the two contrasting documents only becomes clear to the text-immanent reader indirectly from the context, the content of this document is directly accessible.

26. See especially: Archibald L.H.M. van Wieringen, ‘The “I”-Figure’s Relations in the Poem in Isa 38,10-20’, Biblica, 96 (2015), pp. 481-97, here 486-89.
The "writing" (38.10-20) is marked by a heading. Compared to the other headings in the Book of Isaiah, this heading is remarkable because it functions within a narrative unit, namely, part 36-39. As it is part of a narrative unit, 38.9 is the only exception to the customary Isaian use of headings, in which headings function on the level of communication between the text-immanent author and text-immanent reader rather than on the level of the characters. As 38.10-20 is marked by means of the heading in 38.9, it becomes part of the direct communication with the text-immanent reader, as is the case with the other headings in the Book of Isaiah. This also implies that the heading in 38.9 lifts the "writing", which is "torah", to the level of the other headings in the Book of Isaiah. Whereas the other headings use words such as "חָזוֹן" vision (1.1), "דָּבָר" word (2.1) and "מַשָּׁא" statement (13.1; 15.1; 17.1; 19.1; 21.1,11,13; 22.1; 23.1; 30.6), words which cannot be considered to be written products, the heading in 38.9 contains the word "מִכְתָּב" writing. This is an important addition to the other headings, because it causes the idea of the "torah" to reach the level of the entire Book of Isaiah. In this way, the Book of Isaiah itself, as a written product, can be considered as being written prophetic "torah".

Many observations have been made in recent exegetical research concerning the bridging function of chapters 36-39, and especially of chapter 39, between the first part of the Book of Isaiah (chapters 1-39) and the second part (chapters 40-66). This bridging function is also evident from the perspective of the references to writing and reading. On one hand, the heading in 38.9, which lifts the writing activity to the level of communication between the text-immanent author and the text-immanent reader, is the last heading in the Book of Isaiah. As such it renders the new headings in chapter 40-66 superfluous, as it were. On the other hand, the last written product in chapter 36-39 is not the "מִכְתָּב" writing, but the letters by the King of Babylon, the content of which is unknown to the text-immanent reader, but the prophetic reaction to which already hints at the impending exile.

7. The D’ element in Isaiah 40-66: other written products

After this climactic D element in 36-39, chapter 40-66 again contains a contrasting written product in 49.1-50.3. This passage is characterised by various direct speeches, which, depending on their introduction or the absence thereof, take place in the present, in the past or in the distant past. An instance of writing activity carried out by God belongs to the distant past. In 49.16, the Lord states that he has written the city walls of Zion onto the palms of his hands. This activity implies safety and care for Zion. The Lord reminds Zion of this writing after she has complained in 49.14 that the Lord has forgotten her. When her inhabitants continue to complain, the Lord wonders in 50.1
where the written text is that might have annulled his duty to care for and safeguard the city. He calls the contrasting written product סֵפֶר כְּרִיתוּת a letter of divorce (confer also: Dt 24.1,3),31 which implies that he himself is its author. Where is this letter of divorce? Nowhere, because it does not exist. In contrast to the conflicting written products (letters) by Assur and Babel in 36-39, the conflicting written product that is the letter of divorce is simply a whimsical thought rather than a reality.

8. The C” element in Isaiah 40-66: the presence of writing

Chapters 40-66 also elaborate on both the B and C elements. The external written product becomes interiorized in this elaboration.

The C element is present in 44.5.32 Whereas the C elements in 1-39 deal with the inability to access the הַתּוֹרָה torah, in 44.5, the first passage in 40-66 to mention writing, the addressees are so involved that they are not only able to say that they belong to the Lord and that they bear the name of Jacob, but that they are also able to write down (כתב) ‘the Lord’s’. They write it on their hands (Cf. 49.16 about God writing on the palms of his hands), indicating that they will themselves become the written product.

9. The B” element in Isaiah 40-66: the prophetic presence as torah

Finally, the intra-textual relations reach their conclusion in 40-66 with a B element. This, it turns out, refers to the Servant, in whom God’s written text becomes manifest. The Servant evolves into הַתּוֹרָה torah in which God expresses himself: like הַתּוֹרָה torah, the Servant is the expectation of the faraway coasts (42.4)33 and, for the sake of his justification, the Servant also is הַתּוֹרָה torah (42.21) for all who have averted turned away from God’s הַתּוֹרָה torah (42.24). In this way, הַתּוֹרָה torah mentioned in 2.1-5 is resumed as it were in 51.4.34 It is precisely the Servant who is הַתּוֹרָה torah, so the people that identifies itself with the Servant has now also become a manifestation of God’s הַתּוֹרָה torah in 51.435,7.



text

10. Concluding remarks

From this analysis, it is possible to conclude that Conrad’s view on the intra-textual function of the written document, that is, ספר הַתוֹרָה תּוֹרָה, in the Enneateuch is fruitful for interpreting the intra-textual function of the references to written products in the Book of Isaiah.

This intra-textual function changes in chapters 40-66 compared to chapters 1-39: the written product and the characters merge. On account of this, there is no further mention of ‘not reading’ in the text, and the sender’s role of the Servant and the receiver’s role of the people are also identified as being תּוֹרָה torah.

Chapters 36-39 form the climax of the theme of writing and reading in chapters 1-39. The other written products in these chapters are mentioned to define the position of the character Hezekiah: there should be no relation with the blasphemous products of Assur/Babel, but instead with the praise of God. The heading above this song of praise also highlights the position of the text-immanent reader in relation to the positive written product. Chapters 36-39 can therefore be regarded as a bridge to the second part of the Book of Isaiah: the positive relations with written products in the chapters 36-39 prepares for the positive identification of the roles with the תורָה torah in the chapters 40-66.36

Acknowledgements

This article is a reworked version of my paper on written products in the Book of Isaiah for the SBL Annual Meeting, in November 2016.

---

36. I am greatly indebted to Maurits J. Sinninghe Damsté (Gorredijk, the Netherlands) for his correction of the English translation of this article.