

Blind People, Blind God

The Composition of Isaiah 29,15–24

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From a literary critical point of view, Isa 29,15–24 is a long known exegetical crux. At a closer look, the themes in different segments of this pericope seem to be so far removed from each other that the reader may find it difficult to recover the logic binding these verses together. While the view that the הוֹי-cry in 29,15 begins a new section of prophecies is widespread,¹ the coherence of the following verses intrigued ancient and modern readers of this pericope alike.

The scribes of 1QIsa^a mark off 29,15 from the previous 29,13–14 by a space, but this clearly indicates a less significant transition than in 29,1 or 30,1, where two other הוֹי-prophecies begin. A smaller space denoting a new section appears at 29,18.² Isa 29,22 begins a new line in the manuscript, as in 29,1 or 30,1. Later editorial marks set off 29,13 and 15. Codex Leningradiensis delimits 29,15–21 from 29,22–24. Codex Sinaiticus signals paragraph transitions at 29,15a(b).16.18.21.22 and 30,1.

Many modern commentaries differentiate between 29,15–16 and 17–24, and comment on the two pericopes as if independent.³ Verses 17–24 are also treated as a composite text, usually divided into 29,17–21 and 22–24.⁴ A few scholars, however, consider Isa 29,15–24

¹ Note, however, J. Vermeylen, *Du prophète Isaïe à l'apocalyptique. Isaïe, I–XXXV, miroir d'un demi-millénaire d'expérience religieuse en Israël*, I, 1977, 404–405, and P. Höffken, *Das Buch Jesaja. Kapitel 1–39*. NSK.AT 18/1, 1993, 206–206, who treat 29,13–16 as a unit, as well as U. Becker, *Jesaja – Von der Botschaft zum Buch*, FRLANT 178, 1997, 234, who holds the same about 29,9–16.

² Regarding the size of this space, cf. also 29,8.13. The space at 29,18 can be technically explained by the fact that this scroll considers בְּיִוִּים הַהֵוֹי a sign of pericope transition. Cf. J.W. Olley, »Hear the Word of Yahweh«: The Structure of the Book of Isaiah in 1QIsa^a, VT 43 (1993), 32.

³ R.E. Clements, *Isaiah 1–39*, NCBC, 1980, 240; O. Kaiser, *Der Prophet Jesaja. Kapitel 13–39*, ATD 18, 1983³, 218–224; H.G.M. Williamson, *The Book Called Isaiah: Deutero-Isaiah's Role in Composition and Redaction*, 1994, 58.

⁴ Cf. H. Wildberger, *Jesaja. Kapitel 28–39*, BKAT X/3, 1982, 1125–1146; K. Koenen, *Heil den Gerechten – Unheil den Sündern!*, BZAW 229, 1994, 21.

one textual unit,⁵ with possible expansions or glosses made by later redactors.⁶

On the level of the book, it indeed seems most likely that 29,15–24 is one literary unit (fragile though as it may be) supposed to be discussed together. The **וְהִי**-cry functions as the principle text delimiter of Isa 28–33,⁷ similarly to **נִשְׂא** in Isa 13–23, which also demarcates small collections rather than textually coherent prophecies.

This study investigates in what sense Isa 29,15–24 forms a literary unit and, implicitly, how we can reconstruct the development of this pericope from eventual textual fragments to its present literary form. I shall first analyse how firmly each verse is rooted in its present place. A brief comment on the Isaianic background of the identified fragments of the pericope will follow the contextual analysis.

1. *From Unit to Fragments: The Integrity of Isaiah 29,15–24*

In distinguishing between materials of various origins inside this pericope one should concentrate primarily on the meaning of the smallest units of 29,15–24 asking how (if) these could be related to their context.

V. 15

Woe to those who deeply hide plans from Yhwh,
and whose deeds are in the dark,
and say: »Who sees us? Who knows us?«

Isa 29,15 begins with a **וְהִי**-cry, a sharp condemnation of those who consciously refuse to involve YHWH in their plans. In spite of a few lexical uncertainties, this verse presents no serious interpretive problems.⁸ It is not clarified here what kind of hidden plans and dark deeds these people perform, but the consideration of the prophet that YHWH should have been implicated in those points to important matters. This way of life is sustained by a conviction that neither man nor god has any insight into their dark affairs. In formal accordance with the structure of the

⁵ Cf. W.A.M. Beuken, Isa 29,15–24: Perversion Reverted, in: F. García Martínez et al (eds.), *The Scriptures and the Scrolls*, FS A.S. van der Woude, VTSup 49, 1992, 43–64, esp. 48; M.A. Sweeney, *Isaiah 1–39 with an Introduction to Prophetic Literature*, FOTL XIV, 1996, 381–382; J. Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39*, AB 19, 2000, 407–408.

⁶ According to B. Duham, *Das Buch Jesaja*, 1968⁵, 212–215, Isa 29,15 was expanded by a late redactor by 29,16–24. O. Procksch, *Jesaja I*, KAT IX, 1930, 378–383, considers 29,15–16.19–20.22–23a.24 Isaianic, while 29,17–18.21.23b secondary (mainly because of metrical reasons).

⁷ See Isa 28,1; 29,1.15; 30,1; 31,1; 33,1.

⁸ For translating the w-qatal as present tense, see P. Joüon/T. Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 1993, §§ 111i, 118r, 119r. Cf. Isa 5,11–12; Hab 2,12; Am 6,1.

וְהוֹי-cries, the interjection is followed by a participle, which makes the reason for the condemnation explicit, elaborated in the second and third cola of the verse.⁹

V. 16

O your perversity!

Could the potter be accounted as the clay?

As if the one made could say to his maker:

»You have not made me!«,

and the one formed say to the one who formed him:

»He has no understanding!«

When considered on its own the meaning of this passage is clear.¹⁰ Isa 29,16 addresses people who think perversely that the potter (יְהוָה) can be accounted as the clay (the people). The same group of people purportedly refuse that they would be the creations of יְהוָה and that יְהוָה would have intelligence.

But how can this verse be connected to 29,15? According to the usual reading, the prophet questions here whether a creature can act independently, asking no advice from God.¹¹ However, this rhetoric would be incongruent with 29,15. Isa 29,16 seems to be too cumbersome as an answer to the ideology exposed by 29,15. Those at word in vs. 15 do not deny that יְהוָה has made them, or that he would have understanding. They rather believe that what they perform in secret cannot be observed by anyone.¹² Second, the polemic character of 29,16 softens the previous utterance, transforming the condemnation of 29,15 into a disputation speech.¹³ Third, although exegetes recognise some common terms or ideas in 29,15–16 that they assume would plead for

⁹ Cf. H.-J. Zobel, הוֹי, ThWAT II, 385.

¹⁰ For the vocative הַפְּסֹכִים, see Joüon/Muraoka, Grammar, § 162c. כִּי in 29,16 is usually rendered as ›that ...‹. The difficulty with this is that the sentence introduced by כִּי cannot be a logical follow-up to the previous verse line. It is, however, possible that כִּי functions here as the synonym of אִם. For the interchangeability of אִם and כִּי, cf. Joüon/Muraoka, Grammar, § 167i (cf. Jer 49,16 with Ob 4). In an interrogative sentence, this function of כִּי can be compared to הֲכִי (Job 6,22).

¹¹ A. Dillmann, Der Prophet Jesaja, 1890⁵, 266; Wildberger, Jesaja, 1129, 1131; Clements, Isaiah, 240.

¹² Cf. Kaiser, Jesaja, 219; Höffken, Jesaja, 206–207. Contrast this with Isa 5,8–9.11–14; 28,1–4; 30,1–3; Ps 94,7–9.

¹³ Clements, Isaiah, 240, and Williamson, Book, 60, consider Isa 10,5–15 a suitable parallel for a הוֹי-word ending with a rhetorical question. However, 10,15 is rhetorically well-prepared by a longer text that precedes it, so that there is no logical break with the previous verses. Further, it is often doubted that 10,15 would be the closure of a prophecy (see O. Eissfeldt, Einleitung in das Alte Testament, 1964³, 413; Kaiser, Jesaja, 42; Becker, Botschaft, 272).

common authorship,¹⁴ these are used with different meanings, which is exactly what raises suspicion about the unity of intentions in 29,15–16. Fourth, dealing with the ideology of those addressed in 29,15 in the context of creation is strange to the 8th century Isaiah, to whom 29,15 is ascribed, but frequent in the second part of the book.¹⁵ While there is hardly any doubt that in some way 29,16 intends to reflect on the attitude of the speakers in vs. 15, yet the manner in which it argues and approaches those people's ideology questions that it would come from the author of 29,15.

V. 17

Is it not only a little while,
and Lebanon will revert to a fruitful land,
and the fruitful land will be accounted as a forest.

The meaning of 29,17 has puzzled many exegetes. Most scholars consider this saying a proverb about turning something into its opposite. **שוב ל** is almost generally translated as ›to turn into‹, ›to transform into‹. The wild country (Lebanon) is transformed into a fruitful land and the fruitful land into a wild country.¹⁶ However, the usual sense of **שוב** is ›to turn back‹, that is to a previous place or state.¹⁷ Significantly, this implies that Lebanon is restored here to its former state. Lebanon appears in the Bible with positive connotations, as a symbol of fertility and glory, but nowhere as a wild country.¹⁸ The trees of Lebanon are (like?) the trees of Eden (Ez 31,16), and the trees of YHWH (Ps 104,16).¹⁹

The poetic structure of this verse may reveal the plain sense behind the metaphors of Isa 29,17. Verse 17bc forms a chiasmic parallelism. From a semantic point of view this means that **שוב ל** corresponds to (or equals) **יחשב לבנון, לייער**, and **לכרמל** to **והכרמל**. This literary structure highlights the expressions **לבנון** and **יער**. Lebanon and its forest does not refer to the geographical area north of Israel here, but rather to Jerusalem.²⁰ This symbol is inspired by the famous Solomonic house, **בית יער הלבנון**, ›the house of the forest of Lebanon‹, the symbol

¹⁴ **מעשה** is noted by Becker, *Botschaft*, 244. Cf. also Williamson, *Book*, 60.

¹⁵ Cf. also Duhm, *Jesaia*, 212; Vermeylen, *Isaïe*, 406. The idea that Israel is the work of Yhwh is omnipresent in Deutero-Isaiah (43,1.7.15.21; 44,2.21.24; 45,9.11; 46,4; 49,5; 51,13; cf. 17,7; 27,11; 64,7).

¹⁶ E.g. H.J. Mulder, *יער*, ThWAT III, 786; H.-J. Fabry, *שוב*, ThWAT VII, 1130; Dillmann, *Jesaia*, 266; E.J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah II*, 1969, 325.

¹⁷ Cf. also Beuken, *Perversion*, 51. See **שוב ל** in Gen 20,14; I Reg 12,26; II Reg 5,10; Ez 16,55; 46,17; cf. **שוב** in Ps 85,5.

¹⁸ Ps 72,16; 104,16; Cant 4,11.15; Isa 10,34; 33,9; 35,2; 37,34; Jer 22,6; Ez 31,15.16; Hos 14,7; Nah 1,4.

¹⁹ See F. Stolz, *Die Bäume des Gottesgartens auf dem Libanon*, ZAW 84 (1972), 141–156.

²⁰ So also Beuken, *Perversion*, 52. For **יער** see also Isa 9,7; 10,18.19.34; 32,19.

of the glory of Jerusalem (I Reg 7,2; 10,17; I Chr 9,16), also known in the book of Isaiah (cf. **בֵּית הַיְעָר** in Isa 22,8), which may have conflated with ancient Canaanite traditions about El (= YHWH) and his divine garden in Lebanon (= Jerusalem).²¹ Consequently, the reversion of ›Lebanon‹ to a fruitful land that it has once been, to a fruitful land, that is (**חֲשֵׁב**) a forest,²² means that Isa 29,17 is a prediction about the historical restoration of (the glory of) Jerusalem.

This restoration of ›the forest of Lebanon‹ is supposed to appear very soon. The formulation of 29,17 implies that the rehabilitation of Jerusalem is still a matter of the future, so that for the audience this sounds as a consolation amidst unpleasant circumstances. It comforts people promising them that before their patience is absorbed, Jerusalem will be restored. This is a key point in this passage.

As noted, **הַלְלוּא** is often considered the beginning of a new independent pericope, unrelated to 29,15–16. However, it would be quite unusual to begin an entirely new text with such a rhetoric question. Isa 29,17 with its appeal to the foreknowledge of the audience regarding an event that will soon become a reality alludes to another prophecy in the book that the reader is supposed to have been acquainted with, which Beuken correctly identifies with the anti-Assyrian prophecy in Isa 10,25 and its context.²³ But what has **הַלְלוּא** to do with its present context? Can 29,17 be connected with 29,16?

I believe the answer is affirmative. Syntactically speaking, **הַלְלוּא** can be related to the disputation introduced by the particle **אִם** in 29,16, so that the two interrogative verses function as complementary.²⁴ Second, it was suggested above that 29,16 does not close a dispute, but it rather opens a discussion with the audience. Verse 17 continues the argument begun in 29,16 in a similarly metaphorical language.

Whether or not 29,17 is considered an apodosis, this verse holds the key to understanding the rhetorical function of 29,16 and its rereading of 29,15. Isa 29,16 reproaches the audience its perverse thinking, namely that the people thought YHWH, the creator, was like a human being, like a creature, unaware of what is going on. But how does this correspond to 29,15? Verse 17 provides the explanation. As mentioned,

²¹ Cf. Stolz, *Bäume*, 141–156.

²² Although exegetes usually distinguish between **יְעָר** and **כְּרָמֶל**, Isa 10,18 and 37,24 (= II Reg 19,23) suggest that the two terms are synonymous symbols and refer to abundant vegetation (not agricultural field as often understood) as opposite to desert land (cf. Isa 32,15–16). For **כְּרָמֶל** as a symbol of fruitfulness, see M.J. Mulder, **כְּרָמֶל**, ThWAT IV, 344–345, 351.

²³ Beuken, *Perversion*, 44, 53–54. Cf. also Procksch, *Jesaia*, 381.

²⁴ For the sequence **אִם** followed by **הַלְלוּא** (usually in the reversed order), see Job 14,14; Ps 94,9; Jer 14,22; Ob 5; Mic 2,7.

this verse was a consolation of desperate people who expected the restoration of Jerusalem. When we connect this idea with 29,16, the main concern of the present dispute becomes obvious: if and when Jerusalem will be restored. The author of 29,16 and 17 understood 29,15 as a *complaint* of the people towards YHWH. Isa 29,16 does not elaborate on the theme of 29,15 in a negative way (as it was meant originally), but as the ideology of desperate people, who thought that their plan and way was hidden from YHWH, and to their deepest regret (!), God was unable to see them. In anticipation of the following section we may mention here a key text, Isa 40,27, in which Jacob complains: »My way is hidden (נסתרה) from YHWH, my cause is ignored by my God.« It is not unimportant that the same text underscores the perversity of Jacob's thinking by pointing out that YHWH is the creator of the universe (Isa 40,28). As we have seen, in underlining YHWH's control of the events, Isa 29,16 also alluded to the creating acts of YHWH.

Isa 29,16–17 give *promising* replies to the *desperate* questions of 29,15. The argument why the thinking of those behind 29,16–17 is considered perverse is twofold. First (the אֵם part), the creator knows his creature and sees him/her. Second (the הַלֹּואִים part), it is perverse, because they have to remember the prophecy (Isa 10,25) that it is only a short while until Jerusalem will be restored to its former glory.

To conclude, thus far we have seen that Isa 29,15 originated independently from 29,16–17. Isa 29,17 does not begin a new pericope, but 29,16–17 belong together both because of their form (הַלֹּואִים/אֵם), coherent logic, and metaphorical language. The way 29,16–17 interpret 29,15 is radically different from its original intention. While Isaiah harshly criticises wicked politicians, intentionally hiding their plans and deeds before YHWH, 29,16–17 treats the ideology of these people as a problem of faith seriously tested by negative circumstances, notably the desolated state of Jerusalem.

V. 18

And the deaf ones will hear the words of the scroll on that day,
and without gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind ones will see.

The day when the deaf ones are supposed to hear the words of the scroll (דְּבַר־סֵפֶר) and see without darkness and gloom (מֵאֲפֶל וּמִחֹשֶׁךְ)²⁵ will be undoubtedly the moment of the fulfilment of the promise in 29,17. That is, 29,18 is subordinated to 29,17. This is also true in another sense. Isa 29,18 interprets 29,15 through vss. 16–17, i.e. spoken out by people with a faith in need of being updated. Indeed, the two verses, 17–18 are usually related to each other. Suspicion with regard to the secondary origin of 29,18 compared to 29,17 has been raised by Procksch

²⁵ The preposition is best interpreted as *privativum* (cf. Wildberger, Jesaja, 1134).

based solely on metrical arguments.²⁶ There are, however, other more serious considerations which question whether 29,18 and its localisation after 29,16–17 would be the work of the same author.

First, 29,18 refers to **דְּבַר־סֵפֶר**, »the words of a/the scroll«. From the pericope 29,15–24 it is not clear what kind of scroll this verse refers to, so that we need to look at the larger context. In the book of Isaiah **סֵפֶר** appears only in 29,11.12; 30,8; 34,4.16; 50,1. From these only 29,11.12 and 30,8 are relevant to us, and it may be both that the author of 29,18 has in view.²⁷ Obviously, the relationship between the motifs of blindness and deafness in 29,18 and 29,9.11–12 appears on a secondary level. Isa 29,18 reread those earlier passages with a different concept, rehabilitating those formerly under judgment in 29,1–14. Likewise, the motif of **דְּבַר־יְהוָה** (**הַסֵּפֶר**) is also used differently. In 29,11–12 the vision not understood by the people and its seers is *compared to* any sealed scroll that one is unable to read, while **דְּבַר־יְהוָה** in 29,18 refers to a concrete scroll containing former prophecies. In Isa 30,8 the prophet is told to write his words on a scroll to be preserved as a witness forever against those who do not want to listen. In 29,11 the scroll is brought in connection with vision and seeing, in 30,8 with hearing. Both verbs appear in the parallel lines of 29,18. This means that Isa 29,18 is not only concerned with the pericope 29,15–24, but it interprets these verses in the larger context of Isa 29,1–14 and 30,1–17(ff?). 29,18 only makes sense in this larger context, in contrast to 29,16–17, which is, as we have seen, a reaction to 29,15.

Second, 29,18 interprets part of 29,15 in a way differently from 29,16–17 (although the intentions are not exclusive). It assumes namely that the one who cannot hear and cannot see is not YHWH, but the people themselves (contrast 29,15c). This reinterpretation relies on the larger context in which the attitude of the addressees in 29,15–17 is analysed, where seeing, blindness, hearing, deafness²⁸ all have a different connotation, and are connected to the prophet's audience rather than YHWH (cf. 29,10.14; 30,9.10). The function of 29,18 was to bring this **הוֹי**-pericope in connection with its context. These considerations probably testify to the secondary origin of 29,18 with respect to 29,16–17.

²⁶ Becker, *Botschaft*, 234, considers 29,18 the beginning of a new expansion (18–21?), but he gives no comments regarding his decision. One may suspect that the appearance of **בְּיָמֵי־הַהוּא** has led Becker to this conclusion.

²⁷ The connection with 29,11 is generally noted (cf. Young, *Isaiah*, 326; Beuken, *Perversion*, 56–59).

²⁸ The word **הַרְשִׁים**, »the deaf ones«, is phonetically similar to **הַרְשָׁשׁ**, »earthenware, potsherd, scorched clay«, recalling the imagery of 29,16.

In this particular context, ספר refers to a written form of former prophecies. The scroll is referred to because 29,17 alludes to one of the verses from this scroll (Isa 10,25). The words of this prophecy, for which the audience of 29,16–17 proves to be too deaf to understand (הלוא), will be completely clear on the day when it will be fulfilled. Seeing the facts as they are (29,16) and remembering (hearing) the prediction (29,17) are the two aspects connecting vs. 18 to vss. 16–17.

V. 19

And the oppressed ones will have increasing joy in Yhwh,
and the poorest of men will rejoice in the Holy One of Israel.

Both categories of people, the oppressed ones (עניים) and the poorest of men (אביוני אדם), are the victims of injustice and oppression. These sufferers appear overwhelmingly in the Bible with positive connotations, unlike the blind and deaf of vs. 18, who are implicitly criticised. The blind and deaf need to change in their relation to YHWH, but the poor and oppressed live a life dependent on God.²⁹

The imagery of oppression and the argument for the increased joy becomes clearer if vs. 19 is read in relation to the following verses, 29,20–21, speaking about the oppressor and the mistreatment of the just, motifs anticipated in the imagery of the ›poor‹ and ›oppressed‹ of 29,19.³⁰ If this is true, one may conclude that vs. 19 presupposes the existence of 29,20–21, and is probably secondary to those.

V. 20

For the tyrant will be no more,
the scoffer will perish,
those evilly watching will be cut off.

The qatal and w-qatal forms of this verse are translated with future tense, consistent with the other predictions of the same prophecy. Isa 29,20 is connected to its context by the particle כִּי. But to which verse should this be related? Who are referred to in this threefold parallelism?

In conformity with what has been noted above, leaving 29,18 and 19 out as two additions after 29,17, we may consider 29,20 the continuation of 29,17, and ascribe it to the author of 29,16–17. The restoration of Jerusalem soon in the future depends on the fall of the oppressor and the tyrant.

²⁹ For the distinction between the poor and oppressed, on the one hand, and the blind and deaf, on the other, cf. also Kaiser, *Jesaja*, 221; Vermeylen, *Isaïe*, 408, and Höffken, *Jesaja*, 207–208.

³⁰ Cf. the connection between לֵץ (29,20) and עניים (qere) in Prov 3,34, or between ערץ (cf. עריץ in 29,20) and עניים in Ps 10,17–18. According to Koenen, *Heil*, 20, מַחֲשֵׂאֵי אָדָם can be considered an antithetic allusion to אביוני אדם in 29,21.

Because 29,20–21 are usually read together, the terms **לִץ**, **עֲרִיץ** and **שִׁקְרֵי אֹן** are assumed to refer to injustice in the Judaeen society.³¹ However, it is striking that **עֲרִיץ** in Isaiah is always used in connection with foreign oppressors, which would suit the sense of 29,20 particularly well. The foreign tyrant is responsible for the present state of ›the forest of Lebanon‹.³² The context of Isa 10,25, to which 29,17 alluded, deals, as noted, with the fall of Assyria. The three symbols adopted in 29,17 correspond formally to the three symbols of 29,20.

V. 21

Those who mislead one in a (legal) case,
and for the arbiter in the gate they set a trap,
and deceive the righteous one with emptiness.

מַחֲטִיאִי is translated as ›to make (one) an offender‹,³³ ›to cause to lose‹ (a lawsuit),³⁴ or ›to declare as guilty, to condemn‹.³⁵ However, these renderings are not supported by biblical evidence.³⁶ The hif. of **חֲטָא** appears quite often with the meaning ›to cause to sin‹, ›to mislead‹ (cf. the parallel **נָטָה** hif.). The charge against those accused in Isa 29,21a is that they mislead people. **דַּבֵּר** may be used in a juridical context with the nuance of ›(legal) case‹,³⁷ or ›accusation, charge‹ (Deut 22,14,17; Job 33,13), ›verdict‹ (Deut 17,9; II Chr 19,6).³⁸ Given the juridical background of this verse and its vocabulary, ›case‹³⁹ or ›charge‹ are both possible interpretations. **מוֹכִיחַ** refers to the mediator or arbitrator in a legal case, the one who has to make a decision in a lawsuit, the judge.⁴⁰

³¹ Cf. Kaiser, *Jesaja*, 222; Beuken, *Perversion*, 54–55, 63–64; Koenen, *Heil*, 20; U. Berges, *Die Armen im Buch Jesaja. Ein Beitrag zur Literaturgeschichte des AT*, Bib 80 (1999), 164–165.

³² For **עֲרִיץ**, see Isa 13,11; 25,3.4.5; 29,5; 49,25. Cf. also Ez 28,7; 30,11; 31,12; 32,12. **עֲרִיץ** is related to the Assyrians, by Procksch, *Jesaja*, 381.

The noun **לִץ** is unknown in Isaiah. The expression **אֲנָשֵׁי לְצֹן** and the verb **לִיץ** appear in 28,14 and 22 respectively in connection with the Judaeans. **לִץ** appears almost exclusively in wisdom literature (Ps 1,1; Prov 1,22; 3,34; 9,7.8; 13,1; 14,6; 15,12; 19,25.29; 20,1; 21,11.24; 22,10; 24,9). **לִץ** is a synonym of **זָד** (Prov 21,24), which is found in Isa 13,11 paralleled by **עֲרִיץ** and related to Babylon (cf. also Isa 25,4–5 [**זָרִים**] is read as **זָדִים** by the LXX]).

³³ Joüon/Muraoka, *Grammar*, § 54d note 1.

³⁴ RSV; JPS Tanakh.

³⁵ Wildberger, *Jesaja*, 1134.

³⁶ ›To declare guilty‹ is not suited to this context. Declaring one (**אָדָם**) guilty is not in itself incorrect. This is part of every juridical procedure (cf. Dillmann, *Jesaja*, 267).

³⁷ Ex 18,16.19; 24,14; Deut 1,17; 16,19; 17,8; 19,15.

³⁸ F.A. Ames, **דַּבֵּר**, *NIDOTTE I*, 913.

³⁹ Cf. W.H. Schmidt, **דַּבֵּר**, *ThWAT II*, 115; Wildberger, *Jesaja*, 1134.

⁴⁰ Cf. Job 9,33; 32,12; Prov 9,7; 24,25; Ez 3,26; Am 5,10. The activity of the **מוֹכִיחַ** may be compared to that of a **שֹׁפֵט** (cf. Isa 2,4; 11,3).

Isa 29,21 does not presuppose that the misleaders take revenge on the unfavourable outcome of a lawsuit (which questions translating מוכיח as ›the one who reproaches them‹), but rather that the מחטיאי אדם control the outcome of these lawsuits. The arbitrator (מוכיח) may be the misled אדם of 29,21a, and the false charges that these misleaders bring in may be the trap that they lay (יקשון) for the מוכיח. תהו is here a synonym of שוא, used as in Isa 59,4 in a legal context. Translating תהו as ›emptiness‹, it may refer to groundless accusations and unfounded charges (if ב is rendered as ›with‹). They ›mislead‹ or ›deceive‹ (נטה hif.) the righteous one with emptiness (see Prov 7,21 for נטה hif. + ב). The righteous one (צדיק) is in this case not a third person whom the misleaders falsely accuse,⁴¹ but the righteous מוכיח, who trusts their ›honesty‹. They lead him into sin, they cause him to sin (cf. מחטיאי, i.e. to formulate false judgments in legal cases. It is also possible to translate ב as ›into‹, meaning that those addressed in 29,21c ›turn (or throw) the righteous one (the arbitrator) into confusion‹.

In exegetical literature Isa 29,21 is regularly connected with the previous verse. But is the theme of injustice sufficiently coherent and logically cogent to suggest common origin? The view that 29,20 and 21 could be ascribed to the same author becomes at a closer look difficult to sustain. First, formally speaking, the threefold parallelism of 29,20 rounds off the line of thought of this verse, so that it is impossible to extend the function of the verb כרת of 29,20c beyond this verse. Second, there is no syntactical connection (no ׀) between 29,20 and 21. Third, the ›dangling participle‹ מחטיאי is entirely unusual as a follow-up to 29,20. Fourth, the theme discussed in the two verses is only superficially related. It has been argued above that 29,20 alludes to the foreign oppressors of Jerusalem. This meaning is impossible for 29,21, which obviously deals with legal cases at the gates of the city, with social injustice inside the prophet's community, and not with foreigners treating the people of YHWH unjustly.

If this interpretation is correct, if Isa 29,21 criticises social injustice in the prophet's community, then there is only one verse to which this could be related, namely 29,15. Reading the two verses together takes away the veil from this verse that turned Isa 29,15–24 into an enigmatic composition. The criticism against the prophet's community falls into its place, and the strange participle form in 29,21a receives its proper location as the extension of the הוי-cry of Isaiah, usually followed by such participles. In certain cases one הוי-cry may introduce multiple accusations, with several subsequent participles as in Isa 5,18–19.22–23; 18,1–2; 30,1–2; Jer 22,13–14; Am 6,1.3–6.13.

⁴¹ So is this verse usually interpreted (cf. Wildberger, Jesaja, 1133).

An early יהוי-word of the prophet consisting of 29,15+21 was divided by the author of 29,16–17+20. This author reinterpreted the previous accusation in two respects. First, he regarded 29,15 not as an accusation against Israelites or Judaeans, but as a complaint of people begging for compassion. Second, the injustice against which the prophet had originally raised his voice in 29,21, was (by the insertion of 29,20) brought in connection with the injustice committed by the enemy against the people of YHWH, an interpretive tradition which is not unknown in the book of Isaiah (see below). In order to clarify the place of 29,18 and 19 we need to look at the following verses.

Vv. 22–23c

Therefore, thus says Yhwh to⁴² the house of Jacob,

the one who redeemed Abraham:

Now Jacob will not be ashamed,
and now his face will not grow pale.

For when he will see his children,
the work of my hands in his midst,
they will sanctify my name.

The country personified as the ancestor Jacob (the masculine counterpart to Zion) will not have to be ashamed. For when he (Jacob) will see his children in his (Jacob's) midst (בקרבו), they (the children) will sanctify the name of YHWH.⁴³ בקרבו is to be understood geographically. It refers to a time when Jacob's children will return to their land. But what does ›being ashamed‹ mean in this context? There is wide agreement among scholars that at least 29,23a–c forms one unit with 29,22. Accordingly, כִּי at the beginning of 29,23a provides the argument why Jacob is not supposed to be ashamed.

The first possibility is that the shame of Jacob is caused by the perverse thinking of his children about YHWH, as exposed by 29,15 (YHWH cannot see us, so we can do whatever we want) and as reinterpreted by 29,16–17.20 (YHWH cannot see us, he does not care about us). It is a shame to speak about YHWH in such an inappropriate manner. It is as if comparing YHWH to worthless idols which can neither see, nor understand (Ps 135,15–17; Dan 5,23; cf. Ps 82,5). Israel considering itself a potter (and implicitly its God as clay) in 29,16 reminds one of the idol-makers. Idols are often mentioned as the source of shame (Isa 1,29; 42,17; 44,9; 44,11; 45,16–17). This shame of the children is the shame of the father. According to 29,23, the children of Jacob and

⁴² Or ›concerning‹; cf. אֵל in Isa 37,33.

⁴³ יקדישו does not refer to Jacob, but his sons. The book of Isaiah occasionally distinguishes between Jacob and his descendants (cf. 43,1 and 5; 44,1 and 3; 58,14). A similar phenomenon can be observed with regard to Zion and her children (cf. 49,14 and 17.20–22; 54,1 and 13; 60,4; 62,5).

Abraham, who formerly thought that YHWH is like a handmade god (29,15–16), will recognise that in fact they are his handmade people (מעשה יד).⁴⁴ When Jacob will see his children again, he will see them sanctifying the name of YHWH, i.e. with an entirely new attitude towards their God.

A second possible explanation is that Jacob will not be ashamed for he will see the promise of YHWH being fulfilled. The lack of fulfilment of divine promises as in 29,17 may have also caused shame for those trusting God (Isa 5,19; 51,7; 50,7; 54,4; 66,5). In connection with Abraham and Jacob, this promise also included the multiplication of their descendants (cf. Isa 51,1–8; 54,1–4).

It appears that 29,22–23c derive from a date later than 29,16–17+20.⁴⁵ First, 29,16–17+20 focuses on »the children«, while 22–23c on »the ancestor«. Second, 29,16–17+20 presupposes a crisis situation in the present, while in 22–23c the scene is shifted towards a future when Israel will see his children again in his midst, i.e. it presupposes a state beyond the moment of deliverance anticipated in 29,16–17.20. Third, the rather unusual לא־עִתָּה possibly implies that this future has already become a present reality.

V. 23d–e

They will sanctify the Holy One of Jacob,
and the God of Israel they will fear.

Isa 29,23d–e is often considered a gloss,⁴⁶ because the two verse lines sound redundant after 29,23c. Moreover, the previous first pers. form of the YHWH-speech is replaced here by third pers. formulas. I concur with these arguments and consider that 29,23d–e and 22–23c originated on different occasions. However, vs. 23d–e is not an independent gloss. There is a noteworthy connection between עריץ in 29,20a, referring to the foreign tyrant, and the verb ערץ in 29,23e. Instead of the foreign oppressor, Israel will fear the Holy One of Jacob. Furthermore, 29,23d may be related to 29,19 (dependent on 29,20 as noted above) through the divine names קדוש יעקב and קדוש ישראל respectively. These considerations suggest that 29,19 and 23d–e derive from the same author. Those sanctifying YHWH and fearing him (ערץ) and the oppressed and poor (29,19) who rejoice in YHWH after being delivered

⁴⁴ מעשה ידי refers to the descendants of Jacob and not the acts of Yhwh (Isa 60,21; 64,7; cf. also 29,16; 43,21; 45,11), which means that ילדיו is not a gloss (contra Wildberger, Jesaja, 1135). יד מעשה יד alludes to the deeds of Yhwh in Isa 5,12. The seeing (ראה) of Jacob in 29,23 may hint to 5,12, but that does not exclude that יד מעשה יד is interpreted here in a new way.

⁴⁵ Cf. also Wildberger, Jesaja, 1136; Koenen, Heil, 19.

⁴⁶ Wildberger, Jesaja, 1135; Koenen, Heil, 19.

from the mighty tyrant (עריץ; 29,20) refer to the same group of people. 29,19+23d–e express two aspects of the saving experience: the joy for being free (29,19) and the sanctification of God for being delivered (23d–e).⁴⁷

V. 24

The confused ones will come to understanding,
and those grouching will learn insight.

Isa 29,24 is generally seen as part of 22–23c. There is, however, a shift in the theme of the two verses and their inner relation is not without problems. It is strange that the people is supposed to sanctify the Holy One of Jacob before coming to understanding and learning insight. This may suggest that we need to detach 29,24 from 23 and find its pair elsewhere in this pericope.

The vocabulary of 29,24 is reminiscent of words connected to learning, understanding, insight, i.e. activities brought in connection with perception, with seeing and hearing. This suggests to relate 29,24 with 29,18, which stands, as noted, on its own in its context. The two fit each other particularly well. First, the four verbs used in these two verses (שמע, ראה, ידע, למד) belong to the semantic field of acquiring knowledge. Second, as it was the case with 29,18, the vocabulary of 29,24 points to beyond 29,15–24. Note especially למד / מלמדה in 29,13 and בין / בינה in 29,14.⁴⁸ Third, in its present context, 29,18 refers to the blindness of those cited in 29,16. The same is true of 29,24. The addressees of this verse are the confused ones (תעי־רוח), who do not know what they speak, who have lost their minds (בינה), and are grouching (רוגגים) against YHWH reproaching him that he cannot see them. Interestingly, נרגן is paralleled by איש תהפכות, 'the perverse person' in Prov 16,28, reminding one of הפככם in Isa 29,16. On the day when the prophecy will be fulfilled, they will come to understanding and recognise the meaning of Isa 10,25 (דברי־ספר), they will learn the real sense of the prophetic word (ילמדו־לקח).

The investigation into the text of Isa 29,15–24 has led to the following distinctive textual blocks. (1) The generative text of Isa 29,15–24 was the הוי־cry in 29,15+21. (2) Isa 29,15+21 was reinterpreted by 29,16–17+20, altering fundamentally its original meaning. As far as all other fragments read 29,15+21 through the looking-glass of this edition, this expansion must be considered the second step in the diachronic formation of our pericope. (3) A third integral block consists of 29,22–23c. (4) Another originally coherent expansion is 29,19+23d–e.

⁴⁷ Cf. I Chr 16,10; Ps 34,3; 62,12; 64,11; 97,12; 105,3; 106,5; Isa 41,16.

⁴⁸ Cf. also Beuken, Perversion, 62.

(5) A fifth block once forming a unit is 29,18+24. The scope of 18+24 reaches beyond 29,15–24 and alludes to the preceding and following יהוי-cries. Because it would be strange to assume that Israel sanctifies YHWH before learning insight, 29,19+23d–e probably postdates 29,18+24.⁴⁹

While it is clear that the author of 29,16–17+20 divided the original prophecy and choose one verse as a heading and another one as a closure of his secondary text, it remains a question how the other three texts were added. Because of the argumentative לכן, it is most likely that 29,22–23c was designed not as a marginal note, but part of the text where it now stands. The two other sections, however, 29,18+24 and 29,19+23d–e, each reveal close internal connections expressing totality which can be fully appreciated only if those are read together. The literary parallel created by the divine name קדוש ישראל (29,19) / קדוש יעקב (29,23d) also disappears if the two verses are dislocated. These considerations lead us to the conclusion that 29,19+23d–e and 29,18+24 were supposed to function originally as two independent additions, perhaps as marginal notes, inserted subsequently among the verses of the developing prophecy.

2. From Fragments to Unit: A Brief Motif-Based Investigation

Thus far we have seen that the present text of 29,15–24 is the result of a longer process of composition shaped in five stages. In this section, I return to the question where these five stages find their closest literary parallels inside the book of Isaiah, and what the diachronic consequences are of this intertextual inquiry.

a. The Isaianic prophecy: 29,15+21

The earliest text, 29,15+21 is a יהוי-word which denounces people for their undisclosed plans, dark deeds, ungodly thinking and improper attitude towards social justice, prevalent themes of several יהוי-sayings. Isa 29,15(–16) is generally connected to anti-Assyrian political plans and secret alliances with Egypt. The reason for this is the proximity of 30,1–2 and 31,1–2, which clearly deal with political matters.⁵⁰ Moreover, עצה appears often in connection with politics so that this aspect should not be excluded in 29,15+21. One may infer, however, that 29,15+21 has once been part of another collection of thematically hybrid יהוי-sayings, similar to (or identical with?) the one that we now find

⁴⁹ It must be mentioned that the pericopes delimited in this way present an impressive measure of similarity in verse form. Note the tricolae of 15+21, 16–17+20, and the bicolae of 19+23d–e and 18+24.

⁵⁰ Cf. Duhm, *Jesaia*, 212.

in Isa 5,8–24, which likewise enumerates topics occasionally only superficially related, some of which may have connections with foreign politics (cf. 5,21 with 31,2).⁵¹

b. The first expansion: 29,16–17+20

In a second step, Isa 29,15+21 was reinterpreted by 29,16–17+20. The author of this passage divided the former יהוה-saying, inserting his own text between the two verses. The former condemning woe-cry of Isaiah against those who questioned whether יהוה was able to see and know their secrets is reinterpreted as the vision of desperate people oppressed by foreigners, believing that their life was hidden from יהוה. The questions »who sees us, who knows us?« are considered not to have been raised by an audience careless of יהוה, but by one worried about a God being careless of his people. The theme of the blindness of God is understood by the two authors in two distinctive ways. The question of the oppressors (cf. also Ps 10,11; 64,6; 73,11; 94,7; Isa 47,10) is interpreted in 29,16 as the question of the oppressed ones (cf. Job 22,13–14; Mal 2,17). A radical change has taken place in the life of these people by which those once condemned by Isaiah for oppression have now become themselves the victims of tyranny. This gives the explanation for the re-interpretation of 29,21 as referring to foreign tyrants. The localisation of our text after Isa 29,1–14 is well-suited, for this latter deals with the capture of Jerusalem by the ערבים (29,5).

The idea behind Isa 29,15–17.20–21 is parallel to Isa 40,27. With similar words Jacob complains that his way is hidden (סתר) from יהוה (cf. 8,17). As in 29,16, Isa 40,27 deals with this problem in the context of יהוה as creator and superior to his creation (40,26.28; cf. Jer 23,23–24). This may also be the background of Isa 45,9, which can be understood as an answer to those who question whether God is in control of history (45,7.11). The terminology used in 29,16 and 45,9, as well as the background of the dispute in the two passages presuppose a close relationship between them.⁵² A further important text is Isa 64,6–11, which also seems to allude to 29,15–21. The desolate state of Jerusalem (64,9–10) is explained by the fact that יהוה has hidden his face from his children (64,6.11). The knowledge of יהוה concern-

⁵¹ There are several common expressions and themes in 29,15+21 and 5,8–24, though those are not always used in the same sense. Cf. ראה, מעשה (5,12.19), מבלי-ידעה (5,13; cf. ידע in 29,15), שוא (5,18; cf. תהו in 29,21), חטאה (5,18), עצה, ידע (5,19), חשך (5,20), צדקה (5,23). Note that the יהוה-word in Isa 28,1–4 also contains a theme appearing in Isa 5,11–12.22. Cf. Am 6,1.3–6.13.

⁵² Cf. Williamson, Book, 58–60, though he works with the idea that 29,16 is Isaianic and therefore earlier than 45,9.

ing the state of his people is connected in 64,7 with his creational work.⁵³

The reference text of 29,17 is Isa 10,25.⁵⁴ The expression **עוד מעט** lent from 10,25 recalls (cf. **הלוא**) the entire prophecy against Assyria, as Beuken has argued.⁵⁵ There are also close connections (vocabulary, grammar, verse form) between the picture of the enemy in 29,20 and Isa 16,4, which describes the vanished foreign oppressor of Moab.

29,20	16,4
כִּי־אֶפֶס עֲרִיץ	כִּי־אֶפֶס הַמֵּץ
וּכְלָה לֵץ	כְּלָה שָׂדֶה
וּנְכַרְתּוּ כָל־שִׁקְדֵי אוֹן	חֲמוּ רַמְסֵי מִן־הָאָרֶץ

The fact that both 29,17 and 29,20 allude to two prophecies dealing with the fall of the foreign oppressor provide further independent support for the earlier assumptions that there is a literary connection between verses 17 and 20 and that these verses refer to a foreign tyrant. By making 29,21 follow 29,20, the unjust oppressor is not Israel, but his enemy.⁵⁶

A striking summation of terms similar to 29,20(–21) characterising the enemy as an evil oppressor appears in Isa 13,9–11 in relation to Babylon. Note especially **חַטְאִיָּה זֹדִים**, **לֵץ** (cf. **לֵץ**) and **עֲרִיצִים**. In Hab 1–2 Babylon also takes on the shape of the unlawful and evil ruler whose op-

⁵³ Cf. also Isa 51,12–16 with its comforting promise of salvation to come soon (**מָהֵר**) to an oppressed people belonging to a creator God, Israel's maker (**עֹשֶׂה**).

⁵⁴ As for the connections between Isa 32,15 and 29,17, Beuken, *Perversion*, 55, considers 29,17 the primary text on which 32,15 is built, contra e.g. Duhm, *Jesaia*, 213, and Wildberger, *Jesaja*, 1138. In 32,15 the desert is supposed to become (**הִיָּה לֵ**) a fruitful land (cf. Jer 4,26). The antithesis between desert and fruitful land in 32,15 brings this text close to other Deutero-Isaianic desert-passages (40,3; 41,18; 41,19; 43,19; 43,20; cf. 35,1–2.6), mostly inspired by Israel's pre-settlement history. It must be noted though that the desert-imagery is conflated with the deserted land of Judah (cf. Isa 27,10; 51,3; 64,9) so that proper distinction is difficult. But if, as argued, **יַעַר לְבָנוֹן** is supposed to be a symbol for Jerusalem in 29,17, then this aspect is lost in 32,15. At any rate, Isa 32,15 is also secondary on its present location.

⁵⁵ Cf. Beuken, *Perversion*, 53–55. Temporal notifications referring to a near future as in 29,17a are frequent in Isaiah (cf. 7,16; 8,4; 16,14; 18,5; 21,16; 26,20; 29,5; 37,30; 46,13; 54,7; 56,1).

⁵⁶ The reinterpretation of originally anti-Israel/Judah prophecies as anti-enemy speeches appears on various occasions. E.g. Isa 10,16–19 is reread as an anti-Assyrian text, being dislocated from an originally probably anti-Israelite/Judaean context (cf. the terms **מִשְׁמַן**, **רִזָּה** [17,4], **שִׁית**, **שְׁמִיר** [5,6; 7,23.24.25; 9,17], **יַעַר**, **כַּבּוּד**, **יַעַר**, **בֶּשֶׂר** [17,4], **כְּרַמֶּל**). The same is true for Isa 10,34, which in its present location seems to allude to the fall of Assyria rather than Jerusalem, as it did originally (cf. 11,1; G.C.I. Wong, *Deliverance or Destruction? Isaiah x 33–34 in the Final Form of Isaiah x-xi*, VT 53 [2003], 544–552). Cf. also Jer 6,22–24 with 50,41–43.

pression leads the audience of Ezekiel (8,12; 9,9) to think similarly to those at word in Isa 29,16.

It remains uncertain whether 29,15–17.20–21 has anything to do with the fall of Assyria in the 7th century. Allusions to former prophecies related to Assyria may point in this direction. Yet in so far as Assur could have also served as a model for all future oppressive world powers (cf. Isa 52,4), these allusions need not necessarily lead to such a conclusion. The lexical and thematic relationship with the second part of the book Isaiah⁵⁷ and other (early) exilic literature rather suggests that 29,15–17.20–21 should be connected with expectations concerning the fall of Babylon and the restoration of Jerusalem, supposed to become a reality very soon.

c. The second expansion: 29,18+24

The second expansion of the prophecy is identified as 29,18+24. The vocabulary of this passage is concerned with learning and insight, so that blindness and deafness are unlikely to refer to physical disabilities.⁵⁸ Blindness is caused by external factors, אפל and חשך (i.e. a state of judgment), but when these pass away, the people will be able to see. In the Isaianic vs. 15, the people think that they can hide from YHWH, that YHWH is blind. In the first reinterpretation (29,16) Israel believes that YHWH is hidden from them (29,16). Yet they who thought YHWH was blind, are themselves the blind ones (18b); they who thought he had no understanding, must themselves revise their misconceptions and come to an understanding (24a).

It was noted above that דברי־ספר in 29,18 alluded to 29,11, and beyond that to a concrete scroll (unlike 29,11), containing former Isaianic prophecies, including especially Isa 10,25. Israel who failed to remember and recognise this word (cf. הלוא), is deaf, but on the day when the prophecy is fulfilled it will come to understanding (29,24). Israel missed the opportunity to hear the spoken word, but it will listen to the written word. As Clements suggested, מאפל ומחשך probably hint to Isa 8,22,⁵⁹ where חשכה and אפלה symbolise the judgment of those refusing to hear the prophetic teaching and instruction (6,9; 8,20). The focus of 29,18+24 reminds the reader of the entire context of Isa 8,22.

⁵⁷ See especially the motifs of Israel as the creation of Yhwh (cf. note 15) and the instant fulfilment of the prophecy (cf. note 55).

⁵⁸ Contra Procksch, *Jesaja*, 381; R.E. Clements, *Beyond Tradition-History. Deutero-Isaianic Development of First Isaiah's Themes*, JSOT 31 (1985), 103–104; *Idem*, *Isaiah*, 241. The vocabulary of 29,18.24 is reminiscent of the wisdom literature, in which seeing and hearing have a specific symbolic meaning.

⁵⁹ Clements, *Tradition-History*, 104.

After judgment is fulfilled, the former situation is restored, Israel will be able to listen, see, understand and learn. The main point in seeing and understanding is that Israel will be able to relate history to the prophetic word, i.e. to interpret its past and present in the light of the prophecy (Isa 10,25; cf. 30,20–21).

The theme of Israel's blindness and deafness also appears in Isa 42,18–25. Here, too, blindness refers to the inability of making sense of the present and not recognising YHWH in the negative events that Israel has undergone (cf. Isa 5,12; 9,8–9.12; 22,11; 43,8), brought upon by his reluctance to listen to the prophetic instruction (30,9; 42,23–24; 48,8). This kind of argumentation seems to function in the larger context of the rhetoric of Second Isaiah through which he attempts to convince his audience that it was YHWH, who has led his people into exile (42,24; 45,7).⁶⁰ Similarly to 29,18, Isa 41,18–20 maintains that when God will turn the »desert« into a fruitful land (cf. 32,15), the people will see, know, hear and understand that YHWH has done this. What YHWH has failed to achieve by fulfilling negative prophecies, he will accomplish in a positive way.

Clements relates Isa 35,5 with 29,18 and considers these a »summary anticipation of themes and assurances which are found more fully set out in chs. 40–55«, i.e. actually later developments of Deutero-Isaianic themes.⁶¹ Clements may well be right with respect to Isa 35,5.⁶² We have seen, however, that the texts 29,18(+24) directly alludes to are Isa 8,22; 29,11 and 30,8. It is more likely, therefore that 29,18+24 derives from an author who may be identical with Deutero-Isaiah, whose objective was to frame earlier Isaianic prophecies by comments similar to the speeches he delivered for his audience. By this he provides a hermeneutical key to understanding earlier Isaianic texts.⁶³

⁶⁰ See further Isa 5,30; 8,23; 42,7; 49,9; 50,10; 59,10, where darkness (and blindness) appears as a state of judgment and light as liberation. For חָשָׁךְ and אֶפְלַח in relation with the judgment day of Yhwh, cf. also Am 5,20; Joe 2,2; Zeph 1,15. In Isa 44,18–19 blindness is related to idolatry (cf. Ps 135,18).

⁶¹ Clements, *Tradition-History*, 103.

⁶² In Isa 35,5–6 blindness, deafness, lameness, and dumbness do not characterise the people as a whole as in 29,18, but those rather highlight (physical?) disabilities among the people of Yhwh.

⁶³ The idea that Deutero-Isaiah left his marks on the earlier book of Isaiah has been worked out more fully with respect to other First-Isaianic texts by Williamson, *Book*.

d. The third expansion: 29,19+23d–e

Isa 29,19+23d–e speaking about the joy of the oppressed ones and the poor and their reverence of YHWH constitutes the third expansion of the pericope. The motif of the poor and oppressed is well-known in the book of Isaiah, but as Berges has pointed out, one has to distinguish between different contexts. He notes that in texts from the 8th century עני, עני, אביון and דל can be explained as a specific social substratum of the Israelite or Judean society (Isa 3,14–15; 10,1–4). In exilic sections there is a tendency to present the nation as a whole suffering from the oppressing world power as עני(ה) (41,17; 49,13; 51,21; 54,11). In the post-exilic community, the poor and oppressed regain their social significance over against the oppressors of the Judean society (58,7; 66,2).⁶⁴ Despite some problems in the interpretation of Berges,⁶⁵ his observation that the exilic community oppressed by Babylon is typified as עני deserves attention at 29,19, in which the people of YHWH as a whole is presented as the antagonist of the oppressor (עריץ). Similar is the viewpoint of Isa 25,4, in which the poor and needy (אביון and דל) are contrasted with the עריצים, the foreign (Babylonian) oppressors. Likewise in 26,6 the עני and דלים are supposed to tread on the ruins of the lofty city (קריה), probably Babylon.

The second half of this expansion, 29,23d–e, alludes to Isa 8,13. The context of Isa 8,13 was also important for 29,18+24, as we have seen. In the future, the former attitude of the close circle of the prophet Isaiah, the למדי (cf. למד in 29,24) who solely understand the sealed teaching,⁶⁶ will characterise an entire nation sanctifying and fearing YHWH.

e. The fourth expansion: 29,22–23c

A fourth stage in the development of Isa 29,15–24 is represented by 29,22–23c. From a diachronic perspective, the seeing of Jacob (ראה) and the sanctification of YHWH (קדש) by the descendants of Israel most likely postdates 29,18+24 and 29,19+23.⁶⁷

The name ›Jacob‹ is frequent in Isaiah, but ביה״יעקב appears rarely. Occasionally it denotes the Northern Kingdom (2,5[?].6; 8,17;

⁶⁴ Berges, *Armen*, 153–177.

⁶⁵ His conclusions regarding Isa 11,4; 32,7 and 14,32 are debatable.

⁶⁶ See חתום תורה in Isa 8,16 and הספר החתום in 29,11, to which 29,18 alluded.

⁶⁷ Note that the hif. form of קדש which appears in 29,23c and d with the connotation of ›to sanctify‹ (Yhwh) is very rare (with this meaning only in Num 27,14 and Isa 8,13; otherwise it means ›to consecrate to‹). Because 29,23d is obviously inspired by Isa 8,13 and not by 29,23c, verse 23d must be considered earlier than verse 23c, which can only be explained from 29,23d.

10,20), but it mostly refers to the entire country of Israel, suggesting an exilic setting or later (14,1; 46,3; 48,1; 58,1).⁶⁸ The name ›Abraham‹ appears in Isa 41,8; 51,2 and 63,16. The verb פָּדָה in connection with Abraham is strange. But Abraham may appear here, like Jacob, as a representative of his descendants, of those who were delivered from Abraham's land of origin. In an Isaianic setting, פָּדָה mostly refers to the return from Babylon, the ›second Egypt‹ (35,10; 51,11; cf. 50,2 and 1,27), related to which פָּדָה often appears (e.g. Deut 7,8; 13,6; Mic 6,4).⁶⁹ As noted above, »(not) becoming ashamed« is a favourite theme of Second Isaiah. The explanation of this motif in 29,23 underlines its relationship with exilic Isaianic passages.⁷⁰

If, as noted, 29,22–23c was composed for its present location, then it may have been this author who relocated the two former expansions, 29,18+24 and 29,19+23d–e, which he found either following 29,21, or as marginal notes. The two central themes, the seeing of Jacob (רָאָה) and their sanctification of YHWH (קָדַשׁ) correspond to the focus of the two dislocated pericopes. If לֹא-עָתָה in 29,22 is considered the present day of the fulfilment of the prophecy, then 29,22–23c already belongs to the era following the return of the deportees to the land of Jacob, i.e. to the early post-exilic period.

3. Conclusion

Isa 29,15–24 is a composite text developed in five distinctive stages. (1) The earliest layer is 29,15+21, which goes back to the 8th century prophet. Isaiah harshly condemns people because of their secret plans, their ideology that God cannot observe what they do, and their abuse of social justice. (2) In a secondary stage this early criticism of the prophet was reinterpreted by an exilic writer, by inserting his own text, 29,16–17+20, inside the earlier הוֹי-cry. This author writes in a context when Jerusalem lies in ruins and people eagerly look for its restoration. The former Isaianic condemnation against those who believe YHWH is unable to observe their secrets is considered not a judgment speech, but the opening of a dispute based on the conviction of the audience that YHWH cannot see them. This is the belief of desperate people, whose faith is seriously tested by severe conditions. The dispute into which the prophet converts the earlier הוֹי-cry connects the verses of this pericope both syntactically, as well as in their logical structure. The restoration of

⁶⁸ For בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל, cf. Isa 5,7; 14,2; 46,3; 63,7.

⁶⁹ More frequent is the synonymous verb נָאֵל (cf. 35,9–10; 63,16).

⁷⁰ Cf. especially Isa 45,15–17. Yhwh, called מִסְתַּחֲתֵר אֵל (cf. סָחַר in 29,15), will put those making idols (חַרְשֵׁי צִירִים; cf. יָצַר in 29,16) to shame (בוֹשׁ; 29,23). But Israel, who trusts Yhwh, will be delivered and will not be ashamed.

the ›forest of Lebanon‹, i.e. Jerusalem, is paired with the destruction of the one who has caused desolation: the tyrant Babylon. The former critical words against the unjust of Isaiah's society (29,21) are transformed here into anti-Babylonian speeches by relocating them after 29,20. (3) Isa 29,18+24 builds on the motif of blindness, deafness, understanding and learning, contextualised here as the ability to relate former prophecies to the experienced events, thus alluding to the topic of the dispute of 29,16–17. This addition is familiar with the wider context of the present prophecy, notably Isa 29,1–14 and 30,1–17 and suggests that the three pericopes are seen in relation to each other. (4) A further coherent text-block is 29,19+23d–e, mentioning the poor and oppressed as rejoicing and sanctifying YHWH in relation to the deliverance from the tyrant. While 29,18+24 was more strongly related to 29,16–17, this text describing the entire people of YHWH as poor and oppressed stands closer to 29,20–21. The above mentioned three expansions all belong to the exilic era and show clear connections with Deutero-Isaiah, who may have authored them. Deutero-Isaiah shows here how early Isaianic prophecies can find their actuality for an audience with which he was in a constant dispute in relation to topics such as the faithfulness of YHWH to his word and his people. (5) The final pericope, 29,22–23c, mentioning the seeing of Jacob and the sanctification of YHWH by his sons, is probably a post-exilic update on the previous prophecy, using a language familiar to exilic and post-exilic sections of the book Isaiah. The author who wrote this text may be also responsible for the present form of the prophecy, that is he may have relocated 29,18+24 and 19+23d–e to fit his interpretation more closely.

This article argues that Isa 29,15–24 is composed of five coherent segments. The early Isaianic word, 29,15+21, was reinterpreted in a new way by an exilic author in 29,16–17+20. The presupposed blindness of Yhwh serving as a motivation for an ungodly life by those addressed in 29,15, is reconsidered as the ideology of desperate people who deem the blindness of Yhwh explains the present desolate condition of Jerusalem. The former injustice in Isaiah's society (29,21) is reinterpreted as the injustice of the foreign tyrant against the people of Yhwh. Isa 29,18+24 (the blindness of the people) and 29,19+23d–e (the oppressed Yhwh-fearing people) elaborate on the same theme in a larger context and presuppose a similar situation and author as implied by 29,16–17+21, probably to be identified with Deutero-Isaiah. A final expansion of the text reassessing the seeing of Jacob and the reverence of Yhwh by his descendants can be discerned in 29,22–23c, which probably comes from the post-exilic period.

Cette étude propose de voir en Es 29,15–24 une composition en cinq fragments cohérents. La parole ésaïenne originelle, 29,15 + 21, a reçu une nouvelle interprétation en 29,16–17+20 de la part d'un auteur exilique. La cécité supposée de Yahwéh, qui sert de prétexte à une vie sans Dieu en 29,15, est comprise à frais nouveaux, à savoir comme la conception de Judéens désespérés, qui pensent que la cécité de Yahwéh explique l'état dé-

labré de Jérusalem. L'injustice régnant dans la société du temps d'Ésaïe (29,21) est réinterprétée celle d'un tyran étranger envers le peuple de Yahwéh. Aussi bien Es 29,18 + 24 (la cécité du peuple) qu'Es 29,19 + 23d-e (le peuple craignant Yahwéh opprimé) développent la même thématique dans un contexte élargi et présupposent une situation et un auteur analogues, comme on peut l'inférer d'Es 29, 16–17 + 21. Il faut vraisemblablement identifier l'auteur comme le Deutéro-Esaïe. Un dernier élargissement du texte, se référant à la vision de Jacob et à l'adoration de Yahwéh par ses descendants et datant sans doute de l'époque post-exilique, peut être repérée en 29,22–23c.

Der Artikel weist nach, dass sich Jes 29,15–24 zusammensetzt aus fünf kohärenten Segmenten: Das frühe jesajanische Wort 29,15+21 wurde durch einen exilischen Autor in 29,16–17+20 einer neuen Interpretation unterzogen: Die angenommene Blindheit Jahwes, die den in 29,15 Angesprochenen als Motivation für ein gottloses Leben dient, wird neu verstanden als Auffassung von verzweifelten Judäern, die meinen, dass die Blindheit Jahwes den gegenwärtigen desolaten Zustand von Jerusalem erkläre. Die Ungerechtigkeit in der Gesellschaft Jesajas (29,21) wird neu interpretiert als die Ungerechtigkeit eines ausländischen Tyrannen gegenüber dem Volk Jahwes. Sowohl Jes 29,18+24 (die Blindheit des Volkes) als auch Jes 29,19+23d–e (das unterdrückte jahwefürchtige Volk) entwickeln das gleiche Thema in einem breiteren Kontext weiter und setzen eine ähnliche Situation und einen ähnlichen Autor voraus, wie sie aus 29,16–17+21 zu erschließen sind. Wahrscheinlich ist der Autor mit Deuterojesaja zu identifizieren. Eine letzte Erweiterung des Textes, die über das Sehen Jakobs und die Verehrung Jahwes durch seine Nachkommen reflektiert und die wahrscheinlich aus der nachexilischen Periode stammt, kann in 29,22–23c festgestellt werden.