CHAPTER TWO

THE ISAIAH TRADITION IN THE ASSYRIAN PERIOD

This chapter deals with the issue of which parts of First Isaiah can be dated to the Assyrian period, i.e. the eighth-seventh century. The chapter begins with an analysis of Isa 6-8 and Isa 28-32, because these two complexes play a key role with regard to the question of the extent to which one may find early prophetic words within First Isaiah.\(^1\) In this way, these complexes provide an ideal battleground for defending my views against the radical position (as taken by Kaiser and Becker) and the more traditional position (as taken by Wildberger and Barthel). My main thesis is that within both complexes a distinction can be made between material from the Assyrian period on the one hand, and a thorough reworking of this material on the other. This reworking, which is of a literary and redactional character, can in my view be plausibly situated in the period following the downfall of the Judaean state in the sixth century. It will be demonstrated that the Isaiah tradition in the Assyrian period has a quite different profile than its later, probably exilic, reworking.

After analysing Isa 6-8 and Isa 28-32, I deal with the rest of First Isaiah in search of early material. Instead of dealing with every chapter, I concentrate on parts of Isa 5, 9-11 and 13-23.\(^2\) The analysis fo-

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\(^1\) Barthel 1997: 25; similarly Höffken 2004: 139.

\(^2\) Isa 12, 24-27, 33, and 34-35 are left out, because these are usually perceived as late texts. Furthermore, Isa 36-39 will not be discussed here, since an analysis of these chapters would exceed the bounds of this study. Isa 36-37 (2 Kgs 18-19) however will be taken into account in chapter 6.1.2. Isa 1-5, finally, is a somewhat complicated case. Although, in my view, parts from ch. 5 date from the Assyrian period (the woe-sayings, discussed in section 2.3.1), most of the material of these chapters belongs to later redactional stages. With regard to ch. 1, I agree with those who see it as a text from a late stage in the growth of the book of Isaiah as a whole (cf. Williamson: 2006, 15, 28). Although ch. 1 may include ‘earlier material’ (earlier compared to the very late date of ch. 1 as a whole), I am not convinced that parts from it can be traced back to the Assyrian period. A case in point is 1:4-8, a unit which in my view postdates the Assyrian period (discussed in section 2.3.7). The woe-sayings of ch. 5 are dressed in a later (probably exilic) redaction focusing on judgement and disaster, to which at a still later stage 5:1-7 was added. Similarly, ch. 2-4 in my view mainly consist of later material. Although I would not principally exclude the possibility that some early mate-