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Mysteries of the Book of Jeremiah – its text and formulaic language

To read Jeremiah is to be constantly solving riddles. It is like putting together the pieces of an *immensely large three-dimensional puzzle*: one level is the Book of Jeremiah¹ itself, with its texture from Jer 1:1 to 52:34, which resembles a surface stretching in two directions; the other level consists of its manifold links to other books, e.g. Deuteronomy, Amos, Hosea, forming, so to speak, a foundation and a framework at the same time.²

As a result, reading Jer means to be confronted with a huge number of questions. Some of them, despite the efforts of many scholars, have not been answered satisfactorily; in some sense, they remain *mysteries*. In this article³ I want to address two of them. The first issue (1.) regards the text of Jer, namely the character and quality of the Greek translation.⁴ The other problem is Jer's language; from among the wide range of aspects, the frequent use of standardized expressions stands out and will be treated below (2.).

1. The Greek translation of Jer

The relationship between the Hebrew and the Greek texts has become a hotly disputed issue, especially since the publication of Gerald Janzen's thesis in 1973.⁵ He interpreted three Jer manuscripts from Qumran as support for Jer G. This led to a turnaround in the opinion of influential scholars such as Emanuel Tov, Adrian Schenker, Pierre-Maurice Bogaert, Hermann-Josef Stipp,⁶ and many others. The *majority position* now gives preference to the much shorter Jer G over the Hebrew text of Jer in the version of MT.

Meanwhile, important translations in modern languages have appeared,⁷ and many scholars have addressed this matter further. As a result, quite a *number of problems* have shown up with what has become *opinio communis*. They indicate that accepting the priority of Jer G overlooks significant data pointing in the other direction, viz. arguments speaking for Jer MT as being closer to the original version of Jer than Jer G. I will first present three examples from Jer 1 showing typical differences between Jer G and MT (1.1), then deal more systematically with the problems (1.2) and finally reflect on the procedure (1.3).

1.1 Typical differences between Jer G and MT

¹ Henceforth abbreviated to "Jer".

² This aspect regards Jer's intertextual relationships, esp. those scrolls on which Jer is dependent; for some indications see my other article in this volume.

³ It was originally a response to the paper of Hermann-Josef Stipp on "Formulaic Language and the Production of Jeremiah"; this corresponds to the second part here.

⁴ The initial plan of Hindy Najman and Konrad Schmid for his paper had foreseen as title "Jer G*: The Earliest Known Translation of the Book of Jeremiah," to offer a solid foundation for dealing with the text of Jer. As this important topic dropped out, but is nevertheless indispensable for a responsible approach to Jer, I cover this subject at least briefly. – "Jer G" will be used as abbreviation for the Greek text of Jer further on.

⁵ J. Gerald Janzen, *Studies in the Text of Jeremiah*.

⁶ An example of the dispute is offered by Hermann-Josef Stipp in: "Zur aktuellen Diskussion". He is reacting to my position, presented in the same volume: "Die Diskussion um den Jeremiatext" (2008).

⁷ For Jer G are especially pertinent *A New English Translation of the Septuagint* (= NETS), with an introduction to Jer on pages 876–881 by Albert Pietersma and Marc Saunders; Martin Karrer / Wolfgang Kraus (eds.), *Septuaginta Deutsch* (= LXXD), for the translation; and in the corresponding second volume Wolfgang Kraus / Martin Karrer (eds.), *Septuaginta Deutsch. Erläuterungen und Kommentare II. Psalmen bis Daniel*, the presentation by Andreas Vonach, Jeremias.

As Hermann-Josef Stipp concentrated on “formulaic language”, I pick out examples broadly pertaining to this field, and which are found in the very first chapter. They show that, right at the beginning of Jer, the two versions *differ significantly*. Although the variations often seem to be at the level of details, they reveal different orientations, and sometimes even tendencies behind both text types.

a) The first words of the Book (Jer 1:1)

Jer 1:1 MT: דברי ירמיהו “The words of Jeremiah ...”

Jer 1:1 G: τὸ ῥῆμα τοῦ θεοῦ “The word of God ...”

Jer G presents the Book as *stemming from God*, whereas the Hebrew text attributes the following contents to a human person, the prophet Jeremiah. Both expressions are common usage.⁸ In MT “the words of Jeremiah” form a frame with Jer 51:64, the concluding remark⁹ before the final chapter 52, taken from 2 Kings.

The essential distinction between human and divine words receives new light from the following v. 2:

Jer 1:2 MT: אשר היה דבר־יהוה אלי “... to whom the word of Yhwh had come ...”¹⁰

Jer 1:2 G: ὃς ἐγενήθη λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ πρὸς αὐτὸν “... which came as word of God to him ...”

Looking at Jer 1:1 alone it is difficult to judge which version ought to have preference. The context of v. 2, however, might give a hint. The combination, in the Hebrew version, of human and divine origin of the following book, is unique for the start of prophetic scrolls and a pervasive feature of Jer.¹¹ Yet it creates a *tension* which is not present in the Greek version, attributing everything only to God. Taking Jer 1:1–2 together, it seems preferable to suppose that the tension of MT, accrediting Jer to the prophet and to God, stands at the origin and that the Greek version eliminated it.

b) The first words of the prophet (Jer 1:6)

Jer 1:6 MT: אהה אדני יהוה “Alas! Lord Yhwh!”

Jer 1:6 G: Ὁ ὢν δέσποτα κύριε “O Being (One), Master, Lord!”¹²

In Hebrew, Jeremiah starts to speak with an *expression of anguish or lament*. The three words are a formula.¹³ In Greek, the prophet begins with a reverential, devotional address to God which is reminiscent of Exod 3:14.¹⁴ Lamentation will become typical of Jeremiah later on, especially in his ‘confessions’.

⁸ דברי + name of a prophet as opening of a biblical scroll is also found in Amos 1:1; ῥῆμα τοῦ θεοῦ occurs in Isa 40:8, too, and, with κυρίου in middle position, in Num 22:18 and Jos 3:9.

⁹ It is absent in Jer G which, because of its different structure (see 1.2, c below), has the oracle for Baruch there as final word (51:35 G).

¹⁰ This is a variation of the so-called “Wortereignisformel”, occurring 36 times in Jer and various times in other biblical books; for the passages see Hermann-Josef Stipp, *Konkordanz*, esp. 36–37, which also display the enormous variety in Jer’s usage of it. For Stipp’s different position on text-critical issues in Jer, see his eight articles in *Studien zum Jeremiabuch* under the heading “Der Text des Jeremiabuches” (57–258).

¹¹ See the other article in this volume, “A new understanding”, there 1.2, dealing with the *Incipit*.

¹² Thus according to the edition of Ziegler, also in the parallel Jer 4:10; Rahlfs’ choice is both times ὦ δέσποτα κύριε “Oh, Master, Lord!”. For an explanation see Vonach, *Jeremias*, 2737.

¹³ The first occurrences seem to be Jos 7:7 and Judg 6:22. Besides four times in Ezek, they come again in Jer 4:10; 14:13 and 32:17.

¹⁴ Therein God had revealed himself as ὁ ὢν. The other instances of the Hebrew formula in Jer are differently rendered in G. Jer 14:13 and 39:17 have either Ὁ ὢν κύριε (in the edition of Ziegler), or ὦ κύριε (thus Rahlfs).

It is not easy to decide what came first. It is a normal trait of call narratives to start with an objection;¹⁵ however, there is no parallel for such an expression of wailing like אהה “Alas!” at the beginning. On the other hand, the devotional address of G is *quite unusual*, too.¹⁶ The textual variants within G in the three other parallel passages also display a certain variety in this version.¹⁷ Did the Hebrew change the ‘liturgical’ tone of G (or its ‘Vorlage’) to a more distanced attitude of the prophet towards God, or, conversely, did the Greek version alter the apparently pessimistic first reaction of Jeremiah to a more positive one?

c) The unique roles of Jeremiah (Jer 1:18)

Jer 1:18 MT: לעיר מבצר ולעמוד ברזל ולחמות נחשת

“... a fortified city, and a column of iron, and walls of bronze”

Jer 1:18 G: ὡς πόλιν ὀχυρὰν καὶ ὡς τεῖχος χαλκοῦν ὀχυρὸν

“... like a fortified city, and like a fortified wall of bronze”

Jeremiah is *richly endowed* in Jer 1. He is appointed “prophet for the nations” (1:5), presented as the promised successor to Moses (1:7, 9),¹⁸ set above nations and kingdoms with divine power (1:10),¹⁹ and granted visions like Amos (Jer 1:11–16, cf. esp. Amos 8:1–3). As if that were not enough, the second last verse of Jer 1 adds further, exceptional, roles.²⁰

The Hebrew version establishes a direct relationship²¹ between prophet and the designations attributed to him, whereas G uses the comparative particle ὡς twice. MT has three expressions, one more than G, which does not contain the middle term “column of iron”, and the plural “walls”, instead of the singular in the Greek. In any case, these additional roles for Jeremiah seem *strange*, and they are not encountered elsewhere.

The main difference between the two versions lies in the “column”. It has a special significance in Jer, as the final chapter elaborately describes the beauty of the two bronze columns of the temple and their loss (52:17, 21–23).²² Jer 52 also reports the fall of the city, and the destruction of it and its walls (52:13–14). The prophet Jeremiah apparently has to replace, metaphorically, what gets lost:²³ in G city and wall, in MT additionally a symbol of the temple. Once again, it is hard to come to a firm decision. Did G omit the specific ‘religious’ element here, or MT add it, to ‘complete’ the picture of the prophet Jeremiah as substituting for *all* major destructions, including the sanctuary?

¹⁵ Cf. Exod 3:11; Judg 6:13; Isa 6:5.

¹⁶ One might adduce Ezekiel’s falling down at the appearance of the Lord in Ezek 1:28, yet he does not utter any word during the call.

¹⁷ G’s variation of formulas can best be seen with the formula נאם יהוה “oracle of Yhwh”, rendered inconsistently either as λέγει κύριος “says the Lord”, as εἶπε κύριος “said the Lord”, or as φησὶν κύριος “speaks the Lord”; for the occurrences see Vonach, *Jeremias*, 2737–2738.

¹⁸ These verses refer to Deut 18:18, cf. below 2.3 with note 78, and the other article “A new understanding” in this volume, there 2.2, b.

¹⁹ The verbs “to pluck up and to tear down, ... to build and to plant”, have God as subject in all other instances in Jer.

²⁰ Jer 1:18 has received a lot of attention because of its ‘strange’ contents, very recently also by Christl M. Maier, *Jeremiah as YHWH’s stronghold*.

²¹ The phrase לַיְהוָה has various meanings. *HALAT* 693, lists Jer 1:18 under “13. c. 2 acc. jmd zu etw. machen”, לַיְהוָה in this case being equivalent to introducing a direct object, to be translated as “appoint to / as”.

²² This is valid both for MT and G. They expand even their source text, the report in 2 Kings 25. In Jer 27:19 (– 22, missing in G) Jeremiah announces the deportation of the columns and other temple inventory / equipment.

²³ Georg Fischer, „Ich mache dich ... zur eisernen Säule“ (1994).

The three examples above can be looked at from *both sides of the discussion*. The majority position tends to view Jer 1 G as reflecting better the original text,²⁴ ascribing to MT changes and a tendency to expand the text, especially in 1:18. The present-day minority, on the contrary, regards Jer 1 G as secondary, reducing the tension of 1:1–2, portraying the prophet as more ‘pious’ in 1:6, and shortening the strange roles of Jeremiah in 1:18 to just two. The discussion about the text of Jer thus resembles a *mirror image*, or a ping-pong match: whatever arguments are brought forward, it seems that they can be reversed in the other direction, if one looks only at individual passages. The picture changes if a broader horizon and other aspects are taken into account; this is the next step here.

1.2 Indications speaking against G’s priority

Problems with Jer G show up on various levels, starting with its attestation (a).²⁵ Detailed analyses of the text (b, e), the overall structure of the book (c), and comparisons with parallel texts serving as sources for Jer (d) further suggest that one should be cautious in accepting Jer G as superior to the Hebrew text.

a) The testimony of Qumran

The finds at Qumran have provided the first attestations to Jer, in several ways. *Six manuscripts* containing Jer fragments have been found, one from cave 2, the others from cave 4.²⁶ Most of them belong to the proto-masoretic text form, especially the very long leather scrolls 4Q70 and 4Q72.²⁷ An ongoing matter of debate is 4Q71 (earlier 4QJer^b), taken by Gerald Janzen and others as convincing evidence for the primacy of the Greek text form of Jer. The limited extent and the irregularity of this manuscript, however, do not support such a far-reaching conclusion,²⁸ and the latter still awaits a convincing explanation. In opposition to this interpretation of Qumran fragments in favor of Jer G, the longest, oldest, and best manuscripts there testify to a text form very close to what later became known as Jer MT. This is further confirmed by the *Hodayot* and other writings found in Qumran, which do not form part of the Biblical canon, such as the “List of False Prophets” from 4Q. As Armin Lange pointed out,²⁹ citations of Jer in non-canonical scrolls of Qumran follow predominantly the proto-masoretic text form. He concluded that this pre-MT tradition of Jer was obviously regarded as authentic.

²⁴ E.g. Karin Finsterbusch, “MT-Jer 1,1–3,5; similarly Christl M. Maier, Jeremiah as YHWH’s stronghold.

²⁵ There are great differences in the textual evidence: The Hebrew manuscripts of Jer are nearly ‘uniform’, having only few deviations with respect to the Greek texts of Jer, which display a broad variety of readings – see the critical edition of Joseph Ziegler in the Göttingen Septuaginta series (volume 15, 1957, new 2013).

Furthermore, the earliest Greek manuscripts are from the 3rd century CE, whereas large parts of the Hebrew text of Jer are attested to in Qumran, in scrolls from the 2nd and 1st century BCE. – Richard D. Weis, *The Textual Situation*, is especially helpful for an overview on the textual traditions of Jer.

²⁶ See the critical editions of Milik Baillet (for 2Q) and Emanuel Tov in *DJD*, volumes 3 and 15.

²⁷ Emanuel Tov dates 4Q70 to the beginning of the second century BCE (*DJD* XV, 150). It thus is among the oldest manuscripts found in Qumran and speaks against assigning a Hasmonean date to the Hebrew version of the Jer text, as e.g. Adrian Schenker and Christian-B. Amphoux do.

²⁸ See the remarks of Eibert Tigchelaar, *Jeremiah’s Scriptures*, esp. 291–293 and 301–303, and Georg Fischer, *Jeremia. Der Stand* (2007), 21–22. The line length of 4Q71 ranges from 112 to 147 spaces which is far beyond what is normal for Qumran manuscripts, in the line width as well as in the unevenness of the number of spaces.

²⁹ Armin Lange, *The Question of Group Specific Texts in Light of Essene Jeremiah Quotations and Allusions*, paper read at the SBL Congress in Chicago on November 19th of 2012.

b) Shifts in person, number, and gender

The thesis of Oliver Glanz has recently contributed significantly to the understanding of the differences between the various textual traditions of Jer.³⁰ He analyses Jer with respect to its *frequent changes of references*, i.e. where the text switches between singular and plural, male and female, or between first, second, and third person.

The high number of 585 such shifts in the entire book is a sign of a *conscious and systematic literary technique* which cannot be solely attributed to a redactional procedure. The comparison of MT, Qumran and LXX shows an extremely close affinity of the two Hebrew attestations, with an accordance of 96% between MT and Q. It is different with Jer G which coincides with MT “in terms of existence and position” only in 67%.³¹ Besides some mixed or unclear cases the most interesting finding is that there are 80 cases (corresponding to 13.8%) where shifts in the Hebrew text tradition are not mirrored in LXX, an indication that Jer G tends to reduce incoherence and to produce a ‘smoother’ text.

c) The structure of the book

The clearest indication of a *conscious* ‘deviation’ between the Hebrew and Greek text of Jer is the different arrangement of the book. The most obvious example for that is to be found in the oracles against the foreign nations. In Jer G they come in the middle of the book, in chapters 25–31, seemingly following the ‘classical’ structure of prophetic books, containing the sequence: woe for Israel—woe for other nations—salvation for Israel.³² Jer MT has these oracles at the end, as chapters 46–51, with Babylon as culmination, before Jer 52, parallel in both textual traditions, reports the final destruction of Jerusalem. This arrangement of the Hebrew text of Jer is unusual, yet it fits well with the overall development of key themes within the book, especially the roles of Egypt and Babylon.³³

Thus Jer G appears to present the more usual arrangement of prophetic books, but to lead to *problems for the internal coherence* of the book, e.g. Egypt and Babylon receive judgment long before it becomes clear what they are responsible for.³⁴ On the other hand, Jer MT displays an ‘abnormal’ arrangement for the book as a whole, compared to similar scrolls; on the level of details and inner cohesiveness, however, it seems to be more logical.

There is no ‘middle way’ here: one has to give preference to *either G or MT*. The different structure of the books is no ‘casual’ accident, but the product of a deliberate decision. Opting for Jer G means to see the traditional scheme first, and to accept ‘illogical’ presentation

³⁰ Oliver Glanz, *Understanding Participant-Reference Shifts*.

³¹ Glanz, *Understanding*, 232.

³² For a table of the different arrangements see e.g., Vonach, *Jeremias*, 2698. Even Jer G cannot be completely subsumed in this scheme, as Jer 32–52 (G) contain a lot of judgment on Israel, too. However, Jer G follows the traditional structure much more closely than does MT. – There are further differences in the structure between the Greek and the Hebrew text, e.g. the position of the Babylon oracles within those against the foreign nations in G in the second place, after Egypt (Jer G 27–28), whereas in MT they come at the very end (Jer 50–51).

³³ See my other article in this volume, “A new understanding of the Book of Jeremiah”, esp. notes 24 and 26. Judgments on Egypt and Babylon in the middle of the book, as in Jer G, clash with its general progression, even in Jer G, where Egypt later on becomes the country where Judeans flee to (in G chapters 49–51), and Babylonian forces afterwards besiege and capture Jerusalem (chapters 44–46).

³⁴ Admittedly, Jer does not follow ‘normal’ logic, in many instances. The chronology of the book is out of order, and even in the arrangement of MT God’s ‘retribution’ for his temple in Jerusalem, to be executed upon Babylon (50:28; 51:11), comes before the reported destruction of this sanctuary (52:13) and is thus an anticipation. However, this is a minor tension with respect to the one mentioned in the previous note.

regarding key themes. Taking the order of Jer MT as original implies giving preference to a unique composition,³⁵ in chronology as well as in the arrangement of the book, as a consequence of a progressive development of various motifs and themes.³⁶ A vote for Jer G favors the usual overall structure, but has to accept a lot of problems on the lower levels. Conversely, to opt for Jer MT includes counting on refined developments of several topics within an ‘unorthodox’ design.

d) External comparisons

There is general agreement about the *dependence of Jer 52* on its parallel in 2 Kings 24:18–25:30.³⁷ This is the most obvious case³⁸ where there is a ‘Vorlage’ for the text of Jer, namely the end of 2 Kings as a source for it. It has the added advantage that we still have access to it and are thus not constrained to speculation.

There are four, or to some extent even six,³⁹ texts relating the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BCE to compare: the Hebrew and the Greek text of 2 Kings, as well as of Jer 52, and, in part, both versions of 2 Chron 36. I summarize briefly the results with respect to the relationship of 2 Kings with Jer 52:⁴⁰

Jer 52 MT // G expand its source text, with a series of additions in verses 10, 11, 14, 20, 21, 34.

Jer 52 G is an independent translation, not based on 4 βαϛ 24:18–25:30, its Greek counterpart, as is shown by, for example, different renderings of verbs in verses 4 and 7, and it has a tendency to use rare expressions.

Jer 52 MT contains the longest addition in verses 28–30, giving the dates and numbers of three deportations.

Jer 52 G is the shortest of all four texts, even in comparison with 4 βαϛ which already was shorter than 2 Kings. It does not contain verses 2–3, 15, and several other expressions testified to by the three other parallel versions.⁴¹

In conclusion, Jer 52 G is the *most deviant version* of all parallel accounts. As Jer 52, in both textual traditions, is dependent on the end of 2 Kings, the Greek translation of Jer 52 seems to have substantially changed the original text.

e) Further observations

There have been many other investigations of the text of Jer in recent years which show *problems with Jer G* or give preference to MT. I only mention a few of them in the following, starting with two more general arguments.

³⁵ Compared with the criteria for textual criticism, Jer MT would correspond more to a “*lectio difficilior*” which should be preferred.

³⁶ One further example is the “cup of wrath” in Jer 25:15–29 (in Jer G chapter 32), announcing God’s judgment to begin with Jerusalem and to end with the “King of Sheshach”. Jer MT is in line with it, in the structure of the book as well as in the order of the oracles against the foreign nations, whereas G differs in both respects.

³⁷ An exception is Emma Abate, *La fine*. She considers Jer 52 G to be the oldest textual layer (157).

³⁸ For a few further examples, see Fischer, *Die Diskussion um den Jeremiatext* (2008), 616–617.

³⁹ Or seven, if Jer 39 MT is also considered. Its parallel Jer 46 G does not contain the verses 4–13, describing for the first time events at the capture of Jerusalem. This *lacuna* ‘avoids’ the repetition with Jer 52.

⁴⁰ Cf. Georg Fischer, *Jeremia 52 – ein Schlüssel* (1998), 333–359.

⁴¹ The amount of ‘abbreviation’ corresponds to what can be observed in the rest of Jer, where G is up to a sixth shorter than MT. Maybe this is also true for the contents of the parts missing in Jer 52 G, which display similar tendencies as elsewhere in the book. – Already at the end of the 19th century, Friedrich Giesebrecht, *Das Buch Jeremia*, 261–262, named the missing of verses 2–3 in G a “deliberate shortening” (“absichtliche Kürzung”).

In the introduction to Jeremiah in *NETS*,⁴² Albert Pietersma and Marc Saunders deal with doublets in Jer, and compare the renderings of Jer 10:12–16 and Jer 51 (28 G):15–19. They see “a considerable number of both stylistic and interpretational differences—and that in what is a patent doublet on the Hebrew side.”⁴³ This is a sign of *inconsistency*.

Benjamin Foreman analyses the *animal imagery* in Jer.⁴⁴ He compares the textual variants between G and MT, and in nearly all cases he gives precedence to the Hebrew version, as being the more difficult and original wording.

Several studies that are limited to certain areas or themes of Jer follow the same line. Konrad Schmid’s Habilitationsschrift⁴⁵ deals with Jer 30–33. Therein he discovers that Jer G does not reflect literary seams of the Hebrew text, and concludes from this its *secondary character*.⁴⁶

The Canaanite God Baal, mentioned in Jer for the first time in 2:8, is rendered in Jer G twelve times as ἡ Βααλ, a feminine goddess. Andreas Vonach explains this against the background of the veneration of the goddess Isis in Egypt.⁴⁷ The change from the originally masculine deity to the female form signifies an *adaptation to the different religious setting* there.

Jer 25 is like a central pillar for the book. The verses 1–14 therein are the last common ground between MT and G before their separation with respect to the book’s structure; with v14 the two versions begin to deviate. Recently Shimon Gesundheit has treated this problem,⁴⁸ and he recognized Jer G as presupposing a text similar to MT, yet *smoothing its tensions*, with v3 in G being incomprehensible.⁴⁹

1.3 In conclusion

Jer and especially its Greek text are a mystery. On nearly every level there are difficulties with Jer G.⁵⁰ They reflect the *enormous task as well as the difficulty of translating* an unvocalized, to a large extent poetic, original for a socially and culturally different milieu, at a much later time. This was also an opportunity to substantially alter the composition of the book, ‘streamlining’ some fractures in its structure.⁵¹ Nevertheless, the translator(s) tried to

⁴² See note 6.

⁴³ *NETS*, 880. Earlier, Franz D. Hubmann, *Untersuchungen zu den Konfessionen*, had similarly observed discrepancies in the translations of these parallel texts in Jer called ‘doublets’ and advised caution with respect to G (242–243).

⁴⁴ Benjamin Foreman, *Animal Metaphors*.

⁴⁵ Konrad Schmid, *Buchgestalten des Jeremiabuches*.

⁴⁶ Schmid, *Buchgestalten*, 19–24, esp. 19, calling Jer G a “synchronic interpretation,” and 22, “eine durchgängige, wenn nicht Eliminierung, so doch Nivellierung literarischer Nahtstellen.” My own investigation on Jer 30–31, *Das Trostbüchlein* (1993), arrived at the same result with respect to the profile of G.

⁴⁷ Andreas Vonach, Ἡ Βααλ in der Jer-LXX, esp. 66–67.

⁴⁸ Shimon Gesundheit, The question of LXX Jeremiah; for the “flattening” tendency see esp. p. 53.

⁴⁹ For a broader exposition of the problems connected with the Greek text of Jer, see also the second chapter in Fischer, *Jeremia. Der Stand* (2007; p. 17–53), and my entry “7.3 Jeremiah: Septuagint” (2016) in the handbook *Textual History of the Bible*, volume 1B (7.3).

⁵⁰ Even ‘defenders’ of the high quality of Jer G admit troubles with it. Pietersma and Saunders (see n.7 above) see that Jer G did not aim at “lexical or grammatical consistency”, differentiated “due to context”, displays “variations at the word, phrase, and clause level”, and was “working at lower levels of constituent structure at the expense of the larger units of discourse” (*NETS*, 876–878, 880). Hermann-Josef Stipp, too, in his monograph *Das masoretische und alexandrinische Sondergut des Jeremiabuches*, draws an ambivalent picture of Jer G. He observes *lacunae* in it which lead to problems in the cohesion of the text (e.g. 43), text changes in Jer 22:15 (55–56), and other signs of its unreliability. – Recently also Johann Cook, *Greek Philosophical Perspectives*, 272–273, has pointed out three cases where “the translator in fact referred to external data”.

⁵¹ Vonach, *Jeremias*, 2697–2702.

adhere closely to the original, sometimes even maintaining the order of its words, or taking the risk of being barely comprehensible in Greek.⁵²

In the view of the present-day majority of colleagues, Jer G is a generally faithful translation of a Hebrew text which was quite different from what later became Jer MT. They propose a distinct ‘Vorlage’ for which we have no proof. Certainly a ‘Vorlage’ must have existed, but we have no access to it, and speculations about it are methodologically *hazardous*, as we are unable to verify them in any way.⁵³

The arguments and the detailed analyses mentioned above heavily undermine the majority position and suggest that no more investigations should be started which take for granted the priority of Jer G. They lead also to the conclusion that Jer G, in the process of the translation, *interpreted and transformed* its ‘Vorlage’ and *rearranged* the book. Therefore Jer G cannot help in reconstructing the process of the formation of Jer.

2. The formulaic language of the Book of Jeremiah

The mysteries of Jer continue with its language. Jer offers an *enormous variety* of expressions, images, changes in forms of communication, formulae, genres, etc. Hermann-Josef Stipp concentrated in his paper on a very specific aspect of Jer’s formulaic language, namely its relationship to deuteronomistic (dtr) usage, taking several texts as examples. The entire Book of Jeremiah is marked by *various kinds of formulae*. Above (1.1, a) we dealt with the “word-event-formula”, occurring in many variations from 1:2 onwards. In another form, it is found a further three times in the same chapter (1:4, 11, 13). Hermann-Josef Stipp himself has provided an excellent tool for the investigation of such stock phrases in Jer,⁵⁴ and it makes clear that they are pervasive on various levels throughout the book. The presence of dtr thinking is also confirmed by the opening of the final chapter, Jer 52:1–3, which follows completely deuteronomistic phraseology and thought.⁵⁵

From the beginning of Jer to its end there are countless repetitions, as a necessary means to hold together this large, seemingly disparate book containing so many different types of material.⁵⁶ The frequency of formulae and formulaic language is a *sub-phenomenon* of this feature, so typical for Jer.⁵⁷

What is more fascinating in this trait of Jer is the high degree of variation in the use of doublets, stock phrases, and other repetitions, a sign of the *attentiveness and creativity* of its

⁵² Georg A. Walser, *Jeremiah*, 6–7, 14–16. This is especially true for some transcriptions which must have been unintelligible for Greek readers, for example Σαων εσβι εμωηδ (Jer G 26:17, corresponding to 46:17 in Hebrew).

⁵³ It is impossible to exclude such a different Hebrew Vorlage for the translation of Jer G. However, in the light of the observations adduced above, especially a still extant ‘Vorlage’ for Jer 52 in 2 Kings, this supposition seems implausible. To reason with something, like such a presumed different Hebrew ‘Vorlage’ for Jer G, to which we have no access and which is beyond our control, runs the risk that the whole investigation is biased. For the dangers of this methodological procedure cf. Fischer, *Die Diskussion um den Jeremiatext* (2008), 620, esp. also note 26.

⁵⁴ Stipp, *Konkordanz*. Examples are the veneration of other gods, leading the forefathers out of Egypt, the trias of plagues, etc.

⁵⁵ Jer 52:3 e.g. employs מרד “to revolt”, never to be found elsewhere in the book, but five times in Joshua 22 and four times in 2 Kings. Such dtr ideology can also be seen in Jer 15:4 where the guilt for the unstoppable destruction of Jerusalem is attributed to King Manasseh, similar to 2 Kings 21:11; 23:26 and 24:3.

⁵⁶ Cf. in my other article, “A new understanding” (2017), the exposition in 1.2.

⁵⁷ For a broader view of the various phenomena of repetitions in Jer see Georg Fischer, *Jeremia 1–25* (2005), 47–49.

author.⁵⁸ Only rarely are expressions fully identical; often small changes indicate another, slightly different nuance. A series of *hapaxlegomena* and unique phrases demonstrates further that whoever was responsible for Jer was not content to follow trodden paths, but consciously chose the exact wording.

It is in accordance with this line of thinking that I seek to understand the texts dealt with by Hermann-Josef Stipp. I would like to bring out how they *combine* commonly used phraseology with ‘*originality*’, as a possible sign of an authorship different from a dtr hand.

2.1 Jer 42:10–18 – a mixed picture

This passage is part of the larger unit 42:7–22, bringing the divine reaction (v. 7) to the request for guidance as to whether they should leave for Egypt or stay in the country,⁵⁹ transmitted by Jeremiah to the Judeans fearing the Chaldeans (41:18). I agree with Stipp with respect to the embedding of the prophet’s speech, its key role, the long introduction,⁶⁰ and also about the non-dtr character of this reply.

Going a step further, I would like to point to some *special features* of this text. The combination in v. 12 of נתן, referring to God, and רחמים, to be granted by somebody else, has a close parallel in 1 Kings 8:50. The expression שריד ופליט in v. 17 has only one parallel, namely Josh 8:22 where “neither survivor nor one who escapes” remains for Ai, as it is struck by Joshua’s troops. These are signs that *dtr language and ideas are in the background* of Jer 42,⁶¹ although not pervasive.

Besides the closeness to dtr motifs, Jer 42 displays traits that are *typical of or specific to Jer*. Examples are the list of verbs in v. 10, taking up, in a unique variation, 1:10; in v. 15 the expression ועתה לכן “but now, therefore ...”⁶² and to “set the face to come”, again in 44:12 and otherwise only in Dan 11:17; the unique phrase רעב ... דבק “hunger will stick” in v. 16; in v. 18 the exclusively Jeremianic locution “my anger and my wrath ... poured out”, to be found also in Jer 7:20 and 44:6,⁶³ and the four negative words ולא, ולא, ולא, ולא, picking up partially Jer 24:9 and 25:11, or 25:18, with an exact parallel in 44:12⁶⁴ and no other attestation elsewhere. All these usages are indications that the formulaic language of Jer 42:10–18 has a *distinctive “Jeremianic flavor”*.

⁵⁸ See e.g. the enormous variety in the mentioning of the three plagues, in the combinations of “Judah” and “Jerusalem”, and in the list of verbs with “tear down and pluck up, ... build and plant” documented by Stipp, *Konkordanz*, 49–50; 56–58; 96, and, more generally, the remarks in Fischer, *Jeremia 1–25* (2005), 50–53.

⁵⁹ This is not expressed directly in 42:1–6, but can be deduced from the divine answer in the following verses. Furthermore, it is the first reported reversal of the prohibition to intercede, which is a unique feature of Jer (cf. 7:16; 11:14; 14:11), as Jeremiah prays here on behalf of the people and God accepts his intercession and grants a response. For the motif of intercession in Jer Benedetta Rossi, *L’intercessione*, has contributed the most thorough recent study.

⁶⁰ Stipp, *Formulaic Language*, 149: “... most extended prelude to a prophetic utterance in the entire Hebrew Bible”. In my understanding, this lengthy prelude serves as an *exemplary model* of a request for intercession, and also for its distortion, as Jer 43 reports the disobedience towards God’s answer, against the promise in 42:5–6 to obey.

⁶¹ One might still add the phrase “to repent of the evil” in v. 10, to be found also in Exod 32:12, 14; 2 Sam 24:16, in the latter passage with the same preposition אל, as predominantly in Jer. However, here in Jer 42 it seems to be the only instance where this phrase refers to a *past* action.

⁶² The only other occurrence in the Bible is Jer 32:36.

⁶³ The latter passage inverts the nouns, once again a sign of an alteration in detail.

⁶⁴ There the second word is linked asyndetically (לשמה), without ו.

This passage contains further interesting traits. 42:12 addresses those intending to leave Judah for Egypt; however, they are promised that “he will make you return to your land” which seems to have those exiled to Babylon in mind.⁶⁵ This looks like a mixture of reference levels, bringing together various meanings into one quite common formulaic clause. Another ‘eye-catcher’ is the communication structure. 42:13 starts with the subordinate clause of a conditional phrase and introduces two quotes (in v. 13, and in v. 14). 42:15 continues with the main clause and opens in it, after the exhortation to listen and an extended ‘messenger formula’,⁶⁶ a new conditional phrase with the dependent clause “If you really set your face to come ...”, giving the impression of a complicated interlacing of sentences. These two examples (v. 12, and v. 13–15) are indications of the *complexity* of this small unit and of Jer in general.

Summing up, Jer 42:10–18 is marked by dtr ideas as well as by Jeremianic idioms and thoughts, with the latter being dominant. This results in a mixed picture of its language, which also confirms Stipp’s position with respect to the non-dtr character of the passage. On the other hand, the specific features of this text point towards a *more highly developed type of language*, possibly a sign of a later time. The long introduction, comparable to a ‘model case’ for a request for prophetic intercession, the dense, intricate manner of the presentation, and also the intensifying continuation (vv. 19–22) could fit with that.

2.2 Jer 44 – “some sort of duplicate”?

Hermann-Josef Stipp sees in Jer 44 a “dtr editor” at work who “appended another confrontation between Jeremiah and the Judeans”.⁶⁷ He focusses especially on 44:7–8. Once again, I agree with him in part, this time on some *dtr idioms* to be found in these two verses; Stipp connects them mainly with the “worship of foreign gods”. I would still add the locution *איש-ואשה עולל ויונק* “man and woman, child and suckling”, with only two other attestations in 1 Sam 15:3 and 22:19.

But this is only one side of the coin. The other one is their *specific Jeremianic character*. The ‘messenger formula’ is extended, naming “Yhwh, the God of hosts, the God of Israel” as the origin of the prophet’s communication, which only occurs elsewhere in Jer 35:17 and 38:17. Similarly, the phrase *עשה רעה גדולה על-נפש* in v. 7 “to inflict great evil upon oneself” has only one parallel, namely Jer 26:19. And the paired words *קללה* and *הרפה*, as in v. 8,⁶⁸ are not attested outside Jer.

There is another indication of a slight deviation from typical dtr usage in Jer 44:8. The formulaic *כעס* (in the hiphil) + *במעשה ידי* “to provoke with the work of (your / their) hands” is found in Deut 31:29; 2 Kings 22:17; Jer 25:6–7; 32:30. Here, however, the plural *במעשי* “with

⁶⁵ The idiom “to make return to the land” has, in all other instances in Jer, Yhwh as subject. Jer G (49:12) similarly has first person singular verbs here, for God’s action. Only in Jer MT 42:12 does it refer to somebody else who, by divine intervention, will have pity on the Israelites and allow their homecoming – a veiled reference to Cyrus’ allowance?

⁶⁶ “Yhwh of hosts, the God of Israel” is attested many times in Jer, starting with 7:3. Its first occurrence might be 2 Sam 7:27, a dtr passage, with 1 Chron 17:24 as its parallel.

⁶⁷ Stipp, *Formulaic Language*, 152.

⁶⁸ They come again in Jer 44:12, and stand in reversed order and not in direct sequence, in Jer 24:9 and 49:13.

the works” is used, as it occurs only once again in 2 Chron 34:25.⁶⁹ If one attends not only to 44:7–8, but to the entire speech of Jeremiah in 44:1–14, the differences with respect to dtr ideas and phraseology become still more visible.⁷⁰ Even when alluding in Jer 44:9 to the negative dtr evaluation of King Solomon’s wives in 1 Kings 11:3–4, 8, the language and the thrust of this verse in Jer is markedly dissimilar. The next verse, 44:10, contains the verb כָּבַד, obviously used here as an Aramaic loan word with the meaning “to cleanse, to clear”.⁷¹ Looking at the entire unit, its *difference and distance* with respect to dtr language and thought weighs much more than the usage of certain dtr phrases, because the latter are only picked up within a specific Jeremianic framework, to convey a distinct and richer message. This would also suggest that a dtr editor should not be presupposed for this passage. There is yet another reason why Jer 44 may not be regarded as a “sort of duplicate” of Jer 42. The setting is completely different, and also its position and significance. Jer 42 was spoken in Judah, near Bethlehem (41:17), still before the departure; in Jer 44 Jeremiah addresses those who have left their home country against God’s advice and settled in Egypt. Structurally, Jer 42 is ‘in between’, after the people’s request and their reaction to the divine answer, whereas Jer 44 stands ‘after’ having heard God’s will and having been disobedient to him. Jer 44 occupies the final position; there the *narrative movement of Jer reaches its (negative) climax*.

This is further underlined by the outspoken intention to venerate the “Queen of Heaven”, in the people’s response to Jeremiah’s speech (44:15–19), and his double reply to it (44:20–23, 24–30). In it, the prophet, in God’s name, uses the root נָדַר “to vow; a vow” four times in v. 25, interpreting the community’s self-obligation to worship other gods of v. 17 as a solemn pledge, and ironically exhorting them to fulfill it. After having already experienced the destruction of Jerusalem as a consequence of not listening to Yhwh, this group here goes even further, reaching a *peak of stubborn disobedience and insolence*.

2.3 Jer 29:16–20 – “a secondary supplement”?

These verses ostensibly *do not fit well*. In 29:15 “prophets in Babylon” are the theme, and only v. 21 returns to this topic, mentioning the prophets Ahab and Zedekiah there. Thus Stipp’s decision to regard vv. 16–20 as a secondary insertion seems natural.⁷² This may be so, and it is also impossible to prove that these verses are not secondary.

However, there are some factors which cast doubt on such an assumption. The address of those in Babylon with a second person plural continues from v. 15 in v. 16: “... which did not go out with you into exile”.⁷³ 29:17–18 communicates to them the negative evaluation which

⁶⁹ This is the parallel passage to 2 Kings 22:17, which used the singular. There is a similar unique connection with the Book of Chronicles in Jer 42:16: The phrase נָשַׁב (in the hiphil) with חָרַב as subject links it exclusively with 1 Chron 21:12.

⁷⁰ The sequence “not listen and not incline the ear” to God’s instruction (v. 5) is uniquely Jeremianic, starting with Jer 7:24, 26. Dealing with Jer 42, we already presented the three non-dtr expressions “my anger and my wrath ... poured out” (v. 18; 44:6), “set the face to come”, and the four negative words וְלִקְלֵלָהּ וְלִחְרֹפָה (42:15, 18; also 44:12).

⁷¹ Gary A. Anderson, *How Does Almsgiving Purge Sins?*, at 13. – I stop here with indications for the non-dtr character of Jer 44:1–14; more can be read in Fischer, *Jeremia 26–52* (2005), 435–441.

⁷² Stipp, *Formulaic Language*, 156: “definitely a very late intrusion”, and “undoubtedly a secondary supplement”.

⁷³ The phrase יָצָא בְּגוֹלָהּ “to go out into exile” only recurs again in Jer 48:7 and in Sach 14:2.

Jeremiah had received in his vision of the two baskets of figs in Jer 24, informing them about the terrible fate awaiting those who had remained in Jerusalem, mentioned just before in v. 16. This is *appropriate in two respects*. It takes up Jer 24 which had, as Jer 29 does, those exiled with King Jehoiachin in view, and it deals with the issue of pondering the respective fates of those in Babylon versus those in Jerusalem which is the backdrop of the entire chapter.⁷⁴ Prophets in Babylon and some of the exiled ones seem to have regarded those who were able to remain in Jerusalem as the ‘lucky ones’, whereas the assessment of God and Jeremiah is completely opposed, giving preference to those in the Golah.

The latter aspect is treated in two directions. 29:19 accuses first the population of Jerusalem of not listening to God’s words, but then (a) levels the same reproach at the address of those exiled: “... and you did not listen”, thus calling to mind their sinful past.⁷⁵ In contrast to that, (b) v. 20 exhorts them to listen now to Yhwh’s message and uses for their banishment “from Jerusalem to Babylon”⁷⁶ the verb שלח “to send”, *interpreting the exile as a divine mission* and thus giving it a deeper meaning. This is in tune with 29:11–14 and able to foster hope among the deported.

The preceding observations unveil concealed features of this unit 29:16–20. Seemingly an “insertion”, it is “*inserted*” exceedingly well into its context, continues debated issues and enables the discussion to proceed in a very refined way. This raises doubts about its “secondary” character.⁷⁷

There are still more reasons to question it. As it stands, the unit 29:16–20 reacts to v. 15. There the exiled ones are quoted: “Yhwh has raised up for us prophets in Babylon.” The expression קום in the hiphil + נביא “raise up a prophet” is exclusively linked with Deut 18:15, 18, God’s promise of a prophet like Moses in the future. This stands in stark contrast to Jer 1:7, 9 where Jeremiah is portrayed as this promised successor of Moses.⁷⁸ Jer 29:15 thus *challenges Jeremiah’s authority*, confronting him with a similar claim of or for prophets in Babylon.

Jer 29:16–20 is an *indirect reply* to that, reversing the announcements and expectations of those in Babylon who see themselves as ‘losers’ and the population in Jerusalem as the blessed. Picking up the vision of Jer 24, and extending it further,⁷⁹ God’s message through

⁷⁴ See the conflict in Jer 29 between God (and Jeremiah) pleading to settle down in exile for a limited time, against some prophets in Babylon who obviously are opposed to it, most clearly Shemaiah declaring Jeremiah indirectly to be a “madman”, when referring to his message (vv. 26–28). Before that, these prophets in Babylon are denounced for “deceit” (שקר, v. 9, also v. 23) and immoral behavior (“committing adultery”, v. 23).

⁷⁵ This ‘switching’ of the focus within one verse brings together two different aspects; cf. also above the problem with the reference in 42:12.

⁷⁶ This expression forms a frame with the beginning of the chapter, where it occurred thrice in vv. 1–4 (in vv. 2–3 separated). The messenger formula in v. 21 starts a new small unit, dealing with the prophets Ahab and Zedekiah; thus v. 20, although summoning them to listen and in this way also being a transition to what follows, is at the same time an appropriate closure for that part of God’s communication which directly has the Babylonian Golah in view. – The *Codex Leningradensis* has *Setumot* before v. 16 and after v. 20, therefore taking vv. 16–20 as a small unit.

⁷⁷ Stipp also adduces the “pre-Masoretic idiolect” of 29:16–20 as an argument for taking it as a “late intrusion”. Viewed from another perspective, his observations of such words encountered only in MT and not in G are a natural phenomenon: A translation, all the more Jer G which is so much shorter than Jer MT, can be expected not to contain all the expressions of the original language and source text.

⁷⁸ The connections with Deut 18:18 are “to speak everything that I command him / you”, and “to put my words into his / your mouth”, the latter one being an ‘exclusive relationship’.

⁷⁹ See especially 29:18, with its unique combinations of רדף “to pursue, to persecute” with the trias of plagues, and of זעזעה (*Ketib*, the *Qere* is זעורה) “deterrence” with the ‘Katastrophenformel’ “curse, terror ...”.

Jeremiah first inverts this misjudgment, and then invites them to seek for a better future by listening to him. This includes the divine appreciation and plans for them, communicated immediately before in 29:11–14, and it signifies a change with respect to what earlier had been a cause for the disaster which befell them, namely “not to listen” (v. 19). Upon closer investigation, and attending to the larger context, the unit Jer 29:16–20 is very meaningful in its place⁸⁰ and offers something akin to an answer to the challenge raised in v. 15 to Jeremiah’s legitimation and, indirectly, also to his advice to settle down for a limited time in Babylon.

2.4 Concluding reflections

Stipp’s analyses, based on the formulaic language of the three texts, resulted in *three different attributions*, Jer 42:10–18 being non-dtr, parts of Jer 44 a dtr duplicate to it, and Jer 29:16–20 a late, secondary intrusion. He is convinced “that formulaic usage ranks among the paramount pointers to the literary history of the book”.⁸¹

I am not so confident about it. A closer look at these passages revealed other aspects that do not fit well with his interpretation. In all cases, the phraseology used gives a *mixed impression*. Parts of it consist of common expressions also used elsewhere; yet in all three texts, in nearly every verse, the language is frequently surprising in its variety, and in the use of formulae. It often employs fresh combinations and new, sometimes even unique elements. Reading Jer is a constant source of amazement, offering pieces of formulaic usage, yet with a high degree of variation and creativity, and paired with specific Jeremianic language and thinking.

On the levels of *motifs and communication*, Jer is still more astonishing. It brings together several perspectives, as seen in 42:12 and 29:19: addressing those desiring to leave the country, it has in view those in exile, and addressing them, it focusses on the remainder in Jerusalem. This creates a strange, ambiguous impression, as if various settings become merged, probably an indication of the wish to collect and to integrate many experiences and positions. As a consequence, Jer is immensely rich, condensed, and its changing pictures often resemble a kaleidoscopic presentation.

The mysteries of Jer continue with the *book’s dynamic*. There is a clear progression from Jer 42 to 44, the latter chapter forming a kind of ‘pseudo-coda’⁸² as it is chronologically and ideologically the last passage dealing with those Judeans who survived the fall of Jerusalem. They should have learned their lesson, but they didn’t. Even after the worst calamity of Judean history in ancient times they continue to refuse to listen to God’s word and his prophet. This arrangement shows a well-planned organization of the book.

On various levels—formulaic usage, communication structure, overall dynamic—indications of deliberate design show up. This obliges us to *reflect on the method*. Are the arguments brought forward by Stipp and others strong enough to claim a “literary history” of Jer? The above evidence recommends caution; too many factors speak against it, and several aspects

⁸⁰ The reasons brought forward here for the linkage of this unit with Jer 29 cannot establish for sure that it belonged to the original composition of the chapter; however, they caution against interpreting it too easily as a later insertion.

⁸¹ Stipp, *Formulaic Language*, 148.

⁸² For this literary feature in Jer see Fischer, *Jeremia. Der Stand* (2007), 98–99.

point in another direction. It seems to be, in all its astonishing complexity, a most thoughtful composition. The production of Jer remains a mystery.