The Book of Jeremiah – A Composite Text

For years, scholars have grappled with the apparent editing that seems to have taken place in the book of Jeremiah. Some have argued for varying degrees of what many of them called "Deuteronomistic" influences.[1] Some argued for Deuteronomistic influence throughout the text of Jeremiah[2], while others saw the book of Jeremiah as a combination of the words and writings of Jeremiah's scribe Baruch in concert with Jeremiah, as well as a later Deuteronomistic editor.[3] A close examination of the text of Jeremiah reveal that some editing has taken place and that the evidence suggests that Jeremiah is not the author of the entire text.

The Jewish Study Bible gives this brief introduction into the composite nature of the text of Jeremiah:

Rabbinic tradition maintains that Jeremiah wrote his own book as well as the books of Kings and Lamentations. The modern view is that, although the book of Jeremiah contains an extensive collection of the prophet's oracles, the present form of the book is not entirely the work of Jeremiah. The prophet's oracles appear in a narrative biographical framework in which other writers provide information about the prophet, the circumstances in which he spoke, and the major events of his life. Thus, the introduction in 1.1-3 provides basic information concerning Jeremiah's identity, home, and the years of his prophetic career; a series of prophetic word formulas ("the word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord" [7.1; 11.1; etc.]) introduce each of the major sections of the book. Jeremiah's oracles appear primarily in chapters 2-25, 30-31, and 46--51, but they are interspersed with narratives, especially in chapters 26-29, 32-45, and 52, that provide important information concerning the circumstances in which he spoke.

The book itself claims that the prophet's companion, the scribe Baruch ben Neriah, wrote several versions of Jeremiah's oracles (see especially chapter 36), and this may account for many of the narratives about the prophet. Furthermore, the literary style of the narratives and their overall perspective concerning the relationship between God and Israel correspond markedly to the narrative traditions of the books of Kings. Some modern scholars therefore

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[1] The "Deuteronomistic Editor" is a term used for the idea proposed in scholarship that much of the Hebrew Bible was edited by individual scribes or scribal schools. These editors had a specific goal: to have the text of the Hebrew Bible reflect their theological views, ideas that coincided with much of the text of Deuteronomy. These views of the Deuteronomist historian conflicted with other ideas taught in the Hebrew Bible. See: M. Day, How did Josiah change the religion of the Jewish nation?

[2] Christl M. Maier, "The Nature of Deutero-Jeremianic Texts," in Jeremiah's Scriptures: Production, Reception, Interaction, and Transformation, Brill, 2017, p. 103-123. See also: *Inter alia* Winfried Thiel, *Die deuteronomistische Redaktion von Jeremia 1-25* (WMANT 41; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1973); Winfried Thiel, *Die deuteronomistische Redaktion von Jeremía 26-45: Mit einer Gesamtbeurteilung der deuteronomistischen Redaktion des Buches Jeremia* (WMANT 52; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1981).

[3] William McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah, Vol. 2: Commentary on Jeremiah, XXVI-LII (International Critical Commentary),* T & T Clark, 1996, cxxxii.

maintain that Jeremiah and perhaps Baruch are associated with circles that composed the Deuteronomistic History (Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings; see p. 453). Nevertheless, these observations do not account for the full compositional history of the book. Jeremiah appears in two versions: the Hebrew Masoretic Text that appears in all Jewish Bibles and that stands as the basis for the book in Protestant Christian circles, and the Greek Septuagint version that originally served as Scripture in the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Christian traditions. Although the Greek version contains many of the same oracles and narratives as the Hebrew version, it is approximately one eighth shorter and its content appears in a. markedly different order; for instance, the oracles concerning the nations appear as chapters 46-51 in the Hebrew version, but in the Greek version they appear as chapters 25-31 with a different sequence of nations. Because the text of the Greek version corresponds with fragments of a Hebrew version of Jeremiah found among the Dead Sea Scrolls, many interpreters argue that the Greek version of the book represents an early edition of Jeremiah that was later expanded and rearranged to form the present Hebrew edition of the book. Other fragments of Jeremiah that correspond to the Hebrew Masoretic Text also appear among the Dead Sea Scrolls, indicating that the two versions of the book circulated among Jews for several centuries following the lifetime of the prophet. This of course points to the likelihood that writers other than Jeremiah or Baruch had a hand in the book's composition. The fact that Jeremiah 51.64 ends "Thus far the words of Jeremiah," but the book contains an additional chapter, is but one reflection of its complicated editorial history. Many modem scholars believe that an original Jeremianic core, largely poetic in nature, was supplemented by prose authors from the school of Deuteronomy, who re-edited the book and brought it more in line with Deuteronomic ideas and terminology. Though this theory has much to commend it, it is very difficult to disentangle the editorial layers of the book.[4]

Possible Deuteronomistic Editing/Redaction in Jeremiah

Biblical Scholar Ronnie Goldstein[5] submits more details of the evidence of Deuteronomistic influences on the text of Jeremiah. Here he offers the following explanation of some of the evidence for the editing and the seams in the text of Jeremiah:

The Limitations of the Narrative Material about the Prophet: The Extent of the Legends and Their Relation to the Prophecies

Only a few of the texts concerning the prophet in the book can be called narratives or legends about Jeremiah since, in many cases, these only provide the framework for a prophecy or a

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[4] Adele Berlin, Marc Zvi Bretter, Michael Fishbane. *The Jewish Study Bible*, Oxford University Press, 2015, p. 918-919.

[5] Goldstein's commentary is from *The Oxford Handbook of Jeremiah*, chapter 9, Oxford University Press, 2021, emphasis added throughout.

sermon.[6] In a significant number of those cases, they comprise elements added at redactional stages and are not independent narrative traditions about the prophet.

Generally, it seems that there is a clear disconnect between the narrative traditions regarding the prophet and the rest of the material in the book, which points to the growth of the legends separately from the prophecies.[7] For instance, according to the book's heading (Jer 1:2), Jeremiah started his career as a prophet in Josiah's thirteenth year (see Jer 3:6 and the formula that records the period of his activity in 25:13; 36:2). Yet, while some of the prophecies can be connected to Josiah's period, no legends or substantial literary traditions are given about those times.

Similarly, various materials in the book that could have been the basis for narratives about the prophet did not develop in that manner. For example, there is no narrative tradition regarding the beginning of Jeremiah's prophesying in Anathoth; such a tradition is only hinted at in texts such as Jeremiah 11:21, 12:5–6 (which refer to the pursuit of the prophet by the people of Anathoth and his relatives). The prophecy in Jeremiah 13:1–11 seems connected geographically to the origins of the prophet in Anathoth (note the mention of Perath, a location that is probably next to Anathoth), and yet this passage is given only as a symbolic act without a substantial narrative. In this case, we would expect to have a story that describes the prophet going from his home in Anathoth to Perath and showing his worn clothing to the locals, but this tradition kept his form as a symbolic act.

Aside from the relative scarcity of substantial narrative traditions, especially in the first part of the book (Jeremiah 1–25), there is also a disconnect between the existing narratives and non-narrative material about the prophet. For example, the collection of prophecies in Jeremiah 23:9–40 concerns pseudo-prophets, and these figures are also the main issue raised in the narratives in Jeremiah 27–28. A connection between these passages could have been made in more than one way, but this is not the case. The prominent exception to this is the story in Jeremiah 26, which partly parallels the prophecy in Jeremiah 7:1–15 (see especially Jer 7:14 and 26:6).[8]

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[6] See, for example, E. W. Nicholson, *Preaching to the Exiles*, Oxford, 1970, esp. 36.

[7] This matches the well-accepted division of the book, following Duhm and Mowinckel, into three different layers: the prophecies, in poetry (A); the narratives, in prose (B); and the Deuteronomistic (Dtr) Sermons (C). See B. Duhm, *Das Buch Jeremia* (KHAT) (Tübingen and Leipzig, 1901), esp. x–xxi; S. Mowinckel, *Zur Komposition des Buches Jeremia* (Kristiana, 1914); S. Mowinckel, *Prophecy and Tradition: The Prophetic Books in the Light of the Study of the Growth and History of the Tradition* (Oslo, 1946); reprinted in: K. C. Hanson (ed.), *The Spirit and The Word; Prophecy and Tradition in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis, 2002), 3–80. However, the prose narrative material cannot be considered as a single source or layer, nor can the book's poetry. Still, the separation of the narrative material from the prophecies is clear.

[8] Goldstein cites the following: For Jeremiah 7 and 26, and the relationship between them see the review in: T. Seidl, "Jeremias Tempelrede—Polemik Gegen Die Joschijanische Reform?: Die Paralleltraditionen Jer 7 Und 26 Auf Ihre Effizienz Für Das Deuteronomismusproblem in Jeremia Befragt.," in: Walter Groß (ed.), *Jeremia Und Die "Deuteronomistische Bewegung"* (BBB 98; Weinheim 1995), 141–179.

Many of the prophecies' headings, linking them to particular times and places, cannot be taken as stemming from narrative material about Jeremiah. In some cases, they derive from sources initially not connected to the prophet, such as the heading in Jeremiah 24:1b, which probably depends, directly or indirectly, on 2 Kings 24:8–17.[9]

Other prophetic traditions, some of which might be considered narratives, are, in fact, only reports of prophecies, or symbolic acts, to which biographical elements were added (in many cases, probably secondarily). The prophecy in Jeremiah 34:8–22 serves as a good example. The narrative elements of this passage are preserved only as part of the heading of the prophecy in verses 8–11, and the central part of the passage (vv. 12–22) is not formally a narrative at all.[10] Similarly, the report about the House of the Rechabites in Jeremiah 35:1–19 tells simply of a symbolic act and contains scarcely any narrative elements. Only the heading in 35:1 (based probably on 2 Kgs 24:2) and verse 11 in the body of the text set the symbolic act in a narrative context.[11]

The long and developed report in Jeremiah 32 is somewhat different, as it includes prominent narrative elements. Here, the symbolic act of buying a field is transmitted almost like a story: the coming of Hananel, the purchase of the field, and the passing on of the deed of purchase to Baruch for safekeeping are described in great detail (32:6–14). These are connected to a place (the prison compound) and a discrete moment (when the prophet was imprisoned; 32:2; 32:8). Even the tradition concerning the prophet's origin from Anathoth, which is hardly reflected in the stories, appears here (32:8), along with the connection of Jeremiah to Baruch (32:12). The dialogue between the prophet and God in 32:16–44 is also connected to a particular time and place (32:24–25). These elements transform a report about a symbolic act in Jeremiah 32:1–25 into a sort of a narrative, an exceptional case within the book.[12]

Another unique case is the short episode in Jeremiah 29:24–32. In the Masoretic text (MT), the form of the passage is a report of a prophecy; the narrative elements are embedded within the prophecy against Shemaiah. This creates difficulties, particularly in verse 29, which should have appeared before verse 24. The Syriac version (and, to a lesser extent, the Septuagint) is markedly different, particularly in verses 24–25. Here, the material is structured as a narrative with a chronological sequence. Though many suppose that the version reflected in the Peshitta

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[9] Goldstein, *The Life of Jeremiah*, 2013, p. 232–233.

[10] For Jeremiah 34:8–22, see Duhm, *Jeremia*, 280; W. McKane, *Jeremiah*, (ICC), vol. II (Edinburgh, 1996), 878–884; Y. Hoffman, *Jeremiah* (Tel-Aviv and Jerusalem, 2001), 649–650 (Hebrew); Goldstein, *Jeremiah*, 196–198.

[11] See the exhaustive review of H. Migsch, *Studien zum Jeremiabuch und andere Beiträge zum Alten Testament* (Frankfurt, M: P. Lang, 2010), 13–106. Goldstein explains, "My intention here is to stress the road not taken by the authors and redactors of the passage, to observe its lack of narrative and plot, and to clarify the difference between it and the narrative material concerning the prophet."

[12] For Jeremiah 32, see the exhaustive literature in: A. G. Shead, *The Open Book and the Sealed Book: Jeremiah 32 in its Hebrew and Greek Recensions* (London, 2002). The evolution of Jeremiah 32 and its dating needs further investigation. See, for example M. Sweeney, "Dating Prophetic Texts," HS 48 (2007): 60–66. In the present case, the text's proximity to various narrative traditions about the prophet indicates, perhaps, that this is a relatively late story.

represents an effort to create a smoother text, verse 29, which is also attested in the MT, suggests that this transition to narrative occurred in the MT as well.[13] Either way, this case demonstrates that there was some fluidity between the narrative material and the prophecies. This passage (Jer 29:24–32) resembles another short story regarding Jeremiah and Pashhur (Jer 20:1–6). Both passages reflect a narrative tradition regarding the pursuit after the prophet while retaining some differences: in 20:1–6, the priest indeed strikes Jeremiah, but in 29:24–32, the priest does not harm the prophet. In both cases, a brief story serves only as a background for the prophet's oracles against Pashhur (20:4–6) and Shemaiah (29:30–32).

The Double Cycle of Stories about the Imprison and Release of Jeremiah (Jer 37.11-40.6)

A double cycle of stories about Jeremiah in the last days of Jerusalem (Jer 37:11–40:6) provides a possible key to understanding the history of the narrative traditions in the book of Jeremiah. **This sequence contains various overlapping stories**: *two accounts of his capture and imprisonment* (37:11–15; 38:1–13), *parallels versions of his secret meeting with Zedekiah* (37:16–21; 38:14–28a), and *a double narrative describing his release from jail by the Babylonians* (embedded in 39:11–14 and 40:1–6). Contrary to the notion that this sequence is historically reliable, describing different incidents in Jeremiah's life and perhaps even authored by Baruch son of Neriah, *these dual accounts demonstrate that the chapters in which they are situated contain diverse traditions transmitted by different sources*. Although scholars widely concede this position, the nature, essence, and relationship of the doublets continue to be debated.[14]

A possible explanation for the relationship between the narratives in this sequel lies in the passages regarding Jeremiah's secret meeting with Zedekiah in Jeremiah 37:16–21 and 38:14–28a. According to Jeremiah 37:16–21, Zedekiah secretly met with Jeremiah. In this account, the prophet complains about his imprisonment (v. 17) and implores: "Now please hear me, my lord king … do not send me back to the house of Jonathan the scribe to die there" (v. 20). Zedekiah accedes to his request, transferring him to the prison compound (חצר המטרה), which is regarded as a better accommodation. In Jeremiah 38:14–28a, on the other hand, the king meets with Jeremiah secretly, and the predicts for him a harsh future with a sliver of hope:

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[13] See McKane, *Jeremiah*, 731–733, for a review of the different opinions on this matter. Compare M. Dijkstra, "Prophecy by Letter (Jeremiah XXIX 24–32)," VT 33 (1983): 319–322. It is not impossible also that the episode about Shemaiah was delivered originally as a short story that lost its original form in the MT.

[14] See esp. J. Skinner, *Prophecy and Religion: Studies in the Life of Jeremiah* (Cambridge, 1922), 258ff; Goldstein, *Jeremiah*, 13–61, and the works cited there. Thus, for example, some maintain that the great disparity between the double set of stories indicates that both sit at considerable historical remove from the actual events: cf. McKane, *Jeremiah*, 2:970; Hoffman, *Jeremiah*, 680–681. This position was fully developed by R. P. Carroll, *From Chaos to Covenant*, 154–156. Carroll's approach leads him to abandon any attempt to determine the relationship between the narratives or to elucidate the history of their development. This tendency is particularly prominent in his commentary: R. P. Carroll, *Jeremiah* (OTL; London, 1985), 699–700. According to another perspective, each of the versions preserves different details, and their synthesis thus provides us with a full account of the historical events: see J. Bright, *Jeremiah* (AB) (Garden City, NY, 1965), 234; J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah* (NICOT) (Grand Rapids, MI, 1980), 643.

salvation is dependent on his surrender to the Babylonians. This episode ends with the king asking the prophet not to reveal their conversation (38:24). The king suggests the prophet to tell the officials that he was appealing to the king "not to send me back to the house of Jonathan to die there" (38:26).

The best explanation for the relationship between those two passages is that the second narrative depends on the first, reworking it for the author's specific purposes. The reference to Jonathan's house is inappropriate in Jeremiah 38:26 since it was nowhere alluded to in 38:1–28a. This indicates that 38:1–28a depends on 37:11–21.11 In this case, it seems that the very existence of the doublet can be explained as a reaction of the author of 38:14–28a to the earlier story in Jeremiah 37:16–21. While both episodes contain Jeremiah's plea, this is represented as his own, true words in 37:20, and as a cover-up in 38:26.[15] It seems likely that the author of the story in 38:14–28a was uncomfortable with the attitude of the prophet toward the king in Jeremiah 37:16–21. Jeremiah's plea before Zedekiah did not befit his status as a divine envoy worthy of respect and deference. No other prophet acts in such a fashion, even in the face of persecution.[16] Although Jeremiah is frequently portrayed as a suffering and harassed figure, he nowhere else pleads for his life before another human being. This episode contrasts dramatically with other passages in the book such as Jeremiah 1:17–19 (cf. v. 8; Jer 16:20–21) and 26:14–15.

Unwilling to accept an act of supplication to the king by a prophet, the author of 38:24–27 took this statement and turned it on its head. While Jeremiah did, in fact, tell the officials that he pleaded with the king for his life, he did so only at Zedekiah's suggestion in order to deceive the officials. Thus, the original story becomes a false report. According to this late narrative, it was actually Zedekiah who was afraid for his life, and Jeremiah only delivered God's words to him. The author further covers for himself by insisting that the officials "stopped questioning him [i.e., Jeremiah], for the conversation had not been overheard" (38:27).[17] In other words, according to this narrative, no one can claim that the version of events in Jeremiah 38 is not credible because only Zedekiah and Jeremiah were present.

This reading accounts for the essential difference between the two traditions. In 38:14–28a, Jeremiah and Zedekiah's positions are reversed, and the prophet regains his expected stature. Here, the king is the one who is in fear of being handed over to the Judeans who deserted to the Chaldeans (38:19), and Jeremiah is the one comforting him (38:20). In contrast to

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[15] Although McKane (*Jeremiah*, 967) notes that the subject of the conversation in 37:20 becomes a lie in 38:26 designed to mislead the officials, he fails to recognize this fact's significance. See also E. K. Holt, "The Potent Word of God: Remarks on the Composition of Jeremiah," in A.R.P. Diamond et al. (eds.), *Troubling Jeremiah* (Sheffield, 1999), 168. Eschewing diachronic analysis of the text, however, the latter's conclusions significantly differ from my own here.

[16] See A. Ehrlich, *Mikra ki-Pheschuto*, vol. 3 (Berlin, 1901), 255 (Hebrew).

[17] For the clandestine nature of the report in 38:24–28a, see Hoffman, *Jeremiah*, 177: "This is an intriguing example of a report by a writer of an event at which only two parties were present, the information that became public differing from that in the report itself."

Jeremiah's concern that he will be sent back to Jonathan's house to die (37:19), in chapter 38, it is Zedekiah who is afraid that he will be delivered into the hands of those who have defected to the Chaldeans.

It is possible then to establish with confidence the diachronic relationship between the two accounts of Jeremiah's secret meeting with Zedekiah. *The close similarities between them demonstrate that they are two interdependent accounts of the same event, one reworking the other*. This conclusion fits well the relationship between the other double narratives relating to Jeremiah, and it traces the lines of his development as a character over time. The principal feature of this revision process is the idealization of the prophet and his acts: his transformation from human being to hero.

Thus, the account of Jeremiah's imprisonment in 38:1–13 seems designed to displace the one in 37:11–15. The first episode, in which Jeremiah was captured while attempting to escape from the city (37:12–13), is problematic. Jeremiah's flight (most likely at the time of the siege; 37:11 is probably secondary), which entailed his abandonment of the people of Jerusalem in a crisis, could be considered a misdeed for a prophet. The revised version of this episode, which describes how the prophet was thrown into a pit by the officers (38:1–13), corrects the problem. As in Jeremiah 37:11–15, the officers considered Jeremiah a traitor, but this time the cause was their refusal to accept his prophecy, which they viewed as treasonous (38:4).[18]

The same explanation can also be applied to the double account of the release of the prophet by the Babylonians in 38:28b, 39:3, 14 (the first version of the account), and 39:11–12, 40:2–6 (the second version). Here also, Jeremiah's release by the Babylonians at the time of the defeat of the city (38:28b, 39:3, 14) could suggest that the prophet was a collaborator and a traitor.[19] The later version of the release, embedded in 39:11–12; 40:2–6, makes this situation a bit easier to digest: the prophet is not freed immediately at the time of the conquest of the city, but instead is released from his fetters amidst the Judeans in their way into exile (Jer 40:1, 4). At the same time, the prophet's importance is enhanced in the revised episode: the prophet is released at the order of Nebuchadnezzar himself explicitly because his prophecy has been confirmed (see Psalms 105:19–20).[20]

It seems that even within the first cycle of materials, which included the story about the imprisonment of the prophet (37:12–15), his meeting with the king (37:16–21), and his release by the Babylonians (38:28b, 39:3, 14), there are traces of diachronic literary development, which occurred before the evolution of the second cycle. The author of the first cycle appears to have reworked an early version of those stories to create the present sequence. Alongside the traditions about Zedekiah defending Jeremiah from the officers, others maintain the king

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[18] Goldstein, *Jeremiah*, 27–31.
[19] In this narrative, the prophet ironically resembles Rahab in Joshua 2 and 6, who was saved by the Israelites at the time of the conquest of Jericho.
[20] Goldstein, *Jeremiah*, 37–46.

was responsible for arresting the prophet (see Jer 32:2–5).[21] One could speculate that the story of the meeting in Jeremiah 37:17–21, which present Zedekiah more positively, was a response to traditions concerning the imprisonment of the prophet by the king and his release by the Babylonians.[22] By incorporating the episode regarding Jeremiah's secret meeting with Zedekiah (37:16–21), this author displayed the king defending the prophet, and he represented the ministers as Jeremiah's persecutors.[23] With this, he created a sequence that included: imprisonment of the prophet by the officers, his meeting with the king, and his release. The resulting narrative softened the king's role during the period of the prophet's persecution.[24] Likewise, seemingly aware of the charges of treason brought against Jeremiah during the siege, the author of the first cycle sought to rebut the claim that Jeremiah was a traitor (37:12, 14).

Jeremiah and Hananiah (Jeremiah 28) and the Meeting between Jeremiah and Zedekiah (Jer 37:16–21)

The clash between Jeremiah and Hananiah, as described in Jeremiah 28, also bears some resemblance to an account from an earlier era: the story of Micaiah in 1 Kings 22. The Micaiah narrative also has similarities with the first account of the prophet's meeting with Zedekiah (Jer 37:16–21).

Although the account of the clash between Hananiah and Jeremiah centers on the symbolic acts of these two prophets, it differs from other symbolic acts within the book: it is grounded in a particular time and place, and it includes a plot, which describes the actions of the prophet and his antagonist. Thus, it creates a story. As in the double cycle in Jeremiah 37:11–40:6, it seems that a process of idealization took place here as well. The core of the narrative is a short story, essentially a sophisticated symbolic act (beginning with the original nucleus of Jer 27: 1–8), in which Jeremiah appeared before Zedekiah with thongs and bars of a yoke, demanding that he submit to the king of Babylon. As a result, Hananiah broke the bar on Jeremiah's neck and promised that the burden of the king of Babylon would be broken within two years (the core of 28:1–2 and 28:10–11). Originally, this story probably ended with God's word to Jeremiah, which promised a yoke of iron instead of the broken wooden yoke (the core of 28:12–14).31 The story seems quite realistic: the prophet is not portrayed as a legendary figure, but experiences humiliation and is embarrassed by his opponent's words.[25]

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[21] These verses were added to the narrative in Jeremiah 32 at a secondary stage. Nevertheless, it seems that their claim that Zedekiah was responsible for Jeremiah's arrest relies on an existing tradition. Compare: H. J. Stipp, "Zedekiah in the Book of Jeremiah: On the Formation of a Biblical Character," *CBQ* 58 (1996): 627–648.

[22] For the king's portrayal in the various traditions (with some key differences from the position taken here), see Stipp,, "Zedekiah."

[23] Verse 37:16 connects between the episodes. See Goldstein, *Jeremiah*, p. 52-53..

[24] For the king's relatively positive portrayal in contrast to the officers, see McKane, Jeremiah, p. 942-943; Stipp, "Zedekiah," especially 631–632.

[25] Cf. A. Rofé, *The Prophetical Stories: The Narratives about the Prophets in the Hebrew Bible. Their Literary Types and History*, Jerusalem: Magnes, 1988, p. 93.

This story has been modified significantly by the addition of a Deuteronomistic layer. In this layer, which includes verses 3–4 (without the words "Yes, I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon"), 5–9, 15–17, the main topic is the future of the vessels exiled with Jeconiah. While in the original layer, the prophet suffers humiliation in silence, **the Deuteronomistic layer puts words in Jeremiah's mouth, based on Deuteronomy 18:9–22, to articulate a response to Hananiah**.[26] Moreover, according to the Deuteronomistic layer, Jeremiah's response includes his prediction against Hananiah: "This year you shall die," concluding the story with the fulfillment of this prophecy. **The difference between the original, non-Deuteronomistic kernel of the story and the Deuteronomistic layer is apparent**. It seems that here, too, one can find an attempt to transform the image of the prophet into an ideal figure.

The story of Jeremiah and Hananiah has a close parallel in the story of Micaiah and Zedekiah in 1 Kings 22:6–28. Both stories depict a struggle between two prophets: a true prophet and a false prophet. Additionally, they both feature a symbolic act (iron horns by Zedekiah son of Chenaanah [1 Kings 22:11] versus a yoke on Jeremiah's neck [Jer 27:2; 28:10]); they include a violent action taken by a false prophet (striking the prophet by Zedekiah [1 Kgs 22:24] versus breaking the yoke by Hananiah [Jer 28:10]); and ultimately, they build an argument between specific prophets into a broader discussion of how to identify a legitimate prophet (especially according to the Deuteronomistic layer in Jer 28:6–8; compare with 1 Kgs 22:22, 24–25). It is difficult to determine whether one of the stories was inspired by the other—and, if so, the direction of the influence.

A similar situation exists with Jeremiah and Zedekiah's meeting story in the king's palace (Jer 37:16–21), which can also be compared to 1 Kings 22.34 In these two stories, the king invites the prophet for a consultation, and, in both accounts, the prophet's opinion is contrary to the opinion of other prophets who promise victory.[27] According to 1 Kings 22:26–27, the prophet is imprisoned due to his prophecy, and the terms of his imprisonment are harsh: "scant bread and scant water." According to Jeremiah 37:21, by contrast, the prophet's imprisonment has been alleviated, and he is given a reasonable portion of bread: "a loaf of bread daily."[28] The prison's role in 1 Kings 22 is evident: this is the place of the prophet's confinement until it becomes clear whether his words are correct or not. In contrast, Jeremiah's residence in the courtyard compound is, in this case, an act of kindness by the king.[29]

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[26] It is possible that the deuteronomistic layer of this story was an independent passage before it was incorporated into the prior layer, and it presented a continuous, alternate story of the meeting between the two prophets, which was only later integrated into the pre-Dtr story. See Ronnie Goldstein, *The Life of Jeremiah: Traditions about the Prophet and Their Evolution in Biblical Times*, Bialik Institute, 230–231.

[27] This element of the narrative, in which false prophets collectively offer the same prophecy to the king and only one of the group reveals a different and surprising opinion, also exists in narratives about advisors; e.g., Herodotus, 1, 206–207.

[28] William McKane, *Jeremiah*, p. 931–932.

[29] Ronnie Goldstein, "The Prophet Jeremiah: Legends, Traditions, and Their Evolution," *The Oxford Handbook of Jeremiah*, (chapter 9), p. 241/911 electronic version.

The So-Called Biography of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 37–44) and Its Composition

Jeremiah 37–44, the so-called biography of Jeremiah, is an unusual composition within the prophetical books. These chapters include a sequence of stories about the prophet, beginning with the siege of Jerusalem and ending with the exile of Jeremiah to Egypt, along with the remnants of Judah. Despite its assumed connection to Baruch the son of Neriah, and the historical veracity frequently attributed to these chapters by many scholars, **it is clear that it is an artificial composition assembled a long time after the period of Jeremiah.**

The principal stage of the existing sequence's composition was carried out by a redactor who built the present sequence from independent sources. For this reason, he should be considered the author of this sequence. The major part of the redaction in chapters 37–44 forms the work of a single redactor, whose primary intent, it seems, was to incorporate Jeremiah into a chronicle about the last days of Jerusalem and Judah, the destruction of Jerusalem, and the murder of Gedaliah (a chronicle in which the prophet did not originally appear). By turning the prophet into a central protagonist in Judean history, this redactor explained the kingdom's fate as a direct consequence of the people's refusal to heed his warnings. This sequence was composed by a Deuteronomistic redactor, who belongs to a late stage in the evolution of the Deuteronomistic school, evincing close substantive and stylistic affinities with the literature of the Second Temple period. This late redactor combined two primary types of literary sources—narratives about the prophet and a chronicle concerning the last days of the kingdom of Judah —to set forth his view of the prophet's role in history.[30]

The account regarding Gedaliah and the events following his murder in Jeremiah 40:7–41:18 stands between two stories about Jeremiah, the first recounting his release by the Babylonians (Jer 40:1–6), the second describing how the remnant asked Jeremiah for divine guidance before their descent to Egypt (Jer 42:1–43:3). The original narrative regarding Jeremiah's release appears to have made no mention of Gedaliah, his presence being introduced in Jeremiah 40:5 by the redactor responsible for the sequence as a whole. This redactor likewise altered the chronicle concerning the descent of the Judean remnant to Egypt by inserting the dialogue between them and Jeremiah in Jeremiah 42:1–43:3. In this fashion, he reinterpreted history by adducing an alternative reason for the emigration—namely, the people's refusal to heed the prophet's warnings.

Similar techniques are apparent in Jeremiah 37–40:6, which links the prophet's biography with national history, thus providing an alternative explanation for the latter. Concerning Jeremiah's imprisonment, this redactor positioned the climax of the siege (the outbreak of famine in the city) as the background for the second story regarding Jeremiah's imprisonment (compare Jer 38:9; Jer 37:21 to 2 Kgs 25:3). Thus, according to this redactor, the double cycle represented consecutive events. The same tendency to reinterpret the chronicle about the last days of Jerusalem and turn Jeremiah into a central figure of Judean history is visible in Jeremiah 39:1–

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[30] See Goldstein, *Jeremiah*, 131–184.

14, where the city's destruction by the Babylonians is combined with the release of the prophet at the same time. Similarly, Jeremiah 37:1–2, which is partially paralleled in 2 Kings 24:17–20, serves to introduce the sequence as a whole, thereby underscoring that the catastrophe occurred because the king and the people refused to heed the prophet's warnings.

Therefore, the redactor understood the two cycles of stories about Jeremiah as relating to two different events, placing them one after the other in chronological order.[31] The placement of the two versions side by side directly contravened the second cycle, which was meant to replace the first. The redactor may have been motivated by the desire to portray Jeremiah as long-suffering, for example, or to preserve as many traditions as possible regarding the prophet.[32] It seems plausible that he regarded all the sources at his disposal as authentic (and thus authoritative), thus seeking to arrange them in such a way as to ensure that all the events in Jeremiah's life were included in the narrative sequence. This is a particularly intriguing possibility since it attests to a viewpoint precisely the opposite to the one taken by the author of the second cycle concerning Jeremiah's imprisonment (and, in particular, the author of 38:14–28a, who had no qualms about turning the story in 37:17–21 into a false account). The course this redactor took may represent a function of his temporal remove from the sources, placing them virtually side by side without any trace of differentiation or hint at their inner relationship.

It is this redactor who inserted, and probably even composed, the two accounts about Jeremiah and the Judean community who emigrated to Egypt: Jeremiah 42:1–43:5 and 44:1–30. Those two accounts are generally regarded as belonging to the Deuteronomistic stratum of the book. *Their syntax, lexical features, and grammar suggest that they were composed at a relatively late date; the ideas embodied in them also reflect those prevalent during the Second Temple period.* Both narratives are disputations, evincing particularly close affinities with another genre characteristic of the Second Temple period: penitential prayers and their literary setting. Employing concepts and terminology typical of this literature—especially regarding retribution—Jeremiah 42 and 44 appear to exemplify the view that past generations received just punishment after having consistently ignored the prophetic admonitions to repent. *The historical background of Jeremiah 42 and 44 reflect the circumstances in Judea during the Persian period, and the two accounts were intended to reinforce the notion that the only hope that the Israelites' covenant with Yhwh will be preserved rests with the returnees from Babylon.*

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[31] Compare: A. R. P. Diamond, "Portraying Prophecy: Of Doublets, Variants and Analogies in the Narrative Representation of Jeremiah's Oracles: Reconstructing the Hermeneutics of Prophecy," *JSOT* 57 (1993): 99–119; M. C. Callaway, "Black Fire on White Fire: Historical Context and Literary Subtext in Jeremiah 37–38," in A.R.P. Diamond et al. (eds.), *Troubling Jeremiah* (Sheffield, 1999), 171–178.

[32] For the inclusion of double narratives in a sequence, see the survey in A. Nahkola, Double Narratives in the Old Testament: The Foundations of Method in Biblical Criticism (Berlin and New York, 2001). In the case of Jeremiah 37:11–40:6, the impression from the first cycle may be softened by that generated by the second cycle. This may perhaps have been the redactional intention. What is clear, however, is that the redactor understood the two accounts as pertaining to two separate events, and he arranged them in chronological order. This appears to rest on the view that the sources he had are reliable, unlike the strategy followed by the author of Jeremiah 38:14–28.

To highlight this fact, the Judeans in Egypt are depicted in those narratives as the complete antithesis of the Babylonian returnees, serving as an example of the people's stubbornness and rebelliousness in refusing to heed Jeremiah's cautions.[33]

The Narrative Material and the Deuteronomistic Redaction

The complexity of the narrative material in the book of Jeremiah has implications for understanding the relationship between the Deuteronomistic content in the book (referred to as layer C) and the narrative material (referred to as layer B).[34] Although some narratives about the prophet are clearly Deuteronomistic, part of the prophet's biographical stories must be separated from the Deuteronomistic speeches: the narratives and the Deuteronomistic speeches are not two literary expressions of the same Deuteronomistic source, as some have argued.42 The two cycles about Jeremiah in Jeremiah 37:11–40:6 are mostly non-Deuteronomistic. Through some other stories, one can find a non-Deuteronomistic kernel that underwent Deuteronomistic redaction to different degrees (e.g., the story in Jeremiah 28, as mentioned earlier). For instance, the story in Jeremiah 36 has some idioms and ideas that characterize the Deuteronomistic redaction (see especially vv. 2–3, v. 7, and the prophecy to Jehoiakim in vv. 29–31), but the core of the story shows no such signs, and is possibly non-Deuteronomistic.

In contrast, some of the stories are clearly Deuteronomistic without an apparent pre-Deutronomistic nucleus (such as Jeremiah 42 and 44; probably also Jeremiah 35). A significant part of the Deuteronomistic material about the prophet and his experiences seems to be relatively late. It can be dated to the Persian period, presumably from the last part of the fifth century BCE.

Between Prophecy and Narrative

In the first part of the book, there is a sequence that is somewhat akin to a narrative about the prophet (chapters 18-20). This is a quasi-narrative, created by an editor out of materials that had almost no biographical basis. The relationship between the different passages in this sequence is loose. This includes a symbolic act in the house of the potter (18:1–11), a poetic prophecy of doom (18:13–17), a complaint prayer (18:19–23), another prophetic act: smashing the jug (19:1–13), the arrest of the prophet by Pashhur (20:1–6), and a collection of complaint prayers (20:7–18). The sequence seems to have been composed to connect the prophecies to

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[33] For Jeremiah 42 and 44, see Goldstein, *The Life of Jeremiah,* Bialik Institute, 2013, 87–130.

[34] Generally, this matches the well-accepted division of the book, following Duhm and Mowinckel, into three different layers: the prophecies, in poetry (A); the narratives, in prose (B); and the Deuteronomistic (Dtr) Sermons (C). See B. Duhm, *Das Buch Jeremia* (KHAT) (Tübingen and Leipzig, 1901), esp. x–xxi; S. Mowinckel, *Zur Komposition des Buches Jeremia* (Kristiana, 1914); S. Mowinckel, *Prophecy and Tradition: The Prophetic Books in the Light of the Study of the Growth and History of the Tradition* (Oslo, 1946); reprinted in: K. C. Hanson (ed.), *The Spirit and The Word; Prophecy and Tradition in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis, 2002), 3–80. **However, the prose narrative material cannot be considered as a single source or layer, nor can the book's poetry**. Still, the separation of the narrative material from the prophecies is clear.

the prophet's life events, and simultaneously to develop a new theological message that had not existed in the separate units. A thin editorial layer connects the units: verses 18:12 and 18:18, which are related in content and style, combine the first three passages and create a semi-biographical sequence between them. Jeremiah 19:14–15 has a similar function: its primary purpose in this section is to build a continuum between 19:1–13 and 20:1–6, originally two separate units. This unit's considerable editorial effort indicates a redactor's attempt to sort out the prophetic sources in his hand as a quasi-biographical work. With this, he created a portrayal reminiscent of other traditions regarding Jeremiah, the persecuted prophet who fulfills his role by warning the people.[35]

It seems that, in this case, the author of the sequence in Jeremiah 18–20 sought to contextualize the prophecies, and especially the complaint prayers attributed to Jeremiah, which include a request to punish the people for their misdeeds. There is, thus, a reason to suppose that the placing of Jeremiah 18–20 in the present sequence of the book was intended to influence the reading of the other complaint prayers in Jeremiah 11–17 (also known as the "Confessions of Jeremiah"), which are interspersed throughout these chapters without having been incorporated explicitly into the context of the prophet's life experiences.

The complaint prayers attributed to Jeremiah, probably at an early stage of the traditions about the prophet, were, in this case, an essential factor in the creation of a quasi-biographical sequence about the persecution of the prophet because of his harsh words against the people.[36] The prayers were attributed to the prophet, probably because of verses like Jeremiah 15:16: "When your words were offered, I devoured them"; and Jeremiah 17:15: "See, they say to me: 'Where is the prediction of the Lord? Let it come to pass!'" (see also: Jer 18:20; Jer 20:8–9).[37] These prayers, which have parallels in complaint prayers outside of the book of Jeremiah (see esp. Psalms 35:11–14; 109:4–5), invited the redactors of the book to find a context for them. This led to the creation of the current sequence in Jeremiah 18–20, creating two cycles of denunciation by the prophet, persecution of him by the people, and, as a consequence, a complaint by him. This is in accordance with redactional (and mainly Deuteronomistic) ideas regarding the prophet's role and the growing tradition relating to the persecution of prophets by the people. A similar process probably happened also earlier, and it is possible that the story

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[35] For the composition of Jeremiah 18–20, see Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 371–379; see also Bright, *Jeremiah*, lxxv; Goldstein, *Jeremiah*, 223–228.

[36] Opinions differ on these prayers and their place in the evolution of the book. See A. R. P. Diamond, *The Confessions of Jeremiah in Context: Scenes of Prophetic Drama* (JSOT Supp 45) (Sheffield, 1987). While Jeremian authorship is not impossible, the general character of the prayers and their similarity to other complaint prayers in the book of Psalms are better explained by the assumption that these are existing prayers secondarily ascribed to Jeremiah, and, in their turn, that these formed a basis for narrative traditions about the prophet. For a similar process in Greek literature, see M. R. Lefkowitz, *The Lives of the Greek Poets* (London, 1981), 40–48. Goldstein, *Jeremiah*, 226–227.

[37] Compare the opinions of Bright, *Jeremiah*, lxv–lxvi, and others, who find in these verses evidence of the authenticity of the prayers and their correct attribution to Jeremiah. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 332, 363, 380–381, 399, disputes this, rightly in my opinion, and points to the similarity of these verses to psalms (especially: Psalms 35, 42, 79, 109) that are not particularly connected to the prophet.

about Jeremiah in the cistern (Jer 38:1–13) is based on the similar motif in the complaint prayers (as Psalms 69:1–3).

Idealization, Schematization, and Historicization

The transmission and evolution of the main traditions concerning the prophet were affected by three central factors:

(1) Idealization: modifying details in the tradition of the prophet that appear problematic. As we have seen, this process was responsible for significant changes to the image of the prophet.
(2) Schematization: adaptation of the prophet's narrative to fixed ideological and historiographical patterns. In this process, characters tend to lose their specificity and begin to serve the author's main idea. This process occurred in the Deuteronomistic redaction, which intended to give the material in its possession a consistent and uniform message.[38]
(3) Historicization: matching the prophet's narrative to the dominant historiography and creating links between the prophet's actions and the major events of his era. This process should probably also be related to the addition of headings to the prophecies, which have a central place in the creation of the biographical tradition of the prophet. Many of these headings appear to have been added at an editorial stage to anchor the traditions and deeds of the prophet in a detailed biographical sequence. For example, the connection of the episode in Jeremiah 34:8–22 to the temporary lifting of the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem is the work of a redactor whose intent is to link traditions concerning Jeremiah's life with other historiographical traditions regarding the siege and the city's destruction, thus providing a theological explanation for the historical events and, at the same time, depicting the prophet as being directly involved in history.[39] A similar technique was used in chapters 37–44. The implications for the attempt to sketch the prophet Jeremiah's biography from the traditions preserved in the book are clear.

Further Reading

R. P. Carroll. *From Chaos to Covenant: Uses of Prophecy in the Book of Jeremiah*. London, 1981.
S. Mowinckel. *Prophecy and Tradition: The Prophetic Books in the Light of the Study of the Growth and History of the Tradition*. Oslo 1946; reprinted in: S. Mowinckel, *The Spirit and The Word: Prophecy and Tradition in Ancient Israel*, edited by K. C. Hanson. Minneapolis, 2002, 3–80.
E. W. Nicholson. *Preaching to the Exiles: A Study of the Prose Tradition in the Book of Jeremiah*. Oxford, 1970.
C. R. Seitz. *Theology in Conflict: Reactions to the Exile in the Book of Jeremiah. De Gruyter,* 1989.

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[38] On this tendency toward uniformity in the Deuteronomistic redaction of the book, see, for example A. Rofé, "Studies on the Composition of the Book of Jeremiah," 1–29, and the references there. See Goldstein, *Jeremiah*, 231.

[39] On this process in Jeremiah 34:8–22, see Goldstein, *Jeremiah*, 196–198. Others have argued for the historicity of the passage in its present form. See, *inter alia*, Holladay, *Jeremiah*, vol. 2, 239, 241. Moreover, see also I. Ephal, *The City Besieged* (Leiden and Boston: 2009), 169–172.

C. J. Sharp. *Prophecy and Ideology in Jeremiah: Struggles for Authority in the Deutero-Jeremianic Prose*. London and New York, 2003.

J. Skinner. *Prophecy and Religion: Studies in the Life of Jeremiah*. Cambridge, 1922.