

RBL 04/09/2002

Huwylér, Beat.

Jeremia und die Völker: Untersuchungen zu den Völkersprüchen in Jeremia 46-49

Forschungen zum Alten Testament 20

Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1997. Pp. x + 433, Cloth, EUR 69,00, ISBN 3161467744.

Marvin A. Sweeney
Claremont, CA 91711

This Basel dissertation (K. Seybold, director) assesses the role of the oracles concerning the nations in the literary-historical development of the book of Jeremiah. The interpretation of these oracles presents a number of complicated issues. First, scholars consider the biblical oracles concerning the nations in general to be somewhat ambiguous because they constitute announcements of salvation for Israel on the one hand and announcements of disaster for the nation in question on the other. The general lack of a statement of the grounds for the nation's punishment complicates the issue further because it points to a type of oracle that differs from the typical prophetic announcement of judgment against Israel or Judah. Consequently, many scholars argue that the oracles concerning the nations are a relatively late development that express eschatological hopes for the restoration of Israel. Huwylér, however, notes the very close involvement of Israel's prophets in political affairs together with the use of oracles concerning nations in pre-Israelite ancient Near Eastern cultures and argues instead that the oracles concerning the nations cannot be dismissed so easily as late phenomena.

Second, the very different forms of the book of Jeremiah in the Septuagint (LXX) and Masoretic (MT) traditions have important implications for tracing the literary-historical development of the book, especially since neither version can be viewed exclusively as an expansion or a contraction of the other. Rather, both appear to have developed from a common base, but both also continued to develop further as independent editions. This has important implications for the oracles concerning the nations, which appear near the end of the book as chapters 46-51 in the Masoretic tradition and near the middle of the book as chapters 25-31 of the Septuagint tradition. The question of the textual versions also has an impact on the interpretation of chapter 25, which appears as a single chapter in the MT but as two segments in the LXX in which MT Jer 25:15-38* appears after the oracles concerning the nations to introduce the second half of the book in LXX Jer 32. Huwylér argues that the current configurations of Jer 25 point to this text as a key element in assessing the role of the oracles concerning the nations in the formation of the

book, and it suggests that the oracles concerning the nations are intimately connected to the prophecies of Jeremiah himself.

Third, the oracle concerning Babylon in chapters 50-51 complicates the issue because it clearly points to a concern in both versions of the book to organize the oracles concerning the nations in order to address the issue of the Babylonian exile. In order to avoid prejudicing the issue, Huwyler dispenses with consideration of the Babylonian oracle in order to focus on the oracles concerning the other nations in chapters 46-49. He proposes the application of inductive criteria to distinguish the Jeremian and non-Jeremian elements of each passage, with a particular concern to identify the concrete situations presupposed by the oracles concerning the nations and the manner in which they have been applied to address such situations throughout the course of their literary-historical development.

Based upon consideration of the three issues outlined above, Huwyler argues that the redaction-critical analysis of the oracles concerning the nations in Jeremiah necessarily entails assessment of the LXX and MT as witnesses to successive editions of the book. When considered in relation to prevailing theories of a Deuteronomistic edition of Jeremiah, this points to three stages: the Deuteronomistic edition of the prophecies of Jeremiah; the Alexandrian edition of the book represented by the LXX; and the proto-Masoretic edition represented by the MT.

Huwyler's close reading of each oracle employs both text-critical and literary/redaction-critical perspectives to yield the following results. The first oracle concerning Egypt in Jer 46/26:3-12 presupposes Egypt's battle against Babylon at Carchemish in 605 BCE. The prophet employs the imagery of the rising Nile to portray Carchemish as the breaking of the dam that will ultimately sweep Egypt away. The second oracle concerning Egypt in Jer 46:13-26/26:13-25 presupposes Nebuchadnezzar's attack against Egypt early in the reign of Pharaoh Hophra (ca. 588 BCE). The salvation oracle directed to Jacob in Jer 46:27-28 originally addressed the northern kingdom of Israel early in the prophet's career, but it is now read in relation to Egypt and the final years of Judah. The setting of the oracle concerning Philistia in Jer 47/29:1-7 is less certain, but it appears to presuppose Egyptian campaigns against Philistia prior to Carchemish and later attempts to stop the Babylonian advance into the coastal plain. The LXX version presupposes Ptolemaic and Seleucid conflict in the late fourth and third centuries BCE. The oracle concerning Moab in Jer 48/31 presupposes the Babylonian assault against Moab and Edom in 582 BCE. The well-known links between this text and Isa 15-16 point to an editorial reworking of the Isaian text. The statement concerning Moab's restoration in 48:47 is a post-Jeremian expansion. The setting of the oracle concerning Ammon in Jer 49:1-6/30:1-5 is uncertain insofar as it may extend from 605 to 582 BCE, but there is no reason to deny the core of the unit to Jeremiah. The interpretation of the oracle concerning Edom in Jer 49:7-22/29:8-23 is complicated by its intertextual relationship with Obadiah and by gaps in information concerning Babylonian

campaigns against Edom. Although the concerns of the oracle are Jeremian, it appears to have been reworked under the influence of Obadiah to address fifth-century Arab incursions and third-century Nabatean incursions. The oracle concerning Damascus in Jer 49:23-27/30:12-16 presupposes Babylonian incursions into territory held by Assyria in 605 BCE. The oracle concerning Kedar and Hazor in Jer 49:28-33/30:6-11 presupposes Nebuchadnezzar's desert campaigns of 599/598 BCE. The oracle concerning Elam in Jer 49:34-39/25:14-19 is not Jeremian but stems from the late exilic period.

Altogether, Huwyler presents a model of literary growth in which originally Jeremian oracles, addressed to specific historical and political concerns of the late seventh and early sixth centuries, form the primary basis of the oracles concerning the nations. He links them with the "enemy from the north" oracles in Jer 4-6 in which the nations named here suffer divine judgment along with Judah. The absence of grounds for punishment would suggest that the nations are included in a general scenario of punishment directed specifically at Judah.

The LXX arrangement of the oracles concerning the nations represents an earlier edition of the book in which Jer 25:1-13 concludes the earlier Deuteronomistic edition of Jer 1-25. Jeremiah 25:15-38*, with its focus on YHWH's cup of wrath for the nations, introduces the second half of the book following the oracles concerning the nations in the LXX edition of Jeremiah. Although Huwyler raises the question of the interpretation of the sequence of nations in the LXX edition of the book, he finally admits that he is not able to explain it adequately. He is also somewhat qualified in his assessment of the theological impulses of the expanded pre-Masoretic tradition, although he points to the possibility that it envisions the restoration of the nations along with the restoration of the land of Israel and thereby justifies Jeremiah's identity as the prophet to the nations.

Clearly, the strength of this study lies in Huwyler's efforts to reconstruct the "original" setting and interpretation of the Jeremian oracles concerning the nations. He has advanced discussion of these oracles by pointing to their Jeremian origins and especially to the historical and political situations that they address. In addition, he has correctly raised the question of the hermeneutical outlook of the LXX and MT editions of the book apart from the postulated Jeremian perspective, but his attempts to relate these oracles to the later setting of the Ptolemaic-Seleucid conflict are necessarily more speculative insofar as they constitute attempts to reconstruct the manner in which these oracles would have been read in relation to later historical situations. His effort to emphasize the role of the nations in the pre-Masoretic edition of the text suffers from his failure to reconstruct an adequate sociohistorical context for such concerns. These problems are also rooted in part in his tendency to emphasize the original form of the oracles, leaving him to focus piecemeal on the redactional additions in both the LXX and MT editions rather than to treat the posited redactional forms of each as coherent texts.

Despite these weaknesses, the strengths of this study demand serious consideration by those interested in the books of Jeremiah in particular and Israelite-Judean prophecy in general.