

Jordan Davis / Benedikt Hensel (eds)

A Prophet to the Nations

Archaeological and Historical Perspectives on
Jeremiah 46–51

A Prophet to the Nations

Vetus Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus

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Foreword

Israel and the Nations is a research topic that has occupied my academic work for quite some time. This subject encompasses multiple levels of significance: on the one hand, it is profoundly theological, as it situates Israel among the nations or juxtaposes it against them – often within a framework of election, or, depending on the biblical tradition, as an expression of a particular soteriological or even prophetic-judgement perspective (whether against the nations or even against Israel and Judah themselves). On the other hand, it serves as a literary vehicle for the self-definition of biblical Israel – or more precisely, for the various concepts of Israel articulated within the different traditions underlying the Hebrew Bible. In contemporary scholarship, this phenomenon is frequently described or analysed through the lens of the cultural-sociological category of “Othering.” Furthermore, Israel’s place in relation to the nations has significant historical implications, providing insights (particularly through archaeological research on these nations) into (a) the history of Israel and Judah themselves, as well as (b) the genesis of the traditions that reference these nations, which were ultimately incorporated into the Hebrew Bible.

Moreover, Israel’s interaction with the nations allows for the tracing of cultural-historical developments. This perspective further underscores how the fate of Israel and Judah was embedded in the broader processes of transformation occurring in the Southern Levant, as well as within the Egyptian, Mesopotamian, and Eastern Mediterranean spheres. The Book of Jeremiah, for instance, integrates Israel and Jerusalem’s fate into the world politics of the sixth century BCE through its Oracles against the Nations.

The present volume continues my research interests on Israel and the Nations and may be considered the informal sequel to the collected volume, *Israel, Judah, and Neighboring Groups in the Books of Samuel: Textual and Historical Approaches* (published in 2025 by Mohr Siebeck in the ORA series *Research on Israel and Aram in Biblical Times*), which I edited with Prof. Dr. Stephen Germany (Lausanne, CH). Like the present volume on Jeremiah, the volume on Samuel sought to integrate literary-historical, historical, and archaeological perspectives within a multidisciplinary framework.

I extend my sincere gratitude to all contributors to this Jeremiah volume – all of whom are internationally renowned specialists in the field – for engaging with the complex and ambitious endeavour of this book. My special thanks go to my assistant, Dr. Jordan Davis, whose keen interest in the historical and literary-historical aspects of the nations in Jeremiah has greatly enriched this project. His rigorous scholarly diligence and tireless commitment have

significantly shaped this volume. His expertise, particularly in relation to his current *Habilitation* project, *The Book of Jeremiah as History and Story*, has been of decisive importance for the success of this publication.

I also wish to express my gratitude to the Oldenburg-based research assistants in Hebrew Bible studies – Maite Benn, Jan Fricke, Rieke Kolodzie, Maryam Matta, and Fabian Shehu – who meticulously reviewed the manuscript for errors with great dedication and attention to detail.

Oldenburg, March 17, 2025
Benedikt Hensel,
together with Jordan Davis

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The Oracles against the Nations: An Introduction

Jordan Davis

1 A Brief History of Research

The book of Jeremiah has fifty-two chapters, six of which (i.e., Jer^{MT} 46–51//Jer^G 25*–31, ~11,5% of the book) comprise the so-called “oracles against the nations,” (henceforth OAN) in which the prophet proclaims judgement on the people of Egypt, Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Edom, Damascus, Qedar, Elam, and Babylon.¹ It seems somewhat curious, then, that these oracles have regularly been either overlooked or considered to be a non-essential (generally later) addition (see below).² This fact is even more curious given that (arguably) the most theologically charged verse in Jeremiah’s magisterial introduction relates directly to the prophet’s relationship to “the nations”:

Before you were formed in the belly, I knew you, and before you came out of the womb, I consecrated you: a prophet to the nations, I bestowed you. (Jer 1:5)

In order to understand this peculiar oversight, a brief overview of the history of Jeremiah research is in order.

Although he was certainly not the only one, Bernhard Duhm’s 1901 commentary is perhaps the archetypal example of early 20th century scholarship on the prophets. For Duhm, as for many others, it was the words of the named prophet that were of the greatest value. This is because, “the goal of identifying the original words of the prophet was inspired partly by Romanticism’s fascination with ‘great men’ who propounded ground-breaking ideas.”³ The aim of redaction criticism was to strip away the added material in order to reach this

- 1 For a discussion on the different order of the nations in the LXX, see E. Peels, “From Egypt to Babylon, or from Elam to Moab?: Queries Concerning the Order of the Oracles against the Nations in the Book of Jeremiah”, in H. Bezzel/U. Becker/M. De Jong (ed.), *Prophecy and Foreign Nations: Aspects of the Role of the “Nations” in the Books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel* (FAT II 135; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016) 59–75. See now Tucker in this volume.
- 2 B. Huwylar, *Jeremia und die Völker: Untersuchungen zu den Völkerversprüchen in Jeremia 46–49* (FAT 20; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 15, refers to this as the “Nullposition.”
- 3 R.L. Troxel, *Prophetic Literature: From Oracles to Books* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 4.

“pure” prophetic core. To this end, Duhm argued that Jeremiah 1–25 comprised quoted utterances of the prophet, chapters 26–29 and 32–45 were later writings composed and/or collected by Baruch. Chapters 30–31 were understood to be a self-contained “Tröstungsbüchlein” (“little book of comfort”), while ch. 52 – that largely reproduces 2 Kgs 25 – was a postexilic narrative appendix. Importantly, Duhm argued that the OAN contained no traces of authentic Jeremian material and were only added at the end of the 2nd century or later.⁴ A similar example is found in Mowinckel’s 1914 work, which attempted to divide Jeremiah into four primary “sources,” likely inspired by the success of the Documentary Hypothesis for the Pentateuch. Speaking of the OAN Mowinckel writes, “We clearly see how the oracles, originally circulated anonymously, attach themselves to a certainly un-Jeremian original collection that first became ‘Jeremian’ through a false misconception.”⁵ In short, for the scholarship of the early twentieth century, the OAN were a superfluous addition, compiled by a scribe that was in no way contemporary with the “real Jeremiah.”

While Duhm had already noticed a relationship between Jeremiah and Deuteronomy, and Mowinckel’s source C, “shows a conspicuous similarity with the ‘deuteronomistic’ language of the redactional sections from Deut, Judg, Sam and Kgs,” it was later scholars who suggested that the book of Jeremiah as a whole was shaped by one or more Deuteronomistic redactors.⁶ Names such as Rudolph, Hyatt, and Thiel all suggested that it was a Deuteronomistic redactor who was responsible for the shape of the book of Jeremiah.⁷ While this line of research has produced many robust results, the OAN are regularly missing from the discussion. Thiel, for example, concludes that the OAN contain no Deuteronomistic elements and therefore must have been added in a “post-dtr.

4 B. Duhm, *Das Buch Jeremia* (Tübingen/Leipzig: J. C. B. Mohr, 1901), xx.

5 Translation J. Davis from S. Mowinckel, *Zur Komposition des Buches Jeremia* (Kristiania: Jacob Dybwad, 1914), 65, “Wir sehen deutlich, wie die ursprünglich anonym umlaufenden Orakel sich an eine sicher nicht jirnejanischen Ursammlung anhängen und erst durch die falsche Auffassung dieser Sammlung »jirnejanisch« werden.”

6 Translation J. Davis from Mowinckel, *Komposition*, 33–4, “zeigt eine auffällige große Ähnlichkeit mit der ‘deuteronomistischen’ Sprache der redaktionellen Partien von Dtn. Ri., Sam. und Kg.”

7 W. Rudolph, *Jeremia* (HAT 12; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1968), XX, argued that, “so ist es nicht ausgeschlossen, daß der Verfasser der C-Stücke [i.e., Mowinckel’s] zugleich der Hauptredaktor des Jeremiabuches war” (“so it cannot be excluded, that the author of the C-pieces was also the main redactor of the book of Jeremiah”). See also J.P. Hyatt, “The Deuteronomic Edition of Jeremiah”, in L.G. Perdue/B.W. Kovacs (ed.), *A Prophet to the Nations: Essays in Jeremiah Studies* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1984) 247–67, esp. 251; W. Thiel, *Die deuteronomistische Redaktion von Jeremia 1–25* (WMANT 41; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1973).

Redaktionsstufe.”⁸ More recently, Thomas Römer argued for a two-stage Deuteronomistic redaction, beginning with Jer 7–35 and later expanding to Jer 1–45, once again the OAN play no role in the discussion.⁹ Albertz proposes a three-stage Deuteronomistic redaction of JerD¹ (comprising most of Jer 1–25*), JerD² (expanding to Jer 45) and JerD³ (adding Jer 30–31; 46–51; 52).¹⁰ But even here, Albertz’s arguments for the location and inclusion of the OAN are based solely on the oracle against Babylon: “at the end of their third edition the redactors were seeking to show how in their day, after so many missed opportunities for salvation, with the fall of Babylon, following the judgement on Judah and the nations Yahweh wished to offer his people Israel yet another possibility for a great future.”¹¹ Thus, even when the OAN are included in the discussion, the plurality of nations are overlooked. Although the Deuteronomistic elements of Jeremiah remain an important and fruitful field of research, the purpose and function of the OAN are clearly unanswered by such endeavours.¹²

Particularly with the turn to the 21st century, biblical scholarship in general, and prophetic studies in particular, has experienced a dramatic increase in post-modern approaches, which some scholars argue represent *the* way forward for biblical studies.¹³ But once again there are good grounds to question whether the treatment of the OAN fare much better under this new rubric. Arguably the most popular contribution for Jeremian scholarship has come from trauma studies.¹⁴ Stulman and Silver, for example, write, “Language of trauma gives the book [of Jeremiah] its distinctive character ... This literary work names the community’s ordeal, mourns it, and seeks to survive it. While the first half of prophetic drama anticipates the downfall of Israel/Judah (Jeremiah 1–25), the second half (Jeremiah 26–52) portrays the disaster and imagines a future

8 Thiel, *Redaktion*, 281–2.

9 T. Römer, “How did Jeremiah Become a Convert to Deuteronomistic Ideology?”, in L.S. Schearing/S.L. McKenzie (ed.), *Those Elusive Deuteronomists: The Phenomenon of Pan-Deuteronomism* (JSOTSup 268; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999) 189–99.

10 R. Albertz, *Israel in Exile: The History and Literature of the Sixth Century B.C.E.* (StBibLit 3; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 302–21.

11 Albertz, *Exile*, 321.

12 A recent example is N. Mastnjak, *Deuteronomy and the Emergence of Textual Authority in Jeremiah* (FAT II 87; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016).

13 For a very positive overview on postmodern shifts in the studies of the prophets, see esp. C.J. Sharp, “Introduction”, in C.J. Sharp (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Prophets* (New York: Oxford University, 2016) xxi–xxxv, esp. xxiii.

14 To name but two recent examples: J. Claassens, “Give us a portion among our father’s brothers’: The Daughters of Zelophehad, Land, and the Quest for Human Dignity”, *JSOT* 37 (2013) 319–37; C.M. Maier, “Wer schreibt Geschichte? Ein kulturelles Trauma und seine Träger im Jeremiabuch”, *VT* 70 (2020) 67–82.

beyond the misfortunes it narrates (see, especially, Jeremiah 30–33 and 50–51).¹⁵ While the experience of exile is undoubtedly an important aspect of Jeremiah, reducing the book to only this renders the OAN, not to mention the special emphasis on Jeremiah's peculiar calling towards those nations, as something of an afterthought. Placed under the rubric of Judah's future hope, the OAN take on a decidedly spiteful tone. Indeed, Amy Kalmanofsky has argued that Jeremiah's OAN should be understood as "Revenge Fantasy."¹⁶ While such an interpretation plausibly functions for Babylon, it is significantly less convincing for Judah's neighbours. In his oracle against Edom, for example, Jeremiah envisions its destruction at the hand of the Babylonians. Yet as part of this oracle the prophet speaks with the voice of God saying, "Leave your orphans, I will preserve them, and your widows are to trust in me." (Jer 49:10) – which hardly functions as satisfying *Schadenfreude*. Jeremiah also refers to Edom as Esau in Jer 49:8 and 10, which emphasizes the Jacob/Esau kinship ties, rather than Judean enmity.¹⁷ Further evidence against such a reading comes from Jeremiah 27 where the prophet warns Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre and Sidon of the approaching danger, and seeks to spare them from suffering. Even more so, Jer 12:14–15 relate God's promise to restore all these nations and bless their future. Without labouring the point any further, the category of trauma as a singular, overarching interpretive key is too simple, particularly when it comes to the concept of Jeremiah as a prophet to the nations.

There have been several developments within scholarship that provide fertile ground for reconsidering this topic:

1. Although the distinctiveness of biblical prophecy remains unquestioned, there is a growing body of work that has demonstrated that biblical prophecy needs to be seen within the broader context of ancient Near Eastern prophecy and prophetic traditions. In particular Nissinen emphasises the *political* aspect of prophecy: it becomes abundantly clear that prophecy had a political function throughout the ancient Eastern Mediterranean as the source of divine knowledge necessary

15 L. Stulman/E. Silver, "A Critical Introduction", in L. Stulman/E. Silver (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Jeremiah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021) 1–22, here 3–4.

16 A. Kalmanofsky, "As She did, do to her!": Jeremiah's OAN as Revenge Fantasies", in A. Mein/E.K. Holt/H.C.P. Kim (ed.), *Concerning the Nations: Essays on the Oracles against the Nations in Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel* (LHBOTS 612; London/New York: Bloomsbury, 2015) 109–27.

17 This is all the more dubious when placed in the context of Jeremiah's relationship to Deuteronomy. Considering that Deut 23:7 outlines special treatment for the Edomites (cf. Deut 23:3 where Ammon and Moab do not receive such treatment).

for the appropriate maintenance of the society.¹⁸ While Nissinen himself highlights that the literary history (i.e., redactional processes) of biblical prophecy is unparalleled, and regularly reflects post-monarchic re-readings or re-interpretations of past events, this does not mean that one should ignore the politically-oriented foundation of biblical prophecy. In their introduction to *The Oxford handbook of Jeremiah* Stulman and Silver write, “As our understanding of the complex relationship between prophetic discourse and state power in the ancient Near East becomes clearer, the political dimension of Jeremian poetry within this horizon is becoming correspondingly more obvious.”¹⁹

2. Recent studies have highlighted that Israel and Judah’s identity formation, including the production of the Hebrew Bible, cannot be seen within an intellectual vacuum but needs to be understood in light of the trade, political and cultural entanglements with its surrounding neighbours. The fact that the OAN concern all the nations of the known world, suggests that these chapters, too, need to be seen within this expanded concept of identity construction.
3. Recent archaeological developments have also greatly expanded the available information regarding these neighbouring nations. For example, past scholarship relied on Glueck’s assumption of a gap in occupation in Persian period Edom and Moab, a conclusion that is now demonstrably false.

With new archaeological data comes new historical reconstructions, which in turn leads to new biblical interpretations. One example of “proof of concept” for this line of enquiry comes from the recent monograph of A.M. Wilson-Wright, who has shown that Jeremiah’s treatment of Egypt is regularly rooted in the historical-political climate of Judah’s vassal relationship with Egypt prior to the Babylonian invasion. Unlike earlier research, that conceived of Josiah’s reign in terms of 2 Kings – as a period of Judean independence and prosperity – Wilson-Wright shows via up-to-date archaeological data that Judah was already an Egyptian vassal during Josiah’s reign, and that the “glorious” king was killed by Nekau/Necho II for being an unfaithful vassal-partner.²⁰

18 M. Nissinen, *Ancient Prophecy: Near Eastern, Biblical, and Greek Perspectives* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2017), 344.

19 Stulman/Silver, “Introduction”, 10.

20 A.M. Wilson-Wright, *Jeremiah’s Egypt: Prophetic Reflections on the Saite Period* (ANEM 30; Atlanta: SBL, 2023), 17.

The oracles against Egypt, then, are not mere literary creations, but relate to identifiable historical and political developments.²¹

This volume does not presume to answer every question regarding the OAN, rather it aims to be a resource that will be invaluable for future research.

2 This Volume

In “The Function and Purpose of the Oracles against Foreign Nations in Jeremiah,” *Georg Fischer* provides an overview of the OAN’s function and purpose within the extant book of Jeremiah. He demonstrates how the OAN are fully integrated into the larger context of Jeremiah. Key motifs link the OAN to earlier chapters – repeated phraseology (including doublets) and repeated themes – not least Jeremiah’s calling to be a “prophet to the nations” (Jer 1:5) and YHWH’s role as “king of the nations” (Jer 10:7). Fischer emphasizes the OAN’s presentation of YHWH’s character: The OAN emphasize divine justice, judging both Israel and its neighbours, particularly major powers like Egypt and Babylon; The OAN demonstrate divine compassion, promising to restore Moab, Ammon and Elam; and the OAN highlight YHWH’s sovereignty, comparing him as victorious over the gods of the other nations.

In “The Distinctive Features of Jeremiah’s Oracles against the Nations in the Septuagint,” *Miika Tucker* provides a comparison of the Greek version of the OAN with its Hebrew counterpart. As is well-known, the OAN have a different location and sequence in the LXX, which Tucker argues also provides the two versions of Jeremiah with different theological emphases. He notes that the MT’s conclusion with judgement on Babylon functions as part of Judah’s future hope. In contrast, the LXX places the OAN in the middle of the book, forming a tighter connection to the cup of wrath, thereby highlighting Judah’s long experience of exile and punishment. Furthermore, the LXX downplays the concept of a restored Davidic kingdom, which is a prominent theme in the MT version of the book of salvation (Jer^{MT} 33:14–26).

In “Judgement and Hope, Anger and Compassion: The Theological Profile of the Oracles against the Nations in the Book of Jeremiah,” *H.G.L. (Eric) Peels* notes how the OAN focus on divine judgement, using intense imagery of war, vengeance, and destruction. He further argues that scholars have long dismissed the OAN as non-Jeremianic, nationalistic additions that have little theological value. Peel alternatively demonstrates that the OAN depict God as

²¹ Wilson-Wright, *Egypt*, 114.

both judge *and* redeemer, judgement falls on Israel and the nations alike, but so too does redemption, with several nations receiving a promise of restoration. In the face of violence and suffering, God shines through as a constant of hope.

In “Why was your bull washed away?” (Jer. 46:15): The Achaemenid Context of the Oracles against Egypt,” *Gad Barnea* investigates the two-part oracle against Egypt. He notes that while the first oracle can be firmly dated to the battle of Carchemish, the second oracle – a Babylonian invasion of Egypt – never took place historically. Barnea outlines the arguments in favour of seeing this second prophecy reflecting Cambyses’ conquest of Egypt in 526 BCE. Given the strong support for this Persian period event, he concludes that the present form of the OAN must be dated to the Hellenistic period.

In “For Yahweh is destroying the Philistines ...’ (Jer 47:4): On the Historical Background of Jeremiah 47:1–7,” *Felix Hagemeyer* first provides a historical overview of the Iron Age II cities of Ashkelon and Gaza. He then goes on to demonstrate that Jer 47:2–7 has plausible, historical roots, reflecting the Neo-Babylonian destruction of Ashkelon. The key difficulty of Jeremiah’s oracle against the Philistines concerns the understanding of Jer 47:1b, which refers to Pharaoh’s conquest of Gaza. The verse lacks clear historical markers, such as the specific name of the Pharaoh, making it difficult to associate it with a particular historical event. Hagemeyer discusses the various options, ranging from Necho II at the end of the 7th century to Ptolemy I Soter in 312 BCE, favouring the former.

In “Moab at the End of the Iron Age: The Political and Economic Situation,” *Margreet L. Steiner* highlights that Jeremiah’s oracle against Moab lays a heavy emphasis upon Moab’s wealth. She discusses how Moab’s strategic location along the inland trade route not only enabled it to prosper but gave it access to luxury goods, which have been found in the archaeological record. Two, linked events contributed to the collapse of Moab. First, the Neo-Babylonians devastated all the key Moabite sites. Second, trade along the King’s Highway was replaced by trade routes within the Arabian Peninsula thus limiting Moab’s prospects for recovery. Steiner thus concludes that the prophecy made by Jeremiah concerning the demise of Moab was undoubtedly based on historical fact, the Neo-Babylonians devastated Moab and it did not recover.

In “Edom in the Neo-Babylonian and Persian Periods, and New Light on the Origins of Idumea,” *Piotr Bienkowski* demonstrates that the current archaeological data contradicts Nelson Glueck’s overly influential theory of a “settlement gap” at the end of the Iron Age. The data also speaks against the other common arguments of an Edomite “invasion,” “mass migration,” etc. into the Negev. Rather the Edomite markers in the Negev reflect a temporary situation

following the Babylonian control of the Syro-Palestinian isthmus, wherein Edomites, Arabs and other people groups thrived on the south Arabian trade. However, this situation ceased at the end of the sixth century BCE, when these same trading sites were either destroyed or abandoned. Persian period Idumea, then, was not a continuation of this situation, but arose as part of the restoration of the overland trade. Thus, Idumea was not home only to Edomites and Arabs, but Judeans and Phoenicians also.

In “‘City of my joy’ (Jer 49:25): Literary and Historical Reflections on Aram and Damascus in the Latter Prophets,” *Friederike Neumann* begins by noting that the historical record for Damascus during the Babylonian and early Persian-periods is lacking. Thus, an investigation into biblical attitudes towards Damascus is undertaken by comparing Isa 17:1–3, Amos 1:3–5, and Jer 49:23–27. The earliest oracle is Isaiah’s, which presents Damascus negatively, Neumann links this to the fact Judah was threatened by Aram and Israel in the Syro-Ephraimite War. In contrast, Jeremiah refers to Damascus as “city of my [=YHWH’s] joy”, a phrase typically reserved for Jerusalem. Neumann shows that Jeremiah’s Damascus oracle is unusual in several respects and refers to the city’s destruction in the past tense. The oracle is to be dated after the Babylonian expansion, when Damascus had been destroyed.

In “Jeremiah, Qedar and the Queen of the Enclosure,” *Jordan Davis* first traces the references to the Qedarites and the “Arabs” found in the Assyrian and Babylonian sources and questions the broadly accepted thesis that the central city of the Qedarites was Adummatu, as well as the concept that the Qedarite tribe was later synonymous with “Arabs” in the context of the Arabian trade routes at the beginning of the Persian period. Following this, the discussion turns to the text of Jeremiah, where it is argued that the LXX rendering “Qedar and the Queen of the Enclosure” is far more plausible than the MT’s “Qedar and the kingdoms of Hazor.” Finally the discussion turns to the role of the OAN within Jeremiah, particularly in light of the fact that the Qedarites are otherwise represented positively in the Hebrew Bible.

In “Late Neo-Elamite Kingdoms, the Rise of Cyrus the Great, the Fall of Babylon and the End of the Babylonian Captivity: Varying Notions of ‘Elam’ in JerMT 49:34–39 // JerG 25:14–20 and JerMT 25:15–26 // JerG 32:1–12,” *Alexa Bartelmus* highlights that the region of Elam was historically of little relevance to Judah. Furthermore, the term “Elam” itself is ambiguous and can refer to geographical, political, and/or ethnic entities. She argues that Jer^{MT} 49:38 provides the keys to deciphering this deliberately vague text: First is the promise that YHWH will set his throne in Elam, second is the destruction of “king” and “magnates” (her translation), entities that are lacking articles and/or possessive suffixes. She argues that these two details only make sense if Elam is used

as a cipher for the origin of Cyrus II's reign. Cyrus' entrance onto the "world stage" began in southern Zagros – i.e., Elam – and included the significant removal of the Babylonian rule (the "king"), with all its associated territories ("magnates"). Thus, Bartelmus argues that the editors of Jeremiah deliberately played with the ambiguity of the term "Elam" in constructing their oracle that primarily reflected the rise of the Persian empire.

In "A Land Laid Waste by Copy and Paste?: The Formation of the Oracles against Babylon in Jer 50 and 51," *Helge Bezold* provides a critical assessment of the idea that Jer^{MT} 50–51 should be treated as a literary unit. He alternatively proposes a literary historical differentiation between Jer^{MT} 50 and 51, arguing that Jer^{MT} 50 is a newer text that was composed in order to incorporate the older anti-Babylonian material of ch. 51 into the book. To this end he highlights that Jer^{MT} 50 contains a far higher number of intertextual links with the rest of Jeremiah, including Jer^{MT} 4–10; 30–32, and 46–49. Bezold's model also sheds new light on the issues of how the Babylon oracles were composed and how they entered the book of Jeremia, not least providing a proposal for these chapters' extraordinary length.

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The Function and Purpose of the Oracles against Foreign Nations in Jeremiah

Georg Fischer

1 Introduction

Why does Jer not finish with chapter 45, the promise for Baruch? What can readers still expect after that? Obviously, whoever was responsible for the final form of Jer felt that *open issues* still remained, which he packed into the OAN.¹ In Jer, the OAN occupy an extraordinary place² and constitute a substantial part of the scroll, with more than 220 verses; this length also indicates importance.³

Up to Jer 45, readers had occasionally received hints that more information was forthcoming, e.g., in the announcement of a wide-ranging divine judgement in Jer 25. In Jer 39, Jerusalem's fate was sealed – but how about the other nations? Would God let them go unpunished for their guilt? The OAN testify that Yhwh holds them *accountable*, too, and that even mighty powers do not escape justice.

In the following, I will first demonstrate the many links between the OAN and the rest of Jer (§2). I will then go on to look for functions of the individual OAN, trying to detect relevant motifs for them (§3). Finally, I will address what purposes might stand behind Jer's presentation of the OAN (§4).

1 OAN is an abbreviation for “oracles against foreign nations” in the Book of Jeremiah (= Jer), if not further specified.

2 The position of the OAN close to the end in Jer 46–51 is unusual and has no parallel in other prophetic books.

3 Jer 46–49 have exactly 111, the Babylon oracles in Jer 50–51 nearly as many, namely 110 verses. As a result, the OAN hold 16,2 % of the 1364 verses of the entire Book of Jeremiah.

2 Insertion into the Book of Jeremiah

2.1 *Connecting Words and Motifs*

2.1.1 “Nations” (גוֹיִם)

There are many expressions, motifs, and other links that connect the OAN in Jer with the preceding chapters. From the very beginning Jeremiah is called to be a “*prophet for the nations*” (1:5); this unique designation already indicates that his mission extends beyond Judah, Jerusalem, and his own people. Correspondingly, Yhwh is addressed in 10:7 as “*king of the nations*”⁴ so that the biblical God and his prophet share the same orientation and international horizon.

The word גוֹי “nation” occurs 87 times in Jer;⁵ the plural “*nations*” 56 times. This underlines the importance of this theme in Jer. After Jer 1:5, the term next appears in 1:10, where God conveys upon Jeremiah utmost authority “over the nations and over kingdoms.” The last incidence is Jer 51:44, which proclaims that other nations will no longer flow towards Babylon. This signals a transition of influence within Jer from the Mesopotamian kingdom to the prophet, hinted at right from the beginning.

Besides Judah and Israel, Jer mentions many nations *by name*, with Jer 25:19–25 providing the longest list of them. Among the foreign nations, two occupy a special place because of their frequency and importance, Babylon and Egypt.⁶ “*Egypt*” occurs the first time in Jer 2:6 in the context of the exodus theme. The most important nation in Jer, however, is “*Babylon*” despite its delayed appearance until Jer 20:4–6. Prior to this, Jer had announced a “foe from the North”, which hinted at the Babylonian invasion in a veiled form. Several times Israel’s/Judah’s neighbours also appear, e.g., in Jer 9:25 and 12:14–17.⁷

Connected with Babylon, its king, *Nebuchadnezzar*, also has a decisive role throughout the book. He is mentioned for the first time by name in Jer 21:2

4 This title is also singular in the Tanak.

5 Only Ezekiel offers more occurrences with 90 instances, according to the statistics of BibleWorks.

6 Babylon (בָּבֶל) appears 169 times in Jer, which greatly outnumbers all other scrolls (2 Kings 32x; Ezek 20x). With regard to Egypt (מִצְרַיִם), Jer occupies the first place among the prophets (62x; Ezek 54x; Isa 51x). Classic, foundational studies for these nations and their roles within Jer are J. Hill, *Friend or Foe? The Figure of Babylon in the Book of Jeremiah MT* (Biblical Interpretation Series 40; Leiden: Brill, 1999) and M.P. Maier, *Ägypten – Israels Herkunft und Geschick. Studie über einen theo-politischen Zentralbegriff im hebräischen Jeremiabuch* (ÖBS 21; Frankfurt: Lang, 2002).

7 For more passages, see G. Fischer, “Der weite Blick des Völkerpropheten. Personen, Nationen und Orte im Jeremiabuch”, in T. Wagner *et al.* (ed.), *Text – Textgeschichte – Textwirkung* (FS S. Kreuzer; AOAT 419; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2014) 93–110.

and is a key figure in God's plans who will also receive judgement. Yhwh calls him "my servant,"⁸ although he is responsible for Jerusalem's fall in 587 BC, and even beyond this date for a third exile.⁹ In the OAN he appears victorious against Egypt in Jer 46:2, 13, 26 and against Kedar and Hazor in 49:28, 30. However, this switches in Jer 50, where he receives heavy accusations because of his cruelty (50:17; 51:34). His portrayal depicts a trajectory, from being powerful in attacking Judah and other nations to being condemned.

...

"Nations" is not a random topic in Jer. It occupies a central role, from the first to the last chapter, with emphases on the two dominant nations at the time of the prophet around 600 BC.

2.1.2 Links by Uncommon Expressions

There are many literary devices connecting Jer 1–45 with the OAN, even ignoring singular words like the Egyptian place names "Migdol, Memphis, Tahpanhes."¹⁰ Longer expressions and *rare motifs* form stronger links, a few of which are listed below:

- The phrase "terror around" occurs five times in Jer and only in Psa 31:14 outside of it. The phrase first occurs in 6:25, with its last occurrences appearing in 46:5 and 49:29.
- "Balm in Gilead" connects 8:22 and 46:11; Gen 37:25 being the only other instance for this topic.
- The motif of an attack coming from the North is hinted at for the first time in Jer 1:13–15 and often repeated; it occurs in the OAN in 46:20; 47:2; 50:3.
- Being "handed over into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon" first appears in 21:7; 27:6, other passages continue the motif until its final occurrence in the OAN in 46:26, which definitively expresses the inferiority of the Egyptian Pharaoh by comparison.
- The combination of to "make drunk" and to "vomit" links 25:27 and 48:26.¹¹

8 This occurs only in MT 25:9; 27:6; 43:10; see K.A.D. Smelik, "My Servant Nebuchadnezzar: The Use of the Epithet 'My Servant' for the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar in the Book of Jeremiah", in *VT* 64 (2014) 109–34.

9 Jer 52:30 ascribes to him a third deportation in his 23rd year, corresponding to 582 BC.

10 Jer 46:14; all three of them were already mentioned in 43:7–8; 44:1. This links Jer 42–44 and the events regarding the group who fled to Egypt with the OAN.

11 See also the variation of the theme in 51:7, 39, 57, in the latter two instances intensified with "eternal sleep."

- The rare shout “Hedad!”¹² connects God’s judgement (25:30) with the Moab and Babylon oracles (48:33; 51:14).
- God announces a “reversal of fates”¹³ in 29:14 and more often for Israel. Similarly, also Moab, Ammon, and Elam receive the same promise (48:47; 49:6, 39).
- The parallel of having to drink and not being left unpunished connects the cup scene in 25:28–29 with 49:12 in the Edom oracle.
- In 29:13, Yhwh had given hope to those in Babylon that, upon “seeking” (בִּקֵּשׁ) him, they will find. 50:4 foresees the fulfilment of this announcement.
- 37 times the Tanak talks about an “eternal covenant”; the only two instances in Jer are 32:40 and 50:5.
- The designation “meadow of justice” (נוֹה צֶדֶק), used in 31:23 in an ambivalent way,¹⁴ reappears as an appellation for Yhwh in 50:7.¹⁵

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These examples confirm the intense relationship between the earlier chapters and the OAN in Jer. The connection is even stronger than this selection of motifs shows, but these suffice as there are many further arguments for it.

2.2 Doublets as Connecting Devices

Alongside connecting expressions (such as those mentioned above) Jer also uses *doublets* which function like clamps. The promise for Israel being saved from 30:10–11 is repeated nearly verbatim at the end of the oracle for Egypt in 46:27–28. Jer 6:22–24, describing a cruel enemy approaching Jerusalem, is reapplied to Babylon in 50:41–43, thus forming a kind of *talio*: What it had done to Judah, falls back on this city.¹⁶ The repetition of 10:12–16, the praise of Yhwh vis-à-vis idols, in 51:15–19 reaffirms his sovereignty in the Babylonian context of their gods and confirms his closeness to Israel even there. The lengths of these

¹² Five times in Jer, out of seven within the Tanak.

¹³ Out of a total 26 occurrences in the Tanak, the Hebrew idiom שׁוּב שְׁבוּת with its variants appears 12 times in Jer. For its different interpretations, the excursus in R. Willi, *Les Pensées de Bonheur de Dieu pour son Peuple selon Jr 29. Un témoignage de l'espérance au temps de l'exil* (Lugano: Facoltà di Teologia, 2005) 249–55, is helpful.

¹⁴ In 31:23, the expression may refer either to God who is mentioned before as subject, or to the object, the “holy mountain” (alternatively “mountain of the sanctuary”). The two passages in Jer constitute an exclusive relationship for the metaphorical usage; Job 8:6, the only other instance, refers to a human dwelling.

¹⁵ J. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21–36* (AB 21B; New York: Doubleday, 2004) 456.

¹⁶ There are some differences in Jer 51, due to the changed addressee and situation.

repeated passages clearly indicate a desire to link the OAN with the earlier texts and to make readers reflect on the meaning of the reiteration.

2.3 *A Key Date Revealed at the End*

The dating phrase “*fourth year of King Jehoiakim*” represents a special case.¹⁷ It appears in 25:1, 36:1, 45:1, and finally 46:2, but it is only with the fourth instance that the significance of this phrase is revealed to be the battle at Carchemish, thus providing the clue to understand the earlier passages.¹⁸ The beginning of Jer 25 – the central chapter in the book – connects this decisive moment in the history of the ancient Near East with the announcement of Yhwh’s international judgement. It demonstrates that God had already informed Jeremiah about his plans and the important changes lying ahead; for readers, however, the connection between the date and its meaning only becomes evident more than 20 chapters later. The OAN provide – at their beginning – the key to understand a central date of the scroll. Without 46:2, one would not be able to perceive its significance.

2.4 *The Announcement of International Judgement in Jer 25*

Jer 25 certainly offers *the strongest link* with the OAN in various ways. In the first part, v. 8–13 present a two-step-judgement: The first step affects Judah and its neighbours, with the second including Babylon. This receives a more detailed development in the second unit with the cup of divine wrath (v. 15–29), which mentions over 20 different groups who have to drink it. The sequence, once again, begins with Jerusalem and Judah (v. 18), it follows with Egypt and other nations, concluding with the “King of Sheshak.”¹⁹

What God tells and orders Jeremiah in Jer 25 is the *outline* for the rest of Jer according to the order of the MT: the judgement to befall Jerusalem is described in Jer 26–39, the OAN begin with Egypt in Jer 46 and end with Babylon in 50–51. In between, the Philistines with their cities Gaza and Ashqelon (25:20) follow in second place in Jer 47. The sequence of Edom, Moab, Ammon (25:21) is altered; Moab receives the longest treatment and comes first in Jer 48, with the Ammonites second (49:1–6) and Edom last (49:7–22). After them,²⁰

17 It corresponds to 605 BC.

18 Similarly, the identity of the attacking enemy from the North had only been revealed in Jer 20.

19 This is an Atbash cryptographic word for “Babel” in Hebrew. The reoccurrence of Sheshak in 51:41 will confirm this identification. – For the specific, unique character of Jer 25 see my forthcoming article “A New Vision of Judgment” in *JHS*.

20 Tyrus ranges there in 25:22, but is already mentioned together with Sidon in the oracle concerning the Philistines in 47:4.

Damascus, Kedar and Hazor (49:23–33) may be loosely connected to groups mentioned in 25:23–24. Elam (25:25) explicitly occurs again in 49:34–39, in a similar position before the oracle concerning Babylon.

Jer LXX shows a different arrangement; the OAN follow immediately after 25:13 and precede the narration of the cup of wrath. This arrangement disturbs the two-step-judgement scheme as the disaster upon Jerusalem and Judah now only takes place *after* those of the nations. Furthermore, the sequence of the nations in LXX does not follow the order God described to Jeremiah; the main deviations being Elam, which replaces Egypt in first place, the latter coming next, Babylon in third place and Moab in the last position (as Jer 31 LXX). If one assumes that God's communication of his plans and their enactment should correspond, the placement and the internal order of the OAN in the LXX appear illogical and therefore seem to be secondary.

2.5 *Preparation of and Transition to the OAN in Jer 41–45*

The *contexts* of the OAN offer further clues for their insertion. In Jer 41:17, certain Judeans intend to flee to Egypt. Despite divine warning through Jeremiah in Jer 42, they realize their plan, taking others with them (43:5–7). In Egypt, a final confrontation between those who fled and Jeremiah takes place in Jer 44.²¹ The oracle against Egypt in *Jer 46 fittingly continues* this story arc, taking up the last place mentioned in Jer 42–44.²²

In between, *Jer 45* occupies a strange position. Chronologically, it clearly belongs with Jer 36 by the date and its references to Baruch receiving dictation. Thematically, however, it is not misplaced, Jer 45:4 indicates divine destroying and uprooting affecting *וְאֶת-כָּל-הָאָרֶץ הַזֶּה* – the extent of this phrase is uncertain: It may mean “this whole country” but also “this entire earth.” Verse 5 favours the latter interpretation as it speaks of “disaster for all flesh.” Baruch's desire for “great (things)” is reduced by the promise to save his life as “booty.”²³ This combination of wide-ranging disaster and yet limited salvation *foreshadows a tension* also present in the OAN. In them, several times great calamities befall

21 For these decisive chapters to understand the dynamic of Jer as leading to increased resistance and continuing disobedience, see especially R. Caruso, *Il Paradigma della Scelta Disobbediente. Studio narratologico di Ger 40–44* (TG, Serie Teologica 244; Rom: Gregorian & Biblical, 2020) and K. Bodner, *After the Invasion. A Reading of Jeremiah 40–44* (Oxford/NY: Oxford University, 2015).

22 Furthermore, Jer 43:10–13 and 44:30 had announced King Nebuchadnezzar's dominion over Egypt which 46:13, 26 will confirm.

23 E. Chauty, *Qui aura sa vie comme butin ? Échos narratifs et revelation dans la lecture des oracles personnels de Jérémie* (BZAW 519; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2020), offers the most extensive discussion of this motif; for Jer 45, see especially 207–26.

people, but nevertheless there are glimmers of hope, so that some of them survive. Baruch's fate in its mixture of general ruin and being spared therein thus is a *perfect introduction* to the OAN and serves as a transition between the Egypt-oriented chapters Jer 41–44 and 46.

2.6 *The Role of Jer 52*

Like Jer 45, the final chapter, Jer 52, is similarly 'misplaced.' Events connected with the fall of Jerusalem were already reported in Jer 39, the chronologically and narratologically 'correct' position. Yet, the abbreviated version there²⁴ does not include essential facts such as the destruction of the temple or the plundering of its valuables. The oracle against Babylon presupposes these actions in 50:11, 28; 51:11 yet this information is only supplied afterward in Jer 52:13, 17–23. Jer 52 thus appears to be *necessary* for understanding the final oracle of the OAN.²⁵

2.7 *Similar Intertextual Working Technique*

A final observation regarding the relationship of the OAN with Jer concerns the literary technique of *utilizing other sources*. A key example of this technique is Jer 52, which is tightly connected with 2 Kings 24:18–25:30; the whole dynamic of Jer leads to this end in chapter 52. The oracle against Moab in Jer 48 largely draws on Isa 15–16; 24:17–18 and Num 21:28–29; 24:17; 33. The Edom oracle in Jer 49:7–16 is very close to Obad 1–9 and in my eyes dependent upon it.²⁶ God's final word in 51:58 is a quote from Hab 2:13. Even within the OAN, this way of writing is visible in the doublets 49:18 // 50:40 and 49:19–21 // 50:44–46. For a similar strategy with earlier parts of Jer see §2.2 above.

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Taking these arguments altogether, it seems reasonable to conclude that the OAN form *an integral part of Jer*. They are certainly, under various aspects, much closer to Jer 1–45 than to any other biblical text or book. The relationship displays different aspects:

24 Jer 39 is dependent on 52: G. Fischer, *Jeremia 26–52* (HThKAT; Freiburg: 2005) 349–50.

25 1:3 indicates the "fifth month" in Zedekiah's eleventh year as the end for Jeremiah's prophecy. Only Jer 52:12 reports again this date, a sign of a frame for the scroll and intended suspense until the last chapter.

26 For a discussion of this issue, see G. Fischer, "Jeremiah's Relations with the 'Minor Prophets'", in R.J. Bautch/M. Lackowski (ed.), *On Dating Biblical Texts to the Persian Period* (FAT II 101; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019) 55–63, here 61–2.

- The unique designations “prophet / king of the nations,” together with the frequent naming of the “nations” makes them a key topic in Jer.
- The emphasis given to the two nations, Egypt and Babylon, further accentuates this motif and focusses on the main political powers at the time of Jeremiah's life. The framing of the OAN in MT with these two nations corresponds well to the role they play throughout the book.
- The many, partially unique connections between Jer 1–45 and the OAN, especially the doublets, speak for a deliberate linking in motifs and even longer phrases, thus binding together Jer 1–51.
- Jer 25 programmatically outlines the structure of the following chapters. God's announcements of bringing judgement on all nations requires a realisation; the second half of Jer, and particularly the OAN show that God fulfils his word. Under this aspect, the OAN are “needed” to complete Jer.
- The sequence “judgement on Israel, its neighbours, and finally on Babylon”, as proclaimed in 25:9–13 and further confirmed in greater detail in the cup scene 25:15–26, is only respected in Jer MT. Jer 26–39 (–44) bring the judgement on Jerusalem and Judah, Jer 46–51 on the rest of the nations. Their sequence in the cup scene is far closer to the order given in the OAN according to MT than in the LXX.
- In Jer MT, there is a nearly perfect double ‘preparation’ in Jer 41–45. Jer 41–44 shows the desire of Judeans to escape Babylonian retaliation in Egypt and the divine warning of disaster awaiting them there. The ambivalence of saving one's life in the midst of a catastrophe in Jer 45 prefigures the fate of many nations in the OAN.
- The Babylon oracles allude to events exclusively mentioned in the following chapter, Jer 52. This is a further indication that Jer 52 is no “Anhang,”²⁷ but the necessary completion of the book.
- Finally, the device of quoting other ‘biblical’²⁸ scrolls observable constantly in the earlier chapters of Jer is present in the OAN, too. This indicates a similar literary working technique throughout the entire book.

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27 This is a term often used for Jer 52, e.g., in the revised version of the German “*Einheitsübersetzung*” from 2016, 955.

28 This word is anachronistic for the time when Jer was written, but obviously these earlier writings which would later become part of the Tanak already enjoyed authority and appreciation.

The OAN are thus not ‘foreign’ to Jer. They *essentially belong to this scroll*, and we now turn more precisely to look for their functions and then their purpose.

3 Functions of the OAN in Jer

3.1 *The Oracles for Egypt, Jer 46*

The two oracles on *Egypt* in Jer 46 bring to *completion* the important and decisive topic connected with the nation on the Nile in Jer. Since Jer 2:6, Egypt had been a major focus, there with reference to the Exodus out from it.²⁹ 2:18 had questioned the orientation towards this nation by critically asking what profit Israel would gain by drinking the water of the Nile. This same chapter concludes in v. 36–37 by announcing Judah’s delusion in trusting in Egypt, foreseeing that it will be left in shame.

As observed above, Jer 41–44 prepare the ground for the oracle against Egypt in the OAN, particularly their (first place) position within them, which also aligns with 25:19. Jer 46 *continues smoothly* after the ‘transitional’ and preparatory chapter with Baruch (Jer 45) and underlines that reliance on Egypt is short-sighted, as its power is weak vis-à-vis the Babylonian dominance. Verses 25–26 clearly express that confidence in Egypt and its Pharaoh is an illusion. In this vein, Jer 46 confirms that God’s advice to the Judeans not to flee to there was well founded.

Jer 46 *unveils the frailty* of Egypt, the Pharaoh, and its military by various traits. חיל “army” is the first word in the oracle starting in v. 2, and it is presented as defeated. With this background, the exhortations in v. 3–4 appear to be ironic; the contrast in v. 5–6 with the fleeing soldiers highlights this still more. The ridiculing name for the Egyptian King in v. 17, “Loud noise, who lets the deadline pass,”³⁰ indicates his weakness and stays in opposition to the destructive plan in v. 7, as a display of power.

Besides boasting and relying on its military force, the intention to destroy others is one aspect of Egypt’s *guilt*. In the OAN, culpability is often only alluded to and rarely explicitly mentioned, with the major exceptions being the oracles for Moab and Babylon. In Jer 46, the key concept of *divine justice* occurs for the first time within the OAN. Verse 10 uses the root נקם twice, which is frequently rendered with “vengeance, revenge,” but really means “just

29 מִצְרַיִם occurs 62 times in Jer which thus holds the third place after Exod (175x) and Gen (88x).

30 This is the rendering of J.R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37–52* (AB 21C; New York: Doubleday, 2004), 206.

retribution.”³¹ Jer 46 thus interprets the demise of Egypt as God acting against its injustice and re-establishing fair conditions. The designations “virgin” and “daughter” for Egypt in v. 11, the latter also in v. 24, are signs of Yhwh’s principal benevolence towards Egypt as well as the final phrase in v. 26, promising for the future a similar residing as in earlier times.

The deeper ‘struggle’ in Jer and behind the OAN is *Yhwh’s dispute with other ‘Gods’*. Jer 10:1–16 is the core text for this theme. It shows up here in 46:25³² where Yhwh announces to “visit,” i.e., punish, the Egyptian Gods, mentioning in first place Amon from Thebes (“No”). When Yhwh executes judgement on Egypt, this also means a display of his reign in that foreign region and over that people and at the same time his superiority over their ‘gods.’

3.2 *The Oracle for the Philistines, Jer 47*

Following the sequence of Jer 25:19–20, the *Philistines* continue after Egypt.³³ They are combined here with *Tyre* and *Sidon* which were mentioned in 25:22, thus grouping together regions along the Mediterranean coastline. These introduce Judah’s closer neighbours, beginning in the West and going around clockwise,³⁴ before turning to a slightly more distant nation with Damascus in 49:23, and afterwards to still farther ones.

The oracle on the Philistines, in itself, offers no clear clues for its insertion here in the OAN. Therefore, one can only speculate about its function. One reason might be the desire to *include the more important neighbours* in the final chapters of Jer here and thus give an impression of being ‘complete,’ although not dealing with all the groups mentioned in the cup scene in Jer 25. Jer 12:14–16, Yhwh’s announcement of punishment and possible salvation for “all my bad neighbours,” could be another motif for including the Philistines here, as a people having stood in conflict with Israel for many centuries.³⁵

31 G. Sauer, “גַּם”, *THAT II*, 106–9, here 107: “Ein begangenes Unrecht wird durch Bestrafung ausgeglichen und dadurch aufgehoben.”

32 This topic was already present in 44:8, 15–19, 25.

33 Outside of 25:20 and 47:1, 4, they do not appear elsewhere in Jer. This fact is unique among the OAN, insofar as all other neighbours of Judah / Israel play a role in other parts of Jer.

34 The order Moab, Ammon, Edom in Jer 48–49 is straightforward on Judah’s Eastern side from North to South, possibly another indication of an originally systematic arrangement in the Hebrew text of Jer.

35 See the conflicts and battles with them, especially in Judg 14–16 and 1 Sam. Jer 47 might evoke this memory.

3.3 *The Oracle for Moab, Jer 48*

Following Jer 25:21 one would expect the sequence Edom – Moab – Ammon. Yet Jer 48 continues with the second nation from 25:21, *Moab*,³⁶ and dedicates to it 47 verses, more than any other nation except Babylon. This special attention provides opportunity to present *more arguments* for Yhwh's judgement. 48:7 reproaches Moab for “trusting in your works and your treasures.” Judging by the divine reaction v. 11–12 suggest that Moab's “being at ease” does not correspond to God's intention. Explicitly, v. 26 accuses Moab of having elevated himself (גָּדַל *hiphil*) against Yhwh; the repetition in v. 42 emphasizes this as well as v. 29–30, which use seven words for its pride and arrogance. Verse 27 indicts Moab for having scoffed at Israel, something that Moab, too, will suffer (v. 39), demonstrating how evil falls back on the perpetrator in a kind of just compensation.

The Moab oracle stands out within the OAN by *divine compassion* for this foreign nation. Thus, Jer 48 efficiently proves Yhwh's impartiality. He, “the King” (v. 15), wails (v. 31) and sheds tears (v. 32) for Moab, as he had done for his own people (9:9; 14:17).³⁷ His heart is emotionally “stirred” (הִמְהִי, v36), as his inner being was moved for Ephraim (31:20). These verses are theological highlights in the OAN and set him apart from Moab's god Kemosh (v. 13, 46). The promise of the reversal of fates in the final v. 47 fittingly concludes Yhwh's care for this neighbour of Israel.

3.4 *The Oracle for the Ammonites, Jer 49:1–6*

As in Jer 25:21, the *Ammonites* follow Moab in 49:1–6. Despite its brevity, this oracle repeats several motifs of the previous oracles. The *talio*, receiving the same punishment as one's fault, marks v. 1–2 by the root “to inherit.”³⁸ This people is also called “daughter” (cf. 46:11, 24, for Egypt), even “turning” daughter in v. 4, the same expression as for Israel in 31:22. 49:4 questions the Ammonites' boasting of its deep valleys and criticizes its trust in treasures, as Moab was said to do in 48:7. They, too, experience the divine promise of a reversal of their fate (49:6, similar to 48:47).

Differently from their neighbours in Transjordan, the Ammonites and their King Baalis were heavily involved in the events after the fall of Jerusalem in 587.

36 The same order, with Moab in the first place before Ammon and Edom as here in Jer 48–49, occurred already in 40:11.

37 J. Woods, *Jeremiah 48 as Christian Scripture* (PTMS 149; Eugene/OR: Pickwick, 2011) 255–69 and 281, interprets the divine weeping in Jer 48 as signs of his pain and empathy. As God is moved with compassion for his people (in English 9:10), he similarly feels for a foreign nation.

38 Maybe there is a further wordplay with בְּנֵי “sons,” used for Israel and in “sons of Ammon.”

This king seems to have supported or encouraged Ishmael to *murder Gedaliah* (40:14) which happens in 41:2. In the skirmishes following the assassinations, Ishmael and his men lose and withdraw to the territory of the Ammonites (41:10), an indication that they could find refuge there from persecution from Johanan and the other troop leaders. The oracle in 49:1–6, particularly v. 4, questions this faith in Ammon as a place of protection following a case of injustice.

3.5 *The Oracle for Edom, Jer 49:7–22*

Named first in the series in Jer 25:21, *Edom* comes last in 49:7–22. In this oracle, several *new elements* attract attention. Amidst the destruction upon this nation, v. 11 shows God's care for the orphans and widows, which in line with, e.g., Deut 14:29 he is specially inclined to do.³⁹ 49:12 surprisingly speaks of those "whose verdict it was not to drink the cup," most probably referring to Jerusalem and its population.⁴⁰ After Jer 25 and all the other chapters extensively demonstrating their guilt and announcing that they *must* drink the cup first, this change in evaluating their status is unexpected and indicates a *turn in God's assessment* of his people. It will open the way for further novelties in the next two chapters.

Edom's fault is similar to Moab's, namely arrogance (49:16; cf. 48:29–30). However, the word for such hubris is different here: זָדוֹן. It will reoccur again prominently in 50:31–32 twice, as a designation for Babylon. Thus, pride and *feeling oneself to be superior to others* appear as common elements of the culpability of the nations. These accusations of arrogance here in Jer 48–49 thus prepare the following oracles which will still show an increase of this attitude.

In the second part of 49:19, God's three rhetorical questions emphasize his *uniqueness* and superiority above all other authorities (רֵעָה, literally "shepherd").⁴¹ He also does not need council from others. These three phrases are part of a doublet 49:19–21 // 50:44–46; the repetition in the first Babylon oracle underlines Yhwh's *equal treatment* of the nations and his dominion over them all.

39 Deut 10:18 testifies that Yhwh generally cares for those two groups, similarly within his people.

40 "Verdict" renders מִשְׁפֵּט. B. Huwylar, *Jeremia und die Völker* (FAT 20; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997) 214, expresses the astonishment about this unexpected evaluation of Jerusalem's population excellently: "Die Argumentation ist dabei so unjeremianisch wie nur möglich."

41 This term establishes a connection with Jeremiah's third confession in 17:16, where the prophet, also as "shepherd," takes his position not by "standing before" God, but exerting this role "after" him.

3.6 *The Oracles for Damascus, Kedar and the Kingdoms of Hazor, Jer 49:23–33*

The next two oracles, for Damascus (49:23–27) and for Kedar and the Kingdoms of Hazor (49:28–33), pose a *problem* insofar as these names were not explicitly mentioned in the cup scene of Jer 25, yet might have been included by the groups mentioned in v. 20–25. In this case, Jer 49 would choose specific examples to show the realisation of the divine announcement. The other option is to assume that the list in Jer 25 is not complete and God's intention to judge "all nations" and "all inhabitants of the earth" (25:15, 17, 26, 29) receives here in Jer 49 further concrete confirmation by adding new cities (see also Hamat and Arpad in v. 23) and peoples.

The *divine passion* shown towards Egypt, Moab, Ammon, and Edom continues in v. 25 for Damascus, the "city of my joy." Once again, there is this *strange mixture* of positive emotions in God for a people or society and nevertheless bringing judgement upon them, similar to his stance towards Judah and Jerusalem. Both oracles coincide in not mentioning fault; Nebuchadnezzar's attack against Hazor, said to have neither gates nor locking bars (v. 30–31), appears all the more cruel. In the verse before, the last occurrence of the expression "terror around," for Kedar in v. 29, indicates a *common fate* for various individuals and groups throughout Jer, among them Jerusalem (6:25), the priest Pashhur (20:3), Jeremiah in the perception of others (20:10), and Egypt (46:5).

3.7 *The Oracle for Elam, Jer 49:34–39*

The cup scene had announced the judgement on *Elam* in 25:25. Outside of that verse and the oracle⁴² here, this nation does not occur elsewhere in Jer – a similar case like that of the Philistines; here, however, faults of Elam are mentioned. God starts the oracle with his action against Elam's "bow," called "the summit / peak (רֶאשִׁית) of its power" (49:35). As in the first OAN for Egypt, the initial focus rests on weapons and the trust in military strength. Such confidence does not hold for long; Yhwh himself announces with often repeated "I" in v. 35–38 that he will bring Elam's ruin and destroy these illusions. Once again, as for Moab and Ammon, he announces for it a reversal of its fate (v. 39). Elam, too, can expect a hopeful future.

42 For the peculiarities of the Elam oracle see H.G.L. Peels, "God's Throne in Elam. The Historical Background and Literary Context of Jeremiah 49:34–39", in J.C. de Moor/H.F. van Rooy (ed.), *Past, Present, Future. The Deuteronomistic History and the Prophets* (OTS 44; Leiden: Brill, 2000) 216–29.

3.8 The Oracles Concerning Babylon, Jer 50–51

The length of the oracle against *Babylon* is nearly equal that of all the others combined (110 verses in Jer 50–51, 111 verses in Jer 46–49). This, per se, is already one reason for their significance, but their position at the end, their variety, their richness in details and in new elements as well as the importance of this nation offer further arguments in seeing them as the *climax of the OAN* in Jer.⁴³

To exert this function, the Babylon oracles are *different* from the oracles in Jer 46–49 in several ways:

- Whereas the *guilt* of other nations is mostly dealt with only randomly, Babylon is indicted much more.⁴⁴
- In the previous oracles, theological motifs were rather rare. In Jer 50–51, *Yhwh's role* and acting is dominant. As a consequence, his portrayal becomes richer.
- With few exceptions, *Israel's fate* was nearly absent in the chapters before. This changes significantly with 50:4–8 and continues until 51:51. In this regard, the complex relationship between Babylon and Jerusalem / Israel / Zion receives a solution, and the “Babylon motif,” prominent since 20:4, reaches its culmination.
- A final symbolic action confirms the validity and certainty of the divine announcements (51:59–64).

In the following, I will concentrate on these four issues. They are so extended that I have to select some aspects and will present only major ones here.

3.8.1 Babylon's Culpability

This nation belongs to Israel's foes who, upon devouring it, declare: “We are not guilty, because they have sinned against Yhwh” (50:7).⁴⁵ However, in v. 11 God calls the Babylonians “(those) plundering my inheritance” and thus accuses them of having enriched themselves with what belongs to him as booty. There is a *discrepancy* between their self-depiction and Jer's, wherein they are liable of stealing from God's property.

Several *symbolic names* indicate the nature of Babylon's misconduct. 50:21 refers to it as ארץ מרתים “(country of) double rebellion”, 50:31–32 as זדון “arrogance”, and 51:1 as לב קמי “heart of those standing up against me.”

43 This goes together with a different introduction. In the earlier oracles, Yhwh had addressed Jeremiah (46:1, 13; 47:1; 49:34), now, in 50:1, the prophet is the one who *transmits* God's word.

44 M. Kessler, *Battle of the Gods: The God of Israel Versus Marduk of Babylon. A Literary/Theological Interpretation of Jeremiah 50–51* (SSN 42; Assen: Van Gorcum, 2003) 209–10, also remarked the insistence on “sin and guilt” in these oracles.

45 This reasoning is strange: Another's fault is no excuse for own misbehaviour.

Whereas the first expression remains open with regard to whom Babylon revolted, the latter two cases are clear. The end of 50:29 used the same root as the verb (זדן) for behaving arrogantly versus Yhwh; similarly, 50:24 accuses them of challenging him. And in 51:1 Yhwh indicts the Babylonians of a deep opposition against him. Until 51:41, the riddle of the designation Sheshak in 25:26 has not been resolved. It is only in the present oracle that its identity with Babylon is clarified.

The unit with the sword-song alludes to reliance on military power. 50:36–37 mention heroes, horses and those riding them; they all will fail. Heroes and fortifications occur more often (50:15; 51:30–32, 56–58). Confidence in treasures and richness of water, also for defence, is another repeated theme (50:37–38; 51:13, 32, 36).

In Jer 20–49, there was no moral assessment of Babylon's actions. The narrations mainly described what they did without an ethical evaluation. Jer 50–51 offer an *important complement* to this kind of 'neutral' presentation.⁴⁶ In the end, and very clearly, these oracles state inhuman aggression, pride, and defying the biblical God as reasons for their downfall. Thus, these oracles demonstrate that also great powers bear responsibility and that Yhwh brings them to justice. This is consoling for all those who had to suffer under them.

3.8.2 Yhwh's Role

Main issues in these two chapters are Yhwh's superiority over the Babylonian gods,⁴⁷ his bringing just retribution and his capacity to save from inhuman oppression. Already 50:2 mentions Bel, Marduk and other deities / idols. This topic pops up again in 50:38; 51:44 (Bel), 47, 52 as well as in the doublet to 10:12–16 in 51:15–19. The latter passage confirms Yhwh's *prevalence*, now specifically in the Babylonian context, over their 'gods.'

Divine retribution is a pervasive motif.⁴⁸ The root נקם, used here the most (50:15 [2x], 28 [2x]; 51:6, 11 [2x], 36 [2x]), does not mean "revenge", but re-establishing justice. Other roots, like שלם "pay back, recompense" and גמול "retaliation" (50:29; 51:6, 24, 56 [2 + 1x]) emphasize this aspect and make it a key

46 U. Sals, *Die Biographie der „Hure Babylon“: Studien zur Intertextualität der Babylon-Texte in der Bibel* (FAT II 6; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004) has well demonstrated the dark and destructive features of Babylon throughout the Bible.

47 Kessler, *Battle of the Gods*, 216–17, aptly brings out the differences between Yhwh and the main Babylonian god, Marduk.

48 See C. Comte, "Violence retributive contre Jérusalem et contre Babylone/Babel dans le livre de Jérémie (TM)" in E. di Pedé/O. Flichy (ed.), *Quand la Bible parle avec violence. XXVIII^e congrès de l'Association catholique française pour l'étude de la Bible*, Metz, 31 août–2 septembre 2022 (LeDiv 285; Paris, Éd. du Cerf, 2024), 232–54.

theme. Yhwh's appellation as "pasture of justice" in 50:7, by foes (!), accentuates this feature further. The concept of a divine lawsuit is also connected with it (the root רִיב, in 50:34 [3x] and 51:36 [2x]). This means that what happens with Babylon follows a clear logic. What she had done to others, falls now back upon her (see also 50:15 and 51:7 with v. 39).

The Babylon oracles are theologically rich. In 50:7, the enemies had also called Yhwh "hope of their forefathers." Following the dire description of his people in 50:33, a voice declares in 50:34 "their redeemer is strong." In v. 44, picking up 49:19, God himself speaks and presents his acting "like a lion;" the first, rhetorical question therein expresses that he is incomparable. This is also the core of the doublet in 51:15–19, ending with his close relationship with "Jacob" as "creator of everything." All these motifs and the actions he undertakes against Babylon⁴⁹ display *divine might*, of which Israel is a main beneficiary. Yhwh also has the "final word." At the end of 51:58, he quotes Hab 2:13 and declares how people labour in vain and become tired, commenting thus the destruction of Babylon's walls and gates. Readers get the message: Only Yhwh and what he does will remain. Do not trust in human wisdom, military strength or great riches!⁵⁰

3.8.3 Israel's Fate

The preceding paragraph had alluded several times to Yhwh's association with his people. Unlike the previous OAN, Jer 50–51 *abound in references* to Israel, Judah, Zion and Jerusalem. They sometimes develop motifs known from earlier chapters, but also offer several new elements within Jer and are thus a surprise. I present a few of them.

To seek Yhwh in Zion (50:4–5) combines 29:13 and 31:6; that they *weep* in doing it, was never said before, is a sign of deep emotion and links them with God who also wept (9:9; 14:17; 48:32). In 50:8, God exhorts his people to flee from Babylon (see also 51:45, 50) and to be "like rams before the sheep." Herewith, Israel receives a new, *leading role* among the nations in taking distance from this oppressive nation.

In between, 50:6–7 had recalled the *terrible past* of God's people, erring around and being devoured. This aspect comes up various times, e.g., in 50:17, 33; 51:34. Jer 51:51 finally mentions having been ashamed by foreigners entering Yhwh's temple. Therein, a group is speaking, as "we," as also in the Ketib form of the verbs in 51:34 and before in v. 10. This evokes the impression that the

49 E.g., in 50:18 his "visiting" (פָּקַד), leading to another symbolic name for Babylon in v. 21 and the wordplays with it in v. 27 and 31.

50 See Jer 9:22 (in English 9:23).

new, saved community, the rest, reflects on its history and arrives in understanding now what happened to them before.

The topic of Israel's culpability is addressed three times. After announcing to bring them back to their pasture, God declares that even upon searching for Israel's guilt or Judah's sin, *it is no more* and cannot be found, because he forgives (50:19–20). Yet, 51:5 still knows about their country being full of אשם (guilt, liability)⁵¹ against him. The people themselves pronounce in 51:10: “Yhwh has brought forth our justice (in plural: צדקתינו)” and encourage to “Let us narrate in Zion the deeds of Yhwh, our God!” Up to Jer 44, this book had nearly incessantly repeated their resistance and crimes – that they are now without sin and can consider themselves as ‘just’ signifies a *reversal of their moral state*. In between, 49:12 had signalled a transition, veiledly speaking about Israel in a surprising manner as those who did not have the obligation to drink the cup.

Their relationship with Yhwh, too, is affected by this: 51:5 negates that Israel and Judah would be “widows,” forsaken by him. They continue to be *his partner*,⁵² and he invites them not to fear (51:46). Another voice exhorts them to remember Yhwh from afar (51:51). Taking together all these aspects, one may rightly conclude that one main function of the Babylon oracles is to communicate, to explain, and to substantiate hope for Israel.

3.8.4 The Symbolic Action with the Scroll

Throughout Jer, several symbolic actions⁵³ served to underline aspects of divine plans and messages, e.g., the broken vessel in Jer 19, the yoke in Jer 27–28, or the buying of the field in Anathoth in Jer 32. Concluding the Babylon oracles, we find the same device in 51:59–64. Its last verse is especially relevant, explaining the *meaning of throwing the scroll* weighed with a stone into the Euphrates to make it sink. This verse holds several important messages:

- The sinking of the scroll symbolizes Babylon's *downfall*.
- “Not rise up again” indicates an *end forever*, corresponding to Yhwh's intention in 51:12–13. Babylon will never become a power like before.

51 J. Goldingay, *The Book of Jeremiah* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021) 932–3, perceives irony in this verse through the connections and contrasts with 50:7, 29. Lundbom, *Jeremiah* 37–52, 436, interprets: “Israel and Judah are not forsaken by their God despite the fact that their land is filled with guilt.”

52 In this vein also Kessler, *Battle of the Gods*, 217 and 221–2, entitling his last section “YHWH, Covenant Partner with Israel.”

53 A still relevant study is K.G. Friebel, *Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's Sign-Acts. Rhetorical Nonverbal Communication* (JSOTS 283; Sheffield: Academic, 1999).

- The repetition of a part of God's final word in v. 58, "and they tire," emphasizes the *futility* of human / 'Babylonian' endeavours for military and economic strength and political dominion.
- "Until here the words of Jeremiah" conveys to the previous action the status of the prophet's *final message*, and thus utmost importance. At the same time, it indicates that Jer 52, which is a necessary and planned conclusion for the book (see above 2.6), stems from another voice. Its function is to confirm Jeremiah's prophecies.

The *Euphrates* had been the stage for another symbolic action already earlier. In Jer 13, the prophet had to first hide a linen waistcloth and then, later, to collect it again from there. The river had a disastrous impact on the piece of clothing, it was completely deteriorated and unusable, beyond repair. Jer seems to generate a kind of 'frame' by the first and last symbolic action, both connected with Babylon's main river and showing its devastating effect, with an increase towards a definitive termination in Jer 51.

4 Purposes of the OAN in Jer

How can readers in the present still detect possible purposes of such an ancient writing as the OAN in Jer? Having no access to the mind of the author(s),⁵⁴ we can only *deduce indirectly* what might be intended. Promising approaches are (a) explicit statements in this direction, e.g., God's plans. Further (b), repeated and therefore emphasized themes may also indicate purposes. From a pragmatic viewpoint (c), imperatives reveal what authors expect from their audience and thus also reveal probable aims. To conclude this contribution in a not too extended manner, I will give here only a few examples, without any claim for completeness.

4.1 *Divine Plans*

The central chapter, Jer 25, had twice revealed clearly that Yhwh is going to *judge all nations*. Jer 45:5 had picked up this motif with "Behold, I am bringing disaster above all flesh." The OAN show with a relevant selection of the most important nations and Israel's major neighbours⁵⁵ the *realisation of his project*.

54 Because of the many internal connections and the highly complex scroll, I assume an individual to be responsible for Jer, but do not want to exclude other options. For this, see G. Fischer, *Jeremiah 1–25* (HThKAT; Freiburg: Herder, 2005) 93–4 and 122.

55 As exposed above, the Egypt and Babylon oracles in Jer 46 and 50–51 frame them. Jer 47–49 deal with all peoples surrounding Israel, with Elam in 49:34–39 serving as a transition to Babylon.

The final aim of these divine actions is only revealed late, in two directions. 50:34 lays open God's main intention, to "*give rest to the world*."⁵⁶ He achieves this by making the inhabitants of Babylon tremble.⁵⁷ The demise of the demonstration and of the enactment of brutal, violent power allows humanity to respire, to regain hope and to find peace. 51:12–13 explicitly develop this idea. Therein, Yhwh announces the definitive end of Babylon (see also 51:64), as the realisation of his plan.

4.2 *Key Motifs and Theology*

The main motif pervading the OAN is *disaster in various forms* befalling all nations, without exception. Its extent symbolizes that the entire world is affected and that nobody can escape this divine judgement, thereby indicating that Yhwh is just. Even the mighty ones, who believe themselves immune despite their cruelties, cannot withstand his sentence with all its consequences.

In an impressive number of cases, destruction is not the final goal. Three nations receive promises of a reversal of their fate (Moab 48:47; Ammon 49:6; Elam 49:39). The last phrase for Egypt in 46:26 also alludes to hope. The divine guarantee of protection for Edom's orphans and widows in 49:11 is a further sign of Yhwh's compassion for another nation, as well as his calling Damascus "city of my joy" (49:25). Counting together these positive statements and considering the fourfold position at the end, God's judgement is *counterbalanced with salvation* for many nations and a dynamic towards it. The only exception⁵⁸ is Babylon; for them and those acting likewise or adhering to such an ideology there is no hope.

The central purpose behind this international judgement is the *portrayal of Yhwh*. He is just, insofar as he sentences everybody and, above all, is concerned about "equitable, right retribution."⁵⁹ He is mighty in bringing the high, influential ones down, reducing iniquity and stopping evil. He is incomparable (49:19 // 50:44); other 'gods' can in no way compete with him (46:25; 48:13, 26, 35; 49:1, 3; 50:2; 51:44). He controls history and the entire earth, using even

⁵⁶ The verb used is רָגַע in the hiphil.

⁵⁷ Expressed by רָגַז in the hiphil, thus forming a wordplay with רָגַע.

⁵⁸ Among the eight nations mentioned in Jer 46–49, six receive signs of recovery or divine affection for them. Such expressions are missing in the short oracles for the Philistines and for Kedar. – Once, in 51:33, even Babylon is called "daughter" which could also signal relationship and protection; for this implication of the term see M. Häusl, *Bilder der Not. Weiblichkeits- und Geschlechtermetaphorik im Buch Jeremia* (HBS 37; Freiburg: Herder, 2003).

⁵⁹ See the insistence on the root נָקַם "just recompense" in 46:10 and various times in the Babylon oracles, there also with other expressions and the motif of the רִיב "lawsuit."

powerful kings and dominating nations for his plans. He receives honorary titles, e.g., creator, redeemer, the Holy one of Israel. He displays a wide range of feelings (anger, joy, compassion, ...) and actions (speaking, destroying, pardoning, saving ...); this demonstrates that he reacts accordingly, discerning situations, affected people, effects, etc.⁶⁰ He is eternally linked to Israel by a covenant. The OAN thus continue and *crown Jer's theology*. Thereafter, Jer 52 has nothing new to say about him.⁶¹ The presentation of Yhwh in Jer 46–51 serves to establish firm foundations for hope and to convince that what he says are not mere words.

4.3 Exhortations

As Jer mainly addresses those believing in Yhwh, I concentrate here on the imperatives directed toward them. Jer 46:27–28, repeating 30:10–11, encourages Jacob / Israel twice not to have fear. This forms a kind of prelude to the *series of appeals* in the Babylon oracles.

The main motif in this respect⁶² is the repeated call to *leave 'Babylon'*, urgently. It starts in 50:8 with the orders to “flee from the midst of Babylon,” to “go out from the country of the Chaldeans” and to exert a leading role in this kind of ‘exodus,’ “like rams before the flock.”

Jer 51:6 requires again to flee; there, this summons stays in parallel with “rescue one's life,” in order not to perish because of Babylon's guilt. A third time, in 51:45, God commands to go out from its midst, addressing the group as “my people,” and thus survive; v. 46 follows with demanding twice to have no fear. Finally, 51:50 presses them not to stop on this way, to “remember Yhwh” and to “let Jerusalem rise upon their hearts.”

All these passages describe a process of *increasingly distancing oneself from 'Babylon'* and of orienting oneself in an intensified way towards the biblical God and the place of his veneration (see 3:17). The divine exhortations find an adequate response: After having attempted in vain to heal Babylon, an unspecified group orders in 51:9 to abandon her and decides “Let us go, everybody, to his own country!” Verse 10 continues with “we,” this time to be identified with Israel. They encourage themselves to go and “narrate the deeds of Yhwh, our God, in Zion.” This indicates that Yhwh's plan has been heard (50:45 // 49:20)

60 In the terminology of literary presentation, he is a “round character.”

61 Jer 52:2–3 only report his negative evaluation of King Zedekiah and his anger, quoting 2 Kings 24:19–20.

62 There are many other imperatives, mainly for attacking Babylon, e.g., in 50:14–16, 21, 26–29; 51:3, 11–12, 27–28. Mostly other groups seem to be involved; however in 50:21, and maybe in 51:11–12, Israel might also participate in bringing about its downfall.

and that its result, the destruction of this oppressing nation, has become effective. Consequently, all those who suffered by it, are liberated and can go free.

• • •

This last point revealed a major intent of the OAN as a whole. Their dynamic towards the Babylon oracles and the specific character of Jer 50–51 urge to perceive the essence of what ‘Babylon’ stands for: It symbolizes an *ideology of power, violence, arrogance, a striving for dominion, and opposition against God*. These chapters reveal the true identity of what seems to be ‘great’ and successful in the world.⁶³ They thus clarify and illustrate for Israel how it should see and assess Babylon, which appeared to be invincible and attractive up to Jer 46.⁶⁴ In this regard, Israel has to ‘convert.’

Israel is also invited to learn that the *nations cannot help*. This was already its experience in 37:3–8. Expecting support from Egypt against the Chaldeans was futile. The nations’ attempt to ‘heal’ Babylon also fails (51:8–9). And even Babylon itself turns out to be helpless, despite all its defences and military power, against the hostile attacks and the divine plans (51:11–12). This is a lesson for Israel: Do not trust in other nations!⁶⁵

The OAN hold still another message for Yhwh’s faithful: *Take courage!* The doublet at the end of Jer 46 and the various appeals in the Babylon oracles coincide in evoking confidence in divine rescuing in the midst of tribulations and even worldwide uproar (see 51:46). In the OAN, God invites Israel to view history and the nations from his larger perspective and thus gain trust in him and his dealings.

The OAN are *essential to Jer*, and in their position according to MT. They provide final solutions to important motifs earlier in the scroll, continuing and completing them. They offer Yhwh’s and Jeremiah’s last words which hold utmost importance as a kind of resume. They round off the Book of Jeremiah by showing that Yhwh, in the course of history, overall, is just and wants to bring salvation.

63 Even the earlier period of Babylon’s supremacy was in accordance with God’s plans: He used it as an instrument of judgement and its King Nebuchadnezzar as his servant, see 25:9–11 and the motifs of “hammer,” “sword,” “cup” in Jer 50:23, 35–37; 51:7, 20–23 to indicate its role, albeit for a limited time (Jer 25:11–12, and later twice repeated “seventy years”).

64 These functions are partly applicable also to other nations, especially those having longer oracles, like Egypt, Moab, Edom.

65 Eric Peels, in the introduction to his commentary, arrives at the same result.

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The Distinctive Features of Jeremiah's Oracles against the Nations in the Septuagint

Miika Tucker

1 Introduction

The oracles against the nations (OAN) in Jeremiah exemplify the defining differences that distinguish the Septuagint version of the book from the Masoretic version. The location of these oracles, their internal order and certain literary and textual features are different in the two versions, and these differences significantly affect the message, profile, and outlook of the two.

2 Placement of the OAN in MT and LXX

In the Masoretic text, the oracles against the nations are located at the end of the book (MT 46–51), and in the Septuagint, they are in the middle (LXX 25:14–31:44). The transposition of such a large block of text constitutes a major editorial reworking on a scale that is unique in the Hebrew Bible. The sense of these texts and their surrounding contexts naturally shifts on the coattails of this momentous change.

In the Masoretic text, chapter 25 represents a significant boundary between oracular and narrative material. The main content of Jer 1–24 consists of oracles of judgement against Israel and Judah, and Jer 25, verses 9–13 in particular, marks a shift in that its message of judgement is aimed at the other nations of the Levant in addition to Judah. The cup of wrath passage (Jer 25:15–38[32:1–24])¹ metes out judgement by listing the nations that are to drink from the cup, signifying the judgement that God has in plan for them.

1 The chapter and verse numbers in the Masoretic text (MT) and the Septuagint (LXX) differ after Jer 25:13. In this article, when the verse references differ, the MT reference will be presented first and the LXX reference will be presented in parentheses. E.g., 50(27):4 refers to 50:4 in the MT and to 27:4 in the LXX, and 25:15(32:1) refers to 25:15 in the MT and 32:1 in the LXX. If reference to the verses in only one of the witnesses is intended, it is expressed by the abbreviation MT or LXX.

Jer MT 26 initiates a lengthy narrative portion of the book, describing the opposition that Jeremiah faces in his prophetic task (Jer MT 26–29) and the fall of Jerusalem and its aftermath (Jer MT 34–45). The narratives end in the condemnation of the Judean refugees who have fled to Egypt thinking that there they will be safe from another incursion of Nebuchadnezzar's army (Jer MT 44). The oracles against the nations ensue, moving the focus of the text back to the other nations in the region. These oracles mainly constitute oracles of judgement, as their name suggests, but they also include a few oracles of hope, both for the other nations and for Israel in particular (Jer 50[27]:4–5, 17–20 and 33–34). Together with the book of consolation (Jer MT 30–33), these oracles end the Masoretic version on a positive note for Israel and Judah, and Jehoiachin's release in the final chapter of the book may be seen as a concrete sign of this hope on the horizon.

On the other hand, the oracles against the nations in the Septuagint commence after Jer 25:13. They are preceded by the oracles of judgement against Israel and Judah (Jer 1–24) and by Jer 25:1–13, which speaks against Judah and Jerusalem as well as against the nations on a general level. The oracles are then immediately followed by the cup of wrath passage (Jer LXX 32), which serves as a symbolic fulfilment of the judgement that is proclaimed in the preceding oracles² and as their conclusion.³ Only after all the oracles of judgement have been presented, both against Israel and Judah and against the nations of the Levant, the narratives of Jeremiah's opposition (Jer LXX 33–36) and of the downfall of Jerusalem commence (Jer LXX 41–46). The book of consolation (Jer LXX 37–40) offers hope for the future, but the final chapters of Septuagint Jeremiah narrate the flight of the Judean refugees to Egypt and Jeremiah's condemnation of their decision not to stay in the promised land, which would have been the will of YHWH (Jer LXX 47–51). The book ends on this note of condemnation, and the only assurance of salvation is given to Baruch the scribe, whose life will be given to him as a ransom (Jer LXX 51:31–35).

Scholars have identified contextual connections for the Oracles against the nations in both the Masoretic text and the Septuagint. For the Septuagint, the location of the oracles concentrates all the book's material concerning nations other than Israel and Judah together within chapters 25–32, and the cup of

2 Cf. V. Mäkipelto/T. Tekoniemi/M. Tucker, "Large-Scale Transposition as an Editorial Technique in the Textual History of the Hebrew Bible", *TC* 22 (2017), <https://jbt.org/v22/TC-2017-Makipelto-Tekoniemi-Tucker.pdf>. Accessed 6.11.2024.

3 E. Tov, "Some Aspects of the Textual and Literary History of the Book of Jeremiah", in P.-M. Bogaert (ed.), *Le Livre de Jérémie* (BETL 54; Leuven: Leuven University, 1981), 145–67, p. 152.

TABLE 3.1 The placement of the oracles against the nations in Jer LXX and Jer MT

Jer MT	Jer LXX
Oracles against Judah and Jerusalem (1–24)	Oracles against Judah and Jerusalem (1–24)
Judgment oracles against Jerusalem and the nations (25:1–14)	Judgment oracles against Jerusalem and the nations (25:1–13) OAN (25:14–31:44)
Cup of wrath: judgement of Jerusalem and the nations (25:15–38)	Cup of wrath: judgement of Jerusalem and the nations (32)
Jeremiah and other prophets (26–29)	Jeremiah and other prophets (33–36)
The Book of Consolation and oracles of hope (30–33)	The Book of Consolation and oracles of hope (37–40)
Fall of Jerusalem and flight to Egypt (34–45)	Fall of Jerusalem and flight to Egypt (41–51)
OAN (46–51)	
Destruction of Jerusalem (52)	Destruction of Jerusalem (52)

wrath passage forms an appropriate conclusion to the oracles against the nations by acting as a prophetic act that instantiates the prophetic word of the oracles.⁴ This reflects the location of oracles against the nations in other books of prophets, particularly Isaiah and Ezekiel, where they occur in the middle of the book.⁵ In addition, the absence of the oracles at the end of the book results in chapter 52 following immediately after the narrative of the fall of Jerusalem (Jer 34–45[41–51]), placing a greater emphasis on the most significant calamity in the book.⁶

In the Masoretic text, Jer 45 functions in a similar manner as the transition chapter 25 in the Septuagint, i.e., it shifts the subject from the Judeans to the universal “all nations” and on to the particular oracles against the nations (Jer MT 46–51).⁷ Also, there is a close contextual link between the fate of the Judean refugees who seek safety in Egypt, against the will of YHWH and

4 Tov, “Some Aspects”, 151–52.
5 J. Gerald Janzen, *Studies in the Text of Jeremiah* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1973), 115.
6 H.-J. Stipp, “Legenden der Jeremia-Exegese (I): Das eschatologische Schema im alexandrinischen Jeremiabuch”, *VT* 64 (2014), 484–501, on p. 494.
7 P. Raabe, “What is Israel’s God Up To among the Nations? Jeremiah 46, 48, and 49”, in J.R. Lundbom/C. Evans/B. Anderson (ed.), *The Book of Jeremiah* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 230–52, on p. 231.

against the warnings of Jeremiah, and the first of the oracles, which is the oracle against Egypt (Jer 46).⁸ The oracles against the nations at the end of the book sever the connection between Jer 52 and the narrative of the fall of Jerusalem (Jer 34–45[41–51]), shifting the emphasis of the book away from the destruction of Jerusalem and to YHWH’s judgement of the nations, which also includes the expectation of the restoration of Israel.⁹

3 The Internal Order of the OAN in Jer MT and Jer LXX

The Internal arrangement of the oracles is also different in the Masoretic text and the Septuagint. The Masoretic text locates the oracle against Babylon as the final oracle, both of the cluster of oracles against the nations and of the whole book, and the oracle against Egypt is the first of the oracles. Consequently, the two major powers in the region bookend all of the oracles against the nations. The Septuagint, on the other hand, begins with the oracle against Elam, followed by the oracles against the two major regional powers, Egypt and Babylon. The Septuagint closes the section with the oracle against Moab.

TABLE 3.2 The internal order of the Oracles Against the Nations in Jer MT and LXX

OAN in Jer MT	OAN in Jer LXX
Egypt (46:2–28)	Elam (25:14–26:1)
Philistines (47)	Egypt (26)
Moab (48)	Babylon (27–28)
Ammonites (49:1–6)	Philistines (29:1–7)
Edom (49:7–22)	Edom (29:8–23)
Damascus (49:23–27)	Ammonites (30:1–5)
Kedar and the kingdoms of Hazor (49:28–33)	Kedar, the queen of the court (30:6–11)
Elam (49:34–39)	Damascus (30:12–16)
Babylon (50–51)	Moab (31)

8 S. Marzouk, “The Representation of Egypt in the Book of Jeremiah”, in L. Stulman/E. Silver (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Jeremiah* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2021) 57–77, on pp. 72–3.
9 M.K. Chae, “Redactional Intentions of MT Jeremiah concerning the Oracles against the Nations”, *JBL* 13 (2015) 577–93, on p. 585.

Several theories have been proposed to explain the differing order of these oracles. The order of the nations in the Septuagint has largely eluded explanation, but a possible pattern is that they are ordered in Hellenistic geopolitical sequence: Elam representing the Parthians, Egypt the Ptolemies, and Babylon the Seleucids.¹⁰ The order in the Masoretic text, on the other hand, closely follows the order of nations in the cup of wrath passage (Jer 25:15–38[32:1–24]),¹¹ which also happens to follow a geographical order from South to North and from West to East.¹² The Masoretic placement of the oracle against Babylon as the final oracle imbues it with an emphasis as the final word of the book: judgement for the tool of YHWH's judgement, and restoration for Israel and Judah.¹³ The Septuagint gives no such privilege to the oracle against Babylon as it is listed simply as one oracle among the others.

4 Editorial Differences and Their Effect on the Versions

Marked differences between the Masoretic text and the Septuagint are also attested within most of the oracles, especially at the beginning and end of each oracle. This is to be expected due to the rearrangement of their order in the two versions. The following presents the fairly obvious editorial differences for each oracle, beginning with the introduction to the oracles as a whole.

4.1 *Introduction to the Oracles against the Nations*

The Oracles against the Nations in the Septuagint begin at LXX 25:14, the first phrase of which corresponds to the end of 25:13 in the Masoretic text. The introduction in the Septuagint is a relative clause informing the reader that the following constitutes Jeremiah's prophecy against the nations (pl.) of Elam Ἡ ἐπρόφητευσεν Ἰερεμίας ἐπὶ τὰ ἔθνη τὰ Αἰλαμ. The Masoretic text also attests the relative clause אֲשֶׁר־נִבֵּא יְרֵמְיָהוּ עַל־כָּל־הָגוֹיִם, but the relative pronoun functions to modify the previous phrase in the first half of 25:13, "everything written in this book," and does not mention Elam. The Masoretic text later employs a relative clause in its own introduction to the oracles against the nations in

10 W. McKane, *Jeremiah* 26–52 (London: T&T Clark, 1996) pp clxiv – clxv.

11 Janzen, *Studies*, 115–116; Stipp, "Legenden", 500–1.

12 Chae, "Redactional Intentions", 586–7.

13 For a similar argument, cf. J.W. Watts, "Text and Redaction in Jeremiah's Oracles against the Nations", *CBQ* 54 (1992) 432–47, on pp. 442–3.

TABLE 3.3 The introduction to the oracles against the nations in the MT and the LXX

Jer MT 25:13–14	Jer LXX 25:13–14
וְהִבֵּאתִי עַל־הָאָרֶץ הַזֶּה אֶת־כָּל־דְּבָרֵי אֲשֶׁר־ דִּבַּרְתִּי עָלֶיהָ אֵת כָּל־הַכְּתוּב בַּסֵּפֶר הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר־נָבֵא יְרֵמְיָהוּ עַל־כָּל־הַגּוֹיִם — כִּי עָבְדוּכֶם גַּם־הֵמָּה גּוֹיִם רַבִּים וּמַלְכִּים גְּדֹלִים וְשָׁלַמְתִּי לָהֶם כְּפַעֲלָם וְכַמַּעֲשֵׂה יְדֵיהֶם	καὶ ἐπάξω ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν ἐκείνην πάντας τοὺς λόγους μου, οὓς ἐλάλησα κατ’ αὐτῆς, πάντα τὰ γεγραμμένα ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τούτῳ. 14 Ἄ ἐπροφήτευσεν Ἰερεμίας ἐπὶ τὰ ἔθνη τὰ Αἰλαμ. —

MT 46:14 and adds the agency of YHWH to the oracles: אֲשֶׁר הָיָה דְּבַר־יְהוָה: “The word of the LORD that came to the prophet Jeremiah concerning the nations.” This plus in the Masoretic text owes its existence entirely to the relocation of the oracles to the end of the book.¹⁴

The *Vorlage* of the Septuagint reading τὰ ἔθνη τὰ Αἰλαμ seems to be גוֹי עִילָם. As a plural construct, however, גוי only occurs elsewhere as part of the expression גוֹי הָאָרֶץ or with a pronominal suffix.¹⁵ Though the use of this expression only in connection to the word אֶרֶץ raises doubts about this reconstruction, the concentration of the expression גוֹי הָאָרֶץ in Jer (3 out of 11 cases) lends plausibility to it. The plusses in the Masoretic text, i.e., the common addition of כָּל and the supplementary statement in MT 25:14, also suggest that the change here has taken place in the textual tradition of the Masoretic text rather than in the tradition of the Septuagint *Vorlage*. The Masoretic verse 25:14 stands in the place where the oracles against the nations are located in the Septuagint, and it likely functions as a patch to compensate for the relocation of the oracles in the Masoretic text.¹⁷

14 Cf. Tov, “Some Aspects”, 151–2.
15 McKane, *Jeremiah* 26–52, 1110.
16 The expression גוֹי הָאָרֶץ occurs in Gen 18:18, 22:18, 26:4; Deut 28:1; Jer 26:6, 33:9, 44:8; Zech 12:3; Ezra 6:21; 2Chr 32:13 and 17. Cases with a pronominal suffix are in Gen 10:5, 20, 31 and 32.
17 A. Aejmelaeus, “Jeremiah at the Turning Point of History: The Function of Jer XXV 1–14 in the Book of Jeremiah”, *VT* 52 (2002), 459–82, 479.

4.2 *Elam 49:34–39 (LXX 25:14–26:1)*

The oracle against Elam is the first of the oracles against the nations in the Septuagint (25:14–26:1). In the Masoretic text, it is located second to last, just before the oracle against Babylon, in 49:34–39. The fact that the intro to the oracle in Septuagint Jeremiah corresponds to the end of 25:13 in the Masoretic text contributes to the necessity of another intro to the oracle in the Masoretic text, and this is supplied by the plus in 49:34:

TABLE 3.4 The introduction to the oracle against Elam in the MT and the LXX

Jer MT 49:34	Jer LXX 25:14
The word of the LORD that came to the prophet Jeremiah concerning Elam, in the beginning of the reign of King Zedekiah of Judah.	What Jeremiah prophesied against the nations of Elam
אֲשֶׁר הָיָה דְּבַר־יְהוָה אֶל־יִרְמְיָהוּ הַנָּבִיא אֶל־עֵלָם:	Ἄ ἐπροφῆτευσεν Ἱερεμίας ἐπὶ τὰ ἔθνη τὰ Αἰλαμ.
בְּרִאשִׁית מַלְכוּת צִדְקִיָּה מֶלֶךְ־יְהוּדָה לֵאמֹר	—

Compared to the Masoretic text, the introduction to the oracle in the Septuagint is very simple and places emphasis on Jeremiah as the one who delivers the prophecy. It also employs the expression אֲשֶׁר נָבִיא instead of the prophetic formula אֲשֶׁר הָיָה דְּבַר יְהוָה אֶל יִרְמְיָהוּ of the Masoretic text, which harkens back to the introductory formula by which the book begins in Jer 1:2. The Septuagint introduction to the oracle lacks the reference to YHWH as the source of the prophecy and the date of the prophecy, but it curiously includes the date at the end of the oracle in Jer LXX 26:1 ἐν ἀρχῇ βασιλεύοντος Σεδεκίου τοῦ βασιλέως ἐγένετο ὁ λόγος οὗτος περὶ Αἰλαμ. “In the beginning when King Zedekiah reigned, this word came concerning Elam.” The note at the end of the oracle gives the impression that it was added as an afterthought, possibly when the oracle was first incorporated into the Jeremiah corpus and attributed to the prophet. Its shift to the beginning of the oracle in the Masoretic text is most likely intended as a harmonization with the conventional form of dating oracles.¹⁸

18 Pace McKane, *Jeremiah 26–52*, 1110–11, who argues that Jer LXX 26:1 is a later insertion into the Septuagint.

4.3 Egypt 46:2–26 (LXX 26:2–25)¹⁹

The Septuagint continues with the oracle against Egypt (Jer LXX 26:2–25), which corresponds to the first of the oracles in the Masoretic text (MT 46:2–26). Both versions begin the oracle by stating that it concerns the battle of Charchemish in which Nebuchadnezzar defeated the army of Pharaoh Neco in the fourth year of Jehoiakim, King of Judah (605 BCE). The only plus in the Masoretic text is the patronym בְּרִיאֲשֵׁיָהוּ “son of Josiah” after the name Jehoiakim.

The conclusion to the oracle, however, attests significant differences between the two witnesses. The Masoretic text attests two plusses in verse 25 and adds a brief oracle of hope for Egypt in verse 26. In contrast to the rest of the oracle, these verses are written in prose and are therefore likely a later addition to the oracle.²⁰ The plusses in the Masoretic text detail that Egypt will be given to Nebuchadnezzar, but they also promise renewed inhabitation after YHWH’s punishment: “Afterward Egypt shall be inhabited as in the days of old, says the LORD.”

TABLE 3.5 The end of the oracle against Egypt in the MT and the LXX

Jer MT 46:25–26	Jer LXX 26:25
The Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, said:	–
“Behold, I am bringing punishment upon Amon of Thebes,	Behold, I am avenging Amon, her son,
and Pharaoh and Egypt and her gods and her kings,	–
upon Pharaoh and those who trust in him.	on Pharaoh and on those who trust in him.
²⁶ I will deliver them into the hand of those who seek their life, into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and his officers. Afterward Egypt shall be inhabited as in the days of old, declares the Lord.	–

19 For a detailed presentation and analysis of the textual variants between the Masoretic text and the Septuagint of the oracle against Egypt, cf. C. Sharp, “Take Another Scroll and Write’: A Study of the LXX and the MT of Jeremiah’s Oracles Against Egypt and Babylon”, VT 47 (1997) 487–509.

20 W.L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 2* (Philadelphia: Hermeneia, 1989), 324.

TABLE 3.5 The end of the oracle against Egypt in the MT and the LXX (*cont.*)

Jer MT 46:25–26	Jer LXX 26:25
אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל	–
הִנְנִי פוֹקֵד אֶל־אֲמוֹן מִנָּא וְעַל־פְּרָעָה	ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ ἐκδιώκων τὸν Ἀμμων τὸν υἱὸν αὐτῆς ἐπὶ Φαράω
וְעַל־מִצְרַיִם וְעַל־אֱלֹהֶיהָ וְעַל־מַלְכֶיהָ וְעַל־פְּרָעָה	–
וְעַל הַבְּטָחִים בּוֹ	καὶ ἐπὶ τοῦς πεποισθότας ἐπ’ αὐτῷ.
וַיָּנֻתְתִּים בְּיַד מַבְקָשֵׁי נַפְשָׁם וּבְיַד נְבוּכַדְרֶאצַּר	–
מֶלֶךְ־בָּבֶל וּבְיַד־עַבְדּוֹ וְאַחֲרֵיהֶם תִּשְׁכַּן כִּימֵי־קֶדֶם	
נְאֻם־יְהוָה	

Two significant plusses in the Masoretic text occur in connection to the oracle against Egypt, in particular, the superscript and postscript to the oracle. Both plusses borrow text from elsewhere in the book. The superscript, אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, “The word of the LORD that came to Jeremiah the prophet concerning the nations” (Jer MT 46:1), serves as the introduction to all the oracles, and it recurs almost verbatim to introduce the oracle against Elam in the Masoretic text (Jer MT 49:34).²¹ The postscript with the brief oracle of hope appears in different forms three other times in the Oracles Against the Nations. At the conclusion of the oracle against Elam, both the Septuagint and the Masoretic text attest a similar statement of hope (49:39[25:19]), but the Masoretic text additionally adds similar remarks at the end of the oracles against Ammon (MT 49:6) and Moab (MT 48:47).

More significance has been inferred from the position of the oracle against Egypt in the Masoretic text than from its position in the Septuagint. The Masoretic tradition bookends the oracles against the nations with oracles against the two regional powers of Egypt and Babylon.²² The oracle also follows directly after the narrative of the Judean refugees in Egypt (42–44[49–51:30]), which squarely condemns the Egyptian diaspora for not staying in the land of Israel and for resorting to idolatry. The narrative alienates this diaspora in its effort to legitimate the Babylonian diaspora as the true remnant of Israel. The oracle against Egypt that immediately follows serves to amplify the power of this divine word and to affirm the prophet’s warnings of seeking refuge from

21 Cf. the discussion above on the oracle against Elam.

22 Chae “Redactional Intentions”, 589.

Egypt.²³ The Septuagint lacks the link between the oracle against Egypt and the narrative of the Egyptian diaspora and positions the oracle as the second among the oracles against the nations, which seemingly does not bear the same significance as its position in the Masoretic text.

4.4 *Promise to Jacob 46:27–28 (LXX 26:27–28)*

The promise to Jacob follows the oracle against Egypt in both witnesses, and its text is the same in both. The subsequent oracle is what distinguishes the two versions. In the Septuagint, the promise is followed by the oracle against Babylon. The promise explicitly mentions that YHWH will make an end to the nations to which He exiled Israel, and the oracle against Babylon represents the immediate fulfilment of this promise. This thematic connection is most likely original. Janzen even suggests that the promise was intended as an opening to the oracle against Babylon. In the Masoretic text, this connection has been severed, possibly because the promise was erroneously associated with the oracle against Egypt.²⁴

The text of the promise is near identical to Jer 30(37):10–11 in the Masoretic text, but there it is lacking in the Septuagint. The promise is a better fit in the context of Jer 30(37),²⁵ which is composed of oracles of hope for Israel and Judah, but its absence in that context in the Septuagint renders it suspect. The other possibility is that the promise has been copied from the oracles against the nations into Jer 30 in the Masoretic text precisely because of its affinity to the other oracles in that chapter.

4.5 *Babylon 50:1–51:64 (LXX 27:1–28:64)*²⁶

The introduction to the longest of the oracles against the nations is slightly different in the two witnesses, partially due to different word ordering. The Septuagint opens with Λόγος κυρίου, ὃν ἐλάλησεν ἐπὶ Βαβυλῶνα “The word of the Lord, which he spoke concerning Babylon,” while the Masoretic text states הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה אֶל-בְּנֵי הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה “the word that YHWH spoke concerning Babylon.” The Masoretic text also adds further information related to the addressee and the agency of Jeremiah: הַנְּבִיא יֵרֵמְיָהוּ בֶּן־יִדְיָהוּ כֹהֵן בְּשָׂדִים אֶל-אֶרֶץ כַּשְׂדִּים “concerning the land of the Chaldeans, by the prophet Jeremiah.”

23 Marzouk, “The Representation”, 72–3.

24 Janzen, *Studies*, 93–4 and 116.

25 Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2, 324.

26 For a detailed presentation and analysis of the textual variants between the Masoretic text and the Septuagint of the oracle against Babylon, cf. Sharp, “Take Another Scroll”, 487–509.

TABLE 3.6 The end of the oracle against Babylon in the MT and the LXX

Jer MT	Jer LXX
51:59a The word that the prophet Jeremiah commanded Seraiah son of Neriah son of Mahseiah	28:59a The word that the Lord commanded Ieremias the prophet to speak to Saraiaś son of Nerias son of Maasaiaś,
51:64b Thus far are the words of Jeremiah	28:64b —
51:59a הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר־צִוָּה יְרֵמְיָהוּ הַנָּבִיא אֶת־שָׂרְיָה בֶן־נְרִיָּה בֶן־מַחֲסֵיָּה	28:59a Ὁ λόγος ὃν ἐνετείλατο κύριος Ἰερεμία τῷ προφῆτῃ εἰπεῖν τῷ Σαραΐα υἱῷ Νηριου υἱοῦ Μαασαίου
51:64b עַד־הֵנָּה דְּבָרֵי יְרֵמְיָהוּ	28:64b —

The conclusion to the oracle in the two witnesses is significantly different, owing no doubt in part to the placement of the oracle as the climax of the whole book in the Masoretic text. The text of the oracle itself ends similarly in both witnesses at 51(28):58, but the Septuagint lacks the significant call to Israel to get out of Babylon before its destruction (MT 51:45–48). The superscripts of the conclusions differ slightly.

The Septuagint maintains the emphasis on the word originating from YHWH in line with the introduction to the oracle, “The word that YHWH commanded Jeremiah the prophet to speak to Seraiah,” but the Masoretic text lacks YHWH’s agency here and instead stresses the prophet’s role in conveying the oracle, “The word that the prophet Jeremiah commanded Seraiah.”

The Septuagint lacks the final statement regarding the extent of Jeremiah’s words, which is necessarily related to the location of the oracle in the Masoretic text as the final oracle of the book: “Thus far the words of Jeremiah.” This signals the end of the book and emphasizes Jeremiah’s agency in producing it, but it simultaneously represses the role of Baruch the scribe, who is addressed in the final prophetic word of the book in the Septuagint (LXX 51:31–35). The role of Baruch in the Septuagint is not integral to the oracle against Babylon, but his significance for framing the contents of the book and as the purveyor

of the divine word as presented by Jeremiah is replaced in the Masoretic text by Jeremiah himself.²⁷

4.6 *The Philistines 47:1–7 (LXX 29:1–7)*

In the Septuagint, the oracle against the Philistines (LXX 29:1–7) begins with a simple introduction Ἐπὶ τοὺς ἀλλοφύλους, which is unique among the introductions to the oracles in Septuagint Jeremiah with regard to the preposition. This introduction most likely represents the Hebrew אֶל-פְּלִשְׁתִּים.²⁸ In the Masoretic text, the oracle begins with a formula and a date, “The word of the LORD that came to the prophet Jeremiah concerning the Philistines (אֶל-פְּלִשְׁתִּים), before Pharaoh attacked Gaza,” elements that are similar to the Masoretic plusses in the oracle against Elam.

TABLE 3.7 The introduction to the oracle against the Philistines in the MT and the LXX

Jer MT 47:1	Jer LXX 29:1
אֲשֶׁר הָיָה דְּבַר־יְהוָה אֶל־יִרְמְיָהוּ הַנָּבִיא	–
אֶל־פְּלִשְׁתִּים	Ἐπὶ τοὺς ἀλλοφύλους
בְּטָרִם יָכָה פָּרַעְה אֶת־עֵזָה	–

A likely date for the sack of Gaza by an Egyptian Pharaoh, referred to at the end of the verse בְּטָרִם יָכָה פָּרַעְה אֶת־עֵזָה, is during Pharaoh Necho's return to Egypt in 609/608 BCE after he defeated Josiah's army at Megiddo.²⁹

4.7 *Edom 49:7–22 (LXX 29:8–23), Kedar and the Kingdoms of Hazor 49:28–33 (LXX 30:6–11) and Damascus 49:23–27 (LXX 30:12–16)*

The Septuagint version of the oracles against Edom, against Damascus and against Kedar and the Kingdoms of Hazor is largely the same as the Masoretic version. There are no quantitative differences in these oracles between the two witnesses. A notable variation in the Greek is the title “Kedar and the Queen of

27 For a more detailed analysis of this feature in the texts, see K. Finsterbusch, “Different Beginnings, Different Book Profiles: Exegetical Perspectives on the Hebrew Vorlage of LXX-Jer 1 and MT-Jer 1”, in K. Finsterbusch/A Lange (ed.), *Texts and Contexts of Jeremiah* (CBETH 82; Leuven: Peeters, 2016) 51–64, on pp. 59–64.

28 McKane, *Jeremiah* 26–52, 1140.

29 McKane, *Jeremiah* 26–52, 1143.

the Court” (LXX 30:6), but this is a different interpretation of the Hebrew consonants חצור as חֶצֶר ‘court’ and reading למלכת ‘to the queen’ instead of לממלכות ‘to the kingdoms,’³⁰ which likely resulted from a scribal error.

4.8 Ammon 49:7–6 (LXX 30:7–5)

The text of the oracle against Ammon is similar in both the Septuagint and the Masoretic text. The only quantitative difference is that the Septuagint lacks the promise of hope that is attested at the end of the oracle in the Masoretic text יהוה נאם בְּנִי־עַמּוֹן אָשִׁיב אֶת־שְׁבוּת בְּנֵי־עַמּוֹן “But afterward I will restore the fortunes of the Ammonites, says the LORD” (Jer MT 49:6), which is similar to the messages of hope at the end of the oracles against Moab (48:47[–]), also lacking in the Septuagint, and Elam (49:39[25:19]). The promise also resembles the words of Ezek 29:14a, where a similar promise is extended to Egypt.³¹

4.9 Moab 48:7–47 (LXX 31:7–44) and the Conclusion to the Oracles

The oracle against Moab begins in like manner in the two versions, but the endings are different. The Septuagint lacks three concluding verses that are attested by the Masoretic text. These verses (MT 48:45–47), which partially derive from Num 21:28–29, lament the destruction of Moab and the plight of its refugees and captives. The final verse, MT 48:47, is a promise of hope that is similar to the end of the oracle against Ammon (MT 49:6), which is also a plus in the MT, and the oracle against Elam (49:39[25:19]): וְשִׁבְתִּי שְׁבוּת־מוֹאָב בְּאַחֲרִית הַיָּמִים נֹאם־יְהוָה “Yet I will restore the fortunes of Moab in the latter days, says the LORD.”

The Oracles against the Nations in the Septuagint conclude with the oracle against Moab in LXX 31. The oracle in the Septuagint ends in a judgement of doom for Moab at 31:44. The Septuagint does not note the end of the oracles at this point, and they continue into the cup of wrath passage in LXX 32. The oracle in the Masoretic text, on the other hand, concludes with the note עַד־הֵנָּה מִשְׁפֹּט מוֹאָב “Thus far is the judgement of Moab.” This conclusion corresponds to the end of the oracles in the Septuagint and may reflect the ending formula that has been lost in the Septuagint.³² It is also very similar to the end of the oracles in the Masoretic text, עַד־הֵנָּה דְּבַר־יְרֵמְיָהוּ (51:64), which is also lacking in the Septuagint.

30 McKane, *Jeremiah* 26–52, 1238.

31 Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2, 345.

32 H.-J. Stipp, *Jeremia* 25–52 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 706.

TABLE 3.8 The end of the oracle against Moab in the MT and the LXX

Jer MT 48:45–47	Jer LXX
45 “In the shadow of Heshbon fugitives stop without strength, for fire came out from Heshbon, flame from the house of Sihon; it has destroyed the forehead of Moab, the crown of the sons of tumult. 46 Woe to you, O Moab! The people of Chemosh are undone, for your sons have been taken captive, and your daughters into captivity. 47 Yet I will restore the fortunes of Moab in the latter days, declares the LORD.” Thus far is the judgement on Moab.	—

5

The Import of the Location and Internal Order of the OAN in Septuagint Jeremiah

The differences between the location and internal order of the oracles against the nations in the Masoretic text and the Septuagint demonstrate a number of literary tendencies of both versions. The Septuagint location of the oracles against the nations, after 25:13 and before the cup of wrath passage (Jer 25:15–38[32:1–24]), presents all of Jeremiah’s substantial proclamations against foreign nations together.³³ The topic of judging the nations is first taken up in Jer 25:9–13, and it naturally continues into the oracles against the nations in LXX 25:14–31:44. Coupled with the cup of wrath passage (Jer LXX 32), which lists nearly the same nations, the oracles form a combination of prophetic message followed by its symbolic fulfilment. The picture of the nations drinking from YHWH’s cup of wrath symbolizes the judgement that has just been proclaimed against them. Without this close connection, the symbolic act

33 Jer 9:25–26 and 12:14–17 also mention a forthcoming judgement against the nations but do not go into detail.

lacks substance. The purpose of the action is to convey a message, and the preceding oracles fulfill this role.³⁴

The location of the oracles in the Septuagint also serves as an antecedent of later references to such oracles in the book of Jeremiah. One of the most obvious is the reference in Jer 36(43):2, “Take a scroll and write on it all the words that I have spoken to you against Israel and Judah and all the nations.” It is unlikely that this refers only to the cup or wrath passage since it merely describes a prophetic action. The text refers to words that YHWH has previously spoken to Jeremiah against all the nations, implying that the oracles are antecedent in time and in literary sequence.³⁵

Finally, the absence of the oracles against the nations at the end of Septuagint Jeremiah allows a seamless transition from the message to Baruch (LXX 51:31–35) to the final chapter of the book, Jer 52, which recounts the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of the people of Judah to Babylon. This transition serves to immediately fulfill the expectations that have built up through the narrative of the fall of Judah and Jerusalem in LXX 34–51 that entails the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of the people at the hands of the enemy from the North.³⁶ The fall of Jerusalem is referred to in Jer 39(46):1–3, but no details of the city’s destruction are presented in the Septuagint as they are in the Masoretic text (MT 39:4–10). YHWH’s promise to Baruch to break down and pluck up in Jer 45:4(51:34) is fulfilled immediately in the next chapter (52) in the Septuagint.

The tendencies in the Septuagint become clearer when we contrast them with the placement and order of the oracles against the nations in the Masoretic text, which places more emphasis on YHWH’s judgement of the nations and on the restoration of Judah. After the narrative of the fall of Jerusalem and the Judean refugees’ flight to Egypt (Jer 34–45[41–51]), the Masoretic text continues with the oracles against the nations before concluding the book with the recount of the destruction of Jerusalem (Jer 52). This momentarily shifts the focus of the book away from YHWH’s judgement of Judah and brings into focus, first, the coming fate of Egypt to where the Judean refugees had fled (Jer MT 46), and second, the climactic judgement of Babylon (Jer MT 50–51). With

34 For arguments that the close connection between the oracles against the nations and the cup of wrath passage indicate that the Septuagint presents the original location of the oracles, cf. Tov, “Some Aspects”, 152 n. 20; R.P. Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary* (London: SCM, 1986), 758; W.L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 2* (Philadelphia: Hermeneia, 1990), 313; and Mäkipelto/Tekoniemi/Tucker, “Large-Scale”, 10.

35 For a similar discussion with regard to Jer 45:1(51:31), cf. McKane, *Jeremiah 26–52*, 1099–1104; cf. also Mäkipelto/Tekoniemi/Tucker “Large-Scale”, 10–11.

36 For a similar argument, cf. Chae “Redactional Intentions”, 584–5.

intermittent promises of salvation for Judah,³⁷ the prediction of the downfall of Babylon right before Jer 52 imbues the final narrative chapter of the book with a sense of hope as Jehoiachin is released from his prison and allowed to dine at the table of the king of Babylon (Jer 52:31–34). The oracle against Egypt in connection with the condemnation of the Judean refugee community residing there and the oracle against Babylon with its message of hope for the exiles in Babylon serve a specific function in the Masoretic text. They rhetorically alienate the refugee community in Egypt from their right to the promised land in favour of the exilic community in Babylon, whose return and restoration is presented as the intention of YHWH.³⁸

Together, the Septuagint placement and ordering of the oracles against the nations result in a perspective that views the judgement of Judah and the destruction of Jerusalem through the lens of YHWH's "general pattern of divine punishment of the nations."³⁹ Judah and Jerusalem are the addressees of the majority of the judgement oracles that exhort them to observe YHWH's will (Jer 1–25), but Judah is merely the first nation to which these oracles are addressed as the other nations follow suit in LXX 25–32. A narrative section ensues in LXX 33–36, which describes Jeremiah's warnings to the people of Jerusalem to submit to the Babylonian conquest and overlordship because it is the will of YHWH, and this section is followed by the book of consolation in LXX 37–40.⁴⁰ The final twelve chapters of Septuagint Jeremiah (41–52) detail the downfall of the kingdom of Judah and the destruction of Jerusalem. This ending places greater emphasis on the most extensive calamity in the book as Jer 52 is not separated from the narrative of the downfall by the oracles against the nations, resulting in structurally privileged weight on the punishment of Judah as opposed to the punishment of Babylon in the Masoretic text.⁴¹

The design of Septuagint Jeremiah is to justify YHWH's judgement as a consequence of the leaders' and the people's failure to observe the will of YHWH and to listen to the prophet's warnings.⁴² The judgement of Judah and Jerusalem is presented as part of YHWH's punishment of the nations in the region, signifying that Judah is privy to no exceptional treatment. Septuagint Jeremiah offers a glimmer of hope in the book of consolation, but there is no

37 Oracles of salvation to Judah within the oracle against Babylon: Jer 50(27):4–5, 17–20 and 33–34.

38 Marzouk, "The Representation", 72–3.

39 M. Sweeney, *Form and Intertextuality in Prophetic and Apocalyptic Literature* (FAT 45; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 71–2.

40 Sweeney, *Form and Intertextuality*, 70–2.

41 Stipp, "Legenden", 494.

42 Sweeney, *Form and Intertextuality*, 70.

emphasis on the restoration of the Davidic kingship as in the Masoretic text (MT 33:14–26). Septuagint Jeremiah is parallel to Isaiah 1–39 in its anticipation of the restoration of Jerusalem in conjunction with that of the nations, but in contrast to Isaiah, Septuagint Jeremiah leaves the issue of restoration to the very distant future. It prepares readers to accept a long period of exile as the will of YHWH.⁴³ Septuagint Jeremiah resembles Isaiah and Ezekiel in locating the oracles against the nations in the middle of the book, which also contributes to the emphasis on YHWH's judgement of Judah in the climax of the book as opposed to the judgement of other nations and the restoration of Israel in the Masoretic text.⁴⁴

6 Conclusions

The characteristic features of Jeremiah's oracles against the nations in the Septuagint become apparent in comparison to the Masoretic text. The Septuagint locates the oracles against the nations in a different location and arranges them in a different order, and each oracle usually attests slight editorial differences at the beginning and end. Adding and supplementing headings to oracles is a common literary feature of the Masoretic text, so it is very likely that these features were used to supplement the relocation and rearrangement of the oracles. Some of the plusses in the Masoretic text are related to the macro structure of the book, such as Jer MT 25:14 that stands in the place of the oracles in the Septuagint, the general introduction to the oracles in MT 46:1, and the concluding remark, "Thus far the words of Jeremiah", at the end of the oracle against Babylon (Jer MT 51:64). These seem to have a strong connection to the reordering and relocation of the oracles.

These textual differences result in a different literary outlook that the book presents. In contrast to the Masoretic text, which underscores the destruction of Babylon and the restoration of the Judean community in exile in Babylon at the climax of the book, the Septuagint gives more weight to the disaster that has befallen Judah and Jerusalem. The oracles in the middle of the book mirror the literary structure of other prophetic books in the Hebrew Bible, and their absence from the end leaves the reader with a sense of the totality of YHWH's punishment in allowing Judah and Jerusalem to become desolate, even to the point that the remaining refugees who flee to Egypt are condemned even

43 Sweeney, *Form and Intertextuality*, 72 and 75.

44 Chae "Redactional Intentions", 582–4.

there. The oracles of salvation are far removed from the climactic ending that emphasizes judgement.

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Judgement and Hope, Anger and Compassion: The Theological Profile of the Oracles against the Nations in the Book of Jeremiah

H.G.L. (Eric) Peels

1 Uncomfortable Reading¹

The collection of Oracles Against the Nations (= OAN) in Jeremiah 46–51 is strongly dominated by the language of retribution and destruction. The oracles present a wide range of images of strife and war, vengeance and ruin, lamentation and torment. Signs of hope and restoration are only marginal points of light in this darkly coloured OAN, so full of threat and violence. Reading these texts quickly evokes resistance and even intuitive revulsion, and raises ethical and theological questions. Do the OAN legitimise extreme violence? Do they promote revenge as a solution? Does God really use one people to destroy another? What is the contemporary Bible reader to make of texts that emphasise God as a warlord commanding his armies to wreak havoc?

In the early stages of research, the theology of the OAN was little appreciated. These texts were considered to be inauthentic, the products of epigones, impossible to be by Jeremiah himself: “Auch als Fremdvölkerprophet hätte Jeremia Jahwe richten, nicht rächen lassen.”² According to F. Schwally, there is a significant theological difference between the concept of God of the ‘true’ prophet Jeremiah and ‘der Rachegott’ of the authors of the OAN.³ According to these exegetes, the pre-exilic prophets like Jeremiah were ethical-religious geniuses whose new ideas were at odds with the patriotism of Israelite popular religion. Their moral-religious motivation is opposed to a particularistic nationalism. The prophecies against foreign nations, which were seen as

1 This article draws in part on H.G.L. (Eric) Peels, *Jeremiah 46–51* (HCOT; Leuven: Peeters, 2025).

2 H. Bardtke, “Jeremia der Fremdvölkerprophet”, *ZAW* 53 (1935) 209–39, on p. 231.

3 F. Schwally, “Die Reden des Buches Jeremia gegen die Heiden. XXV. XLVI–L”, *ZAW* 8 (1888) 177–217, on p. 204. This was also the view of, e.g., B. Duhm, R.H. Pfeiffer, A. Kuenen, and J. Skinner.

implicit prophecies of salvation for Israel, fit poorly into this picture. These texts breathe the wrong spirit of vindictiveness, nationalism, and xenophobia.

Although research in recent decades has taken a much more positive view of the possible presence of original Jeremian material in the OAN and its theology, the charge of nationalism is still heard. “The Oracles against the Nations are very uncomfortable reading. They are nationalistic, savage, vengeful, mean, and destructive. But sometimes one should look directly into the eyes of the troll to defeat him.” (E.K. Holt)⁴ “The text seeks to push its worldview upon us, filled with violence, vengeance, and a bloody, bloodthirsty divine.” (R. Graybill)⁵ The OAN are essentially “revenge fantasies” (A. Kalmanofsky).⁶ No less radical is the evaluation of the OAN in some literature written from the perspective of postmodern and ideology-critical hermeneutics. A prominent representative of this approach is C.J. Sharp. Commenting on the ‘artfully vitriolic’ OAN of the Book of Jeremiah, she criticises the language of violence and the mockery of the panic and trauma of the victims:

Such discourse is naturalised in the OAN, in keeping with a militaristic logic that looks to norms of male able-bodiedness, capacity for physical domination, testosterone-fuelled resolve in the face of terror, and willingness to inflict maiming injury and death on others, including vulnerable noncombatants. The OAN laud torture, massacre, and enslavement of survivors as if that posture were inevitable, ethically appropriate, and theologically justifiable.⁷

The theology of retribution in Jeremiah must be rejected as victim-blaming rhetoric because it contains “the distorted view that those who suffer are to blame for their own agony and deserve what they are experiencing.”⁸ The same goes for “the narrative strategy of honouring vicious invaders as doing

4 E.K. Holt, “The Meaning of an *Inclusio*: A Theological Interpretation of the Book of Jeremiah MT”, *SJOT* 17 (2003) 183–205, on p. 189 n.16.

5 R. Graybill, “The Jeremian Oracles Against the Nations”, in L. Stulman/E. Silver (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Jeremiah* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2021) 387–404, on p. 403.

6 A. Kalmanofsky, “As She Did, Do to Her!': Jeremiah's OAN as Revenge Fantasies”, in E.K. Holt/H.C.P. Kim/A. Mein (ed.), *Concerning the Nations. Essays on the Oracles Against the Nations in Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel* (JSOTSup 612; London/New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015) 109–27; cf. A. Kalmanofsky, *Terror All Around. The Rhetoric of Horror in the Book of Jeremiah* (LHBOTS 390; New York: T&T Clark, 2008).

7 C.J. Sharp, *Jeremiah 26–52* (IECOT; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2022), 336.

8 Sharp, *Jeremiah*, 42.

God's work."⁹ Against the idea of a retributive divine sovereignty, Sharp presents texts on God's faithfulness (31:20, 31:37, 32:37–41; Hos. 11:9, Isa. 19:24–5).

Scholars such as Holt, Graybill, Kalmanofsky, Sharp, and others rightly claim that the OAN make for tough reading, and sharpen the reader's awareness of the danger of abusing these texts. Their analysis and evaluation, however, runs the risk of leaving little room for any theological value in the OAN, and even of reducing that theology to harmful ideology. A very different approach is taken by W. Brueggemann, who argues that the fundamental conviction that YHWH rules is the horizon of the prophetic tradition. He laments the lack of this awareness in our modern society: "The loss of this public rhetoric is an enormously costly loss, because it means the withdrawal of biblical imagination from the most urgent spheres of our common life."¹⁰ In his view, a renewed experience of the prophetic tradition in the OAN can contribute to a necessary transformation of thought, warning us against the self-exaltation that ultimately leads to self-destruction. Given our socio-political situation, a text like Jer 50–51 calls for "a fresh reading" today.¹¹ Huwyler also argues that the OAN should not be seen as a product of ancient patriotic texts that are obsolete to us: "So erwiesen sich die Jeremia Worte gerade in ihrer geschichtlichen Bindung als lebendiges Gotteswort, das zur Bewältigung der Vergangenheit und zur Gestaltung der Gegenwart und der Zukunft verhalf."¹² For M.K. Chae, the positive theological value of the OAN lies in the notion of the kingship of YHWH: "The expectation of future hope comes solely out of Yahweh's kingship. The elevation of Yahweh's universal kingship finally led to the radical inclusion of nations into future restoration."¹³

Despite the sometimes raw language and crude imagery that may repel the reader, the OAN reveal theological principles that are of lasting value into the 21st century, as this article will argue. The language and presentation of the OAN are essentially no different from that of the prophecies against Judah in the Book of Jeremiah. In fact, material from the prophecies against Judah is

9 Sharp, *Jeremiah*, 20.

10 W. Brueggemann, *Texts That Linger, Words That Explode. Listening to Prophetic Voices* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 17.

11 Brueggemann: "This requires attentiveness to the politics of rhetoric, to the strange, relentless power of these words to subvert and astonish." ("At the Mercy of Babylon: A Subversive Rereading of the Empire", in R. Kessler, *Reading the Book of Jeremiah. A Search for Coherence* (Winona Lake: Eisenbraun, 2004) 117–34, on p. 134).

12 B. Huwyler, „Jeremia und die Völker. Politische Prophetie in der Zeit der babylonischen Bedrohung (7./6. Jh. v. Chr.)", *ThZ* 52 (1996) 193–205, on p. 202.

13 M.K. Chae, "Theological Reflections on the Oracles against the Nations", *HBT* 37 (2015) 158–69, on p. 169.

even reused in the OAN. Contrary to what is sometimes assumed, most OAN are not indirect prophecies of salvation for Israel, and therefore the accusation of nationalism seems unfounded (see §6). Read against the backdrop of a shocking upheaval in the history of the ancient Near East, the OAN point to the sovereignty and justice of the One who, through the fault lines of history, unfathomably holds everything in his hands. YHWH, who, sometimes with tears in his eyes, interrupts and reverses evil in order to bring judgement upon the nations and his people, and ultimately to lead Israel and the nations on their way into a new future.

In developing this theological profile of the OAN, it is important to consider the placement (§2), order (§3), and composition (§4) of the OAN collection.

2 The Place of the OAN Collection

The Book of Jeremiah has been preserved in two versions, the Greek text of the Septuagint (= JerG)¹⁴ and the Hebrew Masoretic text (= JerM). JerG has a different book structure from JerM: the OAN are placed in the middle of the book (25:14–31:44). In JerG, the OAN also have a different order from JerM. This has implications for the presentation of the theology of the Book of Jeremiah in general and the theology of the OAN in particular.

JerG divides – in outline – into prophecy and narrative. The prophecies, first those against Judah/Jerusalem and then those against the nations, are in the first part of the book (chapters 1–32). In the OAN collection from chapter 25 onwards, up to the Cup of Wrath pericope in chapter 32, the judgement becomes universal: Israel can no longer expect help from the surrounding nations. The second part of the book (chapters 33–52) then follows the events around the prophet Jeremiah, interrupted by the Book of Comfort in chapters 37–39. This second part describes the fulfilment of the prophetic judgement of the first part, concluding with the announcement of a radical judgement on Judah (YHWH's ominous words to Baruch: "I am bringing evil upon all that lives" (51:35)) and the description of the fall of Jerusalem in chapter 52. Thus, the book structure of JerG places full emphasis on the execution of YHWH's judgement on Judah and Jerusalem. In the theological perspective of JerG, the divine punishment of Judah's violation of the covenant with YHWH has the last word.

14 'Septuagint' refers here to the original Greek translation (the 'Old Greek'), as reconstructed in the Göttinger edition by J. Ziegler (2013⁴).

Up to chapter 45, JerM also has this general division between prophecy (first part of the book), and narrative (second part of the book). But by placing the OAN at the end, the whole takes on a different theological perspective. From chapter 26, the narrative unfolds according to the sequence of the Cup of Wrath pericope (25:17–29): first the judgement on Judah (chapters 26–45, interrupted by the Book of Comfort in chapters 30–33), then the judgement of the nations (chapters 46–49) and finally the judgement of Babylon (chapters 50–51). The whole concludes, as in JerG, with chapter 52. The OAN in JerM begin with the prophecy concerning Egypt (Jer 46), thus establishing a direct link with Jer 40–44. The words of the prophecy to Baruch in Jer 45 (“I will bring disaster upon all that lives”) are given an additional dimension before the OAN collection. By placing the Babylon prophecy at the end of this collection, full emphasis is given to YHWH’s judgement on the archenemy Babylon, which had brought about the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem. In the Babylon oracle, the door of hope is opened: through the fall of Babylon, Israel will rise again. In JerM, it is not judgement that has the last word, as in JerG, but the prospect of a new future, both for Israel and for the subjugated and enslaved nations.

Opinions differ as to which position of the OAN is original: in the middle of the book (JerG) or at the end (JerM). The majority of scholars are convinced of the relative priority of the Greek text and also believe that the position of the OAN in the middle of JerG is original. They see the relocation of the OAN to the end of the book as part of a secondary development in JerM.¹⁵ The main argument for this view is that in JerG the OAN collection fits well into the immediate context. In the Book of Jeremiah, the first mention of YHWH’s judgement upon all nations is in 25:8–13. This judgement is elaborated in the immediately following OAN collection in JerG 25:14–31:44. A fitting conclusion to this is JerG 32 with the pericope on the symbolic act of the cup of YHWH’s wrath against all nations. Thus, in JerG the words of judgement on the nations are grouped in one context, introduced by 25:1–13. In the structure of JerM, however, the announcement of the judgement on the nations in 25:13c (‘what Jeremiah prophesied about all nations’), which appears to be the superscription of the OAN collection, has no immediate follow-up. The Cup of Wrath pericope JerM 25:15–29 then hangs somewhat in the air, with no direct connection to the OAN in Jer 46–51. Thus the natural coherence between the symbolic act and the message to be conveyed is broken in JerM.

The preference for the book structure of JerG as the most original, however, is not without its problems. In JerG, the prophecy about Babylon – announcing the total demise of that city – is placed in the middle of the book, whereas in the

¹⁵ Cf. Peels, *Jeremiah*, 20–30.

rest of the book, Babylon plays a central role as the instrument in God's hand to punish Judah.¹⁶ Also, if the location of the OAN collection in Jer G, including the oracle against Babylon, is original, one would expect Babylon to be mentioned in the list of the nations in the concluding Cup of Wrath pericope – but this name is absent in JerG 32. Another problem is that both JerG 28:7 and 29:13 refer to the image of the cup of wrath and can only be understood in the light of the Cup of Wrath pericope, which, however, has been given a place in JerG *after* the OAN collection.

It is worth considering the hypothesis that the original position of the OAN was indeed in the middle of the book, as in JerG, but that the great Babylon oracle was not yet part of it. This prophecy differs from the other OAN in a number of ways, and also dates from a later period (see §4). When the Babylon prophecy was secondarily added to the OAN, the editor (or editors) subsequently moved the whole collection to the end of the book, which he deemed a more appropriate place. Unlike JerG, the editor of JerM placed a great deal of emphasis on Babylon as God's instrument of punishment and on the final judgement of Babylon, giving hope to Israel. After the relocation of the OAN collection, Jer 25 was editorially revised to reflect this theme and to link it with JerM 46–51. JerM 25 has many pluses compared to JerG, which, taken together, point to this later redaction. These pluses concern the king and the people of Babylon (25:12,14,26). Elsewhere in JerM, the role of Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon is also emphasised ('my servant' in 27:6, the judgement on Babylon in 27:7). The placement of the OAN, culminating in the judgement on Babylon in JerM 50–51 at the end of the collection, is consistent with this.¹⁷

The difference in book structure between JerG and JerM clearly results in a slightly different emphasis in the theology of the OAN. Whereas the conclusion of JerG focuses on the downfall of Judah and Jerusalem, the conclusion of JerM directs attention to a new future for Judah and Jerusalem.¹⁸

16 G. Fischer rightly argues: "Egypt and Babylon receive judgement long before it becomes clear what they are responsible for" (*Jeremiah Studies: From Text and Contexts to Theology* (FAT 139; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020), 85.

17 Moreover, the book structure of JerM also seems to be a secondary adaptation to the historical-theological concept and the sequence in the Cup of Wrath pericope: the judgement first comes on Judah (Jer 25–44), then on the nations (Jer 46–9) and, finally, on Babylon (Jer 50–1). "Dementsprechend lässt sich das masoretische Arrangement aus dem Wunsch herleiten, die nachstehenden Buchteile mit dem geschichtstheologischen Konzept der Becherperikope in Einklang zu bringen" (H.-J. Stipp, »Nimm dir eine Buchrolle und schreibe!« (Jer 36,2). *Gesammelte Aufsätze zum Jeremiabuch* (FRLANT 281; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2021), 90.

18 "In this way, the composers bring closure with overtures of renewal and rebuilding" (L. Stulman, *Jeremiah* (AOTC; Nashville: Abingdon, 2005), 353.

3 The Order of the OAN Collection

JerG	JerM	Cup Pericope (25:15–29)
Elam (25:14–26:1)	Egypt (46)	(Jerusalem/Judah)
Egypt (26:2–28)	Philistia (47)	Egypt / Uz
Babylon (27–8)	Moab (48)	Philistia
Philistia (29:1–6)	Ammon (49:1–6)	Edom
Edom (29:8–23)	Edom (49:7–22)	Moab
Ammon (30:1–5)	Damascus (49:23–7)	Ammon
Kedar/Hazor (30:6–11)	Kedar/Hazor (49:28–33)	Phoenicia
Damascus (30:12–16)	Elam (49:34–9)	Arabia
Moab (31)	Babylon (50–1)	Elam / Media (Persia) (Babylon)

Not only the position but also the order of the OAN differs in JerG and JerM, which has consequences for their theology.¹⁹

JerG offers a formal classification that places the three great empires of Elam (= Persia), Egypt, and Babylon first. These are followed by a series of smaller nations, in random order. By placing Elam/Persia as the first of all (or was this already the case in the Hebrew source text of JerG?), the Greek translator emphasised the relevance of the prophecies against the nations to his Hellenistic-Egyptian contemporaries, whose memory of the mighty Persian Empire was still vivid. YHWH, the God of Israel, has a case against the whole world – all kingdoms must bow down to him as King, even the greatest of them all: Elam/Persia. At the same time, in JerG, Elam is the only nation to receive a promise of restoration (25:19). Thus, the oracle against Elam in JerG has a paradigmatic function. The nation is judged by YHWH, but it is not without hope. The fate of Elam is indicative of God’s dealings with all the nations of the world at that time. JerG wanted to show to later readers the essence of YHWH’s worldwide judgement: the three great empires at the forefront, with

19 For the view that the arrangement of the OAN in JerM may be more original than that in JerG, see E. Peels, “From Egypt to Babylon, or from Elam to Moab? Queries Concerning the Order of the Oracles Against the Nations in the Book of Jeremiah”, in H. Bezzel/U. Becker/M. de Jong (ed.), *Prophecy and Foreign Nations. Aspects of the Role of the “Nations” in the Books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel* (FAT II 135; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2022), 59–75.

Elam as first and foremost – but with a hopeful perspective.²⁰ However, there is little theological profile of its own to be derived from the rest of the OAN structure in JerG.

This is different in JerM, where the OAN have a clearer and more meaningful structure. The placement of Egypt at the beginning of the collection and Babylon at the end reflects the situation of these nations as the two main antagonists dominating the world of Jeremiah's day. The first nation to succumb to Babylon is Egypt, at the Battle of Carchemish in 605 BCE – the other nations subsequently follow. With this sequence, JerM works towards the apotheosis of the whole book: Babylon at the end, as the culmination of God's judgement on all nations, in an oracle that also has elements of hope for Israel.²¹

The OAN collection in JerM begins with a (double) prophecy against Egypt (46:2–26). The judgement announced by YHWH on “all that lives” (45:5) begins nearby: Egypt, the refuge of false hope. The prophetic warning against trusting in Egypt that is found throughout the Book of Jeremiah reaches its climax here. The double oracle in Jer 46 makes it clear once again that no hope is to be derived from Egypt. The evaluation of Egypt in the Book of Jeremiah is predominantly negative, and this is underscored by the positioning of the oracle against Egypt at the beginning of the OAN collection.²²

The series of nations that follow Egypt (seven in all) culminates in the oracle against Elam in 49:34–39. This prophecy differs in style and content from the other OAN: it is indefinite, vague, and compilatory; geographical and historical references are absent. Although the oracle uses the name Elam in every

20 See further H.G.L. Peels, “God's Throne in Elam: The Historical Background and Literary Context of Jeremiah 49:34–39”, in: J.C. de Moor/H.F. van Rooy (ed.), *Past, Present, Future: The Deuteronomistic History and the Prophets* (OTS XLIV; Leiden: Brill, 2000) 216–29, and Peels, *Jeremiah*, 36–7, 333–57.

21 According to M. Kessler, *Battle of the Gods. The God of Israel Versus Marduk of Babylon. A Literary/Theological Interpretation of Jeremiah 50–51* (SSN 42; Assen: Van Gorcum, 2003), 166, the order of JerM implicitly refers to the beginning and end of Judah's history, in which Egypt was the first and Babylon the last archenemy.

22 W. Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah: Exile and Homecoming* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 424, argues that Egypt opens the OAN collection for two reasons: “Egypt has come to be a primal metaphor for worldly power that is organised against the purposes of God. For both political and metaphorical-theological reasons, Egypt is named first in the list of nations, for when Egypt is brought under the rule and purpose of Yahweh, in effect Yahweh's governance will be fully established.” Cf. M.P. Maier, *Ägypten – Israels Herkunft und Geschick. Studie über einen theo-politischen Zentralbegriff im hebräischen Jeremiabuch* (OBS 21; Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2002), 277: “Das Gericht, mit dem JHWH seine unangefochtene Oberherrschaft über die Nationen demonstriert, ‘muss’ bei Ägypten beginnen, weil die Judäer auf es ihre Hoffnungen gesetzt und es zu einer quasi-göttlichen theo-politischen Alternative gemacht haben.”

verse (seven times in all), Elam itself is nowhere specified. In the oracle against Elam, all the emphasis is on the divine subject announcing judgement (ten times a divine “I”). The prophecy against Elam uniquely focuses on the actions of YHWH and offers a concentrated proclamation of God majestically carrying out his purposes with regard to the nations. This is the third time in the OAN that divine kingship is mentioned (v. 38, also in 46:18 and 48:15). YHWH sovereignly rules over the elements (v. 36) and establishes his throne at the far end of the world (v. 38). The mention of God’s throne in Elam accentuates the intensity and inevitability of the judgement on the nations while also providing a unique perspective on the nature and extent of that judgement. Distant Elam is like an exclamation mark behind the fullness of the seven nations in Jer 46–49. From one end of the world of that time to the other, from the Nile to beyond the Euphrates and the Tigris, the storm of judgement will rage: no nation will escape it. At the same time, the oracle against Elam intensifies the message of the previous chapters by emphasising in every verse of this prophecy that the worldwide judgement, which also affects Elam, is carried out by YHWH himself in his burning wrath. Thus, within the OAN collection of JerM, the Elam prophecy serves as a hinge. On the one hand, this oracle brings the collection of seven OAN in 46:2–49:33 to a climactic conclusion. On the other hand, the Elam oracle sets the stage for the prophecy against Babylon in Jer 50–51.

Babylon plays an important role in the Book of Jeremiah, but more so in JerM than in JerG. In JerG, Babylon is given a place among the other nations on a par with them in being subjected to divine judgement. The OAN collection (25:14–31:44) in JerG is followed by the Cup of Wrath pericope (32:1–15) where Babylon is conspicuously absent from the list of nations. In addition, Babylon/Nebuchadnezzar are mentioned much less frequently in JerG than in JerM. JerG concludes with the description of Judah’s last years, the fall of the city and temple, and the dispersion of Judah to Babylon and Egypt.

The function of Babylon in JerM is different from that in JerG. Not only because Babylon and Nebuchadnezzar are explicitly mentioned much more often, but especially also because of the place and position of the Babylon prophecy at the end of the book and at the end of the OAN collection. What has been said in Jer about Babylon and the nations, including Israel, culminates in the text of chapters 50–51 as the climax of the whole book. Here, all the themes and motifs of Jer come together in a kaleidoscopic picture. In the way this prophecy describes the fall of the great enemy, who seems to be in control of the world, there is also a glimmer of hope. Explicitly, the redemption of Zion is the flip side of the fall of Babylon. The prophecy then forms a powerful conclusion to the book. In chapters 50–51 Israel is repeatedly called

upon to flee from Babylon and return to Zion. The vision of God's people seeking YHWH again (50:4–5, 20), the prospect that YHWH will bring Israel back (50:19), and that he will plead Zion's case (50:34, 51:36), is a promising opening to the future. Despite the knowledge of Judah's downfall, JerM ends with a perspective of hope and expectation that differs from JerG. In JerG the emphasis is ultimately on the judgement of Judah, whereas in JerM the emphasis is on the judgement of Babylon. JerG prepares the reader for the exile whereas JerM prepares the reader for the exodus from the exile. The position of the Babylon prophecy at the end of the OAN collection in JerM, more so than in JerG, is consistent with the key role of Babylon in the Book of Jeremiah. The focus of this article is to further outline the theology of the OAN collection in JerM.

4 The Composition of the OAN Collection

In outlining the theological profile of the OAN, it is also necessary to recognise the varying theological weight of the individual prophecies in the composition of this collection. Despite many common motifs, images, and representations, there are considerable differences between the OAN in terms of content and elaboration. Some oracles have little or no theological motivation, containing only a description of the threat of coming judgement and inescapable destruction (Philistia, Damascus, Kedar/Hazor). While these texts lack any mention of a reason or cause for the judgement, other prophecies are much more detailed in this respect (Egypt, Moab, Babylon). The description of the judgement is quite concise in some prophecies (Philistia, Damascus) and comprehensive in others (Egypt, Moab, Babylon). Some prophecies end with a vision of restoration (Egypt, Moab, Ammon, Elam), others end with a radical, final demise (Edom, Babylon).

The prophecy against Babylon in particular holds a unique place in the OAN collection.²³ It is widely accepted that this collection can be divided into two sections (Jer 46–49 and Jer 50–51), as evidenced by its content and indicated by the various headings and subscriptions which suggest some sort of chronological sequence.²⁴ There is good reason to assume that Jer 50–51

23 For the unique position and theological function of the Elam prophecy (49:34–39), see § 3.

24 The OAN collection begins with a prophecy against Egypt, featuring an inscription mentioning the fourth year of Jehoiakim (46:2). The collection ends with a prophecy against Babylon, which is editorially linked to the fourth year of Zedekiah (51:59). The Elam prophecy in 49:34–39, which is dated to the beginning of Zedekiah's reign (the year of his accession to the throne), is a turning point in this cycle.

are of a later date than the rest of the OAN and that they were added to this collection secondarily.²⁵ The Babylon oracle differs from the other prophecies in Jer 46–49 in several ways. More than any other OAN, Jer 50–51 form a literary mosaic of genres and styles, themes and motifs.²⁶ Not only is the Babylon oracle much larger than the other prophecies, but it is also the only prophecy linked to a historical narrative (51:59–64). In all the other OAN, Babylon is the enemy threatening another land/people. In Jer 50–51, Babylon itself is the threatened nation. More so than in the other OAN, the Babylon oracle lacks a recognisable structure. Whereas the Moab prophecy in Jer 48 contains various quotations (from Isa and Num), Jer 50–51 are notable for their extensive recycling of many texts both from the Book of Jeremiah itself and from other prophetic books. Unlike elsewhere in the OAN, in Jer 50–51 the impending doom of the city and the land is repeatedly motivated and explained with references to the guilt of Babylon, with explicit mention of the mistreatment of Israel/Judah. Most strikingly, and unlike the other prophecies, is the fact that words from, about, or addressed to Israel/Judah occupy a prominent place in the Babylon prophecy, with descriptions of past evil past, present pain, and future redemption. Finally, the polemic against idols and idolatry is more prominent in this prophecy than anywhere else.

Therefore, the description of the message and theology of one oracle may differ significantly from that of another. Despite the distinct emphases within each OAN, it is still possible to outline general theological themes for the collection as a whole, as is done below. While individual OAN may emphasise their unique aspects, there is a constant in the proclamation of the universal, sovereign rule of YHWH (§5). Related to this fundamental idea are the themes of divine judgement (§6) and divine redemption (§7), which play an important role in the OAN collection. The concluding section (§8) sketches an overarching picture of God as presented in the OAN.

5 The Universal and Sovereign Rule of YHWH

Like no other Old Testament book, Jeremiah has a universal perspective.²⁷ The OAN are driven by the firm conviction that YHWH exercises sovereign rule

25 See the arguments for this in Peels, *Jeremiah*, 363–6.

26 “It is truly the ‘mother of oracles,’” according to Kessler, *Battle of the Gods*, 67.

27 Cf. G. Fischer, “Der weite Blick des Völkerpropheten. Personen, Nationen und Orte im Jeremiabuch”, in T. Wagner/J.M. Robker/F. Ueberschaer (ed.), *Text – Textgeschichte – Textwirkung* (Fs S. Kreuzer; Münster: Ugarit, 2014), 93–110; G. Fischer, *Jeremia. Prophet über*

not only over Israel but over all nations.²⁸ The ‘God of Israel’ (46:25, 48:1, 50:18, 51:33) is ‘King of the nations’ (10:7),²⁹ ‘King, whose name is YHWH of Hosts’ (46:18, 48:15, 51:57), Creator of all that exists (10:12–13 = 51:15–16),³⁰ not bound by time or place (23:24). He has appointed his prophet over peoples and kingdoms (1:5,10). He can uproot, break down, destroy, and overthrow nations and kingdoms, but he can also build and plant them (1:10, cf. 18:7–10). In line with 45:4 (‘What I have built I am breaking down and what I have planted I am plucking up’)³¹ the emphasis in the OAN is on uprooting and tearing down, although building and planting are not absent.

YHWH calls the nations to account, punishes their pride and evil-doing, and ends all arrogant self-aggrandisement. He decides the fate of the nations, and he enlists one of them to accomplish his purpose: the great Babylon. It is striking that Babylon and Nebuchadnezzar are rarely mentioned by name in Jer 46–49. The enemy whom YHWH uses as his instrument of punishment usually remains anonymous, referred to by vague terms and images. This *Babelschweigen* (an apt term coined by H.-J. Stipp) contributes to the threat of the judgement prophecy. The enemy does not need to be further identified because the hearer of the prophecy understands very well who was being referred to. The *Babelschweigen* places full emphasis on YHWH as the one who is the real enemy of the nations, the one who rules in sovereignty.³² It is *his* ‘plan’ (49:20) and *his* ‘work’ (48:10) that he executes with *his* ‘sword’ (47:6–7) on *his* ‘day’ (46:10). When Babylon itself exalts against God, it is subsequently destructively punished by YHWH (his ‘work,’ 50:25, 51:10f) in accordance with

Völker und Königreiche (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2015), 17–18, 32–6, 224–34, 253, and G. Fischer, *Theologien des Alten Testaments* (Stuttgart: Katholische Bibelwerk, 2012), 94–6.

28 Brueggemann, *Commentary on Jeremiah*, 419: “These oracles in chs. 46–51 voice a single recurrent theme: God is sovereign. The nations must honor God’s sovereignty.” Cf. W. Brueggemann, *The Theology of the Book of Jeremiah* (New York: Cambridge University, 2007), 43–55, 75–115 and J.F. Liu, *Hope According to the Sovereignty of Yahweh. A Theology of the Oracles Against the Nations in Jeremiah 46–49* (Pasadena: PhD-thesis Fuller Theological Seminary, 2010), 244–52.

29 Cf. Fischer, *Jeremiah Studies*, 320–2.

30 On the theme of YHWH as creator in the Book of Jeremiah, see J.R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah Closer Up. The Prophet and the Book* (HBM 31; Sheffield: Phoenix, 2010), 51–7.

31 “The statement provides an appropriate lead-in to the Oracles against the Nations” (Brueggemann, *Commentary on Jeremiah*, 419).

32 H.-J. Stipp, *Jeremia 25–52* (HAT I/12,2; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 8, 634; B. Huwylar, *Jeremia und die Völker: Untersuchungen zu den Völkersprüchen in Jeremia 46–49* (FAT 20; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 278–84.

his 'plan' (50:45, 51:11–12, 29). YHWH then uses another nation, the Medes, against Babylon. There are no limits to his power.

The OAN proclaim a God whose universal rule is superior to any other ruler, whether human or divine. He ends the self-confidence of people who consider themselves invulnerable (Moab, Edom, Kedar/Hazor, Babylon). YHWH intervenes when a nation believes it can raise itself above others and determine the course of history (Egypt, Babylon). The great world powers prepare to terrorise and subjugate the world (46:8 Egypt; 50:25, 51:53 Babylon), but YHWH thwarts their ambitions. There is no area beyond the reach of his power. In the tangle of the history of those days, as ancient structures faltered and collapsed (Judah's independent nationhood, the Temple of Jerusalem, the Davidic dynasty), and the world was on fire, the prophecy points to YHWH as the one who makes his own way through it all. Against the backdrop of war, occupation, deportation, and destruction, when the dismay at the explosions of violence paralyses everyone, and no one can make sense of it anymore, the prophecy proclaims that all this is not beyond YHWH and that he is in control. He is and remains the King of the nations who is turning the world upside down. "He is radically altering the *status quo* of the international scene ... Yahweh destroys the old *status quo* in order to create a different future."³³ This theological baseline of YHWH's sovereign rule does not answer all the questions about divine violence in the OAN,³⁴ but it does offer a perspective amid the futility of history, where nations toil for nothing, and nations wear themselves out for fire (51:58). 'Es wird regiert' (K. Barth): neither fate nor great powers will rule in the end, but YHWH.

Not only the nations and their rulers must bow down before YHWH, but also the gods of these nations. YHWH is incomparable to anything or anyone (10:6, 49:19=50:44; the 'formula of incomparability').³⁵ When God's judgement

33 P.R. Raabe, "What is Israel's God Up To among the Nations? Jeremiah 46, 48, and 49", in J.R. Lundbom/C. Evans/B. Anderson (ed.), *The Book of Jeremiah* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 230–52, p. 249 and 251. "In a world that is unstable, morally uncertain, and under siege from a plethora of dangerous forces, Jeremiah proclaims that God is nonetheless still ordering and governing with the intent to accomplish God's purposes" (L. Stulman, *Order amid Chaos: Jeremiah as Symbolic Tapestry* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 109).

34 Significantly P.D. Miller, "The Book of Jeremiah", *NIB* 6 (2001) 919, observes: "The questions we bring to such texts may be as likely to get satisfactory answers as those Job raised. We are before a great and terrible God who is known to be for us but who cannot be domesticated and moralised into a gentle, loving force. The Bible assumes a moral ground for the divine activity even when it cannot show it." Cf. M.J. Chan/B.A. Strawn, *What Kind of God? Collected Essays of Terence E. Fretheim* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 129–39.

35 Brueggemann, *Theology*, 44: "This 'formula of incomparability' is a proper starting point from which to discern the claim of Yhwh that dominates the rhetoric and the faith of the Book of Jeremiah." Cf. Fischer, *Jeremiah Studies*, 317–20.

is pronounced on a nation, its gods are also struck – and they stand powerless before him: Amon and all the gods of Egypt (46:25), Chemosh of Moab (48:7,13), Milcom of Ammon (49:3), Bel/Marduk of Babylon (50:2, 51:44). In the eyes of the nations of the time, the God of Israel must have been utterly insignificant: his land invaded, his temple destroyed, his people decimated and deported. Against this background, the claim of YHWH's superiority over the gods of this world, as often found in the OAN, is unprecedented.

In this proclamation of God's universal rule, the uniqueness of YHWH is also revealed. In the national-religious ideologies of the ancient Near East, the deity was closely linked to one's own country and people. The deity fights for them. War against other peoples and the conquest of their lands were attributed to the deity, carried out by the armed forces of the deity's own people.³⁶ The portrayal of YHWH in the Book of Jeremiah is quite different. He fights *against* his own people and other nations, using a *foreign* nation as his instrument. At the same time, YHWH can take punitive action against this foreign nation if it oversteps the boundaries he has set.³⁷ He is also ruler over other nations, appointing princes over them (49:19), holding them accountable, and judging them – even regardless of their relationship with Israel.

6 Theology of Judgement

According to many exegetes, the message of the OAN is that through the downfall of the surrounding nations, the hope of salvation dawns for Israel.³⁸ Just as ancient war oracles cursed the enemy to boost the morale of their own forces, the OAN would have brought comfort and encouragement to beleaguered Israel. This is indeed the case with the unique prophecy about Babylon in Jer 50–51, although the scope of that prophecy is much broader. However, a strong indication that the other OAN are not implicitly salvation prophecies for Israel is that these texts rarely speak of any harm being done to Israel (only in 48:27 and 49:2). Moreover, these prophecies always concern Israel's actual

36 Cf. S. Sherwin, "‘I Am Against You’: Yahweh's Judgement on the Nations and Its Ancient Near Eastern Context", *TyndB* 54 (2003), 149–60.

37 See Chan/Strawn, *What Kind of God?*, 179–81 (the paragraph 'Exceeding the Divine Mandate').

38 E.g., L.C. Allen, "Jeremiah: Book of", in M.J. Boda/J.G. McConville, *Dictionary of the Old Testament Prophets* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 2012), 434, interprets the role of the OAN as implicit pronouncements of salvation for YHWH's own people: "The foreign oracles, which are a series of proclamations of disaster, are ultimately vehicles of hope for Judah. They function as red traffic light that means a green light for Judah in the cross street."

or potential allies in the resistance against Babylon. B. Huwylar and H.-J. Stipp, therefore, rightly argue that the primary intention of the OAN is to discourage the Judaeans from forming alliances with surrounding nations against Babylon's aggression.³⁹ The OAN teach that no help can be expected from any other nation. If even mighty Egypt is defeated by Babylon, any hope of salvation that Judah might still cherish is lost.⁴⁰ Instead of a message of salvation, the OAN imply a message of judgement and doom for Judah and Jerusalem. They underscore the inevitability of judgement on Judah. Moreover, these prophecies contain an implicit warning to Israel: if even the foreign nations are chastised by YHWH for their pride and arrogance, how much more must Judah itself, the people of God's covenant, fear his wrath if it persists in its evil ways (cf. 23:17). If YHWH is capable of destroying a foreign nation, how much more so would He not reproach his own people?

That the announced disasters that affect the surrounding nations are no more than 'flankierende Massnahmen YHWHs zu seinem Strafhandeln an Juda' (H.-J. Stipp)⁴¹ is, however, an understatement. The OAN also contain a message for the nations themselves, as the judgement is set in the larger context of God's *ryb baggoyim* 'lawsuit against the nations' (25:31, cf. 45:5). It is the *melek haggoyim* 'the king of the nations' who claims universal recognition (12:16–17) and who has appointed the king of Babylon to make all nations bow under his yoke (27:6–11). He pursues his way among the nations, sweeping away evil (3:17, 25:31, 45:5). Even if the reason for the judgement is not given or only briefly mentioned in some of the OAN, the idea of God's cosmic sovereignty is in the background.

Although the oracles against the nations are independent textual units with their own subject matter, the phrasing of the judgement described in each of them has so many similarities and overlaps with that in other oracles that together they merge into a single picture. The terminology and the metaphors for the judgement upon one nation can be seamlessly used to describe the fate of another nation (e.g., 46:11//51:8; 48:40–41//49:22; 48:45//49:27; 49:17//50:13; 49:18//50:40; 49:19–21//50:44–46). They all drink from the same cup of the wrath of YHWH. They all face the 'enemy from the North,' with the same

39 Huwylar, *Jeremia und die Völker*, 300–4, 321–23; Stipp, *Jeremia*, 631–2; cf. G.R. Hamborg, "Reasons for Judgement in the Oracles against the Nations of the Prophet Isaiah", *VT* 31 (1981) 145–59; Chae "Theological Reflections", 165–6, and J. Goldingay, *The Theology of Jeremiah: The Book, the Man, the Message* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 2021), 63–5.

40 Cf. the conclusion of the judgement prophecy about Egypt and Ethiopia in Isa 20:6: "Behold, this is what has happened to those in whom we hoped and to whom we fled for help to be delivered from the king of Assyria! And we, how shall we escape?"

41 Stipp, *Jeremia*, 632.

disastrous consequences for all, such as the following: the death of their soldiers, total destruction, eternal shame and being the object of ridicule forever, depopulation and exile, the land becoming a haven for vermin, etc. All this is the execution of God's 'plan' (49:20; 50:45; 51:12,29), connected with God's 'judgement' (48:47; 51:9; cf. 49:12), the fulfilment of his 'vengeance' (46:10; 50:15,28; 51:6,11,36), resulting in the complete 'reckoning' with all nations (46:28). The rapidly changing and constantly recurring motifs and images give the OAN collection a kaleidoscopic effect. The reader/listener is left with a sense of bewilderment: for what reason does this destructive storm sweep over the world, this great "catastrophe over everything that lives" (25:31, 45:5)?

The prophecies of doom against Judah and those against other nations are thematically and stylistically closely related, particularly in Jer 4–6 and 46–49. Texts and motifs from the prophecies against Judah are reused and applied to the nations (e.g., 6:22–24//50:41–43). At the same time, there is a notable difference between the prophecies against Judah and those in the OAN collection. In the former, there is a detailed discussion of the social, political, and especially religious sins of Judah as the cause of the impending judgement. In the OAN, however, there is much less theological motivation. Judah has repeatedly broken and despised the covenant with YHWH by worshipping other gods and by continually violating the law and righteousness. In the OAN of Jer 46–49, the justification for the judgement is much less specific, or even absent (as in the prophecies about Philistia (47), Damascus (49:23–27), and Elam (49:34–39)). In another prophecy, this justification must be inferred indirectly from the sketch of false reassurance held by the people concerned (Kedar/Hazor, 49:28–33). The exception is again the prophecy about Babylon in Jer 50–51, which differs from the other OAN. The fate of Babylon is the mirror image what of it has done to Judah, and the causes of its judgement, just as was the case with Judah, are thoroughly discussed.

According to Smothers, the OAN of Jer 47–49 should be read in the context of international treaty law.⁴² These nations were vassals of King Nebuchadnezzar, the 'servant' of YHWH, but they violated their treaty with Babylon. For this, they are now being punished by YHWH, who is the Suzerain. However, this hypothesis is not sufficiently supported by the texts themselves. In his interpretation of the judgement in the OAN of the Book of Amos, J. Barton postulates the violation of natural law, which, as an 'international customary law,' has less to do with the laws and institutions of YHWH than with 'common

42 See G.L. Keown/P.J. Scalise/T.G. Smothers, *Jeremiah 26–52* (WBC; Dallas: Word, 1995), 277. Cf. T.G. Smothers, "A Lawsuit against the Nations: Reflections on the Oracles against the Nations in Jeremiah", *RevExp* 85 (1988) 545–54.

moral sense.⁴³ Although this may also be implied in the OAN in the Book of Jeremiah, there is no clear indication of it. In these oracles, three specific reasons for judgement are explicitly mentioned: a) the hubris of the nations, b) the evil done to Israel, and c) sin against YHWH.⁴⁴

The hubris with which a nation rises up against other nations and/or against YHWH⁴⁵ is described in various ways in the prophecies about Egypt, Moab, Ammon, Edom, and Babylon. Egypt believes it can conquer and destroy the world (46:8). Moab (48:14), Ammon (49:4), Edom (49:16), and Babylon (51:53) are very self-assured. They have great confidence in their own resources and capabilities (Moab, 48:7,13; Ammon, 49:4) and consider themselves invulnerable (cf. Kedar/Hazor in 49:31). The hubris of the nations is characterised in a number of ways (cf. Höffken 1977, 321–7): *g'h / g'wn / g'wh* – almost synonymous ‘pride’, ‘arrogance’, ‘conceit’ (Moab, 48:29); *rm lb* ‘haughty’ (Moab in 48:29); *gbh* ‘pride’ (Moab, 48:29); *brh* ‘arrogance’ (Moab, 48:30); *bd* ‘boastfulness’ (Moab, 48:30; Babylon, 50:36) and *zdw* ‘pride’ (Edom, 49:16; Babylon, 50:30–31). This hubris is directed not only against other nations but also against YHWH. Moab magnifies itself against YHWH (*hgdl*, 48:26,42); Babylon challenges YHWH (*grh*, 50:24) and is presumptuous towards him (*zyd*, 50:29). In his fiery judgement, YHWH scorns any reliance on one’s own power and wealth and puts an end to all pride and vanity.

Harming Israel can also be a reason for judgement. Thus, Moab is accused of mocking Israel (48:27) and Ammon of annexing Israel’s territory (49:2). The Babylon prophecy, in particular, dramatically highlights the evil done to Israel: Babylon has plundered Israel (50:11), devoured it and mistreated it (50:7,17; 51:34–35). It oppresses Israel and refuses to let the exiles go (50:33). In all this, Babylon has sinned against YHWH (50:14) and has taken what is his: his inheritance (50:11; 51:19) and his temple (50:28; 51:11; cf. 51:51). The whole land of Babylon is profoundly guilty before YHWH and full of idolatry (50:38; 51:5,52); Babylon is called ‘the heart of my adversaries’ (51:1). Not only Israel but the whole world has been mistreated by Babylon (51:7,25,49; cf. 51:48).

The OAN proclaim that YHWH does not remain remote and unmoved in the face of pride, mockery, self-confidence, malice, and wickedness but that

43 J. Barton, *Amos’s Oracles against the Nations. A Study of Amos 1.3–2.5* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1980); cf. J. Barton, “Natural Law and Poetic Justice in the O.T.,” *JThS* 30 (1979) 1–14.

44 Cf. the comprehensive study by P. Höffken, *Untersuchungen zu den Begründungselementen der Völkerorakel des Alten Testaments* (Bonn: Richard Schwarzbold, 1977).

45 See D.E. Gowan, *When Man Becomes God. Humanism and Hybris in the Old Testament* (Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1975). Cf. Hamborg, “Reasons for Judgement”, 158: “This concept of the *hybris* of nations is one which should be included in a study of prophetic theology.”

he is intensely involved in the lives of peoples and nations. He responds with burning anger to all evil (*hrwn 'ap*, 49:37, 51:45; *qsp*, 50:13; *z'm*, 50:25), and especially to the injustice against his own people, Israel. The latter aspect is particularly evident in the Babylon prophecy: YHWH does not abandon his people (51:5) but comes as a redeemer (*g'l*, 50:34). He is a God of retribution (*'l gmlt*, 51:56; cf. *šlm*, 50:29; 51:6,24,56), who judges the nations (*špt*, 48:21; 51:9) and punishes them (*pqd*, 46:25; 49:8; 50:18,31; 51:44,47,52; cf. *l' nqh*, 49:12). YHWH pleads Israel's cause (*ryb*, 50:34; 51:10,36) and avenges his people and his temple (*nqmh*, 46:10; 50:15,28; 51:6,11,36). Babylon receives its just deserts, according to the *ius talionis* (50:15,29; 51:6,24,56).

In the OAN, human evil is exposed. Divine violence is not blind or arbitrary, but a response to evil.⁴⁶ YHWH holds people accountable for their actions, and he abhors all hubris, idolatry, exploitation, and oppression. The characterisation of the various nations shows how futile it is for a nation to become entrenched in pride and self-confidence (the danger of nationalism), to rely on its gods (religion in the service of the state), and to seek ruthlessly to develop its own power and prosperity (international aggression). None of this can stand in God's judgement.⁴⁷ It will end in 'nothing,' in 'fire' (51:58), no matter how lofty the ambitions may be (49:16; 51:53). Thus, the OAN proclaim a message that is valid and lasting not only then, but for all time. It is a message with the joyful perspective that evil will not eventually have the last word.

7 Theology of Hope

Although the theme of judgement and doom dominates the OAN, there are also signs of hope: not only for Israel but surprisingly also for the nations.

Restoration and hope for a new future for Israel are, in a sense, the brackets around the OAN. Both the first and the last prophecies speak of a return from exile and a new life in peace and security. The prophecy of salvation for Israel in 30:10–11 was editorially added to the prophecy about Egypt (Jer 46) as a counterpart to the words of salvation for Israel in the prophecy about Babylon

46 "The violence assigned to Yahweh is to be understood as counterviolence, which functions primarily as a critical principle in order to undermine and destabilize other violence" (W. Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament. Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 244).

47 "The God of Israel is destroying the self-security, the self-orientation, the self-focus, the self-determination, and the self-complacency of foreign nations" (Raabe, "What is Israel's God Up To", 249).

(Jer 50–51).⁴⁸ It is precisely in the prophecies about these two superpowers, the land of its slavery, respectively the land of its exile, that Israel receives hopeful promises. After the chastisement of the present, the future holds the return and the restoration of life (46:27–8; 50:4–5, 19–20). Israel will enter into an everlasting covenant with YHWH in Zion (50:5), based on total forgiveness (50:20). He will conduct Israel's trial and bring their righteousness to light (50:34; 51:10, 36).

In addition, the OAN in JerM also contain words of salvation for the nations, albeit brief and quite unexpected, at the end of the prophecies about Egypt (46:26), Moab (48:47), Ammon (49:6) and Elam (49:39).⁴⁹ About these nations, we are told that YHWH will give them a new future 'hereafter' (46:26 and 49:6), 'in the last days' (48:47 and 49:39). He will restore Egypt to safety as it was before (46:26) and bring about a reversal in the fortunes of Moab, Edom, and Elam (the *šûb š'êbût* formula in 48:47, 49:6, 49:39). In the OAN-JerG, only the prophecy about Elam has a word of salvation (25:19).

The interpretation of these words of salvation and the difference between JerG and JerM has been the subject of much scholarly debate. According to G. Fischer and A. Vonach, the difference between JerM and JerG shows that by omitting the promises of salvation to Egypt, Moab, and Ammon, JerG takes a more critical attitude towards these nations than JerM.⁵⁰ In their view, JerG reflects a later phase in the textual history related to the situation in the Diaspora.⁵¹ Presumably, however, the text of JerG also has priority in this respect.⁵² In particular, the omission of the promise of salvation for Egypt seems implausible given the Egyptian context in which JerG was written.⁵³

48 For the reasoning behind this, see H.G.L. Peels, "But Fear not, O Jacob my Servant! The Place and Function of the Salvation Oracle Jeremiah 46:27–28 MT", in K. van Beekum/G. Kwakkel/W.H. Rose (ed.), *Biblical Hebrew in Context* (Fs J.P. Lettinga, OTS 74; Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2018), 114–29.

49 It concerns only these four texts. It is an over-interpretation to read Jer 49:11 which seems to speak of God's compassion for the victims of Edom as an implicit promise of salvation for Edom. Nor can it be concluded with any certainty from Jer 49:25 that YHWH would have positive feelings towards Damascus.

50 G. Fischer, „Jer 25 und die Fremdvölkersprüche: Unterschiede zwischen hebräischem und griechischem Text“, *Bib* 72 (1991) 474–99, 493; Fischer, *Jeremiah Studies*, 341; A. Vonach, „Jeremias – Ieremias – Jeremia“, in M. Karrer/W. Kraus (ed.), *Septuaginta Deutsch. Erläuterungen und Kommentare zum griechischen Alten Testament. Band II: Psalmen bis Daniel* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2011), 2696–2814, 2701.

51 Fischer, „Fremdvölkersprüche“, 499; „Auch erlaubt das eigene schwere Schicksal in der Diaspora nicht mehr, die fremden Völker so stark mit Heil zu bedenken wie im MT.“

52 Cf. Peels, *Jeremiah*, 20–5.

53 That the omission in JerG would be due to homoioarkton (G.E. Yates, "Hope in the Midst of Wrath: Promises for Outsiders in Jeremiah 46–51", *BiSa* 175 (2018) 67–82, 78 n. 26, is only conjecture.

Most probably, the promises of salvation in 46:26, 48:47, and 49:6 are later additions to JerM. However, the question of the limitation of the salvation promises to only three other nations and their dating is difficult to answer.

These words of salvation are often explained as reflecting later historical developments in order to bring the prophecy 'up to date.' Egypt was never as devastatingly defeated as Jer 46:13–24 seems to imply, not even after a possible invasion by Nebuchadnezzar in 568 BCE. Nebuchadnezzar's campaign of 582 BCE did indeed mark the end of Moab as an independent nation, but it did not completely destroy the people of Moab as Jer 48 prophesies. On the contrary, there was some recovery in Moab as time went on. The promise of salvation to Ammon (49:6) is sometimes associated with the period when that nation flourished under the Ptolemies in the 3rd century BCE. If each of these three cases does indeed involve later updating, the question remains as to why other OAN were not similarly updated, even though the nations mentioned in them also had a *Nachgeschichte*.

P. Höffken has a specific opinion on this matter.⁵⁴ According to him, the promises of salvation are related to an ideal, eschatological conception of the land of Israel in which Philistia, Kedar, and Edom are included within Israel's borders, while no claim is made to the Transjordanian territories of Moab and Ammon, and certainly not to Egypt. The last three nations could therefore receive their own promise of salvation. However, the presence of a word of salvation in the prophecy about Elam and its absence in the prophecy about Damascus complicates Höffken's theory, which has found little support.

L.C. Allen, G.E. Yates, and J.F. Liu suggest that the promise of salvation to Elam in JerG has a typological function: what applies to Elam as the first people in the OAN collection would also apply to the other nations.⁵⁵ Later, JerM extended this text about Elam to include other nations in order to make its intention clear. According to them, only these four nations receive a word of salvation because only in the prophecies about Elam, Egypt, Moab, and Ammon is there any mention of exile. Exile would be a necessary condition for restoration since the words of salvation refer specifically to a return from exile.⁵⁶ A problem with this view, however, is the fact that Elam's position as the first of the nations in JerG was probably not original.⁵⁷ Moreover, this explanation for the limitation of salvation to only three other nations may be unconvincing

54 Höffken, *Untersuchungen*, 400.

55 L.C. Allen, *Jeremiah. A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 501–2; Yates, "Hope", 78–9, and J.F. Liu, *Hope*, 243.

56 "For Judah, the judgement of deportation was the necessary condition of restoration, and so it would be for these nations" (Allen, *Jeremiah*, 468).

57 See §3 and footnote 19.

for another reason. The prophecy about Elam does not literally refer to exile (*glh*) as in the prophecies about Egypt (46:19), Moab (48:7,11), and Ammon (49:3), but to ‘scattering’ (*zrh*, 49:36), which may not be the same. Moreover, the same term, ‘scattering,’ is also used in the prophecy about Kedar/Hazor (49:32), which does *not* end with a word of salvation. It is therefore unlikely that the promise of salvation refers specifically to the return from exile.

The promises of salvation now found in JerM were probably added to the OAN at an early stage to align them with Jeremiah's overall prophetic message. It is noteworthy that expectations of salvation for the nations are also found elsewhere in Jeremiah (e.g., 3:17; 4:2; 12:15–17; 16:19; 18:7–8; cf. 39:15–18). There are numerous idiomatic and thematic correspondences in the Book of Jeremiah between the fate of Israel/Judah and that of the nations.⁵⁸ Jeremiah preaches about the judgement of Judah, but also its restoration (e.g., Jer 30–33). The same applies in symmetry to the nations: they will be judged by YHWH, but also for them, as for Judah, there is hope for the future (cf. the significant use of the verbs ‘tear out,’ ‘have mercy,’ ‘bring back’ and ‘be built’ in 12:14–17). As a ‘prophet to the nations,’ Jeremiah brought a message of judgement *and* restoration for Judah and the nations. So the ‘building and planting’ after judgement applies to both (1:10; 18:7–10). Moreover, the theme of restoration after destruction is to some extent conventional,⁵⁹ as is widely attested in the Mesopotamian ‘City Lament’ texts.⁶⁰

The reason for limiting an explicit promise of salvation to only four peoples, and to these four in particular, remains an open question. However, the notion of hope and salvation is still present in a broader, more implicit way in the OAN. In the structure of the OAN collection in JerM, the prophecy about Babylon occupies a meaningful last place. God's judgement on the nations is not his last word but his penultimate word. The executor of God's judgement on all the nations (Jer 46–49), who once violently ruled the world, now falls himself (Jer 50–51). The yoke that oppressed the nations (cf. Jer 27–28)

58 J.G. McConville, *Judgement and Promise: An Interpretation of the Book of Jeremiah* (Leicester: Apollos, 1993); E.K. Holt, “A Prophet to the Nations”, in H. Bezzel/U. Becker/M.J. de Jong (eds), *Prophecy and Foreign Nations: Aspects of the Role of the “Nations” in the Books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel* (FAT II 135; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2022) 99–110; Yates, “Hope”; Raabe, “What is Israel's God Up To”, 249–51.

59 R.P. Carroll, *The Book of Jeremiah* (OTL; London: Westminster John Knox, 1986), 796.

60 “The return of divine support was an essential element for a city's restoration and the hoped for reversal of the gods' abandonment” (F.W. Dobbs-Allsopp, *Weep, O Daughter of Zion: A Study of the City-Lament Genre in the Hebrew Bible* (Biblica et Orientalia 44; Rome: Pontifical Institute, 1993), 92–3, cf. 106–7).

is broken; the hammer that crushed them is now itself shattered (51:20–24). It is not the judgement on the oppressed nations that has the last word, but the judgement on the oppressor. The flip side of the judgement of Babylon is the liberation of the nations: they are now called on to flee from Babylon back to their own land (50:8,16; 51:9). Heaven and earth will rejoice at the fall of Babylon (51:48). The end of tyranny offers hope not only to Israel but also to the nations worldwide.

The fact that, despite the dominant theme of judgement, the OAN collection still contains a message of hope for the nations, albeit to a limited extent, is in keeping with a universalistic tendency in Old Testament prophecy (Amos 9:7; Isa 2:2–4, 19:19–25, 56:3–8; Ezek 29:13–14; Mic. 4:1–4; Jonah; Zeph 3:9; Zech 2:11, 8:20–23, 9:7; Mal 1:11; cf. Ps 47:10, 87). This tendency is taken up by the New Testament which extends salvation to all nations. The dividing wall has been torn down (Eph 2:14), and enemies across all borders are reconciled to God through the death of his Son (Rom 5:10). Those reconciled will become a multitude that no one can count, from all nations and peoples, from every tribe and language (Rev 7:9). There will be no hope for only one nation: Babylon, which already in Jeremiah became symbolic, the *chiffre* of supreme pride and oppression, the symbol of the ultimate enmity against God and his people. As in Jeremiah, the fall of this Babylon in Rev 17–19 brings hope to the nations, to the joy of heaven and earth (Rev 18:20).

8 The Image of God in the OAN

The OAN collection primarily brings a message of judgement and doom upon all nations. The instigator and executor of this is the holy God of the one nation Israel (46:25, 48:1, 50:18, 51:33; 50:29, 51:5). What image do the OAN, being read as a coherent collection, reflect of him?⁶¹ The image of God portrayed in the OAN as a whole is that of a sovereign God, who relentlessly asserts his rule like

61 This section offers a summary and evaluation of how God is spoken of in the OAN in JerM. According to G. Fischer, *Der Prophet wie Mose: Studien zum Jeremiabuch* (BZABR 15; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2011), 68–70, 85; Vonach "Jeremiah", 2723–6 and Fischer, *Jeremiah Studies*, 341–2, the Greek version of the Book of Jer generally paints a 'milder' portrait of YHWH than in JerM, as JerG tends to avoid anthropomorphisms and downplays violence attributed to God. This would be part of a theological program the Greek translator followed to make the Book of Jeremiah more acceptable to the diaspora Jewry in Alexandria. This is contradicted by H.-J. Stipp, *Studien zum Jeremiabuch: Text und Redaktion* (FAT 96; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 155–73, 199–236. In support of their

a storm raging across the world. The metaphors of God as King, Warrior, and Judge predominate: YHWH is a king who wages war against his enemies and restores justice. However, He is not a cold, unmoved avenger, but He is passionately involved, in great indignation against over all evil, yet also deeply moved.

He is *the* King (*hammelech*; 46:18; 48:15; 51:57; cf. 49:38) who rules over all the nations and whose name is 'YHWH of Hosts' (46:10,18,25; 48:1,15; 49:5,7,26,35; 50:18,25,31,33–34; 51:5,14,19,33). With the same power He used to create the universe, He also works in history (51:15–19). He is incomparable (49:19 = 50:44), unmatched by any power, human or divine (46:25; 48:7,13; 49:3; 50:2; 51:44). He thwarts the seizure of world power (46:8) and judges injustice and oppression (49:1–2, 50–51 *passim*). He exposes the lie of self-assurance and false confidence (48:7; 49:4,16,31) and punishes all arrogant pride (46:17; 48:30; 49:16). Nothing is hidden from him (49:10). He also destroys idolatry and paganism (48:35; 51:47,52). His intervention is depicted with a variety of terms and images: he 'visits' (46:25; 49:8,19; 50:18,31,44; 51:27,44,47), 'causes terror' (49:5, cf. 48:43–4; 49:37), 'brings drunkenness' (51:38,57, cf. 48:26), 'scatters' (49:5,32,36), 'brings disaster' (49:37), 'eradicates' (49:38, 51:55), 'lays a snare' (50:24), 'carries off for slaughter' (51:40, cf. 49:20=50:45), 'ravages' (47:4, 51:55), 'destroys' (51:62), etc.

This King marches into battle as a mighty Warrior to punish any power that rises up against him and/or against humanity. He takes his weapons from his arsenal (50:25) and assembles his armies (49:14; 50:9; 51:1–2,11,27–28). He enlists the 'enemy from the North' as his instrument (46:20,24; 47:2; 50:3,9,41,48). The divine Warrior is the commander-in-chief who instructs his armies and orders them to attack (48:12; 49:28,31; 50:14–15,21,26–27; 51:1–3,12,53). He actively participates in the battle, being like a lion and a vulture to his enemies (49:19,22; 50:44). He raises his sword against them (46:10; 47:6–7; 49:37; 50:35–38), breaks their bows (49:35; 50:32) and smashes them with his war club/hammer (51:20–23, cf. 50:23). He sets fire to their strongholds (49:2,27; 50:32,58) and tears down their walls (50:15; 51:12,44,58). Thus, his plan of war is fully implemented (49:20; 50:45; 51:12,29).

This King is also the Judge who stands up for the oppressed, avenges all evil (51:24,56), and applies the *ius talionis* (48:26; 49:2; 50:15,29; 51:6,24,56) to make justice prevail. This punishment is based on his just verdict (48:47; 49:12; 51:9). Evil is not a *quantité négligeable* or even an illusion, but it does matter and will eventually be punished. With royal-judicial authority, the Judge judges all the kings and princes of the earth (51:57). It is his vengeance that undoes injustice

thesis, Fischer and Vonach also cite some texts from the OAN (48:31; 49:35,37; 50:20–3; 50:24), but these references are unconvincing.

(46:10; 50:15,28; 51:6,11,36).⁶² He is the redeemer (50:34) who defends the rights of his people (48:26; 49:2; 51:10) and pleads their cause (50:34; 51:36).

This God, King-Warrior-Judge, does not carry out his work (48:10; 50:25) indifferently, like an emotionless machine, but with great passion. He is intensely involved in the weal and woes of the nations. His judgement is the result of his burning wrath over evil and injustice (49:37; 50:13,25; 51:45). He abhors all pride, self-assurance, oppression, and abuse of power, and he sweeps it all away in his fury. At the same time, he shows profound compassion: as his judgement ravages Moab, God has tears in his eyes (48:31–32,36). The King who punishes evil is the same one who laments the judgement.⁶³ He has regard for the widows and orphans of the victims (49:11; uncertain exegesis). In the midst of the chaos of total ruin and destruction, God's tears are a sign that he will not ultimately abandon the work of his hands. This is true of his own people, Israel, who are the people of his covenant (50:5; 51:5,19). He consoles, restores, and radically forgives Israel (46:27–28; 50:19–20). But such divine compassion can also apply to other nations (46:26; 48:47; 49:6,39; see §7).

The combination of great anger and deep compassion, devastating vengeance and hopeful promises, outbursts of violence and tears of sorrow gives the image of God in the OAN a tremendous dynamism. There is a high tension here that will be fully manifested in the New Testament proclamation of the cross of Christ. Where the Son is forsaken by the Father in his judgement of all evil, God's love for this world triumphs through the depths of death.

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62 Cf. H.G.L. Peels, *The Vengeance of God: The Meaning of the Root NQM and the Function of the NQM-texts in the Context of Divine Revelation in the Old Testament* (OTS 31; Leiden: Brill, 1995), 176–87.

63 Cf. H.G.L. Peels, "Divine Tears Over Divine Violence? God's Lament in the Oracle Against Moab in Jeremiah 48", in J. van Ruiten/K. van Bekkum (ed.), *Violence in the Hebrew Bible: Between Text and Reception* (OTS 79; Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2020), 295–314.

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“Why was your bull washed away?” (Jer. 46:15): The Achaemenid Context of the Oracles against Egypt

Gad Barnea

1 Introduction

A short and remarkable passage within the Jeremian corpus – positioned outside the context of its Oracles Against the Nations (OANs)¹ – makes reference to a longstanding tradition of proclaiming such visions:

The prophets who were before me and before you from times immemorial, they prophesied war, evil, and calamity against many countries and great kingdoms. As for the prophet who prophesies peace, when the word of that prophet comes to pass, then it will be known that Yhwh has truly sent the prophet. (Jer 28[35]:8–9).²

The portrayal of OANs in these verses should not be read as a blanket condemnation of prophecies of doom – especially since these are placed in Jeremiah's mouth throughout the corpus – nor should they be understood as claiming that all previous prophets were prophets of ruin but, in context, they merely serve a rhetorical role providing a traditional background to Jeremiah's dispute with Ḥananiah in which Jeremiah is presented as a prophet of peace.³ Yet, presenting such a statement as uttered by the prophet serves to highlight

1 This passage precedes the OANs in the MT but follows them in the OG. Its placement relative to the OANs probably has exegetical/redactional significance. A discussion of this logic is outside the scope of this article.

2 Author's translation of the MT text. Henceforth, whenever there is a difference in location between the MT and the OG, references will include the OG chapter reference in square brackets. In cases where verse numbers also differ, separate references will be provided. Note to the translation: The Hb. *dbar* is usually connected to the Akk./Sum. *dibiru* “calamity,” although it should be noted that CAD (s.v. *dibiru*) rejects this connection without explanation. Out of the three afflictions, the OG mentions only “war” (πόλεμος) – directly contrasted with the single “peace” (εἰρήνη) in the next verse.

3 For more on the various interpretations of this passage, see especially M.J. de Jong, “The Fallacy of ‘True and False’ in Prophecy Illustrated by Jer 28:8–9,” *JHS* 12 (2012) 1–29. See also

the notion that the OANs in the book of Jeremiah align with this well-known genre of oracles as found in all the major prophets as well as almost all of the co-called “minor” prophets.⁴ Significantly, as I showed elsewhere,⁵ as a genre, OANs were not unique to the biblical narrative. They played an important role in the cultic and political practices of ancient Near Eastern as well as Greek cultures,⁶ and naturally figured as a form of *schadenfreude* in most other ancient civilizations as well.⁷ A central feature of such oracles consists of their message being directed at a specific audience and a well-defined timeframe and/or chain of events. They are not *stricto sensu* prophecies but rely on the hearers/readers of these denunciations being intimately familiar with certain commonly accepted narratives, images, wordplays, and puns regarding the nation(s)⁸ targeted by these pronouncements and sharing a common stratum of knowledge – whether deriving from their direct experience, or from popular myth or legend about the nation or people-group in the prophet’s crosshairs, as noted by Hagedorn:

These oracles are only possible because *the hearers/readers already possess a certain knowledge of the actions/characteristics of the foreigners*. Whether such knowledge is historically accurate or based on concrete encounters is not important, because the *imagined community* – to appeal to a term coined by Benedict Anderson – utilizes the imagined adversary to proclaim a message of hope and victory for one’s own group.⁹

J.R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21–36: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 21B; New York: Doubleday, 12004) 334–5.

- 4 OANs are found in First-Isaiah (as well as in Second-Isaiah 46–47), Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Nahum, and arguably in Second-Zechariah. See J.H. Hayes, “The Usage of Oracles against Foreign Nations in Ancient Israel,” *JBL* 87 (1968) 81–92, on p. 81. For a handy table listing the various passages, see <https://www.esv.org/resources/esv-global-study-bible/chart-23-03/>.
- 5 G. Barnea, “Dating Amos’ Oracles against the Nations: Metaphors of Neo-Assyrian Campaigns,” *RB* 130 (2023) 524–51, on p. 526.
- 6 A.C. Hagedorn, “Looking at Foreigners in Biblical and Greek Prophecy,” *VT* 57 (2007) 432–48.
- 7 They are documented also in Assyria and Egypt. See J.W. Hilber, “Royal Cultic Prophecy in Assyria, Judah, and Egypt”, in R.P. Gordon/H. Barstad (ed.), “*Thus Speaks Ishtar of Arbela*”: *Prophecy in Israel, Assyria, and Egypt in the Neo-Assyrian Period* (University Park: Penn State University, 2021) 161–86, on pp. 173–5.
- 8 I use the term “nation” for convenience acknowledging its complexity and the fact that it is generally anachronistic for the time period under consideration here. For a recent discussion, see H. Mylonas/M. Tudor, *Varieties of Nationalism: Communities, Narratives, Identities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2023), 17–21.
- 9 Hagedorn, “Looking”, 448 (emphasis added). The internal reference is to B.R. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006).

In other words, as a well-known, distinct, and popular genre of ancient expression that is not limited to the Hebrew Bible, the OANs derive their narrative, social, and even theological force from the hearers' familiarity with certain widely accepted – real or mythologized – details of historical events that were still preserved in living memory. Given this background, within the context of the present article, my attention will mainly be directed to the study of the historical and myth-historical context surrounding the oracle(s) concerning Egypt within the Jeremian corpus – rather than the complex textual and redactional difficulties affecting them,¹⁰ although I will take those aspects of the text into account when needed. The central question will thus be the following: Since the historical role of OANs as a genre of prophetic literature is *contingent* upon the hearers/readers of these oracles having a widely held and intimate understanding of their target's misfortunes and possessing some familiarity with the various popular references such as metaphors, allegories, and paronomasia, what could have been the historical/myth-historical context of the Oracles Against Egypt (i.e., the two oracles against Egypt contained in Jer 46[26], henceforth OAE), which would have resonated with the public at which it was directed?

2 The Two Parts of the OAE

In its current structure, both in the MT and the OG, the OAE is a bipartite unit composed of two oracles – both of which are preceded by a superscription. The unit is followed by a postscript (Jer 46[26]:27–28).¹¹ This epilogue of reassurance to Jacob/Israel is not part of the OAE as such and will not be further discussed here.¹² The first part of the OAE (Jer 46[26]:2–12]) is set in a very

10 For in-depth studies of these questions, see M.K. Chae, "Redactional Intentions of MT Jeremiah Concerning the Oracles against the Nations", *JBL* 134 (2015) 577–93; H.-J. Stipp, "Two Ancient Editions of the Book of Jeremiah", in L. Stulman/E. Silver (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Jeremiah* (New York: Oxford University, 2021), 93–113 and R. Graybill, "The Jeremian Oracles against the Nations", in L. Stulman/E. Silver (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Jeremiah* (New York: Oxford University, 2021) 387–404. See also B. Hannes/U. Becker/M.J. de Jong, *Prophecy and Foreign Nations: Aspects of the Role of the "Nations" in the Books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2022).

11 This postscript is closely paralleled in JerMT 30:10–11. JerOG 37 (=JerMT 30) omits these verses.

12 While they are not part of the OAE *per se*, they do serve a purpose in the redaction of the OANs as a collection. For a dedicated discussion, see E. Peels, "But Fear Not, O Jacob My Servant! Place and Function of the Salvation Oracle Jeremiah 46:27–28 MT", in K. van Bekkum/G. Kwakkel/W.H. Rose (ed.), *Biblical Hebrew in Context: Essays in Semitics and Old Testament Texts in Honour of Professor Jan P. Lettinga* (Leiden: Brill, 2018) 114–129.

specific historical context: the battle of *Karkamiš* (Carchemish) ca. 605 BCE where the Neo-Babylonian general *Nabû-kudurri-ušur* (Nebuchadnezzar) II – at the time still crown prince – roundly defeated the Egyptian-Assyrian coalition forces led by pharaoh Necho II. The second part (Jer 46[26]:13–26) – also starring Nebuchadnezzar II – presents this monarch as coming to Egypt and striking it in such a manner that a personified Egypt (the “Daughter of Egypt,” see discussion below) is instructed to prepare for exile “for Memphis shall become a waste and will be burned, without inhabitant” (Jer 46[26]:19)¹³ among other serious calamities. While the historical Nebuchadnezzar II did try to capture Egypt¹⁴ – more than once – these campaigns were resounding failures and were summarily rebuffed.¹⁵ Therefore, as opposed to the first oracle, which corresponds to a specific historical reality, the second does not. Both oracles share certain traits such as lexical, stylistic, and structural features,¹⁶ suggesting that they may have been composed by the same author or, at least, harmonized by a competent redactor. The second oracle – which will be the first object of my inquiry – is constructed around some historical event concerning a successful, infamous, brutal, and decisive conquest of Egypt from its northern border that had a significant impact on the Jeremian narrative and with which the hearers of the oracle were closely familiar. This is true of

- 13 The verse is somewhat more explicit in the OG through the causal use of διά+acc. although the message is identical: ὅτι Μέμφις εἰς ἀφανισμόν ἔσται καὶ καυθήσεται διὰ τὸ μὴ ὑπάρχειν κατοικοῦντας ἐν αὐτῇ.
- 14 A papyrus known as the “Adon Letter” should be dated to this period. This is a letter from the Philistine king of Ekron to the king of Egypt which mentions the coming of the king of Babylon. This papyrus should be dated to one of Nebuchadnezzar’s attempts at conquering Egypt – from ca. 600 BCE to possibly year 37 of Nebuchadnezzar (=ca. 568 BCE). For a thorough study, including a review of the history of Ekron, see B. Porten, “The Identity of King Adon”, *BA* 44 (1981) 36–52.
- 15 See especially D. Kahn, “Nebuchadnezzar and Egypt: An Update on the Egyptian Monuments”, *HeBAI* 7 (2018) 65–78, on pp. 72–78. See also I. Eph’al, “Nebuchadnezzar the Warrior: Remarks on His Military Achievements”, *IEJ* 53 (2003) 178–91, on pp. 187–8. For a more recent view arguing that Nebuchadnezzar, though failing to capture Egypt, was successful at keeping it well-contained, see A. Fantalkin, “In Defense of Nebuchadnezzar II the Warrior”, *AOF* 44 (2017) 201–8.
- 16 Apart from certain terms that appear in both oracles and are to be expected from the context such as *nws* (“flee”) and *špwn* (“north”), other key terms are more unique. For example, the term “daughter Egypt” which appears only in the OAE (further discussed below) ties both of its parts together, as does the rare (but not unique) “consuming sword” and the verb-pair “stumbling and falling.” Moreover, the beginning of the two oracles is formulaic, starting with imperatives concerning preparations for battle followed by a rhetorical question regarding military defeat, and the verb-pair “stumble and fall.”

both the second part of the OAE proper, and its corresponding oracle set in Tahpanhes (Jer 43[50]:8–13) – henceforth the “Tahpanhes Oracle” (TO).

3 Nebuchadnezzar as Cambyses?

As several scholars have already mentioned, the setting described in the second part of the OAE cannot fit any historical reality related to Nebuchadnezzar II in spite of being ascribed to him. It has therefore been suggested that the second oracle was a before-the-fact prophecy, which predicted a successful Babylonian invasion of Egypt but failed to materialize and it was the failure of this prophecy that prompted a later redactor to add information from a later, successful, conquest¹⁷ namely that of Cambyses in 526 BCE.¹⁸ While such an adaptation could theoretically have taken place – any dependence on a before-the-fact prophecy would go against the genre characteristics of OANs which, as noted above, *rely on common popular knowledge of events* and are thus, by definition, *ex eventu*.¹⁹ Rather, it would seem that the (myth-)historical characters of Cambyses and Nebuchadnezzar were eventually confused, connected, and compounded in the minds of the general populace who regarded both as “king of Babylon.” Cambyses is indeed well-documented as bearing the title *šār bābili*(E)^{ki} in administrative documents throughout his reign²⁰ – a title that was previously held by a long line of Babylonian dynasts including, of course,

17 See, for example, D. Kahn, “Nebuchadnezzar Fails to Conquer Egypt so Jeremiah's Prophecy was Updated”, *TheTorah.com* (2022) (online at: <https://thetorah.com/article/nebuchadnezzar-fails-to-conquer-egypt-so-jeremiahs-prophecy-was-updated>).

18 J.F. Quack, “Zum Datum Der Persischen Eroberung Ägyptens Unter Kambyses”, *JEH* 4 (2011) 228–46.

19 Of course, the redaction of a before-the-fact prophecy could transform it into a “standard” *ex eventu* OAN, but this is splitting hairs. As far as the hearers of the oracle as it is presented in the biblical text are concerned, it referred to events that have already occurred and were impressed upon the minds of the people.

20 See discussion in J. Peat, “Cyrus ‘King of Lands,’ Cambyses ‘King of Babylon’: The Disputed Co-Regency”, *JCS* 41 (1989) 199–216, *passim*. For primary sources, see e.g., BMAG 7 in M. Frazer, “Inscribed Mesopotamian Artefacts in the Brighton Museum and Art Gallery, UK”, *AuOr* 35 (2017) 97–117, on p. 102. A document from Erech dated to the 9th year of Cambyses (*šattu 9^{kam m}kam-bu-zi-ia šār bābili^{ki} šār matati*), see C.S. Knopf, “Miscellaneous Neo-Babylonian Documents Chiefly from Erech” (PhD Thesis, Yale, 1931), on pp. 55–56. This might indicate that the count of Cambyses’ regnal years as king of Babylon started prior to the death of his father but, at any rate, was maintained well beyond his single-year “official” reign in Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar II. As I have pointed out elsewhere,²¹ confusion between these two monarchs is documented in several later sources such as the Coptic Cambyses Romance and Megasthenes' *Indica*.²² Moreover, mistaken identifications of Nebuchadnezzar are also known from the book of Judith which prompted Eusebius of Caesarea to declare in his "Chronicle" that "*Cambyesen aiunt ab Hebraeis secundum Nabuchodonosor uocari, sub quo Iudit historia conscribitur*."²³

The attribution of Cambyses' actions to Nebuchadnezzar in the Jeremian corpus cannot be dated with absolute precision but it must be assigned to the Hellenistic era. There is a substantial number of cases where JerMT refers to "*Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon*" while JerOG either lacks any reference to a king or simply refers to an unnamed "king of Babylon."²⁴ It is therefore evident that editorial concerns with the attribution of the king who shall serve as a chosen instrument of Yhwh – whether Cambyses, Nebuchadnezzar, or an unnamed king – was a preoccupation of the redactor well into the Hellenistic period. The root of this confusion could hypothetically be found in the events surrounding Cambyses' death as related in Darius I's Bisotūn inscription (DB) where two different rebels who were contemporaries of Cambyses' final years – Nidintu-Bel and Arkha – claimed to be Nebuchadnezzar (III and IV respectively) "son of Nabonidus" in order to "deceive the people."²⁵ These were,

21 G. Barnea, "Review: Aren M. Wilson-Wright, *Jeremiah's Egypt: Prophetic Reflections on the Saite Period* (Ancient near East Monographs / Monografias Sobre El Antiguo Cercano Oriente; Atlanta: SBL, 2023)", *RBL* 12 (2023) 1–6, on p. 4.

22 The Coptic Cambyses Romance has been dated to anywhere between the second century BCE to the seventh century CE, see P.F. Venticinque, "What's in a Name? Greek, Egyptian and Biblical Traditions in the 'Cambyses Romance'", *BASP* 43 (2006) 139–58, on p. 141. See also S. Döpp, "Kambyses' Feldzug Gegen Ägypten: Der Sogennante Kambyses-Roman Und Sein Verhältnis Zu Griechischer Literatur", *GFA* 6 (2003) 1–17. For Megasthenes' *Indica* in Josephus, see D.J. Wiseman, *Nebuchadrezzar and Babylon* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1985), 40. See also B. Garstad, "Nebuchadnezzar and Alexander in the Excerpta Latina Barbari", *Iraq* 78 (2016) 25–48, on p. 28.

23 R. Helm, *Eusebius Werke 7: Die Chronik Des Hieronymus: Hieronymi Chronicon* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1956), 104c.

24 This is a major difference between the MT and the OG versions of Jeremiah. E.g., "Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon" (JerMT)/"King of Babylon" (JerOG): JerMT[OG] 21:2; JerMT 27:6/JerOG 34:5; Jer 29[36]:21; Jer 32[39]:28; Jer 46[26]:13, and Jer 50[27]:17. In a significant number of instances, the OG lacks any reference to a king whereas the MT has "Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon," e.g., Jer 21:4; 22:25; 25:1; 25:9; 25:11–12; MT 27:8/OG 34:7; 39:5; 46:26; 52:4, 12, 28.

25 DB §16, 49, 52. The historical Nebuchadnezzar III seems to be recorded on twelve Babylonian tablets dated to Tašrītu – Kissilīmu (VII–IX) of the accession year of Nebuchadnezzar, as well as thirty-seven tablets dated to Ayāru – Tašrītu (II–VII) of his first regnal year. See S. Zawadzki, "Bardiya, Darius and Babylonian Usurpers in the Light of the Bisitun

in all likelihood, the very same rebels whose uprisings caused the historical Cambyses to return from Egypt – a journey during which he found his death (see below). As mentioned, the total and complete subjugation of Egypt – with features that are strikingly similar to those described in the second part of the OAE as well as the TO – did occur in 526 BCE under Cambyses II. The likelihood that the OAE/TO refer to Cambyses rather than Nebuchadnezzar has already been proposed by several scholars²⁶ – but only in broad strokes and general contours. My goal with the present contribution is to provide a broader and deeper context and analysis in support of this option within the textual features of the OAE.

4 Cambyses II: An Overview

Following the death of his father, Cambyses II²⁷ was installed as governor of Babylon and assumed the title “king of Babylon” (*šār bābili*(E)^{ki}), which, as mentioned, he seems to have held throughout his reign. The requirements for this position included maintaining certain regal ritual roles and, according to the chronicle of Nabonidus, Cambyses did participate, as king, at the Akitu/New Year festival on 27 March 538 BCE, accepting the royal sceptre from the god Marduk in his temple, Esagila.²⁸ Following the death of his father, Cambyses acceded the throne of the Persian empire in 530 BCE and four years later, in 526 BCE, invaded Egypt. According to DB, Cambyses died at some point after July 1st 522 BCE – almost certainly while on his way back to the heart of

Inscription and Babylonian Sources”, *AMI* 27 (1994) 127–45, on pp. 139–41. See also discussion in Y. Bloch, “The Contribution of Babylonian Tablets in the Collection of David Sofer to the Chronology of the Revolts against Darius I”, *AOF* 42 (2015) 1–14, on p. 3. On the use and abuse of famous throne names in order to assert authority, see G. McKee, “He Lied to the People, Saying ‘I Am Nebuchadnezzar’: Issues in Authority Control for Rebels, Usurpers, Eccentric Nobility, and Dissenting Royalty”, *LRTS* 66 (2022) 94–107.

- 26 For example, see H.D.M. Spence-Jones, *Jeremiah. Vol. 2. The Pulpit Commentary* (London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), 208, and W. McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1986), 1066–8. More recently, see R. Goldstein, “Cambyses’ Conquest of Egypt is Ascribed to Nebuchadnezzar”, *TheTorah.com* (2023) (online at <https://thetorah.com/article/cambyses-conquest-of-egypt-is-ascribed-to-nebuchadnezzar>).
- 27 Cambyses II was named after his grandfather Cambyses I. The name probably derives from the region/people east of modern-day Iran known as Kambojas. See J. Harmatta, “The Rise of the Old Persian Empire. Cyrus the Great”, *AAH* 19 (1971) 1–15, on pp. 7–8.
- 28 The Nabonidus Chronicle III 24–28. See A.K. Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1975), 111.

the empire in order to subdue a rebellion that was brewing there (in all likelihood the rebellions of Nidintu-Bel and Arkha mentioned above). According to the description in DB, he died “by his own death”²⁹ – possibly alluding to suicide or an accident. Herodotus³⁰ claims that the Persian king was passing through Syria on his way to Persia and died there at a city called Agbatana from a wound incurred “in the same part where he himself had once smitten the Egyptian god Apis.”³¹ The incident of Cambyses’ killing of the Apis bull was an infamous and nefarious act which was widely transmitted and which shall be further discussed below in relation to the OAE. The notion that he died en route is also described in general terms in the so-called Demotic Chronicle.³²

5 Cambyses’ Conquest of Egypt

A thorough study of the various sources for Cambyses’ conquest of Egypt is out of the scope for the present article.³³ The following shall only serve to review certain elements of the traditions surrounding Cambyses’ campaign as far as they can be related to passages in the OAE/TO. Any large-scale invasion – such as the one undertaken by Cambyses against Egypt – requires significant preparations and the assembly of a large and varied force with plentiful supplies. The Persian king seems to have prepared for this invasion in the plain surrounding Tel Keisan – a site located in northern Palestine, about 8 km inland from Acre and to the north of Mt. Carmel – overlooking the approach to the rich and fertile Jezreel valley where, logically, certain regiments of Cambyses’ force would have camped. The fact that this location was used by the Persian kings for this purpose is reported by Strabo: “Then follows Ptolemais, a large city, formerly called Ace. It was the place of rendezvous for the Persians in their expeditions against Egypt.”³⁴ This remark by the Greek geographer shows that the use of this strategic location and the encampment of the Persian army units in that area was known well into the first century BCE and would likely have been known to the hearers of the OAE. This location might explain the

29 DB 1:43 OP *Kabūjiya uvāmaršiyuš amariyatā* (“Cambyses died by his own-death”), Babylonian: *ṁKambuziya mītūtū ra[mā]nīšu mīti* (“died of his own natural death”) and Elamite: *ṁkán-bu-zí-ia hal-pi [du]-hi-e-ma hal-pi-ik* (“Cambyses dying on his own receiving, died”).

30 *Hist.* 3.62.

31 *Hist.* 3.64.

32 Quack, “Zum Datum”, 234.

33 For recent studies, see A. Schwab/A. Schütze, *Herodotean Soundings: The Cambyses Logos* (Tübingen: Narr Francke Attempto, 2023).

34 *Geogr.* 16.2.25.

obscure reference³⁵ to the mountains that bracket the area from the shore to the Jezreel valley – Mt. Carmel and Mt. Tabor – in the OAE: “As I live, declares the King, whose name is Yhwh of hosts, like Tabor among the mountains and like Carmel by the sea, shall one come” (Jer 46[26]:18).³⁶ In the spring of 526 BCE Cambyses won a critically important battle at the city of Pelusium, in the eastern Delta³⁷ – the gateway into Egypt – against the newly-installed and inexperienced pharaoh Psammetichus III. Following their loss, the Egyptians retreated to Memphis, and in the following months the Persians took control of the entirety of Egypt as well as the cities of Cyrene and Barca in Libya. By the end of August that year, Cambyses was officially installed as king of Egypt and assumed the traditional pharaonic titles “king of Upper and Lower Egypt” and “descendant of Ra, Horus, Osiris.” Following the counsel of Udja-Hor-Resnet – Egyptian adviser, confidant, and “sole companion”³⁸ to Cambyses (and, later, Darius I) – he also went to Sais, the seat of the Saite dynasty to take part in cultic rituals in the temple of Neith.³⁹

5.1 The “Daughter of Egypt”

The repeated mentions of the “Daughter of Egypt” – an expression that appears exclusively in the OAE (Jer 46[26]:11, 19, 24) – could well be a (myth-)historical reference to certain prevalent traditions surrounding the persona of princess Nitetis and Cambyses’ campaign on Egypt that were still popular in Herodotus’ day. According to the Cambyses-*logos*, one version of the official Persian *casus belli* (“οὕτω μὲν νυν λέγουσι Πέρσαι”) ⁴⁰ that caused Cambyses to lead a campaign to conquer and punish Egypt was that when the Persian monarch asked pharaoh Amasis II for his daughter in marriage, the latter sent the daughter of his predecessor Apries instead.⁴¹ This was naturally perceived as an affront

35 W.L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 2: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah, Chapters 26–52* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 330.

36 For other interpretations that seek to attach this reference to the historical Nebuchadnezzar, see A.M. Wilson-Wright, *Jeremiah's Egypt: Prophetic Reflections on the Saite Period* (ANEM 30; Atlanta: SBL, 2023), 105.

37 *Hist.* 3.11.

38 M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature: A Book of Readings. Volume III, the Late Period* (Berkeley: University of California, 1980), 36–41.

39 G. Posener, *La Première Domination Perse En Egypte. Recueil D'inscriptions Hiéroglyphiques* (Le Caire: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1936), 170–1. See also D. Kahn, “Notes on the Time-Factor in Cambyses’ Deeds in Egypt as Told by Herodotus”, *Transeu* 34 (2007) 103–12.

40 *Hist.* 3.2.1.

41 Herodotus relates the Egyptian version of the story as well, which claims that it was Cyrus who married Apries’ daughter – which made the Egyptians consider Cambyses as one of their own kin (οἰκειόω).

to the dignity of the king that cannot be passed over in silence. The second story which, according to Herodotus, is the Egyptian version of the events, presents Cambyses as the son of Cyrus by princess Nitetis – likewise daughter of Apries – and thus the conquest was presented as a legitimate union with the local population.⁴² Whatever the (myth-)historical realities of these stories may have been, at least in the collective memory or popular *imaginaire* of the people in the region, an Egyptian princess was considered to have been instrumental to Cambyses' campaign and successful subjugation of Egypt. The syntagm "Daughter of GN" has been used in various ways in the biblical narrative as a metaphor for a personified city or country⁴³ and as Dobbs-Allsopp has shown, this syntagm is found throughout the ancient Near East as a divine epithet or a personified location used in the context of a lament.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, metaphors can be – and often are – rooted in historical or myth-historical lore and in the case of the OAE, the use in Jer 46[26]:19 of the additional qualifier of the verb *yšb* (ישב, "to sit/dwell") in the Hebrew and κατοικέω ("to dwell/govern")⁴⁵ in the Greek seems to point to a more specific application of this context that is best translated as "enthroned," as already suggested by Holladay.⁴⁶ It is therefore likely that this expression here is doing double duty both as a personification of Egypt and a reference to the popular perceptions of this daughter of the pharaoh who will not return to her homeland since it is now devastated.

5.2 Violence

Cambyses' conquest of Egypt is unanimously described in all ancient sources as a period of violence defined by destruction, pillaging of temples, mockery of the gods, desecration of royal tombs, and the mutilation of the corpse of pharaoh Amasis.⁴⁷ It should be noted however, that no desecration of temples by Cambyses is recorded in contemporary Egyptian sources, although such acts

⁴² *Hist.* 3.1–3.

⁴³ M. Kartveit, *Rejoice, Dear Zion!: Hebrew Construct Phrases with "Daughter" and "Virgin" as Nomen Regens* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2013), 57–65.

⁴⁴ F.W. Dobbs-Allsopp, "The Syntagma of Bat Followed by a Geographical Name in the Hebrew Bible: A Reconsideration of Its Meaning and Grammar", *CBQ* 57 (1995) 451–70, *passim*, esp. 470. See also, more recently, Kartveit, *Rejoice*, 154–5. The latter, however, sees the use of this syntagm in Jeremiah as "ironic" without considering possible historical references.

⁴⁵ See LSJ s.v. κατοικέω.

⁴⁶ Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2, 324. Cf. also NRSV for JerMT 48:18 "enthroned daughter Dibon" for יִשְׁבֶּת בַּת־דִּיבּוֹן.

⁴⁷ E.g., *Hist.*, 3.27–29; *Geogr.*, 17.1.27.

are mentioned in later Egyptian literature.⁴⁸ The evidence does not support such a widescale and systematic destruction, although some instances of damage can be traced.⁴⁹ More than a hundred years after the Persian conquest, the Yahwists of the Elephantine island refer back to the total destruction of Egyptian temples by Cambyses in a letter they sent to the governor of Yehud around 407 BCE:

And during the days of the king(s) of Egypt our fathers had built that Temple in Elephantine the fortress and when Cambyses entered Egypt he found that Temple built. And they overthrew the temples of the gods of Egypt, all (of them), but one did not damage anything in that Temple. (TADAE A4.7:13–14).

As I argued in a previous article,⁵⁰ this reference to the total annihilation of temples in Egypt must have been accepted on *both sides* of the communication – by both the Yahwistic and the Persian parties – since, otherwise, it would have presented an unimaginable gamble on the part of the authors of this missive.⁵¹ If painting Cambyses as a violent and insolent conqueror was “anti-Persian propaganda,” as it is often seen in scholarship,⁵² it would mean that the Yahwists

- 48 J. Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1997), 62. For more recent and focused studies, see S.H. Aufrère, “Les Destructions des Perses en Égypte et de Cambyse en Particulier: Topos Ou Réalité”, in J.-M. Marconot/B. Tabuce (ed.), *Iconoclasme et Vandalisme: La Violence de L'image* (Montpellier: Université Paul-Valéry, 2005) 115–58, and K. Jansen-Winkel, “Die Quellen Zur Eroberung Ägyptens Durch Kambyses”, in T.A. Bács (ed.), *A Tribute to Excellence: Studies Offered in Honor of Ernő Gaál, Ulrich Luft, László Török* (Budapest: La chaire d'Égyptologie, 2002) 309–19.
- 49 Posener, *Première Domination*, 168–9. See also, more recently, D. Kahn, “Cambyses’ Attitude Towards Egyptian Temples in Contemporary Texts and Later Sources. A Reevaluation of the Persian Conquest of Egypt”, in A. Schwab/A. Schütze (ed.), *Herodotean Soundings: The Cambyses Logos* (Tübingen: Narr Francke Attempto, 2023) 327–49.
- 50 G. Barnea, “The Migration of the Elephantine Yahwists under Amasis II”, *JNES* 82 (2023) 103–18, on pp. 113–14. See also I. Kottsieper, “Die Religionspolitik der Achämeniden und die Juden von Elephantine”, in R.G. Kratz (ed.), *Religion und Religionskontakte im Zeitalter der Achämeniden* (Gütersloh: Veröffentlichungen der Wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaft für Theologie, 2002) 150–78, on p. 160.
- 51 See also M.C.A. Korpel, “Disillusion among Jews in the Postexilic Period”, in R.P. Gordon/J.C. de Moor (ed.), *The Old Testament in Its World Papers Read at the Winter Meeting, January 2003 the Society for Old Testament Study and at the Joint Meeting, July 2003 the Society for Old Testament Study and Het Oudtestamentisch Werkgezelschap in Nederland En België* (Leiden: Brill, 2005) 135–57, on p. 149, n. 58.
- 52 E.g., S. Ruzicka, *Trouble in the West: Egypt and the Persian Empire, 525–332 BCE* (New York: Oxford University, 2012), 18, or R. Forshaw, *Egypt of the Saite Pharaohs, 664–525 BC*

would be repeating these insults back to Persian authorities from which they are now requesting succour, thereby undermining their case. In the same paper, I suggest that at the time this missive was written at Elephantine, the received image of Cyrus' son and heir probably constituted "part of the then-current Persian propaganda under Darius II, who might have wisely amplified this tale for his own agenda in order to recast his namesake as a healer of the crimes of Cambyses and a great lawgiver,⁵³ and thereby showing himself as his spiritual heir."⁵⁴ However, this tradition could very well have originated with Darius I himself, whose strategy of presenting himself as the restorer and redeemer of dignity of the Egyptians within the Achaemenid empire was a resounding success causing him to be seen favourably by the Egyptians.⁵⁵ At any event, this tradition seems to have been broadly accepted by the post-Darius I imperial authorities and formed part of the legacy of the Persian conquest of Egypt.

5.3 *The Slaughter of the Apis Bull*

Clear references to an extreme level of destruction perpetrated by a northern army that can only refer to the violence of Cambyses are peppered throughout the second oracle of the OAE as well as the TO. A proclamation regarding the main centres of power in Egypt: Migdol,⁵⁶ Memphis and Tahpanhes, warns that nation to "stand ready and be prepared, for the sword shall devour round about you" (Jer 46[26]:14). The next verse refers to "your bulls" (אַבִּירֶיךָ) – the bulls of the Egyptians – an expression which has no known relation to Nebuchadnezzar. However, as mentioned, the slaughter of the sacred "Apis bull" forms a central, scandalous, and dramatic component of the (myth-)history surrounding Cambyses' conquest of Egypt:⁵⁷ "Why has your Apis fled/washed away? Why did not your bull stand? Because Yhwh thrust

(Manchester: Manchester University, 2019), 179. This does not mean, of course, that the Greco-Roman descriptions of Cambyses' conquest are historically reliable – my point is that even if they were exaggerated (and they certainly were), these stories were widely accepted even by the Persians.

53 D. Agut-Labordère, "Darius Législateur et les Sages de L'Égypte: Un Addendum au Livre des Ordonnances", in J.C. Moreno García (ed.), *Élites Et Pouvoir En Égypte Ancienne: Actes Du Colloque Université Charles-De-Gaulle Lille 3, 7 Et 8 Juillet 2006* (Lille: CRIPEL, 2009–2010) 353–58.

54 Barnea, "Migration", 113.

55 See E. Bresciani, "The Persian Occupation of Egypt", in I. Gershevitch (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Iran. Vol. 2, Median and Achaemenian Periods* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1985), 502–28, on pp. 507–9.

56 A.M. Wilson-Wright, "Migdol", in C.M. Furey et al. (ed.) *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception Online* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021).

57 *Hist.* 3.27–29.

him down.” (Jer 46[26]:15).⁵⁸ There can be little doubt that such an event took place – an Apis bull is recorded to have died in August, 525 BCE, and was buried in a granite sarcophagus made at Cambyses’ order.⁵⁹

5.4 Temples

The Egyptian temples seem to have been more specifically and systematically targeted. While Egyptian legal and administrative documents from the first years following Cambyses’ conquest do not show any significant negative impact to the general economic life of the country,⁶⁰ temple economies seem to have been deeply affected. The so-called Demotic Chronicle describes a significant reduction in the vast revenues that Egyptian temples received from the king.⁶¹ Only three of the leading temples were allowed to retain their full privileges.⁶² This reality seems to be most directly reflected in the TO (Jer 43[50]:12–13): He⁶³ will “kindle a fire in the temples of the gods of Egypt, and he shall burn them and carry them away captive. And he shall clean the land of Egypt as a shepherd cleans his cloak of vermin, and he shall go away from there in peace. He shall break the obelisks of Heliopolis, which is in the

58 The two Hebrew verbs used in this verse: *shp* (שָׁחַט) and *hdp* (הִדָּח) – respectively, φεύγω and παραλύω in the Greek – denote “overthrow/thrust/push/drive out,” with *shp* deriving from the Akk. *saḥāpu* (See BDB s.v. שָׁחַט and CAD s.v. *saḥāpu*) and *hdp* being its Heb. cognate. For a recent discussion of the text-critical issues of this verse, see Wilson-Wright, *Jeremiah’s Egypt*, 100–1. Thomas Schneider’s suggestion to read הָחַט here as a rendering of the Egyptian *nsw ḥp*, i.e., “King Apis,” a common title the Apis bull is intriguing but fails to convince on linguistic and contextual grounds. See T. Schneider, “Jeremia in Memphis: Eine Neusituierung von Jeremia 46,13–24”, in B. Huwlyer/H.-P. Mathys/B. Weber (ed.), *Prophetie und Psalmen: Festschrift für Klaus Seybold zum 65. Geburtstag* (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2001) 79–97, p. 80–1, rightly criticized by Wilson-Wright, *Jeremiah’s Egypt*, 100, note 109.

59 EI s.v. Cambyses. See also Posener, *Première Domination*, 171.

60 EI s.v. Cambyses. See also Posener, *Première Domination*, 169.

61 W. Spiegelberg, *Die Sogenannte demotische Chronik des Pap. 215 der Bibliothèque Nationale zu Paris Nebst den auf der Rückseite des Papyrus Stehenden Texten* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1914), 32–3.

62 Bresciani, “Persian Occupation”, 505–6. For a thorough and recent study, see F. Wespi, “Cambyses’ Decree and the Destruction of Egyptian Temples”, in A. Schwab/A. Schütze (ed.), *Herodotean Soundings: The Cambyses Logos* (Tübingen: Narr Francke Attempto, 2023) 351–69.

63 JerMT followed by Aquila and Symmachus use the first person here while JerOG uses the third, which is more in line with the context and is certainly the preferable reading. Ascribing this act to Yhwh in the MT could have stemmed from a scribal error or – more likely – a later exegetical editorial correction. For a discussion preferring the MT version, see, e.g., J.R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37–52: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 21C; New Haven: Yale University, 2008), 147.

land of Egypt, and the temples of the gods of Egypt he shall burn with fire." The complete overpowering of Egypt by a "people from the north" (Jer 46[26]:24) is further emphasized in the next verse with Yhwh bringing "punishment upon Amon of Thebes, and Pharaoh, and Egypt and her gods and her kings, upon Pharaoh and those who trust in him." (Jer 46[26]:25). Finally, as stated, within the context of the "Daughter of Egypt" – ostensibly the original excuse for the invasion (see above) – Memphis is said to have "become a waste, a ruin, without inhabitant." (Jer 46[26]:19). A parallel passage in the TO (Jer 43[50]:8–11) describes "Nebuchadrezzar" and casting his "net" (שֶׁפָּרֶוֹ)⁶⁴ over large stones upon which his throne will be placed. He is then said to "strike the land of Egypt, giving over to the pestilence those who are doomed to the pestilence, to captivity those who are doomed to captivity, and to the sword those who are doomed to the sword." Taken together, the OAE and the TO reflect the popular image of Cambyses' excesses and violence – an image which undoubtedly rests on historical reality.

5.5 *Foreign Mercenaries and the Expulsion of Foreigners*

Immediately following the "Apis bull" allusion we find a passage that seems to refer to an event documented in the Naophorous statue of Udja-Hor-resnet regarding the violent expulsion of foreigners from the temple of Neith during the early reign of Cambyses – an incident which must have made foreigners feel unwelcome and even persecuted:

I made supplication in the presence of the Majesty of the King of Upper and Lower Egypt, Cambyses, concerning all the foreigners who had settled in the temple of Neith to drive them therefrom so as to cause the temple of Neith to be in all its beneficial powers as in its primal condition, so that His Majesty commanded that all the foreigners [who] had settled in the temple of Neith be expelled, that all their houses be demolished and all their abominations which were in this temple (Naophorous Statue of Udjahorresnet, 17–20).⁶⁵

This historical context is likely reflected in the words the foreigners say to one another following the conquest of Egypt: "Arise, and let us go back to our own people and to the land of our birth, because of the sword of the oppressor" (Jer 46[26]:16). Foreign mercenaries were an important contingent of the

64 Goldstein, "Cambyses' Conquest".

65 A.B. Lloyd, "The Inscription of Udjahorresnet a Collaborator's Testament", *JEA* 68 (1982) 166–80, on p. 169. See also Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 38.

Egyptian forces during the Saite period⁶⁶ – numbering over 30,000 men under Apries according to Herodotus⁶⁷ (with even more added under Amasis II). In the OAE they are said to be “like fatted calves; yea, they have turned and fled together, they did not stand; for the day of their calamity has come upon them, the time of their punishment.” (Jer 46[26]:21).

6 The First Oracle of the OAE: Carchemish

Having focused on the second oracle of the OAE, I now return briefly to the first oracle which refers back to the battle of Carchemish in 605 BCE. This battle can be seen – rightly – as the beginning of the end for Egyptian imperial power in the Levant.⁶⁸ The oracle seems to have been composed around a battle hymn that refers to that pivotal confrontation. However, apart from its superscription and verse 10, which is clearly a later insertion,⁶⁹ the hymn itself does not betray any prophetic aspirations. That verse 10 has been added to the text can be seen by the fact that it disrupts the flow of the hymn between two “go up” imperative verses (9, 11) whose narrative and poetic force comes to light once this insertion is removed. The date of the oracle (and the hymn) has almost uniformly (and uncritically) been dated to 605 BCE.⁷⁰ However, strictly speaking, while it can hypothetically be dated to the immediate aftermath of this battle – 605 BCE should not be seen as anything more than a *terminus post quem* as this text could just as well have been composed at a later date based on orally transmitted traditions or elements of scribal curricula. Thus, this oracle could technically have been written decades or even centuries later.⁷¹

66 Forshaw, *Egypt of the Saite Pharaohs*, 57.

67 *Hist.* 2.163.

68 The Egyptians still attempted to maintain influence over the region up to the Persian conquest with, for example, an attempt reported by Herodotus to recapture Kadytis/Gaza (2, 159) which does not provide a date for this campaign, but the 597 BC Babylonian campaign may have travelled further south to attack Gaza and Ekron, forcing the Egyptians to abandon their all aspirations in the southern Levant. This could potentially be the context behind the Adon letter mentioned above. See Forshaw, *Egypt of the Saite Pharaohs*, 128. See also D. Kahn, “Some Remarks on the Foreign Policy of Psammetichus II in the Levant (595–589 B.C.)”, *JEH* 1 (2008) 139–57, on p. 142.

69 Most likely a calque on Isa 34:8. See Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2, 321.

70 E.g., J.R. Lundbom, “Language and Rhetoric in Jeremiah’s Foreign Nation Oracles”, in J.R. Lundbom/C.A. Evans/B.A. Anderson (ed.), *The Book of Jeremiah: Composition, Reception, and Interpretation* (Leiden: Brill, 2018) 211–29, on p. 211.

71 D.M. Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature* (New York: Oxford University, 2009), 9–10, 22.

Some scholars have even tried to suggest a hypothetical participation of Judahite soldiers in this pivotal battle based on a remark by Berossus but, as I contend elsewhere,⁷² this historical anchor is far from reliable as it relies solely on Berossus' significantly later, fragmentary, and problematic work called *Babyloniaca* in which the supposed participation of Judahite soldiers in this battle is mentioned.⁷³ This detail is exclusive to Berossus and is found in a source with a complex transmission history which survived only in quotes within much later works.⁷⁴ The recent suggestion by Wilson-Wright that the first part of the OAE may have included an "eyewitness account" of the battle⁷⁵ is theoretically intriguing especially since Necho II did use a variety of mercenaries in his campaign but unfortunately, it has zero evidence to support it. Even the biblical text itself does not support this option. However, rather than a direct reference to the battle of Carchemish and given the greater reliance on Cambyses' conquest of Egypt – not only in the OAE but also in the TO – as Yhwh's chosen instrument of retribution upon Egypt, one cannot discount the option that the inclusion or even composition of the lamentation hymn on Carchemish in the first oracle of the OAE may have been editorially added at a later date in order to connect the popular combined image of Nebuchadrezzar-Cambyses back to a historical event associated with the Babylonian king.

7 Conclusions

This paper showed that the OAE and its alter ego in the TO reflect a rich set of references that correspond remarkably well to the historical realities and popular images surrounding Cambyses' conquest of Egypt in 526 BCE rather than a Babylonian invasion which never succeeded. Even though the name of king in both of these sources is Nebuchadrezzar – in the MT and the OG – it can hardly be denied that the reference is to the son of Cyrus who successfully

72 Recently argued by Wilson-Wright, *Jeremiah's Egypt*, 19–20 (esp. p. 20, note 30), 97, note 95. But see my analysis, Barnea, "Review: Wilson-Wright", 2.

73 S.M. Burstein, *The Babyloniaca of Berossus* (Malibu: Undena, 21978), 6–8.

74 Scholars of Berossus have noted that he is especially untrustworthy in his treatment of Nebuchadnezzar – see Burstein, *Babyloniaca*, 26, note 2.

75 The short parenthetical statement found in the letter of pseudo-Aristeas (ps.-Aristeas 13) is often appealed to in order to support this hypothesis. This text, written at some point in the second century BCE, should be read with an abundance of caution since it is tinted with ideological overtones rather than expressing historical fact. See discussion in Barnea, "Migration", 106–10.

defeated the Saite king and added the land of the Nile to the Persian empire. This confusion between Cambyses and Nebuchadrezzar is recorded in a variety of later Greek sources and seems to reflect a popular reception of the tumultuous events of the mid-fifth century BCE. Thus, the OAE should be dated to a period following the establishment of the first Persian occupation of Egypt, i.e., after 526 BCE. More specifically, given the high level of differentiation between the MT and OG in the OAE and other parts of the Jeremian corpus regarding the name of Nebuchadrezzar or the “king of Babylon,” the dating of the version of the OAE known to us today should be dated to the Hellenistic period. This includes – in all likelihood – the first part of the OAE, which deals with the battle of Carchemish.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Prof. Dan’el Kahn for his input and suggestions. All errors, inconsistencies and contradictions in this paper are solely my responsibility. Abbreviations: EI=E. Yarshater, *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers, 1992); BDB=F. Brown/S.R. Driver/C.A. Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977); CAD=M.T. Roth, *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago* (Chicago: The Oriental Institute, 1964–2010); LSJ= H.G. Liddell/R. Scott/H.S. Jones/R. McKenzie, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996); TADAE=B. Porten/A. Yardeni, *Textbook of Aramaic Documents from Ancient Egypt* (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University, 1986–1999).

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“For Yahweh is Destroying the Philistines ...” (Jer 47:4): On the Historical Background of Jeremiah 47:1–7

Felix Hagemeyer

1 Introduction

The Philistines,¹ who lived west of Jerusalem and the Judean hill country, play a prominent role among the nations in the Hebrew Bible. In the *narrative worlds* of the books of Judges, Samuel, Kings and Chronicles, “early Israel” is permanently at war with the coastal dwellers, who are portrayed as prototypical foreigners and arch-enemies.² However, the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel,

1 Cf. also section 3.1. A comprehensive discussion of the Philistine culture would go far beyond the scope of this chapter. For a more comprehensive discussion, see e.g., P.W. Stockhammer, “Rethinking Philistia as a Contact Zone”, in I. Shai/J.R. Chadwick et al. (ed.), *Tell it in Gath: Studies in the History and Archaeology of Israel. Essays in Honor of Aren M. Maeir on the Occasion of his Sixtieth Birthday* (ÄAT 90; Wiesbaden: Zaphon, 2018), 375–84; A.M. Maeir/L.A. Hitchcock, “The Appearance, Formation and Transformation of Philistine Culture: New Perspectives and New Finds”, in P.M. Fischer/T. Bürge (ed.), *“Sea Peoples” Up-To-Date: New Research on Transformations in the Eastern Mediterranean in the 13th–11th Centuries BCE. Proceedings of the ESF-Workshop held at the Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna, 3–4 November 2014* (Contributions to the Chronology of the Eastern Mediterranean 35; Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2017) 149–62; A.M. Maeir, “Like Frogs out of a Pond: Identity Formation in Early Iron Age Philistia and Beyond”, in I. Koch/O. Lipschits/O. Sergi (ed.), *From Nomadism to Monarchy? Revisiting the Early Iron Age Southern Levant* (Mosaics 3; University Park: Eisenbrauns, 2023), 201–8; F. Hagemeyer “‘Sie kamen, sahen, siegten [...]’: Die Migration der Philister nach Israel/Palästina und die Herausbildung ihrer Kultur in der frühen Eisenzeit”, in N. Nebes/I. Gerlach (ed.), *Migration und Kulturtransfer: Zur kulturellen Interaktion im Vorderen Orient und Nordostafrika im 2. und 1. Jahrtausend v. Chr.* (Sabaica et Aethiopica 1; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2023), 45–75. Cf. also the chapters in F. Hagemeyer (ed.), *Jerusalem and the Coastal Plain in the Iron Age and Persian Periods: New Studies on Jerusalem’s Relations with the Southern Coastal Plain of Israel/Palestine* (c. 1200–300 BCE). *Research on Israel and Aram in Biblical Times IV* (ORA 46; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2022).

2 E.g., in the stories of the books of Samuel the Philistines are the only foreign nation that succeeds in capturing the Ark of the Covenant in a war with the Israelites (1 Sam 4:1–22). On the significance and literary function of the Philistines in the books of Samuel, using the example of the Ark narrative (1 Sam 4–6 and 2 Sam 6), see B. Hensel, “The Ark Narrative(s) of 1 Sam 4:1b–7:1 / 2 Sam 6* between Philistia, Jerusalem, and Assyria: A New Approach for a Historical Contextualization and Literary-Historical Classification”, in F. Hagemeyer (ed.),

which deal with the later “history of Israel” – the last years of the kingdom of Judah and the Babylonian exile – show little interest in the Philistines.³ It is noteworthy, though, that in the context of the Jeremicanic oracles against the nations (Jer 46–51), we find a text (Jer^{MT} 47:1–7 = Jer^G 29:1–7)⁴ that deals with the coastal plain and the inhabitants of Ashkelon and Gaza.

The following chapter will examine the question of why a separate oracle in the Book of Jeremiah is dedicated to the Philistines. In addition, the historical and literary background of the text will be analysed.

2 Observations on the Text of Jeremiah 47:1–7

After an introductory verse, the oracle of Jer 47:1–7 turns against the Philistines with a word of judgement (vv. 2–5) and concludes with a poem (vv. 6–7) about the “sword of Yahweh” (חרב ליהוה, Jer 47:6a).⁵

Jerusalem and the Coastal Plain in the Iron Age and Persian Periods: New Studies on Jerusalem's Relations with the Southern Coastal Plain of Israel/Palestine (c. 1200–300 BCE). Research on Israel and Aram in Biblical Times IV (ORA 46; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2022), 161–91. Cf. also B. Hensel, “Die Philister in der gegenwärtigen historischen Forschung und ihre Rolle in den Samuelbüchern: Neue historische, kulturgeschichtliche und literarhistorische Erwägungen – mit einem Seitenblick auf 1 Sam *4–6 und 2 Sam *5–6”, in K. Soennecken/P. Leiverkus et al. (ed.), *Durch die Zeiten – Through the Ages: Festschrift für Dieter Vieweger – Essays in Honour of Dieter Vieweger* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2023), 147–67. But, see F. Hagemeyer, *Aschdod und Jerusalem: Eine archäologische und exegetische Untersuchung zu den Beziehungen von südpalästinischer Küstenebene und jüdischem Bergland* (ORA 53; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2023), 172–91 for a different historical interpretation of 1 Sam 5:1–6:18.

- 3 In the Book of Ezekiel, the gentilicium פלשתי (in its plural form פלשתיים) is mentioned only in Ezek 16:27, 57; 25:25–26. In Jeremiah, apart from Jer 47, the Philistines are referred to only in Jer 25:20.
- 4 On the positioning and order of the oracles against the Nations in Jer^{MT} and Jer^G, and the differences between the Greek and the Masoretic text, see E. Peels, “From Egypt to Babylon, or from Elam to Moab? Queries Concerning the Order of the Oracles against the Nations in the Book of Jeremiah”, in H. Bezzel/U. Becker/M. de Jong (ed.), *Prophecy and Foreign Nations: Aspects of the Role of the “Nations” in the Books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel* (FAT II 135; Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2022), 59–75. Cf. also, C.J. Sharp, *Jeremiah 26–52* (IECOT; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2022) 34–36.
- 5 On the structure of the text, see, e.g., W. Werner, *Das Buch Jeremia: Kapitel 25,15–52* (NSKAT 19/2; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2003), 160; E. Peels, “‘Before Pharaoh seized Gaza’: A Reappraisal of the Date, Function, and Purpose of the Superscription of Jeremiah 47”, *VT* 63 (2013) 308–22, on pp. 309–10. Jack R. Lundbom points to a break indicated by a *setumah* after v. 5 in M^L and M^P. In his view, this could indicate that Jer 47:6–7 was not originally connected to Jer 47:2–5. However, a *setumah* is found neither in 2QJer nor in M^A for the passage in question. Cf. J.R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37–52: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 21B; New York: Doubleday, 2004), 230.

The introduction in Jer 47:1 declares the text to be a word of Yahweh communicated to Jeremiah. Remarkable is the phrase *יבה פרעה את-עזה* (v. 1b), according to which the oracle was given to the prophet “before Pharaoh seized Gaza.”⁶ First, this presupposes a military threat to the Philistine coast from Egypt and thus from the south. Second, a contextual reference is made to the word of judgement against Egypt in Jer 46.⁷

Vv. 2–3 unfold a military threat from the north (*מצפון*, Jer 47:2a). With regard to geography, this alludes to a conquest of Philistia by Babylonia (and not by Egypt as in Jer 47:1). Jer 47:2, introduced by the messenger formula *כה אמר יהוה*, compares the imagined invasion of the Babylonian army with a catastrophic flood (*שטף* *qal*). Wilhelm Rudolph has already pointed out that the description in v. 2 was probably understood by the ancient recipients as an allusion to the rainfall period in Palestine and the associated floods.⁸

In Jer 47:3a, the frequent use of terms from the field of military cavalry is notable. The approach of the Babylonian chariots is illustrated by the enumeration of acoustic signals, such as the stamping of horses’ hooves (*שעטת* *פרסות*).⁹ V. 3b metaphorically describes the fear that the Babylonian army causes on the southern Levantine coast: the Philistine fathers are so afraid that their arms (literally: hands) become limp (*רפיון ידים*) and they can no longer care for their children.¹⁰

In Jer 47:4, Philistia (*כל-פלשתים*) is mentioned for the first time as the destination of the army coming from the north. In addition, Yahweh is emphasised as the agent of the imminent destruction by the allusion to the motif of the Day of Yahweh (*על-היום הבא*), “the day that is coming”, v. 4a). V. 4b connects the Philistines with the Phoenician coast as the “last helpers” (*עזר* *qal*) of Sidon and Tyre.¹¹ The clause refers to the close economic and, to a certain extent,

6 For the historical background of the heading, see section 4.2.

7 On Egypt, see Gad Barnea’s chapter in this volume.

8 On this, see W. Rudolph, *Jeremia* (HAT 1/12; Tübingen; Mohr Siebeck, 3¹⁹⁶⁸), 277. Cf. also H.-J. Stipp, *Jeremia* 25–52 (HAT 1/12,2; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), on p. 670; G. Fischer, *Jeremia* 1–25 (HThKAT; Freiburg/Basel/Vienna: Herder, 2005), 494.

9 Georg Fischer (Fischer, *Jeremia*, 494) refers to parallel phrases in Ezek 26:10–11, where Nebuchadnezzar’s attack on Tyre is described. For William L. Holladay, the sound of battle is evidently the sound of war. Cf. W.L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 2: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah: Chapters 26–52* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress), 336.

10 This motif is also found in Jer 6:24; 50:43; Jes 13:7–8; Zeph 3:16 and 2 Sam 4:1. See Rudolph, *Jeremia*, 272; B. Huwiler, *Jeremia und die Völker: Untersuchungen zu den Völkersprüchen in Jeremia 46–49* (FAT 20; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 136.

11 The text of Jer^G 29:4 reads *καὶ ἀφανιῶ τὴν Τύρον καὶ τὴν Σιδῶνα καὶ πάντας τοὺς καταλοιποὺς τῆς βουθείας*, which presupposes not only the annihilation of the Philistines, but also the destruction (*ἀφανιῶ*) of Sidon and Tyre by the army approaching from the north.

political relations between Phoenicia and Philistia in antiquity.¹² The foreignness of the coastal dwellers is emphasised by the writer of Jer 47:4 by mentioning the island of Caphtor (כַּפְתּוֹר, Jer 47:4b) as their point of origin.¹³ In recent research, there is a broad consensus that Caphtor can be identified with Crete or at least an island in the Aegean.¹⁴ Moreover, Crete and the Aegean Islands are considered important, but not exclusive, points of origin for Philistine groups.¹⁵

According to Jer 47:5, the Philistines react to the destruction of the coastal strip with various mourning rites, the shaving of hair (קִרְחָה, literally: baldness), silence (נִמָּה niph.) and ritualised self-harm (גִּדְדִּי hitpol.). According to Carolyn C. Sharp, the author of the verse possessed “cultural knowledge of Philistine ritual praxis.”¹⁶ However, the acts of mourning described cannot be regarded as exclusively Philistine rites, much rather, they were widespread throughout the ancient Near East.¹⁷

Two rhetorical questions (v. 5b and v. 6a) provide transition from the word of judgement against the Philistines (Jer 47:2–5) to the poetic conclusion of the oracle (Jer 47:6–7), which is structured as a dialogue between two anonymous speakers. The first speaker calls upon the personified “sword of Yahweh” (חֶרֶב לַיהוָה, Jer 47:6a),¹⁸ a “mythological prop” (Hermann-Josef Stipp),¹⁹ to end the murder and killing in the coastal plain. In v. 7, a second speaker replies that this proves impossible in view of the divine command (צִוָּה piel) to destroy the city of Ashkelon and the Philistine coast.²⁰

12 Growing economic and cultural ties between the northern (Phoenicia) and southern Levantine coast (Philistia) can be demonstrated for the Iron Age IIB – C by the increased export of Phoenician pottery to southern Israel/southern Palestine. Phoenician pottery is found not only in coastal cities such as Ashdod and Ashkelon, but also in the Judean mountains. Cf. Hagemeyer, *Aschdod und Jerusalem*, 75 fn. 409.

13 Cf. also Amos 9:7.

14 Caphtor is usually understood as the designation for Crete due to its similarity to the Akkadian terms *Kaptāru/a* or *Kaptūru* as well as the Egyptian term *Kḫjw/K[a]-f-tū*. Cf., e.g., Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37–52*, 238; Stipp, *Jeremia 27–52*, 47; Hagemeyer, “Sie kamen, sahen, siegen [...]?” 54 with further references in fn. 36.

15 For more details, see section 3.1.

16 C.J. Sharp, *Jeremiah 26–52*, 317, 328.

17 E.g., R.G. Kratz, “Trauer”, in A. Berlejung/C. Frevel (ed.), *Handbuch theologischer Grundbegriffe zum Alten und Neuen Testament* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft; 42015) 429–30; M. Leonard-Fleckmann, “Mourning: I. Hebrew Bible/Old Testament” in C.M. Furey/B. Matz et al. (ed.), *EBR* 19, (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2021), 1307–9.

18 Cf. Jer 50:35–38; Ez 21:6–22.

19 Stipp, *Jeremia 25–52*, 672 (German original: “mythologisches Requisit”).

20 Stipp, *Jeremia 25–52*, 669.

3 The Philistines and the Coastal Cities of Ashkelon and Gaza

3.1 *Some Remarks on the Philistines*

In Jer 47:1–7, the Philistines²¹ symbolise a “foreign nation” that is depicted in the Hebrew Bible as “the ultimate other” in contrast to Israel.²² In biblical literature, the coastal dwellers are portrayed within the framework of a “theology of alterity” by focussing on individual Philistine cities (e.g., Ashkelon and Gaza in Jer 47 or Ashdod in 1 Sam 5:1–6:18; Neh 13:23–24). This theology is made fruitful for a variety of identity discourses in Israel/Judah.²³

Based on archaeological finds, a distinct “Philistine culture”²⁴ can be identified during the transition from the Late Bronze Age to the Iron Age (late 12th and early 11th century BCE). This period was characterised by numerous demographic, political, social and economic upheavals in the Levant and throughout the Mediterranean region.²⁵ In Palestine, Egyptian dominance

21 It is unlikely that the early Iron Age dwellers of the Palestinian coastal plain identified themselves as “Philistines”, but rather as inhabitants of their respective settlements (e.g., as Ashkelonites, Gazites, etc.). For an etymological analysis of the foreign appellation “Philistine/s”, see T. Schneider, “The Philistine Language: New Etymologies and the Name ‘David’”, *UF* 43 (2012) 569–80, on pp. 570–1. On the multifaceted and nested identities in early Iron Age Israel/Palestine, cf. A.M. Maeir, “Philistine and Israelite Identities: Some Comparative Thoughts”, *WO* 49 (2019) 151–61, on pp. 153–6.

22 Regarding the portrayal of the Philistines as “the ultimate other” in the context of the Hebrew Bible, see the detailed discussion in Hagemeyer, *Ashdod und Jerusalem*, 151–278 and esp. 287–91. Cf. also H.M. Niemann, “Nachbarn und Gegner, Konkurrenten und Verwandte Judas: Die Philister zwischen Geographie und Ökonomie, Geschichte und Theologie”, in U. Hübner/E.A. Knauf (ed.), *Kein Land für sich allein: Studien zum Kulturkontakt in Kanaan, Israel/Palästina und Ebirñari für Manfred Weippert zum 65. Geburtstag* (OBO 186; Freiburg (Switzerland): Universitätsverlag/Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002), 70–91; H.M. Niemann, “Neighbors and Foes, Rivals and Kin: Philistines, Shepheleans, Judeans between Geography and Economy, History and Theology”, in A.E. Killebrew/G. Lehmann (ed.), *The Philistines and other “Sea Peoples” in Text and Archaeology* (ABS 15; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2013), 243–64.

23 On the significance of the Philistines and the city of Ashdod for a biblical theology of alterity, see Hagemeyer, *Ashdod und Jerusalem*, 287–91.

24 In this chapter, “Philistine culture” is used as a collective term for all early Iron Age artefacts found on the Levantine coast and its hinterland, reflecting a mix of both Palestinian and allochthonous influences from Cyprus, Crete and mainland Greece. However, the “Philistine culture” was by no means uniform, but was characterised by numerous regionalisms. For more detail and references, see Hagemeyer, “Sie kamen, sahen, siegten [...]?” 56–64.

25 These far-reaching changes were triggered by climate change, Egypt’s increasing loss of power, the collapse of the Hittite Empire and the Mycenaean palatial administration, to name a few factors. Cf. M.H. Wiener, “Causes of Complex Systems Collapse in the Aegean, Eastern Mediterranean, Anatolia and Italy at the End of the Bronze Age”, in



FIGURE 6.1 Philistine Bichrome pottery

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gradually declined, and many (but not all) of the local city-states experienced a steady decline. At the same time, a new material culture, characterised by strong Aegean and Cypriot affinities, left its traces on the coast. Particularly characteristic is the appearance of locally made monochrome pottery (so-called “Philistine 1 Pottery”), that is similar but not identical to Late Hellenistic III C-style pottery types from other areas of the eastern Mediterranean.²⁶

P.M. Fischer/T. Bürge (ed.), *“Sea Peoples” Up-To-Date: New Research on Transformations in the Eastern Mediterranean in the 13th–11th Centuries BCE. Proceedings of the ESF-Workshop held at the Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna, 3–4 November 2014* (Contributions to the Chronology of the Eastern Mediterranean 35; Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2017) 43–74. On social developments in the Aegean during the 12th century BCE, see A. Yasur-Landau, *The Philistines and Aegean Migration at the End of the Late Bronze Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2010), 34–96.

- 26 A.M. Maeir, “Insights from the Philistine ‘Symbol-Scape’ on Philistine Origins and Social Structure”, in G. Guarducci/N. Laneri/S. Valentini (ed.), *Archaeology of Symbols: ICAS 1: Proceedings of the First International Conference on the Archaeology of Symbols* (Material Religion in Antiquity 3; Oxford: Oxbow, 2024) 229–38, on p. 231. For more detail, see P.A. Mountjoy, *Decorated Pottery in Cyprus and Philistia in 12th Century BC: Cypriot III C and Philistine III C*, vols. 1–2, (Contributions to the Chronology of the Eastern Mediterranean 36, Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2018).

The monochrome Philistine pottery was soon replaced by bichrome ware (“Philistine 2 Pottery”).

Until the mid-1990s, it was assumed that the Philistines (and other Sea Peoples) occupied and colonised the Levantine coastal plain in a more or less uniform conquest at the beginning of the Iron Age.²⁷ It was hypothesised that the colonisers were of Aegean origin and their (mainly) Aegean culture was assimilated over time by local influences.²⁸ The theses of R. A. Stewart Macalister (1870–1950) were seminal for the theory of a military colonisation of Palestine from the Aegean.²⁹ Other early scholars, such as Albrecht Alt (1883–1956)³⁰ and William F. Albright (1891–1971),³¹ were also inspired by the martial depiction of the Philistines and Sea Peoples on the reliefs in the mortuary temple of Ramses III (1184–1153 BCE) in *Medīnet Hābū* and by texts in the Hebrew Bible, e.g., the story of the looting of the Ark (1 Sam 4–6).³²

Although the theory outlined above is still defended, at least in part, in some recent studies,³³ the archaeological data obtained in recent decades show that there was rather little destruction in the Levantine cities during the transition from the Bronze Age to the Iron Age.³⁴ A precise analysis of Philistine pot-

- 27 E.g., T. Dothan, *The Philistines and Their Material Culture* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1982); A. Yasur-Landau, *Aegean Migration*.
- 28 Maeir, “Frogs”, 202. For a summary of the state of research until the mid-1990s, see I. Singer, “Egyptians, Canaanites and Philistines in the Period of the Emergence of Israel”, in I. Finkelstein/N. Na’aman (ed.), *From Nomadism to Monarchy: Archaeological and Historical Aspects of Early Israel* (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 1994), 282–338.
- 29 R.A.S. Macalister, *The Philistines: Their History and Civilization* (The Schweich Lectures of the British Academy; London: The British Academy/Oxford: Oxford University, 1914).
- 30 E.g., A. Alt, “Ägyptische Tempel in Palästina und die Landnahme der Philister”, *ZDPV* 67 (1944), 1–20.
- 31 W.F. Albright, “Syria, the Philistines and Phoenicia”, in I.E.S. Edwards/C.J. Gadd et al. (ed.), *Cambridge Ancient History*, Vol. II/2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1975) 507–36.
- 32 For references, see fn. 2.
- 33 See, most recently, A. Faust, “The Bible, Archaeology, and the Practice of Circumcision in Israelite and Philistine Societies”, *JBL* 134 (2015) 273–90; A. Faust, “The ‘Philistine Tomb’ at Tel ‘Eton: Culture Contact, Colonialism, and Local Responses in Iron Age Shephelah, Israel”, *Journal of Anthropological Research* 71 (2015) 195–230.
- 34 Regarding the archaeological data, see J.M. Millek, “Sea Peoples, Philistines, and the Destruction of Cities: A Critical Examination of Destruction Layers ‘Caused’ by the ‘Sea Peoples’”, in P.M. Fischer/T. Bürge (ed.), *“Sea Peoples” Up-To-Date: New Research on Transformations in the Eastern Mediterranean in the 13th–11th Centuries BCE. Proceedings of the ESF-Workshop held at the Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna, 3–4 November 2014* (Contributions to the Chronology of the Eastern Mediterranean 35; Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2017) 113–40; J.M. Millek, “Just What did They Destroy? The Sea Peoples and the End of the Late Bronze Age”, in J. Kamlah/A. Lichtenberger (ed.), *The Mediterranean Sea and the Southern Levant: Archaeological*

tery implies that this ware was not exclusively Aegean in character. Rather, we are dealing with archaeological finds in which various influences from Cyprus, Crete and mainland Greece were combined with local Levantine elements. Therefore, the Levantine coastal plain functioned for a longer period as “a complex and multifaceted mosaic” (Aren M. Maeir)³⁵ that enabled the (mostly) nonviolent interaction, mixing, and entanglement of diverse, ethnically, socially, and culturally inhomogeneous migrant groups with the local Semitic population.³⁶ As a result of this multifaceted entanglement processes, the “Philistine culture”³⁷ emerged in the early Iron Age.

3.2 *Ashkelon in the 7th–4th Century BCE*

As the previous analysis has shown, the Philistine city of Ashkelon represents an important point of reference for the oracle of Jer 47:1–7. The text probably alludes to the destruction of the harbour city by the Babylonian army towards the end of the 7th century BCE (see below).

The archaeological exploration of the *tell* of Ashkelon began as early as 1815, when Lady Hester Stanhope (1776–1839) initiated the first excavation with the permission of the Sublime Porte.³⁸ The first scientific excavation on behalf

and Historical Perspectives from Bronze Age to Medieval Times (ADPV 48; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2021), 59–98. Cf. also Hagemeyer, “Sie kamen, sahen, siegten [...]?”, 52–3. In addition, very few weapons have been found that can be linked to the Philistines. For references, see Maeir, “Frogs”, 204.

35 Maeir, “Philistine ‘Symbol-Scape’”, 236.

36 E.g., A.M. Maeir, “The Philistines be upon thee, Samson (Jud. 16:20): Reassessing the Martial Nature of the Philistines – Archaeological Evidence vs. Ideological Image?”, in Ł. Niesiołowski-Spanò/M. Węcowski (ed.), *Change, Continuity, and Connectivity: North-Eastern Mediterranean at the Turn of the Bronze Age and in the Early Iron Age* (Philippika 118; Harrassowitz: Wiesbaden, 2018), 158–68; P.W. Stockhammer, “Philistia as a Contact Zone”, 375–84; Hagemeyer “Sie kamen, sahen, siegten [...]?”, 45–75. More recently, Ido Koch has disputed the significance of migration processes for the development of Philistine culture and emphasised the importance of social and economic regionalisation phenomena for its emergence. On this, see I. Koch, “Early Philistia Revisited and Revised”, in O. Lipschits/Y. Gadot/M. Adams (ed.), *Rethinking Israel: Studies in the History and Archaeology of Ancient Israel in Honor of Israel Finkelstein* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2017), 189–205. However, recent DNA samples from Ashkelon indicate that there were indeed (smaller) waves of immigration from southern Europe to the Levantine coastal plain during the transition from the Late Bronze Age to the Iron Age. Cf. M. Feldman/D.M. Master et al., “Ancient DNA Sheds Light on the Genetic Origins of Early Iron Age Philistines”, *Science Advances* 5 (2019) eaax0061, <https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.aax0061>.

37 For the meaning and use of the term “Philistine culture”, see fn. 24.

38 On the early exploration of ancient Ashkelon, see J.D. Schloen, “Early Explorations”, in L.E. Stager/J.D. Schloen/D.M. Master (ed.) *Ashkelon I: Introduction and Overview*

of the Palestine Exploration Fund (PEF) was conducted between 1920–1922 and directed by John Garstang (1876–1956) and William J. Phythian-Adams (1888–1967).³⁹ Modern excavations were carried out on a large scale from 1985–2016 by the *Leon Levy Expedition to Ashkelon*, directed by Lawrence E. Stager and Daniel M. Master (co-director from 2007).

Following its integration into the Neo-Assyrian Empire (in the late 8th century BCE), Ashkelon was able to maintain its status as an important hub for long-distance trade in the eastern Mediterranean. In the 7th century BCE, the city was protected by massive mudbrick fortifications.⁴⁰ Portions of the fortification from the period immediately before the Neo-Babylonian conquest in 604/3 BCE have been uncovered on the *North Tell* (North Slope, Grid 2, Phase 6).⁴¹

The remains excavated on the *South Tell* bear witness to Ashkelon's economic importance on the eve of the Babylonian destruction. A winery (*Building 776*)⁴² with four wine presses, plastered mudbrick walls and sandstone ashlar foundations (Grid 38, Phase 14) is attested in Grid 38.⁴³ The winery had two sub-phases. In the more recent sub-phase, high-quality East Greek

(1985–2006) (Final Reports of the Leon Levy Expedition to Ashkelon 1; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 143–52.

39 J. David Schloen discusses the results of the British and Israeli excavations at Ashkelon in the 20th century. Cf. J.D. Schloen, "British and Israeli Excavations", in L.E. Stager/J.D. Schloen/D.M. Master (ed.) *Ashkelon I: Introduction and Overview (1985–2006)* (Final Reports of the Leon Levy Expedition to Ashkelon 1; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 153–63.

40 The fortifications were originally built in the Middle Bronze Age and were reinforced in the 9th and 8th centuries BCE (North Slope, Grid 2, Phase 8–7). Cf. R.J. Voss/L.E. Stager et al., "The North Tell of Ashkelon in the Bronze and Iron Age", in L.E. Stager/J.D. Schloen/R.J. Voss (ed.), *Ashkelon 6: The Middle Bronze Age Ramparts and Gates of the North Slope and Later Fortifications* (Final Reports of the Leon Levy Expedition to Ashkelon 6; University Park: Eisenbrauns, 2018) 25–101; Fig. 2.107–2.116.

41 Voss/Stager et al., "North Tell of Ashkelon", 101, Fig. 2.117–2.118.

42 More wine presses have been unearthed in Grid 51 (Master, "Nebuchadnezzar", 84). Apparently, the production of wine was of significant economic importance in late Iron Age Ashkelon.

43 On architecture and stratigraphy, see L.E. Stager/D.M. Master/J.D. Schloen (ed.), *Ashkelon 3: The Seventh Century BC* (Final Reports of the Leon Levy Expedition to Ashkelon 3; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 17–26 with Fig. 2.1–2.23. According to Lawrence E. Stager, the use of ashlar masonry and the central location of the winery in the city centre indicate that the building was a royal installation under the supervision of the king of Ashkelon, a client of the Egyptian Pharaoh (cf. L.E. Stager, "Ashkelon on the Eve of Destruction in 604 B. C.", in L.E. Stager/D.M. Master/J.D. Schloen (ed.), *Ashkelon 3: The Seventh Century BC* (Final Reports of the Leon Levy Expedition to Ashkelon 3; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2011) 3–11, on p. 5). Recent studies by Daniel M. Master suggest that the facility may not

ware and numerous precious artefacts were unearthed. The objects, including a faience statue of Bes, a bronze statue of Osiris, and a decorated bronze votive offering table as well as seven bronze *situlae*,⁴⁴ represent Egyptian imports and imply increased economic (and cultural) contacts between Ashkelon and Egypt in the late 7th century BCE.⁴⁵

The remains of an approx. 500 sqm marketplace in the area of Grid 50 (Phase 7) date from the same period.⁴⁶ The ensemble comprised streets with drainage systems and several buildings. A house with business premises (*Building 406*) and an administrative building (*Building 234*) were excavated.⁴⁷ For *Building 406*, the function of individual business units could be determined more precisely. Finds of fat-bellied wine jars, a jug, a juglet and a wine decanter

have been a single building complex, but several long, narrow production facilities. On this, see D.M. Master, "Nebuchadnezzar at Ashkelon", *HeBAI* 7 (2018) 79–92, on p. 84.

44 For a detailed discussion of the Egyptian bronze finds, see L. Bell, "A Collection of Egyptian Bronzes" in L.E. Stager/D.M. Master/J.D. Schloen (ed.), *Ashkelon 3: The Seventh Century BC* (Final Reports of the Leon Levy Expedition to Ashkelon 3; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 397–420. A hoard with numerous bronze objects, including 26 bronze statuettes of Egyptian deities, also dates from the 7th century BCE (cf. Stager, "Eve of Destruction", 10). For this hoard, cf. J.H. Iliffe, "A Hoard of Bronzes from Ascalon, c. Fourth Century B.C.", *QDAP* 5 (1935) 61–8.

45 C. Uehlinger, "Bildquellen und 'Geschichte Israels': Grundsätzliche Überlegungen und Fallbeispiele", in C. Hardmeier (ed.), *Steine – Bilder – Texte: Historische Evidenz außerbiblischer und biblischer Quellen* (ABG 5; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2001) 25–77, on p. 65. According to Christoph Uehlinger, however, no conclusions can be drawn from the Egyptian finds in Ashkelon regarding the situation in other cities on the Palestinian coastal plain. Angelika Berlejung (personal communication, 25 April 2024) identifies the bronze artefacts as votive offerings that were stored in Ashkelon for resale. In her opinion, however, such valuable trade goods collected in a single hoard do not indicate that the cult in Ashkelon during the late 7th century BCE was characterised by Egyptian influences. Bernd Schipper argues differently, for whom the finds do not represent trade goods, but rather point to the existence of an Egyptian enclave in Ashkelon with its own shrine. Cf. B. Schipper, "Egypt and the Kingdom of Judah under Josiah and Jehoiakim", *TA* 37 (2010) 200–26, on p. 207.

46 Stager/Master/Schloen (ed.), *Ashkelon* 3, 37–49 with Fig. 3.8–3.20. At about the same time, a zone of commercial exchange was established in the area of Grid 51, as suggested by numerous finds (e.g., gold, weights, scales, and various imported vessels). Cf. Master, "Nebuchadnezzar", 90.

47 On *Building 234*, see Stager, "Eve of Destruction", 8. Cf. also A. Fantalkin, "Why Did Nebuchadnezzar II Destroy Ashkelon in Kislev 604 B.C.E.?", in I. Finkelstein/N. Na'aman (ed.), *The Fire Signals of Lachish: Studies in the Archaeology and History of Israel in the Late Bronze Age, Iron Age, and Persian Period in Honor Of David Ussishkin* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2011) 87–111, on pp. 89–90.

prove that a wine shop (*Room 375*) existed here.⁴⁸ The cuts of meat (e.g., two complete forelegs of beef) found in another room of the building indicate that this shop (*Room 431*) was the workplace of a butcher.⁴⁹

Probably the most dramatic event in the history of ancient Ashkelon was the conquest of the city by Nebuchadnezzar II. The Babylonian Chronicle (BM 21946, lines 15–20) reports on a campaign in the Levant during the first year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign (604/3 BCE).⁵⁰ According to the account, the king set out in the month of Sivan (l. 15) and marched victoriously through the *land of Hatti* until the month of Kislev. The local kings surrendered (l. 17) and only Ashkelon (l. 18–20) had to be conquered by military means. The city was turned into “a heap of rubble” (l. 20). The large-scale destruction of Ashkelon described in the historical source was archaeologically proven in the area of the winery (*Building 776*, Grid 38, Phase 14) and in the area of the marketplace (Grid 50, Phase 7).⁵¹

Perhaps Ashkelon was devastated because the city had been an important Egyptian outpost with a garrison of mainly Greek mercenaries (Alexander Fantalkin).⁵² However, the Babylonian king may also have intended to prevent or at least hinder long-distance trade via the Mediterranean, as he was unable to control the existing sea routes. Or Nebuchadnezzar II wanted to demonstrate his military power in the border region with Egypt right at the beginning of his reign (Daniel M. Master).⁵³

48 Stager, “Eve of Destruction”, 7. Ostrakon Ashkelon 1.5 was found in front of the shop. Based on the adjective 𐤓𐤕𐤍 (“red”), which can be read in l. 2 of the inscription, the ostrakon could have been a receipt or assignment of quantities of wine. Cf. F.M. Cross, “Inscriptions in Phoenician and Other Scripts”, in L.E. Stager/J.D. Schloen/D.M. Master (ed.), *Ashkelon I: Introduction and Overview* (1985–2006) (Final Reports of the Leon Levy Expedition to Ashkelon 1; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2008) 333–72, on pp. 341–2; Fig. 1.75.

49 Stager, “Eve of Destruction”, 8.

50 For a concise reassessment of Nebuchadnezzar's military achievements in the Levant, see A. Fantalkin, “In Defense of Nebuchadnezzar II the Warrior”, *AoF* 44 (2017) 201–8, on pp. 202–5.

51 L.E. Stager/J.D. Schloen et al., “Stratigraphic Overview”, in L.E. Stager/J.D. Schloen/D.M. Master (ed.), *Ashkelon I: Introduction and Overview* (1985–2006) (Final Reports of the Leon Levy Expedition to Ashkelon 1; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2008) 215–323, on pp. 279, 312.

52 Fantalkin, “Kislev 604 B.C.E.”, 88, 93–103. Cf. also Fantalkin, “Nebuchadnezzar II”, 202–3. Alexander Fantalkin interprets the East Greek ware found in Ashkelon as the personal property of Greek mercenaries. In addition, he associates the personal names recorded in the two ostraca Ashkelon 1.14 (Cross, “Inscriptions”, 348–9) and Ashkelon 3.3 (Cross, “Inscriptions”, 367) with two mercenaries in Egyptian service. According to Daniel M. Master, East Greek Ware reached the southern Levant and Ashkelon in the course of Ionian commercial expansion (cf. Master, “Nebuchadnezzar”, 91).

53 Master, “Nebuchadnezzar”, 92.



FIGURE 6.2 Excavation director Lawrence E. Stager examining the destruction debris in the marketplace

COURTESY OF THE LEON LEVY EXPEDITION TO ASHKELON

Ashkelon was rebuilt relatively soon after its destruction in 604/3 BCE.⁵⁴ Local coins⁵⁵ and imported pottery from Greece (e.g., Black- and Red-Figured Ware) and Italy (e.g., Italic Red-Figured Ware) testify to the fact that the city regained great economic importance in Persian and early Hellenistic times.⁵⁶

On the *South Tell* (Grid 38, Phase 13), a lavish building with different rooms grouped around a central courtyard was excavated and dated to the first part of the 5th century.⁵⁷ After a period of decline, at least three *insulae* or housing blocks (Grid 38, Phase 10) were built. In another part of the *South Tell* (Grid 50, Phases 6), an early Persian period warehouse was discovered.⁵⁸ In the later part of the 5th century BCE, this building went out of use and the area functioned as a cemetery for dogs.⁵⁹

54 On the archaeology and history of Ashkelon in Persian times, see F. Hagemeyer, "Melting Pot, Salad Bowl, Contact Zone? The Southern Coastal Plain of Israel/Palestine in the 5th–4th Century BCE", in L.C. Jonker/A. Berlejung/I. Cornelius (ed.), *Multilingualism in Ancient Contexts: Perspectives from Ancient Near Eastern and Early Christian Contexts*, (Stellenbosch: African Sun Media, 2021), 94–109, on pp. 97–100 (with further references).

55 Besides the imitation of Greek tetradrachmae, so-called Philisto-Arabian Coins were also produced. The term "Philisto-Arabian Coins" refers to coins minted on behalf of satraps, governors, local rulers, nomadic tribes or independent cities in the southern provinces of the Achaemenid Empire. On the Persian coinage from Ashkelon, cf. H. Gitler/O. Tal, *The Coinage of Philistia of the Fifth and Fourth Centuries BC: A Study of the Earliest Coins of Palestine* (Collezione Numismatiche 6; Milan: Ennerre, 2006), 96–113; Pl. X–XVII. For some new identifications of some Persian period Philistian coins, see H. Gitler/O. Tal, "Reclassifying Persian-Period Philistian Coins: Some New Identifications", *Israel Numismatic Research* 11 (2016), 11–22.

56 Cf. Hagemeyer, "Melting Pot", 99 with fn. 18 (with further literature).

57 Stager/Schloen et al., "Stratigraphic Overview", 283; Fig. 15.60; Hagemeyer, "Melting Pot", 98. In the area of Grid 57, a building temporarily used as a workshop (Phase 6) was excavated (Stager/Schloen et al., "Stratigraphic Overview", 319; Fig. 15.98). The workshop was eventually abandoned (Phase 5). In the late Achaemenid period a new building was erected, which partly follows the ground plan of the older building (Phase 4). Cf. Stager/Schloen et al., "Stratigraphic Overview", 320–1; Fig. 15.99–15.100.

58 Stager/Schloen et al., "Stratigraphic Overview", 313–14; Fig. 15.94.

59 Lawrence E. Stager interprets the dog cemetery as a sacred site for a Phoenician healing cult. However, a corresponding temple has not yet been excavated. Cf. L.E. Stager, "Dogs and Healing in Phoenician Ashkelon", in L.E. Stager/J.D. Schloen/D.M. Master (ed.), *Ashkelon 1: Introduction and Overview (1985–2006)* (Final Reports of the Leon Levy Expedition to Ashkelon 1; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 565–68. For an archaeozoological study of the more than 1000 dog skeletons from the Persian period identified in Ashkelon, see P. Wapnish/B. Hesse, "The Ashkelon Dog Burials: Data and Interpretations", in L.E. Stager/J.D. Schloen/D.M. Master (ed.), *Ashkelon 1: Introduction and Overview (1985–2006)* (Final Reports of the Leon Levy Expedition to Ashkelon 1; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 541–64. Towards the end of the Persian period or at the beginning of the Hellenistic era, another extensive seaside warehouse complex was established in the Grid 50 excavation area (Stager/Schloen et al., "Stratigraphic Overview", 317; Fig. 15.97).

Pseudo-Scylax reports that Ashkelon became “a city of the Tyrians” during the 4th century BCE and served as headquarters of a Tyrian governor (Ps.-Scyl. 1.104). Towards the end of the 4th century BCE, the city belonged to the Ptolemaic Empire. In the early 3rd century BCE, Ashkelon was destroyed and subsequently abandoned, probably in the course of the First Syrian War (274–271 BCE).⁶⁰

3.3 *Gaza in the 7th–4th Century BCE*

The Philistine city of Gaza, which is mentioned in Jer 47:1, 5, can probably be identified with *Tell Ḥarūbe*.⁶¹ This archaeological site, which has been inhabited almost continuously since the Middle Bronze Age, is located in the north-eastern district of modern Gaza, c. 3–3.5 km east of the Mediterranean coast. The ancient city was located at the start and end point of the trade caravans to the Arabian Peninsula, so that *Tell Ḥarūbe* was of great importance for trade, especially but not exclusively in spices and incense.⁶²

⁶⁰ According to Kathleen J. Birney, the destruction can be dated to the time of the First Syrian War, primarily on the basis of coin finds. Two coins of Ptolemy II Philadelphus (r. 283/2–46 BCE) dated to 275/4–1 BCE and 274–1 BCE were found *in situ* in the destruction debris of Grid 38, Phase 10. Cf. K.J. Birney, *Ashkelon 9: The Hellenistic Period* (Final Reports of the Leon Levy Expedition to Ashkelon 9; University Park: Eisenbrauns, 2022), 3. On the two coins, see D.T. Ariel, “Coins”, in K.J. Birney, *Ashkelon 9: The Hellenistic Period* (Final Reports of the Leon Levy Expedition to Ashkelon 9; University Park: Eisenbrauns, 2022), 373–432, on p. 408 cat. nos. 101 and 104.

⁶¹ On this identification, see J.-B. Humbert, “À Gaza, une archéologie abandonnée: 1994–2012”, in J. Kamlah/A. Lichtenberger (ed.), *The Mediterranean Sea and the Southern Levant: Archaeological and Historical Perspectives from Bronze Age to Medieval Times* (ADPV 48; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2021), 186; M. Sadeq, “An Overview of Iron Age Gaza in Light of the Archaeological Evidence”, in J.R. Spencer/R.A. Mullins/A.J. Brody (ed.), *Material Culture Matters: Essays on the Archaeology of the Southern Levant in Honor of Seymour Gitin* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2014), 241. Cf. also Y. Levin, “Gaza”, in D.C. Allison Jr./C. Helmer et al. (ed.), *EBR 9* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2014) 1046–57, on p. 1046.

⁶² On the economic and cultural relations between the Southern Levant and Northern Arabia in the Iron Age, see J.M. Tebes, “Trade and Nomads: The Commercial Relations between the Negev, Edom, and the Mediterranean in the Late Iron Age”, *Journal of the Serbian Archaeological Society* 22 (2006) 45–62; J.M. Tebes, “The Southern Levant and Northern Arabia in the Iron Age”, in K. Radner/N. Moeller/D.T. Potts (ed.), *Oxford History of the Ancient Near East, Vol. V: The Age of Persia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023) 231–98. Cf. also C.B. David, “The Negev Highlands – A Corridor for the Copper and Incense Trade during Nonconsecutive Periods between the Chalcolithic and Roman Periods”, in E. Ben-Yosef/I.W.N. Jones (ed.), *And in Length of Days Understanding” (Job 12:12): Essays on Archaeology in the Eastern Mediterranean and Beyond in Honor of Thomas E. Levy*, vol. 2 (Interdisciplinary Contributions to Archaeology; Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2023) 1227–54.

The archaeological exploration of the *tell* began as early as 1659 with Chevalier Laurent d'Arvieux (1635–1702). The French nobleman tried to find and excavate the Temple of Dagon mentioned in the Book of Judges (Judg 16:23–30) but was unsuccessful.⁶³ Since the 20th century, research into the ancient settlement has hardly been possible due to the extensive medieval and modern building activity and the difficult political situation. William J. Phythian-Adams was only able to examine small areas of *Tell Harūbe* in 1922. Five different fortifications were identified in the course of his investigation.⁶⁴ More recent surveys were carried out on a very small scale under the direction of Joanne Clarke, Louise Steel and Moain Sadeq in the 1990s.⁶⁵ Of greater significance was the archaeological exploration of *el-Blaḥiye* (Anthedon), just 3 km south of *Tell Harūbe* on the Mediterranean coast. The excavations at the harbour of ancient Gaza (see below) were carried out between 1995 and 2012 under the direction of Jean-Baptiste Humbert and Moain Sadeq.⁶⁶

In terms of historical development, Gaza was transformed into an Assyrian vassal kingdom in the late 8th century BCE. After the death of Ashurbanipal (669–631 BCE), the city and its surrounding area came under Egyptian control during the reign of Psamtik I (664–610 BCE).⁶⁷ Towards the end of the 7th century, Gaza was conquered by Nebuchadnezzar II. A Babylonian vassal may have ruled the city until the early 6th century BCE. At least in Prism EŠ 7834⁶⁸ an anonymous king of Gaza (LUGAL ša KUR.ḫa-az-z[a-ti], c. vii* (vi'), l. 24') is

63 M. Sadeq, "Iron Age Gaza", 241. On Dagon, see now Hagemeyer "Sie kamen, sahen, siegten [...]?", 56–7. Cf. also J.P. Emanuel, "Dagon Our God: Iron I Philistine Cult in Text and Archaeology", *JANER* 16 (2016) 22–66; L. Feliu, "Dagon: I. Ancient Near East and Hebrew Bible/Old Testament", in D.C. Allison Jr./H.-J. Klauck et al. (ed.), *EBR* 6, (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2013), 2–3.

64 On the results, see W.J. Phythian-Adams, "Reports on the Soundings at Gaza, etc.", *PEQFS* 55 (1923) 11–17; W.J. Phythian-Adams, "Second Report on the Soundings at Gaza", *PEQFS* 55 (1923) 18–30; W.J. Phythian-Adams, "The Problem of 'Deserted Gaza'", *PEQFS* 55 (1923) 30–6.

65 J. Clarke/L. Steel/M. Sadeq, "Gaza Research Project: 1998 Survey of the Old City of Gaza", *Levant* 36 (2004) 31–6.

66 On the results, see Humbert, "Gaza", 185–244.

67 On the history and archaeology of Gaza in the Iron Age, see A. Ovadiah, "Gaza", in E. Stern (ed.) *NEAEHL* 2 (Jerusalem: The Israel Exploration Society & Carta, 1993) 464–7; M. Sadeq, "Iron Age Gaza", 239–53.

68 *Editio princeps*: E. Unger, *Babylon: Die heilige Stadt nach der Beschreibung der Babylonier* (Berlin/Leipzig: De Gruyter, 1931), 35–6, 282–94; Pl. 52–6. Cf. also the new edition with commentary and translation in R. Da Riva, "Nebuchadnezzar II's Prism (EŠ 7834): A new Edition", *ZA* 103 (2013), 196–229, on pp. 208–21; Fig. 1–12.

mentioned in a list of Syro-Palestinian client rulers (c. vii* (vi'), l. 23'–29').⁶⁹ Only a few years later, the city was subjugated by Necho II (610–595 BCE) or Psamtik II (595–589 BCE).⁷⁰

With regard to archaeological finds, no architectural structures are known for *Tell Ḥarūbe* that date with certainty from the 8th–6th century BCE. In *el-Blaḥiye* (Anthedon), a section of a massive mudbrick wall/rampart (I Zone sud – Niv. I/7) was uncovered in the area of the *ville haute* (Chantier A [= Field A]).⁷¹ The fortification was built in the middle of the 8th century BCE and was reinforced towards the end of the 8th century BCE.⁷²

Persian rule over Gaza began with the conquest of the Neo-Babylonian Empire by Cyrus II in 539 BCE.⁷³ According to H. Jacob Katzenstein, a Persian garrison was stationed in the city and the area belonged to the Fifth Persian Satrapy.⁷⁴ Siegfried Mittmann and others consider it plausible that the Persians handed Gaza over to the Arabs or rather Qedar. As the start and end point of the trade caravans to Northern Arabia, the city enjoyed tax and customs exemption.⁷⁵ Gaza was finally conquered by Alexander the Great in 332 BCE from the hands of the Persian commander Batis (Arr. *Exped. Alex.* 2.25.4, Curt. 4.6.7–25, Jos. *Ant.* 11.320).⁷⁶

There is archaeological evidence for the use of local coins beginning in the middle of the 5th century BCE, which may have been minted directly in *Tell Ḥarūbe*.⁷⁷ It is possible that the most recent wall uncovered on the *tell* by William J. Phythian Adams dates from the late Persian period and was built in

69 For a discussion of Prism EŞ 7834, c. vii* (vi'), l. 23'–29, see Hagemeyer, *Aschdod und Jerusalem*, 218–19 with further literature cited in fn. 296–305.

70 See section 4.2 for more detail and references.

71 Humbert, “Gaza”, 195–8; Figs. 6–7.

72 Humbert, “Gaza”, 198.

73 On the literary sources dealing with the history of Gaza in the Persian period, see H.J. Katzenstein, “Gaza in the Persian Period”, *Transeu* 1 (1989) 67–86.

74 Katzenstein, “Gaza in the Persian Period”, 70–1, 79. Cf. also Gitler/Tal, *Coinage of Philistia*, 41 for further literature.

75 S. Mittmann, “Die Küste Palästinas bei Herodot”, *ZDPV* 99 (1983) 130–40, on pp. 136–9. For a similar position, cf. Ovadiah, “Gaza”, 464; Y. Levin, “The Southern Frontier of Yehud and the Creation of Idumea”, in Y. Levin (ed.), *A Time of Change: Judah and its Neighbours in the Persian and Early Hellenistic Period* (LSTS 65; London: T & T Clark, 2007), 239–52, on pp. 248–49.

76 Josephus calls Batis by the name “Babemesis”. Quintus Curtius Rufus refers to the city commander as “Betis”.

77 On the Persian coins from Gaza, see Gitler/Tal, *Coinage of Philistia*, 114–45; Pl. XVIII–XXXII. Cf. also L. Mildenberg, “Gaza Mint Authorities in Persian Time: Preliminary Studies of the Local Coinage in the Fifth Persian Satrapy, Part 4”, *Transeu* 2 (1990) 137–46, on pp. 139–40.

preparation for an invasion by Alexander the Great.⁷⁸ In *el-Blaḥīye* (Anthedon), residential buildings (with two sub-phases) from the (late) 6th–5th century BCE (I Zone sud – Niv. I/6 a and Niv. I/6 b) have been discovered in the area of the *ville haute* (Chantier A [= Field A]).⁷⁹ The houses were built from unfired, standardised mud bricks (40 × 40 × 12 cm) on weak foundations. In addition to local pottery, numerous imports (Attic, East Greek and Cypriot ware) have been identified.⁸⁰ After a hiatus in settlement, new dwellings made of small fieldstones were erected during the 4th–3rd century BCE (I Zone sud – Niv. I/5).⁸¹

In the *ville basse*, almost exclusively architecture from the Hellenistic-Roman period has been excavated to date. Only in Chantier F (= Field F), the remains of a large harbour warehouse from the 5th–4th century BCE (II Zone North – Niv. II/29) have been partially uncovered. For this building, mud bricks with the same dimensions as those excavated in the *ville haute* (40 × 40 × 12 cm) were used (see above for *ville haute*).⁸² The archaeological finds therefore point to a planned expansion of *el-Blaḥīye* (Anthedon) in Persian times, as Gaza/*Tell Harūbe* apparently required a larger port during this period.

4 Historical and Literary-historical Considerations

4.1 *The Core of the Oracle (Jer 47:2–7)*

Jer 47:2–7 (or at least Jer 47:2–5) is usually identified as the literary core of the oracle against the Philistines. In addition, the verses are frequently attributed to the authorship of the prophet Jeremiah. For John Bright, the “exceedingly vivid” character of the text speaks in favour of its historical authenticity and Jeremianic origin.⁸³ Eris Peels argues similarly, interpreting Jer 47:2–7 (with the exception of the clause concerning Sidon and Tyre in v. 4a) as a text written

78 Gitler/Tal, *Coinage of Philistia*, 41; M. Sadeq, “Iron Age Gaza”, 241.

79 Humbert, “Gaza”, 193–5; Fig. 4–5.

80 J.-B. Humbert/M. Sadeq, “Fouilles de Blakhiyah – Anthédon”, in J.-B. Humbert (ed.), *Gaza Méditerranéenne: Histoire et archéologie en Palestine*, (Paris: Errance, 2000), 105–20, on pp. 105–6, 112–17. Cf. also Gitler/Tal, *Coinage of Philistia*, 41–2.

81 Humbert, “Gaza”, 193.

82 Humbert, “Gaza”, 237–40; Fig. 36.

83 J. Bright, *Jeremiah: A new Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 21; New York: Doubleday, 1965), 311. William L. Holladay (Holladay, *Jeremiah*, 336), Beat Huwlyer (Huwlyer, *Jeremia*, 140) and Jack R. Lundbom (Lundbom, *Jeremiah* 37–52, 231) attribute (at least) Jer 47:2–5 to the authorship of Jeremiah.

by Jeremiah due to the thematic, stylistic and rhetorical similarities with Jer 4–6 and Jer 46.⁸⁴ According to Werner H. Schmidt, Jeremiah wrote the oracle, which implies a literary relationship with Isaianic texts and the idea that Yahweh is the driving force behind developments in world history. The literary motif of the threat posed by an enemy from the north and the “lively, evocative style with an element of lament” also point to Jeremiah’s authorship.⁸⁵

On the basis of the preceding historical and archaeological analysis (see above), it can be considered fairly certain that in Jer 47:4–5 and Jer 47:7 the author explicitly refers to the destruction of Ashkelon in 604/3 BCE.⁸⁶ In the same vein, Lawrence E. Stager⁸⁷ interprets Jer 47:4–5 as a reflection of Nebuchadnezzar II’s military campaign against Ashkelon. In his opinion, the oracle appeals to Jehoiakim of Judah (608–598 BCE) to prevent the Judean king from the consequences of an anti-Babylonian and pro-Egyptian policy. Hermann-Josef Stipp⁸⁸ holds the view that the oracle was composed on the occasion of the Babylonian destruction of Ashkelon as a warning to the Judean elites not to secede from the supremacy of Nebuchadnezzar II. Although Jack R. Lundbom⁸⁹ and Beat Huwyl⁹⁰ opt in favour of a compilation of Jer 47:2–7 before 604/3 BCE, they likewise contextualise the oracle in the period of the Babylonian threat to the Levant during the last years of the 7th century BCE.

84 Peels, “Pharaoh”, 311.

85 W.H. Schmidt, *Das Buch Jeremia: Kapitel 21–52* (ATD 21; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 292. Ernst Kutsch identifies Jer 47:2, 3b, 4aα.b as the basic layer of the oracle, in which the annihilation of the Philistines by an enemy from the north is announced. This basic layer has undergone several expansions. Jer 47:6–7 represents the first addition, which was added after 604 BCE to emphasise the fulfilment of the words of Jer 47:2, 3b, 4aα.b. After the campaign of Pharaoh Apries/Hophra (589–70 BCE) against Sidon and a naval operation against Tyre reported by Herodotus (Hdt. II.161), a later redactor added the verses Jer 47:1b, 3a, 4aβ.γ, (5), which refer to an Egyptian advance into the Levant. For more detail, see E. Kutsch, “... denn Jahwe vernichtet die Philister’: Erwägungen zu Jer 47,1–7”, in J. Jeremias/L. Peritt (ed.), *Die Botschaft und die Boten: Festschrift für Hans Walter Wolff zum 70. Geburtstag* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchner Verlag, 1981), 253–67.

86 Abraham Malamat argues differently, arguing that the text refers to the alleged invasion of Palestine by the Scythians c. 609 BCE, as mentioned in Herodotus (Hdt. I.105). Cf. A. Malamat, “The Historical Setting of Two Biblical Prophecies on the Nations”, *IEJ* 1 (1950–1951), 149–59, on pp. 155–158.

87 Stager, “Eve of Destruction”, 4.

88 Stipp, *Jeremia* 25–52, 673. Cf. also Rudolph, *Jeremia*, 257; Bright, *Jeremiah*, 312; Holladay, *Jeremiah*, 337.

89 Lundbom, *Jeremiah* 37–52, 234, 242.

90 Huwyl, *Jeremia*, 141.

4.2 *The Heading of the Oracle (Jer 47:1)*

Previous scholarship has paid greater attention to the fact that Jer 47:1 presupposes a conquest of Philistia (or at least the city of Gaza) by Egypt and not by Babylonia. According to Eric Peels, the phrase *בטרם יכה פרעה את-עזה*, (“before Pharaoh seized Gaza”, v. 1b) most likely refers to the conquest of Gaza from Babylonian hands by Pharaoh Necho II (610–595 BCE) in 601/0 BCE.⁹¹ H. Jacob Katzenstein argues similarly, concluding from Jer 47:1, references in Herodotus (Hdt. II.159) and the Babylonian Chronicle (on the Babylonian campaign of the year 604/3 BCE)⁹² that Gaza had been a Neo-Babylonian vassal since the end of the 7th century BCE. After the retreat of the Babylonian army from Egypt, the city would have been reoccupied by Egyptian troops in 601/0 BCE.⁹³ In fact, Herodotus (Hdt. II.159) mentions a conquest of the city of *Καδυτίς* by Necho II after the Pharaoh had defeated the Syrians, who are usually identified with the Babylonians, at *Μαγδωλος*. While *Καδυτίς* is generally equated with Gaza, more recent research identifies *Μαγδωλος* with the Egyptian border town of Migdol and less frequently with Megiddo.⁹⁴

However, it is also conceivable that the note in Jer 47:1b points to an earlier or later Egyptian conquest of Gaza. A reference to a capture of the coastal city by Psamtik I (664–610 BCE) is a possible option. At least in Ostrakon Karnak LS 462.4 and also in Herodotus (Hdt. II.157) a campaign of this Pharaoh against Ashdod (north of Gaza) is attested for the year 635 BCE.⁹⁵ Necho II could have occupied Gaza as early as 609 BCE, either after the Battle of Haran or immediately after the conflict with Josiah of Judah (2 Kgs 23:29–30;

91 Peels, “Pharaoh”, 314. Cf. also B. Schipper, *Israel und Ägypten in der Königszeit: Die kulturellen Kontakte von Salomo bis zum Fall Jerusalems* (OBO 170; Freiburg (Switzerland): Universitätsverlag/Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999), 240 fn. 260; A.M. Wilson-Wright, *Jeremiah's Egypt: Prophetic Reflections on the Saite Period* (ANEM 30; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2023), 24.

92 On this, see section 3.2.

93 H.J. Katzenstein, “Gaza in the Neo-Babylonian Period (626–539 B.C.E.)”, *Transeu* 7 (1994) 35–49, on p. 43. Abraham Malamat (cf. Malamat, “Historical Setting”, 155–8) considers a conquest of Gaza by Psamtik I (664–10 BCE) or Necho II (610–595 BCE). Eric Peels (cf. Peels, “Pharaoh”, 311–20) offers an overview of other historical possibilities for identifying the Pharaoh in question.

94 H.J. Katzenstein, “Before Pharaoh Conquered Gaza (Jeremiah XLVII 1)”, *VT* 33 (1983) 249–51, on p. 249; Lundbom, *Jeremiah* 37–52, 233; Huwylar, *Jeremia*, 143. Cf. also Fantalkin, “Nebuchadnezzar II”, 204–5 with fn. 11. In older research, *Μαγδωλος* was equated with Megiddo and *Καδυτίς* with Kadesh on the Orontes. Cf., e.g., P. Volz, *Der Prophet Jeremia* (KAT 10; Leipzig/Erlangen: Deichertsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1922), 398; Malamat, “Historical Setting”, 154 fn. 16; Kutsch, “Philister”, 257.

95 On the campaign against Ashdod in 635 BCE, see Hagemeyer, *Aschdod und Jerusalem*, 103, 109–10.

2 Chr 35:20–24).⁹⁶ It is also possible, albeit unlikely, that the city was successfully besieged in 605 BCE during the retreat of the Egyptian army after the defeat at the Battle of Carchemish.⁹⁷ However, Jer 47:1b could as well refer to the expedition of Psamtik II (595–589 BC) to Syro-Palestine in 592 BCE.⁹⁸ Or, like Pierre-Maurice Bogaert, one might think of a very late event, in particular the well-attested capture of Gaza by Ptolemy I Soter (367/6–283/2 BCE) in 312 BCE (Diod. 19.80–86; Jos. C. Ap. 1.22; Plut. Demetr. 5).⁹⁹

With regard to the various historical scenarios, Beat Huwyler has already recognised that there are no clear indications, such as the name of Pharaoh, to link the note in Jer 47:1b to a specific event.¹⁰⁰ The interpretation is further complicated by the fact that the Alexandrian text of Jer^G 29:1 (= Jer^{MT} 47:1) consists only of the phrase ἐπὶ τοῦς ἀλλοφύλους (“concerning/against the Philistines”) and apparently knows nothing of an Egyptian conquest of Gaza.¹⁰¹

96 Huwyler, *Jeremia*, 143.

97 E.g., Malamat, “Historical Setting”, 155 fn. 17; Kutsch, “Philister”, 257. However, Jer 47:1 could also allude to a conquest of Gaza by Pharaoh Apries/Hophra (589–70 BCE), who may have taken the city on the march after his campaign against Sidon and Tyre (Hdt. II.161). Cf. Peels, “Pharaoh”, 315.

98 In the opinion of Bernd Schipper, this endeavour mentioned in Papyrus Rylands 9 was a deliberate demonstration of pharaonic power intended to emphasise Egypt's claim to Syro-Palestine vis-à-vis Babylonia. Cf. B. Schipper, *Israel und Ägypten*, 242–4. For a similar view, see D. Kahn, “Some Remarks on the Foreign Policy of Psammetichus II in the Levant (595–589 B.C.)”, *JEH* 1 (2008) 139–57, on pp. 148–53. Cf. also Wilson-Wright, *Jeremiah's Egypt*, 26–7 (with further references).

99 P.-M. Bogaert, “Relecture et déplacement de l'oracle contre les Philistines: Pour une datation de la rédaction longue (*TM*) du livre de Jérémie”, in Institut catholique de Paris, Département des études bibliques (ed.), *La vie de la Parole: De l'Ancien au Nouveau Testament: Études d'exégèse et d'herméneutique bibliques offertes à Pierre GreLOT professeur à l'Institut Catholique de Paris* (Paris: Declée, 1987), 146. According to Pierre-Maurice Bogaert, the mention of Tyre and Sidon in v. 4 refers to the change in the political system from aristocratic rule to republics (Tyre: 274 BCE; Sidon: 262/1 BCE).

100 Huwyler, *Jeremia*, 145. Werner H. Schmidt makes a similar argument. Cf. Schmidt, *Jeremia* 21–52, 291.

101 This fact has already led scholars such as Wolfgang Werner (Werner, *Jeremia*, 159) to assume that Jer^{MT} 47:1b represents a secondary addendum. See also Rudolph, *Jeremia*, 311. According to Beat Huwyler (Huwyler, *Jeremia*, 149), the clause concerning Gaza in Jer^{MT} 47:1 was added because later literati saw the Egyptians as the successors of the Babylonians with regard to the execution of the divine will. For the opinion that Jer^G 29:1 has preserved the original text, see H.-J. Stipp, *Das masoretische und alexandrinische Sondergut des Jeremiabuches: Textgeschichtlicher Rang, Eigenarten, Triebkräfte* (OBO 136; Freiburg (Switzerland): Universitätsverlag/Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994), 74.

5 Concluding Discussion

The oracle of Jer 47 seems to be a largely consistent text that portrays the Philistines as “foreigners” and “ultimate others” in contrast to Israel/Judah.¹⁰² Perhaps the author of the basic textual layer possessed very vague knowledge of the early Iron Age Philistine culture. His reference to the island of Caphtor (Jer 47:4b) could be understood as a distant memory of allochthonous influences from the west that reached the Levantine coastal plain at the transition from the Late Bronze Age to the Iron Age.

However, the oracle's point of reference is not to be found in the early Iron Age, but in the late 7th century BCE. Undoubtedly, Jer 47:2–7 reflects the Neo-Babylonian destruction of Ashkelon. It should be emphasised that the described suffering of the coastal dwellers is not connected with negative actions towards Judah and the Judeans.¹⁰³ In contrast to other oracles directed against the Philistine coast, e.g., Amos 1:6–8 and Zeph 2:4–6,¹⁰⁴ the writer takes a (largely) unbiased stance. The text is characterised neither by clearly nationalistic or xenophobic tendencies nor by malicious joy in view of the destruction of Ashkelon and Gaza. Nor is the author (in contrast to the scribe of e.g., Zeph 2:7)¹⁰⁵ interested in the economic potential of the coastal cities, which is well attested archaeologically for both the late Iron Age and the Persian period.

In the *narrative world* of the oracle, the Philistine coastal plain seems to serve as a generic object of projection to illustrate the agency of Yahweh throughout the world, including the Mediterranean coast. The neutral and to some extent distanced attitude towards the coastal dwellers could indicate that Jer 47:(1a.)2–7 was written several years after the events of 604/3 BCE, probably during the Babylonian exile (at the earliest). The purpose of the composition may have been to supplement an older, perhaps pre-exilic collection (Jer *46–51) with a reference to the traditional arch-enemies of Israel/Judah.

As far as the note in Jer 47:1b about the conquest of Gaza is concerned, two possibilities are envisaged: First, the clause may have been part of the basic text of the oracle or a very early addition. Second, the verse was inserted as a very late addendum. Regarding the first option, the note probably refers to

¹⁰² The linking of Jer 47:2–5 and Jer 47:6–7 by means of the rhetorical questions centred in v. 5 and v. 6a does not reveal any literary break. Therefore, the poem of Jer 47:6–7 probably already belonged to the basic layer of Jer *47.

¹⁰³ For this observation, see Huwylar, *Jeremia*, 142. Georg Fischer takes the opposite view. In his opinion, the author of Jer 47:1–7 assumed that the Philistines' misconduct vis-à-vis Judah was well known. Cf. Fischer, *Jeremia*, 497.

¹⁰⁴ See most recently Hagemeyer, *Aschdod und Jerusalem*, 220–5, 231–9.

¹⁰⁵ On Zeph 2:7 and its historical background, see Hagemeyer, *Aschdod und Jerusalem*, 238–9.

a conquest of Gaza by Necho II (probably in 601/0 BCE) or Psamtik II (in 592 BCE). We would deal with the same time horizon (i.e., “around 600 BCE”) that serves as the frame of reference for the following verses. If this is the case, the author has supplemented the traditional literary motif of an “enemy from the north” with the concept of an “enemy from the south.” The military activity of the Egyptians would thus have been presented as part of the divine plan to destroy the Philistine coast.

As far as the second possibility is concerned, Jer 47:1b was added very late, perhaps in early Hellenistic times. It is quite possible that a redactor felt the need to update the oracle after the conquest of Gaza by Ptolemy I Soter in 312 BCE. During the Ptolemaic period, when the memory of the conquest of Ashkelon in 604/3 BCE had already faded, the idea of a threat to Syro-Palestine from Babylonia was probably no longer plausible. The editor thus adapted the scenario originally presented in Jer 47 to the current political conditions of his time.¹⁰⁶ In any case, by referring to an anonymous Pharaoh, the scribe has deliberately obscured the historical background of the verse in question. A precise interpretation of Jer 47:1b is therefore virtually impossible.

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¹⁰⁶ The absence of any mention of Gaza in the Alexandrian text of Jer^G 29:1 (= Jer^{MT} 47:1) may argue in favour of a very late addition. The Greek version was probably composed using an older, non-Masoretic Hebrew *Vorlage*.

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Moab at the End of the Iron Age: The Political and Economic Situation

Margreet L. Steiner

1 Moab in Jeremiah's Prophecy

Reading the prophecies against Moab proved to be an enlightening experience for me, as it is not one of the biblical texts that is frequently read in a church setting or ever discussed at my Protestant school. The text essentially enumerates the events that will transpire in Moab, delineating which towns will be destroyed and who will experience the anguish. Most of the archaeological research is focussed on the identification of the place names mentioned in the text.¹ Some sites are relatively straightforward to identify, such as Hesban, Dhiban, Nebo and Aroer; for many others, there are a number of proposed locations, none of which can be considered definitive. There is consensus among scholars, however, that the majority of these sites are to be located in the northern part of Moab, that is to say, north of the Wadi Mujib.² Whether this indicates that the Moab referred to in the biblical text was confined to the Dhiban Plateau at the end of the Iron Age, that the northern part of Moab was the most well-known to the biblical writers, or for some other reason, is irrelevant. Jeremiah's text is not a geographical-political textbook.

A comparison of Jeremiah's prophecy on Moab with those concerning other regions reveals a focus on the wealth of Moab. In Jeremiah 48:3, looting is mentioned, while verses 7 and 32–33 focus on Moab's riches. Verses 7 and 32–33 bemoan the fruits, grapevines and wine, orchards and fields of Moab. Verses 36 and 37 again refer to the wealth gained by the Moabites. The other prophecies do not mention wealth as frequently or at all. Does this indicate that Moab was more prosperous than Judah at the time of Jeremiah? Was Moab more inclined to display its opulence and boast about its riches, as the text seems to imply? Alternatively, was Jeremiah simply more aware of Moab's wealth due to

1 For an overview of this research, see B. MacDonald, *"East of the Jordan": Territories and Sites of the Hebrew Scriptures* (ASOR 6; Boston: American Schools of Oriental Research, 2000, 175–82

2 MacDonald, *East*, 183.

its proximity? This is a topic that warrants further investigation, and archaeological research may provide insights into this matter.

2 The Political Situation

It is commonly accepted that the prophecies attributed to Jeremiah were composed either at the end of the Iron Age (circa 600 BCE) or the beginning of the Persian Period (second half of the 6th century BCE). The textual evidence for Moab from 600–500 BCE is derived mainly from the Bible, as there is a paucity of information from Babylonian and Persian sources regarding the region. Biblical texts indicate that both Moab and Ammon provided military assistance to the king of Babylon during the revolt of Judah under the rule of Jehoiakim (2 Kings 24:1–2). Subsequently, the Moabite king participated in an insurrection against Babylon (Jer. 27:3).

According to Josephus, in the 23rd year of his reign (582 BCE), King Nebuchadnezzar undertook a campaign against the Transjordanian lands and crushed the revolt, thereby destroying many of the Moabite and Ammonite towns (Jos., *Ant.*, 10:181). It is possible that Moab became part of a Babylonian province at this time; however, some scholars prefer to connect the destruction of the towns and the potential transfer into a province with King Naibonides between 553 and 543 BCE.³ It seems reasonable to conclude that the prophecies in Jeremiah 48 were intended as a warning for or a description of the impending destruction.

3 Settlement Patterns

The number of excavated sites in Moab is relatively limited, and even fewer have been published in their final form. From the Iron II period (9th–6th centuries BCE), several important towns have been unearthed, yet the political and economic situation remains unclear. Thus for the end of the Iron Age (Iron IIC, 7th – early 6th centuries BCE), only a fragmented picture can be presented.

As the capital of Mesha's kingdom, Dhiban is believed to have been a major site from at least the second half of the 9th century BCE until the end of the Iron Age, when it was either destroyed or abandoned. The site has yielded only

3 B. Routledge, *Moab in the Iron Age: Hegemony, Polity and Archaeology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2004), 211.

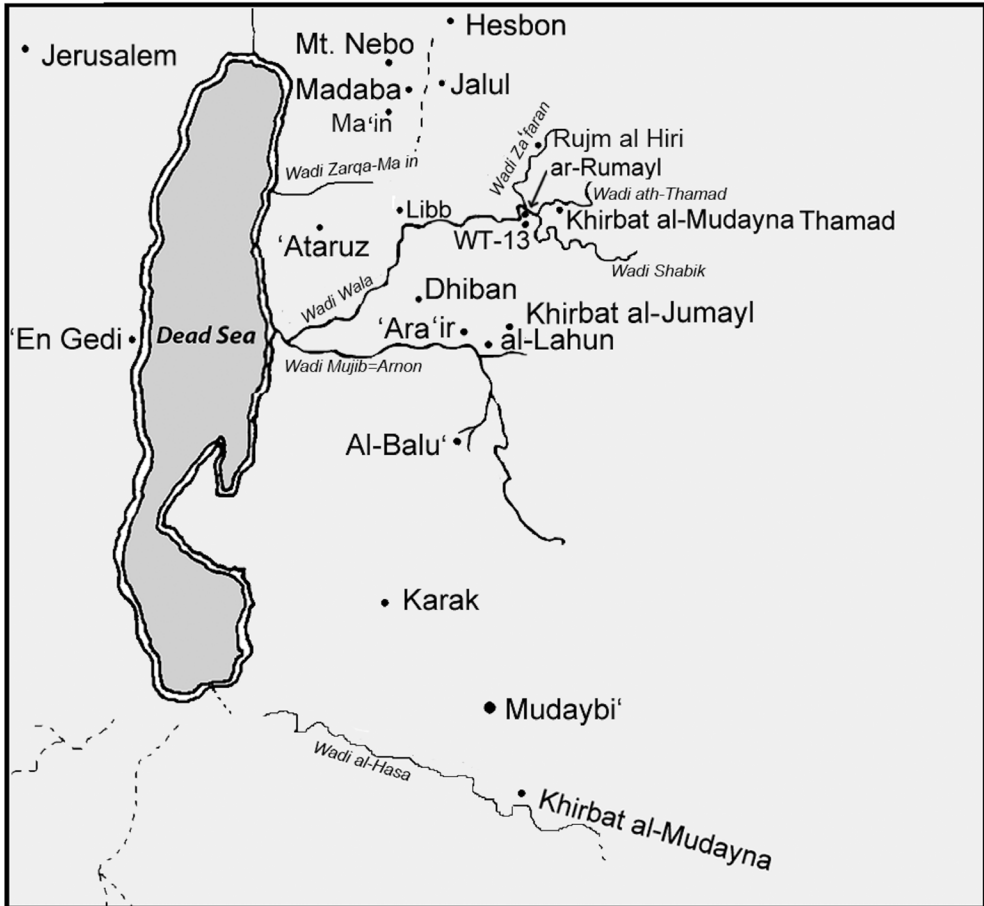


FIGURE 7.1 Map of sites mentioned in the text
COURTESY WADI THAMAD PROJECT

a limited number of architectural remains dating to the 7th century BCE. The majority of the buildings and fortifications that have been excavated date from the latter part of the Iron IIB period, specifically the 8th century BCE. In his review of the large building that Morton excavated at the north site of the tell, Routledge concludes that the pottery found on the latest clean surface in the building dates to the 8th century BCE, and that the building was no longer in use in the late 7th and early 6th centuries BCE.⁴ The majority of Iron IIC pottery published from Dhiban does not originate from clean contexts; it has been

⁴ Routledge, *Moab*, 164.

recovered from fills and tombs. This pottery is primarily composed of common household wares.⁵ The tombs yielded a number of luxury items, including bronze and silver jewellery, cylinder seals, and pendant beads, as well as an anthropoid coffin.⁶ However, it is challenging to assign these objects to either the Iron IIB or Iron IIC periods. Additionally, more than fifty so-called Cypro-Phoenician juglets were discovered in these tombs. These juglets are imitations of the Cypriot black-on-red juglets and are commonly dated to the 9th and 8th centuries BCE.⁷ However, at Mudayna Thamad some hundred fragments were found in clear 7th century contexts, suggesting that (part of) the Dhiban collection may have originated from that period as well. We may conclude that Dhiban was still occupied at the end of the 7th century but possibly on a smaller scale than in the preceding Iron IIB period.

It appears that Mukkhayat (ancient Nebo) was occupied until the end of the Iron Age as well, although the excavation of Iron Age layers has only recently commenced.⁸ The two tombs in the vicinity yielded a considerable quantity of pottery, in addition to personal jewellery of bronze, iron, and, in one instance, silver.⁹ Approximately two hundred Cypro-Phoenician juglets were discovered within these tombs.

Khirbet Ataruz, which boasts a substantial Iron IIA/B temple, was deserted in Iron IIC.¹⁰ Madaba, too, underwent a significant transformation, shrinking from a 13 ha walled town in Iron IIB to a modest settlement in Iron IIC.¹¹ It is notable that no mention is made of any luxury or prestige items. The assessment of Khirbet al-Balua in the Wadi Mujib area is hindered by the ongoing

- 5 A.D. Tushingham, *The Excavations at Dibon (Dhibân) in Moab. The Third Campaign 1952–53* (AASOR 40, Cambridge, MA: ASOR 1972).
- 6 F.V. Winnett/W. L. Reed, *The Excavations at Dibon (Dhibân) in Moab, Part 1: The First Campaign, 1950–1951; Part 2: The Second Campaign, 1952* (AASOR 36–37 for 1957–1958, New Haven: American Schools of Oriental Research 1964).
- 7 M.L. Steiner, “The Case of the Enigmatic ‘Cypro-Phoenician’ Juglets in Moab”, in J. Ebeling/P. Guillaume (ed.), *The Woman in the Pith Helmet: A Tribute to Archaeologist Norma Franklin* (Atlanta, GA: Lockwood, 2020), 279–90.
- 8 D. Foran et al., “Analyzing and Integrating Legacy Data at Khirbat al-Mukhayyat, Jordan”, *JEMAHS* 12 (2024) 150–71.
- 9 S. Saller, “The Iron Age Tombs at Nebo, Jordan”, *Liber Annuus* 16 (1966) 165–298.
- 10 C. Ji, “Khirbat ‘Ataruz: An Interim Overview of the 10 Years of Archaeological Architectural Findings”, *ADAJ* 55 (2011) 561–79.
- 11 T.P. Harrison/D. Foran/A. Graham, “Investigating 5,000 Years of Urban History: The Tall Madaba Archaeological Project”, in T. Levy/P.M. M. Daviau/R.W. Younker/M. Shaer (ed.), *Crossing Jordan: North American Contributions to the Archaeology of Jordan* (London: Equinox 2007) 143–52.

publication of its findings. It appears that the qasr and the casemate wall enclosing a minimum of 6.5 hectares of the site were constructed during the Iron IIB period, while a new quarter of at least 5.5 hectares to the east side of the town may have been erected during the Iron IIC period, also encircled by a casemate wall.¹² However, the excavation of the area is still incomplete, so it is not possible to be certain of the full picture. The majority of the material excavated from the Iron IIC period consists of household pottery and agricultural tools and installations.

Both Tall Jalul and Hesban were occupied throughout the Late Iron Age and the Persian period, but it seems that they were not part of Moab during this time. Instead, they belonged to the Ammonite cultural and political sphere.¹³

Two archaeological sites in the Wadi Thamad have recently been published: Mudayna Thamad¹⁴ and site WT-13.¹⁵ Mudayna Thamad is a modestly sized, heavily fortified site, encompassing a surface area of less than 1 ha within its walls. It dates from the latter half of the 8th century until the conclusion of the Iron Age, when it was destroyed. WT-13 is an open-air cultic site situated 3 km to the west of Mudayna Thamad. The site yielded a considerable quantity of artefacts, predominantly of a cultic nature, along with pottery sherds. The site was in use during the 8th and 7th centuries BCE. Further details can be found below.

A number of larger sites have only been identified through surveys and have yet to be excavated. Noteworthy are Tall Ma'in, which may have encompassed an area of 6–10 hectares, and Libb, which could have been as large as 15–20 hectares, both half way from Nebo to Dhiban. The pottery has been dated to the Iron II period.¹⁶ The sites of Khirbet al-Heri and Khirbat Rumayl in the Wadi Thamad area were heavily fortified during the Iron II period.¹⁷ However,

- 12 U. Worschech, "City Planning and Architecture at the Iron Age City of al-Balu in Central Jordan", *SHAJ V* (1995) 145–9; K. Bramlett/M. Roddy/C. Tyson/F. Ninow, "The Qasr at Balu'a" in E. Ben-Yosef/I.W.N. Jones (ed.), *And in length of days understanding" (Job 12:12) – Essays on Archaeology in the 21st Century in Honor of Thomas E. Levy*. (Interdisciplinary Contributions to Archaeology; Cham: Springer Nature, 2023) 923–42.
- 13 P. Bienkowski, "Transjordan in the Persian Period: The Archaeological Evidence and Patterns of Occupation", in B. Hensel (ed.), *Transjordan and the Southern Levant; New Approaches Regarding the Iron Age and the Persian Period from Hebrew Bible Studies and Archaeology* (ArchB 8; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2024) 235–61.
- 14 R. Chadwick et al., *The Iron Age Town of Mudayna Thamad, Jordan; Excavations of the fortifications and northern sector (1995–2012)* (Oxford: BAR, 2024).
- 15 P.M.M. Daviau, *A Wayside Shrine in Northern Moab. Excavations in the Wadi ath-Thamad*. (Wadi ath-Thamad Project I; Oxford: Oxbow, 2017).
- 16 Bramlett, personal communication.
- 17 Daviau, *Shrine*, 254–59.

due to the absence of archaeological excavations at these locations, it remains challenging to trace the developments that occurred there.

The precise dating of several fortresses erected at the end of the Iron Age is still in progress. At Khirbat al-Lahun, situated in the Wadi Mujib region, a modest fortress measuring $33/37 \times 43$ metres in size was unearthed atop the Iron I settlement. An Egyptian New Year bottle was discovered at the site, dating to the Saite period (7th century BCE). This, along with the pottery, indicates that the small fortress was in use during the Iron IIC period.¹⁸ At Ara'ir, also situated in the Wadi Mujib region, a fortress measuring 50×50 metres may have been constructed.¹⁹ The larger fortress at Khirbat al-Mudaybi, situated to the southeast of the Karak plateau, is estimated to have been constructed and occupied during the seventh century BCE.²⁰

Ultimately, the precise nature of the settlement organisation at the end of the Iron Age remains unclear. Some large sites may have been in a state of decline during the Iron IIC period (Ataruz, Dhiban), while others experienced growth (Balua) or were newly constructed (the fortresses). Some sites continued in use from the latter part of the eighth into the seventh century BCE, including Mudayna Thamad, site WT-13 and Mukkhatat. Texts are of limited use in this regard. Apart from a few minor inscriptions on household items, the principal literary source for Moab is the Mesha stele which dates from the 9th century BCE. Biblical texts, such as the one that inspired this volume, may offer insights, but it remains unclear how accurately they depict the circumstances of the period they describe. If my reading of the excavated material is correct it suggests that in Iron IIC the northern part of Moab (Madaba, Ataruz, Dhiban) experienced a decline in importance, while the focus shifted to the south (Balua) and east (Mudayna Thamad). However, it is possible that I am reading too much in too little evidence.

It is noteworthy that large Moabite sites situated along the King's Highway in Iron IIB, such as Madaba and Dhiban, with surface areas of 13 and 12 hectares respectively, appear to have diminished in size during Iron IIC. Conversely,

- 18 D. Homès-Fredericq, "Un goulot de bouteille de Nouvel An, trouvé à Lahun (en Jordanie)", *StPNO* II (1982) 79–90; D. Homès-Fredericq, "The Iron Age II Fortress of Lahun (Moab)", in P. Bienkowski (ed.), *Studies on Iron Age Moab and Neighbouring Areas in Honour of Michèle Daviau* (ANESup 29; Leuven: Peeters 2009) 165–82; M.L. Steiner, "The Iron I Pottery from Khirbat al-Lāhūn", *ADAJ* 57 (2013) 519–33.
- 19 E. Olavarri, "Sondages à Aro'er sur l'Arnon." *Revue Biblique* 72 (1965) 77–94; E. Olavarri, "Fouilles à Aro'er sur l'Arnon", *Revue Biblique* 76 (1969) 230–59.
- 20 G.L. Mattingly/ J.H. Pace, "Crossing Jordan: by Way of the Kerak Plateau", in T. Levy/ P.M.M. Daviau/R.W. Younker/M. Shaer (ed.), *Crossing Jordan: North American Contributions to the Archaeology of Jordan* (London: Equinox 2007) 153–60.

Balua nearly doubled in size. A second north-south route may have existed that bypassed the Wadi Mujib area, which is characterised by deep wadis, and ran along the edge of the eastern desert passing the fortress of Mudaybi and the sites in the Wadi Thamad area.²¹ However, it should be noted that small fortresses were also constructed in this period at Lahun and Ara'ir in the Wadi Mujib area, indicating that the King's Highway was still used.

4 Economic Organisation

The economic situation in the 7th century BCE demonstrates that Moab was a wealthy region. Situated along trade routes traversing its territory from the Red Sea to Damascus, Moab derived considerable benefit from its role by ensuring security and producing and exchanging luxury goods. The 'pax Assyria' facilitated the exchange of goods, while the king of Moab and/or elite families may have levied a tax on the goods passing through their lands. It is not possible to ascertain the extent of this trade or the amount of taxes collected, though.

The finds at Mudayna Thamad may provide insight into the economic activities of this period. The site was erected in the latter half of the 8th century BCE which coincides with the zenith of Assyrian influence in Moab. The presence of a casemate wall and a six-chambered gate may indicate that the town was erected under royal aegis, potentially as a fortified settlement defending the eastern border of Moab. In contrast to the majority of fortresses in the Southern Levant, however, it was not situated on a high spur, but rather in a valley surrounded by considerably higher hills. Regardless of the rationale behind this construction project, the site developed into an important industrial site in the 7th century BCE.²²

Two aspects of Mudayna Thamad are worth commenting upon. The first one is the considerable quantity of luxury objects and items associated with trade excavated there.²³ In a somewhat arbitrary sequence one may mention 40 stone altars, 30 pieces of metal jewellery, five bullae, eighteen stamp seals and scaraboids, several metal furniture fixtures, 27 pendants, predominantly crafted from shell, and seven inscribed scale weights.²⁴ Additionally, the site

21 A. Dearman (ed.), *Studies in the Mesha inscription and Moab* (Atlanta: Scholars Press 1989), 192; A.E. Dolan/S. Edwards "Preference for periphery? Cultural interchange and trade routes along the boundaries of late Iron Age Moab", *PEQ* 152 (2022) 53–72.

22 Chadwick et al., *Mudayna Thamad*.

23 For further details on the following, see Chadwick et al., *Mudayna Thamad*.

24 P.M.M. Daviau, "Altars Large and Small: The Iron Age Altars from *Hirbet el-Mudēyine* (Jordan)", in S. Bickel/S. Schroer/R. Schurte/C. Uehlinger (ed.), *Bilder als Quellen/Images*

yielded over 70 terracotta anthropomorphic and approximately 180 horse figurine fragments, two large limestone statues of males and several glazed and unglazed imported Assyrian jars and juglets.²⁵ Additionally, the site has yielded a Middle Bronze Age scarab in a golden setting, pottery imported from Phoenicia, Judah, and Egypt, several large stone altars found in Temple 149, and approximately 100 fragments of Cypro-Phoenician juglets.²⁶

The second group of objects is associated with textile industry and is predominantly found within the three large pillared structures that have been excavated on the east side of the tell. In addition to 349 loom weights, the excavation yielded nine bone spatulas, 49 spindle whorls, five spindles, numerous astragali, seven tablets with holes (potentially for tablet weaving), and nearly a hundred reworked sherds that may have been utilized as spindle whorls. Additionally, the assemblage comprises 72 large stone basins, and 22 low stone stools that, as evidenced by their depiction in Egyptian reliefs, were associated with weaving activities.²⁷ It also includes burned wooden beams, which may have been the remains of either the looms or of racks employed in the drying of cloth. Furthermore, the assemblage includes fragments of woollen cloth, linen threads, and bundles of yarn (as yet unidentified). Additionally, hundreds of fragments of hematite and ochre probably used as dyes were recovered. The assemblage also includes oversize saddle querns and upper millstones, as well as large grinders, some of which were stained red from the pounded dye.²⁸ The three pillared buildings were discovered in a row on the east side of the tell; it is possible that additional buildings existed in this area. It is likely that textile production took place in these buildings at first but this industry soon

as Sources. *Studies on Ancient Near Eastern Artefacts and the Bible inspired by the work of Othmar Keel* (Fribourg: Academic/Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007) 125–49; P.M.M. Daviau/P. Dion, “Economy-related Finds from Khirbat al-Mudayna (Wadi ath-Thamad, Jordan)”, *BASOR* 328 (2002) 31–48 (respectively).

- 25 P.M.M. Daviau/E. Zeran, “Astarte on her Horse at Khirbat al-Mudayna in Northern Moab”, in E.N. Darby/I.J. de Hulster (ed.), *Iron Age Terracotta Figurines in the Southern Levant* (CHANE; Leiden: Brill 2022) 256–84; P.M.M. Daviau/S. Klassen, “Conspicuous Consumption and Tribute: Assyrian Glazed Ceramic Bottles at Khirbat al-Mudayna on Wadi ath-Thamad”, *BASOR* 372 (2014) 115–38 (respectively).
- 26 P.M.M. Daviau/M.L. Steiner, “A Moabite Sanctuary at Khirbat al-Mudayna”, *BASOR* 320 (2000) 1–21.
- 27 P.M.M. Daviau, “Industrial Furnishings at Khirbat al-Mudayna ath-Thamad: Clues from Egyptian Culture”, in M. Neeley/G.A. Clark/P.M.M. Daviau (ed.), *Walking through Jordan: Papers in Honor of Burton MacDonald* (London: Equinox, 2017) 39–61.
- 28 For further details, see J.H. Boertien, “Public or Domestic? Temple, Text and Textile Production at Khirbat al-Mudayna in Moab”, in E.J. van der Steen/J.H. Boertien/N. Mulder-Hymans (ed.), *Exploring the Narrative. Jerusalem and Jordan in the Bronze and Iron Ages* (London: Continuum, 2013) 133–58; Chadwick et al., *Mudayna Thamad*.

expanded, and evidence of this was found in all other buildings at the site, including some gate rooms.

In comparison to significant and considerably larger 7th-century sites such as Jerusalem, Megiddo, Ekron and Khirbet el-Balua, the wealth of Mudayna Thamad is remarkable. At Ekron, a twenty ha site renowned for its large-scale olive oil production in Iron IIC, approximately twenty stone altars have been excavated. This collection represented the largest of its kind found in the southern Levant, but now that number is superseded by the 40 such items discovered at Mudayna Thamad. The latter site also has the largest published collection of animal figurines apart from Jerusalem, while imported Assyrian vessels have otherwise been found solely along the coast in Assyrian fortresses and ports like Tell el-Ajjul.

No other site in the southern Levant has yielded such a substantial corpus of evidence for the production of textiles based on wool and flax on a large scale. It appears that Mudayna Thamad was constructed not only as a fortress but as a production facility as well, as the pillared structures belong to the earliest construction phase. It is not uncommon in the southern Levant in Iron IIC to find special-function sites with sturdy fortifications and pillared buildings, particularly along trade routes. It is thought that Beer-Sheva stratum III, Tel Ira stratum VII and Tel Aroer stratum II, all located in the Negev, are connected to the Arabian trade route to Gaza, as was the fortress of Kadesh Barnea stratum 3. The archaeological record indicates the existence of large-scale production of olive oil or wine at Ekron and Gibeon, respectively. I have earlier connected this production on an almost industrial scale with the opening up of the Assyrian markets and the establishment of the Pax Assyria.²⁹ It is plausible that Mudayna Thamad was specifically constructed for the production of luxury textiles of wool and linen as tribute for Assyria. These textiles subsequently became a highly sought-after commodity, finding its way to other parts of the southern Levant. It appears that this enterprise was not subject to royal control; rather, it was initiated and executed by the local elite residing in Mudayna, who supervised the production process and reaped its benefits.

Further evidence for the affluence of Moab in the 7th century BCE is provided by a one-room cultic site situated three kilometres to the west of Mudayna Thamad, designated WT-13.³⁰ The stratum II open-air shrine from

29 M.L. Steiner, "Introduction to the Levant during the Iron Age II Period", in M.L. Steiner/Killebrew, A.E. (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of the Levant, c.8000–332 BCE* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2014) 677–82.

30 P.M.M. Daviau, *A Wayside Shrine in Northern Moab. Excavations in the Wadi ath-Thamad*. (Wadi ath-Thamad Project I; Oxford: Oxbow, 2017); M.L. Steiner, "Iron Age Cult Sites

Iron IIB-C yielded a plethora of cultic vessels, statuettes, and figurines, along with luxury items such as an imported Assyrian glazed juglet, Phoenician juglets, Egyptian-style amulets and scarabs, jewellery, and exotic marine fossils. In total, the site produced over 500 objects and more than 25,000 pottery sherds.

5 The End of Moab

All sites in Moab were either destroyed or abandoned. The precise date on which this occurred is difficult to determine. The scarcity of Neo-Babylonian and Persian material at these sites suggests a dating at the end of Iron IIC or the beginning of the Neo-Babylonian period. Once more, the most compelling evidence originates from Mudayna Thamad. The burnt gate complex and the destruction of domestic and industrial buildings indicate that the town was the target of an enemy attack.

The most probable hypothesis is that Moab was attacked by one of the Neo-Babylonian kings and never recovered from this assault; no information on Moab is available from either written texts or archaeological sources.³¹ This is in contrast to Ammon and Edom, which did recover and even flourish during the Neo-Babylonian and Persian periods although not all sites were rebuilt. The reason why Moab, situated between these two polities, experienced a divergent trajectory remains a matter of conjecture. Some scholars posit that a shift in the trade routes transporting goods from Arabia to Mesopotamia may have been a contributing factor to this phenomenon.³² In the Iron Age, the most frequently utilised routes were the King's Highway, which ran from south to north through the country, and a potential eastern route, as previously discussed. This positioned Moab as a pivotal player in this trade mechanism, resulting in considerable economic prosperity, as evidenced at Mudayna Thamad. It is proposed that at the conclusion of the Iron Age, the Arabian trade routes underwent a transformation, traversing the Wadi Sirhan instead. This route extends from the oasis of Dumah to Amman and subsequently northwards, circumventing Moabite territory, and redirecting the profits of this trade to Amman and its surrounding region. In contrast, Edom sustained its gains from

in Transjordan", *Religions* 10,3 (2019) Open Access: <https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/10/3/145>.

31 Bienkowski, "Transjordan".

32 Routledge, *Moab*, 211; A.J. Danielson, "Trade, Kingdom, and Empire: Edom and the South Arabian Trade", *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern History* 10,1 (2023) 139–75.

the Arabian trade via the Negev to Gaza, thereby remaining unimpacted by this alteration in routes.

The prophecy made by Jeremiah concerning the demise of Moab was undoubtedly based on historical fact, as the Neo-Babylonian onslaught dealt a severe blow to Moab from which it never recovered. The focus on the northern part of Moab may be a remembrance of Mesha's time, when this part of Moab seems to have been the most important region with the large sites of Madaba, Dhiban and possibly Libb. However, in Jeremiah's time, the economic focus seems to have shifted to the east and south of Moab. The wealth of Moab as mentioned in Jeremiah's prophecies, however, was a tangible reality.

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Edom in the Neo-Babylonian and Persian Periods, and New Light on the Origins of Idumea

Piotr Bienkowski

1 Introduction

The Iron Age kingdom of Edom, known from biblical, Egyptian, Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian sources as well as archaeological and epigraphic evidence from excavations and surveys, was located in Transjordan south of the Wadi Hasa, extending down to the Gulf of Aqaba. The deep cut of the Wadi Hasa separated it from Moab to the north.

Edom is a rugged, mountainous region, with a high plateau falling steeply to the Wadi Arabah to the west, and more gently to the desert to the east. It is an arid area, with annual average rainfall of c. 100–200 mm. The land is primarily suited to pastoralism, but there is evidence of agriculture and cultivation of cereals, olives and grapes, especially in the small villages and farms in the hinterland of Busayra (biblical Bozrah) – at c. 16 hectares by far the largest Iron Age site in Edom and the likely ‘capital’ – and on agricultural terraces adjacent to mountain-top sites in the Greater Petra region to the south.¹

Benedikt Hensel has pointed out the drop in scholarly interest in Edom (as well as Moab and Ammon) following their loss of independence to the Neo-Babylonian kings, and the subsequent assumption that Edom was largely unpopulated, insignificant and overrun by Arab tribes, which continues to be deeply rooted in the literature, and especially biblical studies.² Yet, it has

- 1 For the environment and climate of Edom, see J.R. Bartlett, *Edom and the Edomites* (JSOTSup 77; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989) 33–7; Ø.S. LaBianca/R.W. Younker, “The Kingdoms of Ammon, Moab and Edom: The Archaeology of Society in Late Bronze/Iron Age Transjordan (ca. 1400–500 BCE)”, in T.E. Levy (ed.), *The Archaeology of Society in the Holy Land* (London: Leicester University Press, 1995), 402–3; J.M. Tebes, “Edom and Southern Jordan in the Iron Age”, in K. Keimer/G.A. Pierce (ed.), *The Ancient Israelite World. Routledge Worlds* (Abingdon/New York, Routledge, 2022), 639–40.
- 2 B. Hensel, “Transjordan and Judah from the Babylonian to Hellenistic Periods: Their Cultural, Religious, Economic, and Political Entanglements and their Impact on the Formation of the Hebrew Bible”, in B. Hensel (ed.), *Transjordan and the Southern Levant* (ArchB 8; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2024), 197.

been known for some time now that there is firm evidence of continuity of at least some settlements in Edom from the Iron II, through the Neo-Babylonian and Persian periods, and perhaps even into the early Hellenistic period, and that the sites were connected to the trade and exchange systems with the Mediterranean, as evidenced through imported Attic pottery – and this was first pointed out by the present author more than 20 years ago.³

This paper presents the historical and archaeological evidence for Edom in the Neo-Babylonian and Persian periods in a systematic way. Its main focus is on the evidence from, and pertaining to, the Edomite heartland in Transjordan; but the discussion also extends to the “Edomite” presence in the Negev in the late Iron II period; while the final part considers the development of later Idumea to the west, for which a clear understanding of the current evidence from Edom itself, and the nature of the Iron II evidence from the Negev, are crucial.

The paper is divided into six sections focusing on the Neo-Babylonian and Persian periods in Edom:

- A brief review of the historiography, including still current explanations for the origins of Idumea
- Historical sources
- The archaeological evidence
- An assessment of the patterns of occupation
- New suggestions on the origins of Idumea, building on the previous section and current evidence
- Summary and conclusions

2 Historiography

On the basis of his pioneering surveys in Transjordan in the 1930s, Nelson Glueck concluded that there was a full gap in occupation from the end of Iron II to the Hellenistic and Nabataean periods – a gap that covered the Neo-Babylonian and Persian periods. Specifically, he proposed that Edom

3 P. Bienkowski, “New Evidence on Edom in the Neo-Babylonian and Persian Periods”, in J.A. Dearman/M.P. Graham (eds), *The Land that I Will Show You: Essays on the History and Archaeology of the Ancient Near East in Honour of J. Maxwell Miller* (JSOTSup 343; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001), 198–213; and more recently P. Bienkowski, “Edom in the Persian Period, Relations with the Negev and the Arabian Trade: The Archaeological Evidence”, in B. Hensel/E. Ben Zvi/D.V. Edelman (eds), *About Edom and Idumea in the Persian Period: Recent Research and Approaches from Archaeology, Hebrew Bible Studies and Ancient Near Eastern Studies* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2022), 48–79.

was destroyed in the early sixth century BCE by Nebuchadnezzar when he marched against Jerusalem.⁴ This mirrored preconceptions about the “empty land” of Judah to the west during the “exilic period” of the sixth century BCE.⁵ “Edomite” pottery was understood as a mainly late Iron Age phenomenon that did not continue beyond the early sixth century BCE, influenced by its absence in post-Babylonian destruction levels in the Negev.⁶ For many years, the accepted understanding was that Edom lacked settled occupation in the Neo-Babylonian and Persian periods and was overrun by Arab tribes, usually identified with the Qedarites.⁷

Crystal-M. Bennett’s excavations at Umm al-Biyara, Tawilan and Busayra between 1960 and 1982 (see Archaeological Evidence, below) initially indicated a date for Iron Age settlement in Edom between the eighth and sixth centuries BCE, and at first were insufficiently analysed and published to properly challenge Glueck’s hypothesis of an occupation gap.⁸ But the situation changed after Bennett’s death in 1987, when the Busayra excavations were being prepared for final publication by the present author, with the discovery that there was imported Attic pottery alongside local Iron Age pottery in stratified contexts (see Table 8.1). This demonstrated that the final Iron II phase

- 4 E.g., N. Glueck, *Explorations in Eastern Palestine, III* (Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research 18–19, 1939), 269. For a critique of Glueck’s synthesis, see J.A. Sauer, “Transjordan in the Bronze and Iron Ages: A Critique of Glueck’s Synthesis”, *BASOR* 263 (1986), 1–26; and for a recent appraisal, including Glueck’s impact on interpretations of biblical history pertaining to Edom, see B.L. Crowell, *Edom at the Edge of Empire: A Social and Political History* (Atlanta: SBL, 2021), 8–19.
- 5 O. Lipschits, “Shedding New Light on the Dark Years of the ‘Exilic Period’: New Studies, Further Elucidation, and Some Questions Regarding the Archaeology of Judah as an ‘Empty Land’”, in B. Kelle/F.R. Ames/J.L. Wright (eds), *Interpreting Exile: Displacement and Deportation in Biblical and Modern Context* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 57–90.
- 6 See J.M. Tebes, “The Chronology of Edom in the Iron Age: A Critical Review of the Evidence”, in P. van der Veen/R. Wallenfels/P. James (eds), *Assyria and the West: A Fresh Look at the Unshakeable Pillars of Late Bronze and Iron Age Chronology in the Eastern Mediterranean World* (Bicester: Archaeopress, 2025), 323–46.
- 7 E.g., I. Eph’al, “Syria-Palestine under Achaemenid Rule”, in J. Boardman/N.G.L. Hammond/D.M. Lewis/M. Ostwald (eds), *Cambridge Ancient History IV: Persia, Greece and the Western Mediterranean c. 525 to 479 B.C.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1988), 163. Even recently, despite published evidence of continuity of settled occupation into the Persian period, some scholars continue to maintain that Edomite society collapsed completely and the area was controlled by the Qedarites in the Persian period: for example, Y. Levin, “The Genesis of Idumea”, in B. Hensel/E. Ben Zvi/D.V. Edelman (eds), *About Edom and Idumea in the Persian Period: Recent Research and Approaches from Archaeology, Hebrew Bible Studies and Ancient Near Eastern Studies* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2022), 82.
- 8 See assessment of Bennett’s work in Crowell, *Edom*, 19–23.

continued through the Neo-Babylonian and Persian periods, into the late fourth century BCE, without a stratigraphic break.⁹ At about the same time, a similar situation was observed at Tall al-‘Umayri in Ammon.¹⁰ So the pattern that is now evident, in Edom and further north in Transjordan, is continuity of at least some settlement through the Iron II, Neo-Babylonian and Persian periods, and perhaps into the Hellenistic period.

Based on Glueck’s hypothesis that Edom was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, the general view until the late twentieth century was that Idumea – the area south of Judah in the (late) Persian and Hellenistic periods (see Historical Sources below) – was essentially created by Edomites who migrated west after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BCE, as well as being pushed westwards by invading Arabs from the east.¹¹ More recently, it has been argued that Edomites invaded or migrated into the territory of southern Judah during the late Iron Age, establishing a permanent presence in the Negev, which eventually came to be called Idumea.¹² John Bartlett advocated a more nuanced explanation, arguing that there was no evidence that Edomites emigrated westwards in substantial numbers to conquer and occupy the southern Negev; they had some economic, religious and cultural impact, but never established a political presence. He suggested that the Greek transliteration of the Hebrew word “Edom” – “Idumea” – was a wider geographical designation that had nothing to do with the Iron Age kingdom of Edom in Transjordan.¹³

The present author has proposed a very different interpretation, based on current assessment of the archaeological evidence, rather than on echoes of Glueck’s “occupation gap” hypothesis. This proposes that the origins of Idumea lie not in Edomite invasion, migration or occupation of parts of the Negev during the Iron II period. Edomite presence there was temporary, based entirely on the south Arabian trade, and had ceased by the beginning of the sixth century BCE when all the Negev trading sites were destroyed or abandoned. Rather,

9 P. Bienkowski, *Busayra: Excavations by Crystal-M. Bennett 1971–1980* (British Academy Monographs in Archaeology 13, Oxford: Oxford University, 2002), 478.

10 L.G. Herr, “The Late Iron II–Persian Ceramic Horizon at Tell el-‘Umeiri”, *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan* 5 (1995), 617–19.

11 E.g., N. Glueck, *The Other Side of the Jordan* (Cambridge, MA: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1970), 166; M. Avi-Yonah, *The Holy Land from the Persian to the Arab Conquests (536 B.C. to A.D. 640): A Historical Geography* (rev. ed., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), 25–6; A. Kasher, *Jews, Idumaeans, and Ancient Arabs* (Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum 18; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1988), 3.

12 E.g., Levin, “Genesis”, 83–4; see critique of the “Edomite expansion” hypothesis by J.R. Bartlett, “Edomites and Idumaeans”, *PEQ* 131 (1999), 102–6, and D.V. Edelman, “Late Historical Edom”, 394.

13 Bartlett, “Edomites and Idumaeans”, 112–13.

the origins of Idumea lie in the mixed involvement of Edomite and Arab tribes in the revival of the Arabian trade through Edom and the Negev from the late sixth century BCE. This better fits the archaeological evidence and the large proportions of Arabian and Edomite personal names on Idumean ostraca.¹⁴ This interpretation is further amplified in the final section of this paper.

3 Historical Sources

3.1 *Nabonidus Chronicle*

The Nabonidus Chronicle, written on a single clay tablet, records the events of his reign from its beginning in 556 BCE to the capture of Babylon by Cyrus in 539 BCE. Note that the only surviving version dates to the Hellenistic or perhaps even Parthian period, and so is at least two hundred years later than the events it records.¹⁵

Edom may appear in the Chronicle for his third year (late 553 or early 552 BCE), but the signs are broken and the exact reading is not certain. What is normally restored is: “He/they encamped against the land of Edom” or “against the city of Edom”. This is usually understood as meaning a siege of Busayra and the annexation of Edom.¹⁶

Hanspeter Schaudig has proposed a different restoration of those lines in the Chronicle: “[... the Ar]ameans of the West ... laid (siege) [against the city of E]dom”.¹⁷ He therefore argues that Nabonidus did not besiege Busayra, but instead was defending it against an attack by nomadic Aramaeans. However, he does not rule out alternative readings of these lines, and his proposed interpretation has been challenged.¹⁸ The historical and geographical context tends

14 Bienkowski, “Edom in the Persian Period”, 62–75.

15 See C. Waerzeggers, “Facts, Propaganda, or History? Shaping Political Memory in the Nabonidus Chronicle”, in J.M. Silverman and C. Waerzeggers (eds), *Political Memory In and After the Persian Empire* (SBL Monographs 13; Atlanta: SBL, 2015), 96, and idem, “The Babylonian Chronicles: Classification and Provenance”, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 71 (2012), 285–98.

16 A.K. Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles* (Texts from Cuneiform Sources 5; Locust Valley: J.J. Augustin, 1975), 105; Bartlett, *Edom*, 157–61.

17 H. Schaudig, “Edom in the Nabonidus Chronicle: A Land Conquered or a Vassal Defended? A Reappraisal of the Annexation of North Arabia by the Late Babylonian Empire”, in B. Hensel, E. Ben Zvi and D.V. Edelman (eds), *About Edom and Idumea in the Persian Period: Recent Research and Approaches from Archaeology, Hebrew Bible Studies and Ancient Near Eastern Studies* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2022), 251–64.

18 Bienkowski, “Edom in the Persian Period”, 51–3; Edelman, “Late Historical Edom”, 395–6.

to favour the interpretation that Nabonidus was travelling north to south from Syria, besieging Edom on the way to Arabia.¹⁹

3.2 *The Sela' Relief*

Further indication that Nabonidus travelled through Edom on his way to Tayma in Arabia is the inscribed relief on a rock face at Sela', 5 km north of Busayra (Figures 8.1 and 8.2). The relief is in two parts. On the left is a figure of a Mesopotamian king facing right towards three astral symbols (a moon, a solar disc and a star), with cuneiform text. On the right, only the remains of cuneiform text are visible.²⁰

In the original publication, Stephanie Dalley and Annie Goguel concluded that the king represented was Nabonidus, and that the inscription mentions his name and year 5 of his reign.²¹ Later, Schaudig identified "I am Nabonidus,



FIGURE 8.1 The Sela' relief and inscription of Nabonidus

PHOTO SELA ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROJECT WITH ADRIÁN SALGADO

¹⁹ Crowell, *Edom*, 135–6.

²⁰ R. Da Riva, "The Nabonidus Inscription in Sela (Jordan): Epigraphic Study and Historical Meaning", *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 110/2 (2020), 176–95.

²¹ S. Dalley and A. Goguel, "The Sela Sculpture: A Neo-Babylonian Rock Relief in Southern Jordan", *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 41 (1997) 169–76.



FIGURE 8.2 The location of the Sela' relief, showing recording work in progress
SELA ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROJECT

king of Babylon” on the first line,²² but Rocío Da Riva, who carried out fresh fieldwork at the site and reconstructed some fragments of the text, felt that the reading of the fifth regnal year was uncertain. However, if it was accepted, she suggested that this year name could be evidence that the campaigns against Edom lasted at least from Nabonidus's third year (as in the Nabonidus Chronicle) to his fifth year (as in the Sela' inscription), that is, between 553 and 551 BCE.²³

In terms of overall context, Da Riva concluded that there was a connection between Nabonidus's military campaigns in Edom and the production of the Sela' relief, because rock inscriptions in remote places usually commemorated

22 H. Schaudig, *Inschriften Nabonids von Babylon und Kyros' des Großens samt den in ihrem Umfeld entstandenen Tendenzschriften: Textausgabe und Grammatik* (Alter Orient und Altes Testament 256; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2001), 544.

23 Da Riva, “Nabonidus Inscription”, 189–90.

the military exploits of kings.²⁴ Its purpose was to inspire awe, even though most of those who saw it would not know the figure represented or be able to read cuneiform.²⁵

3.3 *Persian Sources*

Unfortunately, there are no ancient written sources that refer specifically to Edom in the Persian period. It may have been included in the area called “Beyond the River” in the Persian sources. This was a huge area west of the Euphrates, the largest territorial and administrative division of the Persian empire. It became a satrapy of its own some time after 486 BCE, but the only certain provinces within the satrapy of “Beyond the River” are Judah and Samaria.²⁶ Moreover, it is a poorly attested entity, and its southern frontier is quite uncertain.²⁷ It cannot be excluded that Edom was part of the geographical area called Arabāya in the Bisitun Inscription of Darius I (522–486 BCE): this trilingual inscription, on a rock relief, lists Arabāya as an area subject to him (line 1:5).²⁸ However, we do not know the exact extent of the territory of Arabāya, and whether it was included in “Beyond the River” or formed a distinct area.²⁹

3.4 *Sources on Early Idumea*

The term “Idumea” can be confusing. Historians writing in Greek from the fourth century BCE to the first century CE used the name “Idumea” to refer to an area

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- 24 R. Da Riva, “Enduring Images of an Ephemeral Empire: Neo-Babylonian Inscriptions and Representations in the Western Periphery”, in R. Rolliger and E. van Dongen (eds), *Mesopotamia in the Ancient World: Impact, Continuities, Parallels* (Melammu Symposia 7; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2015), 603–30.
 - 25 Da Riva, “Nabonidus Inscription”, 185. Nabonidus also erected a rock relief with inscription at al-Ha’it in northern Arabia, which shares some similar features with the Sela’ relief: A. Hausleiter and H. Schaudig, “Rock Relief and Cuneiform Inscription of King Nabonidus at al-Ha’it (Province of Ha’il, Saudi Arabia), Ancient Padakku”, *Zeitschrift für Orient-Archäologie* 9 (2016), 224–40.
 - 26 Eph’al, “Syria-Palestine under Achaemenid Rule”, 153–8.
 - 27 J. Elayi and J. Sapin, *Beyond the River: New Perspectives on Transeuphratene* (Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 250; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 13–19.
 - 28 L.W. King and R.C. Thompson, *The Sculptures and Inscription of Darius the Great on the Rock of Behistūn in Persia* (London: British Museum, 1907); A. Kuhrt, *The Persian Empire: A Corpus of Sources from the Achaemenid Period* (London: Routledge, 2007), 135–57.
 - 29 Elayi and Sapin, *Beyond the River*, 17; E.A. Knauf, “The Persian Administration in Arabia”, *Transeuphratène* 2 (1990), 201–17; idem, “Supplementa Ismaelitica. 13. Edom und Arabien”, *Biblische Notizen* 45 (1988), 62–81; A. Lemaire, “Populations et territoires de la Palestine à l’époque perse”, *Transeuphratène* 3 (1990), 31–74.

immediately south of Judah – now generally understood to have included the Arad and Beersheba Valleys, the southern Shephelah and the southern Judean hills. But the same name had been used in the third and second centuries BCE by the Greek translators of the Hebrew Bible as a translation of the Hebrew name “Edom”, referring to the Iron Age kingdom in Transjordan. So the same name was used for two geographically and chronologically distinct areas; while some historians seek a causal connection between the two, Bartlett, as noted above, has suggested that the two names were not connected.³⁰

The first Greek literary reference to Idumea is by Diodorus Siculus, referring to events in Palestine and Transjordan in 312 BCE. He was writing in the first century BCE, but drawing on Hieronymus of Cardia, a Ptolemaic official on the Dead Sea of the fourth/third century BCE, who refers to “the satrapy of Idumea”. The earliest datable reference to any cities of Idumea is in a papyrus from Cairo that records the Ptolemaic tax collector Zenon’s journey in 259 BCE, which includes Maresha and Adoreon, and their association with Idumea continued for the next three centuries. The papyrus demonstrates that, by the mid-third century BCE, a person could be identified as an *Idumaios*.³¹

3.5 *Summary: Imperial Control in Edom in the Neo-Babylonian and Persian Periods*

What can we conclude about imperial control in Edom in the Neo-Babylonian and Persian periods? During the Iron II period (c. eighth to early sixth centuries BCE), Edom was an independent kingdom, paying tribute to Assyria from the early eighth century onwards, but was never incorporated into the Assyrian empire as a province.³² It is not clear when Edom lost its independence. The Nabonidus Chronicle suggests that Edom’s incorporation within the borders of the Neo-Babylonian empire was the objective of the campaign. Ammon and Moab were probably already provincial territories: according to Josephus (Ant. 10.9.7), Nebuchadnezzar campaigned against them in 582 BCE, defeating them both, although there is no confirmation in contemporary historical sources. There is no evidence of Neo-Babylonian presence or even interest in Edom prior to Nabonidus, but we cannot read too much into that absence of evidence.

³⁰ Bartlett, “Edomites and Idumaeans”, 102.

³¹ Bartlett, “Edomites and Idumaeans”, 106–7; for the creation of the province of Idumea, see Levin, “Genesis”, 84–6.

³² For discussion on the nature of the “kingdom” of Edom, see Tebes, “The Kingdom of Edom?”, and Crowell, *Edom*, 376–9.

Nabonidus's main objective in Edom may have been to secure more direct control over the Arabian trade route, and Juan Manuel Tebes notes that the list of the Arabian cities he conquered aligns with the north-south running Arabian trade routes. Even if only briefly, Babylon probably directly controlled the Arabian overland trade without the intermediacy of local powers such as Edom and Tayma.³³ Incidentally, Hensel states that Edom was integrated into a network of trade routes, specifically the so-called "King's Highway", which he claims emerged in the Assyrian period as an essential artery for the Near East as a route from Mesopotamia to the Assyrian-controlled port of Tall al-Khalayfi in Edom and a link to north-west Arabia.³⁴ Firstly, while the Assyrians probably campaigned through Edom during Assurbanipal's wars against the Arabs, there is no evidence at all for permanent Assyrian presence or involvement at Tall al-Khalayfi, or indeed anywhere else in Edom.³⁵ Secondly, the present author long ago argued that the concept of the "King's Highway" as a main route through Transjordan prior to the Roman period may well have been an invention of Glueck's. In any case, it had nothing to do with the carefully maintained Assyrian "royal road", which was a network between Assyrian provinces only and not a link to tributary states; and in Assyrian sources there is no mention of the "royal road" anywhere west of the Euphrates.³⁶

There is a complete lack of evidence relating to the status of Edom within the Persian empire. Perhaps it came under the overall rule of the Persian satrap of "Beyond the River", but there is no evidence that Edom became a separate province within that satrapy (unlike Ammon, which may have been a

- 33 J.M. Tebes, "The Southern Levant and Northern Arabia in the Iron Age", in K. Radner, N. Moeller and D.T. Potts (eds), *Oxford History of the Ancient Near East. Volume V: The Age of Persia* (New York: Oxford University Press), 275.
- 34 B. Hensel, "The Complexity of a Site: 'Edom' in the Persian Period from the Perspectives of Historical Research, Hebrew Bible Studies, and Ancient Near Eastern Studies", in B. Hensel, E. Ben Zvi and D.V. Edelman (eds), *About Edom and Idumea in the Persian Period: Recent Research and Approaches from Archaeology, Hebrew Bible Studies and Ancient Near Eastern Studies* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2022), 14–15; for Khalayfi under Assyrian control, see I. Finkelstein, "The Archaeology of Tell el-Kheleifeh and the History of Ezion-geber/Elath", *Semitica* 56 (2014), 131–2.
- 35 P. Bienkowski, "Transjordan and Assyria", in L.E. Stager, J.A. Greene and M.D. Coogan (eds), *The Archaeology of Jordan and Beyond: Essays in Honor of James A. Sauer* (Studies in the Archaeology and History of the Levant 1; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000), 44–58; J.M. Tebes, "Desert Place-Names in Numbers 33:34, Assurbanipal's Arabian Wars and the Historical Geography of the Biblical Wilderness Toponymy", *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 43/2 (2017), 65–96.
- 36 P. Bienkowski, "The North-South Divide in Ancient Jordan: Ceramics, Regionalism and Routes", in T. Potts, M. Roaf and D. Stein (eds), *Culture Through Objects: Ancient Near Eastern Studies in Honour of P.R.S. Moorey* (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 2003), 101–2.

province).³⁷ There is no evidence at all of Persian presence or official involvement in Edom, and it cannot be excluded that there was indirect Persian rule through local tribes.

4 Archaeological Evidence

In any assessment of the archaeological evidence, it must be acknowledged that archaeological coverage of Edom is extremely patchy. Some areas have still not been systematically surveyed, and those that have been surveyed supply data that is mostly not stratigraphically controlled. Around 600 “Iron Age” sites have been identified, mostly by survey alone, comprising villages, farms, watchtowers and only a very few larger sites, and it is impossible to know how many of these continued to be settled through the Neo-Babylonian and Persian periods. Only 11 sites have been extensively excavated (counting the Faynan copper region as a single site), of which five have been finally published: Tall al-Khalayfi, Tawilan, Umm al-Biyara, Busayra, and the Edom Lowlands project in Faynan. This relative lack of data means that questions about precise dating (including identification of pottery characteristic of the Neo-Babylonian and Persian periods, and how it differs, if at all, from Iron II pottery), use of sites, and the nature of the material culture cannot always be answered effectively.

4.1 Sites

Only four sites in Edom have evidence of Persian-period occupation (see map on Figure 8.3). Three of these – Busayra (Figure 8.5), Tawilan (Figure 8.6) and Tall al-Khalayfi (Figure 8.7) – show continuity from Iron II, through the Neo-Babylonian period and into the Persian period. The fourth, in Petra under the Qasr al-Bint, has what is described as the earliest Nabataean occupation, with Persian-period Attic and Rhodian imported pottery. In addition, a Neo-Babylonian bulla was discovered at Umm al-Biyara, impressed by a seal with symbols representing the gods Marduk and Nabu, possibly an imitation of a sixth-century BCE Neo-Babylonian standard seal (Figure 8.4).

This archaeological evidence has been collated and discussed very recently,³⁸ and since there is no new evidence to review, the current situation is summarised in Table 8.1, with bibliography. It should be noted that at both Busayra and Tall al-Khalayfi there is imported Attic pottery of the Persian period

37 L.G. Herr, “The Ammonites in the Late Iron Age and Persian Period”, in B. MacDonald and R.W. Younger (eds), *Ancient Ammon* (Leiden/Boston/Köln: Brill, 1999), 233–4.

38 Bienkowski, “Edom in the Persian Period”, 51–62.

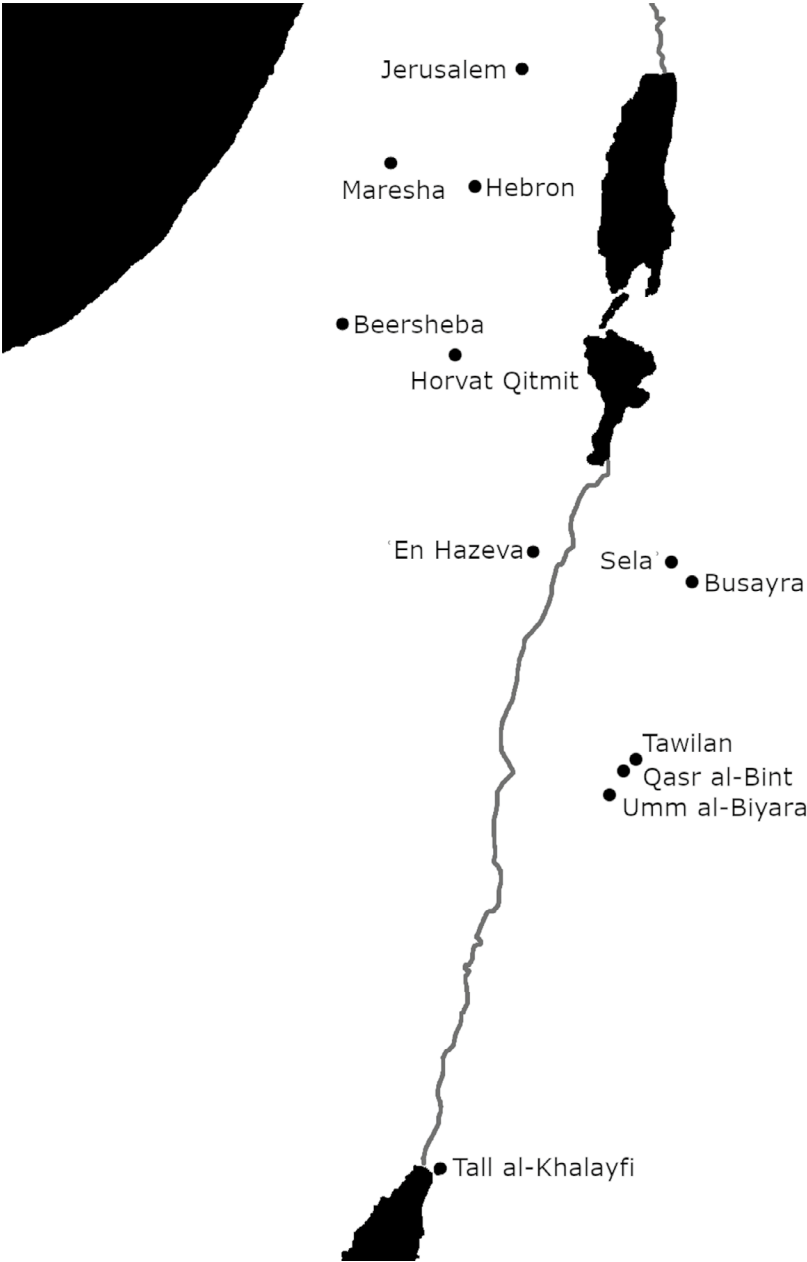


FIGURE 8.3 Map: Edom in the Neo-Babylonian and Persian periods, and key sites in the Negev and Idumea
DRAWN BY JORDAN DAVIS

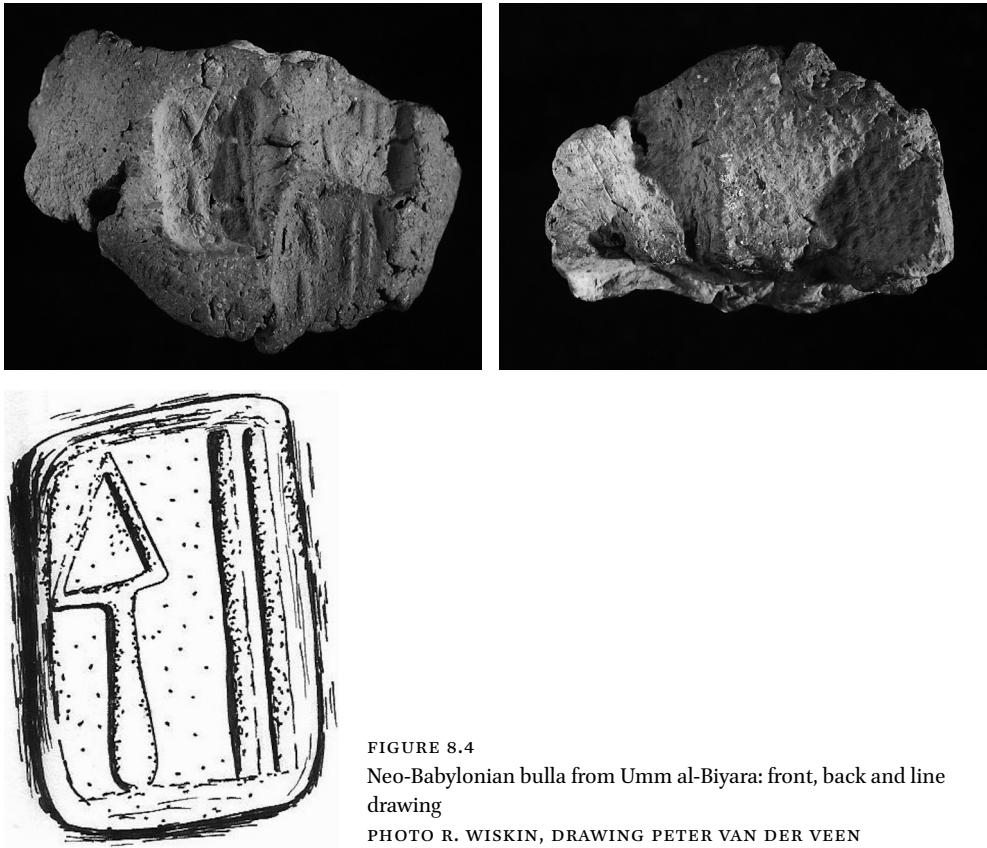


FIGURE 8.5 Busayra, situated on a high spur surrounded on three sides by wadis
PHOTO PIOTR BIENKOWSKI

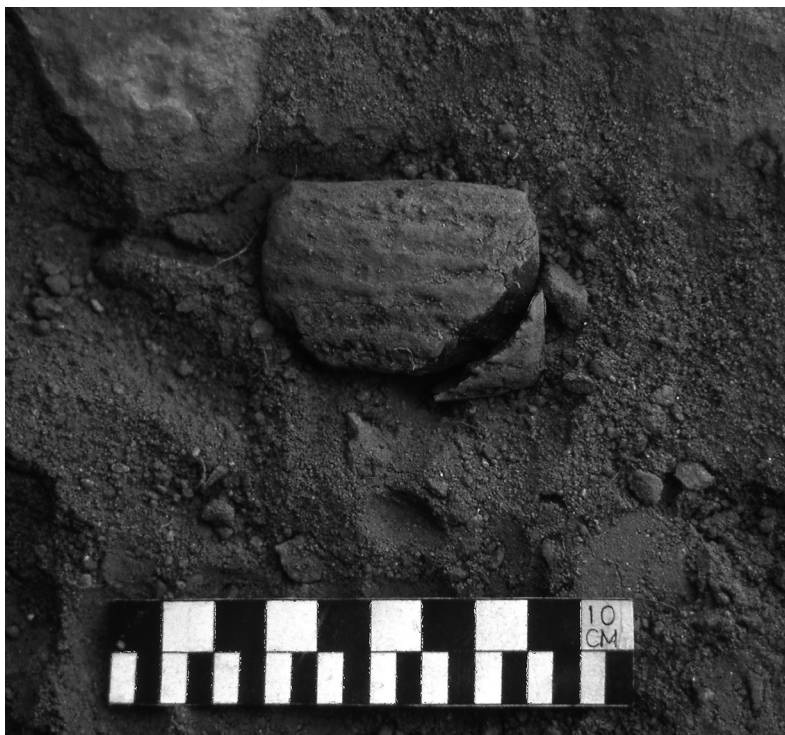


FIGURE 8.6 The cuneiform tablet from Tawilan *in situ* in 1982
PHOTO PIOTR BIENKOWSKI



FIGURE 8.7 Tall al-Khalayfi, prior to the commencement of the 1999 excavations
directed by Mary-Louise Mussell
PHOTO PIOTR BIENKOWSKI

alongside local pottery indistinguishable from late Iron II pottery; at Khalayfi there are also fifth- and fourth-century BCE Aramaic ostraca. It is still very difficult to distinguish what is distinctive about Persian-period pottery assemblages in Transjordan.³⁹

TABLE 8.1 Archaeological evidence for the Neo-Babylonian and Persian periods in Edom

Site	Evidence	References
Umm al-Biyara	Neo-Babylonian bulla, impressed by a seal with symbols representing Marduk and Nabu, dated sixth century BCE	Van der Veen, “The Seal Material”, 81–2.
Sela’	Relief and inscription of Nabonidus (possibly fifth regnal year, i.e. 551 BCE)	Da Riva, “Nabonidus Inscription”
Busayra	<i>Including Area A ‘temple’ and Area C ‘palace’:</i> Integrated Stage 1: Iron II, late eighth to seventh centuries BCE Integrated Stage 2: Iron II, seventh century BCE to likely selective destruction by Nabonidus, c.553–551 BCE Integrated Stage 3: Iron II/Persian (to Early Hellenistic?), 553/551 to c. 300/200 BCE, dated by late fourth-century BCE imported Attic sherds in Area A final phase	Bienkowski, <i>Busayra</i> , 475–8
Tawilan	Cuneiform tablet dated to accession year of Darius (I, II or III?)	Dalley, “Cuneiform Tablet”
Tall al-Khalayfi	Glueck’s ‘Period V’: fifth- and fourth-century BCE Attic sherds and Aramaic ostraca, and fifth-century BCE incense altars	Glueck, “Third Season of Excavation at Tell el-Kheleifeh”, 16

39 For initial suggestions on identifying distinctive Persian-period pottery assemblages in Edom and elsewhere in Transjordan, see P. Bienkowski, “Transjordan in the Persian Period: The Archaeological Evidence and Patterns of Occupation”, in B. Hensel (ed.), *Transjordan and the Southern Levant: New Approaches Regarding the Iron Age and the Persian Period from Hebrew Bible Studies and Archaeology* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2024), 253–6.

TABLE 8.1 Archaeological evidence for the Neo-Babylonian and Persian periods (*cont.*)

Site	Evidence	References
Petra (under Qasr al-Bint)	Phase I (earliest Nabataean occupation): built terraces, pit, walls, with fourth- and third-century BCE Attic and Rhodian sherds. Radiocarbon dates = early fourth century BCE	Renel <i>et al.</i> , “Dating the Early Phases”; Renel and Mouton, “Architectural Remains”; Saliège <i>et al.</i> , “Radiocarbon Dating in Petra”

4.2 Epigraphy and Numismatics

In terms of epigraphic evidence, alongside the cuneiform tablet from Tawilan and the Aramaic ostraca from Tall al-Khalayfi (see Table 8.1), there is possible evidence of Edomite names in Babylonia – names compounded with the theophoric element “Qaus”.⁴⁰ These might attest to Edomite exiles there, but alternatively they may have been hostages or even officials bringing tribute or tax (just as, in Assyrian times, delegations of high officials from Edom, Moab and Ammon bringing tribute are attested by letters and wine lists from Nimrud).⁴¹ But caution is necessary, since some Qaus-theophoric names on Aramaic ostraca at Beersheba had Arabic elements and maybe denoted ethnic Arabs; however, these date to the fourth century BCE, when there was considerable intermixing between the different “ethnic” groups in southern Idumea, leading Joseph Naveh to term its inhabitants “Edomite Arabs”.⁴² Nevertheless, Arabian signs are found on pottery from the late Iron Age at Tall al-Khalayfi and sites in the Negev, and seals with Arabian names at Tel Beersheba and ‘En Hazeva, some of local manufacture.⁴³ This suggests an element of cultural mixing already as part of the late Iron Age Arabian trade system, an element

40 Y. Levin, “The Formation of Idumean Identity”, *ARAM* 27: 1&2 (2015), 194–5. For a list of names incorporating the divine name Qaus, see J.M. Tebes, “Names and Images of God Qos and the Question of Yahweh’s Doppelgänger”, in F. Porzia and C. Bonnet (eds), *Divine Names on the Spot II. Exploring the Potentials of Names through Images and Narratives* (Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 299; Louvain: Peeters, 2023), 105–44.

41 Bienkowski, “Transjordan and Assyria”, 52.

42 J. Naveh, “The Aramaic Ostraca from Tel Beer-sheba (Seasons 1971–1976)”, *Tel Aviv* 6 (1979), 182–98.

43 Y. Thareani, “The Self-destruction of Diversity: A Tale of the Last Days in Judah’s Negev Towns”, *Antiquo Oriente* 12 (2014), 193; also P. van der Veen and F. Bron, “Arabian and Arabizing Epigraphic Finds from the Iron Age Southern Levant”, in J.M. Tebes (ed.), *Unearthing the Wilderness: Studies on the History and Archaeology of the Negev and Edom in the Iron Age* (Leuven: Peeters, 2014), 203–26.

that intensified in the Persian period when the trade was revived. Attempts to define clear “ethnic” markers, such as the theophoric use of the name “Qaus” which tends to be used to automatically identify Edomites, may be misleading (and see below for Qaus as the god of the elite in Edom, but not necessarily an “Edomite” god).⁴⁴

It has been suggested that a group of silver dome-shaped coins from Persian-period southern Palestine was “Edomite coinage”, and perhaps even denoted the presence of a mint located in the Edomite heartland.⁴⁵ However, the coins in question were not from controlled excavations, and were allegedly found in the southern Hebron hills and Beersheba and Arad Valleys, not in Transjordan. The authors of the report do not exclude the possibility that these coins may have been issued by an Edomite mint, but also make it clear that they are referring to Persian-period Idumea, where these coins were allegedly circulating, not Transjordanian Edom.⁴⁶ There is no evidence that such coins were circulating in Transjordanian Edom or that there was a mint there in the Persian period.

5 Patterns of Occupation in the Neo-Babylonian and Persian Periods

The archaeological evidence shows some continuity of settlement in Edom from the late Iron Age through the Persian period (see Table 8.1). After Nabonidus's campaign, Busayra continued to be occupied, with rebuilding and partitioning of the palace and temple and the construction of a new perimeter wall. This phase continued through the Persian period without a break. There was Persian-period activity at Tall al-Khalayfi and Tawilan too, both probably continuing uninterrupted from the late Iron Age, although the stratigraphic evidence is less clear.

But it is unlikely that all Iron II sites in Edom continued to be occupied into the Persian period. The evidence from Umm al-Biyara shows that, while it was occupied during Neo-Babylonian times, it was abandoned certainly by the end of the sixth century BCE, and there is no evidence that it continued into the Persian period. The same pattern was probably repeated at other sites. Overall,

44 A.J. Danielson, “On the History and Evolution of Qws: The Portrait of a First Millennium BCE Deity Explored through Community Identity”, *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions* 20,2 (2021), 113–89; Crowell, *Edom*, 317–19.

45 Hensel, “Transjordan and Judah”, 207.

46 H. Gitler, O. Tal, and P. van Alfen, “Silver Dome-shaped Coins from Persian-period Southern Palestine”, *Israel Numismatic Research* 2 (2007), 50–51.

therefore, there was continuity of settlement at some key sites in the Persian period, and abandonment of others, as well as a continuation of nomadic or semi-nomadic pastoralism that had been a characteristic of this landscape for centuries.⁴⁷

It is possible to explain the selective abandonments through the dual effect of the disappearance of the infrastructure of the Arabian trade route through the Negev in the early sixth century BCE, and the campaigns of Nabonidus in Edom a short while later. The first of these events deprived Edom of the wealth of the trade, which would have had a substantial economic impact through all levels of this tribal society, while the second deprived the ruling elite, especially at Busayra, of their power and perhaps removed all or some of them completely. Iron II sites in Edom do not show much evidence of a settlement hierarchy: in the hinterland of Busayra, for example, there are only small villages and farms.⁴⁸ Many of these would have been owned by the elite and/or would have supplied the king and court at Busayra with food and drink. With the disappearance of their owners and of royal demand for their goods, many of these farming communities may have become unsustainable and were abandoned. But we must also bear in mind the possibility that some of the elite may have remained under submission to Nabonidus, and perhaps later the Persians.⁴⁹ Just as the Tobiads' former status under Persian rule in Ammon was maintained by the Ptolemies, with their stronghold at 'Iraq al-Amir, so too the tribal family at Busayra may have continued in a role of "client-shaykhs" of the Neo-Babylonian and Persian kings, with considerably reduced authority.⁵⁰

The pattern of archaeological evidence also suggests that many of the elements regarded as characteristic of Iron Age Edom – worship of Qaus, participation in the Arabian trade, painted pottery and luxury objects – were in fact restricted to the empowered elites at Busayra who participated in the trade networks.⁵¹ If that is the case, to be an elite in Edom meant, and maybe

47 LaBianca and Younker, "The Kingdoms of Ammon, Moab and Edom", 403–5.

48 B. MacDonald, "The Hinterland of Busayra", in P. Bienkowski, *Busayra: Excavations by Crystal-M. Bennett 1971–1980* (British Academy Monographs in Archaeology 13; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 47–52.

49 B.L. Crowell, "Nabonidus, as-Sila', and the Beginning of the End of Edom", *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 348 (2007), 84.

50 Ernst Axel Knauf suggested that the Edomite king list in Genesis 36 dated to the end of the sixth and beginning of the fifth centuries BCE, and depicted a post-Edomite kingdom in which the region was controlled by local rulers/tribal leaders: "Alter und Herkunft der edomitischen Königsliste Gen 36,31–39", *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 97 (1985), 245–53.

51 Crowell, *Edom*, 317–18.

even required, participation in all these elements, such as membership of the royal court, acquisition of wealth through the Arabian trade, interaction with Assyrian, Neo-Babylonian and Persian officials, and state religion (or at least the religion of the royal line), including patronisation of the monumental temple at Busayra.⁵² These activities appear to be limited to Busayra and the main sites on the trade route. In the Iron Age, the name Qaus appears only at Busayra, Tall al-Khalayfi and Umm al-Biyara in Edom (at the latter on a bulla with the king's name, Qaus Gabr, suggesting it may have originated from Busayra) and at sites on the trade route in the Negev.⁵³ Busayra is the only site in Edom with a structure identified as a temple. Qaus may therefore have been the god of the tribal rulers at Busayra, who incorporated his name into theirs, rather than a "state" god – indeed, there is little (if any) evidence for religious practice elsewhere in Edom, only at Busayra and at the cult sites of Horvat Qitmit and 'En Hazeva on the trade route in the Negev. It may be that the Arabian trade and worship of Qaus were both elite activities linked to Busayra and the sites on the trade route, but not widespread across Edom and not at all characteristic of a wider Edomite "identity". This linking of Qaus with trading activities has implications for our understanding of the origins of Idumea (see below).⁵⁴

Although the Arabian trade through Edom and the Negev had been interrupted by the abandonments and destructions of Negev sites in the early sixth century BCE, there is evidence that it resumed by the end of that century and continued to the end of the Persian period, running along its old route through Edom and the Beersheba Valley to Gaza, as well as through the central Negev Highlands.⁵⁵ A combination of evidence indicates that the Edomite tribes were once again running this trade: continuity of occupation from late Iron II into the Persian period at Busayra and Khalayfi, the key sites on the old Arabian trade route; very little change in the material culture; and the presence of Attic imports, showing that the sites were connected to the Mediterranean

52 Tebes suggested that the Edomite polity extended only as far as the Busayra heartland, but did not have effective jurisdiction beyond that: "The Kingdom of Edom?: A Critical Reappraisal of the Edomite State Model", in I. Milevski and T.E. Levy (eds), *Framing Archaeology in the Near East: The Application of Social Theory to Fieldwork* (New Directions in Anthropological Archaeology; London: Equinox, 2016), 113–22.

53 For list, see Crowell, *Edom*, 175; A.J. Danielson, "Edom in Judah: Identity and Social Entanglement in the Late Iron Age Negev", in B. Hensel, E. Ben Zvi and D.V. Edelman (eds), *About Edom and Idumea in the Persian Period: Recent Research and Approaches from Archaeology, Hebrew Bible Studies and Ancient Near Eastern Studies* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2022), 138–9.

54 There was a large Idumean community also in Ptolemaic Egypt, although admittedly these were mercenaries not traders; see Tebes, "Names and Images of God Qos", 112.

55 For a discussion of the evidence, see Bienkowski, "Edom in the Persian Period", 70–75.

trade network. They probably ran this trade alongside Arab tribes, such as the Qedarites in the Negev and Sinai, and perhaps the early Nabataeans from the fourth century BCE.

Biblical passages in Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Isaiah appear to refer to an ongoing presence at Busayra and Edom during the Persian period. Diana Edelman concludes that these passages apparently recognise that Edom continued to exist after Nabonidus's campaign, not as a kingdom but as a post-monarchic tribal alliance of nobles and chiefs, which had expanded its tribal alliances and influence into southern Arabia and, perhaps, the Negev, and therefore controlled vital segments of the trade route from Arabia to Gaza.⁵⁶

6 New Suggestions on the Origins of Idumea

Most current explanations for the origins of Idumea are based on the assumption that Edomites from Transjordan either invaded or migrated into the Negev during the late Iron Age and remained there permanently, the region eventually coming to be called Idumea.⁵⁷ This is based on echoes of Glueck's "occupation gap" hypothesis for Edom, and an outdated understanding of the archaeological evidence from the Iron Age Negev, and especially the presence of "Edomite" pottery at certain sites.

Current understanding is that Edomite presence at the Iron Age Negev sites was based entirely on trade, where they mingled with the local population and other groups. Edomite pottery is found exclusively at sites along the trade route; it is always in smaller quantities than non-Edomite pottery;⁵⁸ there is a lack of assimilation, with Edomite pottery found on the margins of towns in separate lodgings for traders who come and go; and there is a severely restricted range of pottery types compared with those in Transjordanian Edom, limited to vessels used for communal activities. This is not evidence of any sort of invasion or migration: it denotes a trading relationship.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Edelman, "Late Historical Edom", 402–25.

⁵⁷ E.g. Levin, "Genesis", 83–4.

⁵⁸ The highest proportion of Edomite pottery is found at Horvat Qitmit, where it is just under 40 per cent of the total ceramic assemblage: see C. Whiting, *Complexity and Diversity in the Late Iron Age Southern Levant: The Investigation of 'Edomite' Archaeology and Scholarly Discourse* (Oxford: BAR International Series 1672, 2007), fig. 25b.

⁵⁹ For example, Arad Ostrakon 12 records business relationships between Judeans and Edomites: N. Na'aman, "Textual and Historical Notes on the Eliashib Archive from Arad", *Tel Aviv* 38 (2011), 86; "New Light on Six Inscriptions from Arad", *Tel Aviv* 48 (2021), 227–8. For a full discussion of the evidence, see Bienkowski, "Edom in the Persian Period", 68–70.

The trade ceased after the abandonments and destructions of these Negev sites in the early sixth century BCE, and there is no evidence at all of the continued presence of Edomites in the Negev for the remainder of the century.

As noted above (in Historiography), the present author has suggested a different scenario for the origins of Idumea: that the mix of different groups in Idumea seen in the epigraphic evidence – Edomite, Arabic, Western Semitic, Judahite and Phoenician⁶⁰ – reflects not any pre-existing Edomite migration or occupation, but the joint involvement and mixing of these groups in the revived Arabian trade from the late sixth century BCE. We can take this argument further. The theophoric element “Qaus” appears in about one-third of personal names in Aramaic ostraca from Idumea (fourth century BCE). We have seen above that the worship of Qaus in Iron Age Edom was linked and arguably limited to the trading elite based at the major sites of Busayra and Tall al-Khalayfi – the same sites that continued to be involved in the revival of the trade in the Persian period; there is no evidence that Qaus was more widespread across Edom. Worship of Qaus, along with involvement in trade and membership of the royal court, was an elite phenomenon.

Hensel questions how veneration of Qaus “migrated” into southern Judah where it “arrived” in the Idumea of the Persian period,⁶¹ and yet the answer seems quite straightforward: it came with the trading elites from Edom (primarily Busayra and Tall al-Khalayfi) who were running the trade through the Negev in the Persian period. It is this trade network of the Persian period, involving different groups, including Edomites and Arabs, that explains the mix of Edomite, Arabian and Semitic names in the Aramaic ostraca, and is the true origin of the cultural mix that was Idumea. Idumea was not a “continuation” or “afterlife” of Edomite culture – or, as Yigal Levin puts it, “the new Edom”.⁶² It was something new, a transformation driven by different groups involved in the trade revival of the late sixth century BCE.

7 Summary and Conclusions

There is evidence of continuity of settlement at some sites in Edom from the late Iron Age, through the Neo-Babylonian period and into the Persian period.

⁶⁰ I. Stern, “The Evolution of an Edomite/Idumean Identity: Hellenistic Maresha as a Case Study”, in B. Hensel, E. Ben Zvi and D.V. Edelman (eds), *About Edom and Idumea in the Persian Period: Recent Research and Approaches from Archaeology, Hebrew Bible Studies and Ancient Near Eastern Studies* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2022), 101.

⁶¹ Hensel, “Transjordan and Judah”, 225.

⁶² Levin, “Genesis”, 83.

Although Edom had remained an independent kingdom under the Assyrians, it probably lost its independence after the campaign of Nabonidus between 553 and 551 BCE, which may have been primarily motivated by securing direct control over the Arabian trade route. Edom's status within the Persian empire remains unknown, due to lack of evidence.

While the late Iron Age Arabian trade through Edom and the Negev had ceased in the early sixth century BCE, with the abandonment or destruction of the sites on the trade route in the Negev, there is evidence that it resumed in the late sixth century BCE. It ran once again along its old route, in Edom through Tall al-Khalayfi and Busayra, and then through the Beersheba Valley.

Involvement in trade, alongside membership of the royal court, worship of the god Qaus and patronisation of the temple at Busayra, were arguably an elite phenomenon in the late Iron Age. It is these elite groups, still centred at Busayra and Tall al-Khalayfi, who appear to have been running the revived trade in the Persian period, alongside other groups such as Arab tribes in the Negev and Sinai. The origins of the population mix of Idumea – with its relatively even mix of Edomite (Qaus), Arabian and Semitic names – is best explained through this mixing that happened as part of the Arabian trade in the Persian period, and not as a result of “invasion” or “migration” by Edomites into the Negev during the late Iron Age, for which there is no evidence.

Acknowledgments

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“City of my joy” (Jer 49:25): Literary and Historical Reflections on Aram and Damascus in the Latter Prophets

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1 Introduction

“City of my joy” – this is the name for the city of Damascus in Jer 49:25. Who could the speaker be and for what reason is this honorary title used for Damascus? This declaration belongs to the oracle against Damascus, which is attested in Jer 49:23–27 and which can be described as an uncommon oracle against the nations. In order to recognize the peculiarities of the oracle against Damascus in Jer 49, it is worth first taking a look at other words concerning Damascus in the latter prophets and their literary form and historical background, and then to describe the word in Jer 49 in more detail. Within the prophetic books we find three words against Damascus in the narrower sense: Isa 17:1–3, Amos 1:3–5, and Jer 49:23–27. These are three distinctive words which can be allied to different historical backgrounds.¹

Concerning the history of the city of Damascus, it should be noted that there are not many details available. In the 9th century BCE Aram-Damascus reached its peak strength under the reign of Hazael. But the advance of the Assyrians into the Levant put an end to the power of Aram. The capture of Damascus by Tiglath-Pileser in 732 is well attested and belongs in the context of the Assyrian conquests of the entire region. After its integration into the Assyrian Empire, the city’s history becomes silent. According to Aren M. Meir: “Little is known regarding Damascus between the Late Iron Age and the Hellenistic period.”² Given the paucity of historical information, the literary depiction of Damascus in the latter prophets appears to be an interesting

1 There are only a few more occurrences of the name “Damascus” in the latter Prophets, namely in Isa 7:8; 8:4; Ezek 21:18; 47:16–18; 48:1; Amos 5:27 and Zech 9:1.

2 A.M. Maeir, “Damascus: I. Archaeology”, *EBR* 6 (2013) 29–30, on p. 30. Concerning the history of Aram-Damascus see for more details and further literature in, e.g., H. Niehr, “Damaskus (AT)”, <https://bibelwissenschaft.de/stichwort/16125/>. Recently also H.G.L. (E.) Peels, *Jeremiah 46–51* (HCOT; Leuven: Peeters, 2025), 312–3.

avenue of investigation, as these texts can be dated directly to this “unknown” time frame.

Therefore, the paper will focus on the specific passages against Damascus in Isa 17:1–3, Amos 1:3–5, and Jer 49:23–27. First the literary formation of the passages will be examined and then these observations will be evaluated against their historical background. In each section the presentation of Damascus will be the focus of interest. The investigation begins with the text that is assumed to be the oldest.

2 The Oracle against Damascus in Isaiah 17:1–3

The first word against Damascus can be found in Isa 17:1–3:

- Isa 17 1 An oracle concerning Damascus.
 Behold, Damascus will cease to be a city
 and will become a heap of ruins.
 2 The cities of Aroer are deserted;
 they will be for flocks,
 which will lie down, and none will make them afraid.
 3 The fortress will disappear from Ephraim,
 and the kingdom from Damascus;
 and the remnant of Aram will be
 like the glory of the children of Israel,
 saying of Yhwh Zebaoth.

The passage Isa 17:1–3 shows an announcement of the end of Damascus. After the opening with *נְאֻם דַּמָּשֶׁק* (“pronouncement for Damascus,” cf. Isa 13:1; 15:1; 19:1; 23:1)³ the destruction of the city of Damascus is announced in v. 1. Verse 2 then describes the desolation of the city; only herds of animals will live

3 Concerning the function and intention of *נְאֻם דַּמָּשֶׁק* within Isa 13–27 cf. for example O. Kaiser, *Der Prophet Jesaja: Kapitel 13–39* (ATD 18; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1973), 5; H. Wildberger, *Jesaja: 2. Teilband Jesaja 13–27* (BKAT X,2; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1989), 497–8; M.A. Sweeney, *Isaiah 1–39 with an Introduction to Prophetic Literature* (FOTL 16; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 212–13; U. Berges, *Das Buch Jesaja: Komposition und Endgestalt* (HBS 16; Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1998), 142; J. Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 19; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 271. The heading *נְאֻם דַּמָּשֶׁק* in Isa 17:1 is often considered redactional, see for example Wildberger, *Jesaja 13–27*, 641; U. Becker, *Jesaja – von der Botschaft zum Buch* (FRLANT 178; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997), 274; Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39*, 303.

in it. Verse 3 finally summarises the proclaimed events: Just like the “fortress of Ephraim,” the “kingdom of Damascus” will also disappear. Verses 1–3 are concluded by the formula נאם יהוה צבאות (“saying of Yhwh Zebaoth”).⁴ Verse 4 opens with the phrase והיה ביום ההוא (“and in that day”), which indicates the beginning of a new passage.⁵ After Damascus, the verses from v. 4 onwards also focus on “Jacob,” which refers to the Northern Kingdom.⁶ Thus, the word against Damascus is limited to verses 1–3.

The oracle concerning Damascus in Isa 17:1–3 is in line with other words directed against foreign nations. In its present form, Isa 13–23 can be described as a redactionally assembled collection of oracles against the nations that has undergone a complex process of growth.⁷ Presumably, some of the passages can be traced back to the origins of the book of Isaiah in the 8th century BCE. However, exilic and postexilic passages can also be identified in these chapters.

Regarding the question of the literary coherence of Isa 17:1–3, it has often been noticed that the statement of v. 2 does not quite fit into the context. For example, nothing is known of an important settlement in the region of Aram called Aroer. However, an important fortress with this name is documented in Moab.⁸ Thus, it remains unclear what significance the naming of Aroer in Isa 17:2 has in connection with the metropolis of Damascus.⁹ Therefore, it is often assumed that v. 2 is a secondary addition, which was added to the text as an independent gloss probably with regard to the word for Moab in Isa 15–16 where the name of this well-known city is lacking.¹⁰

The consistency of v. 3 is also discussed. The phrase “remnant of Aram” is particularly striking. Since the expression “remnant of Aram” is otherwise unattested, it might reflect a theological “concept of remnant” that has been transferred to the people of Aram.¹¹ Moreover, the term בני־ישראל (“sons of Israel”)

4 Cf. Wildberger, *Jesaja* 13–27, 639.

5 Cf. for example Kaiser, *Jesaja* 13–39, 65; Becker, *Jesaja*, 274–5; Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah* 1–39, 273, 303.

6 See for example Wildberger, *Jesaja* 13–27, 640, 646.

7 Cf. for example Wildberger, *Jesaja* 13–27, 497–8; Berges, *Jesaja*, 145–52; Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah* 1–39, 271–3; U. Becker, “Die Geburt der Fremdvölkersprüche im Jesajabuch” in H. Bezzel/U. Becker/M. de Jong (ed.), *Prophecy and Foreign Nations: Aspects of the Role of the “Nations” in the Books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel* (FAT II 135; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2022) 25–43.

8 For the location of Aroer, see, e.g., Wildberger, *Jesaja* 13–27, 635; Sweeney, *Isaiah* 1–39, 255.

9 Cf. Wildberger, *Jesaja* 13–27, 635.

10 Similar already Wildberger, *Jesaja* 13–27, 635, 639–41; Becker, *Jesaja*, 274; different Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah* 1–39, 302, 304.

11 See H. Bezzel, “Gerichtsprphetie und Fremdvölkerorakel: Ihr Verhältnis zueinander mit Blick auf die Worte über Damaskus in Jer 17, Jer 49 und Am 1”, in M. Meyer-Blanck (ed.),

is very rarely mentioned in the book of Isaiah, with most occurrences usually being considered as exilic or even postexilic additions.¹² It is therefore quite possible that v. 3 (beginning with וְשֹׂאֵר אֶרֶם)¹³ was subsequently expanded.

Thus, v. 1, 3* is to be regarded as the oldest layer of this oracle against Damascus. Without its secondary extensions, the former word against Damascus is framed by the name of the city: it begins after the redactional superscription מֶשֶׁךְ דַּמְשֶׁק in v. 1 with the addressee Damascus: הִנֵּה דַמְשֶׁק ("Behold, Damascus"). The oracle's last word in v. 3* is also Damascus as it ends with the phrase וּמַמְלַכָּה מִדַּמְשֶׁק ("and the kingdom from Damascus").

With regard to the question of the depiction of Damascus it is noteworthy that in these verses the destiny of Damascus is equated with that of Ephraim, which stands for Samaria. Both kingdoms, the northern kingdom of Israel and the neighbouring kingdom of Aram, are doomed. This parallelism of Damascus and Samaria and their announced destruction is reminiscent of the words in Isa 8:1–4.¹⁴ In Isa 8:1–4, too, both northern kingdoms will come to an imminent end (cf. also Isa 7:8). Isaiah 8:4 reads: "For before the child shall have knowledge to cry, my father, and my mother, the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria shall be taken away before the king of Assyria."

It is also noteworthy that there is no evidence of guilt in connection with the oracle of the fall of Damascus and Samaria in Isa 17:1, 3*. No reason is given why the kingdom of Damascus, or the kingdom of Samaria will come to an end.¹⁵ The same can be said for Isa 8:1–4, where there is also no proof of guilt. Thus, the message of the respective word therefore lies solely in the decisive "that" of the downfall, not in its justification or explanation. In addition, as Uwe Becker points out, it is remarkable that in this context the downfall of Aram and Israel is not attributed to the work of Yhwh.¹⁶

Christentum und Europa: XVI. Europäischer Kongress für Theologie (10.–13. September 2017 in Wien) (VWGTh 57; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2019) 234–48, on p. 240 n. 30. Hannes Bezzel refers to Becker, *Jesaja*, 274–5. Different Berges, *Jesaja*, 147.

12 The term בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל ("sons of Israel") occurs only in Isa 17:3, 9; 27:12; 31:6; 66:20.

13 Concerning the difficult structure of v. 3 see for example Wildberger, *Jesaja* 13–27, 636; Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah* 1–39, 302.

14 See to this observation for example R.G. Kratz, "Israel im Jesajabuch" in idem, *Prophetenstudien* (FAT 74; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 160–76, on p. 173; K. Schmid, *Jesaja* 1–23 (ZBKAT 19,1; Zürich: Theologischer, 2011), 142; Bezzel, "Gerichtsprophetie", 239. The proximity of Isa 7–8 and 17 has also been noticed by Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah* 1–39, 304–5, for example.

15 However, the lack of reasons is not conspicuous, see also Wildberger, *Jesaja* 13–27, 642; compare also Sweeney, *Isaiah* 1–39, 258.

16 Becker, "Geburt", 30–1.

It has therefore often been assumed that these oracles against Damascus and Samaria both in Isa 8:1–4 as well as in Isa 17:1, 3* are intended as words of salvation for Judah. For the fall of Damascus and Samaria means salvation for Judah.¹⁷

Interestingly, this situation, as depicted in Isa 8:1–4 and 17:1, 3* fits quite well into the time of the Syro-Ephraimite War of 734–732, as has often been argued. It was precisely at this time that the northern kingdom of Israel, together with the kingdom of Aram, were hostile to the kingdom of Judah.¹⁸ Thus, there are good reasons to date these words to this particular time as a reflection of the threat from Damascus. Furthermore, the announced end of Damascus and Samaria come true in the following years: Damascus was conquered by the Assyrians in 732 and Samaria in 722/20.¹⁹

Thus, here in Isa 17:1, 3* as well as already in Isa 8:1–4 we find an old word of salvation for Judah – which at the same time means disaster for the northern kingdom of Israel and the neighbouring people of Aram. It was only through later additions in Isa 8:5–8; 17:4–6 and the embedding in the present context of the book of Isaiah that the original words of salvation for Judah then also became a word of judgment for Judah.²⁰

At the end of these observations about the first oracle against Damascus in Isa 17:1, 3* it can be said that in this passage a picture of a destroyed and abandoned city is drawn. Damascus is given a harsh word of judgment here. Together with Samaria, Damascus is clearly seen here as an opponent and enemy of Judah.

3 The Oracle against Damascus in Amos 1:3–5

Another word against Damascus is found in the context of the so-called “oracles against the nations” attested in Amos 1:3–2:3. The passage in Amos 1:3–2:3 is a remarkable collection of oracles against foreign peoples due to its well-structured composition. This special structure of the collection has often been described and discussed.²¹ To focus on the main observations, the following

17 Cf. to this for example Becker, “Geburt”, esp. 30–2.

18 See the already mentioned literature above; different Kaiser, *Jesaja* 13–39, 63–4, who dates the passage into the postexilic period.

19 See for the historical setting of Isa 17:1–3* also for example Sweeney, *Isaiah* 1–39, 260–1; Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah* 1–39, 303–4.

20 Cf. for the whole discussion for example Becker, *Jesaja*, 103–9, 274–5; Kratz, “Israel”, 173; Schmid, *Jesaja* 1–23, 100, 141–2; Bezzel, “Gerichtsprophetie”, 240–1.

21 Concerning the structure and intention of Amos 1:3–2:16 cf. for example H.W. Wolff, *Dodekapropheten 2: Joel und Amos* (BKAT XIV,2; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1969),

can be noted: The present version of the oracles consists of eight words against various nations, which are usually divided into four pairs:

I	Amos 1:3–5	Aram	long
II	Amos 1:6–8	Philistia	long
III	<i>Amos 1:9–10</i>	<i>Tyre</i>	<i>short</i>
IV	<i>Amos 1:11–12</i>	<i>Edom</i>	<i>short</i>
V	Amos 1:13–15	Ammon	long
VI	Amos 2:1–3	Moab	long
VII	<i>Amos 2:4–5</i>	<i>Judah</i>	<i>short</i>
VIII	Amos 2:6–16	Israel	long

Every stanza of the collection follows a similar pattern:

- a) messenger formula (“Thus says Yhwh.”)
- b) formulaic statement (“For three crimes ..., and for four, I will not revoke it.”)
- c) accusation (“Because ...”)
- d) proclamation of punishment (“I will send fire ...” *and further threat of punishment*)
- e) *closing formula* (“says [the Lord] Yhwh”)

It is striking that within the collection there are two different versions of this pattern. Five of the oracles show further elaborate pronouncements of punishment after the word about the fire as well as the closing formula (“long version”).²² The words against Tyre, Edom and Judah represent a shorter version of the pattern. They only have the announcement about sending the fire, and no further threat of punishment;²³ the closing formula in these oracles is also missing (“short version”). In addition, the language of the oracle against

164–85; S.M. Paul, “Amos 1:3–2:3: A Concatenous Literary Pattern”, *JBL* 90 (1971) 397–403; V. Fritz, “Die Fremdvölkersprüche des Amos”, *VT* 37 (1987) 26–38; J. Wöhrle, *Die frühen Sammlungen des Zwölfprophetenbuches: Entstehung und Komposition* (BZAW 360; Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 2006), 93–102; J. Jeremias, *Der Prophet Amos* (ATD 24,2; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 32013), 7–13; G. Eidevall, *Amos: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (The Anchor Yale Bible 24G, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 99–101; R. Kessler, *Amos* (IEKAT; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2021), 48–52.

22 The word against Israel also shows more variants, see for more details for example, Kessler, *Amos*, 66–80, as well as the literature mentioned above in note 21.

23 Cf., e.g., Wöhrle, *Sammlungen*, 93–4.

Judah is reminiscent of Deuteronomistic formulations.²⁴ Therefore, these three stanzas are generally considered as later additions.²⁵ It can probably be assumed that there was an addition in two steps in the exilic (Judah) and postexilic period (Tyre and Edom).²⁶

It should also be noted that the entire collection of oracles against the nations in Amos 1–2* can already be regarded as a literary composition in its older version. This earlier composition thus consists of four words against other nations and then finds its climax in the word against Israel, which is the longest stanza.²⁷

Before we return to the intention of the entire collection of the oracles concerning the nations, the word against Damascus will be the focus of interest in the following. The oracle against Damascus is found in Amos 1:3–5 and thus opens the collection of the oracles in the book of Amos:

- Amos 1 3 Thus says Yhwh:
 For three crimes of Damascus,
 and for four, I will not revoke it.
 Because they have threshed Gilead
 with threshing sledges of iron,
 4 I will send fire upon the house of Hazael,
 and it will consume the palaces of Ben-Hadad.
 5 I will break the bar of Damascus,
 and cut off the ruler²⁸ from the valley of Aven,

24 Cf. among others W.H. Schmidt, "Die deuteronomistische Redaktion des Amosbuches", *ZAW* 36 (1965) 168–93, on p. 177; Wöhrle, *Sammlungen*, 95; Eidevall, *Amos*, 101; Kessler, *Amos*, 81; G. Barnea, "Dating Amos' Oracles against the Nations: Metaphors of Neo-Assyrian Campaigns", *RB* 130 (2023) 524–51, on p. 543.

25 For further arguments, see the literature mentioned above.

26 According to Wöhrle, *Sammlungen*, 134–6, first the deuteronomistic oracle against Judah in the exilic period and then the words against Tyre and Edom in the postexilic period were integrated into the collection. Similar also Eidevall, *Amos*, 101.

27 The oracle against Israel shows some more variants, too (see above note 22). For example, the phrase that introduces the punishment "I will send fire" is missing here. Eidevall, *Amos*, 101, notes: "Given this deviation from the structural pattern, the Israel oracle can be described as open-ended. In this way, the transition to the next part of the book, comprising chapters 3–6, which develops the theme of Israel's alleged crimes in more detail, become rather smooth." This correlates with the assumption, that the chapters in Amos 1–2 are a later composition, which are created in view of the following chapters. Cf. to this assumption among others Wöhrle, *Sammlungen*, 100–2; Kessler, *Amos*, 25–6.

28 Cf. to this translation S.M. Paul, *Amos: A Commentary on the Book of Amos*, (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 43, 51–2; Eidevall, *Amos*, 98, 103; see furthermore also J. Barton, *Amos's Oracles against the Nations: A study of Amos 1.3–2.5* (SOTSMS, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 18; Kessler, *Amos*, 44, 46.

and the scepter-bearer from Beth-Eden;
and the people of Aram will be exiled to Kir,
says Yhwh.

Verses 3–5 are commonly assumed to be a literary unity.²⁹ The passage offers the pattern mentioned above: after the messenger formula at the beginning of v. 3, the formulaic statement with the numerical word “three or four crimes” follows. The “absolute irrevocability of the divine decision”³⁰ is here justified by the offense of Damascus against Gilead. Verses 4–5 proclaim the punishment: Yhwh will send fire to destroy the prestigious buildings in Damascus and will put an end to the rulers of Aven and Beth-Eden. Finally, the exile of Aram to Kir is announced.

Earlier research often focused on determining the concrete historical background of these verses.³¹ However, the expression “because they have threshed Gilead with threshing sledges of iron” in v. 3b “should probably be understood as a metaphor for military acts of violence against a defeated population” as Göran Eidevall points out.³² This is even more evident when other passages that also mention a similar metaphor are taken into account, such as Jdg 8:7, 2 Kgs 13:7, Isa 41:15 or like Mic 4:13 and Hab 3:12 in view of Israel’s future strength. Therefore, it is more likely that this expression is to be seen as a general metaphor for cruel warfare.³³ Thus, it “is not possible to determine whether Amos 1:3 refers to (the memory of) a specific historic event.”³⁴

This observation also fits in with the overall structure of the collection of oracles against the nations in the book of Amos. For the following words against the other nations are also about war crimes and thus about violations of international law, for which the nations are punished by Yhwh.³⁵

29 See, e.g., Wöhrle, *Sammlungen*, 94, as well as the literature mentioned above.

30 Paul, “Amos 1:3–2:3”, 401.

31 Cf., e.g., Wolff, *Dodekapropheten*, 181–4; J. Jeremias, “Zur Entstehung der Völkersprüche im Amosbuch” in idem, *Hosea und Amos: Studien zu den Anfängen des Dodekapropheten* (FAT 13; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996) 172–82, on pp. 180–1; and recently Kessler, *Amos*, 85, again.

32 Eidevall, *Amos*, 104.

33 Cf. C. Fischer, *Die Fremdvölkersprüche bei Amos und Jesaja: Studien zur Eigenart und Intention in Am 1,3–2,3.4f. und Jes 13,1–16,14* (BBB 136; Berlin/Wien: Philo, 2002), 41–2. The use of the motif of threshing in the context of war and warfare is also attested in Assyrian documents, cf. Barton, *Oracles*, 19; Fritz, “Fremdvölkersprüche”, 29; Fischer, *Fremdvölkersprüche bei Amos und Jesaja*, 41; Eidevall, *Amos*, 104; Kessler, *Amos*, 55.

34 Eidevall, *Amos*, 104; similar already Fritz, “Fremdvölkersprüche”, 30.

35 Cf. Kessler, *Amos*, 88–90; similar already Barton, *Oracles*, esp. 39–45; Fritz, “Fremdvölkersprüche”, 32–3; more reserved Eidevall, *Amos*, 100.

In addition, the names “Hazeal” and “Ben-Hadad” mentioned in v. 4 are anything but clear, since the dating of the reign of Ben Hadad above all is uncertain and there were also at least three kings with this name on the throne of Damascus. Charis Fischer, among others, therefore, thinks it is possible that the name Ben Hadad stands for the kingdom of Damascus paradigmatically.³⁶ Thus, the names tend to show rather a stereotypical character and accordingly, do not help to date the word against Damascus.³⁷ Rather, the parallelism of “the house of Hazeal” and “the palaces of Ben-Hadad” leads to the conclusion that this verse generally refers to symbols of power and domination of the Aramean Kingdom, which are consumed by the fire of Yhwh.³⁸ This is also to be seen in parallel with all the other oracles, each of which provides a similar stereotype phrase about sending of the destructive fire (cf. Amos 1:7, 10, 12, 14; 2:2, 5).

In this context it is noteworthy that some scholars have convincingly proven that the oracles already presuppose the deeds of the Assyrian Empire and are thus to be dated to the time after the Assyrian conquest of Damascus in 732 and after the downfall of Samaria in 722/20.³⁹ Therefore, it is more likely that the word against Damascus, and with them the entire first collection of oracles against the nations, stems from a later period, namely from the end of the 8th century BCE at the earliest.⁴⁰

36 Cf. Fischer, *Fremdvölkersprüche bei Amos und Jesaja*, 42–3, 45; also W.L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 2: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah Chapters 26–52*, (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 380–1; Peels, *Jeremiah 46–51*, 318.

37 Cf. Fischer, *Fremdvölkersprüche bei Amos und Jesaja*, 43. Less skeptical, even if the names are not entirely clear is Wolff, *Dodekapropheten*, 189.

38 Cf. Kessler, *Amos*, 55–6; similar already Wolff, *Dodekapropheten*, 188; Fritz, “Fremdvölkersprüche”, 33. On the motif of fire as a whole, see, e.g., Paul, *Amos*, 48–50.

39 See for more details recently Barnea, “Oracles”, with further literature.

40 Cf. for example Eidevall, *Amos*, 101, 105–6; with reference to Fritz, “Fremdvölkersprüche”, 37–8. An earlier dating of the Amosian oracles against the nations to the middle of the 8th century seems therefore unlikely. But for this assumption cf., e.g., Barton, *Oracles*, 26–31. Similar, Jeremias, “Völkersprüche”, 180–2; idem, *Amos*, 13–14, who dates Amos 1:3–5 in the context of the Aramaic wars, in a time before any strengthening of the Assyrians was recognizable. Thus, Jörg Jeremias situates the earliest words of Amos in Amos 1–2 approximately between 760 and 750 during the reign of Jeroboam II. Similarly, Kessler, *Amos*, 84, notes: “Der Spruch in Am 1,3–5 setzt den noch selbstständigen Staat von Aram-Damaskus voraus und zielt auf die Epoche vor seiner Vernichtung.” Nevertheless, Rainer Kessler states, the oldest identifiable version of the composition of the oracles was not formulated until after the fall of Israel as a state. However, the core of the collection retains older elements, and these oldest elements have been preserved, especially in the word against Damascus. Differently, Fischer, *Fremdvölkersprüche bei Amos und Jesaja*, 45–6, who emphasizes that the passage in Amos 1:3–5 does not contain any clear indication of dating, but that a much later origin is very likely. Charis Fischer therefore considers the origin of Amos 1:3–2:3 as a whole to be probable only in the postexilic period (see p. 62).

It would also be conceivable to date the collection of oracles later to the 7th century, as Jakob Wöhrle does, for example.⁴¹ He combines the oracles against the nations with other texts in the Book of Amos that show a cult-critical perspective. In particular, the recurring expression of the destruction of the palaces as prestige objects of the nations by the fire of Yhwh plays an essential role in this context. In addition, the repeatedly documented announcement of the exile (cf. Amos 1:5, 15, 27: 6:7–8, 14) is likely to presuppose the situation of the threat from the Babylonians.

This brings us to the question of the intention behind the oracles against the nations and also of the interpretation of the word against Damascus. It is important to recognize, that the entire collection of oracles is focused on Israel and its destiny.⁴² This becomes obvious by its literary composition which culminates in the word against Israel in Amos 2:6–16*,⁴³ which is the longest stanza within the compilation. Thus, the word against the nations ultimately serve to highlight Israel's offenses even more clearly. Unlike in Isa 17, there are now concrete accusations against the nations. For the portrayal of Damascus this means that Damascus and Israel are once again perceived together – now in their debt – but there is an escalation here: Israel is even worse than Aram. Presumably, Aram is mentioned first in the series of oracles as the former arch-enemy of the Northern Kingdom.⁴⁴ The word against Damascus and against all the other neighbouring peoples is therefore aimed at making the guilt of Israel appear even greater.

Furthermore, it can be stated with Göran Eidevall: “The main purpose seems to have been to explain and justify the downfall of Israel in 722 BCE, from a Judah-centred perspective.”⁴⁵ That means: Just as Israel could not rely on being safe, so can Judah not rely on being unaccountable. For the accused injustices, which are denounced by the nations as well as by neighbouring Israel, are also to be found among their own people.⁴⁶ There is therefore no safety from the impending judgment of God.

Thus, the older collection of oracles in Amos 1–2* shows Yhwh as a God who involves the nations in his actions, but whose focus is on Israel and which at

41 Compare to the following Wöhrle, *Sammlungen*, 100–2, 129–33.

42 Cf. among others Jeremias, *Amos*, 8; Wöhrle, *Sammlungen*, 98; Eidevall, *Amos*, 101.

43 Cf. also, e.g., Jeremias, “Völkersprüche”, 173. Different for example Fritz, “Fremdvölkersprüche”, 27, who assumes that the oracle against Israel was a later addition. Concerning secondary extensions within the Israel stanza see, e.g., Wöhrle, *Sammlungen*, 98–9; Kessler, *Amos*, 82–3.

44 Cf. Eidevall, *Amos*, 104.

45 Eidevall, *Amos*, 101.

46 Similar already Wolff, *Dodekapropheten*, 209–10; Barton, *Oracles*, 36.

the same time includes a special message to Judah. This fits very well into the time after the Assyrian Conquest of Damascus and Samaria and probably even better in the time of the emerging Babylonian threat to Judah.

It becomes clear that God punishes the offenses of *all* nations – but it is not about punishments for actions that nations have done against Israel. Rather, Yhwh judges all nations by his power and ethical standards. Thus, in the end, both Aram and Israel, and indirectly also Judah – and in the extended text then explicitly through the secondary word against Judah – are placed under the judgment of God. In this regard, the recurring numerical word “three or four crimes” is of particular importance. Göran Eidevall emphasizes that “the verbatim repetition of this refrain has the effect of placing all the addressees on the same level.”⁴⁷

This means that Damascus, like Israel, is under God’s punishment – God is thus restoring his own order, which has been disturbed by *all* nations. God’s judgment over all is thus based on the universal actions of God.⁴⁸ Accordingly, the oracles against the nations in the book of Amos are to be understood theologically in the narrower sense, in that they mainly make a statement about Yhwh, who is understood as the God of the whole world and all nations.

4 The Oracle against Damascus in Jeremiah 49:23–27

Finally, we find a third word against Damascus in the Book of Jeremiah. It reads:

- Jer 49 23 Concerning Damascus.
Shamed are Hamath and Arpad:
for they have heard bad news.
They sway like the sea in fear,⁴⁹
that is unable to remain calm.
- 24 Damascus has become weak,
has turned to flee, and panic has seized it.
Anguish and pangs have taken her, as a woman in labor.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Eidevall, *Amos*, 102.

⁴⁸ Cf. for example Paul, *Amos*, 45–6; Eidevall, *Amos*, 100; Kessler, *Amos*, 87–90.

⁴⁹ Concerning the literary problems of this phrase see for example Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2, 379; B. Huwiler, *Jeremia und die Völker: Untersuchungen zu den Völkersprüchen in Jeremia 46–49* (FAT 20; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 234 n. 651; H.-J. Stipp, *Jeremia 25–52* (HAT I/12,2; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 735; Peels, *Jeremiah* 46–51, 316–7.

⁵⁰ Verse 24b is missing in the Septuagint; see below and the literature mentioned in note 49.

- 25 Oh, if only the town of my praise had not been abandoned,
the city of my joy.
- 26 Therefore her young men shall fall in her squares,
and all the men of war shall be cut off in that day,
saying of Yhwh Zebaoth.⁵¹
- 27 And I will kindle a fire in the wall of Damascus,
and it will consume the palaces of Ben-Hadad.

The passage in Jer 49:23–27 begins in v. 23 after the superscription לדמשק (“concerning Damascus”) with a description of the situation of the Aramaic cities of Hamath and Arpad which have heard bad news. In verses 24–25 follows a lament about the abandoned city of Damascus which is called the “city of my joy.” In v. 26, the imminent death of the soldiers in the city is announced. And in v. 27, Yhwh declares that he will send fire against the wall of Damascus and against the palaces of Ben-Hadad.

Previous research has often found that the text in Jer 49:23–27 is not easy to understand and also has some literary problems that questioned its literary coherence. Therefore, the text will be examined in more detail in the following.

With regard to the beginning of v. 23, it has already been perceived with irritation that the text is entitled “Damascus,” but that then follows a statement about Hamath and Arpad.⁵² However, the heading “Damascus” is to be understood metonymically for the entire empire of the Aramaeans.⁵³ Thus, with “Damascus” at the beginning of the stanza, the entire kingdom of Aram is meant. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that “Damascus” is mentioned only here in Jer 49:23, 24, 27, and not again in the Book of Jeremiah.⁵⁴ Significantly, it is therefore also missing from the list of the nations in Jer 25:19–26.⁵⁵ Moreover,

51 The term “Zebaoth” in v. 26b is missing in the Septuagint and is to be regarded as a later expansion, see the literature already mentioned.

52 Cf., e.g., G. Wanke, *Jeremia: Teilband 2: Jeremia 25,15–52,34* (ZBKAT 20,2; Zürich: Theologischer, 2003), 425.

53 See also R.P. Carroll, *Jeremiah. A Commentary* (OTL; London: SCM, 1986), 808; Huwylar, *Jeremia*, 235; Maer, “Damascus”; C.J. Sharp, *Jeremiah 26–52* (IECOT; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2022), 364; Barnea, “Oracles”, 538. At the latest since Assyrian times the whole province “Aram” was also called “Damascus”, cf. among others Huwylar, *Jeremia*, 235.

54 There is then also only one reference to “Aram” within the book of Jeremiah, in Jer 35:11.

55 The absence of Damascus in the list of the nations becomes even more interesting when one considers that in the Greek version (cf. Jer 32:5–12 LXX), the list of nations follows immediately after the composition of oracles against the nations. The relationship between the oracles against the nations in Jer 46–51 and the list of nations in Jer 25 cannot be discussed here, but for further considerations see, e.g., G. Fischer, “Jer 25 und die Fremdvölkerversprüche: Unterschiede zwischen hebräischem und griechischem

sometimes the phrase “that is unable to remain calm” in v. 23b β is assumed to be secondary because it is close to the phrase in Isa 57:20.⁵⁶

After the cities of Hamath and Arpad were mentioned in v. 23, the city of Damascus now comes into focus in v. 24. In contrast to the fear of the other cities, an increase can be seen here: Damascus is not only afraid, but it is also becoming weak, which results in panicked flight.⁵⁷ The expression in v. 24b, where Damascus is compared to a woman giving birth, is missing in the Greek version, so that this part is to be regarded as a pre-Masoretic addition from a later period, following Hermann-Josef Stipp and others.⁵⁸ The secondary phrase makes use of the well-known metaphor, which is attested in a similar way in Jer 6:24 and Ps 48:7 (cf. Jer 49:22). This motif also often appears in context of lament, as for example in Jer 8:21, where the motif is applied to Yhwh.

Verse 25 is somewhat surprising. Here follows a lament about the abandoned city of Damascus in style of a “qinah” (see the beginning with תָּיֵא).⁵⁹ The verse is not only hard to translate,⁶⁰ but it is also disputed who the speaker of the lament is. William L. Holladay, for example, suggests: “Verse 25 is an exclamatory lament over Damascus – it may even be intended as a quotation of the inhabitants (compare 9:18; 48:17).”⁶¹ But if a quotation of the inhabitants is meant, it is mostly introduced in some way in context, as in Jer 6:26 for example. Rather, however, it can be assumed, that Yhwh himself is the speaker of this lament.⁶² This becomes clear, when one looks at the closer and wider context of the collection of the oracles against the nations. And this is also evident in the use of the first-person suffix in the phrase “city of my joy.” This means

Text”, *Biblica* 72 (1991) 474–99; J.W. Watts, “Text and Redaction in Jeremiah’s Oracles against the Nations”, *CBQ* 54 (1992) 432–47; C.M. Maier, *Jeremiah 1–25* (IEKAT; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2022), 434–47. For older research, see, among others, H. Bardtke, “Jeremia der Fremdvölkerprophet”, *ZAW* 12 (1935) 209–39 / 13 (1936) 240–62.

56 See, e.g., B. Duhm, *Das Buch Jeremia* (KHAT 11; Tübingen/Leipzig: J.C.B. Mohr, 1901), 357; Huwlyer, *Jeremia*, 234–5; Wanke, *Jeremia* 25,15–52,34, 425; Stipp, *Jeremia* 25–52, 735.

57 Comparable also Stipp, *Jeremia* 25–52, 736–7.

58 Stipp, *Jeremia* 25–52, 735. Similar already W. Rudolph, *Jeremia* (HAT 12; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1968), 292; Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 807; Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2, 379; Huwlyer, *Jeremia*, 234; Bezzel, “Gerichtsprphetie”, 243.

59 Cf. Huwlyer, *Jeremia*, 235; W.H. Schmidt, *Das Buch Jeremia: Kapitel 21–52* (ATD 21; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 312; Stipp, *Jeremia* 25–52, 737.

60 Concerning the literary problems of this verse see, e.g., P. Volz, *Der Prophet Jeremia* (KAT X; Leipzig: A. Deichertsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1928), 419; Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2, 379; J. Bright, *Jeremiah: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 21; Garden City: Doubleday, 1984), 333; Huwlyer, *Jeremia*, 235–6; Stipp, *Jeremia* 25–52, 734, 737.

61 Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2, 379.

62 See for this and for the following, e.g., G. Fischer, *Jeremia* 26–52 (HThKAT; Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2005), 551. Different e.g. Peels, *Jeremiah* 46–51, 317.

that v. 25 offers a very emotional lament about the abandoned city, which in earlier times could once be called the city of joy. Usually, such an epithet appears in connection with a lament over the destroyed city of Jerusalem, as in Isa 32:13–14,⁶³ or in a praise of Zion, as in Ps 48:3.⁶⁴

Interestingly, in Jer 8:21–9:2 Yhwh himself laments about the breakdown of his own nation: “For the hurt of the daughter of my people am I hurt; I am mourning, and dismay has taken hold on me.” (Jer 8:21). Even if it is controversial whether Yhwh can be seen as a speaker here or whether the prophet is more to be thought of, it is quite reasonable that Yhwh himself is mourning: see עמי (“my people”).⁶⁵ More obvious is Yhwh’s lament in Jer 12:7–13, where he laments that he has left his house and that he has given up his heritage, meaning the temple and his people.⁶⁶

To formulate similar thoughts about Damascus and even in the context of a speech by Yhwh is therefore remarkable and unique within the Hebrew Bible. However, this specific element of divine lament within the word for Damascus in Jer 49:23–25 is oftentimes overlooked or deliberately ignored.⁶⁷ We will come back to this phenomenon later.

Verse 26 has often been regarded as a secondary addition.⁶⁸ One argument for this is that the verse with the opening לכן (“therefore”) does not fit well with the preceding verse. The accusation of guilt for the subsequent announcement of judgment is missing here. So, there is no reference value for לכן. In

63 On the entire passage of Isa 32:9–14 see, e.g., H. Wildberger, *Jesaja: 3. Teilband Jesaja 28–39: Das Buch, der Prophet und seine Botschaft* (BKAT X,3; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1982), 1262–72.

64 See also Bezzel, “Gerichtsprphetie”, 243–4.

65 Cf. Maier, *Jeremia 1–25*, 197–9; similar already M.E. Biddle, *Polyphony and Symphony in Prophetic Literature: Rereading Jeremiah 7–20* (Studies in Old Testament Interpretation 2; Macon: Mercer University, 1996), 28–31. However, there are some scholars, who assume Jeremiah as a speaker, cf., e.g., W.L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah Chapters 1–25* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 288–9; G. Fischer, *Jeremia 1–25* (HThKAT; Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2005), 344, 347; K. Finsterbusch, “Unterbrochene Jhwh-Rede: Anmerkungen zu einem rhetorischen Phänomen im Buch Jeremia”, *BZ* 60 (2016) 1–13, on pp. 8–10.

66 Cf. also J.J.M. Roberts, “The Motif of the Weeping God in Jeremiah and Its Background in the Lament Tradition of the Ancient Near East” in idem, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East: Collected Essays* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2002) 132–42, on p. 135; Maier, *Jeremia 1–25*, 253–4.

67 Thus, already, e.g., Volz, *Jeremia*, 419–20. And Sharp, *Jeremiah 26–52*, 364–5, 376, for example, as far as I can see, did not mention it at all in her recent commentary on Jeremiah.

68 See for the following Duhm, *Jeremia*, 358; Rudolph, *Jeremia*, 293; Bright, *Jeremiah*, 335; Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 808; Wanke, *Jeremia 25,15–52,34*, 425–6; Fischer, *Jeremia 26–52*, 551–2; Stipp, *Jeremia 25–52*, 735; Bezzel, “Gerichtsprphetie”, 242.

addition, there is another argument: the perspective changes between v. 25 to v. 26. While in verses 23–25 the disaster is already considered to have happened because there is lamentation about the already abandoned city, in v. 26 the death of the young men and soldiers is only announced for the future.⁶⁹ Finally, there is an additional argument to consider: the phrase in v. 26 is very close to the formulation in Jer 50:30. However, in Jer 50:30 the expression is much better embedded in the present context than it is the case in Jer 49:26.⁷⁰ It is therefore more likely that the formulation stems from the context of the oracle of Babel and was later inserted in the oracle against Damascus. Thus, even if some scholars try to find arguments against it,⁷¹ it seems to be very clear that v. 26 is a later addition that now provides exactly the announcement of judgment that was not previously present in the passage of lamentation.

Like v. 26, v. 27 also offers an announcement of judgment by Yhwh: he will send fire to the wall of Damascus and to the palaces of Ben-Hadad. This phrase sounds very familiar and is taken directly from the chorus of Amos 1 (cf. the details given above). Thereby, v. 27 shows a special proximity to Amos 1:4b, 14a. Because of this quotational character, v. 27 is therefore often and convincingly regarded as a later addition.⁷² The impression mentioned above, that the statement about the sending of the fire against the palaces in Amos 1 uses the names of the kings typologically is underlined by the quotation in Jer 49:27. For in the time in which the word from Jer 49 is to be located (see below), the use of the name Ben-Hadad as a contemporary ruler makes no sense. At the latest now, when the formulaic phrase is used in Jer 49 the symbolic meaning, argued for Amos 1 above, becomes clear. The fire sent by Yhwh is fundamentally directed against the symbols and institutions of power and reign.

According to the observations given above, it may therefore be assumed that the earliest layer of the word against Damascus is to be found in v. 23,⁷³ 24a,

69 Cf. Wanke, *Jeremia* 25,15–52,34, 426: „Das nach V. 25 bereits eingetretene Unheil verlegt V. 26 in die Zukunft.“ Similar also Fischer, *Jeremia* 26–52, 552; Bezzel, „Gerichtsprophetie“, 242.

70 Cf., e.g., Huwlyer, *Jeremia*, 237; Stipp, *Jeremia* 25–52, 735; Bezzel, „Gerichtsprophetie“, 242; Sharp, *Jeremiah* 26–52, 376. Different Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2, 394, who sees in Jer 50:30 an interruption of the continuity.

71 For example, Huwlyer, *Jeremia*, 237–9.

72 See, e.g., Duhm, *Jeremia*, 358, Rudolph, *Jeremia*, 293; Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 808; Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2, 379; Huwlyer, *Jeremia*, 239–40; Bezzel, „Gerichtsprophetie“, 242.

73 The ending in v. 23bβ is probably also seen to be secondary, see above.

25.⁷⁴ The lament over the deserted city only became a prophetic announcement through the additions in v. 26, 27.⁷⁵

The word concerning Damascus is part of the collection of other oracles against the nations which can be found in Jer 46–51. However, in contrast to the surrounding oracles in Jer 49 the oracle against Damascus in its older version shows some peculiarities.

		Announcement of Judgment	Accusation of Guilt	Announcement of Exile
Jer 49:1–6	Ammon	X	X	X
Jer 49:7–22	Edom	X	X	X
Jer 49:23–25*	Damascus			
Jer 49:28–33	Kedar / Hazor	X	X	
Jer 49:34–39	Elam	X		

In all the other oracles in Jer 49, there are proclamation of judgment, concrete accusations of what the nations are guilty of (its only missing in the word against Elam), and often an announcement of the exile of the respective people (cf. Ammon and Edom).⁷⁶ Interestingly, all these elements are missing in the oracle against Damascus which stands in the middle of this group and is the shortest word in the collection even in its extended form. Instead, the word against Damascus offers a lament about the already destroyed city – which is also prevented by Yhwh himself.

The element of lamentation is of great significance throughout the book of Jeremiah. There are often direct calls to lament the frightening and hopeless situation (compare in the close context e.g., Jer 48:20; 49:3).⁷⁷

74 Similarly, Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 808; Wanke, *Jeremia 25,15–52,34*, 425, which in verses 23, 24a, 25 assume the original form of the oracle.

75 See also Bezzel, “Gerichtsprophetie”, 242.

76 For the composition of the oracles against the nations in Jer 46–49 (50–51) in general, and also for the differences between the Greek and the Hebrew versions see, e.g., Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 312–14; Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 751–9; Fischer, “Jer 25 und die Fremdvölkerversprüche”; Watts, “Text”; Huwylar, *Jeremia*; Wanke, *Jeremia 25,15–52,34*, 389–90; M.K. Chae, “Redactional Intentions of MT Jeremiah concerning the Oracles against the Nations”, *JBL* 134 (2015) 577–93.

77 Cf. for example Schmidt, *Jeremia 21–52*, 275.

Furthermore, it has often been seen that Jer 49:23–25* has a literary connection to Jer 4–6.⁷⁸ The texts in Jer 4–6 describes an “enemy from the north” who will shortly come over Judah and Jerusalem.⁷⁹ In the multi-layered passage, there are invocations first to flee to the fortified cities (cf. Jer 4:5), but then also to flee further south of the land (cf. Jer 6:1) in order to take refuge from the enemy from the north. The dramatic descriptions of the expected disaster then end in Jer 6:22–26 with a call to lament in response to the frighten news that has befallen the people. Accordingly, both texts in Jer 4–6 and Jer 49:23–25* have similar motifs.

However, there are also significant differences between the two passages: in Jer 4–6 there are mainly announcements and threats of the coming catastrophe. The enemy from the north is still approaching and therefore the population is called to flee. In contrast, Jer 49:23–25* describes the events in retrospect. The city is already abandoned, because the inhabitants have already fled.⁸⁰ And while in Jer 6 the population is still called to lament, the lamentation in Jer 49:23–25* is already taking place; moreover, by God himself. These verses thus show, as Georg Fischer notes, an “expression of emotional divine compassion.”⁸¹

It can therefore be assumed that the two above-mentioned texts were not written against the same historical background and are also not on the same literary level. It is generally supposed that the oldest parts of the book of Jeremiah are found in Jer 4–6.⁸² The texts are often associated with the Babylonian conquests at the end of the 7th century BCE and especially with Nebuchadrezzar’s military success at the battle of Carchemish in 605.⁸³

78 See, e.g., Fischer, *Jeremiah* 26–52, 560–1. On the relationship between Jer 4–6 and the oracles to the nations in Jer 46–49 as a whole see, e.g., K. Schmid, *Buchgestalten des Jeremiabuches. Untersuchungen zur Redaktions- und Rezeptionsgeschichte von Jer 30–33 im Kontext des Buches* (WMANT 72; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1996), 334–5; Huwylar, *Jeremiah*, 300–4; H. Bezzel, “When, How, and Why Did Jeremiah Become a ‘Prophet to the Nations’?: Jer 46:2–12 (MT) as a Test Case”, in idem/U. Becker/M. de Jong (ed.), *Prophecy and Foreign Nations: Aspects of the Role of the “Nations” in the Book of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel* (FAT II 135; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2022), 131–47.

79 On the entire passage of Jer 4–6 see, e.g., Holladay, *Jeremiah* 1, 132–8; G. Wanke, *Jeremiah: Teilband 1: Jeremiah 1,1–25,14* (ZBKAT 20,1; Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1995), 58–9; Fischer, *Jeremiah* 1–25, 206; U. Becker, “Jesaja, Jeremiah und die Anfänge der Unheilsprophetie in Juda”, *HeBAI* 6 (2017) 79–100, on pp. 86–94; Maier, *Jeremiah* 1–25, 113–62.

80 That means: Damascus is already destroyed, cf. also Kessler, *Amos*, 85.

81 Cf. Fischer, *Jeremiah* 26–52, 551: “Ausdruck bewegten göttlichen Mitgefühls.”

82 See for example Schmid, *Buchgestalten*, 330–40; Becker, “Jesaja, Jeremiah und die Anfänge der Unheilsprophetie”, 86; Maier, *Jeremiah* 1–25, 46.

83 See, e.g., Holladay, *Jeremiah* 1, 133–4; Wanke, *Jeremiah* 1,1–25,14, 58–9; Schmid, *Buchgestalten*, 335–6; C.M. Maier, “Jeremiah als Völkerprophet? Datierung und Funktion der Worte über

The oracle against Damascus in Jer 49:23–25* is, as mentioned, in itself very short and offers no hint to determine a concrete historical background more precisely.⁸⁴ Even if it is occasionally assumed that parts of the oracles of foreign peoples in Jer 49 can still be traced back to the time of the prophet himself,⁸⁵ an increasing majority of scholars consider that the collection of oracles against the nations should be dated to the exilic⁸⁶ or even to the postexilic period.⁸⁷

The observations that can be made concerning the oracle against Damascus in Jer 49:23–25* also fit in with a dating of the oracles of nations to the time after the fall of Jerusalem. The word in Jer 49:23–25* in its older form can thereby be understood as a *Fortschreibung* of the earlier texts from the first part of the book, especially from Jer 4–6.⁸⁸ What was formulated there as an announcement of the coming disaster is now lamented as a catastrophe that has occurred.

Remarkable here is the lack of condemnation of Damascus – particularly in comparison to the surrounding words against the nations – and the overall quite positive image of Damascus. There is probably no clear explanation for this kind of description and one can only speculate about the reasons. But two aspects could be considered: first, the positive view of Damascus could possibly be based on the fact that in the exilic and postexilic period the Aramaeans and thus Damascus were no longer perceived as a rival power of Judah.⁸⁹ Second,

Ägypten (Jer 46)” in M. Meyer-Blanck (ed.), *Christentum und Europa: XVI. Europäischer Kongress für Theologie* (10.–13. September 2017 in Wien) (VWGTh 57; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2019) 249–74, on p. 272.

- 84 Cf. for example Rudolph, *Jeremia*, 293; Bright, *Jeremiah*, 337; Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 808; Wanke, *Jeremia* 25,15–52,34, 426; see also already Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2, 379: “It would be bold to propose a setting for so short a passage.”
- 85 Cf. among others Bardtke, “Jeremia”; Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2, 312–13; Huwlyer, *Jeremia*, 267–8; and also see Stipp, *Jeremia* 25–52, 736, who notes about Jer 49,23–27: “zumindest ein Grundbestand des Gedichtes darf Jeremia zugeschrieben werden.” Different for example in earlier times Volz, *Jeremia*, 378–81, and also Rudolph, *Jeremia*, 293: “Trotzdem kann das vorliegende Orakel nicht von Jer stammen.”
- 86 Cf., e.g., Volz, *Jeremia*, 381–5; Wanke, *Jeremia* 25,15–52,34, 389.
- 87 See for example Fischer, *Jeremia* 26–52, 463, who dates the origins of the oracles in the 4th century BCE. Concerning the oracles against the nations in the book of Jeremiah Duhm, *Jeremia*, 337, already noted: “nach meiner Meinung gehören sie zu den jüngsten Erzeugnissen der Schriftgelehrsamkeit im Jeremiabuch. Sie sind auch viel mehr reines Produkt der Kunst und Gelehrsamkeit als die meisten Ergänzungen zu Jeremias Gedichten oder Baruchs Biographie.”
- 88 So already Bezzel, “Gerichtsprophetie”, 245. In contrast, Schmid, *Buchgestalten*, 330–40, assumes that Jer 46–51*, as well as Jer 4–6, is one of the oldest passages in the book of Jeremiah.
- 89 Thus, for example, Duhm, *Jeremia*, 357; Fischer, *Jeremia* 26–52. See also the few notes on the history of Damascus in the introduction above.

it is also conceivable that the word for Damascus was included primarily in order to obtain a complete collection in which Damascus was also represented as Israel's direct northern neighbour.⁹⁰

On a theological level, however, it is remarkable, that Damascus is given the same names of honour that are otherwise reserved for Jerusalem as the city of God. Thus, Damascus is paralleled with Zion-Jerusalem here, although this is not explicitly formulated in this way. But they are united by their common fate: both cities are abandoned and destroyed, and both formerly flourishing cities are now the subject of God's lamentation. Similar to what we saw with the oracle against Damascus in the book of Amos, where Damascus and Israel are joint under the judgment of Yhwh, both nations are associated here by God's compassion.

In later times, the secondary additions in v. 26 and v. 27 then reinforced and concretized the situation of the abandoned city of Damascus described in the lament.⁹¹ In addition, in this way, the lament was also adapted to the generally customary form of prophetic oracles of judgment. Therefore, the redactors use well-known formulations from the Book of Jeremiah as in Jer 50:30 and from the Book of Amos as in Amos 1. Remarkably, the motif "fire against the palaces of Ben-Hadad" used in v. 27 seems a little anachronistic, because the reign of a king with the name Ben-Hadad dates back a long time. The statement in form of the quotation from Amos therefore mainly has the function of the general announcement of God's judgment. Thus, in the extended version of the oracle against Damascus, Yhwh's unusual lament about Damascus is no longer so conspicuous, since Yhwh's judgment, like all other peoples, is now also proclaimed against Damascus. It is therefore likely that a later redactor is trying to hide the uncommon image of Yhwh lamenting a foreign nation by expanding the text.

5 Conclusion

The three words against Damascus discussed above show a multifaced picture of the city of Damascus (or the kingdom of Aram) that can be divided into three stages and linked to different historical backgrounds.

Firstly, the oracle against Damascus in Isa 17:1–3: Here it becomes very clear that Damascus is to be seen as an enemy of Judah. The word only includes the

⁹⁰ Cf. Wanke, *Jeremia* 25,15–52,34, 426.

⁹¹ Cf., e.g., Stipp, *Jeremia* 25–52, 737. Similar already Fischer, *Fremdvölkersprüche bei Amos und Jesaja*, 38, who dates Jer 49:27 to the postexilic period.

announcement of the imminent end of the kingdom without further legitimization. This fits well with the time of the conflicts between Israel and Damascus against Judah during the 8th century BCE.

Secondly, the oracle against Damascus in Amos 1:3–5: This word against Damascus opens the list of oracles against the nations with the aim of connecting the fate of all nations with the fate of Israel in order to blame Israel the most. All nations are affected by the judgment of God, as well as Israel, so also Damascus. Damascus is seen here on a par with Israel (and Judah). This theological statement is well conceivable in the 7th century, possibly even in the time of the Babylonian strengthening, which applies the entire region.

And finally, thirdly, the oracle against Damascus in Jer 49:23–27: It is interesting here that Damascus is not only connected to Israel under the impression of the judgment, but that in these verses lamentation about the abandoned city of Damascus can be found, as is otherwise the case with regard to Jerusalem. Damascus is here portrayed in the situation after the catastrophe, which gives rise to lament – also by Yhwh himself. This view makes sense in the time after the conquest of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 587.

The three words concerning Damascus thus reflect a change in the Judean portrayal of Damascus through the ages. Moreover, these three examples offer different perspectives on the relationship between Israel-Judah and Damascus and thus also on the relationship to the nations in general. The main aim is thereby to show that Yhwh, as the God of Israel and Judah, acts in history. The integration of the nations into the divine work reinforces the representation of Yhwh as ruler over the whole world and emphasizes his universal potency. Thus, all prophetic words against Damascus and the other nations are ultimately about God's deeds on and for Israel – in a global perspective.⁹²

It is probably no coincidence that the book of Jeremiah contains the most positive image of Damascus. This can be traced back to the depiction of Jeremiah as a prophet to the nations. It is significant that in the word concerning Damascus in Jer 49:23–27 references to other prophetic words can be seen in several ways, both in the oldest layer and in the secondary additions. This can also be shown in many other oracles to the nations in the book of Jeremiah.⁹³ In the oracles to the other nations in the book of Jeremiah, the voices of other prophets thus resonate, but here they are designed into a “much milder, nation-friendly portrait of God” as Georg Fischer notes.⁹⁴ This

92 Similarly, compare, e.g., Volz, *Jeremia*, 379; Schmidt, *Jeremia* 21–52, 276–7; Maier, “Jeremia als Völkerprophet”, 272–4.

93 Cf. the various contributions in this volume.

94 Fischer, *Jeremia* 26–52, 561: “ein deutlich milderes, völkerfreundliches Porträt Gottes.”

applies in particular to the word to Damascus. Thus, Jeremiah appears in a very special way precisely in Jer 49:23–27 as the prophet for the nations, sent by a God for all nations.

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Jeremiah, Qedar and the Queen of the Enclosure

Jordan Davis

There is a broad agreement that Jer^{MT} 49:28–33 retell the events of Nebuchadnezzar's campaign against northern Arabia in 599/598 BCE, which is reported in the Babylonian Chronicle (held at the British Museum, BM 21946).¹ The pertinent details in the chronicle are disappointingly scant, lines 9–10 of the reverse state:

The sixth year: In the month Kislev the king of Akkad mustered his army and marched to Hattu. He despatched his army from Hattu and they went off to the desert. They plundered extensively the possessions, animals, and gods of the numerous Arabs. In the month Adar the king went home.²

Jeremiah's prophecy as it is recorded in the Masoretic text, however, does not speak of "Arabs" it speaks of "Qedar and the kingdoms of Hazor." Thus, several difficulties immediately present themselves: First, are Qedarites Arabs? Second, what does Hazor, which is located in the Galilee region, have to do with the desert (the Arabian Peninsula?) and do the events described in BM 21946 really align with those in Jer^{MT} 49:28–33? Finally, what purpose does Jeremiah's oracle fulfil within the book of Jeremiah? This essay will seek to address these questions in what follows.

1 A.K. Grayson (ed.), *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles* (Repr.; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2000), 99–102. See discussion in C. Waerzeggers, "The Babylonian Chronicles: Classification and Provenance", *JNES* 71.2 (2012) 285–98, p. 286. For the correlation between ABC 5 and Jer 49:28–33, see, e.g., P.-A. Beaulieu, "Arameans, Chaldeans, and Arabs in Cuneiform Sources from the Late Babylonian Period", in A. Berlejung/M.P. Streck (ed.), *Arameans, Chaldeans, and Arabs in Babylonia and Palestine in the First Millenium B.C.* (LAS 3; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2013) 31–55, on p. 48; I. Eph'al, *The Ancient Arabs: Nomads on the Borders of the Fertile Crescent 9th–5th Centuries B.C.* (Jerusalem: The Magnes, 1984), 172; J. Retsö, *The Arabs in Antiquity: Their History from the Assyrians to the Umayyads* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003), 180.

2 Grayson, *ABC*, 101.

1 Qedar and the Queen of the Enclosure

The analysis of Jer 49:28–33 will be undertaken in §2, however it is important at this stage in the investigation to address the key issue found in v. 28a due to its relevance to the historical reconstruction. As shown in table 10.1, there is a significant discrepancy between the MT and the LXX:

TABLE 10.1 Jer^{MT} 49:28a vs Jer^G 30:23a

Jer ^{MT} 49:28a	Jer ^G 30:23a
לְקִדָּר וּלְמַמְלֹכוֹת חָצוֹר אֲשֶׁר הָכָה נְבוּכַדְרֶצְצָר ... מֶלֶךְ-בָּבֶל	Τῇ Κηδαρ βασιλίσσῃ τῆς αὐλῆς, ἣν ἐπάτα- ξεν Ναβουχοδονοσορ βασιλεὺς Βαβυλῶνος.
To Qedar and the kingdoms of Hazor, which Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon struck ...	To Kedar, queen of the court/enclosure, which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon struck.

Within Jeremiah scholarship there is a broad consensus that the Septuagint sourced a different version of the Hebrew text than that now found in the Masoretic version.³ But that does not mean that the Greek translators reproduced their Vorlage with perfect accuracy.⁴ A proposal for the differences between Jer^{MT} 49:28a and Jer^G 30:23a will be offered in §2.2, but to foreshadow the conclusions reached below, it will be presupposed that the LXX features the more plausible wording.⁵

Translating the Jer^G 30:23a back into Hebrew reveals a far closer similarity to Jer^{MT} 49:28a than the English implies. Queen of the court/enclosure (βασιλίσσῃ τῆς αὐλῆς) would be rendered something like מַלְכַּת-חָצֵר, which is not too far away from the MT’s מַמְלֻכוֹת חָצוֹר (“kingdoms of Hazor”). The Hebrew חָצֵר/ḥāṣēr, which means “enclosure” or “court,” also shares a strong similarity to the Arabic ḥaṣīra, which carries the same meaning.⁶ The Greek αὐλή also carries this dual meaning of “court” or “enclosure”: for example, Jn 10:16 states, “I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold (αὐλῆς),” while Mt 26:3 states,

3 See, e.g., G. Fischer, “Zum Text des Jeremiabuches”, *Bib* 78.3 (1997) 305–28; H.-J. Stipp, *Studien zum Jeremiabuch: Text und Redaktion* (FAT 96: Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 57–82.
4 See now M. Tucker, “The Septuagint of Jeremiah: A Study in Translation Technique and Recensions”, PhD diss. (University of Helsinki), 2020.
5 J.W. Watts, “Text and Redaction in Jeremiah’s Oracles against the Nations”, *CBQ* 54.3 (1992) 432–447, has convincingly argued for the priority of the LXX’s OAN as a whole.
6 Retsö, *Arabs*, 180.

“Then the chief priests and the elders of the people gathered in the palace (αὐλῇν) of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas.”⁷ Within the context of the Qedarites and especially the Arabian queens (see below), the translation “queen of the enclosure” is fitting given the strong connection between the Arabs, livestock and camels.⁸

The common suggestion that the Hebrew חָצֵר/*ḥāṣēr*, meaning “settled abode” or “settlement,” relates to the Arabic *ḥaḍāra*, meaning “to be present/to dwell” is less convincing.⁹ Not only is *ḥaḍāra* phonetically further from *ḥāṣēr* than *ḥaḣīra*, but the explanation for this translation is rooted in a too generalised stereotype. Holladay, for example, suggests that “the Hebrew חָצֵר then refers to Arabs who had settled by water sources, particularly oases, and it thus stands in opposition to the nomads or Bedouin, who are referred to here by the term ‘Kedar.’”¹⁰ As will be demonstrated below, the concept that the “Qedarite” refers generally to nomads and *ḥāṣēr* refers to pastoralists cannot be supported by the Assyrian sources.

1.1 The Assyrian Sources

The word “Qedar” first appears on the world scene in the so-called Iran-Stele (±737 BCE) of Tiglath-pileser III (744–727 BCE) found in Luristan, Iran.¹¹ The stele details numerous campaigns, with column three describing the tribute payers from Syria-Palestine. It begins:

MAN.MEŠ šá KUR.ḥat-ti KUR.a-ri-me šá UŠ tam-[tim] šá SILIM šam-ši
KUR qid-ri KUR a-ri-b[i].

7 Translations taken from NRSV.

8 Camel rearing was likely a skill that seems to have been exclusively specialized by the Arabs. Retsö, *Arabs*, 127, notes, “In order to get access to the goods from Arabia, camels were necessary. The ‘arab people appear in this crucial battle as the experts on the new means of transport, which must have been a technical innovation equivalent to the introduction of cars in the twentieth century. Unlike the handling of cars, the secrets of camel breeding could easily be monopolized, and the ‘arab were thus potentially a major force in trade and, as the cushion saddle was developed, also in warfare.”

9 See, e.g., G. Fischer, *Jeremia 26–52*, (HThKAT; Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2005), 552; H.-J. Stipp, *Jeremia 25–52* (HAT I/12,2; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 739.

10 W.L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 2: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah Chapters 26–52* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 383.

11 The date of 737 BCE is tentatively suggested by L.D. Levine, *Two Neo-Assyrian Stelae from Iran* (Ontario: The Royal Ontario Museum, 1972), 14. For the reign of Tiglath-Pileser III, see E. Frahm (ed.), *A Companion to Assyria* (BCAW; Cornwall: Wiley Blackwell, 2017), 615.

(As for) the kings of the land of Ḫatti (Syria-Palestine), the Arameans who are on the shore of the Sea of the Setting Sun, (the people of) the land of Qedar, (and) the Arabs.¹²

This translation by Tadmor and Yamada conceives *kurqid-ri kur-a-ri-bi* as indicating two separate lands, while Weippert, for example, translated this same phrase as “der Kedrener (von) Arabien” (“the Qedarites from Arabia”).¹³ Both options are grammatically possible, the context has to provide the clues. In this case the context is also problematic because the stele names Zabibê as “queen of *kur-a-ri-bi*” (ln. 19) but there is no mention of a Qedarite ruler who paid tribute. Some scholars have therefore suggested that Zabibê should be understood as the queen of the Qedarites, given that she is the only “Arab” ruler named.¹⁴ Based on the Iran Stele alone, these issues cannot be resolved, below it will be suggested that something approximating “Qedar and the Queen of the Arabs” appears to be a regular political arrangement. If this supposition is correct, then Zabibê would be the queen over a tribal confederation, which in this instance included the Qedarites.

Tiglath-pileser III's Summary Inscriptions 4, 7, and 13 all describe an Assyrian victory over Samsi queen of the land of the Arabs (*sa-am-si šar-rat kur-a-ri-bi*) in ±733 BCE.¹⁵ First, Tiglath-pileser claims to have engaged Samsi in battle at Mount Saqurri, which is possibly located in the vicinity of modern day Jabal al-Durūz in southern Syria (see fig. 1).¹⁶ Not only is Samsi's force considerable – 9,400 soldiers – but the enormous spoil – including 30,000 camels (lns. 19'b–22'a) – suggests that *kur-a-ri-bi* was a significant landmass that was able to house such a force.¹⁷ Mount Saqurri logically belongs within (or on the edge of) the heartland of *kur-a-ri-bi*, so that the entire fighting force of the

12 Translation by H. Tadmor/S. Yamada (ed.), *The Royal Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III (744–727 BC), and Shalmaneser V (726–722 BC), Kings of Assyria*. (RINAP 1; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 86. In Levine, *Stelae*, 19, the text is listed as belonging to column ii.

13 M. Weippert, “Menahem von Israel und seine Zeitgenossen in einer Steleninschrift des assyrischen Königs Tiglathpileser III. aus dem Iran”, *ZDPV* 89.1 (1973): 26–53. KUR can also mean “mountain,” see J. Huehnergard, *A Grammar of Akkadian* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 108.

14 See, e.g., Eph'al, *Arabs*, 83; Frahm, *Assyria*, 302; E.A. Knauf, *Ismael: Untersuchungen zur Geschichte Palästinas und Nordarabiens im 1. Jahrtausend v.Chr.* (ADPV; Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1989), 4.

15 For inscriptions see Tadmor/Yamada, *RINAP* 1, 107, 111, 122. Retsö, *Arabs*, 163f., is thus more convincing in understanding the distinction between Qedarite and Arab to be more pronounced.

16 Retsö, *Arabs*, 133.

17 Tadmor/Yamada, *RINAP* 1, 106.

Arab people could be rallied to fend off the Assyrian aggressors. Second, Samsi flees “to the desert, a place where one is always thirsty,” which suggests that *kur*a-ri-bi was not synonymous with the desert. Third, in the wake of Samsi’s defeat a number of other people groups from the Arabian Peninsula voluntarily brought tribute before Tiglath-pileser III, nearly all of which belong to the sons of Ishmael or Midian according to 1 Chron 1:29–34: the cities (URU) of Mas’a (מִשְׁאָא), Tema{Tayma} (תִּימָא), Hayappa (עֵיפָה), Badanu (?) and Hatte (?), as well as the tribes (LÚ) of Saba (שָׁבָא) and Idiba’ilu (אִדְבָּאִל).¹⁸ Unfortunately, only Tema can be securely located. In any case none of these cities are said to belong to *kur*a-ri-bi (or indeed *kur*qid-ri) according to Tiglath-pileser III, rather these “are on border of the western lands ... a distant place” (Ins. 29’–30’).¹⁹ The absence of Dedan from Tiglath-pileser III’s list further emphasises that the Assyrian threat was confined to the far north, particularly considering that Dedan was one of the “three major civilisations” in Arabia in the eighth century BCE (cf. fig. 1).²⁰ Thus *kur*a-ri-bi did not encompass even the entire northern part of the Arabian Peninsula, and the people groups living about the oases and smaller water sources south of the land that Tiglath-pileser III considered to belong to Samsi were not labelled as a-ri-bi.²¹

That the Qedarites and the Arabian queens were (at least in several instances) allies and perhaps even joined via marriage can be found in reigns of Sennacherib (704–681 BCE) and Esarhaddon (680–669 BCE). Following Samsi’s defeat, the Arabs next appear as allies to the Elamites and Babylonians (±690 BCE): According to the so-called Ungnar/Winckler Tablet Fragment, lines 53’–9” report how Sennacherib chased Queen Te’elhunu and a certain Hazael “in the middle of the desert,” to the city of Adummatu.²² The fragmentary nature of

18 The tribe of Saba mentioned here cannot logically be equated with the Sabaeans in South Arabia, either it means a different tribe with a similar sounding name (perhaps the Sheba mentioned in the Bible, so Retsö, *Arabs*, 134–135), or perhaps the Sabaeans had an economic outpost somewhere in the north-west of the Peninsula (so Eph’al, *Arabs*, 89).

19 Tadmor/Yamada, *RINAP* 1, 107.

20 Quote from C.J. Robin, “Antiquity”, in A.I. al-Ghabban et al. (ed.), *Roads of Arabia: Archeology and History of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia* (Paris: Somogy Art, 2010) 81–99, p. 81. See also S.E. Al-Said, “Dedan (al-Ula)”, in A.I. al-Ghabban et al. (ed.), *Roads of Arabia: Archeology and History of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia* (Paris: Somogy Art, 2010) 262–69.

21 Retsö, *Arabs*, 131, also highlights the absence of spices and incense (Frankincense) from Zabibê’s tribute list, suggesting that these items from deeper in the Arabian Peninsula had not yet been integrated into the Assyrian economic system.

22 A.K. Grayson/J. Novotny (ed.), *The Royal Inscriptions of Sennacherib, King of Assyria (704–681 BC), Part 1* (RINAP 3.1; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2012), 232. For Hazael the Aramean, see, e.g., C. Frevel, *Geschichte Israels* (KSB 2; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2018), 253–55.

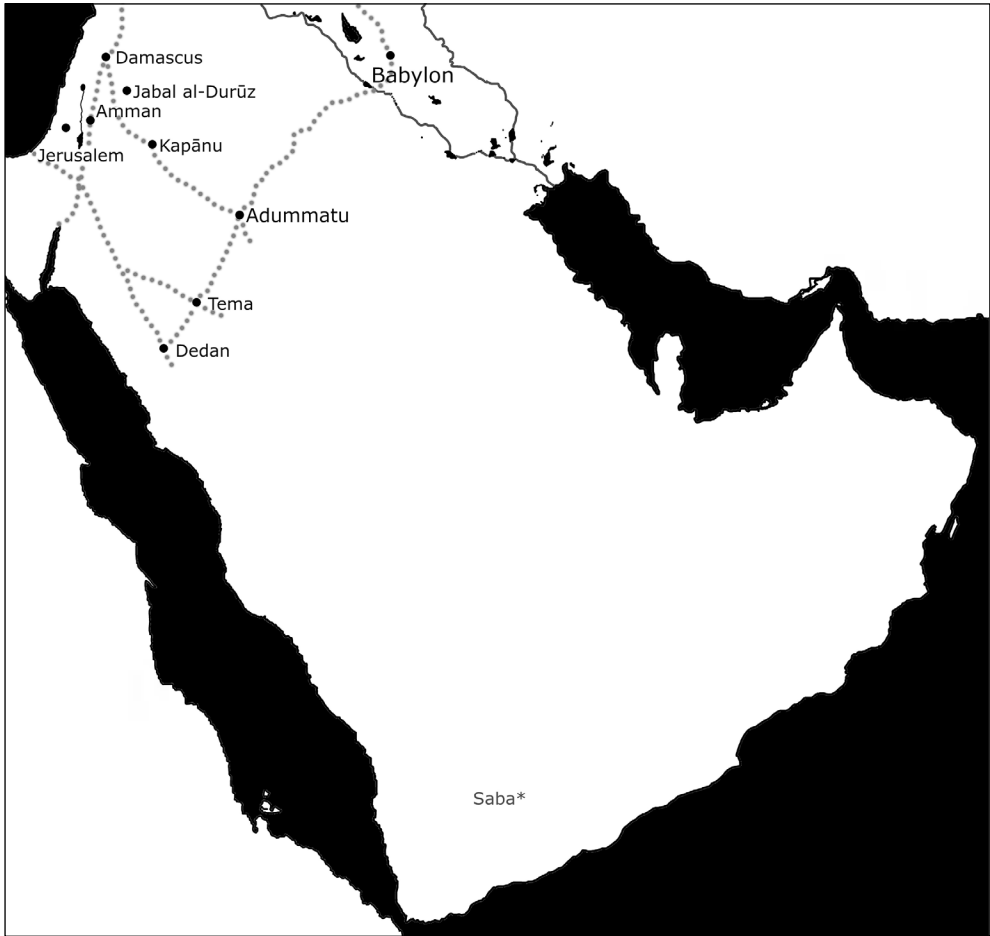


FIGURE 10.1 The Arabian Peninsula

Note: Map by J. Davis. Trade routes taken from G. Charloux/L. Romolo, *Dûmat al-Jandal: 2,800 Years of History in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia* (Riyâdh: Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities, 2013), 20

the inscription means that the relationship between Te'elḥunu and Hazael (not the Aramean king who reigned 843–803 BCE) is unclear, the former is labelled “queen of the people of the Arabs (lûa-ra-bi)” while from Ashurbanipal one learns that Hazael was a Qedarite (see §1.1.2).²³ Hazael remained behind while Te'elḥunu fled west along the Wadi Sirhan to the city of Kapānu, where she was finally captured and taken along with the gods of the Arabs.

23 E. Leichty (ed.), *The Royal Inscriptions of Esarhaddon, King of Assyria (680–669 BC)* (RINAP 4; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 19.

From Esarhaddon's Ninenveh A inscription it becomes clear that following her capture, Hazael took over as king of the lûa-ra-bi. Te'elḥunu's itinerary follows the known trade routes linking Babylon, Adummatu (modern-day Dûmat al-Jandal) and Kapānu (modern-day Kaf) respectively.²⁴ The fact that Te'elḥunu fled further west rather than further south, aligns with the idea that Samsi's kingdom was located in the vicinity of Mount Saqurri and that Tema/Tayma did not belong to kur-a-ra-bi (cf. fig.1).

The fact that Hazael remained in the city of Adummatu while Te'elḥunu continued to flee westwards has led to the popular idea that Adummatu was the capital city of the Qedarites.²⁵ There are several converging lines of discussion here, which shall be separated into sections to avoid unnecessary complications.

1.1.1 Queens of the Arabs

The Arabian queens were something of a novelty in the ancient Near East, not only do they feature in the Assyrian inscriptions but even the Hebrew Bible's Queen of Sheba (1 Kgs 10:1f.) demonstrates the certain mystique associated with these women. Frahm even suggests that the Arabian queens may have inspired the Assyrian kings to include their own women in texts as a result.²⁶ It is important to note that these queens are seen as rulers in their own right, not simply the wives of kings. Frahm notes, "Given that the title šarratu is accorded in Assyrian texts to 'reigning queens' and goddesses only, not to the main wives of kings, there can be no doubt that women played a vital political role among the early Arabs, even though Shalmeneser's Kurkh Monolith and several later inscriptions also mention a number of male Arab rulers."²⁷

The Assyrian inscriptions name a total of 6 (7*) Arabian queens: Zabibê, Samsi, Iatî'e, Te'elḥunu, Apkallatu*, Tabû'a, and Adiya. The confusion with

24 R. Loreto, "The Role of Adummutu Among the Early Arabian Trade Routes at the Dawn of the Southern Arabian Cultures", in G. Hatke/R. Ruzicka (ed.), *South Arabian Long-Distance Trade in Antiquity: "Out of Arabia"* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars, 2021), 66–110, on p. 78.

25 See, e.g., Charloux/Romolo, *Dûmat al-Jandal*, 27; C.J. Robin, "A 'Confederation' of Atarsamain?", in G. Charloux/R. Loreto (ed.), *Dûma 3. The 2012 Report of the Saudi – Italian – French Archaeological Project at Dûmat al-Jandal, Saudi Arabia* (Riyâdh: Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities, 2015) 41–67, p. 41.

26 Frahm, *Assyria*, 307, notes, "It has been observed that the political agency and general visibility of Assyrian royal women increased markedly during the reign of Sennacherib, and one wonders whether such tendencies may not have been, at least in part, a consequence of Assyrian encounters with the remarkably powerful Arabian queens of the eighth and early seventh centuries."

27 Frahm, *Assyria*, 301.

the numbers stems from the fact that Sennacherib claims to have captured Te'elḥunu during his reign, while Esarhaddon reports that his father (i.e., Sennacherib) captured Apkallatu.²⁸ Retsö argues that Apkallatu (ap-kal-la-tú) is not a personal name but a priestly title, thus suggesting that Te'elḥunu was the Apkallatu (i.e., high priestess) to the gods that Sennacherib also brought back to Nineveh. Assuming this was not an isolated case, this would suggest that the Arabian queens were theocratic rulers.²⁹ This connection is made more secure in Esarhaddon's Nineveh A Prism, which reports that as part of his treaty with Hazael, Esarhaddon not only returned the gods of the Arabs but also returned Tabū'a to be "ruler over them."³⁰ Given that the Nineveh A inscription already names Hazael king of the people of the Arabs, there is some confusion regarding how to understand Tabū'a's role. Most understand that Tabū'a was returned so that she might replace Te'elḥunu as queen of the Arabs, with some even suggesting that these two figures were mother and daughter.³¹ What is clear is that Tabū'a is returned alongside the gods of the Arabs, thereby suggesting that her "ruling" is somehow connected to these gods. This must remain conjecture as no further information is given regarding Tabū'a or her role in the land of the Arabs. Even after Hazael's death, his son Iauta' takes over as king of the people of the Arabs with no mention of Tabū'a (cf. §1.2). Even after Iauta' rebels and loses the throne, Tabū'a is not listed as the Queen of the people of the Arabs (lú-a-ri-bi).

The so-called "Šamaš-šuma-ukin-Tammarītu Epigraphs Text A" by Ashurbanipal is the only text that explicitly mentions a King of the Land of Qedar (kurqa-ad-ri) and a Queen of the Land of the Arabs (kur-a-ri-bi) as concurrent rulers.³² It will be argued in §1.1.2 that this represents a special case in which the Qedarites were no longer allies with the other Arabs and were therefore labelled separately. Using this as a clue, there are good grounds for

28 Grayson/Novotny, *RINAP* 3.1, 232 ln. 5"; Leichty, *RINAP* 4, 19 ln. 4 respectively.

29 Retsö, *Arabs*, 155. See also S. Anthonioz, "Adummatu, Qedar and the Arab Question in Neo-Assyrian Sources", in G. Charloux/R. Loreto (ed.), *Dûma 3: The 2012 Report of the Saudi – Italian – French Archaeological Project at Dûmat al-Jandal, Saudi Arabia* (Riyâdh: Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities, 2015) 17–40, p. 21. Returning briefly to Jeremiah^c, it was noted that βασιλισσῆς τῆς αὐλῆς could be translated as either Queen of the Court or Queen of the Enclosure. If the court in question refers to the heavenly court, then the former translation is at least equally plausible. Unfortunately any explanation must remain conjecture.

30 Leichty, *RINAP* 4, 19 lns. 15–16.

31 Cf. Eph'al, *Arabs*, 123; Frahm, *Assyria*, 304.

32 See J. Jeffers/J. Novotny (ed.), *The Royal Inscriptions of Ashurbanipal (668–631 BC), Aššur-etel-ilāni (630–627 BC) and Šîn-šarra-iškun (626–612 BC), Kings of Assyria* (RINAP 5.2; University Park: Eisenbrauns, 2023), 196–97 lns. 1'–9'.

understanding the difference between ^{kur}a-ri-bi and ^{lú}a-ri-bi to be more than simply stylistic, rather the latter term indicates a confederation of tribes that typically encompasses both ^{kur}qa-ad-ri and ^{kur}a-ri-bi. This arrangement can be seen in table 10.2.

TABLE 10.2 Rulers of ^{kur}a-ri-bi vs ^{lú}a-ri-bi

Name	Title	Name	Title
Zabibê	šar-rat ^{kur} a-ri-bi queen of the land of the Arabs	–	
Samsi	šar-rat ^{kur} a-ri-bi queen of the land of the Arabs	–	
Iati'e	šar-rat ^{lú} a-ri-bi queen of the people of the Arabs	–	
Te'elḥunu	šar-rat ^{lú} a-ri-bi queen of the people of the Arabs	Hazael	–
Tabū'a	–	Hazael	lugal ^{lú} a-ri-bi king of the people of the Arabs
		Iauta'	[lugal ^{lú} a-ri-bi]
		(see §1.1.2)	lugal ^{kur} qa-da-ri
–	–	Abī-Yate'	[lugal ^{kur} qa-da-ri]?
		(see §1.1.2)	
Adiya	šar-rat ^{kur} a-ri-bi queen of the land of the Arabs	Ammi-ladīn	lugal ^{kur} qa-ad-ri king of the land of the Qedarites

While the data are limited, there is a trend that when a queen of the Arabs is named there is no king of the Arabs, and vice versa. Furthermore, in the case of Hazael it can be deduced that he was a Qedarite (see §1.1.2), which implies that the label ^{lú}a-ri-bi refers to a confederation of some variety that included Qedarites. Zabibê and Samsi are exceptions to this trend, however in both cases there might be some leeway in suggesting that Tiglath-pileser's scribes did not adhere to the same system as his successors. In the case of Zabibê it was already noted that the Iran Stele mentions both ^{kur}qid-ri and ^{kur}a-ri-bi but

does not name a ruler of ^{kur}qid-ri, which many interpret to mean that she was the queen of both. Similarly, it will be suggested below that the land of the Qedarites was probably closer to Damascus than the land of the Arabs, meaning that Samsi’s battle at Mount Saqurri was likely within Qedarite land. If correct, this would then mean that both Zabibê and Samsi should also be labelled “šar-rat ^{lu}a-ri-bi.”

1.1.2 King of the People of the Arabs/King of Qedar

The first man to be named LUGAL (“king”) of the Arabs is Hazael. As discussed above, while Te’elḥunu was queen, Hazael appeared with no title in Sennacherib’s inscriptions, suggesting that he was a notable figure within a coalition led by Te’elḥunu. The available evidence for Hazael is scarce, from Esarhaddon’s Nineveh A Prism one learns that his centre of power was Adummatu, which has given rise to the popular idea that Adummatu belonged to the Qedarites, an issue that will be challenged in §1.1.3. For the present section, it is important to note that Hazael is labelled the “King of the People of the Arabs,” which strongly suggests that he took over Te’elḥunu’s position after she was forced to vacate it. That Hazael was the leader of a confederation can be seen more clearly when placed in comparison with his son, Iauta’. Both figures are said to have travelled to Nineveh in order to sign a treaty in exchange for the return of their god(s), however the similarities largely end there:

TABLE 10.3 Comparison of Hazael and Iauta’

	Hazael	Iauta’
Title	LUGAL ^{lu} a-ri-bi King of the People of the Arabs	DUMU ha-az-a-DINGUR LUGAL ^{kur} qa-da-ri Son of Hazael, King of the Land of Qedar
Dwelling	^{URU} a-du-ma-tu ^{URU} dan-nu-tu ^{lu} a-ri-bi The City of Adummatu, Fortress of the People of the Arabs.	É EDIN kul-ta-ri mu-šá-bi-šú-nu Pavilions and tents, their abodes.

TABLE 10.3 Comparison of Hazael and Iauta' (*cont.*)

	Hazael	Iauta'
God(s)	a-tar-sa-ma-a-a-in da-a-a nu-ḥa-a-a ru-ul-da-a-a-ú a-bi-ri-il-lu a-tar-qu-ru-ma-a Atar-samayin, Dāya, Nuḥāya, Ruldāwu, Abirillu, (and) Atar-qurumâ	a-tar-sa-ma-in Atar-samayin

Several features are readily apparent: First, Hazael is named “king of the people of the Arabs,” whereas Iauta’ is “king of the land of Qedar,” which is surprising given that Esarhaddon explicitly states that he placed Iauta’ on his father’s throne (Nineveh A iv.19). It will be suggested below that Iauta’'s title is reduced in this report due to the fact that the scribe responsible for writing it was already aware of his future misconduct. Second, Hazael is associated with Adummatu but his son is not (again see §1.1.3). Third, Hazael receives many gods while Iauta’ receives only one. All these point to the idea that Hazael functioned as a representative of numerous tribes, who each had a respective god and that Adummatu was the hub of this united group. Iauta’, on the other hand, seems to be acting on a smaller scale, he is said to dwell in a tent rather than a fortress and he receives only a single god as part of his covenant arrangement. All the evidence points to the idea that ^{lū}a-ri-bi signals a confederation of tribes.

The unstable nature of the confederation of ^{lū}a-ri-bi can quickly be seen with the succession of Iauta’. Esarhaddon notes that with Hazael’s death he increased the tribute (lines 17–22). Probably – but not certainly – in response to this increase, Uabu led a rebellion comprising “all the people of the Arabs” (^{lū}a-ru-bu ka-li-šú) against Iauta’. The wording here seems to imply that the non-Qedarite Arabs were unhappy with their Assyrian-puppet-king and so attempted a coup. Eph’al understands Uabu to be a fellow Qedarite, but this is based on the dubious idea that only a fellow Qedarite would be accepted as a replacement king.³³ The emphasis on “all the people of the Arabs” rather suggests that he was not a Qedarite. This is further reinforced by the fact that Uabu is a characteristically Arabic name (*contra* Hazael), suggesting that his

33 Eph’al, *Arabs*, 226, argues it would only be possible for Uabu to assume the crown “if it is assumed that the leadership of the overall Qedarite complex were transferable from one of its components to another.”

heritage was more removed from Aram.³⁴ Despite being quickly suppressed with Assyrian aid, the situation in Iauta's kingdom was not much improved. From Ashurbanipal's Prism B it is revealed that Iauta' himself soon rebelled against Assyria, reinforcing the idea that the tribute requirements were too heavy.³⁵ The Prism describes how Iauta' "refrained from inquiring about my well-being and withheld audience gift(s) from me" (side vii, lns. 84–85). It seems likely that this was not because of wilful rebellion rather Iauta' was simply unable to pay. Immediately following this it is reported that, "He incited the peopl[e of the land of the] Arabs {kur-a-ri-bi} to rebel with him and they were repeatedly plundering the land Amurru" (side vii, lns. 86–87). As noted above, Iauta' is said to be the king of kurqa-da-ri in Prism B, which needs to be contrasted with the fact that he succeeded his father as king of lu'a-ri-bi according to Esarhaddon. The scribe of Prism B thus separates the Qedarites from the inhabitants of kur-a-ri-bi.

Following his defeat, Iauta' flees and effectively abdicates the throne. Side viii, lines 25b–42 of Prism B then describe the following:

Abī-Yate', son of Tē'ri, came to Nineveh and kissed my feet. I concluded a treaty with him to do obeisance to me. I installed him as king in place of Iauta'. I imposed upon him gold, eyestones, pappardilû-stone, kohl, camels, (and) prime quality donkeys as annual payment.

(As for) Ammi-ladīn – the king of the land Qedar, who, like him (Iauta'), had turned hostile (and) repeatedly plundered the land Amurru – Kamās-ḫaltā, the king of the land Moab, a servant who belonged to me who had brought about his defeat in battle by invoking my name – which the deities Aššur, Šin, [Šamaš], Bēl (Marduk), Nabû, Ištar of Nineveh, (and) Ištar of Arbela [had made great] – captured Ammi-ladī(n) and

34 Retsö, *Arabs*, 160.

35 Frahm, *Assyria*, 304, suggests that Iauta' wished to prove that he was not an Assyrian puppet. This essay will avoid the discussion of the Rassam Cylinder (±649 BCE), which Anthonioz, "Adummatu", 35, describes as "the most corrupted document among Ashurbanipal's sources." Cf. Jeffers/Novotny, *RINAP* 5.2, 240. Of particular importance to the discussion on Arabs is the conflation of Iauta' (ia-u-ta-a') son of Hazael with Uaite' (ú-a-a-te-e') son of Bir-Dāda. See discussion in M. Cogan, "The Author of Ashurbanipal Prism A (Rassam): An Inquiry into his Plan and Purpose, with a note on his Persona", *Orient* 49 (2014) 69–83; Eph'al, *Arabs*, 142–69; Knauf, *Ismael*, 96–97; Retsö, *Arabs*, 169–71; M. Weippert, "Die Kämpfe des assyrischen Königs Assurbanipal gegen die Araber: Redaktionskritische Untersuchung des Berichts in Prisma A", *WO* 7.1 (1973) 39–85.

the rest of his people who had escape[d the sl]aughter. He placed (their) hands and feet in iron fetters and sent (them) to Nineveh, before me.³⁶

From the so-called “Ashurbanipal’s Treaty with the Qedar Tribe” it is revealed that Abī-Yate’ and Ammi-ladīn are both Qedarites.³⁷ The treaty document includes the clauses that Abī-Yate’, “shall not strive for peace with Yauta’ [Iauta’]... you shall not [... with] your brothers, [your] unc[les ...” (lns. 12–14). These brothers and uncles likely refer to those who sided with Ammi-ladīn. From the so-called “Large Letter to the God Aššur,” it seems that Ammi-ladīn had allied himself with Adiya queen of the land of the Arabs (^{kur}a-ri-bi).³⁸ It can therefore be tentatively suggested that Abī-Yate’ made a treaty for the Qedarites, while Ammi-ladīn still operated alongside the people of the Arabs (who were ruled by Queen Adiya).

The Assyrian inscriptions leave many questions unanswered, however the general schema of alliances between Qedarites and Arabian tribes that were regularly ruled by queens seems like a reliable conclusion. Thus, there is historical support for Jeremiah’s “Qedar and the Queen of the Enclosure.”

1.1.3 Adummatu, ^{kur}qid-ri and ^{kur}a-ri-bi

Returning briefly to the question of the location of ^{kur}qid-ri and ^{kur}a-ri-bi there are several popular arguments that seem questionable upon closer inspection. The most prominent is the idea that the city of Adummatu belonged to the Qedarites due to its explicit association with Hazael.³⁹ A second point is Eph’al’s claim that the city of ^{ur}qid-ri-na, in the vicinity of Borsippa provides evidence for Qedarite control all the way up to the border of Babylon..⁴⁰ Taken altogether, these arguments suggest an enormous Qedarite territory that began on the border of the Transjordanian kingdoms, reached deep into the desert to Adummatu and then stretched all the way north to the border of Babylon.⁴¹

This alleged territory needs to be contextualised. The climate in the Arabian Peninsula is extremely harsh, the Al-Jawf region – in which Adummatu is

36 Original in Jeffers/Novotny, *RINAP* 5.1. Text taken from <http://oracc.org/rinap/Q007602/>.

37 Original in S. Parpola/K. Watanabe, *Neo-Assyrian Treaties and Loyalty Oaths* (SAA 2; Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University, 1988). Sourced from <http://oracc.org/saao/P336217/>.

38 Jeffers/Novotny, *RINAP* 5.2, 245.

39 Cf. Leichty, *RINAP* 4, 19. See, e.g., Charloux/Romolo, *Dûmat al-Jandal*, 27; C.J. Robin, “Confederation”, 41.

40 Eph’al, *Arabs*, 225.

41 Cf. the map of the Qedarites in <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Qedarites>.

located – has an average annual rainfall of only 56.4mm, and even the King Salman Bin Abdulaziz Royal Natural Reserve, which borders Dūmat al-Jandal, averages only 116.4mm per year.⁴² The Food and Agriculture Organization suggests that crop growing from rainfall is not possible under 400mm per year, meaning the Al-Jawf region is extremely hostile to crops.⁴³ This is even considering the archaeological evidence that suggests the region used to be much wetter than it is now. C₁₄ analyses of various vegetal material found at the archaeological site of Tayma show that plant types such as pistachio trees, olives, figs and grapes were grown.⁴⁴ When oases are the main source of edible plant material, as well as water, the population that can be supported by such a system is necessarily limited.

While likely exaggerated, it was noted above that queen Samsi is said to have led a force of 9,400 soldiers and that Tiglath-pileser III took 30,000 camels as spoil. Even assuming half that number of camels, the food and water requirements for such a herd would be enormous. Furthermore, this battle took place at Mount Saqurri, which is likely in the region of modern-day Jabal al-Durūz (cf. fig. 1). This leads to the more probable assumption that the bulk of this Arab population lived in the border zone to Aram and northern Transjordan, not in the north of the Arabian Peninsula.

Esarhaddon's Nineveh A Prism labels Adummatu as the fortress of lūa-ri-bi, not the fortress of kurqid-ri. Even the idea that it was a fortified city is difficult in light of the archaeological evidence, which has found no trace of such a fortress, or indeed material culture in general, for the eighth and seventh centuries.⁴⁵ While one might question the historical accuracy of the biblical material, the three references to Adummatu (דומה) in the Bible are also never connected to Qedarites.⁴⁶ Dumah is named twice *alongside* Qedar as a son of Ishmael, which rather suggests that the people of Dumah and Qedar belonged to different groups (Gen 25:14; 1 Chr 1:29–30); and Isaiah's short oracle

42 Cf. H.A. Shabana et al. "Medicinal Plants Diversity at King Salman Bin Abdulaziz Royal Natural Reserve in Saudi Arabia and Their Conservation Management", *Journal of Medicinal Plants Research* 17.11 (2023): 292–304, p. 294. See also P. Sanlaville, "Geographic Introduction to the Arabian Peninsula", in A.I. al-Ghabban et al. (ed.), *Roads of Arabia: Archaeology and History of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia* (Paris: Somogy Art, 2010) 55–68.

43 Cf. <https://www.fao.org/4/s2022e/s2022e01.htm>.

44 Cf. A. Hausleiter, "The Oasis of Tayma", in A.I. al-Ghabban et al. (ed.), *Roads of Arabia: Archeology and History of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia* (Paris: Somogy Art, 2010), 219–61, p. 224.

45 Charloux/Romolo, *Dūmat al-Jandal*, 27.

46 The hebrew דומה in Josh 15:52 is also translated as "Dumah" by the NRSV.

in 21:11–12 relating to Dumah far more plausibly relates to Edom as it appears in the LXX (Ἰδομαίας rather than דומה).

The only connection between Adummatu and Qedarites is Hazael himself, who was argued above to have taken over control of the confederation led by Te'elhunu queen of ^{lū}a-ri-bi. In light of the numerous gods received by Hazael, it seems to be far more plausible that Adummatu was the city of ^{lū}a-ri-bi, exactly as it is labelled by Esarhaddon. Given that Dūmat al-Jandal is *the* major oasis available between Tayma and Babylon (and Tayma did not belong to ^{kur}a-ri-bi according to Tiglath-pileser III), it is only logical that it was a shared resource between various small groups.⁴⁷ In addition to this, Sennacherib describes the Desert Gate in Nineveh as “The Presents of the People of Sumu'il and Tēma Enter Through It” (vii.95–viii.1), which not only fails to mention Qedarites but also Adummatu.⁴⁸ Had the Qedarites been rulers of a vast desert empire, it seems implausible that ^{lū}qid-ri are not mentioned here.

On the other hand, there are numerous clues that point to the conclusion that ^{kur}qid-ri was located nearer to northern Transjordan. First, Hazael is not a typically Arabic name, rather it is more likely a Syrian or Aramaic name featuring the theophoric element “El.”⁴⁹ Second, when Ammi-ladīn attacks “the western lands” he is defeated by the Moabite king Kamās-ḥaltā, which at least suggests that Moab was his closest target.⁵⁰ Third, when Iauta' flees from his defeat, he is said to have travelled to the Nabateans, who are generally considered to be centred around Petra, he does not flee into the desert.⁵¹ Fourth, from a letter written by Nabû-šumu-lišir to Ashurbanipal, it is reported that he went into the “highlands” in order to attack the Qedarites.⁵² The elevation of Dūmat

47 Although referring to a much later period than the one being discussed here, A. Musil, *Arabia Deserta: A Topographical Itinerary*, (OES 2; New York: Charles Crane, 1927), 532, notes, “the oasis at Dūma [counts] among the ten marts which the Arabs annually visited without fear of blood vengeance or robbery, in order to buy their need.” While times change and one cannot uncritically assume the situation of one time period extends to another, the general concept of a shared, safe resource is also reflected here.

48 For Ashurbanipal's Istar Gate inscription, see Jeffers/Novotny, *RINAP* 5.1. Text sourced from <http://oracc.org/rinap/Q003722/>. For Sennacherib's King's Prism, see Grayson/Novotny, *RINAP* 3.1, 143.

49 Retsö, *Arabs*, 160.

50 Cf. Ashurbanipal's Prism B side viii, lns. 32–36. Sourced from <http://oracc.org/rinap/Q003702/>.

51 Cf. Ashurbanipal's Prism A side vii, lns. 23–24. Sourced from <http://oracc.org/rinap/Q003710/>.

52 Sourced from <http://oracc.org/saao/P237241/>. Original in F. Reynolds, *The Babylonian Correspondence of Esarhaddon and Letters to Assurbanipal and Sin-šarru-iškun from Northern and Central Babylonian* (SAA 18; Helsinki: Helsinki University, 2003).

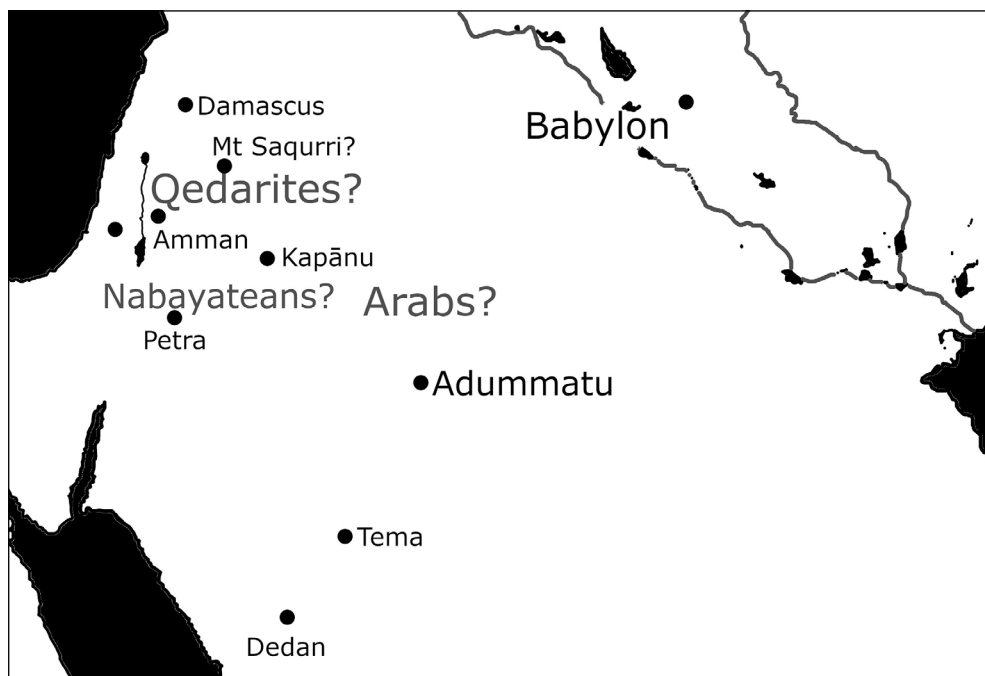


FIGURE 10.2 Possible locations of *kurqa-da-ri* and *kura-ri-bi* in the Iron Age IIB

al-Jandal is approximately 600m, whereas the elevation around Jabal al-Durūz is closer to 1600m.⁵³ The only region that overshadows this latter elevation on the Arabian Peninsula is the Hijaz, which was demonstrated to lay outside of *kura-ri-bi* according to Tiglath-pileser III.⁵⁴

Taken altogether, the land of the Qedarites is far more logically located on the borders of northern Transjordan and south-eastern Aram. The land of the Arabs extended further east into the desert and included the oasis at Dūmat al-Jandal and comprised numerous tribal groups such as the people of Sumu'il. It did not extend much further south as it did not reach Tayma.

1.2 *Babylon and the Arabs*

Unlike the Assyrians, the Babylonian sources provide scant details on the Arabs. From the Babylonian Chronicle (quoted in the introduction above) it is clear that Nebuchadnezzar II invaded “the desert” and “plundered extensively

⁵³ Elevation data taken from Google Maps.

⁵⁴ Cf. Sanlaville, “Geography”, 59–60.

the possessions, animals, and gods of the numerous Arabs.”⁵⁵ How deep into the desert he travelled, if the Qedarites were included, and many other details cannot be ascertained from the Chronicle. While the book of Judith appears to offer more information, scholars are unified in understanding this to be an amalgamation of various historical events, with only traces being linkable to Nebuchadnezzar II.⁵⁶ Even if Judith were to be taken at face value, the book suggests that only the sons of Midian were destroyed, which would be Ephah, Ephraim, Hanoch, Abida, and Eldaah (Gen 25:4; 1 Chron 1:33) not Qedar (cf. Gen 25:13; 1 Chr 1:29).

By the reign of Nabonidus it would seem that ^{kur}a-ri-bi (as suggested in fig. 2) was firmly under Babylonian control. From the Ḥarrān-Stele, Nabonidus claims that the god Šin sent him a vision that resulted, among other things, in the king vacating Babylon and taking up residence in Saudi Arabia for ten years (he names Tēmā {Tayma}, Dadānu {al-Ula}, Padakku {Fadak}, Ḥibrā {Khaybar}, Yādī’u {al-Huwayyit} and Yaṭribu {Medina} – see fig. 3).⁵⁷ In his third year, Nabonidus is said to have mustered his army, the Nabonidus Chronicle is damaged after this, but there is mention of ^{kur}mar.tu (Ammon) and [^{ur}u]-du-mu, which Grayson understands to mean Edom but which Dumbrell argues refers to Adummatu.⁵⁸

Until the most recent studies, scholarship in general held to the theory that, as part of his campaign, Nabonidus destroyed Edom and that the trade routes from Arabia to Gaza were controlled by the Qedarites. Levin, for example, wrote, “As most scholars now recognize, during the Persian period the southern Judean hills, the southern Shephelah and the Negev, rather than being

55 Grayson, *ABC*, 101.

56 D. Levine Gera, *Judith*, (CEJL; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 26, writes, “[Judith] is pseudo-history, not wrong history.” Eph’al, *Arabs*, 174, concludes that “the details about the Arabs as described in the book of Judith should not be used as indicative of the actuality of settlement during the Chaldean period.” Retsö, *Arabs*, 146, suggests that the author of Judith had access to an Aramaic Nebuchadnezzar legend, but that the details of this were combined – among other things – with aspects of Tiglath-pileser III’s campaign.

57 See H. Schaudig, *Die Inschriften Nabonids von Babylon und Kyros’ des Großen: samt den in ihrem Umfeld entstandenen Tendenzschriften* (Münster: Ugarit, 2001), 486–99, esp. 497. For the modern day locations see H. Schaudig, “Section 1: Cuneiform Texts from the Saudi-German Excavations at Taymā’ Seasons 2004–2015”, in M.C.A. Macdonald (ed.), *Taymā’ II: Catalogue of the Inscriptions Discovered in the Saudi-German Excavations at Taymā’ 2004–2015* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2020) 1–19, p. 6. The Nabonidus Chronicle corroborates this view (cf. Grayson, *ABC*, 104–111). See also discussion in D.T. Potts, “The Story of the Origins”, in A.I. al-Ghabban et al. (ed.), *Roads of Arabia: Archaeology and History of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia* (Paris: Somogy Art, 2010) 71–9, p. 77.

58 Grayson, *ABC*, 105; W.J. Dumbrell, “The Tell el-Maskhuta Bowls and the ‘Kingdom’ of Qedar in the Persian Period”, *BASOR* 203 (1971) 33–44, p. 40.

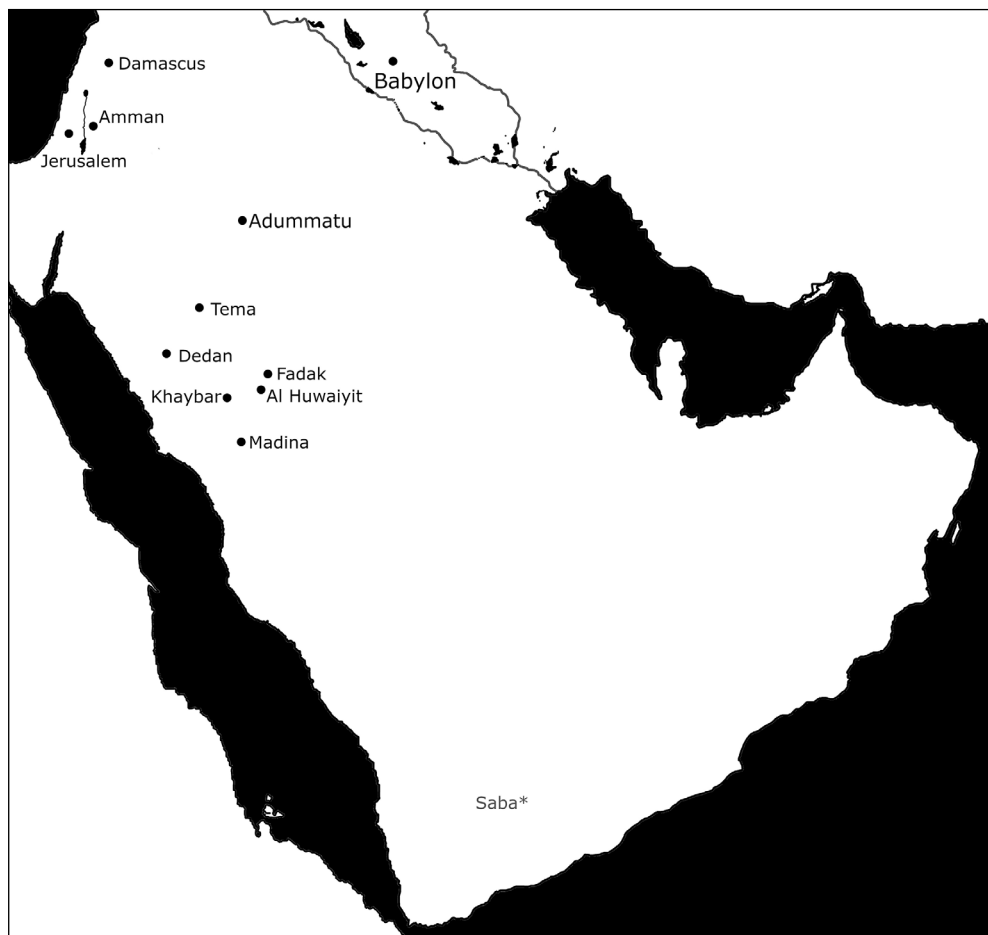


FIGURE 10.3 Nabonidus' Arabian residences

ruled by Edomites/Idumeans, were actually controlled by an Arabic-speaking group known as the Qedarites.”⁵⁹ This suggestion is based upon a number of indicators.

First, Herodotus claims that Cambyses was advised to contact the “king of the Arabians” to learn “how he should cross the waterless desert” in order to reach Egypt, because the territory bordering Egypt “belong to the Arabians”

59 Y. Levin, “The Genesis of Idumea”, in B. Hensel/E. Ben Zvi/D.V. Edelman (ed.), *About Edom and Idumea in the Persian Period: Recent Research and Approaches from Archaeology, Hebrew Bible Studies, and Ancient Near Eastern Studies* (WANEM; Sheffield: Equinox, 2022) 80–98, p. 85.

(Hist. 3.4–5).⁶⁰ Herodotus furthermore infers that these Arabians controlled at least from Gaza until the Gulf of Aqaba (Hist. 3.9), thus essentially attributing to them control of the entire Sinai Peninsula.

Second, a Persian period dedicatory bowl found at Tell El-Maskhuṭa features the donor name, Qaynu bar Gašmu melek Qedar.⁶¹ Gašmu, the king of Qedar is understood to be an alternate rendering of Nehemiah's adversary, Geshem the Arab (Neh 2:19; 6:1f.).⁶² In light of this evidence, Dumbrell, for example, concluded, "The strong presumption, therefore, is that [these Arabians] were Qedarite and that Herodotus' description of friendship and trust between the Arabs and the Persians helps explain Gašmu's position later, in the time of Nehemiah."⁶³

Third, scholars such as Lemaire and Knauf argue that with Nabonidus' centre of influence being Tema, the kingdom of Edom likely became absorbed into Arabia.⁶⁴ This conclusion was often supported by the conception that there was a clear gap in occupation in Transjordan and Edom at the end of the Iron Age II on the one hand, and the clear increase in Arabian-style names found in the Idumean onomastics on the other.⁶⁵ This suggested that the Iron Age polities had ceased to exist and that transient groups with imperial support – such as the Arabs – maintained the caravan trade routes through the Negev.

60 Translation from <http://data.perseus.org/citations/urn:cts:greekLit:tlg0016.tlg001.perseus-eng1:3>.

61 Dumbrell, "Bowls", 33.

62 Dumbrell, "Bowls", 42.

63 Dumbrell, "Bowls", 42.

64 A. Lemaire, "Nabonidus in Arabia and Judah in the Neo-Babylonian Period", in O. Lipschits/J. Blenkinsopp (ed.), *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2003) 285–298, p. 290–291; E.A. Knauf, "Supplementa Ismaelitica 13: Edom und Arabien", *BN* 45 (1988) 62–81.

65 On the occupation gap, cf. P. Bienkowski, "Transjordan in the Persian Period: The Archaeological Evidence and Patterns of Occupation", in B. Hensel (ed.), *Transjordan and the Southern Levant: New Approaches Regarding the Iron Age and the Persian Period from Hebrew Bible Studies and Archaeology* (ArchB 8; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2024) 235–61, p. 236–37. For the onomastics, see B. Porten/A. Yardeni. *Textbook of Aramaic Ostraca from Idumea: Volume 1. Dossiers 1–10: 401 Commodity Chits* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2014); I. Stern, "The Evolution of an Edomite/Idumean Identity: Hellenistic Maresha as a Case Study", in B. Hensel/E. Ben Zvi/D.V. Edelman (ed.), *About Edom and Idumea in the Persian Period: Recent Research and Approaches from Archaeology, Hebrew Bible Studies and Ancient Near Eastern Studies* (WANEM; Sheffield: Equinox, 2022) 99–113; R. Zadok, "The Onomastics of the Chaldean, Aramean, and Arabian Tribes in Babylonia during the First Millennium", in A. Berlejung/M.P. Streck (ed.), *Arameans, Chaldeans, and Arabs in Babylonia and Palestine in the First Millennium B.C.* (LAS 3; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2013) 261–336.

This understanding of the region's history is now being challenged by new studies showing that there was no gap in occupation at several key "Edomite" sites.⁶⁶ Scholars such as Thareani and Bienkowski alternatively suggest that there was both continuity and fluidity along the Arabian trade routes, which resulted, among other things, in traditionally Judeans, Edomites and Arabs coexisting at these sites.⁶⁷ Bienkowski explains:

If this hypothesis is correct, then we would expect the following archaeological evidence: Edomite pottery found exclusively at sites along the trade route; Edomite pottery in smaller quantities than local pottery, but mostly locally made to obviate the need to carry cumbersome bowls and cooking pots on trade caravans, and perhaps adjusted to local techniques; evidence of lack of assimilation, and instead Edomite pottery found on the margins of towns in separate lodgings for traders who come and go; a restricted range of types, focusing on certain vessels used for communal activities to re-affirm tribal identity when interacting with various groups in an alien environment; and evidence of wayside shrines along the trade route, that catered for a variety of groups.

As the ... evidence ... shows, this pattern is exactly what has been found at the Negev sites – it is a perfect fit between hypothesis and evidence.⁶⁸

The Qedarites undoubtedly partook in the Arabian trade between the Arabian Peninsula and Gaza, and Geshem/Gašmu was clearly a person of some influence, however the current evidence does not support a burgeoning Qedarite-led pseudo-kingdom at the beginning of the Achaemenid period. Indeed, the onomastica from the Negev shows that Arabic names comprised about a third, which hardly constitutes a ruling majority.⁶⁹ Furthermore, as Thareani argues, the Persian period evidence from the Negev does not point

66 Cf. Bienkowski, "Transjordan", 237–238.

67 Y. Thareani, "The Judean Desert Frontier in the Seventh Century BCE: A View from 'Aroer", in J.M. Tebes (ed.), *Unearthing the Wilderness: Studies on the History and Archaeology of the Negev and Edom in the Iron Age* (ANES 45; Leuven: Peeters, 2014) 227–65; P. Bienkowski, "Edom in the Persian Period, Relations with the Negev and the Arabian Trade: The Archaeological Evidence", in B. Hensel/E. Ben Zvi/D.V. Edelman (ed.), *About Edom and Idumea in the Persian Period: Recent Research and Approaches from Archaeology, Hebrew Bible Studies and Ancient Near Eastern Studies* (WANEM; Sheffield: Equinox, 2022) 48–79. See now Bienkowski in this volume.

68 Bienkowski, "Edom", 68.

69 Stern, "Maresha", 101 notes that, "ca. 32% of the names are characterized as Arab/Nabatean, 27% Idumean, 26% Western Semitic, 9% Judahite, 5% Phoenician, and 1% others."

to an intense rivalry that would generate a vindictive reflection in Jeremiah, rather the evidence suggests peaceful, multicultural coexistence.⁷⁰

2 Jeremiah's Prophecy against Qedar ... and Hazor?

TABLE 10.4 Jer^{MT} 49:28–33 vs Jer^G 25:23–28

Jer ^{MT} 49:28–33	Jer ^G 30:23–28
To Qedar and the kingdoms of Hazor, whom Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon struck. Thus says YHWH, Arise and go up to Qedar and devastate the sons of the east They shall take their tents and their flocks, their curtains and all their utensils, and their camels shall carry them. They called upon themselves terror from all around. Flee, wander far to dwell in the depths inhabitants of Hazor declares YHWH, because Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon has made plans concerning you and has given thought about them[/you] Arise and go up to a nation at ease, dwelling in security, declares YHWH, they have no gates and no bars, they dwell alone	To Kedar, queen of the enclosure, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon struck. Thus says the Lord, Arise and advance upon Kedar and fill the sons of the Kedem ⁷¹ They will take their tents and their flocks, their garments and all their objects, and their camels will carry them. Call them by the name, ruin all around. Flee exceedingly, deep into your dwelling place, those who inhabit the enclosure, because the king of Babylon has taken counsel concerning you and has given thought about you Arise and go up to a nation dwelling stably in refreshment, who have no gates, no bars, no bolts, they dwell alone

70 Thareani, “Frontier”, 242.
71 Transliteration of the Hebrew קדם (*east*).

TABLE 10.4 Jer^{MT} 49:28–33 vs Jer^G 25:23–28 (*cont.*)

Jer ^{MT} 49:28–33	Jer ^G 30:23–28
Their camels have become plunder and their multitude of cattle spoil. I will scatter to all the winds, those having their sides shaved, from all sides comes calamity declares YHWH. Hazor is a habitation of jackals, an everlasting desolation, no one dwells there, and no son of Adam shall sojourn in her	Their camels have become plunder and their multitude of animals ruin. I will scatter to all the winds, those shav- ing above their face, from all sides I will bring their change declares the Lord. The enclosure will be an amusement of ostriches, an everlasting desolation, no one dwells there, and no son of man shall settle in her

In both the Greek and Hebrew versions, the superscription introduces the oracle as concerning those “whom Nebuchadnezzar struck,” i.e., a completed event (hiphil perfect in Hebrew, aorist in Greek). It is usually understood that the following oracle relates *post de facto* to Nebuchadnezzar’s campaign into Arabia as reported in the Babylonian Chronicle.⁷² Volz highlights the problem that the superscription relates to a past action whereas the following oracle is depicted foretelling events yet to come, he therefore concludes that the superscription must have been a later addition to a pre-existing oracle.⁷³ Given that Jeremiah’s first oracle against Egypt (Jer^{MT} 46:3–12; Jer^G 26:3–12) also depicts a past event – Necho II’s defeat at Carchemish – in an active voice, it seems possible that this is an intentional literary device.⁷⁴ In the case of the Qedar oracle, it will be suggested below that its future orientation – *after* Nebuchadnezzar’s campaign – is actually contextually and chronologically appropriate.

As already discussed at the beginning of §1, the LXX version of Jeremiah’s oracle conforms to the picture depicted in the Assyrian sources of the

72 Cf. Note 1 above.

73 Cf. P. Volz, *Der Prophet Jeremia*, (KAT X; Leipzig: A. Deicherische, 2¹⁹²⁸), 420, argues that the opening clause must have been added later: “Dieser Teil der Überschrift ist später hinzugefügt, denn der Dichter redet von bevorstehenden, nicht von vergangenen Dingen.” (“This part of the superscription is latter inserted, because the poet speaks of things to come and not from things past”).

74 See, e.g., A.M. Wilson-Wright, *Jeremiah’s Egypt: Prophetic Reflections on the Saite Period* (ANEM 30; Atlanta: SBL, 2023), 90–8.

Qedarites (κηδαρ) being regular partners with Arabian queens (βασιλίσση τῆς ἀύλης). These two people groups also belong historically to the area that Nebuchadnezzar most likely attacked: the area that was already under Assyrian vassalage (cf. fig.2). In light of this, the following analysis will take the LXX as the basis for discussion, only afterwards will some brief comments on the MT be made.

2.1 *Analysis of the Greek Text*

The oracle in Jeremiah^G is structured into two semi-parallel segments, each beginning with the phrase “Arise and go up” (Ἀνάστυτε καὶ ἀνάβητε/לָעוֹמוּ וָקוּמוּ), the first sequence pertains to the deeds of the king of Babylon, the second sequence re-depicts these events as the direct action of YHWH.⁷⁵ The oracle can thus be understood as representing the same events through two different interpretive lenses, or axes: as the result of political/historical activity, or as the result of divine activity.

TABLE 10.5 Parallel structure of Jer^G 30:23b–28

Political Axis	23b	Arise and go up	
	24		Camels and belongings, destruction from all around
	25		The king of Babylon has plans
Divine Axis	26	Arise and go up	
	27		Camels and belongings, danger from all around
	28		God has ensured the enclosure will be no more

2.1.1 Political Axis (Jer^G 30:23b–25)

The first segment narrates a scenario that is reminiscent of those reported in the Assyrian annals, whereby the Arabs, when threatened, would flee into “the desert, a place where one is always thirsty.”⁷⁶ The oracle begins with a call, pre-

75 Cf. Fischer, *Jeremia* 26–52, 554. This parallelism is damaged in the MT via the insertion of the phrase “declares YHWH” (נִאֶמַר יְהוָה) in Jer^{MT} 49:30.
76 Tadmor/Yamada, *RINAP* 1, 106.

sumably to the Babylonian army, to “arise and go up” against the Qedarites. This imperative is paired with the instruction to “fill the sons of the east.” Sons of the east is a generalized term for various Arabs, which some scholars have suggested was chosen for its poetic assonance (Kedar <> kedem).⁷⁷ The choice of terms “sons of the east” (Jer^G 30:23) and “those shaving above their face” (Jer^G 30:27) indicates that the oracle was not specifically targeted at the tribe of the Qedarites, rather it concerned those dwelling east of “Ḫatti” in general. Given the placement of the Oracles against the Nations (Jer^G 25:14–31:44) just prior to the cup of wrath vision (Jer^{MT} 25:15–38; Jer^G 32:15–38) in the LXX, there are good grounds for seeing “sons of the east” incorporating those people groups detailed more specifically in the latter: “Dedan, Tema, Rosh {Buz – Jer^{MT}} and all those with shaven temples; all the mixed [people] who lodge in the desert” (Jer^G 32:23–24). If this is correct, then it speaks against the idea that the oracle relates purely to Nebuchadnezzar’s campaign in ±599 BCE.⁷⁸ Dedan and Tema in particular are better associated with the deeds of Nabonidus.⁷⁹

The use of πλήσατε (*fill*) in Jer^G 30:23 differs dramatically from Jer^{MT} 49:28, which commands to ἡρῶ (*devastate*) the sons of the east. Curiously, most commentaries leave this detail undiscussed.⁸⁰ However, if one understands πλήσατε to be the *lectio difficilior* – an argument supported by the idea that Jer^G is the more original – then the question quickly shifts to what does it mean? The combination of πλήσατε and “sons of the east” opens the possibility that this oracle relates to events *after* Nebuchadnezzar’s campaign. Not only would this “solve” the chronological issue associated with the superscription (cf. discussion above re: Jer^G 30:23a), but it also allows a number of other details of the oracle to shine. It is significant that the king of Babylon is not

77 See, e.g., Fischer, *Jeremia* 26–52, 553; Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2, 385; J.R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37–52: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 21C; New York: Doubleday, 2004), 354.

78 Cf. Retsö, *Arabs*, 181.

79 Inscriptions found at Tayma mention Nabonidus’ war against Dedan. See discussion in Schaudig, *Inscripfen*, 19; W.W. Müller/S.F. Al-Said, “Der babylonische König Nabonid in taymanischen Inschriften”, in N. Nebes (ed.), *Neue Beiträge zur Semitistik: Erstes Arbeitstreffen der Arbeitsgemeinschaft Semitistik in der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft vom 11. bis 13. September 2000 an der Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2002) 105–22, p. 116.

80 Lundbom, *Jeremiah* 37–52, 354, for example, writes no more than, “The LXX again goes its own way, with ‘fill’ (“plēsate”) the sons of the Qedem.” Even the large commentaries of Fischer (*Jeremia* 26–52) and Stipp (*Jeremia* 25–52) deal only with the Hebrew version. See also J.M. Bracke, *Jeremiah 30–52 and Lamentations* (Westminster Bible Companion; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 141. One exception is B. Huwylar, *Jeremia und die Völker: Untersuchungen zu den Völkersprüchen in Jeremia 46–49* (FAT 20; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 246, who suggests that it is a corruption of the verb ἀπόλλυμι (“to destroy”).

named in Jer^G 30:25, this allows for the oracle to refer to Nabonidus, who not only expanded the Babylonian presence deeper into the Arabian Peninsula via conquests in Dedan, Tema, etc. (i.e., the other sons of the east), he even dwelt in Tema/Tayma for ten years; he quite literally “filled” their lands with “Babylon.” The link to Nabonidus, if correct, also brings greater clarity to Jer^G 30:30. The “plans” and “thoughts” of the Babylonian king are no longer a vague poetic expression of impending threat (cf. Jer 18:11), but point clearly to a specific (momentous) event: Nabonidus’ curious move to Tayma and the associated control over the lucrative inland trade routes.

With Jer^G 30:23bβ and 25b potentially indicating Nabonidus, it remains to be seen if the rest of the oracle can function under such a reading. The phrase מגור מסביב (“terror all around”) in Jer^{MT} 49:29 is a well-used Jeremian trope (Jer^{MT} 6:25; 20:3; 46:5; 49:29), however each of these are translated differently in the LXX: παροικεῖ κυκλόθεν (“dwells/sojourns all around”), ὁ Μέτοικον (“the alien/sojourner”), περιεχόμενοι κυκλόθεν (“surrounded all around”), and ἀπώλειαν κυκλόθεν (“ruin all around”) respectively.⁸¹ Given that the “ruin all around” in Jer^G 30:24 is directly connected to the packing down of tents and camps (i.e., mobile dwellings), it seems a bit of a stretch to propose that the prophet had property destruction and/or genocide in mind, it is even more difficult to conclude that “Jeremiah relishes the prospect of enemies taking plunder.”⁸² The term ἀπώλεια can mean “utter destruction” but it can also be connected to an experience of loss, including the concept of misery.⁸³ Taking the latter meaning would result in the idea of one’s way of life, economic independence, etc. coming to ruin from every angle, rather than literal devastation. This reading is supported by the imperative “flee” in Jer^G 30:25a, which also points towards the aversion of violence rather than the celebration thereof.

Taken altogether, the political axis part of the oracle makes better sense when seen in the context of Nabonidus’ political actions rather than Nebuchadnezzar’s sudden (and violent) disabling of the Arabian military threat in ±599 BCE.

2.1.2 Divine Axis (Jer^G 30:26–28)

As already noted, the text of the second part also begins with the command to “Arise and go up” (Ἀνάστητε καὶ ἀνάβητε/עלו קומו). The Arabian tribes are depicted as people who are dwelling in prosperity, with no need of

81 See, e.g., R.K. Harrison, *Jeremiah and Lamentations: An Introduction and Commentary* (TOTC 21; Nottingham: Inter-Varsity, 1973), 185.

82 So C.J. Sharp, *Jeremiah 26–52* (IECOT; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2022), 341.

83 J.H. Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, New York: American Book Company, 1886), 70–1.

fortifications.⁸⁴ Within the context of Jeremiah, this type of life is promised to Judah in the future (cf. Jer 23:6).⁸⁵

Where the Arabs will/can flee with their camels and animals in Jer^G 30:24, they will be “plunder” and “ruin” in Jer^G 30:27.⁸⁶ Once again the word ruin is ἀπώλεια (cf. Jer^G 30:24), which when connected to plunder can be understood as a visceral depiction of the Arabian loss of economic and political independence brought about by the arrival of the Babylonians. But this experience is orchestrated by none other than Israel’s god, it is YHWH who will scatter “those shaving above their face,” (cf. Jer^G 32:23), not the Babylonian king. In line with the idea of political/economic ruin, Jer^G 30:27b has YHWH proclaim that he will bring “change” (τροπή, cf. Jer^{MT} 49:32 - “calamity” {טִּיֵּן}), which does not lend itself to the idea of genocide, rather a new way of life.

The final verse in the Divine Axis, proclaiming that the enclosure will be inhabited no more is difficult to understand in light of the above suggestions, as this does point towards the idea of annihilation. It is noteworthy that this verse reuses various oracles spoken over Edom.

TABLE 10.6 Edom/Idumea parallels in Jer^G 30:28

Jer 30:28aα και ἔσται ἡ αὐλή διατριβή στρουθῶν	Isa 34:13 και ἔσται ἔπαυλις σειρήνων και αὐλή στρουθῶν
And the enclosure will be an amusement of ostriches	And [Edom/Idumea] will be a home of sirens and an enclosure of ostriches.
Jer 30:28aβ και ἄβατος ἕως αἰῶνος	Jer 30:11a και ἔσται ἡ Ἰδουμαία εἰς ἄβατον
and an everlasting desolation	and Edom/Idumea will be a desolation
Jer 30:28b οὐ μη καθίση ἐκεῖ ἄνθρωπος, και οὐ μη κατοικήσῃ ἐκεῖ υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου	Jer 30:12 οὐ μη καθίση ἐκεῖ ἄνθρωπος, και οὐ μη κατοικήσῃ ἐκεῖ υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου
[about the enclosure] no one dwells there, and no son of man shall settle in her	[about Edom/Idumea] no one dwells there, and no son of man shall settle in her

84 Fischer, *Jeremia* 26–52, 555, describes it as “eine isolierte Sonderexistenz” (“a special existence in isolation”)

85 Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2, 386.

86 The theme of a defenceless people being attacked and their belongings taken as plunder appears also in Ezek 38:11–12a, where the unwallled villages belong to Judah. D. Rawlinson Jones, *Jeremiah* (NCBC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmanns, 1992), 518, argues that Jeremiah used Ezekiel as a Vorlage but this is questionable. Cf. S.L. Cook, *Ezekiel 38–48: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 22b; New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2018), 76.

This connection is only strengthened when one takes a closer look of Jeremiah's Edom oracle. The Dedanites are specifically named in Jer^G 30:2, with language that mirrors Jer^G 30:25:

TABLE 10.7 Dedan and the enclosure

Jer 30:25aβ βαθύβατε εἰς κάθισιν, καθήμενοι ἐν τῇ ἀλύγῃ	Jer 30:2aβ βαθύβατε εἰς κάθισιν, οἱ κατοικοῦντες ἐν Δαιδαν
deep into your dwelling place, those who inhabit the enclosure	deep into your dwelling place, inhabit- ants of Dedan

In light of the argument above that Dedan belonged under the umbrella-term, “sons of the east,” it is striking that they are also tightly connected to Edom. However, if the argument for the Political Axis made above is correct, it seems plausible that the oracles against Qedar and Edom reflect the historical developments noted in §1.2 above. With the Babylonian occupation of the Arabian Peninsula, Edomites and various Arabian tribes migrated (were scattered) into the Negev and began to occupy the villages along the trading routes. The monopoly over these trade routes, however, ultimately belonged to Babylon. In this sense, the entire political structure of these groups was destroyed and brought to ruin. The oracles are poetic and stylised reflections on the immense and sweeping change brought about by the Babylonians. Importantly, this Babylonian initiative is configured to be the direct result of Jeremiah's speaking the word of YHWH over the nations.

2.2 Some Brief Notes on the Hebrew Text

As already observed at the beginning of §1, the biggest textual difficulty with the Qedar oracle concerns the shift from Jer^G's βασιλίσση τῆς ἀλύγης (“queen of the enclosure”) to Jer^{MT}'s ממלכות חצור (“kingdoms of Hazor”). While almost all commentators agree that חצור does not mean the city from the Galilee region, none can explain satisfactorily why this change occurred.⁸⁷ Many suggest that Hazor was incorrectly transcribed from חצירים (“villages”) found in, e.g., Isa 42:11, but the shift from “queen” to “kingdoms” is rarely discussed. Further

87 See, e.g., J. Bright, *Jeremiah: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 21; New York: Doubleday, 1986), 121; W. Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah: Exile and Homecoming* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 459, both of whom simply note that the meaning of Hazor is uncertain. Other scholars suggest that Hazor was a major Qedarite city, e.g., Duhm, *Jeremia*, 358.

underdiscussed is the lack of consistency between “kingdoms” and “villages,” which hardly constitute a logical word-pair.⁸⁸ The following discussion will – tentatively – propose a historically sensitive explanation that does not resort to scribal error as the solution.

Given the argument made above that both Jeremiah's Edom and Qedar oracles demonstrate an awareness of the fact that the Negev became a region inhabited by Judeans, Edomites and Arabs, it is *possible* that the Hebrew scribe sought to shift the focus away from the northern Arabian Peninsula (i.e., the traditional Qedarite territory under the Assyrians) in order to highlight the Arabs' infiltration of the Negev more explicitly. If correct, the “kingdoms of Hazor” might refer more pointedly to this historical development. Following this line of reasoning it is interesting to note that Josh 15:21 begins a sub-list of, “The cities at the extremity of the tribe of the sons of Judah towards the boundary of Edom in the south ...” Included within this list are: חָצוֹר (“Hazor”), חָצוֹר חֲדַטָּה (“Hazor Hadattah”), קִרְיַת חֶזְרוֹן (“Kiriath Hezron”), חָצֵר גִּדָּה (“Hazar Gaddah”), and חָצֵר שׁוּעַל (“Hazar Shual”). While no explicit connection exists, it seems at least possible that Joshua 15 and the MT version of Jeremiah know of a region in the southern Negev that comes under the umbrella term חָצֵר.⁸⁹

2.3 *Some Reflections on the Role of Qedar in the Oracles against the Nations*

The oracle against Qedar (the LXX version in particular) represents an excellent counterargument to the increasingly common view that the Oracles against the Nations (OAN) “present extreme nationalist sentiments while revelling in violence afflicted upon foreign others.”⁹⁰ The idea that the OAN function as some perverse “revenge fantasy,” or as expressions of the “typically masculine” recourse to violence, run into problems when it comes to the Qedar oracle in particular (but not only there).⁹¹ At the root of these interpretations is the idea

88 See, e.g., Fischer, *Jeremia* 26–52, 552; Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2, 382–383; Stipp, *Jeremia* 25–52, 739.

89 See various alternative explanations in W. McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah* (ICC 2; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), 1238.

90 R. Graybill, “The Jeremian Oracles against the Nations,” in L. Stulman/E. Silver (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Jeremiah* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2021) 386–404, p. 386.

91 For the OAN as revenge fantasy, see A. Kalmanofsky, “‘As She did, do to her!’: Jeremiah's OAN as Revenge Fantasies,” in A. Mein/E.K. Holt/H.C.P. Kim (ed.), *Concerning the Nations: Essays on the Oracles against the Nations in Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel* (LHBOTS 612; London/New York: Bloomsbury, 2015) 109–27. Sharp, *Jeremiah* 26–52, 336–37, suggests that the OAN are examples of “heteronormative [texts that] ... perpetuate the patriarchal ideology of violence as a viable path to agency.”

that the OAN are first and foremost the expressions of a traumatised people.⁹² This creates a difficulty for the Qedar oracle as this group was not, historically or biblically, an abuser of Judah.⁹³ The Qedarites only appear in postexilic texts, but there they are portrayed *positively*: a) Genealogically they belong to the Ishmaelites and are therefore also children belonging to the covenant of Abraham (Gen 25:13; 1 Chr 1:29); b) The tents of Qedar are likened to a thing of beauty in Song 1:5; c) Isaiah imagines a future in which the Qedarites singing praise to YHWH (Is 42:11) and provide animals for sacrifices (Is 60:7); d) Ezekiel refers the Qedarites as Judah's favourite livestock dealers (Ezek 27:21); e) even in Ps 120, although the Qedarites are depicted as a violent people, they allow the Psalmist to live "for a prolonged time" among them.⁹⁴ There are no grounds, therefore, for suggesting that Jeremiah's oracle against Qedar is an expression of revenge or even Schadenfreude.

It is true that the OAN contain violent visions but if the Qedarite oracle is any indication, they are imaginative re-depictions of Babylon's ascension to the new superpower.⁹⁵ In order to achieve their supremacy, Babylon imposed itself violently upon the world. Jeremiah carefully depicts this new world order not only as a momentous historical-political event, but rather as *the inbreaking of YHWH's divine plan*. The entire known world experienced Babylon's restructuring violence. What Jeremiah did was not imagine a (fictive) future in which cosmic justice was served, rather he creatively re-imagined the appearance of this superpower as the result of the plans of Israel's God.⁹⁶ The OAN reinforce

92 For the idea of Jeremiah as trauma literature, see critique in Davis, "Introduction" in this volume.

93 Again, Sharp, *Jeremiah* 26–56, 314, writes, "these poems, which sing with glee YHWH's routing of hostile nations, are imagined from the postexilic context of Judean scribes who remember *the traumas inflicted upon YHWH's people in generations past*." (emphasis added).

94 Cf. Bracke, *Jeremiah* 30–52, 141.

95 One must also not overlook the fact that Judah receives the harshest treatment: only Judah is "made into a desolation, a horror, to hissing and to cursing, just like they are today" (Jer^{MT} 25:18; Jer^G 32:18).

96 Stipp, *Jeremia* 25–52, 743, rightly concludes, "Nach allen Anzeichen verhiess Jeremias Botschaft an die Judäer daher hier nicht den Schutz vor einem Gegner oder die Begleichung einer alten Rechnung, sondern sie sollte im Rahmen seiner Verkündigung vom Feind aus dem Norden an einem weiteren Exempel die göttliche Sendung der Babylonier, ihre daraus resultierende Unüberwindlichkeit und folglich die Sinnlosigkeit des Widerstands unterstreichen." ("From all indications, therefore, Jeremiah's message to the Judeans did not promise protection from an enemy or the settlement of an old score, but was intended to emphasise the divine mission of the Babylonians, their resulting insurmountability and consequently the futility of resistance by means of a further example in the context of his proclamation of the enemy from the north").

the idea that YHWH has power and authority over all nations, not just Israel and Judah.

To this end one must not forget that the concept of monotheism *did not exist* in preexilic Judah. As Knauf succinctly notes, preexilic Israel and Judah were “ganz ‘normale’ vorderorientalische Mittel- und Kleinstaaten des Altertums” (“completely ‘normal’ middle- and small statehoods of the ancient Near East”).⁹⁷ It was only following deportation, the loss of statehood and the loss of the temple – at the hands of the Babylonians – that exilic Judah radically re-imagined their own traditions. In a stunning reversal the Judean elite imagined the downfall of their nation as a punishment ordained by their own deity. YHWH, the god of Israel and Judah, was imagined to have the power and authority to mobilise Babylon. YHWH was conceived as an interregional god who could – through his chosen agent Babylon – create a new world order. This imaginative retelling of Babylon’s dealings with every nation in the known world (i.e., the OAN) fulfils the important theological function of “proving” YHWH’s international reach, influence and power. The OAN are thus a key testament demonstrating the YHWH is a universal god.⁹⁸ They show how YHWH acted mightily on a global scale in the past and so promise that he can do so in the future.

3 Conclusion

This essay has proposed a number of important solutions, each of which has challenged the prevailing opinion, both for the historical reconstruction of the Qedarites and for the interpretation of Jeremiah’s oracle against Qedar.

3.1 *Qedar and the Queen of the Enclosure (Pages 194–213)*

Section 1 of this essay discussed the historical evidence for the Qedarites and other Arabs via use of the Assyrian and Babylonian annals. It was demonstrated that for much of the Assyrian rule, the Qedarites were regularly allied to other Arab tribes (who were regularly ruled by a queen) from the northern part of the Arabian Peninsula. The ¹⁶a-ri-bi, as they were regularly called in

97 E.A. Knauf, *Data and Debates: Essays in the History and Culture of Israel and Its Neighbors in Antiquity* (AOAT 407; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2013), 499.

98 See also E.K. Holt, “A Prophet to the Nations”, in H. Bezzel/U. Becker/M. de Jong (ed.), *Prophecy and Foreign Nations: Aspects of the Role of the “Nations” in the Book of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel* (FAT II 135; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2022) 99–110.

the Assyrian annals, did not refer to every people group living on the Arabian Peninsula, rather it was a term restricted to the northernmost groups. Those living somewhere north of (and not including) Tema (§1.1.3).

It was argued that the label Qedar and the Queen of the Enclosure, as it appears in the LXX version of Jeremiah's oracle, was a fitting, if stereotypical, reflection of this historical reality. The opening line of Jeremiah's oracle correctly summarises that it was these two key groups in particular that Nebuchadnezzar attacked.

It was further shown that it was likely only under Nabonidus that the more southern people groups of the Arabian Peninsula (particularly Dedan and Tema) became firmly integrated into Babylon's interregional trade network. This expanded Arabian populace was likely captured under the umbrella terms "sons of the east" (Jer^G 30:23//Jer^{MT} 49:28). Thus, the oracle "against Qedar" was not, in fact, directed exclusively towards this prominent tribe, but pertained to all the Arabian groups mentioned in the cup of wrath vision (Jer^G 32:23–24//Jer^{MT} 25:23–24). Because of the incorporation of Tema, Dedan, etc. into the oracle, it was argued that the vision as a whole was better associated with the deeds of Nabonidus rather than Nebuchadnezzar.⁹⁹

3.2 *The Priority of the Greek Version (Pages 213–220)*

Informed by the historical results of §1, §2 argued that the Greek version of Jeremiah's oracle was more likely to be the original. The oracle itself is divided into two parallel parts, the first part describing Babylon's physical invasion of the Arabian territory, the second part re-imagining this invasion as the outworking of YHWH's will. In light of this two-part structure, it was argued that one of the major goals of the oracle was to show that *Babylon's deeds were YHWH's deed*. The expansion of the Neo-Babylonian empire was the result of God's cosmic plan, it was God's will to reorder the earth with every known region of the world being brought under Babylon's influence.

For its part, the reasons behind the alterations in the MT version of the Qedar oracle remained somewhat opaque. It was suggested that the reference to the "kingdoms of Hazor" pointed at the infiltration of Arabian people groups into the southern Negev. This connection was tentatively suggested by the strange list of toponyms in Joshua 15 that all feature the root *h-z-r*. The "kingdoms of Hazor," then, could be an umbrella term for this sub-region.

99 Again see Schaudig, *Inschriften*, 19; Müller/Al-Said, "Nabonid", 116.

3.3 *The Oracles against the Nations as Proof of YHWH's International Reach (Pages 220–222)*

Lastly, it was suggested that the oracle against Qedar represented a clear *counter-example* for the increasingly popular idea that the OAN are primarily motivated by expressions of revenge. For its part Qedar was not a historical opponent of Judah, neither was it a biblical enemy. Given this, the theory that the OAN were words against Judah's enemies is demonstrably false.

It was alternatively suggested that the OAN were prime examples of the exilic/postexilic innovation of imagining YHWH as a universal deity. The new world order implemented by the Babylonians was re-imagined to be the out-working of YHWH's plan. It was YHWH who had the ultimate power to implement this new world order, he even has power to punish Babylon after it has completed its violent task (Jer^{MT} 50–51). The OAN, then, are not to be understood as a late supplement to the book of Jeremiah, but are an intrinsic part of the vocation of this prophet for the nations (Jer 1:5).¹⁰⁰

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100 The early opinion of B. Duhm, *Das Buch Jeremia* (KHAT 11; Tübingen/Leipzig: J.C.B. Mohr, 1901), xx, that the OAN are a postexilic appendage still lingers in one form or another within scholarship.

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Late Neo-Elamite Kingdoms, the Rise of Cyrus the Great, the Fall of Babylon and the End of the Babylonian Captivity

Varying Notions of “Elam” in JerMT 49:34–39 // JerG 25:14–20 and JerMT 25:15–26 // JerG 32:1–12

Alexa Bartelmus

1 The Relevance of the “Oracle Against Elam” for Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Studies

The “oracle against Elam” in the Book of Jeremiah (JerMT 49:34–39 // JerG 25:14–20)¹ is remarkable in many ways. First, this is the only one of the so-called “Oracles Against the Nations” (hereafter: OAN) in the entire Bible, that appears to be explicitly directed *against* Elam.² Furthermore, Elam – in contrast to the other peoples dealt with in the OAN – was neither an immediate neighbour of Judah nor is there any indication that it was ever politically or economically significant for Judah before the Persian period:³ its relevance in

- 1 Due to the initial lack of clarity as to which version is the original (but see below section 4.3), and because both versions are important on their own, the relevant passages in this article are not only – as is usually the case – referred to according to the Masoretic Text (hereafter: JerMT), but also after the corresponding excerpts from the version handed down in the Septuagint (hereafter: JerG).
- 2 H.G.L. Peels, “God’s Throne in Elam. The Historical Background and Literary Context of Jeremiah 49:34–39”, in J.C. de Moor/H.F. van Rooij (ed.), *Past, Present, Future: the Deuteronomistic History and the Prophets* (OTS 44; Leiden: Brill, 2000) 216–29, on p. 216; R. Eichler, “An Ambiguous Oracle in the Prophecy against Elam (Jeremiah 49:34–39)”, *Vetus Testamentum* 72 (2022) 183–90, on p. 183. It should be noted, however, that this is not the only occurrence of Elam in the prophetic books. The downfall of Elam – which, in this case, is described as if it had already *taken place* – is also mentioned in Ezek 32:24–5 in a lament about the Pharaoh of Egypt as part of a vision of the underworld. Furthermore, Elam is also mentioned several times in Isaiah (Isa 11:11; Isa 21:2; Isa 22:6); in Isa 21:2 it is described as a power that – together with Media – is to rise up against Babylon (see below n. 57). For further Biblical references, see *Große Konkordanz zur Lutherbibel* (Stuttgart: Calwer, 1993), on p. 283.
- 3 B. Huwiler, *Jeremia und die Völker: Untersuchungen zu den Völkersprüchen in Jeremia 46–49* (FAT 20; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 257; Peels, “God’s Throne”, 216; H.-J. Stipp, *Jeremiah 25–52* (HAT I/12,2; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 745. Note, however, the episode in Gen 14, which postulates that an Elamite king named Kedor-laomer ruled for more than

the context of the book of Jeremiah is therefore in any case in need of explanation. In view of the fact that the “oracle against Elam” also differs significantly from the other OAN, due to its predominantly prosaic form, and lacks the hallmarks of Jeremianic authorship,⁴ it is indeed reasonable to suspect that it may have been included in the collection at a later date than those. In this context, it is interesting to note that the “oracle against Elam” occupies a different position in the Masoretic text than in the Septuagint,⁵ which has led to many hypotheses about the historical context of the origin of the different versions and thus also the question as to which of the two is actually the more original.⁶ Finally, in both the Masoretic text and the Septuagint, the oracle contains two extremely unusual paragraphs following the prophecy of the downfall of Elam: first, there is mention of the setting up of a throne of YHWH in Elam, – which, depending on which version one follows, could mean either the *extermination* (JerMT 49:38) or the *sending* (JerG 25:18) of (a) king and (several) magnates –,⁷ and then of a “turn” of the “captivity of Elam” “at the end of days” (JerMT 49:39 // JerG 25:19).⁸ Obviously, those sentences fulfilled a special function, which in turn suggests that the “oracle against Elam” is of extraordinary importance within the OAN and that its understanding is therefore essential for insights into the genesis of the Book of Jeremiah.⁹ This fact is also illustrated by the special emphasis on the divine self, which appears in all sentences of the “oracle against Elam” as the sole acting protagonist.¹⁰

a decade over Sodom, Gomorrah and several other cities. Since it can be assumed that this episode has no historical basis, but was possibly invented in post-exilic times in order to make Abraham appear more important to an audience living in Babylonia or Elam (see J. Álvarez-Mon, *The Arjān Tomb at the Crossroads between the Elamite and the Persian Empires* [Acta Iranica 49; Leuven: Peeters, 2010], 186–7 with earlier literature), it will not be considered below.

- 4 Huwylar, *Jeremia und die Völker*, 258; Stipp, *Jeremiah*, 745 and esp. 748. Note also that the oracle is kept extremely vague and does not refer to any Elamite place names or personal names (Huwylar, *Jeremia und die Völker*, 257).
- 5 JerG is certainly based on a Hebrew source text, too, which was, however, about 1/8 to 1/6 shorter than the Masoretic version. See A. Rofé, “The Double Text of Jeremiah Revisited”, in L. Stulman/E. Silver (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Jeremiah* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 114–28, p. 114 n. 2 with references to earlier literature.
- 6 For a summary of the debate, see E. Peels, “From Egypt to Babylon, or from Elam to Moab? Queries Concerning the Order of the Oracles against the Nations in the Book of Jeremiah”, in H. Bezzel/U. Becker/M. de Jong (ed.), *Prophecy and Foreign Nations. Aspects of the Role of the “Nations” in the Books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel* (FAT II 135; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2022) 59–75, on pp. 59–60.
- 7 On the translation of מַגְנָטִים as “magnates”, see below n. 20.
- 8 For a discussion of the text passages, see sections 3–5.
- 9 Cf. Peels, “From Egypt to Babylon”, 68 with an interpretation that differs from the one made here.
- 10 Huwylar, *Jeremia und die Völker*, 257; Peels, “From Egypt to Babylon”, 68.

In addition to a number of grammatical and lexical difficulties, the fact that the term “Elam” is ambiguous and its exact historical meaning in this context is very difficult to grasp, due to the lack of precise information,¹¹ is particularly problematic for the interpretation of the oracle: although “Elam” can also be understood, in a broader sense, as a geographical *region* comprising a large number of smaller regional units in south-western Iran,¹² it is obvious that in the present context it refers to a *specific political power* that needs to be defined in more detail. Depending on the period in which one places the origin of the oracle or its inclusion in the collection, however, “Elam” could refer to very *different* political entities; moreover, it cannot be ruled out that in the course of the complicated editorial processes of the Book of Jeremiah, a (possibly ideologically motivated) *reinterpretation* of the original passage took place, which in turn may have caused the shift of the passage within the Book of Jeremiah.

However, the question of the historicity of the oracle and its dating is not only important for the Biblical exegesis of the text, but is also of considerable interest for research into the history of the ancient Near East: if concrete historical conclusions about the situation of Elam before the beginning of the Persian Empire could be drawn from this passage, JerMT 49:34–39 // JerG 25:14–20 would represent an important addition to the hitherto extremely sparse and problematic source material available concerning Neo-Elamite history after the fall of the Assyrian Empire, and in this way could contribute to gaining a clearer idea of the sequence of events that led to the emergence of the Persian Empire in the territory of modern Iran.¹³ Due to the complicated editorial history of the Book of Jeremiah, however, this is only possible if the individual *parts* of the text, which could have been written or modified in different epochs,¹⁴ are clearly separated and examined each on their own with regard to their credibility and historical information content. Such an attempt will be made in the following; as far as possible, the results will be harmonized

11 Huwlyer, *Jeremia und die Völker*, 257.

12 See the definition by R. Zadok, “The Peoples of Elam”, in J. Álvarez-Mon/G.-P. Basello/Y. Wicks (ed.), *The Elamite world* (London/New York: Routledge, 2018) 146–62, on pp. 147–9. Although this refers primarily to the Ur III period, it can also be applied to later periods of Iranian history. Note that “Gutium”, which is later associated with Median rule (see section 3.4 below), is not part of this area, but lies to the north of it.

13 On the Mesopotamian side, the direct transition from the Assyrian via the Neo-Babylonian Empire to the Persian Empire is well documented by a large number of sources. See, among others, M. Jursa, “The Neo-Babylonian Empire”, in K. Radner/N. Moeller/D.T. Potts (ed.), *The Oxford History of the Ancient Near East*, vol. 5: *The Age of Persia* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University, 2023) pp. 91–173, esp. pp. 93–6.

14 Especially the last line (JerMT 49:39 // JerG 25:19) has raised suspicion that it could have been added later; cf., e.g., Huwlyer, *Jeremia und die Völker*, 258 and Peels, “God’s Throne in Elam”, 216 with n. 4.

with the current state of research on the history of “Elam” and southwest Iran in the period in question.

2 JerMT 49:34–39 and JerG 25:14–20 in Comparison

A fundamental problem in dealing with the “oracle against Elam” is that not all sections of the text are fully understood yet. The existing translations of JerMT 49:38–39 // JerG 25:18–19 are highly suggestive and deviate massively from one another, depending on which theses on the time of origin and intention of the two text versions (JerG and JerMT) the modern translator had in mind.¹⁵ Linked to this is a further problem, namely that the text is usually only quoted according to one version,¹⁶ whereby the differences between the two versions (especially with regard to the structure) are lost. In order to avoid circular reasoning, it is important to first establish exactly what the wording of the Elam oracle actually is in the two versions and what similarities and differences there are, before a more detailed analysis of the content is undertaken. Such an attempt will be made in the following passage.

2.1 Translation of JerMT 49:34–39 and JerG 25:14–20¹⁷

JerMT	JerG
25:13b ... against all nations.	25:14b Against the nations, (namely) those of Elam:
49:34 That what was the word of YHWH to Jeremiah the prophet regarding Elam at the beginning of the reign of Zedekia, the king of Judah (is):	

15 The website Bible Gateway (www.biblegateway.com), which provides easy access to a large number of Bible translations, offers a very good overview of the variety of translations.

16 A notable exception is the synoptic translation provided in K. Finsterbusch/N. Jacoby, *MT-Jeremiah and LXX-Jeremiah 25–52: Synoptische Übersetzung und Analyse der Kommunikationsstruktur* (WMANT 146; Göttingen/Bristol, CT, USA: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017), 284–5.

17 Cf. also the synoptic translation in Finsterbusch/Jacoby, *MT-Jeremiah and LXX-Jeremiah 25–52*, 284–5.

(cont.)

JerMT		JerG	
49:35	Thus says YHWH Zebaoth: Behold, I am (herewith) breaking the bow of Elam, the beginning of their might.	25:15	Thus says (the) Lord: I break the bow of Elam, the beginning of their might.
49:36	And I will cause four winds to come upon Elam from the four corners of heaven. And I will scat- ter them for all these winds. And there will not be the nation that will not come there the expelled ones of Elam. ¹⁸	25:16	And I will cause four winds to come upon Elam from the four corners of heaven. And I will scat- ter them in all these winds. And there will not be a nation that will not come there the expelled ones of Elam.
49:37	And I will terrify Elam in front of their enemies and of those who seek their life. And I will bring evil upon them, the fierceness of my wrath. Utterance of YHWH. And I will send the sword after them until I have utterly destroyed them.	25:17	And I will terrify them in front of their enemies, who seek their life. And I will bring evil upon them according to the wrath of my mind. And I will send my sword after them until their dissolution.
49:38	And I will set up my throne in Elam. And I will <i>exterminate</i> king and magnates from there. Utterance of YHWH. ¹⁹	25:18	And I will set up my throne in Elam. And I will <i>send out/away</i> king and magnates from there.

18 Cf. G. Fischer, *Jeremia* 26–52 (HThKAT; Freiburg/Basel/Wien: Herder, 2005), 534 with explanations on the reading and grammar of the Hebrew passage. The Greek text likewise uses a singular verbal form, which has led Finsterbusch/Jacoby, *MT-Jeremia und LXX-Jeremia*, 284 to assume a vocative (“(ihr) Verstoßene Elams”) here. However, this is not easily reconciled with the definite article before the word that is present in the Greek text. Due to the existing uncertainties, the grammatically awkward wording is kept in this translation. Note also that “Elam” is read here (with JerG) against the actual spelling in the Masoretic text; cf. Finsterbusch/Jacoby, *MT-Jeremiah and LXX-Jeremiah* 25–52, 285 n. 9.

19 Another problem is the translation of the word מֶלֶךְ, which etymologically comes from the same root as akk. *šarru(m)* “king, prince”, but can be used both for officials and for the rulers of tribes in Hebrew; see W. Gesenius, *Hebräisches und aramäisches Handwörterbuch über das Alte Testament* (Heidelberg/Dordrecht/London/New York: Springer, 182013), 1297–8. Depending on how the word is translated, a completely different meaning

(cont.)

JerMT	JerG
49:39 And it shall come to pass at the end of the days (that) I will turn the captivity of Elam. ²⁰ Utterance of YHWH.	25:19 And it shall come to pass at the end of the days (that) I will turn the captivity of Elam, says (the) Lord. 25:20 At the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah the king, this word concerning Elam came into being.

2.2 Observations

When JerMT 49:34–39 and JerG 25:15–20 are compared in the secondary literature, the discussion usually focuses on the – quite significant – *differences* between the two versions (esp. the positioning of the OAN in the Book of Jeremiah, the position of the oracle against Elam within the OAN, and the positioning of the explanation on the dating before or after the oracle). In doing so, we lose sight of the fact that there also remarkable *similarities*. These include, first, the fact that the “oracle against Elam” is present both in the Masoretic text of Jeremiah and in the Septuagint version. Furthermore, it can be established that the basic agreement between the two versions – with the notable exception of the mention of the human recipient of YHWH’s message, Jeremiah, by name (only in JerMT 49:34) – covers all the essential parts of the text (that is, information on the time of the oracle and its source; the prophecy of the impending fall of Elam; the setting up of the divine throne and the resulting fate of king and magnates; the “turn” of the “captivity of Elam”), i.e. both those

emerges. In view of my own interpretation (see section 4), I have opted here for the rendering as “magnates”, which has the advantage that it fits the (very different) verbal forms of both versions. The use of the verb ἐξαποστελῶ “I will send out (or: away)” in JerG could perhaps be an indication that the word שָׁרַח was actually understood in this way by the ancient translator into Greek, and that he reinterpreted the phrase as an imperial mission. Finsterbusch/Jacoby, *MT-Jeremiah and LXX-Jeremiah*, 284 n. 5, however, assume (with reference to the apparatus of the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*) that there is a scribal error here and that the intended meaning of the verb was “I will utterly destroy”.
20 Some translators interpret the expression as “to turn fortune” (see, e.g., Fischer, *Jeremiah* 26–52, 533). Two possible etymologies of the word שָׁרַח are discussed in Gesenius, *Hebräisches und aramäisches Handwörterbuch*, 1313; but note the use of the verb שׁוּב (Hi.) in connection with the return of exiles (*ibid.*, 1329).

that definitely contain a negative fate for “Elam” and those that could possibly be interpreted positively for “Elam” (see below sections 3–5). Even more remarkable is the fact that the order of the individual elements within the oracle is also retained, and the wording of the sentences is more or less identical.²¹

Even if these observations may seem banal at first, they provide extremely important historical information: Firstly, at the point in time from which the two text versions diverged, the entire content of the oracle was already part of the collection; secondly, no intentional changes were apparently made to the wording of the actual oracle. Whatever the circumstances that explain the rearrangement of the oracles within the work may be, it must be assumed that the message it was intended to convey (and thus also the basic attitude towards “Elam”) is identical in both historical contexts. Therefore, the same sections of text cannot be interpreted as positive for “Elam” in one version and negative in the other, but the interpretation must fit both JerMT and JerG at the same time.

On the other hand, it can indeed be stated that the change in the position of the oracle within the Book of Jeremiah (see Table 11.1 in section 6.2), as well as the different positioning and wording of the explanation on the dating of the oracle, are quite significant and could possibly indicate that the “oracle against Elam” had a different *significance* for the redactors of the two text versions. This could perhaps be due to the personal circumstances and the political situation in which the redactor lived, at least if the change is not simply explained by purely dramaturgical reasons.²² In view of the observation described above that the wording and sequence of the actual oracle is the same in both versions, however, they must have a *common terminus post quem* with regard to the events described. If this could be determined more precisely (see section 3), it is hoped that this will allow concrete statements to be made regarding the historical context of the text passage and thus also an evaluation of the value of the statements made therein.

In this context, however, there is a third important point to consider, namely the observation that the prophecy concerning the fate of “Elam” is not

21 With the exception of the second verb in JerMT 49:38 // JerG 25:18, which is possibly a scribal error, but could also be based on a different interpretation of the text passage (see above n. 20), there are only a few minor deviations in the wording (e.g., “my sword” (JerG 25:17) versus “the sword” (JerMT 49:37); “them” (JerG 25:17) versus “Elam” (JerMT 49:37); frequent repetition of “utterance of JHWH” in JerMT), which, however, do not change the general message of the text. Cf. also Huwiler, *Jeremia und die Völker*, 259.

22 This scenario only works if JerG was the earlier version, and the original order of the oracles was adjusted in JerMT in order to achieve a more coherent narrative in JerMT. Note, however, the considerations in section 6.3.

exclusively negative, but apparently a change takes place within the oracle. The oracle is therefore not a uniform text, but it is composed of several different components that could well reflect different ideas about or attitudes towards “Elam” at different historical points in time. Consequently, this means that if one wants to approach the question of what “Elam” means in this context and to which historical phases the oracle refers, one should first and foremost not contrast the different *versions* of the text, but the individual *sections* of the text within it and examine them separately from one another, which will be undertaken below.

3 YHWH's Throne in Elam

The most promising starting point for placing the “oracle against Elam” in a concrete historical context is the statement in JerMT 49:38 // JerG 25:18, in which it is said that YHWH wants to set up his throne in “Elam” (which will have consequences for the king and magnates that will be discussed below; see section 4).²³ On the one hand, this passage has no parallel in the entire Bible;²⁴ on the other hand, it contains a reference to a drastic political event that is likely to have brought about fundamental changes in the history of both “Elam” and Judah. The existence of this passage can actually only be explained as a *vaticinium ex eventu*, that is, as a prophecy written after the event in question had already occurred (or was at least foreseeable), because in fact the localization of the event in “Elam” of all places makes no sense at all from a Judean perspective without a concrete historical background. In order to determine what event is being referred to here or how this event is to be evaluated, it must first be clarified what the setting up of YHWH's throne in Elam actually means in concrete terms.

3.1 Content-Related Problems

In texts from Mesopotamia – where a pantheistic world view with anthropomorphic concepts of the gods prevailed –²⁵ the change of location of a deity in connection with warlike events is a frequent motif: the theft of a statue of

23 In fact, JerMT 49:38 // JerG 25:18 does not consist of one, but of two sentences connected by 1, which, however, are usually regarded as a unit by modern (and obviously also ancient) scholars.

24 Peels, “From Egypt to Babylon”, 68.

25 W. Sallaberger, “Pantheon. A. I. In Mesopotamien”, in D.O. Edzard/M.P. Streck (ed.), *Reallexikon der Assyriologie und Vorderasiatischen Archäologie*, vol. 10: *Oannes – Priesterverkleidung* (Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 2003–5) 294–308, esp. p. 294–5.

a god by the enemy is reinterpreted as the voluntary departure of a deity from its own temple to another city located in enemy territory; the involvement of the enemy is not mentioned or the enemy only serves as a tool of the deity. The departure is usually explained by the fact that the deity was dissatisfied with the population of the city in question. Likewise, the return of the deity (or the cult statue) to its temple is interpreted as a decision made by the deity itself.²⁶

At first glance, one might think that the passage in the Book of Jeremiah refers to such an event, because after all, it is described at length elsewhere in the book that YHWH was dissatisfied with the population of Judah and that the dispersion of the Judean people was the result of his righteous anger. Accordingly, as a historian of the ancient Near East, one's first immediate association is that the establishment of YHWH's throne in "Elam" must be a euphemism for the departure of YHWH from his temple, which meant that he could no longer act from his homeland, but only from afar. Of course, the Mesopotamian conditions cannot be transferred to Judah without further ado, as on the one hand there was no pantheistic but a monotheistic world view there and on the other hand the laws of Moses stipulate that people should not create an image of YHWH (Exod 20:4). However, it is conceivable that the idea here might be that YHWH dwells in objects from his temple inventory: that these, together with parts of the population of Judah, were transported away to Babylon by the Babylonians,²⁷ could satisfactorily explain the departure from his own temple. In fact, two visions are described in the Book of Ezekiel in which Ezekiel claims to have seen the throne of YHWH on the move in Chaldea (i.e., Babylonia).²⁸

Against the background of this interpretation, however, the statement that YHWH would re-establish his throne in "Elam" of all places is extremely strange: First of all, there is no indication that Judah was once defeated by a state called "Elam";²⁹ furthermore, there is a blatant contradiction with the immediately preceding passages, which speak precisely – in drastic terms – of the destruction of Elam by YHWH and not of a victory of Elam over Judah. In addition, the sentence in the same line is supplemented by further information

26 Cf., e.g., S. Zaia, "The Cosmic Front: War and its Impact on Official Religion in the Neo-Assyrian Empire (c. 1000–610 BCE)", in I. Polinskaya/A. James/I. Papadogiannakis (ed.), *Religion and War from Antiquity to Early Modernity* (London/New York/Oxford: Bloomsbury, 2024) 102–19, on p. 103.

27 Cf. 2 Chr 36:7, 10, 18.

28 Eichler, "An Ambiguous Oracle", 187 with concrete references.

29 It is conceivable, however, that an Elamite contingent in the Babylonian army is meant here. See section 6.3.

(i.e., the fate of king and magnates), which suggests that YHWH is not only present in Elam, but also actively taking action from there.³⁰

In fact, the passage in question is usually interpreted in Biblical scholarship in precisely the opposite way, namely as the destruction of Elam by YHWH and the extermination of its kings.³¹ Most scholars and translators only see a positive turn for Elam in the following line, which speaks of a “turn” of the “captivity of Elam” in the distant future.³² From a historical perspective, however, this interpretation (i.e., first negative in JerMT 49:38 // JerG 25:18, then positive in JerMT 49:39 // JerG 25:19) hardly makes any more sense than the previous one: although JerMT 49:38 // JerG 25:18 (together with the previous negative prophecies) could certainly be interpreted as the pious hope of people dissatisfied with “Elamite” rule, the question then arises as to what function the threat of complete destruction is supposed to fulfil here if the fate of Elam is to be turned around positively in the end.

There is therefore a strong suspicion that essential information for the reconstruction of the course of historical events is omitted or even actively concealed in the oracle: only YHWH appears as an actor;³³ the time intervals between his actions, the course of the probably complex political developments in the meantime, and the human “tools” that are decisive for the course of events remain unnamed.

3.2 *Grammatical and Lexical Problems*

In fact, the interpretation of this passage is by no means unambiguous, as there are several grammatical and lexical problems here: Firstly, there is no formal contrast between the various oracles presented in JerMT 49:35–39 // JerG 25:15–19, even if most translations construct one (either at the beginning of v. 38 or v. 39), but the individual sentences are simply strung together consecutively in both the Hebrew and the Greek text. The interpretation of one or the other oracle as positive or negative therefore depends on where a translator replaces an “and” in the original text with a “but” in the translation; only the expression “at the end of the days” (Jer 49:39 // JerG 25:19) explicitly establishes a concrete relation between the sentences by indicating a relatively large temporal distance to the events of the previous line. Secondly, contrary to

30 See Eichler, “An Ambiguous Oracle”, whose hypothesis will be discussed in more detail in sections 3.2 and 4.1.

31 See Eichler, “An Ambiguous Oracle”, 184–5 with previous literature.

32 Huwylar, *Jeremia und die Völker*, 258 notes that this is the only oracle with a promise of “salvation” that occurs in both JerG and JerMT; cf. also Peels, “From Egypt to Babylon”, 69 n. 37.

33 Cf. Peels, “From Egypt to Babylon”, 68.

what many translations suggest, the text does not actually specify *whose* king and magnates are actually affected by YHWH's action: the passage is (probably deliberately) kept vague by omitting both possessive suffixes and definite articles.

Remarkable in this context is the thesis of R. Eichler, who argues that the passage could possibly refer not to the extermination of Elamite kings *from* "Elam", but to the dissolution of the other ancient Near Eastern kingdoms *through* the founding of the Persian Empire (aka "Elam") and their reorganization as provinces of the same.³⁴ Due to the exact wording, this solution is not entirely convincing (see section 4.1); however, the establishment of the throne of YHWH in "Elam" and his acting from there imply in any case an enormous shift of power, which should at least be read positively for the *new* "Elam" or the future rulers there. There is therefore no doubt that this passage has something to do with the rise of the Persian Empire.³⁵ As will be explained below, it may even be possible to date it more precisely, namely to the time around the conquest of Babylon (539 BCE).

3.3 *Cyrus of Persia, Savior of the Judeans?*

A first possible indication that the oracle against Elam may have something to do with the fall of Babylon is provided by 2 Chr 36:22–23 and Ezra 1:1–2. In these two books, the fulfilment of a prophecy of Jeremiah is explicitly attributed to the founder of the Achaemenid Empire, Cyrus II (ca. 559–530 BCE):

Ezra 1:1–2:³⁶

1 In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah, the Lord moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and also to put it in writing:

2 "This is what Cyrus king of Persia says: 'The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. 3 Any of his people among

34 Eichler, "An Ambiguous Oracle", 186–8.

35 Note in this context the statement by M.J. de Jong, "Jeremiah 28:8–9 and the Oracles Against the Nations", in H. Bezzel/U. Becker/M.[J.] de Jong (ed.), *Prophecy and Foreign Nations: Aspects of the Role of the "Nations" in the Books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel* (FAT II 135; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2022), 77–98, on p. 92 n. 90 that the "oracle against Elam" formed "a prelude to the Persian takeover of the Babylonian empire". As will be shown below, this is quite an appropriate description of the text.

36 Quoted after *Holy Bible, New International Version*; retrieved from www.biblegateway.com (last accessed: 25 February, 2025).

you may go up to Jerusalem in Judah and build the temple of the Lord, the God of Israel, the God who is in Jerusalem, and may their God be with them.⁴ And in any locality where survivors may now be living, the people are to provide them with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with freewill offerings for the temple of God in Jerusalem.”

The passages in question could, of course, also be read as a reference to Jer 30–33, where the return of the Judeans from exile in Babylon and the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem are prophesied; however, it is doubtful that these events actually already took place at this time.³⁷ In addition, it is possible to establish a concrete connection with JerMT 49:38 via the actors involved and the events described. If one equates “Elam” with the territory of Cyrus II (which, following the fall of Babylon, also included all former Babylonian possessions) and locates him at the centre of this new, “Elamite” empire (see below), the following action in both cases starts from the soil of “Elam”: YHWH, according to the text, personally “moved the heart of Cyrus” and commissioned him to build his temple in Jerusalem and send the Judeans back there. This is combined in 2 Chr 36:23 // Ezra 1:2 with the reference that YHWH had given him “all the kingdoms of the earth”, which can also be understood as an allusion to the OAN. If one reads this passage in the context of the Masoretic version, where the “oracle against Elam” (due to its positioning immediately before the “oracle against Babylon”) clearly marks a turning point in the fate of the Judeans, it is difficult not to see a direct connection here: YHWH in both narratives no longer acts from his temple in Jerusalem, but from “Elam” (or the new, temporary, centre of the Persian empire); unlike in Jer 49, however, in 2 Chr 36 and Ezra 1 his human instrument (i.e., Cyrus) is explicitly mentioned by name.

However, a difficulty with this interpretation arises from the royal title used in 2 Chr 36 and Ezra 1: Cyrus is not referred to there as “king of *Elam*”, but as “king of *Persia*”. Since Elamites and Persians are two different peoples with very different cultures, an equation is not possible without further ado but must

37 In any case, the 18-year delay in the start of temple reconstruction, which was only begun under Darius, needs to be explained; see P.R. Bedford, *Temple Restoration in Early Achaemenid Judah* (Leiden/Boston/Köln: Brill, 2001) with various explanations. J. Wiesehöfer, *Ancient Persia from 550 BC to 650 AD* (London/New York: Tauris, 2001), 49 points out that Ezra and 2 Chr are not “historical” sources in the strict sense, and notes that the attribution of the command to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem and return the Judeans to their homeland could possibly be a (theological) back-projection of acts of later rulers onto Cyrus. Contrary to what is often postulated, the so-called “Cyrus Cylinder” does not constitute proof of a corresponding edict by Cyrus; but see section 5.3 below for a possible slightly different kind of connection.

be examined more closely (see sections 3.5–7). Although the royal title does not necessarily specify the ethnic affiliation of the king in question, the two terms nevertheless convey a different idea of the cultural context from which he came or the territory he ruled. In addition, the setting up of the throne of YHWH in JerMT 49:38 is preceded by several prophecies that announce the fall of Elam in drastic terms, and it cannot be ruled out from the outset that Cyrus may have had something to do with this.

To be able to interpret the passages correctly, it is therefore necessary to take a closer look at the rise of Cyrus in the hope of learning something about the previous fate of “Elam”. The Biblical passages discussed so far do not shed any light on this, but we must now turn to further source material.

3.4 *The Rise of Cyrus of Anšan*

3.4.1 The “Dynastic Prophecy”

In fact, one Babylonian source shows that Cyrus II could certainly be perceived as a “king of Elam”, at least in *retrospect*, namely the so-called “Dynastic Prophecy”.³⁸ This pseudo-prophetic text is comparable to JerMT 49:34–39 // JerG 25:14–20 in that it likewise presents events that have already taken place in the form of prophecies and that no king’s name is mentioned in connection with the events described.³⁹ Nevertheless, it contains enough historically clear information to determine with certainty that the title “king of Elam” here must refer to Cyrus II.⁴⁰ The end of the reign of the Babylonian king Nabonidus (556–539 BCE) is described in lines ii 17’–24’ of this text as follows:⁴¹

- ii 17’) A king of Elam will set out. The royal sceptre he will [take from him].
- ii 18’) From his throne he will remove him and
- ii 19’) he will seize the throne and the king whom he made rise (*ušetbû*) from the throne,
- ii 20’) the king of Elam will change his place.

38 BM 40623 (81–4-28, 168). Editions: A.K. Grayson, *Babylonian Historical-Literary Texts* (Toronto/Buffalo: University of Toronto, 1975), 24–37 no. 3; R.J. van der Spek, “Darius III, Alexander the Great and Babylonian Scholarship”, in W. Henkelman/A. Kuhrt (ed.), *A Persian Perspective. Essays in Memory of Heleen Sancisi-Weerdenburg* (Achaemenid History 13; Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 2003) 289–346, on pp. 311–24.

39 The events described in the text extend far beyond the Persian period, possibly into the reign of Seleucus I; see van der Spek, “Darius III”, 329.

40 Grayson, *Babylonian Historical-Literary Texts*, 25.

41 Quoted here from the translation by van der Spek, “Darius III”, 316.

- ii 21') In another land he will settle him.
- ii 22') That king will be stronger than the land and
- ii 23') all the lands [will bring to him] tribute.
- ii 24') During his reign Akkad [will live] in security.⁴²

Similar to 2 Chr 36:23 and Ezra 1:2, it is stated explicitly here that “all the lands” became subject to Cyrus (here as the anonymous “king of Elam”) after his victory (ii 23’); however, the god of the Judeans plays no role in this (or rather there are no references at all to any divine involvement). Instead, we learn a little bit more about the events that led to the fall of Babylon under its previous ruler Nabonidus and about the rise of the Persian Empire: according to the text, the Babylonian king was overthrown and taken to another country (ii 18’–21’);⁴³ his place was taken by Cyrus, who proved to be stronger than “the land” (KUR) (ii 22’) and to whom all (foreign) countries (KUR.KUR) subsequently brought tribute (ii 23’). If one follows the positive interpretation of the last line by R.J. van der Spek (see above), a state of security and stability was thus achieved in the land of Akkad (i.e., Babylonia) according to the text. What is particularly important for the issue under discussion here is the fact that this account does indeed explicitly state that the *king of Elam* removed the Babylonian king from his throne. However, it should be noted that this is a late text that does not necessarily reflect the perception of contemporaries of the events. Furthermore, the text does not provide any information about how Cyrus himself came to the Elamite throne in the first place. Fortunately, however, there are several other Babylonian sources that shed some light on the course of events described here only in very general terms and provide additional details.

3.4.2 The “Cyrus Cylinder”

From the famous “Cyrus Cylinder” – a building inscription that was probably composed by Babylonian scribes on Cyrus’ behalf –⁴⁴ we learn that Cyrus’

42 Note the divergent interpretation of ii 24’ by Grayson, *Babylonian Historical-Literary Texts*, 33.

43 The fate of Nabonidus is described similarly in Berossus (Jos., *Contra Apionem* 1.20–1; Eusebius, *Praep. Evang.* 9.41); cf. van der Spek, “Darius III”, 319. Xenophon instead claims in his novelistic *Cyropaedia* (Cyr. 7.5.29–33) that Nabonidus was killed. According to A. Kuhrt, *The Persian Empire: A Corpus of Sources from the Achaemenid Period* (London/New York: Routledge, 2010), 81 preference should be given to the two Babylonian sources.

44 Cf. H. Schaudig, *Die Inschriften Nabonids von Babylon und Kyros’ des Großen samt den in ihrem Umfeld entstandenen Tendenzschriften: Textausgabe und Grammatik* (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2001), 551.

battle against Nabonidus (who is thoroughly defamed at the beginning of the text; ll. 1–8)⁴⁵ was preceded by a victory over the “land of the Gutī” (i.e., Gutium) or the Median troops (designated in the cuneiform text as “Umman-manda”)⁴⁶ (13), that he marched into Babylon without a fight (17) and was welcomed by the Babylonians with joy (18).⁴⁷

- 9) Enlil-of-the-gods became extremely angry at their complaints, and [...] their territory. The gods who lived within them left their shrines,
- 10) angry that he had made (them) enter into Shuanna (Babylon). Ex[alted Marduk, Enlil-of-the-Gods], relented. He changed his mind about all the settlements whose sanctuaries were in ruins,
- 11) and the population of the land of Sumer and Akkad who had become like corpses, and took pity on them. He inspected and checked all the countries,
- 12) seeking for the upright king of his choice. He took the hand of Cyrus, king of the city of Anshan, and called him by his name, proclaiming him aloud for the kingship over all of everything.
- 13) He made the land of Gutī and all the Median troops prostrate themselves at his feet, while he shepherded in justice and righteousness the black-headed people
- 14) whom he had put under his care. Marduk, the great lord, who nurtures his people, saw with pleasure his fine deeds and true heart,
- 15) and ordered that he should go to Babylon. He had him take the road to Tintir (Babylon), and, like a friend and companion, he walked at his side.

45 Although the beginning of the text is very fragmentary and no king's name is found in the surviving part, it can be safely assumed on the basis of other sources such as the so-called “Verse Account” (BM 38299), an invective poem on Nabonidus, that this ruler is held responsible for the catastrophic conditions in Babylonia described here. Editions of the “Verse Account” are provided by S. Smith, *Babylonian Historical Texts Relating to the Capture and Downfall of Babylon* (London: Methuen, 1924), 27–97 with copies on pls. 5–10 and Schaudig, *Die Inschriften Nabonids*, 563–78; note also the divergent interpretation of v 2–27 by C. Waerzeggers, “Very Cordially Hated in Babylonia? Zēriya and Rēmūt in the Verse Account”, *Altorientalische Forschungen* 39 (2012) 316–20.

46 Cf. Schaudig, *Die Inschriften Nabonids*, 552, l. 13.

47 BM 90920. Translation quoted from I. Finkel, “The Cyrus Cylinder: The Babylonian Perspective”, in J. Curtis (ed.), *The Cyrus Cylinder and Ancient Persia: A New Beginning for the Middle East* (London: British Museum, 2013), on p. 5. Note that this is a rather free translation. Cf. also the edition by Schaudig, *Inschriften*, 550–6 and the translation of R.J. van der Spek, “Cyrus the Great, Exiles, and Foreign Gods: A Comparison of Assyrian and Persian Policies on Subject Nations”, in M. Kozuh/W.F.M. Henkelman/C.E. Jones/C. Woods (ed.), *Extraction & Control: Studies in Honor of Matthew W. Stolper* (Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago, 2014), 233–64, on pp. 261–3, both with references to earlier editions.

16) His vast troops whose number, like the water in a river, could not be counted, were marching fully armed at his side.

17) He had him enter without fighting or battle right into Shuanna; he saved his city Babylon from hardship. He handed over to him Nabonidus, the king who did not fear him.

18) All the people of Tintir, of all Sumer and Akkad, nobles and governors, bowed down before him and kissed his feet, rejoicing over his kingship and their faces shone.

19) The lord through whose help all were rescued from death and who saved them all from distress and hardship, they blessed him sweetly and praised his name.⁴⁸

It is interesting in this context that the Cyrus Cylinder claims that Cyrus received the order to go to Babylon and depose Nabonidus (14–15) from the supreme god of Babylonia himself, namely Marduk; the motive given for this – similar to the Book of Jeremiah – is divine anger (9–10), which in this case is said to have been caused by disturbed cult orders and the subjugation of his own people (1–8). After a thorough search, Marduk's choice reportedly had fallen on Cyrus, who – according to the text – was a righteous king (*malki išaru*) (11–12).

3.4.3 The “Nabonidus Chronicle”

While in the “Cyrus Cylinder” the focus is on the aspect of Cyrus' personal suitability as a good ruler and the resulting divine favour and not on his military successes (which are only vaguely hinted at in line 13 in the form of the victory over Gutium and the “Umman-manda”), at least some of them can be described somewhat more concretely on the basis of the so-called “Nabonidus Chronicle”.⁴⁹

48 In the following section, the narrative perspective changes from the 3rd to the 1st person; this part of the text will be discussed in detail in section 5.3.

49 BM 35382 (Sp II 964); quoted from the translation by A.K. Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles* (Texts from Cuneiform Sources 5; Locust Valley, New York: Augustin, 1975), 104–11 (here: pp. 109–10), with slight modification of the line numbering. Cf. also the edition by J.-J. Glassner, *Mesopotamian Chronicles* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004; translation of the French original: *Chroniques Mésopotamiennes*, Paris 1993), 232–9. This Babylonian text was probably composed in the Persian period but is only known from a much more recent copy. Smith, *Babylonian Historical Texts*, 98 dates the preserved manuscript to the Seleucid period; note also the considerations of C. Waerzeggers, “Facts, Propaganda, or History? Shaping Political Memory in the Nabonidus Chronicle”, in J.M. Silverman/C. Waerzeggers (ed.), *Political Memory in and after the Persian Empire*

iii 12–13) ... In the month Tishri when Cyrus (II) did battle at Opis on the [bank of] the Tigris against the army of Akkad, the people of Akkad
 iii 14) retreated. He carried off the plunder (and) slaughtered the people. On the fourteenth day Sippar was captured without a battle.

iii 15–16) Nabonidus fled. On the sixteenth day Ugbaru, governor of the Gutī, and the army of Cyrus (II) entered Babylon without a battle. Afterwards, after Nabonidus retreated, he was captured in Babylon. Until the end of the month the shield-(bearing troops)

iii 17–18) of the Gutī surrounded the gates of Esagil. (But) there was no interruption (of rites) in Esagil or the (other) temples and no date (for a performance) was missed. On the third day of the month Marchesvan Cyrus (II) entered Babylon.

iii 19–20) ... were filled before him. There was peace in the city while Cyrus (II) spoke (his) greeting to all of Babylon. Gubar, his district officer, appointed the district officers in Babylon.

Although the text is unfortunately only fragmentarily preserved in some important passages and not necessarily neutral (despite its factual style), it does contain very valuable information, as the events mentioned in it can be embedded in a chronological framework by assigning them to specific years of the reigns of Babylonian rulers.

The date given here for the entry of Cyrus' troops under the commander Ugbaru (who is described as the "governor of the Gutī"; iii 15–16) into Babylon is the 16th day of the month Tašritu ("Tishri" in Grayson's translation; month VII) (iii 12+15).⁵⁰ According to the text, this event was preceded by a very bloody victory by Cyrus himself at Opis (iii 12–14) and the capture of Sippar without a fight on day 14 (iii 14). Nabonidus, who had supposedly fled during the conquest of Sippar, was captured in Babylon (iii 15–16). Cyrus himself only arrived there on the third day of the month Araḫsamna ("Marchesvan" according to Grayson; month VIII) (iii 18) in order to address the inhabitants of Babylon in a speech (iii 19–20);⁵¹ until the end of the previous month, the "shield-bearing" troops of the Gutī kept watch around the Esangil, the main shrine of Marduk (iii 16–17). What is remarkable for the narrator of the "Nabonidus Chronicle"

(Atlanta, Georgia: Society of Biblical Literature, 2015), 95–124 (who even considers a Parthian dating to be possible; see p. 96) on the way that this text should be understood.

⁵⁰ Based on the events described, the year can be identified as the last year of Nabonidus' reign (i.e., 539 BCE).

⁵¹ This important issue will be dealt with in more detail in section 5.3 below.

is that the cults in the Esangil continued without interruption, even though it was surrounded by these troops (iii 17–18).

An explanation of who the Gutian troops were and how Cyrus came to join them can be found a few passages further up in the Chronicle, namely in the account of Cyrus' victory over Astyages, which in any case must have taken place before year 7 of Nabonidus' reign (ii 1–4):⁵²

- ii 1) (Astyages) mustered (his army) and marched against Cyrus (II), king of Anshan, for conquest [...]
- ii 2) The army rebelled against Astyages and he was taken prisoner. Th[ey handed him over] to Cyrus (II). ([...])
- ii 3) Cyrus (II) <marched> to Ecbatana, the royal city. The silver, gold, goods, property, [...]
- ii 4) which he carried off as booty (from) Ecbatana he took to Anshan. The goods (and) property of the army of [...]

Although neither the term “Guti” (or “Gutium”) nor the term “Umman-manda” is explicitly mentioned here, it is clear from the comparison with the “Cyrus Cylinder” (where the battle against Gutium and the Umman-manda is the only warlike event worth reporting from Cyrus' career before the fall of Babylon; see above), as well as from geographical considerations, that the army under the command of the Median king Astyages that is described here must have consisted of these people.⁵³ Astyages had marched against Cyrus of Anšan (ii 1), but was then captured by his own rebellious army and handed over to Cyrus (ii 2). Cyrus subsequently marched against Ecbatana, the “royal city” of Astyages (ii 3), and brought back rich booty from there to Anšan (ii 3–4). The “Nabonidus Chronicle” also mentions some other goods in connection with

52 Quoted from the translation by Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*, 106, with slight modification of the line numbering.

53 It is interesting to note in this context that neither “Gutium” nor “Umman-manda” are ethnic designations. The former term refers to a region northeast of Mesopotamia (above Elam), inhabited by different peoples subsumed under the term “Gutians”; the latter is another term used pejoratively in sources of the 1st century BCE for several different peoples in this area. For more details see, e.g., W.W. Hallo, “Gutium (Qutium)”, in E. Weidner/W. von Soden (ed.), *Reallexikon der Assyriologie und Vorderasiatischen Archäologie*, vol. 3: *Fabel – Gyges und Nachtrag* (Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1957–71), 708–20, and M. Stol, “Umman-manda”, in M.P. Streck (ed.), *Reallexikon der Assyriologie und Vorderasiatischen Archäologie*, vol. 14: *Tiergefäß – Waša/ezzil(i)* (Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter, 2014–16) 330–1; on the latter see also the detailed treatment by S.F. Adah, *The Scourge of God: The Umman-manda and Its Significance in the First Millennium BC* (State Archives of Assyria Studies 20; Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2011).

troops (ii 4), but unfortunately the text breaks off at this point and we are not told what this is all about.

What is surprising about the episode is that the chronicle – which otherwise fits seamlessly into the corpus of the so-called “Babylonian Chronicles” and, like those, focuses mainly on the deeds of Babylonian rulers and their significance for the cults in Babylon – opens its view with this report far beyond the Babylonian territory, to the events in the Iranian highlands and central Zagros, already a few years *before* the entry of Cyrus into Babylon, through which the developments there actually become relevant for the history of Babylon. Since the “Nabonidus Chronicle” describes events that happened in the first year of Cyrus’ reign and in this respect represents a Persian-period compilation in the present form, one could assume that the earlier events concerning Cyrus were only added to an existing collection of records at this time, possibly with a propagandistic function. In fact, however, there are other indications that the victory of Cyrus over Astyages was already perceived as a significant event in Babylonia at the time of Nabonidus, which was relevant not only for Cyrus but also for the Babylonian ruler.

3.4.4 The “Eḫulḫul Cylinders” of Nabonidus

Some of the above information is also found in a building inscription of Nabonidus, which was recorded on numerous cylinders found in Sippar.⁵⁴

Following the description of a vision by means of which the god Marduk supposedly prophesied to him the dissolution of the land of the “Umman-manda” (here clearly in reference to the king of the Medes, Astyages) and the “kings who walk by his side” (i 21–5), Nabonidus writes the following here:⁵⁵

i 26–29) When (my) third year arrived, they had Cyrus (II), king of the land Anšan, a young servant of his (Astyages’), rise up against him (Astyages), and he (Cyrus) scattered the extensive barbarian horde (the Medes) with his small body of troops. He seized Astyages (Ištumegu), king of the barbarian horde (the Medes), and took him to his land as a captive.

54 Recent editions of the inscription known as the “Eḫulḫul Cylinder” can be found in Schaudig, *Die Inschriften Nabonids*, 409–40 and F. Weiershäuser/J. Novotny, *The Royal Inscriptions of Amēl-Marduk (561–560 BC), Neriglissar (559–556 BC), and Nabonidus (555–539 BC), Kings of Babylon* (The Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Babylonian Empire, vol. 2; University Park, Pennsylvania: Eisenbrauns, 2020; hereafter: *RINBE* 2), on pp. 140–51 Nabonidus 28 and on pp. 152–7 Nabonidus 29 (a similar text); for the numbers of the individual objects and the latest joins see there pp. 141–4.

55 Quoted from the translation by Weiershäuser/Novotny, *Royal Inscriptions*, 147.

According to the text, the event is of interest to Nabonidus because the dissolution of the “Umman-manda” made it possible for him to rebuild the temple Eḫulḫul of the moon-god Sîn of Harran who was extremely important to him.⁵⁶ Apparently, they had been roaming in the vicinity of the city of Harran to the west of the river Balikh, in former Assyria, but were forced to withdraw from the region as a result of Cyrus’ victory over Astyages. Nabonidus therefore initially saw this event in a positive light; he does not yet seem to have recognized a threat in Cyrus, whom he describes as a “little servant” (of either Astyages/the Medes or Marduk; see below), at this point.

The political statements that Nabonidus makes are very interesting in the present context: according to the texts, parts of the former Assyrian territory were not, or at least not so firmly, in his hands that he could have afforded to rebuild the temple of the moon god there; the “Umman-manda hordes” that were lingering there were part of a larger political unit whose leader, Astyages, was apparently able to rule over several other kings.⁵⁷ With his victory over Astyages, Cyrus put an end to this unity.⁵⁸ Of considerable importance for the history of western Iran in the 6th century is the question of the position from which he did this: depending on who the possessive suffix in the description of Cyrus as “*his* little servant” refers to, he could be seen – with numerous earlier scholars – as a vassal or subject of the Medes or their ruler Astyages, or – with R. Rollinger – as merely a little servant of the god Marduk.⁵⁹ If one takes seri-

56 The building work is described in much detail in the following passages (i 30 – ii 25).

57 The existence of a “Median empire” is largely doubted in recent research; instead, most scholars prefer to think about the Medes as a rather loose, temporary tribal confederation. Summaries of the various positions can be found, for example, in R. Rollinger, “The Medes of the 7th and 6th c. BCE: A Short-Term Empire or Rather a Short-Term Confederacy?”, in R. Rollinger/J. Degen/M. Gehlen (ed.), *Short-Term Empires in World History* (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2020) 189–213, on pp. 189–91 and R. Rollinger, “The Median Dilemma”, in B. Jacobs/R. Rollinger (ed.), *A Companion to the Achaemenid Persian Empire* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2021) 337–50, on pp. 337–8. Cf. also A. Fuchs, “The Medes and the Kingdom of Mannea”, in K. Radner/N. Moeller/D.T. Potts (ed.), *The Oxford History of the Ancient Near East 4: The Age of Assyria* (New York: Oxford University, 2023) 674–768, pp. 727–9.

58 It is possible that these events provided the background for the hope formulated in Isa 21:2 that there was now a new power (“Elam”) that, after having integrated the Median troops, was able to compete with Babylon and defeat it. Indeed, it finally did; therefore, the statement could also have been written in retrospective. In any case, there is no need to share Vanderhooft’s doubts whether the references to “Elam” and “Media” could refer to the conquering Persian empire. Cf. D.S. Vanderhooft, *The Neo-Babylonian Empire and Babylon in the Latter Prophets* (Harvard Semitic Museum Monographs 59; Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars, 1999), 133.

59 Cf. R. Rollinger, “Zur Lokalisation von Parsu(m)a(š) in der Fārs und zu einigen Fragen der frühen persischen Geschichte”, *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und vorderasiatische*

ously the (unfortunately not entirely certain) indication from the “Nabonidus Chronicle” that Astyages marched against Cyrus “in order to conquer” (*ana kaš[ādi]*; ii 1), the latter would be an attractive option.⁶⁰ The decisive factor is how one interprets the title with which Nabonidus refers to Cyrus in this context and which is also found in the “Cyrus Cylinder” (l. 12) as well as in at least one of the sections of the “Nabonidus Chronicle” concerning Cyrus (ii 1),⁶¹ namely “king of Anšan”, and how much importance one allows for its bearers (i.e., Cyrus and his ancestors; see “Cyrus Cylinder”, ll. 21–2) and the territory they ruled.

3.5 *Elam, Susa and Anšan*

With the exception of the “Dynastic Prophecy”, which as a much later source is not necessarily relevant and will be ignored below, the Babylonian sources remarkably all agree that Cyrus was “king of Anšan”.⁶² Of course, this title probably reflects a Babylonian perspective;⁶³ nevertheless, it is striking that it appears in very different sources and was apparently attributed to Cyrus independently of the respective author and his relationship to him. There is therefore no way around the assumption that the title “king of Anšan” reflects a *historical reality* and that Cyrus had indeed been king of Anšan before his rapid political rise.⁶⁴ However, it is unclear how much power and influence

Archäologie 89 (1999) 115–39, on pp. 127–32 with a detailed discussion of earlier statements in the secondary literature.

- 60 Cf. also Rollinger, “Zur Lokalisation von Parsu(m)a(š)”, 133–4, who points out that there seems to be no unequal balance of power between the two parties.
- 61 In a later section of this text (ii 15), Cyrus is designated as “king of Parsu”. According to Waerzeggers, “Facts, Propaganda or History?”, 104 and esp. 113 this was an anachronistic title that came into the chronicle by a “cut-and-paste adaptation from sources of different genres and from different times” in the redactional process; however, it seems also possible that the title refers to the same territory in other words (below section 3.6).
- 62 To the sources discussed above can be added yet another inscription by Cyrus on a brick from Ur, in which the title “king of Anšan” (with a different spelling: KUR.aš-ša-an) is used for him; see Schaudig, *Die Inschriften Nabonids*, 549.
- 63 In other parts of the empire, Cyrus might have used a different titlature. See, e.g., A. Zournatzi, “Cyrus the Great as a ‘King of the City of Anshan’”, *Τεχμήρια* 14 (2019) 149–80, on pp. 154–5; W. Henkelman, “Cyrus the Persian and Darius the Elamite: a Case of Mistaken Identity”, in R. Rollinger/B. Truschnegg/R. Bichler (ed.), *Herodot und das Persische Weltreich / Herodotus and the Persian Empire: Akten des 3. Internationalen Kolloquiums zum Thema ‘Vorderasien im Spannungsfeld klassischer und altorientalischer Überlieferungen’*, Innsbruck, 24.–28. November 2008 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2011) 577–634, on p. 610.
- 64 The hypothesis of A. Zournatzi, “Cyrus the Great”, esp. on pp. 163–4 that Cyrus as a foreign ruler required an illustrious lineage and urban origin for legitimacy and that therefore both he and his ancestors are described in the Cyrus Cylinder as kings of the city

this title implies: How large was Cyrus' sphere of influence as "king of Anšan"? Did it only include the area around the city of Anšan or a wider area? Did he rule it alone, together with other kings of equal rank or was he even subordinate to a great king? And did the conditions that applied to him already apply to his ancestors?

The relationship between "Anšan" and "Elam" is particularly important for answering these questions. While Anšan was one of several states in the 3rd millennium and early 2nd millennium BCE, which, from a *Mesopotamian perspective*,⁶⁵ formed the core of "Greater Elam",⁶⁶ "Susa" and "Anšan" were first united under the ruler Ebarat I of Šimaški (ca. end of the 3rd millennium BCE).⁶⁷ From around 1500–1100, the title "king Anšan and Susa" or "king of Susa and Anšan" was used continuously by the kings of the various Middle

of Anšan, is not very convincing in view of the fact that his predecessor Nabonidus was not of royal origin either (cf. Weiershäuser/Novotny, *RINBE* 2, 3), and that the founder of the Neo-Babylonian empire, Nabopolassar, could even describe himself as the "son of a nobody" (R. Da Riva, *The Inscriptions of Nabopolassar, Amēl-Marduk and Neriglissar* [Boston/Berlin: de Gruyter, 2013], on p. 5). However, it is conceivable that an urban origin may have played an important role in his *own* cultural context; cf. Herodotus' description of the various Persian tribes (Hdt. 1.125) which will be discussed in section 3.6.

- 65 D.T. Potts, *The Archaeology of Elam: Formation and Transformation of an Ancient Iranian State* (New York: Cambridge University, 2016; second, revised edition), 1. The observation that the term "Elam" *does not reflect the self-perception* of the inhabitants of the various regions in southwest Iran, but is a *concept that was imposed on them from outside* is of enormous importance for the question addressed here. From a Mesopotamian perspective (and probably even more so for the peoples living west of Mesopotamia), "Elam" was for millennia a designation under which the inhabitants of eastern regions, from the area between Dēr and Susa onwards, were subsumed (Potts, *The Archaeology of Elam*, 12).
- 66 Zadok, "Peoples of Elam", 147; P. de Miroschedji, "Susa and the Highlands: Major Trends in the History of Elamite Civilization", in N.F. Miller/K. Abdi (ed.), *Yeki bud, yeki nabud: Essays on the Archaeology of Iran in Honor of William M. Sumner* (Cotsen Institute of Archaeology Monograph 48; Los Angeles: The Cotsen Institute of Archaeology, 2003), pp. 17–38, on p. 36. Note that this does not inform us about the ethnic and/or linguistic identity of its inhabitants; see Potts, *The Archaeology of Elam*, 4–5; P. Steinkeller, "The Birth of Elam in History", in J. Álvarez-Mon/G.P. Basello/Y. Wicks, *The Elamite World* (London/New York: Routledge, 2018) 177–202, on p. 177.
- 67 K. de Graef, "The Middle East After the Fall of Ur: From Ešnunna and the Zagros to Susa", in K. Radner/N. Moeller/D.T. Potts (ed.), *The Oxford History of the Ancient Near East*, vol. 2: *From the End of the Third Millennium BC to the Fall of Babylon* (New York: Oxford University, 2022) 408–96, on p. 445–6 and 452; B. Mofidi-Nasrabadi, "Elam in the Late Bronze Age", in K. Radner/N. Moeller/D.T. Potts (ed.), *The Oxford History of the Ancient Near East*, vol. 3: *From the Hyksos to the Late Second Millennium BC* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022) 869–941, on p. 869. In Elamite texts, Anšan usually appears as "Anzan"; this (possibly important) orthographic difference is not considered here for practical reasons.

Elamite dynasties (“Kidinuids”,⁶⁸ “Ighalkids” and “Shutrukids”) until the reign of Šilhak-Inšušinak (12th century BC).⁶⁹ However, researchers disagree on how this situation should be interpreted: while F. Vallat has assumed the centre of Elam to be in the vicinity of Anšan,⁷⁰ P. de Miroschedji has pointed out that Anšan was an essential part of “Greater Elam” only for about 6 centuries (from ca. 2400–1750 BCE), but thereafter only occasionally formed part of the “Elamite confederation”.⁷¹ It is actually possible that neither Anšan nor Susa were ever really the centre of “Elam”,⁷² as in Middle Elamite royal inscriptions the indigenous term for Elam, *ha(l)tamti*, is used in separate titles such as “keeper(?) (*katru*) of Elam” and “prince(?) (*halmenik*) of Elam”, which are added to the title “king of Anšan and Susa”.⁷³ Remarkably, the latter title is replaced in some of Šilhak-Inšušinak’s inscriptions by “prince(?) (*halmenik* or *menik*) of Elam and Susa”;⁷⁴ in the inscriptions of his successor Huteluduš-Inšušinak, it is no longer found at all, although it is known from one inscription,⁷⁵ that he

- 68 Mofidi-Nasrabadi, “Elam in the Late Bronze Age”, 872 argues in favor of abandoning this term.
- 69 Mofidi-Nasrabadi, “Elam in the Late Bronze Age”, 871. Note that the order of the cities in the title varies, probably due to the expected audience (D.T. Potts, “Cyrus the Great and the Kingdom of Anshan”, in V.S. Curtis/S. Stewart (ed.), *The Idea of Iran*, vol. 1: *Birth of the Persian Empire* [London: Tauris, 2005] 7–28, on p. 9); in Akkadian inscriptions, the title “king of Susa and Anšan” is used, in Elamite ones the title “king of Anšan and Susa” (F. Vallat, “La politesse élamite à l’époque des Ighalkides”, *Nouvelles Assyriologiques Brèves et Utilitaires* 1997/74, 73, on p. 73).
- 70 F. Vallat, *Suse et l’Elam* (Paris: ADPF, 1980); cf. Potts, *The Archaeology of Elam*, 11.
- 71 de Miroschedji, “Susa and the Highlands”, 18 and 36; M. Waters, “Parsumāš, Anšan, and Cyrus”, in J. Álvarez-Mon/M.B. Garrison (ed.), *Elam and Persia* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2011) 285–96, on p. 288.
- 72 Cf. also the distinction made by later authors between the “Susiana” and “Elam” and the various mountain peoples who, according to their testimony, inhabited this region. See Potts, *The Archaeology of Elam*, 11 for more details on this matter.
- 73 See, e.g., F.W. König, *Die elamischen Königsinschriften* (Archiv für Orient-Forschung Bh. 16; Graz: Selbstverlag des Herausgebers, 1965; hereafter: *EKI*) p. 76 no. 22 I, p. 97–102 no. 45 §2, p. 147–8 no. 72 I. The gods of these three regions are also mentioned separately in some royal inscriptions; cf. e.g. *EKI* no. 54 §18: “by the gods of Elam, the gods of Anšan, the gods of Susa”.
- 74 König, *EKI* no. 47, no. 54, and probably also no. 46.
- 75 Edition of the text: M. Lambert, “Hutélutush-Insushnak et le pays d’Anzan”, *Revue d’Assyriologie et d’archéologie orientale* 66 (1972) 61–76; on the resulting identification of Anšan as Tall-e Malyan, see also the discussion of the text by E. Reiner, “The location of Anšan”, *Revue d’Assyriologie et d’archéologie orientale* 67 (1973) 57–62. Archaeological arguments for this identification have been provided earlier by J. Hansman, “Elamites, Achaemenians and Anshan”, *Iran* 10 (1972), 101–24, on pp. 111–24. There is also a corpus of administrative texts from Tall-e Malyan; those texts were dated by their editor, M.W. Stolper, *Texts from Tall-i Malyan 1: Elamite administrative texts (1972–1974)*

still did some building work in the city of Anšan.⁷⁶ This last known “Shutrukid” ruler is famous above all for the fact that he was defeated by the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar I (1125–1104 BCE).⁷⁷ Whether his defeat had a long-term impact on the political situation in the region cannot be established due to the extremely sparse sources.⁷⁸ It is only from the middle of the 8th century onwards that the names and succession of the kings of “Elam” (from a Mesopotamian perspective) again can be reliably reconstructed on the basis of two Babylonian chronicles and a large number of Neo-Assyrian letters and royal inscriptions (up to the year 645 BCE).⁷⁹ The chronicles do not reveal from where they ruled their empire or what the extent of their territory was. According to the Assyrian sources, the Elamite kings moved in an area that stretches roughly between Dēr (= Badrah; on the border with Babylonia) in the northwest and, possibly, Behbahan in the southeast; the exact extent of their movements depends on where the – as yet unidentified –⁸⁰ royal cities of Madaktu and Hidalu – of which the latter was ruled at least temporarily by a subordinate king –⁸¹ were located. However, two surprising findings are

(Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 1984), on pp. 1 and 9 to ca. 1300–1000 BCE. For other dating suggestions see the discussion of earlier literature in Potts, *The Archaeology of Elam*, 240–2 and A. Bartelmus, “Elam in the Late Bronze Age”, in K. Radner/N. Moeller/D.T. Potts (ed.), *The Oxford History of the Ancient Near East 4: The Age of Assyria* (New York: Oxford University, 2023) 588–673, on pp. 605–7.

76 Huteluduš-Inšušinak is referred to only as “prince(?) (*menik*) of Elam and Susa” in all his inscriptions, including those found in Tall-e Malyan.

77 Mofidi-Nasrabadi, “Elam in the Late Bronze Age”, 883.

78 A rough overview can be found in M.-J. Steve, *Syllabaire élamite: histoire et paléographie* (Neuchâtel: Recherches et Publications, 1992), on pp. 21–3; cf. also the table in A. Bartelmus, “Elam in the Iron Age”, 599 fig. 42.3. It should be noted, however, that some of the royal inscriptions grouped there in phase “N II” could possibly be dated earlier; see Bartelmus, “Elam in the Iron Age”, 608–26, and below in this section.

79 Cf. the table in Bartelmus, “Elam in the Iron Age”, 595 (with more detailed information on the sources used on p. 597).

80 See Potts, *The Archaeology of Elam*, 263 with earlier literature. On the possible identification of Hidalu with Tol-e Homayun near the “Arjan Tomb” in the Behbahan plain, see W.F.M. Henkelman, “Imperial Signature and Imperial Paradigm: Achaemenid Administrative Structure and System Across and Beyond the Iranian Plateau”, in B. Jacobs/W.F.M. Henkelman/M.W. Stolper (ed.), *Die Verwaltung im Achämenidenreich: Imperiale Muster und Strukturen / Administration in the Achaemenid Empire: Tracing the Imperial Signature* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2017) 45–256, on pp. 97–8 and Y. Wicks/J. Álvarez-Mon, “An Elamite Duck Weight in the Susa Museum: New Evidence for the Behbahan Plain in the Late Seventh/Early Sixth century BCE”, *Arta* 2022.004 (2022) 1–22, on pp. 16–17.

81 The Neo-Assyrian king Assurbanipal (669–631 BCE) claims that he installed Ummanigaš on the throne of Teumman (the previous “king of Elam”) and his younger brother

certain: firstly, Susa is only mentioned in Neo-Assyrian sources from the reign of Assurbanipal,⁸² and secondly, Anšan (written: Anzan) only appears as a toponym in some of Sennacherib's inscriptions (705–681 BCE), where it does not refer to a residence of the king of Elam, but to a region *allied* with Elam.⁸³ Who ruled Anšan and what the extent of its territory was is not revealed in this context; however, it is noteworthy that other polities (e.g., Parsuaš, Pašeru and Ellipi) are also mentioned as allies of the Elamite king Umman-menanu (692–689 BCE) at the Battle of Halule (691 BCE).

The – still popular – idea that the territory of at least some of the Neo-Elamite rulers known from the Babylonian chronicles must also have included Anšan is due to the fact that during the French excavations in Susa at the beginning of the 20th century, some royal inscriptions were found which contain the title “king of Anšan and Susa”, but which, based on palaeographic criteria, can certainly be dated later than the known Middle Elamite ones.⁸⁴ Until the 1990s, it was assumed that the names of all the kings mentioned therein could be reconciled with the rulers known from Mesopotamian sources.⁸⁵ Since F. Vallat radically questioned this assumption,⁸⁶ modern research has assumed – with very different justifications and resulting historical scenarios – that most of the rulers in question should be dated later and that “Elam” must have experienced a revival after the conquest and alleged destruction of Susa by Assurbanipal.⁸⁷ In fact, this theory hinges on a single, questionable equation

Tammaritu as “king of Hidalu”; see, e.g., J. Jeffers/J. Novotny, *The Royal Inscriptions of Ashurbanipal* (668–631 BC), *Aššur-etel-ilāni* (630–627 BC), and *Sîn-šarra-iškun* (626–612 BC), *Kings of Assyria*, part 1 (The Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period 5/1; Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2018; hereafter: *RINAP* 5/1), 158 Ashurbanipal 155 obv. 5'–8'. He also describes the decapitation of another “king of Hidalu”, Ištar-nandi, by the herald of Hidalu; see, e.g., Jeffers/Novotny, *RINAP* 5/1, 180–1 Ashurbanipal 163 obv. 4'–8'. Some scholars claim that the phenomenon of secondary king at Hidalu already existed earlier; see Potts, *The Archaeology of Elam*, 260–1 for a short discussion with references.

82 Bartelmus, “Elam in the Iron Age”, 660 with references.

83 Cf. A.K. Grayson/J. Novotny, *The Royal Inscriptions of Sennacherib, King of Assyria*, part 1 (The Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period 3/1; Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2012; hereafter: *RINAP* 3/1), 182 Sennacherib 22 v 43–4.

84 König, *EKI*, nos. 71, 73, 77 (similar, but without “king of ...”), 86.

85 The order of the inscriptions in König, *EKI*, as well as the order of the entries in the palaeographic list of signs in Steve, *Syllabaire élamite*, are based on this; on the resulting problems, see Bartelmus, “Elam in the Iron Age”, 613 with n. 102 and p. 621.

86 F. Vallat, “Nouvelle analyse des inscriptions néo-élamites”, in H. Gasche/B. Hrouda (ed.), *Collectanea Orientalia – histoire, arts de l'espace et industrie de la terre: études offertes en hommage Agnes Spycket* (Neuchâtel: Recherches et Publications, 1996) 385–95.

87 An overview of recent chronological scenarios can be found in Bartelmus, “Elam in the Iron Age”, 617 fig. 42.4.

of names;⁸⁸ if one were to abandon this, it would be possible without further ado to place the reigns of the few New Elamite rulers who still claim the title “king of Anšan and Susa” in the first quarter of the 1st millennium BCE.⁸⁹ The dating of a group of administrative texts from Susa (the so-called “Acropolis Archive”)⁹⁰ and some letters found in Nineveh and a few other sites (the so-called “Nineveh Letters”),⁹¹ which can offer more detailed insights into the administrative structure of Elam and possibly even political processes, is also indirectly dependent on this, as long as no solid dating criteria are found; both text corpora have not yet been satisfactorily edited and are therefore difficult to interpret historically.⁹²

While the Assyrian letters and royal inscriptions provide a fairly clear picture of the conflicts in western Zagros and the parties involved at the time of the Sargonids (albeit from a rather one-sided perspective),⁹³ the further fate of this region after the conquest of Susa therefore remains largely in the dark. Apart from the few written sources from Elam itself, which cannot be

88 Bartelmus, “Elam in the Iron Age”, 608–12 und 621–2.

89 Bartelmus, “Elam in the Iron Age”, 621–6.

90 V. Scheil, *Textes élamites-anzanites, troisième série* (Mémoires de la Délégation en Perse 9; Paris: Leroux, 1907; hereafter: MDP 9) and V. Scheil, *Textes élamites-anzanites, quatrième série* (Mémoires de la Délégation en Perse 11; Paris: Leroux, 1911) no. 309; cf. Potts, *The Archaeology of Elam*, 291–4 and Bartelmus, “Elam in the Iron Age”, 636–9.

91 Copies of the cuneiform tablets: F.H. Weißbach, *Susische Thontäfelchen* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1902); partial editions: W. Hinz, “Zu den elamischen Briefen aus Ninive”, in L. De Meyer/H. Gasche/F. Vallat (ed.), *Fragmenta historiae Elamicae: mélanges offerts à M.-J. Stève* (Paris: Editions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1986) 227–34; H. Koch, “Briefe aus Iran”, in B. Janowski/G. Wilhelm (ed.), *Briefe* (Texte aus der Umwelt des Alten Testaments, Neue Folge 3; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2006) 349–56; F. Vallat, “Le royaume élamite de Zamin et les ‘Lettres de Ninive’”, *Iranica Antiqua* 33 (1998) 95–106; E. Gorris/R. Lebrun/J. Tavernier, J., “Syro-Asianica scripta minora IX”, *Le Muséon* 126 (2013) 1–20. See also Bartelmus, “Elam in the Iron Age”, 648–59 for a detailed discussion.

92 Note, in addition, also a bronze plaque with a lengthy Neo-Elamite inscription that was found in the so-called Treasury at Persepolis (G.P. Basello, “From Susa to Persepolis: the Pseudo-Sealing of the Persepolis Bronze Plaque”, in K. De Graef/J. Tavernier (ed.), *Susa and Elam: Archaeological, Philological and Geographical Perspectives. Proceedings of the International Congress Held at Ghent University, December 14–17, 2009* (Mémoires de la Délégation en Perse 58; Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2013) 249–264. This text can possibly be related to the administrative tablets from the “Acropolis Archive” via the names of the persons who occur in it (Vallat, “Nouvelle Analyse”, 388; cf. also Bartelmus, “Elam in the Late Bronze Age”, 639).

93 M.W. Waters, *A Survey of Neo-Elamite History* (State Archive of Assyria Studies 12; Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2000); compare the reviews by W.F.M. Henkelman, “Defining Neo-Elamite History”, *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 60 (2003) 251–63 and A. Fuchs, “[Review of] Waters, Matthew W.: A Survey of Neo-Elamite History (...)”, *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und vorderasiatische Archäologie* 93 (2003) 128–37.

dated with certainty, and a series of interesting but enigmatic archaeological finds,⁹⁴ there is some information available from Babylonian sources for the late period of Elam, which does indicate the continued existence of close contacts between Babylonia and Elam (including the presence of over 700 Elamite guards at the court of Nebuchadnezzar II [605–562 BCE]), but do not allow any clear conclusions to be drawn about the concrete political situation:

- 94 Of particular importance are two richly decorated tombs that were discovered in 1982 in the Behbahan Plain (“Arjan Tomb”) and in 2007 near Ram Hormoz (“Jubaji Tomb”). Some of the objects found there bear short Elamite inscriptions which, however, cannot be dated precisely. Detailed descriptions of the finds and their interpretation can be found in J. Álvarez-Mon, *The Arjān Tomb*, and A. Shishegar, *Tomb of the Two Elamite Princesses of the House of King Shutur-Nahunte Son of Indada: Neo-Elamite Period, Phase IIIB (ca. 585–539 BC)* (Tehran: Pazhuheshgah-e Sazman-e Miras-e Farhangi, 2015 [in Farsi]); a comparative study of burial customs in the Neo-Babylonian period is provided by Y. Wicks, *Profiling Death: Neo-Elamite Mortuary Practices, Afterlife Beliefs, and Entanglements with Ancestors* (Leiden: Brill, 2019). Like the inventory of the tombs, the finds from the so-called “Kalma-karra hoard” (W.F.M. Henkelman, “Persians, Medes, and Elamites: Acculturation in the Neo-Elamite Period”, in G.B. Lanfranchi/M. Roaf/R. Rollinger (ed.), *Continuity of Empire (?) : Assyria, Media, Persia* (Padua: s.a.r.g.o.n., 2003) 181–231, on pp. 214–27) also point to a strong Elamite-Iranian acculturation, whereas a small group of cylinder seals that can be attributed to the Neo-Elamite period (P. Amiet, “Glyptique élamite, à propos de nouveaux documents”, *Arts Asiatiques* 26 [1973], 3–64) shows not only “Elamo-Persian”, but also “Assyrianizing” and “Neo-Babylonianizing” influences (cf. Potts, *The Archaeology of Elam*, 290). Of particular interest is a seal that was impressed on tablets from the Persepolis Archives (R.T. Hallock, *Persepolis Fortification Tablets* [The University of Chicago Oriental Institute Publications 92; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969]), which not only bears an unusual motif, but also carries a short Elamite inscription stating that it belonged to “Kuraš the Anzanite(?), son of Šešpeš” (PFS 93*); cf. Hallock, *Persepolis Fortification Tablets*, 79 seal 93 and R.T. Hallock, “The Use of Seals on the Persepolis Fortification Tablets”, in M. Gibson/R. Biggs (ed.), *Seals and Sealings in the Ancient Near East* (Malibu: Undena, 1977), 127–33, p. 127 and fig. E-5. As this filiation is identical with part of the genealogy of Cyrus in the “Cyrus Cylinder” (l. 21), the question whether this seal could have originally belonged to one of the ancestors of Cyrus is much debated in the literature. Of particular importance is the detailed treatment by M.B. Garrison, “The Seal of ‘Kuraš the Anzanite, son of Šešpeš’” (Teispes), PFS 93*: Susa – Anšan – Persepolis”, in J. Álvarez-Mon/M.B. Garrison (ed.), *Elam and Persia* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2011) 375–405, who suggests to interpret it as an example of a “nascent ‘court style’ associated with the Teispid royal house” (*ibid.* on p. 400–1). The influences of Assyrian art that he recognizes in the motif (*ibid.* on pp. 390–400) are very intriguing regarding the question whether this Cyrus could even be identical with the king Cyrus of Parsumāš who sent his son Arukku with tribute to the Assyrian court (see below section 3.6). Note in this regard also the interesting observations by M.[W.] Waters, “Ashurbanipal’s Legacy: Cyrus the Great and the Achaemenid Empire”, in T. Daryaei/R. Rollinger (ed.), *Iran and its Histories: From the Beginnings through the Achaemenid Empire. Proceedings of the First and Second Payravi Lectures on Ancient Iranian History, UC Irvine, March 23rd, 2018 & March 11th–12th, 2019* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2021) 149–161, esp. on pp. 158–9.

it is still unclear whether the Babylonians “inherited” the territory from the Assyrians,⁹⁵ whether Nebuchadnezzar II ever moved against Elam and perhaps even brought Susa under his direct control,⁹⁶ whether the territory fell to the Medes at some point in time,⁹⁷ or whether an independent royal house was able to maintain itself in Susa until the beginning of the Achaemenid period (or shortly before).⁹⁸ What is certain, however, is that even at the height of the Elamite Empire, whose kings are attested in Mesopotamian sources from 743–645 BCE and who can be safely assigned to the Elamite culture on the basis of their names, there were already larger groups of another people in

- 95 The return of the statues of the gods carried off by the Assyrians to Susa under Nabopolassar (see Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*, 87–90 Chronicle 2: 16–17) is usually seen as a *sign of a re-established Elamite government in Susa*, which might have been regarded as a possible ally by the Babylonians (s. Potts, *The Archaeology of Elam*, 283–4 with earlier literature). However, in analogy with the return of divine statues described in the “Cyrus Cylinder” (l. 30; see below section 5.3), the passage could also be interpreted to mean that Susa was now regarded as the *Babylonians’ own territory* whose cults had to be taken care of.
- 96 This assertion by F.W. König, *Geschichte Elams* (Der Alte Orient 29/4; Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1931), on p. 23 is also followed by E. Weidner, “Jojachin, König von Juda, in babylonischen Keilschrifttexten”, in *Mélanges syriens offerts à Monsieur René Dussaud, secrétaire perpétuel de l’Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres*, vol. 2 (Paris: Geuthner, 1939) 923–35, on p. 929 and R. Zadok, “On the Connections Between Iran and Babylonia in the Sixth Century BC”, *Iran* 14 (1976), 61–78, on p. 61; cf. also R. Zadok, “The Babylonia – Elam Connections in the Chaldaean and Achaemenid Periods (Part One)”, *Tel Aviv* 38 (2011), 120–43, on p. 123. M.A. Dandamaev/V.G. Lukonin, *The Culture and Social Institutions of Ancient Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1989), on p. 59 believe that the period could be narrowed down more precisely to 597/6–584 BCE on the basis of the prophecies in Jer 49:34–9 and Ezek 32:24. The only concrete indication of Nebuchadnezzar’s possible control over Elam, however, are some objects and bricks found in Susa with a Nebuchadnezzar label inscription (S. Langdon, “Les inscriptions de Nebuchadnezzar trouvées à Suse”, *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und verwandte Gebiete* 29 [1905–6] 142–7; S. Langdon, *Die neubabylonischen Königsinschriften* [Vorderasiatische Bibliothek 4; Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1912], 44; F. Thureau-Dangin, “Notes assyriologiques”, *Revue d’Assyriologie et d’archéologie orientale* [1912] 21–5, on pp. 24–5), which, due to their generic content, could have come from anywhere (cf. Potts, *The Archaeology of Elam*, 287–8). In Nebuchadnezzar’s own inscriptions (which, however, hardly ever report on his campaigns, but predominantly on building activities), a victory over Elam has not yet been attested.
- 97 According to S. Zawadzki, *The Fall of Assyria and Median-Babylonian Relations in Light of the Nabopolassar Chronicle* (Seria Historia 149; Poznan/Delft: Adam Mickiewicz University/Eburon, 1988), p. 143 this could have taken place as early as 584 BCE; Dandamaev/Lukonin, *The Culture and Social Institutions*, 61, however, assume that control over Elam was transferred from Babylonia to the Medes in the late reign of Astyages. Cf. Potts, *The Archaeology of Elam*, 289.
- 98 This view is held by most recent scholars on the history of Elam. However, if one accepts the earlier dating of the inscriptions containing the title “king of Anšan and Susa” proposed above, concrete evidence for this is extremely scarce.

the same region, who differed fundamentally from the Elamites in terms of language, way of life and probably also religious beliefs, but who were in active contact with them, namely the members of an ethnic group from which the leading class of the later Persian Empire was to emerge.

3.6 *The Persians, the Elamites and the Medes*

3.6.1 “Persians”

In the famous Bisotun inscription of Darius I (522–486 BCE), the core area of his reign is referred to as “Parsa” (Old Persian: *Pārsa*; Elamite: *parsin*, Akkadian: KUR.*parsu*) and the people who inhabit it as “Persians” (Old Persian: *Pārsa*; Elamite: *parsir* [pl.: *parsip*]; Akkadian: ¹⁴*parsāya*).⁹⁹ While the Akkadian term “KUR.*parsu*” for the land ruled by the Persians is previously only known from the “Nabonidus Chronicle” (ii 15) where it could possibly represent an anachronism,¹⁰⁰ persons referred to as “*parsip*” also appear in the Elamite tablets from the “Acropolis Archive” of Susa. The term is always followed there by a more precise specification: *parsip zampegirip* (“Zampegir-parsip”), *parsip hurip* (“Huri-parsip”) and *parsip dat(i)yanip* (Dat(i)yana-parsip) are distinguished.¹⁰¹

99 The only edition of the Bisotun inscription to date that includes all three versions of the main text (DB) is still F.H. Weissbach, *Die Keilinschriften der Achämeniden* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1911), pp. 8–75; a new edition by J. Hackl, W. Henkelman and J. Tavernier is in preparation. The Old Persian version was re-edited, *inter alia*, by R. Schmitt, *The Bisotun Inscriptions of Darius the Great: Old Persian Text* (Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum, part I: Inscriptions of Ancient Iran, vol. 1: The Old Persian Inscriptions: Texts I; London: Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum/School of Oriental and African Studies, 1991); cf. also R. Schmitt, *Die altpersischen Inschriften der Achämeniden: Editio minor mit deutscher Übersetzung* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2009), on pp. 36–91. On the Babylonian version, see E.N. von Voigtlander, *The Bisotun Inscription of Darius the Great: Babylonian Version* (Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum, part I: Inscriptions of Ancient Iran vol. 2: The Babylonian Versions of the Achaemenian Inscriptions: Texts I; London: Humphries, 1978). The Elamite version was re-edited by F. Grillot-Susini/C. Herrenschildt/F. Malbran-Labat, “La version élamite de la trilingue de Behistun: une nouvelle lecture”, *Journal Asiatique* 282 (1993) 19–59; see also G.G. Cameron, “The Elamite Version of the Bisotun Inscriptions”, *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 14 (1960) 59–68 and the German translation by W. Hinz, “Die Behistan-Inschrift des Darius in ihrer ursprünglichen Fassung”, *Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran und Turan* NF 7 (1974) 121–34. Note further the studies on §70 (the interpretation of which is important for the debate whether the inscriptions in the name of Cyrus in Pasargadae calling him an “Achaemenid” were created by himself or by Darius I; see n. 148) by F. Vallat, “Darius, l’heritier legitime, et les premiers Achemenides”, in J. Álvarez-Mon/M.B. Garrison (ed.), *Elam and Persia* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2011) 263–84 and S.A. Parian/K. Mahmoudi, “A New Reading of the 70th Paragraph of the Behistun Inscription”, *Cuneiform Digital Library Bulletin* 2024:3, 1–29.

100 Waerzeggers, “Facts, Propaganda, or History?”, 96, 104 und 113; see n. 61 above.

101 E.g., Scheil, *MDP* 9, no. 94 rev. 13, no. 51 rev. 5 and no. 281: 29; for the reading *par-sip* instead of *par-šin* see Steve, *Syllabaire*, 157: 395. Cf. Henkelman, “Persians, Medes, and Elamites”, 211 with n. 105.

Regardless of whether one wants to interpret *parsip* as a specific Iranian group or rather in general as inhabitants of Fars,¹⁰² it can be stated that Iranian names (with approx. 10%) are already quite widespread in the archive, and that the bearers of such names could act side by side with Elamites in the transactions attested by the texts and possibly even hold high positions.¹⁰³ A ration list from Nebuchadnezzar's palace archive (from the year 592/1 BCE) where people with probably Iranian names are referred to as "Elamites" can also be interpreted as a sign of mixing between the groups;¹⁰⁴ a strong mutual acculturation is further also suggested by the archaeological evidence.¹⁰⁵ Despite the lack of meaningful sources, researchers – due to the situation in the Achaemenid Empire, where the Fars with the magnificent palaces of Pasargadae and Persepolis constituted the heartland of the Persian rulers – agree that such a situation must also have prevailed on the south-eastern side of the Zagros and that this was the milieu from which Cyrus and his successors emerged. But from where, when and by what route did the ancestors of these kings arrive in the Fars and when did their specifically "Persian" identity develop?

There are two very different basic hypotheses regarding this question, which in turn have given rise to many different interpretations. While it was originally assumed that a more or less closed tribe associated with the ethnonym "Parsu(m)a(š)" – that could also be used as a toponym – migrated from the area around Lake Urmia through the Zagros mountains to the Fars,¹⁰⁶ more recent research has predominantly followed a theory by P. de Miroschedji,¹⁰⁷ according to which Parsua(š) in the Middle Zagros and Parsumaš represent two

102 Cf. Henkelman, "Persians, Medes, and Elamites", 211 who emphasizes in this context that *parsip* should not automatically be equated with the "Persians" in the Achaemenid period.

103 Henkelman, "Persians, Medes, and Elamites", 212 with earlier literature.

104 See, e.g., Zadok, "Connections", 62; P. Briant, "La Perse avant l'empire: (un état de la question)", *Iranica Antiqua* 19 (1984) 71–118, on p. 95; Henkelman, "Persians, Medes, and Elamites", 212.

105 See above n. 94.

106 See in detail, R. Rollinger, "Zur Lokalisation von Parsu(m)a(s) in der Färs und zu einigen Fragen der frühen persischen Geschichte", *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und vorderasiatische Archäologie* 89 (1999) 115–39, on pp. 115–7 with earlier literature.

107 Recently, however, archaeological arguments have been put forward which could possibly support the older theory; see M.T. Atayi/M. Roaf, "The Arrival of the Persians into Fars", in Y. Hassanzadeh/A.A. Vahdati/Z. Karimi (ed.), *Proceedings of the International Conference on the Iron Age in Western Iran and Neighbouring Regions: 2–3 Nov. 2019 Kurdistan University, Sanandaj, Iran*, vol. 2 (Tehran/Sanandaj: RICHT/National Museum of Iran/Kurdistan ICHHTO, 2019) 175–90.

different state entities.¹⁰⁸ According to this theory, “Persian ethnicity” would have originated in the Fars, namely in contact with the Elamites who inhabited the region at the time.¹⁰⁹

The discussion is complicated by the fact that the terms Parsua(š) and Parsumaš cannot be clearly distinguished from one another.¹¹⁰ While the early occurrences of Parsua(š) from the reigns of the Assyrian kings Salmanassar III to Sargon II (possibly to be supplemented by Uartian sources)¹¹¹ refer in any case to the northern area (which is located in the Middle Zagros), and the term Parsumaš – which only appears from Sargon II (722–705 BCE) onwards – certainly refers to the southern area at the time when Assurbanipal reigned, there are some occurrences in sources from the reigns of Sargon and Sennacherib whose identification with one or the other area is disputed. For the early history of the Persians, the question of whether the two areas have anything to do with each other is of decisive importance, regardless of the direction of any migratory movements: if the northern area should indeed be related to the “Persians” as the people from whom Cyrus, Cambyses, Darius and the later Persian great kings emerged, then “Persians” would in any case have lived under Median rule, regardless of the fate of Anšan, which has yet to be clarified.

A major problem in this context is posed by the unresolved etymology of the word.¹¹² The first theory implicitly assumes that there was a connec-

108 P. de Miroschedji, “La fin du royaume d’Anšan et de Suse et la naissance de l’Empire perse”, *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und vorderasiatische Archäologie* 75 (1985) 265–306, on pp. 268–78.

109 de Miroschedji, “La fin du royaume d’Anšan et de Suse”, esp. 295–305; de Miroschedji, “La fin de l’Elam: essai d’analyse et d’interprétation”, *Iranica Antiqua* 25 (1990) 47–95; cf. also Henkelman, “Cyrus the Persian”, 582 with additional literature and Atayi/Roaf, “The Arrival of the Persians”, 175.

110 A. Fuchs, “Parsuaš” in D.O. Edzard/M.P. Streck (ed.), *Reallexikon der Assyriologie und vorderasiatischen Archäologie*, vol. 10: *Oannes – Priesterverkleidung* (Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 2003–2005) 340–2 avoided this problem by treating both terms together under the lemma Parsuaš (A and B).

111 For example, this view is still accepted by M. Salvini, “Urartu”, in B. Jacobs/R. Rollinger (ed.), *A Companion to the Achaemenid Persian Empire* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2021), 351–63, on p. 355; on the problem, see Fuchs, “Parsuaš”, 342.

112 The interpretation as “borderland” (derived from Old Iranian *parsava* “rib, side, frontier” and referring to peoples who lived at the borders of Media; cf. R.N. Frye, *The History of Ancient Iran* [München: Beck, 1984], 66 for this claim that was made by I.M. Diakonoff; M.T. Atayi, “A Theory on the Formation of the Achaemenid Empire: from Parsua to Parsa”, in Y. Hassanzadeh/A.A. Vahdati/Z. Karimi (ed.), *Proceedings of the International Conference on the Iron Age in Western Iran and Neighbouring Regions: 2–3 Nov. 2019 Kurdistan University, Sanandaj, Iran*, vol. 1 [Tehran/Sanandaj: RICHT/National Museum

tion between the words Parsua(š), Parsumaš and the self-designation of the Persians (see above), i.e. that the toponyms explicitly refer to that people.¹¹³ The second theory also works without this assumption; however, the question then remains as to what Cyrus II and his ancestors actually understood themselves to be (see below). In any case, both words are exonyms; we do not know how the inhabitants of Parsua(š) and Parsumaš referred to themselves.

Influenced by the assumption that the development of a separate “Persian” identity could only have taken place *after* the fall of the Elamite Empire, de Miroschedji originally assumed a point in time after the conquest of Susa (647 BCE) for the Persian ethnogenesis he postulated.¹¹⁴ The idea that Persian ethnogenesis could not have taken place earlier than the time of Anšan’s independence from Elam, and that only from then on could one speak of “Persians” in the proper sense (i.e., in the sense of the word’s meaning in the Achaemenid Empire), still persists, although the time window for this has been greatly reduced by Vallat’s hypothesis of the possible revival of a Neo-Elamite state, which is said to have encompassed both Susa and Anšan.¹¹⁵ Robert Rollinger, on the other hand, has argued convincingly that the conditions for the process of ethnogenesis were best when Elam was still at least partially in control of Anšan and confronted Assyrian politics in Babylonia as an independent power,¹¹⁶ and associated the toponym Parsumaš with this process.

3.6.2 Cyrus of Parsumaš and Cyrus of Anšan

In fact, the ruler Cyrus of Parsumaš, who is mentioned in two inscriptions by Assurbanipal (669–631 BCE), is possibly a key figure.¹¹⁷ According to Assurbanipal, this ruler responded to the “fall of Elam” by submitting to Assurbanipal and sending his son – with tribute – to the Assyrian royal court:¹¹⁸

of Iran/Kurdistan ICHHTO, 2019; in Farsi] 522–93 on pp. 521 and 550) would actually negate any connection with the “Persians” as an ethnic group.

113 This is explicitly stated, for example, by Waters, “Parsumaš, Anšan, and Cyrus”, 286. Implicitly, such an interpretation is also assumed in some translations of Neo-Assyrian texts, where LÚ.par-šu-maš is translated as “Persian”; see, e.g., S. Parpola, *The Correspondence of Assurbanipal*, part 1: *Letters from Assyria, Babylonia, and Vassal States* (State Archives of Assyria 21; Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2018), 102–3 no. 116 rev. 3.

114 de Miroschedji, “La fin de royaume d’Anšan et de Suse”, 295; Rollinger, “Zur Lokalisation von Parsu(m)a(š) in der Fars”, 125.

115 Vallat, “Nouvelle analyse des inscriptions néo-élamites”. See, however, section 3.5 above for doubts about the late dating of the texts which are relevant to this hypothesis.

116 Rollinger, “Zur Lokalisation von Parsu(m)a(š) in der Fars”, 125–6.

117 Jeffers/Novotny, *The Royal Inscriptions of Ashurbanipal*, p. 270 Ashurbanipal 12 vi 7’–13’ and p. 307 Ashurbanipal 23, 114–17.

118 The following passage is quoted from J. Jeffers/J. Novotny, *RINAP* 5/1, p. 270 Ashurbanipal 12 vi 7’–13’.

Cyrus, the king of the land Parsumaš, heard about the might[y] victories that, with the support of the gods Aššur, Bēl (Marduk), and Nabû – the great gods, my lords – I had achieved over the land Elam (and that) I had flattened the land Elam, all of it, like the Deluge, and he sent to Nineveh, my capital city, Arukku, his eldest son, with his payment, to do obeisance, and he made an appeal to my lordly majesty.

As Rollinger has convincingly demonstrated, the territory of the aforementioned Cyrus lies *beyond Elam* as seen from Assyria,¹¹⁹ the assumption that it is not (as claimed by de Miroshedji)¹²⁰ a further reference to Parsua(š) located in the Middle Zagros, but a region located in the Fars and thus, in a broader sense, in the vicinity of the city of Anšan,¹²¹ is therefore obvious. Remarkably, however, there is no mention of Anšan in this context. There are several possible explanations for this:

1. If one assumes that “Elam” still included both Susa and Anšan at this time,¹²² one could think that Assurbanipal’s scribes simply subsumed Anšan under this generic term. However, an actual conquest of this region – which from an Assyrian perspective was far away and separated from Assyria by the Zagros Mountains – would be astonishing given the scope of Assurbanipal’s campaigns against the Elamite king Ummanaldašu (Huban-haltaš III, 647–645 BCE) as it is described in his inscriptions.¹²³ It should also be noted that Anšan was already mentioned separately from Elam in Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions from the time of Sennacherib (705–681 BCE).¹²⁴
2. In principle, it cannot be ruled out that Anšan was not mentioned by Assurbanipal precisely *because* it did not submit to him. In this case, however, Parsumaš and Ħudimeri must have been closer than Anšan from an Assyrian point of view: a voluntary submission of the ruler of Parsumaš only makes sense if the territory he ruled bordered more or less directly on Elam and was in danger of being conquered next.¹²⁵ In fact,

119 Rollinger, “Zur Lokalisation von Parsu(m)a(š) in der Fars”, 117–21. The basis for this assumption is the description of the geographical location of Parsumaš and another region called Ħudimeri in Assurbanipal’s second inscription mentioned above.

120 de Miroshedji, “La fin du royaume d’Anšan et de Suse”, 268–78.

121 Rollinger, “Zur Lokalisation von Parsu(m)a(š) in der Fars”, 119–21.

122 This was a popular view before Vallat’s radical reorganization of Elamite chronology; see above.

123 See, e.g., Jeffers/Novotny, *RINAP* 5/1, 200 Ashurbanipal 9 iv 17–v 2.

124 See, e.g., Grayson/Novotny, *RINAP* 1, p. 182 Sennacherib 22 v 43–4.

125 The equation of Parsumaš with northern Parsua(š) (as assumed by de Miroshedji, “La fin du royaume d’Anšan et de Suse”, 270), is ruled out because the latter had

the mention of “people from Parsumaš” (LÚ.*par-šu-maš*), who allegedly carried out raids in the region of Hidalu,¹²⁶ in a letter from the time of Assurbanipal could be interpreted to mean that vagabond groups were on the move in the border area between “Elam” and Anšan;¹²⁷ however, they too must have originally come from the direction of the Fars, where the ancestors of the later “Persians” would then have lived in the area of the still Elamite-dominated Anšan, without a concrete reference to their ethnicity. The question also arises as to when and under what circumstances Anšan should have fallen to the “Persians” at a later date: in fact, there are no sources that would provide concrete evidence of a later conquest. Cyrus’ ancestors are said to have already lived and ruled in the region as “great kings” (“Cyrus Cylinder”, l. 21); he himself does not boast of such a victory.

3. It therefore seems most attractive to consider a third possibility, namely that Parsumaš and Anšan are two different names for the same area and that Cyrus of Parsumaš actually controlled the entire region around the city of Anšan.¹²⁸ Should this be the case, then an equation with one of Cyrus’ ancestors, who according to the “Cyrus Cylinder” were supposed to have been kings there for generations, could by no means be ruled out. This theory is by no means new, but was very popular at the time when the “migration hypothesis” was still popular and it was assumed that after the reign of Teispes two different “lines” of the Persian royal house existed,¹²⁹ one of which (the ancestors of Darius I) would have ruled in Parsua(š), while the other (the ancestors of Cyrus II) would have ruled in

already been an Assyrian province since the time of Tiglat-pileser III (745–727 BCE). See K. Radner, “Provinz. C. Assyrien”, in M.P. Streck (ed.), *Reallexikon der Assyriologie und Vorderasiatischen Archäologie* vol. 11: *Prinz, Prinzessin – Samug* (Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 2006–8) 42–68, on p. 57.

- 126 Parpola, SAA 21, 102–3 no. 116 obv. 4–9. Parsumaš also appears in two other letters (ABL 1309 und 1311); cf. M. Waters, “The Earliest Persians in Southwestern Iran: The Textual Evidence”, *Iranian Studies* 32 (1999) 99–107, p. 103–4.
- 127 However, since Hidalu cannot yet be located with certainty (see above), this assumption is quite speculative.
- 128 Rollinger, “Zur Lokalisation von Parsu(m)a(š) in der Fars”, 137–8 does not want to commit himself in this respect. However, also the title “king of Parsu” used for Cyrus in the “Nabonidus Chronicle” (ii 15) (see n. 61) as well as the possibly Assyrian-art-inspired motif of PFS 93* (see n. 94) could support this view.
- 129 See the detailed description of the developments in scholarship in R. Rollinger, “Der Stammbaum des achaimenidischen Königshauses oder die Frage der Legitimität der Herrschaft des Dareios”, *Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran*, DAI Tehran 30 (1998) 155–209, on pp. 156–76.

Parsumaš.¹³⁰ However, since the former was replaced by the “ethnogenesis theory” and the latter by the hypothesis that Darius had only invented a connection between his ancestors and those of Cyrus in order to bolster his legitimacy,¹³¹ there has been a wide variation of different research opinions, depending on which assumptions the individual scholar still regards as given.

While some researchers continue to ascribe so much significance to the toponym that they locate Cyrus of Parsumaš in a “Persian” environment, while assigning the two known Cyruses of Anšan to the “Elamite” culture,¹³² others deny a direct connection between the toponym Parsu(m)a(š) and a specific ethnic group,¹³³ although they locate the development of a specifically Persian identity of Cyrus and his ancestors in precisely such a field of tension between the contact of Persian and Elamite culture, as would be suggested by the simultaneous use of two very different titles, one of which evokes memories of the “old” Elam and the other of which could possibly allude to a specific ethnic group in its name.

Indeed, the lifetimes and reigns of the individual kings would have to be very long to see Cyrus of Parsumaš as the grandfather of Cyrus and son of Teispes,¹³⁴ but the fact that Cyrus of Anšan and Cyrus of Parsumaš have the same name suggests in any case that they came from the *same cultural environment*;¹³⁵ also that they may have belonged to the same family,¹³⁶ seems quite plausible against this background.¹³⁷

¹³⁰ G.G. Cameron, *History of Early Iran* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago, 1936), 31 n. 28.

¹³¹ See in much detail Rollinger, “Der Stammbaum des achaimenidischen Königshauses”, esp. pp. 183–8.

¹³² Potts, “Cyrus the Great”, 13.

¹³³ Henkelman, “Persians, Medes, and Elamites”, 184 n. 9; cf. also K. Alizadeh, “The Earliest Persians in Iran: Toponyms and Persian Ethnicity”, *Digital Archive of Brief Notes & Iran Review* 7 (2020), 16–53, p. 18.

¹³⁴ See, e.g., Rollinger, “Zur Lokalisation von Parsu(m)a(sh)”, 136; Henkelman, “Cyrus the Persian”, 602 n. 71.

¹³⁵ Based on the form of the name (cf. Henkelman, “Persians, Medes, and Elamites”, 194–6 with a discussion of earlier literature) it can be assumed that it was of Elamite origin.

¹³⁶ M. Roaf suggests this in an unpublished manuscript, which he kindly made available to me in advance and which proved to be very helpful for the literature search on this section.

¹³⁷ It should be noted, however, that the name Cyrus does not appear to have been a very rare name (at least if one regards the occurrences with different spellings as representations of the same name); see Henkelman, “Persians, Medes, and Elamites”, 196 and Potts, “Cyrus the Great”, 12 with n. 61.

Political power in Fars *must* have passed from Anšanite rulers to “Persian” rulers at some point; in view of the fact that both the names of Cyrus’ ancestors are identical to those of later “Persian” rulers and that the territory ruled by Cyrus and his ancestors is uniformly given by Cyrus as “Anšan”, a peaceful take-over in the context of close contact and as a result of gradual mixing between the two peoples at the time of Cyrus’ ancestors seems much more likely than a violent conquest at the time of Cyrus which is, moreover, not documented by the sources.

3.6.3 Parsua(š)

However, the fact that Anšan and Parsua(š) are still listed separately in Sennacherib’s report (see above) is a weighty argument against equating Cyrus of Parsumaš and Cyrus of Anšan: Parsua(š) here cannot refer to the Parsua(š) in the Middle Zagros, as that region had already become an Assyrian province under Tiglath-pileser III (745–727 BCE).¹³⁸ However, if an etymological connection with the people of the “Persians” existed, it is also conceivable that the term was used for an *area of much wider extent*, which also and above all extended *beyond the Zagros*. A likely candidate for the localization of Parsua(š) (versus Parsumaš in the Fars) would then be the region north of Pasargadae, which lay between “Persia” and the Median core region.¹³⁹

First of all, this identification is attractive because the findings of the Persepolis Fortification Archive show that the administrative area of Persepolis, the administrative centre of the satrapy Pārsa/Persis,¹⁴⁰ not only extended from Ram Hormoz to Nīrīz but also refers to areas located southwest (Tamukkan, the later Taoke, at the coast of the Persian Gulf) or northeast (Kabaš, the later Gabae; probably north of Abadeh) of the main area.¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ Radner, “Provinz. C. Assyrien”, p. 57.

¹³⁹ For the localization see B. Jacobs, “Achaemenid Satrapies”, *Encyclopædia Iranica*, online edition. Retrieved from <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/achaemenid-satrapies> (last accessed February 25, 2025).

¹⁴⁰ Note that Jacobs, “Achaemenid Satrapies”, locates the capital of the satrapy in Pasargadae. However, comprehensive administrative archives have so far only been found in Persepolis; see the editions by Hallock, *Persepolis Fortification Tablets* and G. Cameron, *Persepolis Treasury Tablets* (The University of Chicago Oriental Institute Publications 65; Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago, 1948) and A. Azzoni/E.R.M. Dusinberre/M.B. Garrison/W.F.M. Henkelman/C.E. Jones/M.W. Stolper, “Persepolis Administrative Archives”, *Encyclopædia Iranica*, online edition, 2017 (retrieved from <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/persepolis-admin-archive>; last accessed February 25, 2025) for a general overview.

¹⁴¹ W.F.M. Henkelman, “From Gabae to Taoce: the Geography of the Central Administrative Province”, in P. Briant/W.F.M. Henkelman/M.W. Stolper (ed.), *L'archive des Fortifications*

Although the Paraetacene region, to which Kabaš probably belonged,¹⁴² was later assigned to the Great Satrapy of Media,¹⁴³ there was probably a close connection with the Persian core area.

Furthermore, such a localization could also reconcile some statements in the various sources, namely the claim by Herodotus that the Persians had been ruled by the Medes (see, e.g., Hdt. 1.127), the – contradictory – statement in the “Nabonidus Chronicle” (ii 1) that Astyages was intent on conquest (see above), and the foundation of Pasargadae by Cyrus at the site of his victory over Astyages, as postulated by Strabo (Strab. 15.3.8). If the latter claim is taken at face value (which can of course be questioned), Cyrus and his army would have stood in the way of Astyages’ troops (who were advancing first behind the Zagros in a southerly and then in an easterly direction) at a narrow point, directly in front of the valley Tang-e Bolaghi,¹⁴⁴ before they could reach the Marv Dasht plain (where Persepolis was later founded by Darius I) and the region around Anšan (in the Beyza plain) behind it. Up to this point, both Cyrus’ and Astyages’ armies could have moved unmolested.

The idea that Cyrus could have ruled only over the “city” of Anšan at this time is absurd: Cyrus must have had enough manpower at his disposal to oppose Astyages’ troops. In fact, Herodotus writes that Cyrus – according to his

de Persépolis: État des questions et perspectives de recherches. Actes du colloque organisé au Collège de France par la “Chaire d’histoire et civilisation du monde achéménide et de l’empire d’Alexandre” et le “Réseau international d’études et de recherches achéménides” (GDR 2538 CNRS), 3–4 novembre 2006 (Persica 12; Paris: de Boccacard, 2008) 303–16, esp. 312–13.

- 142 Note that Henkelman, “From Gabae to Taoce”, 310–12 distinguishes between Paraetacene (immediately north of Pasargadae) and Gab(i)ene (adjacent to it even further north); however, since Gab(i)ene is located even north of Paraetacene, this does not change the interpretation. For the localization of Paraetacene immediately north of Pasargadae see. A.B. Bosworth, *A Historical Commentary on Arrian’s History of Alexander*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980), 334.
- 143 Jacobs, “Achaemenid Satrapies”; cf. also G. Traina, “The Satrapies of the Persian Empire: Media and Armenia”, in K. Radner/N. Moeller/D.T. Potts (ed.), *The Oxford History of the Ancient Near East*, vol. 5: *The Age of Persia* (New York: Oxford University, 2023) 556–91, on p. 568.
- 144 Recent surveys and limited excavations by Iranian scholars have revealed that the valley was occupied in the Achaemenid period; cf. R. Boucharlat, “Achaemenid Estate(s) Near Pasargadae?”, in M. Kozuh/W.F.M. Henkelman/C.E. Jones/C. Woods (ed.), *Extraction & Control: Studies in Honor of Matthew W. Stolper* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago, 2014) 27–35. There are at least three Achaemenid sites (*ibid.*, p. 30) and a multi-roomed pavilion (*ibid.*, pp. 30–2), which seems to date from the early Achaemenid period (*ibid.*, p. 32) and could have been used as a “resting place or a hunting pavilion for the imperial elite” (*ibid.*, p. 33).

report the son of a “*Persian*” named Cambyses (Hdt. 1.107) –¹⁴⁵ had gathered the “*Persians*” and mobilized them against Astyages (Hdt. 1.125). In this context, he makes an explicit distinction between sedentary farmers and nomadic herds-men and claims that the main tribe, to which the “*Achaemenid*” royal house belonged, had been a tribe called *Pasargadae*.¹⁴⁶ Although the latter perception is possibly an anachronism and might go back to conditions in later times (i.e., the foundation of *Pasargadae* by Cyrus),¹⁴⁷ the phenomenon described above that the “*Persians*” (*parsip*) were specified by origin in the texts from the “*Acropolis archive*” suggests that there may indeed have been several Persian tribes.¹⁴⁸ It is quite conceivable that one part of these tribes was actually ruled by the Medes (Hdt. 1.127),¹⁴⁹ while another part lived under the suzerainty

145 According to Herodotus’ account of the origins of Cyrus, which contains many legendary elements as well as some possibly serious information, Astyages married his daughter Mandane to the Persian Cambyses (after the meaning of a disturbing dream had been explained to him), as he did not see him as a serious threat due to his low status, unlike those Medes who would have been worthy of marrying into his family (Hdt. 1.107).

146 Even though the meaning of the name has not been definitively clarified, there is probably no etymological connection with the Persians; see D. Stronach/H. Gopnik, “*Pasargadae*,” *Encyclopædia Iranica*, online edition, 2009 (retrieved from <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/pasargadae>; accessed on 25 February 2025). Cf. also Rollinger, “*Der Stammbaum des achaimenidischen Königshauses*,” 190 with n. 181 on doubts that Herodotus’ account could be used for historical analysis.

147 Several inscriptions have been found on buildings in *Pasargadae* in which Cyrus (in the first person) is referred to as “*Achaemenid*”. Many researchers nowadays assume that the inscriptions in question were produced by Darius I rather than Cyrus himself, and that the reference to Achaemenes was only made in order to feign a common ancestry with Cyrus (see esp. D. Stronach, “*Darius at Pasargadae: A Neglected Source for the History of Ancient Persia*,” *Topoi: Orient-Occident, Supplément* 1 (1997) 351–63, esp. 352–4). However, one should also note that there are still dissenting opinions; see esp. Vallat, “*Darius, l’héritier légitime*,” 277–9. Other scholars accept the view that Darius might indeed be responsible for the production of these inscriptions, but do not doubt that he was still a distant relative of Cyrus; see, e.g., B. Jacobs, “*Kyros, der große König, der Achämenide: Zum verwandtschaftlichen Verhältnis und zur politischen und kulturellen Kontinuität zwischen Kyros dem Großen und Dareios I.*,” in R. Rollinger/B. Truschnegg/R. Bichler (ed.), *Herodot und das Persische Weltreich / Herodotus and the Persian Empire: Akten des 3. Internationalen Kolloquiums zum Thema ‘Vorderasien im Spannungsfeld klassischer und altorientalischer Überlieferungen’*, Innsbruck, 24.–28. November 2008 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2011) 635–63, esp. 636–53 and M. Roaf, “*Was Cyrus an Achaemenid?*,” 9. Indeed, the idea that Darius could simply have made up an ancestor of his famous predecessor, especially in the Persian core region, is not very convincing, and I agree with M. Roaf’s position that a descent from Achaemenes would only have conferred legitimacy for Darius if both rulers were “*Achaemenids*”.

148 Cf. Henkelman, “*Cyrus the Persian*,” 605 with n. 83.

149 The rebellion within the Median army, which is reported by both Herodotus (Hdt. 1.127) and the “*Nabonidus Chronicle*” (ii 2; see section 3.4 above), could perhaps also have

of the – likewise “Persian” – “kings of Anšan”. The strict separation between different ethnic groups, as described by Herodotus, certainly does not correspond to reality, but it can be assumed that many mixed marriages took place and that the different groups were in active contact with each other and influenced each other. The Persian dynasty also emerged from such a multi-ethnic situation. It is possible that the Persians living in the Anšan region gained a new self-confidence after the fall of Susa and the associated Elamite territories in the west, which led to the development of a specifically “Persian” ethnicity. It cannot be ruled out that the sending of the son of Cyrus of Parsumaš, Arukku, to the Assyrian royal court could have had the consequence that at a later date the Assyrians could have given him supremacy over the conquered Elamite territories where petty kings still might have ruled.¹⁵⁰ In any case, in this context he would have gained an insight into the splendour of the Assyrian royal court, but also the practices necessary to run an empire, which in turn – at least, if he ever returned – could explain the cultural influences of the Assyrian Empire (which was not a direct predecessor) on the Persian Empire.¹⁵¹

3.7 *Cyrus II as a Ruler of “Elam”*

For the interpretation of the biblical passage examined here, the following findings can be summarized from this long excursus on the prehistory of the Persian Empire: Despite the certainly strong influences of the partly still Elamite environment, neither Cyrus II nor his ancestors can be described as “Elamites” in the strict sense. Nevertheless, the region in which his family was based was geographically located in “Elam” from a western perspective. The installation of YHWH’s throne in “Elam” can therefore certainly be linked not only to the later Persian Empire (when the Persian royal court actually

involved Persians who lived under Median rule and had to pay allegiance, but now saw their hour had come.

- 150 The reinstatement of members of foreign royal families as rulers of the region from which they originated after a certain period of residence at the Assyrian royal court, where they may have been indoctrinated accordingly, is well attested for the Sargonid period; cf. e.g. the installation of the sons of the Elamite king Urtaku (675–664 BCE), Ummanigaš (Huban-nikaš) and Tammartu, as king of Elam and king of Hidalu respectively, by Assurbanipal in 653 BCE (see e.g. Waters, *A Survey of Neo-Elamite History*, 47 and 56). Likewise, the exchange of royal children between courts does not seem to have been an uncommon phenomenon; cf. Waters, “Ashurbanipal’s Legacy”, 158 n. 28. Unfortunately, however, very little is known about the last years of the Assyrian empire.
- 151 Although Pasargadae and Persepolis each have their own, specific architecture, they both contain elements that are clearly inspired by the decoration of the Neo-Assyrian palaces (e.g., winged bulls and other protective figures). Cf. the detailed considerations by Waters, “Ashurbanipal’s Legacy” on this matter.

resided for a considerable period of the year in Susa, in the palaces built there by Darius I and his successors),¹⁵² but also to the person of Cyrus. In fact, this interpretation is most likely, as JerMT 49:38 // JerG 25:18 implies a radical event, namely a new world order in which the fate of the world was now determined from “Elam” according to divine command, and this idea is strongly reminiscent of the events surrounding the fall of Babylon and their propagandistic treatment in Persian sources, as will be explained in the following paragraphs.

4 The Fate of “King” and “Magnates”

The many uncertainties associated with the rise of Cyrus leave a number of different possible interpretations for the remainder of the text. If we take a closer look at what actually happens in the second part of the line Jer 49:38 // JerG 25:18, we see that this passage is also – probably deliberately – vaguely formulated: reference is made here to “(a) king” and “(several) magnates”, without specifying by the addition of an article or even a possessive suffix which king of which country is actually being referred to. It should further be noted that neither an abstract noun (such as “kingship”) nor a plural form (“kings”) is formed. The question arises as to what kind of process is being described here. The decisive factors are, firstly, how the verb used in this context is interpreted and, secondly, how the three episodes described in JerMT 49:38–39 // JerG 25:18–19 are positioned in relation to each other within (Judean) history. Since the sentences are simply strung together consecutively, the only clear indication of this is the time reference “at the end of the days” in Jer 49:39 // JerG 25:19, which suggests a *large temporal distance* between the events in JerMT 49:38 // JerG 25:18 and those in JerMT 49:39 // JerG 25:19.

4.1 *Hypothesis 1: The Extermination of Previous Elamite Rulers*

If one equates the establishment of the throne of God in Elam with the “divine” selection of Cyrus, which could have manifested itself, for example, in his own accession to the throne or his victory over Astyages, the later “turn” of the “captivity of Elam” could refer in some way to the fall of Babylon. However, so far

152 C. Tuplin, “The Seasonal Migration of Achaemenid Kings: A Report on Old and New Evidence”, in M. Brosius/A. Kuhrt (ed.), *Studies in Persian History: Essays in Memory of David M. Lewis* (Achaemenid History 11; Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 1998) 63–114, on pp. 75–6, 82–102; R. Zadok, “The Babylonia-Elam Connections”, 130.

there is no evidence that Cyrus' accession to the throne was in any way irregular: according to the "Cyrus Cylinder", his ancestors had already ruled Anšan for generations. In view of the fact that the only event he considered worth reporting before the fall of Babylon was his victory over Astyages, who ruled not in "Elam" (south-east) but in "Gutium" (north-east), and there are no other indications of a violent conquest of Elam by Cyrus, the idea that his accession to the throne should have been preceded by the destruction of Elam and the "extermination" of its kings is rather strange. It should also be noted that there were several kings in both Media and Elam,¹⁵³ who were probably subordinate to a great king but ruled simultaneously. Their extermination would therefore actually require a plural form. If, on the other hand, the institution of kingship in the regions incorporated into the Persian Empire was meant, as suggested by Eichler,¹⁵⁴ one would expect an abstract form. Moreover, the question arises as to why the magnates should have vanished together with the "king(dom)": historically speaking, this statement makes little sense in view of the Achaemenid practice of leaving officials and dignitaries below the highest level of leadership in their offices.¹⁵⁵ However, if in this context a specific king – in this case certainly the leader of the Median coalition, Astyages – was meant by the phrase, one would expect him to be specified more precisely as a great king and at least to be provided with a definite article. Since the place where the throne was set up ("Elam") and the place from where the king and the magnates were exterminated (Media) would not be identical in this case, it would also be necessary to specify the place in order to clarify the change of location.

4.2 *Hypothesis 2: King and Magnates Sent on a Mission from Elam*

The interpretation of the passage as an event that took place *before* the fall of Babylon therefore only makes sense if, instead of an "extermination", one were to assume a "*sending*" of king (absolute)¹⁵⁶ and magnates (i.e., Persian nobles, the later satraps) from Elam, who then at a later point in time drove forward the "turn" of the "captivity of Elam". However, this first of all presupposes a massive textual corruption in JerMT, which – unlike the secondary formation

153 See above sections 3.4–6.

154 Eichler, "An Ambiguous Oracle", 187.

155 See, e.g., M. Jursa, "The Transition of Babylonia from the Neo-Babylonian Empire to the Achaemenid Rule", *Proceedings of the British Academy* 136 (2007), 73–94; C. Waerzeggers, "Very Cordially Hated in Babylonia?", 317.

156 Cf. the use of *κύριος* (without an article) in the Greek text as a designation of God.

of the form ἐξαποστελῶ “I will send out” as a spelling mistake for ἐξαπολῶ or ἐξαπολέσω “I will utterly destroy” –¹⁵⁷ cannot easily be explained, as JerG is supposed to be based on a *Hebrew* original as well.¹⁵⁸ Furthermore, it is not clear what the “captivity” of Elam, in which YHWH placed his throne, should actually have consisted of: Although control of Susiana by Babylonia (at least temporarily) cannot be completely ruled out,¹⁵⁹ the region around Anšan, where Cyrus came from, could not have been affected by this in any case. At best, it is conceivable that this passage alludes to Median suzerainty.¹⁶⁰ Above all, however, the question arises as to what *relevance* the liberation of a distant territory from an equally distant overlord (as well as the previous developments in western Iran) should have had for the Judean author of the passage under discussion here, who obviously chose his words carefully.

4.3 Hypothesis 3: The Fate of the King of Babylon and His Magnates

Against this backdrop, we should now return to the question raised at the beginning as to how YHWH's presence manifests itself (according to the author of the text) and where he was accordingly located. If the hypothesis put forward in section 3.1 that there could be a connection with the looted temple inventory is tenable, then the “setting up of the throne” could not refer to a place in the Iranian highlands but would have to be located in Babylonia. In this case, “Elam” would not refer to the Iranian territory from which Cyrus *came*, but to the Persian empire that he *ruled* after his victories. If this theory is correct, the logical conclusion would be that the passage does not refer to one or more kings in (from a Judean perspective) distant regions or the dissolution of any other kingdoms, but specifically to one particular king and his magnates, namely that of Babylon. In this case, one could stick with the – more convincing – verb “exterminate”. However, both the vagueness of the passage and the temporal distance between the extermination of the former king of Babylon and the “turn” of the “captivity of Elam” in JerMT 49:39 // JerG 25:19, as well as its meaning, still remain to be explained.

157 See Huwlyer, *Jeremia und die Völker*, 259 (with a misinterpretation of ἐκείθεν in n. 753); Finsterbusch/Jacoby, *MT-Jeremia und LXX-Jeremia* 25–52, 284 with n. 5.

158 Peels, “From Egypt to Babylon”, 59 with n. 3.

159 See above section 3.5.

160 In this case, the passage JerMT 49:39 // JerG 25:19 could serve as a further indication that the region around Anšan also had to recognize the Medes' supremacy.

5 The Captivity of Elam

JerMT 49:39 // JerG 25:19 causes the most difficulties in terms of content. However, this is not only due to the unclear historical situation regarding the fate of western “Elam” before the Persian Empire, which still largely eludes us; rather, it could be that ambiguities are being deliberately played with here.¹⁶¹

5.1 *A Reflection of a Historical Reality in the Fate of Elam?*

As has already been stated several times above, there is no evidence that Cyrus ever forcibly brought a larger territorial unit with the name “Elam” under his rule. In addition, “Elam” in the Book of Jeremiah, *when associated with Cyrus*, in all likelihood represents a *positive* entity for the Judeans; the later “turn” of a (passive) captivity of “Elam”, which was caused by him in the course of the extermination of the king and magnates therefore makes no sense at all in terms of content. Thus, if we assume that “Elam” itself was taken captive, this must have happened either before his own reign and/or by other rulers. If Cyrus and his ancestors, who ruled in Anšan, should indeed have been under Median suzerainty, or if some evidence confirms that Susa no longer belonged to Elam before his reign, but was occupied by Babylonia, the “captivity of Elam” could theoretically refer to a situation in which part or even all of former “Elam” had been occupied by one or more foreign powers. In this case, the “turn” of the captivity would mean that it was no longer those powers who were in control of Cyrus and his territory, but that, on the contrary, they now had to obey the Persian Great King. However, the word “captivity” seems surprisingly drastic in this context. There is hardly any evidence of an actual reversal of captivity: although Nabonidus was probably actually deported by Cyrus,¹⁶² it is not known that Cyrus had previously experienced the same fate. At the level of entire peoples, on the other hand, the assumption of “captivity” by the Persian rulers would even contradict the Achaemenid ideal that all peoples integrated into the empire would voluntarily contribute to its success.¹⁶³ Furthermore, the great temporal distance between the events seems strange. Above all,

¹⁶¹ Eichler, “An Ambiguous Oracle”, 183 and 188, also comes to this conclusion (for the whole oracle), albeit against the background of a different interpretation.

¹⁶² This is suggested by the testimony of the “Dynastic Prophecy” (ii 21') and the report of Berossus (see above section 3.4 with n. 43).

¹⁶³ This is most clearly illustrated by the depiction of the peoples on the base of a statue of Darius found in Susa, which was probably originally intended to be erected in Egypt: although the names of the peoples belonging to Darius' empire are written in Egyptian hieroglyphics, the corresponding figures are not shown bound, but with their hands up, in contrast to Egyptian tradition. Cf. M. Wasmuth, *Ägypto-persische Herrscher und*

however, the question arises once again as to what extent such events should have been relevant at all for the authors of the passage in the Book of Jeremiah.

5.2 *A Cipher for the Future Fate of the Judeans?*

Perhaps the situation here is again much more complex than it appears. The phrase “in the last of the days”, which initially makes us think of the Last Judgement but does not necessarily refer to it, hints at an underlying ideological concept: although YHWH had already set up his throne in Elam and ensured that the king and magnates have been exterminated “from there”, his mission had not yet been fulfilled. Now it should be borne in mind that the author of the text was certainly not primarily interested in the fate of Elam, but in that of the Judean people. Could it therefore be that this passage does not refer to Elam as a state or geographical region, but that it is a cipher for the redemption of the Judeans from the Babylonian exile, the practical realization of which was possibly still only a hopeful vision at the time of the fall of Babylon?¹⁶⁴

At first glance, this hypothesis may seem absurd. However, it becomes much more plausible if we consider once again that after YHWH’s accession to the throne, “Elam” (if we associate it with the territory of Cyrus) was no longer just some political entity from the southern Zagros but a global empire that also encompassed all the former possessions of the former Babylonian empire. As part of the new, Persian, empire, Babylon and Babylonia were now formally located in “Elam”, just as YHWH’s throne was located there. This theory becomes even more plausible if we consider that the previous saying already omits a step that is actually quite essential for understanding, namely the explanation of how YHWH actually came to Elam (see section 3.1): After all, the Judeans and YHWH’s temple treasures were not deported by Cyrus, but by his political predecessors, the Babylonians; nevertheless, YHWH miraculously manifests himself in Elam. One could therefore argue that “Elam” is used here as a cipher to artfully reinterpret the role of the aggressor into a new positive function. Similarly, the phrase “captivity of Elam”¹⁶⁵ – yet to be realized in the future – could also have been used as a cipher for the transfer of responsibility for the release of the Judean captives from their exile from the

Herrschaftspräsentation in der Achämenidenzeit (Oriens et Occidens 27; Stuttgart: Steiner, 2017), 118 and 123–4.

¹⁶⁴ See section 3.3 with n. 37.

¹⁶⁵ In this case the “captivity of Elam” should be understood as a *genitivus objectivus*, not a *genitivus subjectivus*.

original wrongdoer Babylon to a new government that would now – thanks to YHWH – hopefully be well-disposed towards the Judean people.

5.3 *The “Liberation” of Babylon*

If we take a closer look at the sources that refer to Cyrus’ takeover of Babylon in this respect and bear in mind that the Judeans who were held captive in Babylon witnessed Cyrus’ entry into Babylon and the propagandistically staged “liberation” of Babylon live, many of the parallels already observed above between the Book of Jeremiah and the Babylonian sources (divine wrath, caused by human misconduct; mishandling of cults; divine selection of the new ruler based on his moral suitability) appear in a new light and the impression arises that the similarities cannot be a coincidence.¹⁶⁶ A possible connection between the texts becomes even clearer if, instead of focusing on the foreign policy and military successes that made Cyrus’ rise possible in the first place, we now turn our attention to the domestic political measures with which he attempted to consolidate his rule.

5.3.1 The “Cyrus Cylinder” (II)

If we continue reading in the second section of the “Cyrus Cylinder” after the self-introduction of Cyrus, which includes the title discussed above, where his actions are now no longer described in the third person but in the first person, we notice first of all that his former enemies, whose overpowering is also described in the first part only in a rather disguised manner, now play virtually no role: it is exclusively about benefits for the people of Babylonia and especially the city of Babylon.¹⁶⁷

22) ... When I went as harbinger of peace i[nt]o Babylon

23) I founded my sovereign residence within the palace amid celebration and rejoicing. Marduk, the great lord, bestowed on me as my destiny the great magnanimity of one who loves Babylon, and I every day sought him out in awe.

¹⁶⁶ The presence of Judean eye-witnesses at the fall of Babylon and a direct influence of the events on the composition of the Book of Jeremiah (in this case regarding the creation of the “oracle against Babylon”) is also suggested by Vanderhooft, *The Neo-Babylonian Empire and Babylon*, 193–202, however, with a focus on prophecies which describe war-like events (esp. Jer 51:32).

¹⁶⁷ The following text passage is quoted from the (rather free) translation of Finkel, “The Cyrus Cylinder”, 6; note also the more literal translation by Schaudig, *Die Inschriften Nabonids*, 555–6 and the comments on individual passages.

- 24) My vast troops were marching peaceably in Babylon, and the whole of [Sumer] and Akkad had nothing to fear.
 25) I sought the safety of the city of Babylon and all its sanctuaries. As for the population of Babylon [..., w]ho as if without div[ine intention] had endured a yoke not decreed for them,
 26) I soothed their weariness; I freed them from their bonds(?).¹⁶⁸ Marduk, the great lord, rejoiced at [my good] deeds,
 27) and he pronounced a sweet blessing over me, Cyrus, the king who fears him, and over Cambyses, the son [my] issue, [and over] my all my troops,
 28) that we might live happily in his presence, in well-being. At his exalted command, all kings who sit on thrones,
 29) from every quarter, from the Upper Sea to the Lower Sea, those who inhabit [remote distric]ts (and) the kings of the land of Amurru who live in tents, all of them,
 30) brought their weighty tribute into Shuanna, and kissed my feet. ...

Particularly important for Cyrus in this context is the statement that his entry into Babylon (l. 22) and the presence of his troops there were peaceful and in accordance with the will of the supreme god Marduk, whose cults Cyrus now – unlike his predecessor Nabonidus – provided for on a daily basis (l. 23). It is then postulated that he freed the inhabitants of Babylon (DUMU.MEŠ TIN.TIR^{ki} “Sons of Babylon”)¹⁶⁹ from a yoke that was not appropriate for them (ll. 25–6),¹⁷⁰ that Marduk was pleased about this (l. 26), blessed Cyrus and his son Cambyses (ll. 27–8) and, as a consequence, had “all kings who sit on thrones” bring him tribute and kiss his feet (ll. 28–30).

In the next section, Cyrus describes how he sent a number of deities (i.e., their cult statues) back to their original places of worship, which had previously fallen into disrepair, and also allowed the people who came from those places to return there:¹⁷¹

- 168 Akkadian: *sarmašunu* (meaning uncertain); Schaudig, *Die Inschriften Nabonids*, 556 translates this term with “yoke”.
 169 Compare the transliteration in Schaudig, *Die Inschriften Nabonids*, 553.
 170 Quoted after the interpretation by Schaudig, *Die Inschriften Nabonids*, 556 (cf. n. 169); note the previous reference to the fact that the inhabitants of Babylon under Nabonidus had allegedly suffered under a yoke without rest (l. 8).
 171 Quoted from the translation by Finkel, “The Cyrus Cylinder”, 6–7.

30) ... From [Shuanna] I sent back to their places to the city of Ashur and Susa,¹⁷²

31) Akkad, the land of Eshnunna, the city of Zamban, the city of Meturnu, Der, as far as the border of the land of Gutu – the sanctuaries across the river Tigris – whose shrines had earlier become dilapidated,

32) the gods who lived therein, and made permanent sanctuaries for them. I collected together all of their people and returned them to their settlements

It is noteworthy that the places mentioned in this section are not in Babylonia proper, but in former Assyria, the northern and north-eastern outskirts of Babylonia and the Susiana. The significance of this finding is disputed: While some scholars see it as proof that the area in question remained under Babylonian rule until the conquest of Babylon by Cyrus,¹⁷³ others explain the presence of the Assyrian statues of gods in Babylon by the fact that Nabopolassar, who had been allied with the Medes, had taken some of the spoils of war back to Babylon after the fall of the Assyrian cities.¹⁷⁴ In the latter case, the mention of the gods of Susa would suggest that they had also come to Babylon in the course of a conquest before Cyrus sent them back from there after his takeover; if, on the other hand, Babylon was not the starting point for all the return shipments,¹⁷⁵ it would also be conceivable that they were brought there from other places that were now under Persian control.

Separately, the repatriation of divine statues from the “land of Sumer and Akkad” (i.e., Babylonia proper), which Nabonidus had brought to Babylon “to the fury of the lord of the gods”, is also described (ll. 33–4).¹⁷⁶

¹⁷² The emphasis is my own in order to indicate uncertainties involved in the translation. Finkel’s translation suggests that *Babylon* (here as “Šuanna”) was the *place from which* the gods were sent back to their places of origin. In earlier literature, the passage was usually read in such a way that all three places mentioned in l. 30, the first of which has unfortunately not survived, outline the geographical area to which the statues of the gods were sent back. If one follows the restoration of W. Eilers, “Der Keilschrifttext des Kyros-Zylinders”, in W. Eilers (ed.), *Festgabe deutscher Iranisten zur 2500-Jahrfeier Irans* (Stuttgart: Hochwacht Druck 1971) 156–6 as “[Ninive]” (see also S. Dalley, “Nineveh after 612 BC”, *Altorientalische Forschungen* 20 [1993], 134–47, on p. 137), this would refer to a strip north, northeast and east of Babylonia, which extended from the former core area of Assyria to Susa.

¹⁷³ See, e.g. R. Zadok, *Assyrians in Chaldean and Achaemenid Babylonia* (Assur 4/3; Malibu: Undena, 1984), 1–13 with n. 6.

¹⁷⁴ Zawadzki, *The Fall of Assyria*, 150.

¹⁷⁵ See n. 172.

¹⁷⁶ Quoted from the translation by Finkel, “The Cyrus Cylinder”, 7.

- 33) and the gods of the land of Sumer and Akkad which Nabonidus – to the fury of the lord of the gods – had brought into Shuanna, at the command of Marduk, the great lord,
 34) I returned them unharmed to their cells, in the sanctuaries that make them happy. May all the gods that I returned to their sanctuaries,
 35) every day before Bel and Nabu, ask for a long life for me, and mention my good deeds, and say to Marduk, my lord, this: ‘Cyrus, the king who fears you, and Cambyses his son,
 36) may they be the provisioners of our shrines until distant (?) days, and the population of Babylon call blessings on my kingship. I have enabled all the lands to live in peace.’
 37) Every day I increased by [... ge]ese, two ducks and ten pigeons the [former offerings] of geese, ducks and pigeons.

This part of the inscription concludes with the wish that the returned deities should bless the reign of Cyrus and his son Cambyses (also in the future) (ll. 34–6). At the end there is another unclear sentence, which apparently concerns the increase in sacrificial offerings (l. 37), before the third part of the cylinder (ll. 38–45) describes construction work on Imgur-Enlil, the inner-city wall of Babylon, in the context of which the cylinder probably belongs.¹⁷⁷

What is *not* found in the Cyrus Cylinder, however, – contrary to what is often postulated –, is a direct reference to the liberation of the Judeans from exile in Babylonia or to the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. Nevertheless, there may be an indirect connection here: a group of high-ranking Judeans had already been taken to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar II in 597 BCE (2 Kings 24:11–16; Jer 52:28–30). As some of them can be identified in administrative texts from Babylon,¹⁷⁸ it can be assumed that they were present there at the time of Cyrus’ entry. It is well known that this event was accompanied by the creation of a series of texts by Babylonian scribes that were intended to cast Nabonidus’s reign in a very bad light and were certainly intended for oral

¹⁷⁷ Note that it is also mentioned that an inscription of Assurbanipal was found during the construction work (“Cyrus Cylinder”, l. 43).

¹⁷⁸ Weidner, “Jojachin, König von Juda”; but also note C. Wunsch’s observation that the common people did not enjoy the same privileges as the members of the upper class, but were distributed across the land. Cf. C. Wunsch, “Glimpses on the Lives of Deportees in Rural Babylonia”, in A. Berlejung/M.P. Streck (ed.), *Arameans, Chaldeans, and Arabs in Babylonia and Palestine in the First Millennium B.C.* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2013), 247–60, on pp. 248–9.

dissemination (including the so-called “Verse Account”).¹⁷⁹ However, there are also other indications that Cyrus’ entry into Babylon was staged to great effect. What is remarkable in this context is the rather brief reference in the “Cyrus Cylinder” to the fact that Cyrus had freed the inhabitants of Babylon from a “yoke” that was not appropriate for them (ll. 25–6).¹⁸⁰ Contrary to what is often assumed, this is not about a declaration of general “human rights”,¹⁸¹ but the statement explicitly refers to a specific population group, namely the “sons of Babylon” (DUMU.MEŠ TIN.TIR^{ki} “sons of Babylon”),¹⁸² i.e., the citizens of this city. Indeed, many Neo-Assyrian texts indicate that this population group – just like the citizens of some other ancient and prestigious cities in the Babylonian heartland – believed they could claim certain privileges for themselves, including a special protected status (*kidinnūtu*), exemption from taxes (*zakūtu*) and exemption from the obligation to perform so-called *ilku* and *tupšikku* (i.e., corvee labour) services. A foreign ruler of Babylonia, who might have had a legitimacy problem due to his foreign origins and therefore had to be on good terms with these important cities, would have done well to formally confirm the continuation of these privileges to them.¹⁸³

5.3.2 The “Just Judgements”

There is now a Neo-Babylonian clay tablet with a text in which – after a section on the fate of Hammurapi’s famous law code, the consequences resulting from its disappearance and the author’s own striving for just decisions – precisely these kind of privileges in relation to nine important Babylonian cities are addressed in col. ii:¹⁸⁴

- 13) ... [(And with regard to)]
- 14) the unencumber[ed] citizens of Babylon,
- 15) the pre-eminent citizens of Borsippa; the [...] citizens of Sippar[r];

179 BM 38299. Editions: S. Smith, *Babylonian Historical Texts*, 27–97 with copies on pls. 5–10; Schaudig, *Die Inschriften Nabonids*, 563–78.

180 On the translation see above, n. 168.

181 On the strange blossoms to which this assumption has led, see van der Spek, “Cyrus the Great”, 234 with n. 4.

182 Compare the transliteration in Schaudig, *Die Inschriften Nabonids*, 553.

183 See van der Spek, “Cyrus the Great”, 245–6 with examples from Neo-Assyrian letters.

184 Quoted from the translation by M. Frazer/S.F. Adalı, “‘The Just Judgements that Ḫammu-rāpi, a Former King, Rendered’: A New Royal Inscription in the Istanbul Archaeological Museums”, *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und vorderasiatische Archäologie* 111 (2021) 231–62.

- 16) the citizens of Kutha, enjoyers of *kidinnu*-status; the [...] citizens of Kiš;
- 17) the citizens of Dilbat, “of the secret”; the [...] citizens of Ur;
- 18) the loyal citizens of Uruk; the [...] citizens of Larsa – [(the citizens of)]
- 19) the great cult centres, the cit[ies (...)]
- 20) of the land of Kar(an)duniaš [...],
- 21) who [are attentive/ bow down] to the god Bēl, lord of Babylon, to the god [...],
- 22) to the great gods [(of heaven and earth)],
- 23) to the goddess Zarpanītu, goddess of Babylon, and the god [...] –
- 24) I inscribed a tablet (recording) their tax-exempt status; [I promulgated] an ed[ict of freedom (anew)];
- 25) their *kidinnu*-status [I established];
- 26) *ilku-tupšikku*-tax, the digging of canal[s (and ...)]
- 27) at the herald’s proclamation [I did not impose on them.]

According to the wording of the text, it was intended to be affixed to a stele (ii 11), which, however, has not survived; the surviving copy is probably an archive copy.¹⁸⁵ Surprisingly, no ruler’s name is mentioned in the surviving section of the text; however, since such a text would be nonsensical without the attribution to a specific ruler, it can be assumed that the name was probably written somewhere in the destroyed passage between ll. i 36 and ii.¹⁸⁶

The editors of the text, which was found in Sippar as early as 1894 and briefly mentioned by V. Scheil in 1902,¹⁸⁷ but has been dormant in the collections of the Istanbul Archaeological Museum until recently, explain it – in accordance with Scheil’s original attribution that was probably based on linguistic criteria – as a possible proclamation by Nabonidus, who, in view of the imminent threat from Cyrus, which prompted him to return from his long stay in the oasis of Tayma, may have seen the need to make amends with the Babylonian cities.¹⁸⁸ This is indeed a conceivable historical scenario, but there is otherwise no evidence that Nabonidus granted privileges to Babylonian cities on a large scale. On the opposite, the accusation in the “Cyrus Cylinder” (ll. 25–6) that at least the inhabitants of Babylon suffered under an unlawfully imposed yoke could be interpreted as an indication that they had been deprived of their

185 Frazer/Adah, “The Just Judgements”, 255.

186 Frazer/Adah, “The Just Judgements”, 251.

187 V. Scheil, *Une saison de fouilles: Sippar (Abou Habba), Janvier-Avril 1894* (Le Caire: Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale, 1902), 96; Frazer/Adah, “The Just Judgements”, 231–2.

188 Frazer/Adah, “The Just Judgements”, 259.

privileges. On the other hand, the explicit mention in the “Cyrus Cylinder” of the exemption of the citizens of Babylon from the duties imposed on them suggests that there must have been a corresponding proclamation, which was certainly also recorded in writing. It is obvious to connect the benevolent address (*šulmu* “well-being” + *qabû* “say”) to the citizens of Babylon mentioned both in the “Nabonidus Chronicle” (iii 19–20) and in the “Verse Account” (vi 2) with this.

Regardless of whether the text discussed here is connected to this, the sources show very clearly that the entry of Cyrus into Babylon was accompanied by public rallies with promises being made to the local population. The return of the statues of the gods to their places of worship will certainly not have gone unnoticed either but will have taken place in the form of large processions. It can be assumed that these were also accompanied by public announcements (in Babylonian and possibly other languages) that the return of the gods had been commissioned by Cyrus on the order of the supreme god.¹⁸⁹ For the Judeans being present in Babylon, too, the whole thing was probably a huge spectacle: A king from the southeast (“Elam” from a Judean perspective) marched into the city of Babylon where they were held captive, freed its citizens from the duties imposed on them, declared that he had subjugated the rulers of the entire known world including the previous king of Babylon on behalf of the Babylonian supreme god Marduk, and made the deities of Babylonia and the regions belonging to “Greater Babylonia” return to their homeland in large processions. What remained to be resolved, however, was the “turn” of their own captivity, consisting of their return to their homeland and the rebuilding of the temple of their own god, whom they could equate with Marduk in his function as supreme god.

If one accepts this scenario, there may indeed be a *highly complex theological concept* behind the few, vague words of JerMT 49:38–39 // JerG 25:18–19: YHWH (who, in the form of his temple goods, had previously been deported to Babylon, which is euphemistically interpreted as YHWH’s voluntary relocation as a result of human misbehaviour) would thus have set up his throne in (the new) “Elam” (i.e., former Babylonia), removed (its old) king and magnates (and replaced them with a new king who acted and gave orders in his place), and thus raised the (implicit or perhaps even explicitly articulated) hope that

189 It is quite conceivable that the information about what was happening was also translated into other languages (especially Aramaic), analogous to later Achaemenid practice; however, the Judeans should also have understood Babylonian after their long stay in Babylon.

the (originally Babylonian, now “Elamite”) captivity (of themselves) would also end sometime in the future.

6 The Fall of Elam

If we follow this line of reasoning and consider “Elam” in the context of the extermination of king and magnates and the “captivity of Elam” as a *cipher for Babylon*, it is clear why “Elam” in the logic of the text first had to fall by the sword of YHWH before the establishment of YHWH’s throne (which led to the new “Elam” aka Persian Empire). However, this does not yet clarify whether this passage was originally meant in this way: in view of the fact that the various versions of the Book of Jeremiah were created in many individual stages, it cannot be ruled out from the outset that the negative oracle may have already existed before further – positive – parts were added to it at a later date.¹⁹⁰ In this case, it would also be conceivable that this passage refers to a completely different “Elam”.

6.1 *The Alleged Dating of the Oracle*

In fact, the “oracle against Elam” is repeatedly used in the secondary literature to draw historical conclusions about the fate of “Elam” (understood either as the kingdom of the Elamite rulers of Susa and Anšan, or just as Susiana and neighbouring areas) after the conquest of Susa by Assurbanipal (647 BCE). The information on the dating of the prophecy, which is found in JerMT at the beginning (JerMT 49:34) and in JerG at the end of the “oracle against Elam” (JerG 25:20), is taken as a concrete reference point for statements in this regard.

Most scholars nowadays assume that Elam must have had recovered from the conquest of Susa by Assurbanipal at this time. The mention in a Babylonian chronicle that Nabopolassar had arranged for the return of divine statues from Uruk to Susa in his first year of reign¹⁹¹ is seen as an indication that an independent Elamite government must have ruled in Susa.¹⁹² However, the “Cyrus Cylinder”, which likewise speaks of the return of divine statues

190 But note the observation of Huwlyer, *Jeremia und die Völker*, 259 that the text seems to be from a single mould and the interpretation made below in section 6.3.

191 Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*, 88 Chronicle 2: 16–7; Potts, *The Archaeology of Elam*, 283.

192 See P. Amiet, “La glyptique de la fin de l’Elam”, *Arts Asiatiques* 28 (1973) 3–45, on p. 24, de Miroschedji, “Notes sur la glyptique de la fin de l’Elam”, *Revue d’Assyriologie* 76 (1982) 51–63, on p. 62, Henkelman, “Persians, Medes, and Elamites”, 183 n. 6; Potts, *The Archaeology of Elam*, 283–4.

to Susa (ll. 30–3), shows very clearly that such a process does not necessarily presuppose an independent Elamite government in Susa, but can also be interpreted in exactly the opposite way. It is therefore also conceivable that the Babylonians could have inherited the rule over Elam – which in this case would have previously been an Assyrian province – from the Assyrians. Indeed, Ezek 32:24–25 provides an indication that “Elam” may already have been politically “dead” at the time to which the “oracle against Elam” is supposedly dated: in the context of a vision to the Pharaoh of Egypt, Elam is described as lying in the underworld together with Assyria, whose successive fall in the years 614–609/8 BCE is certain.¹⁹³ However, it is precisely this passage that some scholars take as an argument that Elam must have become politically dependent in the years between the accession of Zedekiah (597 BCE), shortly after which the “oracle against Elam” is dated, and Ezekiel’s prophecy, which those scholars put at 584 BCE.¹⁹⁴ Opinions diverge as to whether it fell to the Babylonians or the Medes: While S. Zawadzki suggests that Elam was incorporated into Media as early as 584 BCE,¹⁹⁵ R. Zadok rules out the idea of Median control over Elam.¹⁹⁶ An unclear passage in a Babylonian chronicle, which speaks of a confrontation between the Babylonian king and a foreign ruler (possibly that of Elam),¹⁹⁷ is seen as an indication of a possible invasion of Elam by Nebuchadnezzar II: although it only states that the foreign ruler afterwards withdrew out of fear, some objects found in Susa with inscriptions by Neo-Babylonian rulers have been interpreted as evidence of a subsequent major campaign by Nebuchadnezzar.¹⁹⁸

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- 193 On the fall of Assyria, see, e.g., H.D. Baker, “The Assyrian Empire: A View from Within”, in K. Radner/N. Moeller/D.T. Potts (ed.), *The Oxford History of the Ancient Near East*, vol. 4: *The Age of Assyria* (New York: Oxford University, 2023) 257–351, on pp. 330–3.
- 194 Dandamaev/Lukonin, *The Culture and Social Institutions of Ancient Iran*, 59; see n. 86.
- 195 Zawadzki, *The Fall of Assyria*, 143.
- 196 Zadok, “The Babylonia – Elam Connections”, 124; cf. also Potts, *The Archaeology of Elam*, 289.
- 197 D.J. Wiseman, *Chronicles of Chaldean Kings (626–556 B.C.) in the British Museum* (London: The Trustees of the British Museum, 1956), 72: rev. 20; Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*, 102 Chronicle 5 rev. 20. For doubts regarding the addition “king of Elam”, see D.J. Wiseman, *Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1984) 34 and D.J. Wiseman, “Babylonia 605–539 B.C.”, in J. Boardman/I.E.S. Edwards/N.G.L. Hammond/E. Sollberger/C.B.F. Walker (ed.), *Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. 3, part 2: *The Assyrian and Babylonian Empires and other States of the Near East, from the Eighth to the Sixth Centuries B.C.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1991) 229–51, on p. 233; Glassner, *Mesopotamian Chronicles*, 231 rev. 20 reads “king of Elam” without indicating the damage of the relevant line.
- 198 König, “Geschichte Elams”, 23; Weidner, “Jojachin, König von Juda”, 929; Zadok, “On the Connections Between Iran and Babylonia”, 61; cf. Potts, *The Archaeology of Elam*, 285–8 for doubts on the interpretation described above.

In fact, however, it is questionable whether the dating of the “oracle against Elam” can be used for historical conclusions at all, as it is suspected that the information – just like the actual oracle text – was only invented at a later date and with a specific intention.¹⁹⁹ If one compares the (few) existing dating formulae within the OAN with each other, it is noticeable that the information in the “oracle against Elam” differs from the oracles against Egypt, Kedar (and Hazor) and (in JerMT) the Philistines: The latter are each dated to a point in time before the occurrence of a later event, which effectively confirms the prediction made. In contrast, there is no such reference in the “oracle against Elam” or the “oracle against Babylon”; what both have in common, however, is an explicit reference to the reign of Zedekiah, who is accused in 2 Chr 36:11–16 of not having listened to Jeremiah and of having provoked YHWH’s wrath through his iniquities (including apostasy from king Nebuchadnezzar, to whom he had sworn an oath to YHWH). Since Jeremiah had always warned against the formation of an anti-Babylonian coalition,²⁰⁰ the explanation that is added to the “oracle against Babylon” at the end is highly unusual: according to the text (JerMT 51:59–64 // JerG 28:59–64), Jeremiah is said to have predicted the fall of Babylon in Zedekiah’s fourth year. It is therefore obvious that the oracle in question was not written by him but was added later. In JerMT, where the “oracle against Babylon” is at the very end of the OAN, the passage in question could be read as referring to all the preceding oracles. In JerG, on the other hand, where the “oracle against Elam” forms the beginning of the collection, the situation is different: since the “oracle against Babylon” only comes third there, the statement initially seems to refer only to the predictions against Babylon. In both versions, however, importance is obviously attached to using a separate dating formula to show that the prophecy concerning the fate of Elam took place somewhat earlier than the one concerning the fall of Babylon. Unlike the dating of the “oracle against Babylon” in JerMT, the dating of the “oracle against Elam” in JerG cannot be read as referring to all prophecies. However, in this version a concrete reference to all subsequent oracles is established by other means, namely by the fact that the actual oracle in JerG 25:14b is preceded by a heading (“Against the nations, (namely) those of Elam”), which combines two different – in JerMT widely separated – elements, namely the end of the sentence preceding the so-called “Cup-of-Wrath” (hereafter:

199 Note also the considerations by Huwylar, *Jeremia und die Völker*, 265–6 on a possible occasion for the oracle; he also comes to the conclusion that the “oracle against Elam” must stem from exilic or post-exilic times.

200 Zawadzki, *The Fall of Assyria*, 137, Stipp, *Jeremia 25–52*, 759.

CoW) passage (JerMT 25:13b) and the end of the heading to the “oracle against Elam” (JerMT 49:34).²⁰¹

6.2 *The Nations of Elam*

This in turn shows that the CoW passage should not be entirely ignored when interpreting the OAN. However, the fact that the research literature is mostly based on JerMT means that this connection is easily lost, at least in the presentation. For a better overview, the structure of the two versions with regard to the relationship between OAN and CoW is therefore presented here first before an analysis of the contents follows:

TABLE 11.1 Position of the OAN and the CoW in JerMT and JerG

JerMT		JerG	
25:15–38	CoW	25:14b–31:44	OAN (beginning with “Against the nations, (namely) those of Elam”)
26–45	(other contents)		
46–51	OAN (ending with an instruction from Jeremiah to Seraiah, supposedly dated to the 4th year of Zedekiah’s reign [i.e., 594 BCE], to read the scroll with his prophecies to the latter and thus prophesy the fall of Babylon to him)	32:1–24	CoW

A different focus in the narrative is clearly recognizable: while in JerMT everything boils down to the fall of Babylon, the heading in JerG emphasizes that what follows is about the fate of the nations of “Elam”. Nevertheless, both versions also contain the “oracle against Babylon” among the OAN, although the mention of Babylon is surprisingly missing in the CoW passage of JerG and is only hinted at in JerMT by means of an Atbash cryptoscript (see Table 11.2).

201 Peels, “From Egypt to Babylon”, 59.

TABLE 11.2 Order of the “nations” mentioned in the OAN and the CoW (JerMT and JerG)

JerMT		JerG	
CoW:		OAN:	“Against the nations, (namely) those of Elam”
25:18	Jerusalem and Judah	25:14–19	<i>Elam</i>
25:19	Egypt	26	Egypt
25:20	Uz; Philistines (Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron and Ashdod)	27–8	<i>Babylon</i>
25:21	Edom, Moab and Ammon	29:1–6	Philistines
25:22	Tyrus, Sidon and coast beyond the Sea	29:8–23	Edom
25:23	Dedan, Teman, Buz and those whose hair is cut off at the temples	30:1–5	Ammon
25:24	Arabia and mixed peoples in the desert	30:6–11	Kedar/Hazor
25:25	Zimri, <i>Elam</i> and Media	30:12–16	Damascus
25:26	kings of the North all kingdoms on earth <i>Scheschach (Babylon)</i> (other contents)	31	Moab
OAN:		CoW:	
46	Egypt	32:4	Jerusalem and Judah
47	Philistea	32:5	Egypt
48	Moab	32:6	Philistines (Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron and Ashdod)
49:1–6	Ammon	32:7	Edom, Moabitis, Ammon
49:7–22	Edom	32:8	Tyrus, Sidon, beyond the Sea
49:23–7	Damascus	32:9	Dedan, Teman, Ros and those who are shaven (in the area) of their faces
		32:10	mixed peoples in the desert
49:28–33	Kedar/Hazor	32:11	<i>Elam</i> and Persians
49:34–9	<i>Elam</i>	32:12	kings of the East
50–51	<i>Babylon</i>		all kingdoms on earth

Regarding the general structure, by and large there is a clear correspondence between the two CoW sections in JerMT and JerG and the OAN in JerMT; only the order of the OAN in JerG differs significantly.²⁰² However, this should not obscure the fact that there are *fundamental differences* between the two versions that contain *historically relevant* information. These only become apparent when one takes a closer look at the wording of JerMT 25:15–26 and JerG 32:1–12 with regard to the nations that are mentioned:

6.2.1 JerMT 25:15–26 // JerG 32:1–12²⁰³

JerMT	JerG
25:15 “Indeed, thus said YHWH, the God of Israel, to me: ‘Take this cup of wine of wrath from my hand, and give it to drink to all nations to whom I am sending you (now)!’	32:1 “Thus says (the) Lord, the God of Israel: ‘Take the cup of this unadulterated wine from my hand, and you shall give drink to all the nations to whom I send you!’
25:16 And they shall drink, and tumble, and be driven mad, because of the sword that I will send among them.’	32:2 And they shall vomit up and shall race madly in the face of the sword that I, I am sending among them!’
25:17 And I took the cup out of the hand of YHWH, and gave (it) to drink to all nations, to whom YHWH had sent me:	32:3 And I took the cup out of (the) Lord’s hand and gave (it) to drink to the nations to whom (the) Lord had sent me:
25:18 to Jerusalem and the cities of Judah and its kings and its magnates, to give them over to desolation, to wasteland/a horrifying paralysis, to hissing and to cursing – as (it is) on this day,	32:4 to Jerusalem and the cities of Judah and its kings and its leaders, to make them a desolation and an uninhabitable (land) and a hissing, –

202 Compare also the tables in Peels, “From Egypt to Babylon”, 61, and H.-J. Stipp, “Two Ancient Editions of the Book of Jeremiah”, in L. Stulman/E. Silver (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Jeremiah* (New York: Oxford University, 2021), 93–113, on p. 99, where, however, the two versions of the CoW (JerG and JerMT) are combined in a single column, which makes it difficult to assign the information to one or the other version.

203 The English translation given here is largely based on the synoptic German translation by Finsterbusch/Jacoby, *MT-Jeremia und LXX-Jeremia* 25–52, 70–3. I have highlighted the passages relevant for the following interpretation by cursive writing.

25:19 to Pharaoh king of Egypt, his servants, his magnates and all his people,

25:20 and to all the mixed (peoples) and to all the kings of the land of Uz and to all the kings of the land of the Philistines, and to Ashkelon and Gaza and Ekron and the rest of Ashdod,

25:21 and to Edom and Moab and to the children of Ammon,

25:22 and to all the kings of Tyre and to all the kings of Sidon and to the kings of the coast beyond the sea,

25:23 and to Dedan and Tema and Buz and to all those whose hair is cut off at the temples,

25:24 and to all the kings of Arabia, and to all the kings of the mixed peoples who live in the desert,

25:25 and to all the kings of *Zimri* and to all the kings of Elam and to all the kings of *Media*,

25:26 and to all the kings *of the north*, both near and far, one after another, and to all the kingdoms of the earth that are on the face of the earth.

And the king of Sheshach (i.e. Babylon) will drink after them."

32:5 and to Pharaoh king of Egypt, his servants and his magnates

32:6 and to all his people, and to all mixed (peoples/troops), and to all the kings of the Philistines, (namely) Ashkelon and Gaza and Ekron and the rest of Ashdod,

32:7 and to Edom and Moabitis and to the children of Ammon,

32:8 and to the kings of Tyre and to the kings of Sidon and to the kings beyond the sea,

32:9 and to Dedan and Teman and Ros and to every shaven one (in the area) of his face,

32:10 and to all the mixed (peoples) who live in the desert,

32:11 and to all the kings of Elam and to all the kings of the *Persians*,

32:12 and to all the kings *of the east*, far and near, one after the other, and to all the kingdoms on the face of the earth."

6.2.2 Observations

As mentioned above, it is striking that despite the fact that both JerG and JerMT contain the “oracle against Babylon”, Babylon does not appear in JerG in the list of countries that will fall victim to YHWH’s wrath according to the CoW. Even if in JerG the main emphasis is not on Babylonia, but on “Elam” (which in the latter context must undoubtedly refer to the later Persian Empire), the absence of Babylon in the list as well as the rendering as an Atbash cryptoscript in JerMT require an explanation: after all, Babylonia was a – even very significant – part of the countries that were integrated into the Persian Empire. The fact that Babylonia of all places should have been spared YHWH’s wrath makes no sense from a later historical perspective and is in blatant contradiction to the Book of Jeremiah as a whole, which is also and above all about the liberation of the Judeans from the Babylonian exile. The obvious solution is therefore that the list in question must date from an early stage in the history of composition. If we also take a closer look at the statements about “Elam” in this light, it is immediately apparent that “Elam” in this context cannot possibly mean the later Persian Empire. Not only would the statement that it would fall victim to the wrath of YHWH contradict the above interpretation that YHWH’s rule in the future should come from there, but in this context – in both versions – a clear distinction is also made between different ethnic and political entities. It is not “Elam” that is to be destroyed, but “all the kings of Zimri”, “all the kings of Elam” and “all the kings of Media” (JerMT) or “all the kings of Elam” and “all the kings of Persia” (JerG). This clearly shows that the CoW does not refer to the conditions in the Persian Empire, but to an earlier historical situation. It therefore seems as if an already existing list, which originally only included countries that were conquered by Babylon or possibly threatened to be conquered soon, was subsequently expanded or modified (in both versions!) to also include regions that were only added later to the territory described by the Achaemenid Empire.

6.3 *Some Thoughts on the Development of the Two Different Versions*

Based on the above considerations, the history of the manuscripts can be reconstructed as follows: The list of countries in the CoW in JerMT probably dates from an early period in time,²⁰⁴ as the “Persians” are not yet mentioned here; instead, the immediately neighbouring areas of Babylonia (Zimri,²⁰⁵

²⁰⁴ Cf. Peels’ doubts (Peels, “From Egypt to Babylon”, 64–73) about the now popular idea that JerG should be dated earlier than JerMT.

²⁰⁵ Stipp’s suggestion to read Zimri as an (even misspelled!) Atbash cryptoscript for Elam (Stipp, *Jeremiah* 25–52, 71; see also Stipp, “Two Ancient Editions”, 99) is not very

Elam and Media), which were each ruled by several rulers according to the text, play a role here. Also, not the east, but the north is important in this version. Whether or to what extent the statement that these nations would fall because of divine wrath somehow reflect a historical reality (i.e., events that actually happened or at least impending developments) cannot be determined for all the areas mentioned based on current knowledge. In any case, it seems conceivable that a large part of the CoW list of countries in JerMT could go back to Jeremiah himself. However, it seems highly unlikely that he would have prophesied the downfall of the king of Babylon as well. The Atbash cryptoscript “Sheshach” was therefore probably added to the list in JerMT – possibly due to wishful thinking – by later redactors.²⁰⁶ Based on the experience of the Babylonian exile, the prophecies against Babylon were added to the OAN and marked with the note that these too had already been made by Jeremiah himself at the beginning of the reign of the doomed Zedekiah. The “oracle against Elam” was added to the collection only after the conquest of Babylon by Cyrus, when it became clear that a fundamental – and by that ruler with divine legitimation justified – shift of the centre of power to the east had taken place. The author obviously considered it important to link the text to the prophecies regarding the fall of Babylon, which was done in the form of a corresponding dating. In accordance with the list of nations in the CoW (and in the tradition of the other Jeremiah oracles), the *fall* of Elam had to be predicted first; however, the text’s main focus was not on the negative prophecy regarding the former state of Elam (although it might indeed have referred to Elamite contingents fighting in the Babylonian army),²⁰⁷ but rather on a theological explanation of a world-changing transformation that had actually

convincing, since Elam is explicitly mentioned immediately afterwards. Perhaps Zimri could be identified with Zamru, which is mentioned in Neo-Assyrian sources as a royal city in the region of Zamua (A.M. Bagg, *Répertoire Géographique des Textes Cunéiformes*, vol. 7/3–2: *Die Orts- und Gewässeramen der neuassyrischen Zeit, Teil 3: Babylonien, Urartu und die östlichen Gebiete*, Heft 2 (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2020), 617); note also Scheil’s idea (Scheil, *MDP* 9, 65) that this could be the area of origin of the Zari people who occur in the “Acropolis Archive” of Susa. (Currently the latter are thought to be West Semitic semi-nomads on the Babylonian-Elamite border; see Henkelman, “Defining Neo-Elamite History”, 257; Zadok, “The Babylonia-Elam Connections”, 124).

206 The fact that Babylon does not appear in the CoW passage in JerG indirectly confirms this interpretation: when the author of JerG redacted the original list from a shared previous version, he only “updated” the existing entries; the fact that Babylonia should also have been part of the nations listed here that found their way into the Persian Empire was apparently overlooked.

207 Perhaps the possessive suffix in “the bow of Elam, the beginning of their might” does not refer to Elam at all, but (implicitly) to Babylon; for the presence of Elamite guards at the court of Nebuchadnezzar, see above section 3.5.

taken place as a divinely ordained destiny that also provided for the liberation of the peoples held captive by Babylon. Likewise under the impression of the real-life events (i.e., the rise of the Persian Empire instead of a continued domination by Babylonia), “Zimri”, “Elam” and “Media” in the list of nations in the CoW were replaced in JerG by “Elam” and the “Persians”, who, although they were not really “destroyed” by the sword of YHWH, were nevertheless – like all the other peoples – absorbed into the empire founded by Cyrus. In order to match with the actual historical situation, the kings of the “North” were replaced in this version by the kings of the “East”, a region that (at least from a Western perspective) had not played a significant role in the history of the Near and Middle East before. With the addition of the heading “Against the nations of Elam” and the rearrangement of the OAN in JerG, the focus of the prophecies was finally reinterpreted from Babylonia away to the emergence of the new empire that now ruled over “all nations on the face of the earth” (according to the prophecies by divine will) and was in this function supposed to determine the future of the Judean people.

7 Conclusion

The present paper has shown that the difficulties which the “oracle against Elam” presents to modern interpreters are caused by the fact that “Elam” is not a particularly well-defined term. From a Western perspective, “Elam” could be used as a term for specific polities in the southeastern Zagros, but also for a larger regional unit. If one follows the argumentation presented above, the “oracle against Elam” intentionally plays with the ambiguity of the term, creating a new meaning in every single verse.

Thus, “Elam” in the “oracle against Elam” designates

1. a concrete *Neo-Elamite polity* whose territory reached approximately from the Behbahan plain up to Dēr in the Western Zagros, and/or a *contingent of troops* stemming from this area in the Neo-Babylonian army,
2. a region even further east (*former Anšan*) where Persians and Elamites lived side by side and from which the founder of the Persian Empire, *Cyrus the Great*, stemmed,
3. the *centre of his newly founded empire*,²⁰⁸ from which God acted after he had (euphemistically) “moved his throne” there and then gotten rid of its former king and his nobles (i.e., *Babylon*), and

208 At least from the perspective of the Judeans who witnessed the fall of Babylon; the real center of his empire was probably Pasargadae where Cyrus had some palaces built within a large garden complex and where he was finally buried. For a general overview on the

4. *the Persian Empire* as the polity that – in the eyes of the Judean redactor of the Book of Jeremiah who added the oracle to the text – was responsible to fulfil YHWH's "prediction" and free the Judeans from the Babylonian exile.

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importance of Pasargadae in ancient and modern times, see, e.g., Stronach/Gopnik, "Pasargadae" and the studies collected in A. Mozaffari, *World Heritage in Iran: Perspectives on Pasargadae* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014).

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A Land Laid Waste by Copy and Paste?

The Formation of the Oracles against Babylon in Jer 50 and 51

Helge Bezold

In his groundbreaking 1901 commentary, Bernhard Duhm did not hold back his disdain for the oracles against Babylon of Jer 50–51. He found the text too dense, highly repetitive, and very boring so that “only a commentator can read it in its entirety.”¹ In Jer 50–51 he saw a loose compilation of anti-Babylonian material from other sources. About 100 years later, the evaluation of these two chapters as a result of copy-and-paste has not changed much.² Ulrike Sals, in her 2004 monograph on Babylon in the Hebrew Bible concludes that Jer 50–51 represents “a sum of all Babylon texts”³ in the form of a literary collage, and she attributes to it a lack of structure.⁴ In contrast to Duhm, however, Sals interprets the repetitions, exaggerations, and contradictions within Jer 50–51 as intentional literary devices to convey the feeling of chaos.⁵

Despite their different explanation for the form of the two chapters, the interpretations of Duhm, Sals, as well as of many other exegetes share one conviction, namely, that Jer 50–51 is *one* collection of sayings against Babylon. Besides the shared thematic focus on the divine promise to bring Babylon down, this assumption is probably also influenced by the Seraiah episode of Jer 51:59–64. This brief narrative passage reports how Jeremiah wrote “all of these words” (כל הדברים האלה) on “a single scroll” (אל ספר אחד) in Jer 51:60)

- 1 B. Duhm, *Das Buch Jeremia* (KHC 11; Tübingen/Leipzig: Mohr Siebeck, 1901), 360 (“[...] nur ein Kommentator kann es ganz durchlesen”).
- 2 One might add the perspective of Pfeiffer who saw Jer 50–51 as “worst examples” of artificially combined oracles which once existed independently, R.H. Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (London: Black, 1953), 207.
- 3 U. Sals, *Die Biographie der “Hure Babylon”: Studien zur Intertextualität der Babylon-Texte in der Bibel* (FAT II 6; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2004), 437 (“[...] eine Summe aller Babeltexte”).
- 4 Sals, *Biographie*, 445 speaks of a “Fehlen jeder Ordnung” (“a lack of any order/structure”).
- 5 E. Peels, “Against You, Daughter of Babylon! A Remarkable Example of Text-Reception in the Oracle of Jeremiah 50–51”, in W.T. van Peursen/J.W. Dyk (ed.), *Tradition and Innovation in Biblical Interpretation* (FS E. Talstra; SSN 57; Leiden: Brill, 2011), 31–44, on p. 41 voted against an interpretation of Jer 50–51 as chaotic, but he also interprets the outlook on Babylon as “a kaleidoscopic image.”

before Seraiah receives the command to read out the words and to cast it into the Euphrates. Thereby, this episode suggests to the readers the identification of the material of Jer 50:1–51:58 as a coherent collection written on one scroll.

This article engages critically with the scholarly and biblical perspectives regarding the unity of Jer 50 and 51. As it develops a diachronic model for the evolution of the oracles against Babylon, it offers a more refined perspective. Instead of interpreting them as a literary unit, it proposes a literary historical differentiation between Jer 50 and 51. It argues, that Jer 50 was composed with Jer 51 in mind and that it was composed as a hinge chapter which serves the function of incorporating the older anti-Babylonian material of ch. 51* into the book.⁶ This is achieved by the strategic placement of intertextual links between other parts of Jeremiah, including prophecies of doom against Jerusalem (Jer 4–10), salvation oracles (Jer 30–32), as well as other oracles against the nations (Jer 46–49). This model sheds new light on the issues of how the Babylon oracles were composed and how they entered the book of Jeremiah. Furthermore, it explains the extraordinary length of the two chapters, and it also accounts for the repetitive character of the passage. In moving beyond the assumption that the two chapters merely tell the same story twice, it calls for an interpretation that considers the subtle but important differences and nuances between Jer 50 and 51. To better understand the issues involved in the study of Jer 50–51, it is worth first briefly summarizing the history of scholarship on these two chapters.

1 History of Scholarship

Despite, or maybe also because of its complex and somewhat chaotic appearance, the oracles against Babylon in Jer 50–51 have never been addressed in detail from a literary historical angle. Many contributions settle for the conclusion that the outlook on Babylon differs from the rest of the book and, thus, cannot be ascribed to the prophet of Jeremiah.⁷ There are, however, three angles from which Jer 50–51 have been studied so far. All of them – mostly implicitly – also touch upon the question of literary history.

6 Likely, chapter 51 was also reworked in the process of adding chapter 50 (see below), and there are clear cases of secondary additions in Jer 51:15–19 or Jer 51:44b–49a, the latter representing a proto-Masoretic plus.

7 See, e.g., L.C. Allen, *Jeremiah: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 508–11, much more optimistic is W.L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 2: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah Chapters 26–52*, (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 402: “A great deal of the material in 50:1–51:58 is, by the analysis of the present study, authentic to Jrm [...]”

The first is the perspective of the position of the OAN collection in the Greek and the Hebrew versions of Jeremiah. As is widely known, the order of the different sections of the book of Jeremiah differs significantly between the two versions. Whereas the oracles against Babylon mark the climax of the OAN collection in the latter part of the Hebrew book of Jeremiah (Jer 46–51), the Greek text positions the OAN collection already after the prose of JerLXX 25:1–14. Furthermore, the anti-Babylonian material (JerLXX 27–28) takes the third position after the oracles against Elam (JerLXX 25:14–19) and Egypt (JerLXX 26).⁸ Scholars have developed convincing arguments for the originality of each of these arrangements and positions, and the question cannot be addressed in detail, here. Eric Peels, however, has recently made the compelling case to interpret the order of the Greek text as secondary to the Hebrew. Peels suggests that the order was changed in the Ptolemaic period when Babylon had long lost its significance, but when the fall of Persia (Elam) still concerned the redactors. Thus, Peels proposes a redactional intention to position the oracle against Persia (Elam) first and to align it with the divine punishment of Egypt and Babylon.⁹ This article will follow Peel's suggestion and work with the hypothesis that the position of the oracles against Babylon at the end of the OAN collection is the more original one. The position of the OAN collection *within* the book of Jeremiah, however, is a different issue. For the sake of the argument presented here, it is sufficient to assume that in an earlier edition of the book of Jeremiah, the prose section of Jer 25:1–14 was once extended to be followed by a collection of oracles.¹⁰ The question of whether this collection already featured the oracles against Babylon, however, remains disputed.¹¹

8 For an overview, see M.K. Chae, "Redactional Intentions of MT Jeremiah concerning the Oracles against the Nations", *JBL* 134 (3/2015), 577–93, on pp. 577–90; N. Mastrjak, "Jeremiah as Collection: Scrolls, Sheets, and the Problem of Textual Arrangement", *CBQ* 80 (1/2018), 25–44, on pp. 27–30; E. Peels, "From Egypt to Babylon, or from Elam to Moab: Queries Concerning the Order of the Oracles against the Nations in the Book of Jeremiah", in H. Bezzel/U. Becker/M. de Jong (ed.), *Prophecy and Foreign Nations: Aspects of the Role of the "Nations" in the Books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel* (FAT II 135; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2022), 61–75, on pp. 61–4.

9 Peels, "From Egypt", 64–73.

10 For an overview, see K. Finsterbusch/N. Jacoby, "Völkergericht und Fremdvölkersprüche: Kommunikationsebenen in (der hebr. Vorlage von) LXX-Jer 25–32, MT-Jer 46–51 und MT-Jer 25", *JAJ* 6 (1/2015), 145–54, on p. 49 or H.-J. Stipp, *Jeremia 25–52* (HAT; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 14–16.

11 Many important contributions studying the material do not develop a clear position on the literary history. Huwylar, in his influential monograph on the collection of OANs (B. Huwylar, *Jeremia und die Völker: Untersuchungen zu den Völkerversprüchen in Jeremia 46–49*

The second exegetical perspective deals with the relationship between the different perceptions of Babylon in the book of Jeremiah. The portrayal of Babylon as the archenemy of God and his people in Jer 50–51 stands in stark contrast to an alleged “pro-Babylonian” stance that scholars have ascribed to Jeremiah in other parts of the book. John Hill, for example, has devoted an entire study on the question of whether Babylon is a “friend or foe” to Judah in the book of Jeremiah (*Friend or Foe? The Figure of Babylon in the Book of Jeremiah MT*, 1999). In the context of this study, it is important to note that Jer 50–51 does not share semantic or ideological features of possible “pro-Babylonian” passages within the narratives of Jer 27–29, 34, 37–43. One exception, which however stems from the (late) poetic material of Jer 25, might be Jer 51:7 where Babylon is referred to as a “golden cup in the Hand of YHWH” (כוס זהב בבל / ביד יהוה). Besides the conviction that Babylon was a divine tool, the texts differ in the identification of the cup: Jer 51:7 identifies the cup with Babylon, while Jer 25 imagines different nations, including Babylon in V. 26 to drink from it.¹²

(FAT 20; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), for example, excluded Jer 50–51 from his analysis, yet his argument is based mainly on thematic differences between Jer 46–49 and 50–51. A similar trend to avoid diachronic questions can be observed in the works of A.O. Bellis, *The Structure and Composition of Jeremiah 50:2–51:58* (Lewiston/Queenston/Lampeter: Mellen Biblical, 1995); M. Haran, “The Place of the Prophecies against the Nations in the Book of Jeremiah”, in S.M. Paul/R.A. Kraft/L.H. Schiffman/W.W. Fields (ed.), *Emanuel: Studies in Hebrew Bible, Septuagint, and Dead Sea Scrolls in Honor of Emanuel Tov* (VTSup 94; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 699–706; M. Kőszeghy, *Der Streit um Babel in den Büchern Jesaja und Jeremia* (BWANT 173; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2007); M. Kessler, *Battle of the Gods: The God of Israel Versus Marduk of Babylon: A Literary/Theological Interpretation of Jeremiah 50–51* (Assen: Royal van Gorcum, 2003); or Sals, *Biographie*. Besides a preference for synchronic approaches, one reason for this reluctance to engage diachronically with the text might be the complex question of the relationship between the Greek and the Hebrew text. Stipp, *Jeremia 25–52*, 41–48 or C.M. Maier, *Jeremia 1–25* (IEKAT; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer 2022), 431–3 argue based on the Hebrew text. Their literary critical assessment of Jer 25 leads them to conceive the motif of 70 years until the punishment of Babylon (Jer 25:11–12) as a later addition. They assume that the first edition of Jeremiah once ended in 25:13a (“I will bring upon that land all the words that I have uttered against it, everything written in this book.”). A later redactor added the promise of punishment of Babylon and, in the same redactional step, attached the OAN collection (including oracles against Babylon). Others, like Finsterbusch/Jacoby, *Völkergericht*, 50 see the Greek as the more original text and emphasise that JerLXX 25:13 expects divine punishment against Babylon and that the notion of a written document already seems to have Seraiah’s scroll of JerLXX 28:59–64/JerMT 51:59–64 in mind.

- 12 As many exegetes have rightly observed, the notion about the king of Babylon/Sheshach drinking from the cup is a proto-Masoretic addition and was thus, not part of the original Hebrew text. Yet, this addition implies that ancient readers did not identify the cup of wrath with Babylon.

Thus it is difficult to hold that Jer 51:7 depends on Jer 25, and is likely that the metaphorical representation of nations drinking from a divine cup existed as a literary motif in different forms. Beyond the motif of the cup, there is no evidence to support the assumption that Jer 50–51 is intertextually linked with passages within the book of Jeremiah which reflect a benevolent depiction of Babylon or see Nebuchadnezzar as YHWH's servant. The best explanation for this observation is that Jer 50–51 was part of an earlier edition of the book of Jeremiah which comprised only the poetic parts of Jer 1–25*, 30–31*, and 46–51*.¹³ The narrative sections have most likely been incorporated later. Furthermore, the fact that the title “my servant” (עַבְדִּי) for Nebuchadnezzar in texts like Jer 25:9, 27:6 is missing in the Greek text of Jeremiah means that it is the result of a later, proto-Masoretic revision of the Hebrew text.¹⁴

The third, and most important perspective for the question pursued in this article, is the perspective of structure, and the implications of structural analyses for the literary history of Jer 50–51. The detailed studies of Kenneth T. Aitken (1984), David J. Reimer (1993), and Allice O. Bellis (1995) have proposed three different theories about the structure and organisation of Jer 50–51. While they differ in their results and the subdivisions they propose, they also agree regarding the assumption that Jer 50:39–46 marks an ending and 51:1 a new beginning.¹⁵ Bellis even briefly speculates that Jer 50–51 might be “a combination of two collections of poems” which might have been “brought together by the hand of a third editor.”¹⁶ She emphasises, however, that her structural analysis does not allow for a clear assessment of the literary development of the chapters which is why she does not engage with the question of which of the two chapters might be older. German exegetical studies arrive at similar conclusions. In her 1986 study, Birgit Hartberger compared the imagery of Ps 137 with that of Jer 51. In explaining her focus on Jer 51 as a point of comparison with the Psalm, she briefly presents some differences between Jer 50–51.

13 See K. Schmid, *Buchgestalten des Jeremiabuches: Untersuchungen zur Redaktions- und Rezeptionsgeschichte von Jer 30–33 im Kontext des Buches* (WMANT 72; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1996), 201–3.

14 See already A. Schenker, “Nebukadnezars Metamorphose vom Unterjocher zum Gottesknecht: Das Bild Nebukadnezars und einige mit ihm zusammenhängende Unterschiede in den beiden Jeremia-Rezensionen”, *RB* 89 (1982), 498–527.

15 Yet, Aitken and Reimer do not see any indication for dividing the two chapters. Instead, Reimer emphasises that chapter “50–51 need to be taken as a *whole*.” Reimer, *Oracles*, 290 (italics in the original). See already the position of Duhm, *Jeremia*, 366: “Blos um den Leser ein wenig verschnaufen zu lassen, hat man Cap. 51 vom vorhergehenden abgetrennt; sachlich ist kein Grund dafür vorhanden [...]”

16 Bellis, *Structure*, 216.

Without further discussion, she concludes that only Jer 50 has a strong focus on Israel and that the chapter is “structurally independent”¹⁷ from Jer 51. In his 2019 commentary on Jer 25–52, Hermann-Josef Stipp, in passing, mentions the possibility that the structural differences between 50 and 51 could indicate literary growth.¹⁸ However, he holds that there are no conceptual differences between the chapters which is why he refrains from further literary historical differentiation.

This brief overview of previous scholarly engagement with Jer 50–51 highlights that the task of a literary historical analysis of the two chapters is still pending. While no detailed diachronically oriented study on Jer 50–51 exists, it has become clear that the answer of how the oracles against Babylon entered the book of Jeremiah has important implications for the larger question of the composition of the book. The dominant view seems to be that the oracles against Babylon are a collection of sayings that comprise a literary unit. The question of whether this unit was an original part of a Jeremianic collection of OANs or was secondarily added to an existing collection (and how this collection became part of the book of Jeremiah) remains disputed. Regarding the integrity of Jer 50–51, some scholars have noticed that there might be subtle differences between the two chapters. The following analysis follows this suspicion and asks: What evidence is there to differentiate between the two chapters and what do these differences mean for the literary growth of Jer 50–51?

2 The Poetic Frame of Chapter 50

A first hint to differentiate between the two chapters derives from the different poetic framing of Jer 50 and 51. Jer 50 opens with a superscription that is unique within the OAN collection of Jeremiah: “The word that YHWH spoke concerning Babylon” (הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה אֶל בָּבֶל).¹⁹ This reference emphasises the divine authority of the following oracles. Verse 2 continues with the divine call to “declare among the nations” (הַגִּידוּ בַּגּוֹיִם) that “Babylon is taken”

17 B. Hartberger, “An den Wassern von Babylon ...”: Psalm 137 auf dem Hintergrund von Jeremia 51, der biblischen Edom-Traditionen und babylonischer Originalquellen (BBB 63; Frankfurt am Main: Hanstein, 1986), 104 (“Jer 50 ist durch den starken Israel-Bezug thematisch anders gewichtet und gegenüber Jer 51 strukturell eigenständig.”).

18 Stipp, *Jeremia 25–52*, 761: “Daher kann man fragen, ob die Kapitelgrenze eine Spur separater Wachstumsprozesse bewahrt hat.”

19 As the comparison with the Septuagint shows, the rest of the verse (“concerning the land of the Chaldeans, by the prophet Jeremiah”) is a proto-Masoretic addition. The closest parallel is the opening of the second oracle against Egypt in 46:13 (הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה).

(נִלְכְּדָה בָּבֶל) which has a thematic parallel in the final verse of chapter 50. Jer 50:46 serves as an *inclusio* when it mentions that the earth trembles from the call that “Babylon is taken” (נִתְפָּשָׁה בָּבֶל), and it mentions that this call “was heard among the nations” (בְּגוֹיִם נִשְׁמָע). While chapter 51 lacks a distinctive introduction, it opens with the messenger formula “thus says YHWH” (כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה). This introduction is similar to the opening lines of most other oracles, like the words against the Philistines (Jer 47:2), Moab (48:1), Ammon (49:1), Edom (49:7), Kedar/Hazor (49:28), and Elam (49:35) which, however, also feature an additional introductory phrase like לְמוֹאָב (“concerning Moab”). In any case, the framing of ch. 50 stands out, and there is a visible *caesura* at the end of ch. 50. Ch. 51 lacks a comparable framing, but it opens in a way comparable to other oracles in the collection of 47–49. Thus, despite the Hebrew Bible’s chapter division being the result of medieval editorial work, these observations serve as a first indication that the chapter boundary does function as an important marker to differentiate between 50 and 51.

3 Future of Past? Different Concepts Regarding the Fall of Babylon

The first difference in content between chapters 50 and 51 concerns the notion of whether the fall of Babylon will happen soon or has already occurred. Of course, both chapters depict the judgement on Babylon as an irrevocable one and both chapters blend past and future perspectives. Nevertheless, ch. 50 contains more clear statements indicating that Babylon has already fallen, whereas in 51 there are more indications that the fall is still pending.

Compare, again, the opening verses of both chapters. In chapter 50, the nations hear that Babylon “is taken” (50:2). In contrast, chapter 51:1–2 refers to YHWH’s plan to stir up a destructive wind and to send winnowers to Babel. This rather sounds like an event that will happen shortly. Verse 51:33 which compares Babylon to a threshing floor then explicitly mentions that it will take “a little while” (עוֹד מְעַט) until the harvest, obviously a metaphor for the yet awaited punishment. A second case is a difference between Jer 51:20–23, the “song of the war club”, and the similar motif of the broken hammer in 50:23. In Jer 50:23, it is clear that the “hammer” (פֶּטִישׁ) is identified with Babylon, and the verse’s temporal structure indicates that the fall of Babylon has already happened: “How the hammer of the whole earth is cut down and broken!” (אֵיךְ נִגְדַע וְיִשְׁבֵּר פֶּטִישׁ כָּל הָאָרֶץ). In chapter 51, on the other hand, the hammer still seems to be active. In Jer 51:20, an unknown “you” is introduced: “You are my hammer, my tool of warfare” (מִפֶּן אַתָּה לִי כְלִי מִלְחָמָה). In what follows, several objects are listed as possible victims of this most likely divine tool (e.g., nations,

chariots, and groups of people). In the literary context, Babylon appears as the most obvious subject. Babylon was addressed in the preceding verses of 51:11–14 (and in the secondary addition of 51:15–19) and after the short poem, in Jer 51:24, God promises to repay Babylon for all the wrong it did, most likely repealing Babylon's role as a divine tool.²⁰ Thus, the literary context seems to identify Babylon as the hammer of Jer 51:20–23. This allows for another differentiation in the temporal perspective. Chapter 50 states that Babylon, the hammer, has already been crushed, whereas this status change is still about to happen (soon) in chapter 51. Finally, Jer 51:52 deploys the widespread prophetic phrase הנה ימים באים (“see, days are coming”) clearly expressing the pending nature of the divine judgement against Babylon.²¹ In contrast, Jer 50:27 highlights that “their day has come” (כי בא יומם) when it speaks about the slaughter of all Babylonian “bulls” (כל פריה), possibly a metaphorical reference to the Babylonian soldiers.

This different treatment of particular motifs between the two chapters can be observed in other passages, as well. For instance, Jer 51:12, 58 express the hope that the “walls of Babylon” (חומת בבל) – a well-known symbol of military strength – will be destroyed. Verse 12 calls unnamed soldiers to enact the divine plan against Babylon in “raising a standard against the walls of Babylon” (אל חומת בבל שאו נס). In this case, the standard functions as a point of gathering troops to tear down the walls in the upcoming siege. Similarly, in 51:58 God promises that the “broad walls of Babylon shall be levelled to the ground” (חמות בבל הרחבה ערער תתערער), also looking to the future. Notably, the motif of the walls appears in ch. 50, too. There, however, it is incorporated in a poem that clearly looks back to the destruction of Babylon. In 50:15, the readers are invited to join the celebration of Babylon's fall, rejoicing about the fact that “her walls are thrown down” (נהרסו חומותיה).

Another case of this different temporal concept concerns a nuance in the motif of revenge. In Jer 51:11, the awaited coming of the king(s) of the Medes²²

20 While the narrative context lets most scholars to assume Babylon or Nebuchadnezzar is the agent addressed, it is also possible to read this short poem as a divine call to the Persians/Medes or to Israel (or the figure of Jeremiah/another human agent). At least, the 2nd person masculine address (אתה) in v. 20–23 stands out. It disrupts the address of Babylon as a female subject in the rest of chapter 51. Originally, then, the song of the war club might not have focused on Babylon but was reinterpreted by the placement in the context of Jer 51 and the conclusion of Jer 51:24.

21 Jer 51:47 also contains this phrase, yet the entire passage of 51:44d–48a is a proto-Masoretic addition, see Stipp, *Jeremia* 25–52, 806.

22 While the Hebrew text reads plural (מלכי מדי) in 51:11, 28, the Greek – most likely representing the older reading – has singular forms (βασιλέως Μήδων).

is interpreted as an act of divine revenge: “For this is YHWH’s revenge” (כִּי נִקְמַת יְהוָה הִיא). But this act has not yet been realised, whereas Jer 50:28 refers to the same hope for revenge, but this time, the revenge is narrated as something that seems to have happened. It is the voice of fugitives and refugees who declare “YHWH’s revenge” (נִקְמַת יְהוָה) in *ion*. Logically, there can only be fugitives and refugees *after* the fall of Babylon. In sum, despite the two chapters’ blending of future and past perspectives, there is a tendency in chapter 51 to still await the fall of Babylon, while chapter 50 tends to emphasise that this event has already happened.²³

4 The Fall of Babylon and its Positive Implications for Israel in Ch. 50

The next aspect that allows for a differentiation between Jer 50 and 51 correlates with the differences regarding the temporal framing of Babylon’s destruction. It concerns a positive evaluation of this event from a Judean perspective. Jer 50 sets a much stronger focus on this aspect than 51. In 51, there are only two very brief references to a possible positive effect the fall of Babylon has on Israel. In 51:5, the fate of Babylon is set in contrast to that of Israel and Judah who are said to be no widows before their God. And 51:10 formulates the hope of a communal “we”-group who wants to “declare in Zion the work of YHWH, our God” (וְנִסְפְּרָה בְּצִיּוֹן אֶת מַעֲשֵׂה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ).²⁴ This note expresses the hope that the divine destruction of Babylon might imply a return to Zion. However, 51:50 insists that the Judeans shall think of YHWH “from a distant land” (זָכְרוּ יְהוָה מֵרְחוֹק אֶת יְהוָה). This note could allude to refugees which are already on their way back, but it could also denote that the possibility of a return is still pending. In any case, chapter 51 focuses on calling the Judeans to leave the besieged

23 In fact, there are only two cases in which ch. 51 portrays the fall of Babylon as something that has already happened: Both Jer 51:8 and 51:41–43 use the past tense. Both cases, however, deserve further discussion. The first case of V. 8 is rather ambiguous about the finality of the fall of Babylon. While it mentions that “Babylon has suddenly fallen” (פֶּתַח נָפַל), the notion ends with the call to bring balm for her wound and the hope that she “perhaps might be healed” (אִולי תִּרְפָּא). The second case clearly states the successful conquest of Babylon: Verse 41 refers to “how Sheshach has fallen” (אֵיךְ נִלְכְּדָה שֶׁשַׁח) and verse 43 notes that “her cities have become an object of horror” (הָיוּ עָרֶיהָ לְשִׁמָּה). However, from a literary-critical perspective, there is reason to speculate about Jer 51:41–43 being a secondary addition. See the final paragraph of this article.

24 This verse might represent a later addition, though. See the concluding paragraph of this article.

Babylon (51:9, 45), and Zion is only mentioned in passing. There is no elaboration on the theme of return or salvation.

The perspective of Jer 50 differs significantly. This first collection of oracles elaborates extensively on the positive outcome of Babylon's fall. The note of 50:4–5 envisions the gathering of the people of Israel and Judah. They are depicted as weeping and walking towards Zion, seeking God. They also join themselves (וּנְלוּ) to YHWH by an “everlasting covenant” (בְּרִית עוֹלָם). This outlook has several intertextual links with the book of consolation in Jer 30–31.²⁵ In these chapters, YHWH confirms his “everlasting love” (וְאַהֲבַת עוֹלָם) for his people (Jer 31:3), where the return to Zion is mentioned as a central element of hope (31:6, 12), where weeping is part of this return (31:9), and where, most importantly, a new covenant comes into view (31:31–34).²⁶ The promise of an “eternal covenant”, furthermore, has a parallel in Jer 32:40.²⁷

A second reference to restoration is to be found in Jer 50:19–20. This sequence links the promise to bring Israel back with the hope that the Israelite and Judean “guilt” (עוֹן) will no longer be found because God “forgives” (סָלַח) his people. This notion differs strongly from other passages in the book of Jeremiah where the guilt of Judah is a driving theological motif. Thus, the fall of Babylon seems to bring an end to the period of Judean guilt, and, instead, open a time of divine forgiveness. This motif also runs parallel with other oracles of salvation in Jer (cf., e.g., the notion of forgiveness in Jer 31:34, 33:8, or 36:3).

The third case in which Jer 50 refers to the positive outcome of the divine destruction of Babylon is Jer 50:34. There, YHWH is called “their redeemer” (גֹּאֲלָם) who will punish Babylon. This punishment is portrayed as a divine act of conducting his people's legal case. This verse, again, seems to intertextually link Jer 50 with chapter 31 because 31:11 is the only other instance in Jeremiah where the lexeme גֹּאֲל occurs.

25 See the short remark in Schmid, *Buchgestalten*, 339. The passage of Jer 50:4–5 also bears resemblance with the (salvation themed) oracle against Egypt in Jer 46:27–28.

26 Furthermore, Jer 50:6 and the imagery of the divine shepherd might correlate with 31:10, and the motif of God as “abode of righteousness” (יְהוָה נֹוֹה צֶדֶק) in Jer 50:7 might be linked with 31:23.

27 Jer 32:37–41 might reflect an earlier concept of covenant than Jer 31:31–34, see A. Klein, *Schriftauslegung im Ezechielbuch: Redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zu Ez 34–39* (BZAW 391; Berlin/New York, 2008), 101–2 with Schmid, *Buchgestalten*, 103 and T. Krüger, “Das menschliche Herz und die Weisung Gottes. Elemente einer Diskussion über Möglichkeiten und Grenzen der Tora-Rezeption im Alten Testament”, in: T. Krüger/R.G. Kratz (ed.), *Rezeption und Auslegung im Alten Testament und in seinem Umfeld, Ein Symposium aus Anlass des 60. Geburtstags von Odil Hannes Steck* (OBO 153; Fribourg/Göttingen: Universitätsverlag/Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997) 65–89, on pp. 82–3.

Thus, compared to chapter 51, the fiftieth chapter sets a much clearer emphasis on the salvation the fall of Babylon brings, and it is only in this chapter that we can observe intertextual links with the book of restoration of Jer 30–31 and the following passages.

5 Between History and Tradition: Different Concepts of the Fall of Babylon

Besides this different evaluation of the fall of Babylon and its implications for the hopes of the Israelite and Judean people, chapter 50 and 51 also reflect a different interest in conceptualising the fall of Babylon. In general, both chapters imagine a siege and a large-scale attack on the city of Babylon which leads to the destruction of all infrastructure and the desolation of its population. As Babylon was most likely not (fully) destroyed when Cyrus II took control over the city, both depictions of this event must be qualified as fictional. What matters in the context for our analysis is, thus, not to discern which of both chapters contains the more reliable sources, but the way of how these chapters literarily frame the event. In this sense, it is noteworthy that only chapter 51 reflects an interest in the (imagined) historical background behind the fall of Babylon.²⁸

Only ch. 51 refers to a concrete group of attackers, that is the king of the Medes in 51:11, 28 as well as the kingdoms of Ararat, Minni, and Ashkenaz in v. 27. It seems plausible to assume some kind of historical knowledge about the nations involved in the conquest of the Babylonian empire. The three groups might be identified as the Uartians, the Mannaeans, and the Skythians, three people who were conquered by the Medes. While scholars like Stipp suggest interpreting this reference as a later gloss, it still shows that the reference about the Medes in ch. 51 invited a historical perspective.²⁹ And it is this perspective that is missing in ch. 50.³⁰ This chapter only refers to metaphorical entities

28 One example, yet to be found in the proto-Masoretic material of Jer 51:44d–49b, is verse 46 where we hear of ever changing news (שמועה) about the status of Babylon. One Babylonian ruler is followed by another one in quick succession. Obviously, the perspective of this verse fits the years before the fall of Babylon. Such a note, at least, fits very well with what we know about the decline of the Babylonian empire after the death of Nebuchadnezzar II in 562 BCE who was succeeded by four kings (Amel-Marduk, Neriglissar, Labashi-Marduk, Nabonidus) who all only ruled for a couple of years or even months. But it is also possible to read it as a glimpse of the Hellenistic period.

29 See Stipp, *Jeremiah* 25–52, 800.

30 See, for this aspect, Hartberger, “An den Wassern”, 104.

involved in the imagined conquest. It is an unnamed nation (v. 3) or a group of nations (v. 9), the God of Israel (v. 18), or a lion used as a metaphor to describe the attacker (v. 44).

While concrete historical agents are lacking in chapter 50, the fall of Babylon is still historicised, or better, traditionalised in the former chapter. The fall of Babylon is, for example, compared to the fall of Sodom and Gomorrah (Jer 50:40), and thereby gets linked to the biblical depiction of history (Gen 18–19). A similar pattern can be observed in verses 50:17–18 where the act of divine retribution on Babylon is compared to YHWH's punishment of the king of Assyria about one hundred years earlier. Verse 18aβb has God proclaiming: “See, I am punishing the king of Babel and his land as I have punished the king of Ashur” (הנני פקד אל מלך בבל ואל ארצו כאשר פקדתי אל מלך אשור). This analogy follows a historicising pattern that places the fall of Babylon in a row of other empires that have once ruled over Israel but were punished later. This outlook also alludes to traditions like Isa 10 or Nahum 3 which portray the fall of Assyria as an act of divine retribution which has positive implications for Israel. Jer 50:19 also features an aspect of divine salvation. The fall of Babylon is combined with a divine promise to bring back Israel to its metaphorical “pasture” (נוה, cf. Jer 23:3) in the regions of Carmel, Ephraim, and Gilead (as well as the proto-Masoretic addition of Baschan).³¹ Thereby, the text of Jer 50 evokes traditions of Northern Israel as the recipient of divine restitution (cf., e.g., Deutero-Isaiah or Jer 31:6, 9, 20).³²

6 Chapter 50 and its Intertextual Links Within the Book of Jeremiah

The fall of Babylon is, however, not only linked to traditions outside of the book of Jeremiah in chapter 50. Notably, there are significantly more thematic and verbal connections to other parts of Jeremiah in chapter 50 than in 51. This concerns not only the traditions about salvation and divine retribution for Israel and Judah but also Jer 4–10 and the other oracles against nations of Jer 46–59. Two examples shall serve to demonstrate this.

First, the notion of an enemy nation coming “from the North” – the crucial, unnamed designation of Babylon in the former part of the book of Jeremiah

31 The pastoral imagery alongside the divine promise to restore Israel has further links to Jer 30f., see Stipp, *Jeremiah* 25–52, 777.

32 It also reverses traditions about the fall of Israel, cf. Isa 33:9 and Nah 1:4 both mentioning Bashan and Carmel as places of the divine punishment of Israel, see. W. Rudolph, *Jeremiah* (HAT 1/12, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 3¹⁹⁶⁸), 301.

(Jer 1–25) – is an essential feature of Jer 50, but it only occurs once in Jer 51. And this single occurrence in Jer 51:48 is missing in the Septuagint and thus qualifies as a later, proto-Masoretic addition. While the metaphor of an enemy nation coming from the North is absent in Jer 51, chapter 50 refers to this tradition known best from Jer 4–10 on three occasions.

Strikingly, these texts do reverse the imagery: While in Jer 4–10 Babylon was the enemy from the North, in chapter 50:3, 9, 41 Babylon is threatened by yet another unnamed enemy nation from the North. As has often been observed, this implies a parallelisation or equation of the fate of Babylon with the fate of Judah.³³ The semantic range of 50:3 – mentioning a nation “from the North” (מצפון), “desolation” (שמה), or the motif of total depopulation (ולא יהיה יושב בה) (מאדם ועד בהמה) – has several parallels with texts like Jer 4:6–7; 5:30; 8:21; 19:8 in the prophetic utterings against Judah, but also links to the oracle against Egypt in Jer 46:19, Moab in 48:9 or Edom in 49:13. The second case of Jer 50:9 mentions that God gathers a group of nations from the North against Babylon (הנה אנכי מעיר ומעלה על בבל קהל גוים גדלים מארץ צפון) which sounds similar, at least, to the divine punishment of Jerusalem of Jer 1:15. There, too, God calls tribes from the North (הנני קרא לכל משפחות ממלכות צפונה) of course, to attack Jerusalem. Thirdly, Jer 50:41 mentions a people from the North, “a mighty nation and many kings” (וגוי גדול ומלכים רבים) coming “from the farthest parts of the earth” (יעור מירכתי ארץ) to attack Babylon. This sounds very much like a literal borrowing from Jer 6:22:³⁴ “Thus speaks YHWH: See, a people is coming from the land of the North, a great nation is stirring from the farthest parts of the earth” (כה אמר יהוה הנה עם בא מארץ צפון וגוי גדול יעור מירכתי ארץ).³⁵

These examples demonstrate that the motif of the enemy from the North serves as a thematic link between Jer 50 and other parts of the book of Jeremiah, most notably texts that proclaim the divine punishment of Jerusalem by an enemy from the North. Thus, these three verses contribute to reading the fall

33 See, e.g., Hill, *Friend*, 177–8 or Stipp, *Jeremia 25–52*, 775.

34 See G. Wanke, *Jeremia 25,15–52,34* (ZBK.AT; Zürich: TVZ, 2003), 444, J.-D. Macchi, “Les doublets dans le livre de Jérémie”, in A.H.W. Curtis/T. Römer (ed.), *The Book of Jeremiah and Its Reception – Le livre de Jérémie et sa réception* (BETHL 128; Leuven: University, 1997), 211–22, on pp. 213–5, or Peels, “Against you”, 32–7. E.K. Holt, “The Meaning of an Inclusion: A Theological Interpretation of the Book of Jeremiah MT”, *SJOT* 17 (2003), 183–205, on p. 197 assumes “that the *Foe from the North* Oracles [i.e., Jer 4–10, H.B.] are generated on the basis of the scheme given in the genre of the Oracles against the Nations.” This direction of dependence seems, however, rather unlikely given the artificial application of the metaphor of the North in addressing the Persian (or Median) conquest of Babylon.

35 It also bears resemblances with the oracle of salvation in Jer 31:8 (“See, I am going to bring them from the land of the North, and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth.”).

of Babylon as a parallel to the fall of Jerusalem, and thereby, as something that was part of the divine plan from early on.

The second example is Jer 50:44–46, the concluding passage of chapter 50. Scholars unanimously agree that this passage is an almost literal quotation of parts of the oracle against Edom (Jer 49:19–21).³⁶

¹⁹ Like a lion coming up from the thickets of the Jordan against a perennial pasture, I will suddenly chase **Edom** away from it; and I will appoint over it whomever I choose. For who is like me? Who can summon me? Who is the shepherd who can stand before me?

²⁰ Therefore hear the plan that the Lord has made **against Edom and the purposes that he has formed against the inhabitants of Teman**: Surely the little ones of the flock shall be dragged away; surely their fold shall be appalled at their fate.

²¹ At the **sound of their fall** the earth shall tremble; the sound of their cry shall be **heard at the Red Sea**.

(Jer 49:19–21)

⁴⁴ Like a lion coming up from the thickets of the Jordan against a perennial pasture, I will suddenly chase **them** away from her; and I will appoint over her whomever I choose. For who is like me? Who can summon me? Who is the shepherd who can stand before me?

⁴⁵ Therefore hear the plan that the Lord has made **against Babylon**, and the purposes that he has formed **against the land of the Chaldeans**: Surely the little ones of the flock shall be dragged away; surely their fold shall be appalled at their fate.

⁴⁶ At the **sound of the capture of Babylon** the earth shall tremble, and her cry shall be **heard among the nations**.

(Jer 50:44–46)

The verbal agreement is obvious, and the direction of dependence seems clear: The image of YHWH rising from river Jordan like a lion in 49:19 (and the contextualisation at the Red Sea in v. 21) fits the context of Edom as Transjordanian territory. The oracle of Jer 50 has adapted this (older) text to depict the divine punishment of Babylon, which is now imagined first as the expulsion of Babylon from Judah (50:44), and secondly as the conquest of Babylon (50:46). The concluding verse 46 represents a further adaptation: Referring to the nations, it highlights the global consequence of the fall of Babylon (cf. 50:2) compared to the local consequence of divine punishment against Edom (50:21).

³⁶ Cf., already Duhm, *Jeremiah*, 366. More recently, e.g., Macchi, “Les doublets”, 217–9 or Stipp, *Jeremiah 25–52*, 784.

While the fact of the borrowing from Jer 49 is undisputed,³⁷ the implication of this literary phenomenon deserves further discussion. Jer 50:44–46 is not the first case in which chapter 50 adopts material from other oracles against the nations, and not the first with parallels to the Edom oracle. Already the comparison of the fall of Babylon with the divine punishment of Sodom and Gomorrah in 50:40 runs parallel with parallelising Edom with Sodom and Gomorrah in 49:17, the only other occurrence of this phrase in the OAN collection of Jeremiah. What is more, Jer 50 – unlike Jer 51 – at several points (50:29, 31, 32) deploys vocabulary from the semantic range of wisdom traditions, such as the notion of alleged Babylonian “pride” (זדון). This is very similar to the prophetic critique of Edom’s “pride” (זדון) in 49:16, and it reminds the readers of the opening lines of the Edom oracle in 49:7, where the prophet complains about the lack of Edom’s “wisdom” (חכמה) and of “insight” (בין). Ultimately, the motif of the consequences of Babylon’s desolation – leaving people horrified and hissing – links Jer 50:13 to the Edom oracle of 49:17 (cf. 19:9).³⁸ 000

7 Differentiating Between Jer 50 and 51: An Overview

The two chapters of Jer 50 and 51 share the same thematic focus which is why many motifs are to be found twice in sequence of reading chapter 51 after 50. The preceding analysis has, however, highlighted noticeable thematic and conceptual differences between the two chapters. While the individual differences could be explained as incidental variations resulting from a process of collecting distinctive sayings against Babylon, the cumulative evidence prompts for a different solution. Most likely, Jer 50–51 represent in fact *two different* literary units, with Jer 50 being the later text. In several aspects, chapter 50 seems to revise the content of 51: In contrast to chapter 51, chapter 50 emphasises that Babylon has already fallen. Jer 50 also offers an explicit reflection on the salvation that this event implies for Israel. Furthermore, the historical interest of chapter 51 seems to have been replaced by an interest in linking the fall of Babylon with the biblical traditions about the fall of cities in chapter 50.

37 Only Wanke, *Jeremia*, 444 assumes the opposite direction of dependence. His argument, however, is unconvincing. He holds that the fate of a local kingdom like Edom would be irrelevant to the nations (cf. Jer 49:21) in contrast to the importance of Babylon. To him, it is more likely that the global perspective of the fall of Babylon was secondarily adapted to fit the context of Edom. Given the fictional quality of the OANs, however, the assumed “importance” cannot serve as an argument to judge the direction of literary dependence.

38 See Stipp, *Jeremia* 25–52, 776.

Corresponding to the latter observation, chapter 50 is also characterised by multiple intertextual references to other passages in the book of Jeremiah.

Of course, any analysis of Jer 51 will also bring to light a certain degree of intertextuality with other texts. However, studies on Jer 50–51 seem to confirm the *quantitative conclusion* that there are more of these links in chapter 50. The work of Parke-Taylor on “Doublets and Recurring Phrases” (2000) in the book of Jeremiah, for example, lists multiple doublets and parallels to other texts in ch. 50, but only two possible cases in Jer 51, and these are most likely later additions (Jer 51:15–19//Jer 10:12–16 and Jer 51:58b//Hab 2:13b).³⁹ In chapter 50, these parallels also seem to differ in *quality* as they have a structural significance in that the chapter begins with a passage (Jer 50:2–3) which alludes to Jer 4–6, then moves to a passage with links to oracles of salvation (Jer 50:4–7), and closes with a borrowing from the oracle against Edom. Thus, there seems to be an intentional intertextual pattern behind chapter 50 which retraces the order of three large sections of the Hebrew book of Jeremiah. These findings have important repercussions for the question of the evolution of Jer 50–51 and the place of these chapters in the formation of the book of Jeremiah, in general.

8 Implications for the Interpretation of Jer 50–51

The differences between Jer 50 and 51 which this study has brought to light are best explained by understanding Jer 50 as a younger, redactional text. Jer 50 serves both as a revision of the older material of Jer 51 and as a hinge between the oracles against Babylon and the rest of the book of Jeremiah. The theory that the younger material was placed before the older text gains plausibility by other cases in the book of Jeremiah,⁴⁰ and comparative studies like Sara J. Milstein’s *Tracking the Master Scribe* (2016), in which she demonstrates that redactional processes in biblical and Mesopotamian literature often work by “revision through introduction.”⁴¹ Thus, Jer 50 can very well be interpreted as a form of introduction that revises the older material of chapter 51. This interpretation sheds new light on several issues involved in the study of Jer 50–51.

39 G.H. Parke-Taylor, *The Formation of the Book of Jeremiah: Doublets and Recurring Phrases* (SBLMS 51; Atlanta: SBL, 2000), 181 also interprets the similar phrasing of Jer 51:39b and 51:57b as a doublet, yet they appear in the same chapter.

40 See Schmid, *Buchgestalten*, 252, who holds that Jer 24 was written later than chapter 25, arguing that “[...] das redaktionell jüngere Stück schiebt sich vor das ältere.”

41 S.J. Milstein, *Tracking the Master Scribe: Revision Through Introduction in Biblical and Mesopotamian Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2016).

First and foremost, it invites a more nuanced interpretation of the oracles against Babylon. While most scholars work with the assumption that these texts are one collection that over and over repeats the depiction of Babylon's fall, there is good reason to differentiate between the two chapters. This implies understanding the prophetic reflection of the end of Babylon as a dynamic process, and it allows tracing how later scribes transformed the image of Babylon, the implication of Babylon's fall for Israel, and the theological convictions inherent to the depiction. It is striking that the former chapter develops a more carefully thought-out theological interpretation of the fall of Babylon than the latter. The text charges the empire with hubris against God (50:29) and it presents its downfall as a natural outcome of a "competition" with God (כִּי בִיהוּה הַתַּגְרִית in 50:24). As highlighted above, this perspective correlates with an explicit reflection of the end of Israel's and Judah's guilt before God. Only chapter 50 concludes that "the iniquity of Israel" (עוֹן יִשְׂרָאֵל) and "the sins of Israel" (חַטָּאת יְהוּדָה) will not be found anymore (50:20).

The significant differences between the two chapters also contribute to a refinement of previous scholarly interpretations of Jer 50–51. For instance, scholars often remark that the parallels between the divine punishment of Babylon resembles the punishment of Judah, and that "Babylon is a figure which resembles Judah."⁴² Of course, chapter 50 with its links to the prophecies of doom against Judah in Jer 4–10 contributes to parallelising the fate of Judah and Babylon. Both nations have sinned against YHWH. However, the justification for the punishment of Babylon in Jer 51 is different, and there is much less of a parallel fate between the two nations. The latter chapter focuses on Babylon's supremacy: Chapter 51 lists Babylon's wealth (51:13), its violent acts (51:24, 35), its monstrous nature (51:34), its exploitative politics (51:14, 35), and its hegemonic power (51:44, 49, 53). None of these elements ever appear in the book of Jeremiah as attributes of Judah, and they play no role in explaining why God punishes his people.

Reading Jer 51 as the older text also can explain why there are yet fewer links to the book of Jeremiah, and why the text still seems to await the destruction of Babylon. This difference calls for a different dating for both chapters. The expectation of a military conquest of Babylon in chapter 51 and the reference to the "king of the Medes" in 51:11, 28 (not Cyrus II or the Persians), supports the prevalent exegetical theory of a date before the actual defeat of Babylon in 539 BCE, possibly even before the Persian conquest of Media in 550 BCE.⁴³ Jer 50, on the other hand, probably already presupposes the Persian conquest

⁴² Hill, *Friend*, 180.

⁴³ See Schmid, *Buchgestalten*, 213 or Stipp, *Jeremia 25–52*, 761.

of Babylon. Its more thought-out reflection of the fall of Babylon and its emphasis on the salvation this event implies for Israel suggests a later date than most of Jer 51.

One possibility would be to date Jer 50 after Darius crushed the Babylonian revolts under Nidintu-Bel and Araka who – according to the Behistun inscription (DB § 16.49) – were killed for rebelling against Persia.⁴⁴ Herodotus even reports how Darius, in crushing the rebellion, attacked Babylon and razed the city walls (*Hist.* III, 159). While the historicity of this event cannot be verified, it is notable that Jer 50:15 holds that Babylon's "walls are thrown down" (נהרסו) (חומותיה). In any case, Jer 50 was most likely written in the post-exilic period. The call to return to Zion mentions "the way to here" (דרך הנה) which implies that the (imagined) speaker is located in Jerusalem, not in Babylon.⁴⁵

Moreover, the intertextual pattern of Jer 50 with its links to the first part of the book provides valuable insights as to why the fiftieth chapter was incorporated. Presumably, chapter 51 was perceived by the redactors as lacking certain theological convictions and as being too loosely connected to the book. In placing distinctive links to other texts of the book of Jeremiah in the first part of the oracles against Babylon, the redactor (successfully) evokes the impression that all the oracles of Jer 50–51 were an integral part of the Jeremiah tradition.⁴⁶ In this sense, Jer 50 qualifies as a case of redactional copy-and-paste. It takes topics of chapter 51 and combines them with other passages of Jeremiah so that, in the present form of the text, Jer 51 reads like a repetition of the first section. Thereby, the thematic redundancy which scholars like Sals have explained as an intentional expression of the chaos that the fall of Babylon implies, can be explained as the result of redactionally revising older material. It is worth investigating further which aspects of Jer 51 are taken up and revised in chapter 50, and what significance these adaptations have for the overall interpretation of the oracles.

9 From Sheet to Book: The Formation of Jer 50–51

The literary historical differentiation between Jer 50 and 51 allows for a new reconstruction of the formation of Jer 50–51 and their incorporation into

44 See Schmid, *Buchgestalten*, 251–3.

45 See already Rudolph, *Jeremia*, 299.

46 See G. Fischer, *Jeremia 26–52* (HThKAT; Freiburg et al.: Herder, 2005), 568 (with Reimer, *Oracles*, 240, 289) who regards the chapter not only as one literary unit, but also as integral part of the book of Jeremiah.

the book of Jeremiah. Following the argument of this article, Jer 51* must be regarded as the older of the two chapters. As chapter 50, unlike 51, shows significant links to other texts from the book of Jeremiah, it can be characterised as a redactional hinge. That implies that chapter 50 serves the inclusion of the collection of oracles against Babylon into the book of Jeremiah. This inclusion probably occurred contemporaneously with the integration of the idea that God limits Babylon's rule to 70 years (Jer 25:12; 29:10), but probably after the composition of an earlier collection of other OANs.⁴⁷ It is plausible to assume that the core of the salvation oracles of Jer 30–31 shares the same literary horizon.⁴⁸ The literary historical status of Jer 51, in contrast, is not easy to determine.

What is clear is that the received form of the Hebrew text of Jer 51 also shows indications of literary revision. Besides small-scale alterations, the passages of Jer 51:15–19 and 51:41–43 probably represent larger additions. At least the former passage reflects a tendency similar to the addition of chapter 50: It intensifies the relationship between Jer 51 and other texts of Jeremiah in quoting material from Jer 10:12–16. Thereby, aspects of alleged “Jeremianic” theology – for instance, God as an almighty creator in contrast to human insignificance – are incorporated into Jer 51. The Seraiah episode of Jer 51:59–64 – part of the Greek text of Jeremiah and thus, older than Jer 51:15–19 – also contributes to the textual coherence of the oracles against Babylon: Among other things, it creates a narrative frame looking back to the beginning of chapter 50:3. The conviction that the desolation of Babylon involves a total absence of living creatures (לבלתי היות בו יושב למאדם ועד בהמה) in 51:62 appears first in 50:3 (ולא יהיה יושב בה מאדם ועד בהמה) and, thus, frames chapters 50–51.⁴⁹ As stated in the introduction, the idea that the oracles against Babylon were written by Jeremiah on a “single scroll” (ספר אחד in Jer 51:60) further corroborates a reading of Jer 51 alongside chapter 50. This indicates that the Seraiah episode was most likely not an authentic part of Jer 51, but was added later, possibly alongside the incorporation of the material of Jer 50.⁵⁰

These observations suggest that later redactors saw the need to bring the oracles of chapter 51 closer to chapter 50 and other texts from the book of Jeremiah. It is plausible to assume that this interest has resulted in other

47 See, e.g., Holladay, *Jeremiah*, 23: “One must make a distinction between a shorter collection without the oracles against Babylon, and the full collection that includes the oracles against Babylon [...]” Holladay’s pre-exilic dating of Jer 50–51 remains, however, very speculative.

48 See Schmid, *Buchgestalten*, 201–3 or Allen, *Jeremiah*, 502.

49 See Fischer, *Jeremia 26–52*, 629 or Stipp, *Jeremia 25–52*, 809.

50 Similarly, Stipp, *Jeremia 25–52*, 809.

additions or glosses within Jer 51, as well. This article cannot provide an in-depth literary critical analysis of the chapter. However, it is possible to highlight further cases of incoherence. For example, the shift to a first-person plural in sections 51:9–10 and 51:51 comes very unexpected. It is only there that the oracles have Israel/Judah speak as “we.” These verses might be secondary glosses, reflecting on the implications of the preceding judgement for Israel/Judah.⁵¹ Strikingly, they deploy motifs that can be found at other places in the book of Jeremiah, as well.⁵² Furthermore, the aforementioned sequence of Jer 51:41–43 interrupts the divine speech of 51:36–40, 44. These verses suddenly switch to past tense verbal forms (“Sheshach is taken” in 51:41), in contrast to the literary context which refers to the divine promise to destroy Babylon soon. Notably, this sequence bears a resemblance to the oracle against Moab in Jer 48.⁵³ Thus, there is reason to assume that Jer 51 also underwent small-scale literary revisions. Some of them seem to aim for the harmonisation of the text of Jer 51 with other texts of the book of Jeremiah.

Despite these possible cases of later additions, most of Jer 51* can still be regarded as the oldest anti-Babylonian material found in the book of Jeremiah. Texts like Jer 51:7 speaking about “a golden cup” or the sword poem 51:20–23 might represent traces of older sayings about Babylon serving as a divine tool. In general, the older material of Jer 51* bears some resemblance with anti-Assyrian sayings, for example with Isa 10:5–19 or Nah 1–3. The final question to address is whether this material has been part of an earlier collection of OANs in the book of Jeremiah or whether it has existed independent from its present literary context. This issue is complex, and it requires a more detailed analysis. Regarding the length of the chapter, it is at least possible to imagine that the long oracle of Jer 51* once served as the sole oracle against Babylon in the context of a collection of OANs. But the literary connections between Jer 51* and other OANs in Jeremiah are minimal. Thus, it is also possible that it was not before the addition of Jer 50 that the older material of Jer 51 became part of the Jeremiah tradition.

51 See Rudolph, *Jeremia*, 307 who regards only v. 10 as an addition, but notes that the focus on “our vindication(s)” (צִדְקָתֵנוּ) stands in contrast to the theological conviction of Israel’s/Judah’s guilt in other parts of the book of Jeremiah.

52 Note, for instance, the motifs of “disgrace” (חֲרָפָה) and “insult” (בְּלִמָּה) in Jer 51:51 which also appear in Jer 20:8, 11; 24:9, or of “strangers” (זָרִים) with possible links to Jer 51:9; 30:8.

53 E.g., in the motif of the lost “pride” (תְּהִלָּה) in Jer 51:41//48:2 or the אִיְכָה-formula in Jer 51:41//48:17.

A conciliatory hypothesis could be developed with a perspective on material culture and textuality, as proposed by Nathan Mastnjak.⁵⁴ In a comparative approach, he argues that – up until the early Persian period – biblical texts were mostly transmitted on individual manuscripts or sheets of papyrus, not on large leather scrolls. These contained only shorter sections of text.⁵⁵ It is thus plausible to assume that Jer 51* was once one out of several individual collections of prophetic sayings against other nations which might have, historically speaking, had nothing to do with the 6th century prophet.⁵⁶ The present form of Jer 50–51, then, must be regarded as a hybrid textual product: It is witness to the transition from individual collections to the formation of larger textual units, what Mastnjak calls “book scroll.”⁵⁷ While parts of Jer 51 might have once formed part of an individual collection of sayings hoping for the divine destruction of Babylon, later redactors copied and pasted this and other texts to incorporate the idea of a fall of Babylon into what should become the book of Jeremiah.

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- 54 N. Mastnjak, “Jeremiah as Collection: Scrolls, Sheets, and the Problem of Textual Arrangement”, *CBQ* 80 (1/2018) 25–44, on pp. 37–40. See also N. Mastnjak, *Before the Scrolls: A Material Approach to Israel's Prophetic Library* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2023), 3–29.
 55 Cf. the recent studies by David M. Carr: D.M. Carr, “Rethinking the Materiality of Biblical Texts: From Source, Tradition and Redaction to a Scroll Approach”, *ZAW* 132 (2020), 594–621 and D.M. Carr, “Background and Aims of a Scroll Approach to the Formation of the Hebrew Bible”, *AABNER* 3 (2/2023), 9–79.
 56 Cf. C.J. Sharp, *Jeremiah 26–52* (IEKAT; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2022), 316–7 taking up Mastnjak's theory.
 57 Mastnjak, “Jeremiah”, 43.

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