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An Overview of the Field of Jeremiah's Oracles Against the Nations

Prolegomenon: A Lack of Interest

The most notable aspect in the field of OAN studies is the lack of attention that has traditionally been given to the OANs. This state of affairs is commonly lamented by scholars of the OANs (either Jeremiah's or the OANs more generally). For instance, Christensen begins his 1971 dissertation, *Transformations of the War Oracle in Old Testament Prophecy,* with the comment, "The oracles against the nations (OAN) in Old Testament prophecy have received relatively little attention in biblical research of the past century."[1] Another example is Davies who in 1989 observes in *The Book of Isaiah*, "There is very little in the standard textbooks on prophecy about the oracles against foreign nations and related material, despite their evident theological interest, and even detailed studies in this area are rather rare, except perhaps for the protracted discussion over whether it is proper to regard Deutero-Isaiah as a universalist."[2]

One of the reasons attributed to the lack of interest in the OANs is because they have often been considered later additions and therefore of secondary importance. Indeed, Holladay writes in 1960 in his essay on "Style, Irony, and Authenticity in Jeremiah" that, "One of the chief goals of critics of the book of Jeremiah has always been to isolate the *ipsissima verba* of the prophet and thereby to enter more understandingly into his message."[3] This is reflected in Eissfeldt's *The Old Testament:*

1. Christensen, *Transformations*, 1.
2. Davies, "Destiny," 93. See also Geyer, *Mythology and Lament*, 6.
3. Holladay, "Style," 44.

An Introduction where he speaks only of the authenticity and authorship of Jeremiah's OANs, plus their placement in relation to chapter 25.[4] As well, Frank North's essay on the Ammonites in Jeremiah 49:1–6 is solely concerned with glosses and corruptions in order to reconstruct the text.[5]

Christensen also argues that in the nineteenth century the main aim of prophecy was seen as concerned with universal monotheism and moral values, and thus "the narrow nationalism of the foreign-nation oracles appeared to have little relevance for anyone. The OAN tradition constituted the dregs of the prophetic movement."[6] Another reason is given by Bellis in 1999 who remarks (though it is not her view) in "Poetic Structure and Intertextual Logic in Jeremiah 50": "The literary genre of the oracles in Jeremiah 50 is that of prophecies against the nations. In the whole Hebrew Bible this genre has perhaps been paid the least attention. The reason is understandable. The hatred and bloodthirst displayed in these oracles is an embarrassment to the more humane sensibilities of modern believers, both Christian and Jewish."[7] However, some have tackled the subject and as a starting point we will take the surveys provided by Christensen, Reimer, and Kessler.

Brief Overview of History of Scholarship

Christensen divides the history of OAN scholarship into three periods of increasing refinement of methodology: nineteenth century German literary criticism; German form criticism; and the proliferation of extra-biblical materials, which meant that ancient Israelite prophecy could be studied religio-historically. In general, he argues, the early literary critics (for example, Schwally, Volz) relegated the OANs to exilic or post-exilic times, whereas form critics (for example, Gressmann, Bardtke) reversed the picture and saw them as among the earliest forms of prophetic speech.

Reimer laments twentieth-century disregard of Jer 50–51 "after the interest shown by the nineteenth century writers" and claims, as Christensen similarly does, that when these chapters were not ignored,

4. Eissfeldt, *OT*, 362–64.
5. North, "Oracle against Ammonites," 37–43.
6. Christensen, *Transformations*, 1.
7. Bellis, "Poetic Structure," 180.

their study was dominated by two questions: authenticity; and structural problems.[8] Reimer's own dissertation is itself a structural analysis of Jer 50–51.

Kessler argues that Bardtke's 1936 paper, "Jeremia der Fremdvölkerprophet," in which he proposed that Jeremiah prophesied to the nations in his youth (Jer 1:5), marked the end of the older literary criticism in some ways and that following it, "some sort of a passive consensus emerged, in large part because these oracles have failed to attract much attention."[9] Kessler supports his assertion by drawing attention to the commentaries. John Bright's Anchor Bible commentary was the main work between 1965 and 1986, and in 1968 Rudolph's classic commentary was published. Though Rudolph's 1968 commentary was more nuanced, Kessler observes, neither Bright nor Rudolph differed much from the general consensus regarding the OANs being an early genre but largely inauthentic.[10]

The change came in the 1980s with Holladay's and Carroll's commentaries, and the first volume of McKane's. Holladay was interested in the literary and historical questions and considered much of Jer 50–51 to be authentic. Carroll denied that the book of Jeremiah gives much access to the historical Jeremiah. McKane's commentary was concerned with the history of the text and in his first volume McKane introduced the idea of the rolling corpus. However, in Kessler's view it is Brueggemann's 1998 commentary that is the most useful, particularly for a wider public, with its attention to historical, literary, and theological concerns.[11]

Characteristic Emphases and Notable Contributions

Although the above surveys mainly cite works on Jer 50–51, their emphases are characteristic of the study of Jeremiah's OANs in general in that issues of authenticity and authorship are common ones within a historical-critical paradigm. However, by no means have all historical-

8. Reimer, *Oracles*, 1–6.

9. Bardtke, "Jeremia," part 1, 209–39; Bardtke, "Jeremia," part 2, 240–62; Kessler, *Battle*, 19.

10. Kessler, *Battle*, 21. Rudolph, *Jeremiah*, 266, attributes much of chs. 46–49 to Jeremiah, but not ch. 48.

11. Kessler, *Battle*, 7–31.

critical studies dealt exclusively with these two questions and other points of interest have emerged. The *Sitz im Leben* of the OANs is a case in point, as is the comparative analysis of the OANs with other ANE cultures. All these topics will now be addressed, along with notable contributions to the field, namely McKane's "rolling corpus." These areas of interest are not discrete units within scholarship and there is significant overlap between them. This is particularly so in the field of comparative studies, which has sometimes formed the basis for furthering the understanding of the OAN's *Sitz im Leben*.

Authorship and Date

There are three scholars who stand out as major contributors in the development of OAN studies: Eichhorn, Budde, and Gottwald. The first of these, Eichhorn (1752–1827),[12] is notable not for any discovery in the OAN field, but because he influenced the methodology, or, to put it another way, changed the nature of study. Eichhorn stands at the beginning of modern biblical studies and set the trend for much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, for he was a key person in introducing in the late eighteenth/early nineteenth century the new approach to modern biblical scholarship in which concerns about authorship and dating were paramount. He concluded in *Die hebräischen Propheten* that Jer 50–51 was not authentic, dating the chapters between 535 and 160 BCE since the Persians (who conquered Babylon in about 535 BCE according to Eichhorn) had not emerged as a threat before then.[13]

Budde, a colleague of Wellhausen, continued the historical-critical approach and in 1878 published his article on 50–51, "Ueber die Capitel 50 und 51 des Buches Jeremia." Budde's detailed study was, in Kessler's words, "One of the most thorough studies ever undertaken of Jeremiah 50–51"[14] (it is seventy seven pages in length) and proved to be influential. His essay was a piece of literary criticism in which he was greatly concerned with issues of authenticity. Here he argued that the prose and poetic passages should be treated separately, a stance that most of the subsequent commentaries (for example, Weiser's) later accepted. Due to his study of the vocabulary, Budde also thought that the editor of

12. Kessler, *Battle*, 13.
13. Eichhorn, *Die hebräischen Propheten*, 255, 257.
14. Kessler, *Battle*, 15.

50–51 was dependent on the late exilic, anti-Babylonian oracles of Isa 13 as well as Deutero-Isaiah, and Ezekiel, though he retained the prose narratives as authentic.[15]

Gottwald is the third of the scholars noted here. He utilized the work of three Israeli scholars (Diman-Haran, Kaufmann, and Seeligman) and concluded in 1964 in *All the Kingdoms of the Earth* that the OANs were one of the earliest, if not the earliest, forms of Hebrew poetry and that they incorporated non-Israelite motifs and styles.[16] Furthermore, as the title of his book suggests, his work is a detailed examination of the relationship between Israel and her neighbors in the different OT prophetic periods. Though Gottwald did not take the same approach as von Rad,[17] the latter also argued in his definitive study, *Holy War in Ancient Israel* in 1958, and then again in *Old Testament Theology* in 1960, that the war oracles are one of the oldest in prophetic tradition and that the OANs are one form of the war oracle.[18]

There have been others who have changed the face of Jeremiah studies, such as Duhm, who introduced in his commentary the idea of three major sources to Jeremiah. However, since his theories are largely irrelevant to the OANs (he followed the school of thought that considered them inauthentic) he has not been selected for representation here.

Writing in 1971 (though his dissertation was not published until 1975), Christensen claimed that the authenticity debate was ongoing.[19] In fact the debate continues still as can be seen from the work of Geyer, whose 2009 response to Hagedorn is the latest publication on the OANs.[20] Issues of dating and textual analysis also form a major component of Geyer's earlier works.[21]

15. Budde, "Kapitel 50 und 51," 428–70, 529–62.
16. Gottwald, *All the Kingdoms*, 49.
17. Gottwald, "Holy War," 942.
18. Von Rad, *OT Theology*, 199.
19. Christensen, *Transformations*, 1–15.
20. Geyer, "Another Look," 80–87.
21. Geyer, "Mythology and Culture," 129–45.

Sitz im Leben, Form, and Function

One of the characteristic emphases within the historical-critical paradigm has been to provide a *Sitz im Leben* for the OANs and these have ranged from war, through covenant festivals, ascension rituals, and lamentation rituals, to the royal court.[22] The *Sitz im Leben* often determines what form the OANs are seen to be. They have been designated as war oracles, prophetic judgment speeches, curses, part of cult liturgy, treaty curses, political speeches, and early apocalyptic literature. Sometimes the boundaries merge or it is thought that the OAN developed over time, moving from one category through to another.

Von Rad's analysis (more than Gottwald's) had a significant impact on the understanding of the OANs and found wide acceptance, at least in part, and continues to do so. His influence is apparent in Christensen's attempt in *Transformations of the War Oracle* to plot the evolution of the war oracle. He argued that the OANs stemmed from the war oracle and underwent two main transformations: First, the war oracle as a military strategy became a literary mode of prophetic judgment speech (that is, OAN) in the tenth to eighth centuries BCE, around the time of Amos. Secondly, it moved from the world of international politics to the historical realm of early apocalyptic literature in the opening decades of the sixth century BCE in Jeremiah's time. That is, it moved from judgment on YHWH's national foes to the preservation of the Divine Warrior's people in exile until they returned to Zion.[23] Christensen divided Jeremiah's OANs into three categories: Jeremianic oracles; "archaic" (that is, pre-Jeremianic) oracles; and exilic oracles against Babylon. The oracle against Moab is one of the archaic kind,[24] which means it stemmed from the period of political expansion under Josiah and was subsequently reused and expanded. Thus it was more developed and complex than the Jeremianic OANs.[25]

Where Christensen found three categories within Jeremiah's OANs, Geyer argued in *Mythology and Lament* that there were two basic forms of OANs. The first relates to Amos 1–2 and Ezek 25, which are characterized by a strong note of indictment but a lack of mythological

22. Christensen, *Transformations*, 1–15.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid., 208.
25. Ibid., 248.

language. The second form encompasses the rest of the major bodies of OANs: Isa 13–23; Jer 46–51; and Ezek 25–32 and belongs to the realm of mythology.[26] Geyer's classifications have not been adopted by other scholars and the OANs are not generally seen in terms of mythology. Nevertheless, Geyer's book is a rare work in that one chapter deals specifically with the oracles against Moab in Isa 15–16 and Jer 48. He argues that the language is largely liturgical, the themes mythological and the core is lament. According to Geyer, Jeremiah's oracle concerning Moab describes the struggle between chaos and cosmos.[27] Again, most commentators do not see Jer 48 in cosmic terms, no doubt because the language is not cosmic; in fact the OANs rarely use cosmic language.

More recently, Smelik concluded that the OANs had both a military-political level and an ideological one.[28] Brueggemann, too, is interested in the ideological and rhetorical function of the OANs. In "At the Mercy of Babylon" he surmised that when Israel spoke of the mercy of God it first talked of the mercy of Babylon, daring rhetoric that "asserted that no savage power in the world could separate Israel from God's mercy."[29]

In Hayes' work on international treaties, "The Usage of Oracles against Foreign Nations in Ancient Israel," he suggests that the OANs mean salvation for Israel because in the lamentation, ritual judgment on the nation denotes salvation for Israel.[30] The idea that the OANs function as salvation oracles to Judah still endures, for instance Diamond's introductory chapter in *Troubling Jeremiah* and Carroll's on chapter 25.[31] Another example is Holt, whose interesting slant is that the "foe from the North" oracles are OANs directed against *YHWH's own people*.[32] That the OANs are not always equated with salvation for Israel will be discussed in due course.

26. Geyer, *Mythology and Lament*, 9–20.

27. Ibid., 151–72.

28. Smelik, "Approach to Jeremiah," 1–11.

29. Brueggemann, "Mercy (2004)," 129–30.

30. Hayes, "Usage of OANs," 81–92.

31. Carroll, "Halfway," 82, 85; Diamond, "Introduction," 22. Interestingly, in 2002 Barstad ("Prophecy," 93) phrased it the other way round—promises of salvation to foreigners were words of doom against YHWH's own people.

32. Holt, "Meaning of an Inclusio," 185.

In contrast to the above scholars, Hill, in "The Construction of Time in Jeremiah 25," sees the OANs as demonstrating, as in Amos, that judgment is the same for both Israel/Judah and the nations.[33] Amesz makes similar observations and argues that Jer 50–51 displays YHWH's vengeance and sovereignty.[34] The idea that the OANs function as a declaration of YHWH's sovereignty is a common one and Bellis is representative of many when she claims that Jer 50 "expresses the conviction that there is one Lord of history, who is just and powerful and who will punish those who do evil and vindicate those whose cause is just."[35]

Comparative Studies

Interest in extrabiblical materials increased after the Second World War and in 1968 there were two main works published that studied the OANs in relation to other ANE contexts. The first was Hayes' paper, mentioned above, in which he looked at Sumerian curses.[36] The second was van Dijk's monograph on Ezekiel's prophecy to Tyre, in which the OANs are examined in the light of comparative Canaanite and Semitic studies in terms of linguistic parallels in Ugaritic and other North Western Semitic dialects. Van Dijk optimistically judged such philological and syntactical comparisons as being the way forward in clearing up some of the problematic aspects of the text, which had previously been treated by either emending the text or excising parts in order to "meet the poetical and metrical requirements favoured by the commentators themselves."[37] Boadt too, in 1980 in *Ezekiel's Oracles Against Egypt*, conducted a comparative analysis, concentrating on the grammar and usage of Ugaritic and Phoenician texts. This included examination of ANE OANs outside of the OT. He himself acknowledged that in some ways his work continued that of van Dijk's and, indeed, both these comparative studies were written for the *Biblica et Orientalia* series.

Despite van Dijk's expectation, and although knowledge of ANE languages has aided translation and interpretation of words and phrases, the main contribution of comparative studies in relation to the

33. Hill, "Construction of Time," 149, 155.
34. Amesz, "God of Vengeance?" 99–116.
35. Bellis, "Poetic Structure," 199.
36. Hayes, "Usage of OANs," 81–92.
37. Van Dijk, *Ezekiel's Prophecy*, vii.

OANs has still been in regard to their possible original *Sitz im Leben*. Hagedorn's 2007 paper, "Looking at Foreigners in Biblical and Greek Prophecy" is one such recent example and here he argues, from comparisons with Greek prophecy (in Homer and Herodotus), that the context was one of war (real or imagined). In his view, OANs were one means of reaffirming one's own identity and tended to imply salvation for the nation pronouncing them.[38]

Geyer also is concerned with comparative extra-biblical texts, for example, the Sumerian laments and Ugaritic texts. In his recent response to Hagedorn, he asserts that Hagedorn's comparison is invalid, not least because the Greek OANs were uttered by individuals on particular occasions whereas, as he argues elsewhere, the OT OANs were part of cultic liturgy when the Day of Atonement became linked with the Jubilee.[39] He also disagrees that the OANs were salvation oracles for the nation that uttered them. Geyer bases his comments on an assumption of the *Sitz im Leben* of the OANs, which he addresses in an earlier paper. That is, as discussed above, a cosmic battle between the gods in the sphere of mythology.

Rolling Corpus

Perhaps the most significant development in the field of Jeremiah studies has been the concept of McKane's rolling corpus. Put simply, McKane looks at MT Jeremiah in relation to the shorter LXX Jeremiah and accounts for the difference by means of two separate *Vorlagen*. The MT version developed piecemeal over time via authors and redactors adding short commentary notes on previous verses. McKane comes to this conclusion by investigating places in MT that are very similar to LXX and noticing that where there are divergences, they are usually in the form of explanatory notes present in MT but absent in LXX. Having perceived the method of redaction in MT, he notices other places where this appears to have occurred (even though there are no clues in LXX).[40] McKane develops his theory over chapters 1–25 in the first volume of his commentary, but although he does not seem to use the term "rolling corpus" in relation to chapters 26–52, he sees the same process at work.

38. Hagedorn, "Looking at Foreigners," 432–48.
39. Geyer, "Blood," 1; Geyer, "Another Look," 80–187.
40. McKane, *Jeremiah, vol. 1*, l–lxxxiii.

This is interesting, because it brings Jeremiah's OANs into the same purview as the rest of the book in this respect and, in fact, McKane does not deem the OANs to have been a separate corpus added later to MT and LXX, but considers that they originally existed in MT after 25:13 (where they are in LXX).[41] McKane's rolling corpus thesis is now widely accepted, though Diamond deems all of the papers in *Troubling Jeremiah* to provide counter-texts to the idea, at least in "overcoming some of the inconcinnity McKane has sensed afflicting the tradition."[42]

Work Specifically on Jeremiah's OANs

There are two main distinctive elements in the work on Jeremiah's OANs as opposed to OAN studies in general. First, there is the issue of the order and placement of the OANs being different in LXX and in MT. Secondly, there is the question of the role of Babylon and the significance of the oracle concerning Babylon being last in the collection. The significance arises because Babylon is the specific tool in the rest of the book of Jeremiah that YHWH uses to punish the nations. There is no such equivalent in the other prophetic books.[43]

LXX

Much of the discussion on MT's versus LXX's ordering and placement of the OANs has centered around which came first, with the consensus historically tending to rest on LXX as the more original.[44] Now, however, with the discovery of Qumran fragments witnessing to both traditions, it is generally thought that the two had separate *Vorlagen* and distinct re-

41. McKane, *Jeremiah, vol. 2*, clxiv.

42. Diamond, "Introduction," 24.

43. See also McConville, *Judgment and Promise*, 137.

44. Those who consider LXX's placing of the oracles to be original are: Allen, *Jeremiah*, 458; Clements, *Jeremiah*, 246; Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 577; Holladay, *Jeremiah, vol. 2*, 313, 315; Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37–52*, 181; McKane, *Jeremiah, vol. 2*, 1109; Miller, "Jeremiah," 878 (tentatively); Rudolph, *Jeremiah*, 265; Smothers in Keown et al., *Jeremiah 26–52*, 276; Volz, *Der Prophet Jeremia*, 381. Jones (*Jeremiah*, 484) is one of few who consider MT's placing to be original. Those who consider LXX's sequence to be more original are: Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 497, 759; Duhm, *Jeremia*, 337; Jones, *Jeremiah*, 484–85; Smothers in Keown et al., *Jeremiah 26–52*, 276. Those who consider MT's sequence to be original are: Holladay, *Jeremiah, vol. 2*, 313; Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37–52*, 181; McKane, *Jeremiah, vol. 2*, 1110; Rudolph, *Jeremiah*, 265; Volz, *Der Prophet Jeremia*, 382.

dactional histories.[45] Nevertheless, the debate still continues. In his 1992 article, "Text and Redaction in Jeremiah's Oracles Against the Nations," Watts is almost solely concerned with the differences between MT and LXX and seeks to demonstrate that one author was responsible for most of them.[46] Yet, in his final paragraph he asserts that the response to his results should be that the OANs are no longer "dismissed as a secondary scribal addition" and that ultimately they should "be integrated into interpretations of the message of the book as a whole and given the attention which their prominent positions in both the LXX and MT suggest they deserve."[47]

Carolyn Sharp's 1997 article, "'Take Another Scroll and Write'" is a detailed textual analysis of the differences between MT and LXX. In this paper, like McKane, she tentatively concludes that the textual state of the oracles seem to support the idea that there were two different *Vorlagen* underlying MT and LXX.[48] Also in 1997 Lundbom wrote a book on ancient Hebrew rhetoric in Jeremiah in which he concluded similarly, even speculating that Baruch was the custodian of LXX's *Vorlage* and Seraiah that of MT.[49]

Babylon

Most of the books and papers on Jeremiah's OANs published in the twenty-first century have focused mainly on Babylon. That is, van Hecke's "Metaphorical Shifts in the Oracles against Babylon (Jer 50–51)," Kessler's *Battle of the Gods*, and Holt's "The Meaning of an Inclusio," all in 2003, and Smelik's, Amesz's, and Brueggemann's essays in *Reading the Book of Jeremiah* in 2004.[50] Previously, discussions concentrated on the

45. Sharp, "Take Another Scroll," 509; see also Allen, *Jeremiah*, 458; Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 51–55, 757; Clements, *Jeremiah*, 246; Craigie et al., *Jeremiah 1–25*, xlii–xlv; Feinberg, *Jeremiah*, 16; Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, 25; Holladay, *Jeremiah, vol. 2*, 313, 467; Jones, *Jeremiah*, 49–50; Kreuzer, "Old Greek," 226–27; Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37–52*, xiv; McKane, *Jeremiah, vol. 1*, l–li; *Jeremiah, vol. 2*, clxxii–clxxiii, clxxiv; Miller, "Jeremiah," 567–68; Stulman, *Jeremiah*, 8; Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 29, 119, 686; Watts, "Text and Redaction," 446.

46. Watts, "Text and Redaction," 446–47.

47. Ibid., 447.

48. Sharp, "Take Another Scroll," 487–516.

49. Lundbom, *Jeremiah Rhetoric*, 40.

50. Some of these essays have been published previously, e.g., Brueggemann's essay was first published in 1991 in *JBL*.

putative turnaround in Jeremiah's views regarding Babylon in that up until chapters 50–51 Jeremiah has insisted that Judah must submit to Babylon as YHWH's tool of punishment, but in these two chapters he castigates Babylon. However, recent works, such as Brueggemann's, have tended to move away from this debate to more ideological questions. In Brueggemann's case these relate to Babylon's political power. However, since the focus on Babylon concerns only Jer 50–51 and has little bearing on Jer 48, or the OANs in general, no more will be said here on the issue. Nevertheless, the increased interest in the oracle concerning Babylon (the longest oracle concerning the biggest player on the ANE field in the sixth century) highlights the fact that there has not been an equivalent rise in attention given to the oracle concerning Moab.

Significance of Literary / Synchronic Readings

Shift in Focus

By the beginning of the twenty-first century, scholars were beginning to talk of some aspects of historical-critical study in the past tense. For instance, Holt writes "Gone are the questions of former times concerning Jeremiah's biography or the historical circumstances behind the poetry and prose of the Book of Jeremiah."[51] Kessler talks in 2003 about "bygone historicism" when he gives the aim of his own work:

> Since the goal of this work is "to hear" the text (to discover what it "says"), concerns with the shape, form, and sound of the text are high on the agenda. However, literary artistry is never viewed as an appropriate goal in itself. Such a goal stops prematurely, neglecting serious interpretation which should flow from a thoughtful preoccupation with the text. It is assumed that our preoccupation demands a positive, sympathetic perspective on the text. There may be a connection between the fact that 19th century writers were often quite negative in their comments on the text and the fact that they often failed to grasp its proclamatory aspect: what the text is trying to say. More often than not, they spent virtually all their energy on what might lie behind the text (historical criticism), with the unhappy result that they ran out of steam when they should have engaged in constructive exegesis. Such is the heritage of bygone historicism.[52]

51. Holt, "Meaning of an Inclusio," 184.

52. Kessler, *Battle*, 9.

In his essay in *Troubling Jeremiah* Kessler writes, "Reading numerous commentaries and their judgments about what is 'authentic' and what is not, or what could be Jeremiah speaking, and what could not possibly be him, becomes not only tiresome, it provides no help in understanding the text."[53] Kessler tries to move beyond the limits of literary and form criticism in his own work and give a literary reading of the text by introducing rhetorical criticism as a methodological tool.[54]

Kessler also takes issue with those who see no coherence in Jeremiah: "Jeremiah has enjoyed an honoured place in the canon, having been cherished by the faith communities of both synagogue and church as a respected part of the 'holy book.' It therefore falls to the responsible exegete to elucidate the text for the benefit of its readers: what are the words, the form, the structure, seen in their context—in their totality and unity—saying? What is its rhetorical function of the text [*sic*], but more crucially, what is its kerygma?"[55] For Kessler, then, the move away from purely historical-critical questions is a welcome one.

Perdue's chapter ("The Book of Jeremiah in Old Testament Theology") in *Troubling Jeremiah* also acknowledges that, at the time of compiling *A Prophet to the Nations*, the key issues had been "largely historical in nature" but that there were now new methods of interpretations and fresh questions.[56] Certainly, the essays in *Troubling Jeremiah* regarding the OANs tend to de-emphasize the historical questions. Perdue, in contrast to Kessler, however, has reservations about this move:

> The most pressing question for me nowadays, however, is whether these more recent methods may be adapted to and incorporated within previous historical-critical work, or whether they represent what some of our colleagues call a "paradigm shift" that, for the most part, tends to dismiss the past in order to make room for the new . . . Today the cacophony of competing attempts to be heard has become a din of dissonance and a Tower of Babel in modern scholarship. This fragmentation (I prefer not to use the term "crisis") is centered in epistemology, for in these times we have many ways of knowing, issuing

53. Kessler, "Function," 72.
54. Kessler, *Battle*, 7–31.
55. Ibid., 10.
56. Perdue, "Jeremiah in OT Theology," 321–22.

> from different genders, sexual orientations, ethnic groups, and cultures.[57]

Brueggemann takes the in-between position in his chapter on the future of Jeremiah studies when he states that "It is not news any longer that scholarship has moved decisively from *diachronic* to *synchronic* ways of reading. And while some scholars may be polemical about the matter, most are inclined to adopt something of a both/and approach."[58] At the same time he points out that "It is clear that *synchronic reading* and *canonical interpretation* are not to be equated. Nonetheless, an important convergence may be seen in these approaches."[59] Brueggemann sees the shift from diachronic to synchronic as marked by a move from historical analysis to rhetorical study.[60]

This is probably best reflected in the commentaries. The earlier German commentaries (Duhm, Volz, Weiser, Rudolph) were primarily concerned with textual variants and emendations, authenticity and redaction, and literary style. More recent commentaries (for example, Brueggemann's, Miller's, and Fretheim's) speak of power struggles, the nature of YHWH's involvement with other nations, and the wider implications of such texts. Carroll's 1986 commentary, with its ideological focus, was probably the first to depart from the mainstream in this way. Obviously, there have still been recent historical-critical commentaries published on Jeremiah, for example, Holladay's Hermeneia volumes (1986 and 1998), and McKane's ICC volumes (1986 and 1996). Lundbom's three volume Anchor Bible commentary (1999, 2004, and 2004) is also primarily in this mould, despite having other concerns as well.

The tide has changed even in relation to the OANs for there has been increased interest in the last decade or two, particularly in relation to Jer 50–51. Just four years after Bellis was lamenting the dearth of literature relating to the OANs[61] Kessler was able to write in *Battle of the Gods*:

57. Ibid., 322.
58. Brueggemann, *Covenanted Self*, 405.
59. Ibid., 408.
60. Ibid., 409.
61. Quoted earlier as referenced by footnote 7.

> In our survey of scholarship on the Jeremian oracles against Babylon, we have witnessed a growing interest in these oracles after many years of neglect. At one time, compared to the rest of the book, Jer 50–51 resembled a quiet pool, removed from the tumult of the main stream of scholarship, which habitually shunted aside (or just plain ignored!) the OAN, but above all the oracles against Babylon. Clearly, an enormous change has taken place in Jeremiah studies generally.[62]

This change is most easily demonstrated by glancing at collections of essays on Jeremiah. When *A Prophet to the Nations* was published in 1984, none of the twenty three papers comprising the book was dedicated to chapters 46–51. This is perhaps particularly surprising given the title of the collection. In the introductory chapter to *Prophet to the Nations*, Perdue writes that the history of biblical criticism "is clearly mirrored in Jeremiah studies."[63] Whether this is the reason that the OANs are not represented in any of the essays in the book is not discussed. However, he does list the issues that draw most attention and the OANs are not among them: date of Jeremiah's call; Jeremiah's view of and / or relation to the Deuteronomic reform; the identity of the enemy from the North; textual differences between MT and LXX; and the composition and development of the book. "Undergirding and stimulating most Jeremianic research since the inception of modern criticism is the concern to discover the Jeremiah of history."[64] Perdue himself attributes the OANs to later redactors.[65]

By the time *Troubling Jeremiah* was published in 1999 there were two essays out of twenty-five that related to the OANs; both of these papers dealt in different ways with Jeremiah's oracle concerning Babylon in chapters 50–51. This interest in Babylon did not abate, so that when *Reading the Book of Jeremiah* was published in 2004, out of fourteen essays the three concerning the OANs all related to Babylon, though only one of these was solely concerned with chapters 50–51.

It seems that the situation was a little better in Isaianic studies, for in 1989 four of thirty essays in *The Book of Isaiah* were dedicated to the nations: one concerned the destiny of the nations; another cen-

62. Kessler, *Battle*, 28.
63. Perdue, "Jeremiah in Modern Research," 1.
64. Ibid.
65. Ibid., 7.

tered on Babylon; the third addressed the OANs in chapters 13–23 as a whole; and the fourth concerned the oracle against Babylon and Assyria in 14:22–27. Interestingly, studies of the book of Amos tend to give more attention to the OANs found within it than do studies on other prophetic books. In fact, in the 1974 collection of essays, *Studies on Prophecy* there is one essay (amongst twelve) on Amos's OANs (the only essay on either the OANs or Amos). How much of this is due to the fact that Amos opens with the OANs (they come in the middle of Isaiah and at the end of MT Jeremiah) is impossible to judge, but their position at the start of the book means that they are hard to ignore.

Nevertheless, overall, there has been increased interest in the OANs and this shift has taken place since the inception of Brevard Childs' canonical approach. This is unlikely to be purely coincidental, for privileging the final form of the text raises the profile of later textual additions (if such they be). At the same time, one does not necessarily lead to the other for even a canonical approach allows for a view of "a canon within a canon" and the OANs are not normally seen as the most central texts of the OT. I would venture to suggest that one factor in the renewed interest may be (Western) cultural climate changes. First, the world has become a "global village" and international issues are high on the agenda at many levels. Secondly, in Western "post-modern" society, traditional social norms and expectations are challenged and hard questions are asked. This may in part account for what seems to be a greater fascination in scholarship than previously with the "hard texts of the Bible," though such is still a minority interest. As well, in "post-Christian" UK, at least, as the general populace has moved away from regarding the Bible as "inspired Scripture," such a focus may also have arisen from a need to justify the Bible/OT. In addition, new hermeneutical perspectives have also enabled the hard texts of the Bible to be readdressed and perhaps reclaimed; one thinks immediately of Phyllis Trible's feminist readings in *Texts of Terror*.

The interest in Babylon in the twenty-first century may be because of the prominent role of Babylon elsewhere in Jeremiah, because Babylon is the epitome of a "wicked" foreign nation, or because in a contemporary world with arguably only one major superpower (the U.S.), which dominates much of the rest, Babylon is the nation that resonates the clearest. As will become apparent throughout the book, Brueggemann is an example of a scholar who draws links between the

U.S. and Babylon. Nevertheless, whilst Babylon has become the focus of some studies and more has been written on the OANs in general, the oracles concerning other nations still appear to be under-represented in Jeremiah scholarship.

The OANs in Their Literary Context

The mix of interests, some with a purely historical-critical focus and others concerned with the final form, is indicative of the state of current scholarship in Biblical Studies. That is, the work of historical criticism continues (as Hagedorn's and Geyer's latest papers demonstrate), whilst those privileging the final form of the text work in parallel with this older method, if not in tandem with it. Sometimes the research is similar though the aims take diverging paths, for instance intricate textual studies are undertaken as a means of building up a literary image rather than a historical one. Steinmann's 1992 paper on the order of Amos's OANs is one such example of a literary study. Here he seeks to demonstrate that there is coherence in the order of Amos's OANs and, convinced that he does so successfully, calls on those who view some OANs as later additions to prove their case. Acknowledging Paul's work on catchphrases twenty-one years previously, he surmises that the order is determined by the type of nation (for example, city state, nation, or special nation) plus its geographical location.[66]

The work of Shalom M. Paul cited by Steinmann is his 1971 paper on Amos's OANs. In this, Paul is concerned with discovering a pattern in the ordering of the OANs rather than in their historic setting. This he achieves by noting that the nation oracles are linked to each other by means of catchwords or phrases.[67] Paul's literary contribution came some time before such studies became common in the field of biblical studies. This may be due at least in part to his background of midrashic teaching where the text in its final form was read imaginatively. That is, a literary approach would have been more congenial to a Jewish mind such as Paul's than it would to a Protestant historical-critical scholar standing against the backdrop of the Reformation and Enlightenment.[68]

66. Steinmann, "Order," 683–89.

67. Paul, "Amos 1:3–2:3," 397–403.

68. For a further discussion on Jewish thinking and historical criticism see Levenson, *Death*, 33–61, 82–105.

Another example of textual work undertaken in order to understand the literary form is by another Jewish scholar, Adele Berlin in her 1995 article on Zephaniah's OANs and Israelite Cultural Myth in *Fortunate the Eyes that See*. Here she accounts in a literary rather than historical manner for the selection and omission of nations.[69] Van Hecke, too, looks at the coherence of the oracle and its position within the final form by means of its metaphors, specifically the pastoral ones.[70]

Kessler's *Battle of the Gods* is also largely a literary study, though in chapter 7 he looks at the canonical context of the oracle in ever widening contexts (Jeremiah's OANs, the rest of the book of Jeremiah, Isaiah's OANs), and chapter 8 is a historical discussion. In fact, he states that, "Whilst the approach is literary, its ultimate orientation is biblical-theological."[71] He concludes that Babylon's sins were: doing her task of subduing nations too enthusiastically; hubris; and idolatry (idolatry among the nations will be discussed in chapter 7).[72] As might be expected from the title of his book, he considers that YHWH defeats Marduk. He observes that there are not only contrasts but analogies between Judah and Babylon and sees the OANs against Babylon as the only ones that are not salvation oracles for Judah (but are rather judgment on Babylon).[73]

Stulman's 2005 commentary on Jeremiah is, perhaps, a little disappointing in its treatment of Jer 48, for whilst the structure indicates that it will give a sequential reading of the chapter, Stulman does little more than retell Jer 48 in prosaic form. On the other hand, Allen's Jeremiah commentary published in 2008 yields one or two nuggets that are new. For instance, he argues that some of the OANs have a lexical link to the ones immediately preceding and following it, in terms of shared vocabulary or ideas.[74] Though Paul did similarly regarding the OANs in Amos (see above), nothing comparable appears to have been attempted in Jeremiah. It is the link with the vocabulary of chapter 47 (weeping, falling silent, sword, etc.) that persuades Allen that Jer 48 has been placed where it now stands in MT, a suggestion

69. Berlin, "Zephaniah," 175–84.
70. Van Hecke, "Metaphorical Shifts," 68–88.
71. Kessler, *Battle*, 12.
72. Ibid., 209.
73. Ibid., 211–13, 222.
74. Allen, *Jeremiah*, 460.

that has not previously been offered.[75] Also unique to Allen is the dividing of Jeremiah 48 into two roughly symmetrical parts: 1a*b*–27 and 28–44 with 45–47 an addition. Apart from this, however, his main commentary proceeds verse by verse through the chapter and the comments run along conventional lines.

Paul Raabe

Paul Raabe's 1995 article, "Why Prophetic Oracles against the Nations?" published in *Fortunate the Eyes that See*, explicitly addresses the purpose of the OANs and, in my opinion, his paper stands as a beacon in the field of OANs in terms of perspicacity in handling the text in its final form. Raabe begins by pointing out that the OANs are a significant part of prophecy. He then takes Isa 13–23 as his test case and lists all the reasons for judgment that are given in the texts themselves, grouping them in categories.

His paper has clear headings, including one clarifying his title question, which he argues needs to be split into two: 1) the ultimate goal of the future *act* of divine judgment; and 2) the rhetorical purpose of the *speech*. Also, he breaks down the purpose of the OANs according to Israel and the nations, arguing that the nations were an implicit audience, even if they did not actually hear the speech. Some of these purposes overlap and it is arguable whether they are all distinct from each other, but nevertheless Raabe organizes the material lucidly.

Also unique to Raabe are the three models of OANs he proposes based on the relationship of woe and weal. These are: the Jonah model (divine repentance view), in which judgment is pronounced in an unconditional form, though if a nation repents, YHWH will relent; the Amos model (sequential view) in which judgment is irrevocable but the nation can still have a future bound up in Israel's; and the Obadiah model (eschatological view) in which a nation is accused and summoned to change its ways before the inevitable, universal-eschatological day of YHWH. Jer 48 falls under his second model, for judgment is inevitable and inescapable but restoration follows.

Finally, Raabe looks at the rhetorical purpose of the oracles, again according to hearer, that is, all hearers (nations cannot escape by relying on their own resources), Israelite hearers (promises of rescue, warning

75. Ibid., 478.

against foreign alliances, warnings against desiring other nations' gods, and a background for accusations against Israel—to show that they are no better than the goyim) and non-Israelite hearers. The purpose for non-Israelite hearers correlates with the three OAN models: that if a nation repents then YHWH might relent; that judgment is inevitable; that the accusations are designed to change a nation's ways. The weakest section of his paper is that in which he argues that the non-Israelite hearers might actually have heard the OANs. For while the oracles might have been addressed to the nations and there are no logistical reasons why a nation could not have heard them (for example, a prophet or representative could have travelled or uttered their words to a foreign personage in Judah), he argues that texts like Jer 18:7–8 imply that a nation must have heard the message since there is a possibility of repentance. Other commentators do not draw out this logic in 18:7–8, which may well be because the context of Jer 18:7–8 is Judah and not the nations. Nevertheless, whether or not nations heard the oracles, they are an implied audience and Raabe addresses this.

Antecedents for Reading as Christian Scripture

Raabe concludes his paper by asserting that "Indeed, one can say that from the prophetic point of view when the God of Israel intervenes in history, the whole world ultimately benefits."[76] This final sentence of Raabe's is understated in terms of a Christian reading (in fact there is nothing specifically Christian about it), but is typical of the kind of comments that scholars tend to make when addressing wider questions about God and the world (often in their final paragraph). For, generally, modern biblical scholarship has not directly engaged with faith questions. However, this has changed in recent years and along with a move towards literary and synchronic readings, there has been a greater interest in the interpreter's role and context. Therefore, questions of reading texts as Christian Scripture have come more explicitly to the fore. Brueggemann formulates this effectively when he writes:

> We read the texts where we are. We read the text, as we are bound to read it, on the horizon of China's Tiananmen Square and Berlin's wall, of Panama's canal and South Africa's changing situation, of Kuwait's lure of oil. Or among us, when we are dar-

76. Raabe, "Why Prophetic Oracles?" 254.

> ing, we may read the text in relation to the politics of publication, the play of power in promotion and tenure, the ambiguities of acquiring grants, and the seductions of institutional funding. We inevitably read the text where we sit. What happens in the act of theological interpretation is not an "application" of the text, nor an argument about contemporary policy, but an opening of a rhetorical field in which an urgent voice other than our own is set in the midst of imperial self-sufficiency and "colonial" despair. We continue to listen while the voice of this text has its say against other voices that claim counterauthority.[77]

Whilst the above quotation is not specifically Christian in focus, Brueggemann's wider framework is and this sits within it.

Conclusion

So, then, in the last century, the questions brought to the book of Jeremiah and chapters 46–51 particularly have ranged from authorship and identity of the *ipsissima verba*, through the *Sitz im Leben* and historical setting, to the rhetorical function and ideological intentions. That the OANs were deemed not relevant to discussions on the *ipsissima verba* of Jeremiah is probably one reason why they were under-represented in scholarship. Therefore, one of the major milestones on the journey has been a shift to literary and synchronic approaches. Others have been McKane's rolling corpus, scholars asking what purpose the OANs had, and Carroll, and Brueggemann, *et al.* bringing contemporary perspectives and situations to the text.

Though the move has generally been from a diachronic to a synchronic approach, historical questions are still addressed. Furthermore, whilst historical-critical commentaries tend not to ask what the text might mean in a context other than that of the original, such as a Christian (or Jewish) frame of reference, they are nevertheless hospitable to these other questions. Likewise, few works interested in literary and canonical issues ignore historical-critical observations. Nevertheless, the type of investigation that Jeremiah's OANs have undergone has changed over time. That is, to paint with a broad brush, whereas once almost every piece of work was of a historical-critical nature, many competing perspectives are now also brought to bear upon the texts

77. Brueggemann, "Mercy (2004)," 133–34.

(or vice versa), for example, ideological, rhetorical, etc. As well, there has been a fresh move to take into account the interpreter's context, including that of faith, and to read texts as Christian Scripture within a contemporary context. Fretheim, Miller, Brueggemann, Jones, and Clements all operate within a Christian framework and draw out different aspects of the text. Since these commentators explicitly read Jeremiah as Christian Scripture, they will be analyzed in due course. Before that, however, there are two pieces of analysis that need to be undertaken: a comparison of Jeremiah's oracle concerning Moab in MT with, first, LXX and, secondly, Isaiah's parallel oracle. Thus the investigation will now turn to MT Jer 48 in the light of LXX Jer 31.