What Does “Deuteronomistic” Designate? A Response to Hermann-Josef Stipp

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I wish to begin my response by thanking Professor Hermann-Josef Stipp for his clear, meticulous, and carefully argued paper, which clearly results from decades of dedicated research. Its topic goes beyond my own area of research, and I have no expertise to comment on the details of Stipp's fine argumentation. Instead, I would like to address two clusters of questions that are related to the methodological rules derived by Stipp, because they seem to resonate with certain questions that have been posed regarding Jewish literature from the late Second Temple era in the past decades.

Stipp asks whether the formulaic language in the book of Jeremiah can serve as a means for identifying the Deuteronomistic origin of selected passages. He presents two case studies where he tests ideas previously presented by J. Philipp Hyatt, Winfried Thiel, and Ernst Nicholson. First, Stipp analyses an oracle in Jeremiah 42 that, despite the formulaic language, lacks specific Deuteronomistic content. He states that passages that sound Deuteronomistic may not in fact be so, as the diction could be adopted by various authors in different milieus and times. Second, Stipp studies Jeremiah 29 and argues that since verses 16–20 interrupt the text, they could be a Deuteronomistic intrusion. Yet the section is not found in the Septuagint and contains items from the so-called pre-Masoretic idiolect, suggesting that it was added much later than the sixth century BCE. This evidence points to the continuation of the deuter-Jeremianic vocabulary over centuries as well.

Based on his observations, Stipp concludes that the identification of formulaic language itself is fairly straightforward, but such language occurs in both Deuteronomistic and non-Deuteronomistic parts of the book of Jeremiah. Accordingly, the formulaic language is akin to, but not identical with, Deuteronomistic diction. Another conclusion of Stipp is that the deuter-Jeremianic usage should be understood as a specialized idiom for composing parenetic texts.

My questions concern these conclusions. First of all, I would like to address the functional implications of Stipp’s statement that the deuter-Jeremianic language was employed as a specialized idiom, “the natural home” of which
was “discourse”; moreover, Stipp associates this idiom with the label “paren-
netic.” Since “parennetic” is typically defined as hortatory and persuasive, and
often used in relation to pedagogical, perhaps wisdom-related, instruction
material, it is worth reflecting on what this actually means in the context of
Jeremiah. What kind of a discourse are we talking about in terms of the sec-
tions analyzed by Stipp?

In particular, I would be interested in hearing what Stipp’s claim of the
restricted use of a specialized idiom tells us about the purpose of deutero-
Jeremianic texts, now known from a context associated with prophecy. Does
the Deuteronomistic language have an affinity of some kind with the category
of wisdom, which seems to resist strict generic classification? Does the idiom
imply that these sections of Jeremiah serve as instruments for some kind of
divine paideia, that is to say, education and cultivation of the audience believed
to originate from God, Israel’s divine instructor?

The second question to be addressed pertains to the definition of the heu-
ristic concept of “Deuteronomistic.” On account of his textual observations,
Stipp admits that “[t]he demarcation of Deuteronomism is ultimately a matter
of definition,” but nevertheless continues to conclude that “[i]f the adjective
‘Deuteronomistic’ is meant to retain its distinctive force, it cannot be employed
as an umbrella term for all texts using the relevant vocabulary. Rather, a set of
criteria needs to be set out for discriminating proper Dtr texts from similar but
different phenomena.”

This argument about the need to retain the “distinctive force” of “Deutero-
nomistic” reminds me somewhat of the discussion on the phenomenon of
rewriting, which has been lively in the past decades among those who work
with the Dead Sea Scrolls and related material. Scholars have argued over
whether the modern concept of rewriting should be understood as referring
to a strictly defined literary genre or to a broad literary process with a slid-
ing scale of interpretative texts. Some have feared that the term becomes too
vague if used in an inclusive manner. On the other hand, the categorization of

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1 See, for example, Stuart Weeks, “Is ‘Wisdom Literature’ a Useful Category?” (paper presented
at Rethinking the Boundaries of Sapiential Traditions in Ancient Judaism: Third International
Symposium on Jewish and Christian Literature from the Hellenistic and Roman Period,
Université de Lorraine, October 2014).
2 Hermann-Joseph Stipp, “Formulaic Language and the Formation of the Book of Jeremiah,” in
this volume, 164.
3 In particular, see Moshe J. Bernstein, “‘Rewritten Bible’: A Generic Category which has
Outlived Its Usefulness?” Textus 22 (2005): 169–96. Recently, see also Daniel A. Machiela,
“Once More, with Feeling: Rewritten Scripture in Ancient Judaism—A Review of Recent