Textual, Literary, and Delimitation Criticism
The Case of Jeremiah 29 in מ and ב

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1 Introduction

The history of the text of the Book of Jeremiah poses a number of difficult questions to Old Testament-scholars, which remain unsolved. The chronological order (of the Vorlage) of מ and ב (and partly some mss from ק as well) is much debated. Yet a final answer to the question how the Book has been transmitted or how its redaction has taken place is still not provided. The text of ב-Jeremiah is about 15% shorter than the text of מ and it is quite hard to establish which version reflects the earliest stage in the history of the text.¹

Until some 25 years ago, the mainstream of scholars held the so-called ‘mediating’ theory, which ‘holds that it is impossible to generalize on the relative merits of the two versions; instead each reading has to be evaluated on its own merits, resulting sometimes in a preference for the Hebrew text, sometimes for the Greek’.² The discovery of the texts from the Desert of Judah has changed the situation immensely, causing a paradigm shift so that nowadays two

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²Sonderlund 1982, 994. This theory was favoured by scholars such as B. Duhm, P. Volz, W. Rudolph. Similarly also Aalders s.a.-a, 27-30; Bright 1965, cxxii-iv; Oosterhoff 1990, 64-72; Becking 1994, 145-69, esp. 168-9; Idem 2004, 11-48, esp. 47-8; although the latter’s conclusions also might be classified as ‘editorial’ theory.
theories on the textual history of Jeremiah can be distinguished:③

1. The text of the ₦ reflects an early Hebrew Vorlage, which was considerably shorter than that of ₪. This shorter version of the Hebrew text existed independently from other versions which were edited and expanded in later times and became the Vorlage of ₪. A fragment of such a shorter Hebrew version, or rather of one which seems to reflect such a shorter Vorlage, was found in Qumran. In 4Q71 (formerly labeled as 4QJerb) the text of Jer. 9:21–10:21 is partly preserved. In this fragment vv. 6-8, 10 (of ₪) are lacking and verse 9 is inserted into verse 5 (both similar to ₦ and thus diverging from ₪).④ The line of reasoning is that we have a development from a shorter version (the Vorlage of ₦) to a longer one (the Vorlage of ₪): the lectio brevior-principle.⑤

2. The text of ₪ reflects the earliest versions of the text of Jeremiah and the shorter version of ₦ has to be explained with the help of textual critical argumentation. Within this group we have two mainstreams of argumentation:

(a) The shorter version is the result of the transmission of the text in which parts of the text were left out due to

③Sonderlund 1982, 994, lists next to these two and the aforementioned ‘mediating theory’ an additional theory (in his list the first), which he labels ‘editorial theory’. This theory holds that two editions of Jeremiah existed simultaneously, which functioned as the two Vorlages of ₪ and ₦. Both editions were thought to be written by Jeremiah himself (J.G. Eichhorn) or by Jeremiah and Baruch (Van Selms 1972, 12-5; 1976, 99-112). In fact this theory can be considered to be a mixture of both theories, since it does not make a chronological decision as to which Vorlage was first. But in this sense the theory is the closest to the ‘expansion’ theory, which assumes that ₦ is based on a shorter Vorlage than ₪, whereas later on the Vorlage of ₪ was edited and expanded considerably. Yet the latter theory assumes that the longer version (₪) is not necessarily dependent on Jeremiah or his scribe, but might have been expanded in later times, for example when the Vorlage of ₦ was acquired by the Jewish community of Alexandria. Cf. also Becking 1994, 168-9; Idem 2004, 47-8.
