Over the last century Jeremiah’s laments have dominated the discussion of Jer. ix-xx.¹ Within these chapters there are numerous speeches spoken, however, not by the prophet, but by God. Two of these, Jer. xii 7-12 and xv 5-9, have been identified as laments. The complaints of Yahweh in xii 8 and xv 6 especially show how some elements of the lament were used in divine speech. These elements include God’s victimization by Israel in Jer.xii 8 and God’s claim of being rejected by Israel in xv 6. Furthermore, the claim that God will forsake (cf. Ps. xxii 10²) Israel in Jer. xii 7 and the love language of Jer. xii 8 betray God’s dilemma. As Yahweh says in ix 6, “What else can I do?”

Jeremiah IX 9 — A Divine Lament

1 Vgl. K. G. Kuhn, Sifre zu Numeri, Tannaitische Midraschim 3 (Stuttgart, 1959), S. 325.

² Psalmenstudien I (Kristiania, 1921), S. 28 und 50 ff.

³ Vgl. auch Jon. ii 9 und Ps. xxxi 17; auch hier möchte Mowinckel statt hablé "eitle Nichtigkeiten" wie in Jes. v 18 hablé šāw² lesen.

¹ Die Lüge nach dem Alten Testament (Zürich, 1964).

5 Vgl. WUS 2821 und C. H. Gordon, UT 2626. šāw² ist im Singular zweimal belegt KTU 1.6 (= CTA 6) II: 7,29, im Plural šāw² einmal KTU 1.80:3.


God's becoming the foe of Israel corresponds to the shift of the prophet from being the people's advocate in Jer. viii 18-19 to its accuser in xviii 21-3. This correspondence points to the interrelation between the laments of Jeremiah and God. The prophet's rejection at the hands of Israel symbolizes God's experience of Israel. Like Jeremiah, God begins as Israel's helper, but becomes Israel's victim and therefore initiates Israel's demise. Both victims of Israel, Jeremiah and Yahweh, call for Israel's destruction. Thus the laments of the prophet and the deity in Jer. ix-xx enlighten the former's mission and the latter's plan.

Jer. ix 9 belongs to the series of divine laments in chapters ix-xx. The ending of the unit, Jer. ix 1-8, is delimited by ne'z7m yhwh, "oracle of Yahweh", in verse 8. Verse 9 contains a lament and verse 10 is an oracle of destruction against Jerusalem and the cities of Judah. Verse 11 commences a prose section. Despite the fact that the speaker of verses 8 and 10 is divine, some scholars assume that Jeremiah is the speaker of verse 9. Besides the context of verses 8 and 10, there are two other reasons for suggesting that verse 9 is a divine lament.

Three of the versions, the LXX, Old Latin and Syriac, read an imperative "take up" in Jer. ix 9a instead of the MT )essii), "I will raise", attested also in Aquila, Symmachus and the Vulgate. The LXX, Old Latin and Syriac exhibit a shift from the anthropomorphism of verse 9. More importantly, there may be a literary topos underlying Jer. ix 9 that points to the verse as divine speech. If 'al in Jer. ix 9 refers to mourning "over" (i.e., "in") rather than "over" (i.e., "for") or if 'al combines both senses of "in" and "for", then Jer. ix 9 may be seen to contain elements of the topos of the goddess lamenting her beloved on the steppe. While Mesopotamian literature provides a number of instances of this topos, it is attested also in North-West Semitic literature in the Ugaritic Baal cycle. In CTA 5 (KTU 1. 5), VI. 25 - CTA 6 (KTU 1. 6), I. 7, the goddess Anat goes in search of her beloved, deceased Baal. She discovers his body on the "steppe", dbr, equivalent to midbär in Jer. ix 9. Similarly, the goddess's search takes her to "every mountain", kl gr, and "every hill", kl gb. These two phrases correspond to "mountains", heharim, in Jer. ix 9. Anat then laments the death of Baal and avenges her loss by destroying his enemy, Mot, the god of death. Just as Anat mourns for Baal, so Yahweh perhaps laments the destruction "over" the steppe and