

The Dual-Canonicity of the Greek and Hebrew Texts of Jeremiah

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The Septuagint (LXX) and Masoretic (MT) editions of the book of Jeremiah are known to diverge in both length and order. Furthermore, each of these traditions has been treated as authoritative in different places and times within both Judaism and Christianity. This naturally raises the question as to which edition should be considered canonical and the basis of modern translations of the book of Jeremiah. Scholars have gone back and forth in their approaches to this issue. In the past century, LXX primacy has more often than not been the majority view, although some have held to MT superiority or a mediating approach between the two. This paper will argue for what is often referred to as the editorial or two-edition theory, in which neither tradition is considered more authoritative than the other. Instead, the *Vorlage* of the LXX represents an early edition of the book of Jeremiah, while the MT represents a later, more complete one—one that is still Jeremianic in both content and authority.

Being the most striking difference between the two textual traditions, LXX Jeremiah is approximately one-eighth shorter in length than the MT version, with an estimated “2700 words which are present in the MT but absent in the LXX.”¹ Such are traditionally referred to as the “zero” variants of the LXX.² Furthermore, whole passages located in one section of the LXX are found in different sections of the MT. Among these transient “blocks of literature” is the Oracle Against the Nations, which appears directly after 25:13a in the LXX, but is delayed until chapter 46 of the MT.³ In regard to details, Tov observes in the MT various clarifications, additional

¹ J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah (The New International Commentary on the Old Testament)*, ed. R. K. Harrison and Robert L. Hubbard Jr. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 117.

² Bob Becking, “Jeremiah’s Book of Consolation: A Textual Comparison: Notes on the Masoretic Text and the Old Greek Version of Jeremiah xxx-xxxii,” *Vetus Testamentum* 44, no. 2 (April 1, 1994): 148, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost, accessed March 30, 2015.

³ R. K. Harrison, *Jeremiah and Lamentations: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973), 28-29.

headings and verses, substitutions of proper names for pronouns, and repetitions of phrases, among other disparities.⁴

The diversity of these two texts of Jeremiah presents a practical problem for contemporary Bible translators and Christians, as both groups desire to work with a supposed original autograph. Historically, both versions have enjoyed authoritative status. The LXX was the Old Testament of the Apostles and early Christians, and it is still considered authoritative today by the Eastern Orthodox Church.⁵ On the other hand, the longer Hebrew Jeremiah eventually came to be the preference of both Rabbinic Judaism and the greater part of Christendom. Lundbom notes that the ancient Greek translations done by Origen, Aquila, Theodotion, Jerome, and others “consistently support MT.”⁶ In light of this, the question of which edition of Jeremiah ought to be the basis for modern translation and exegesis becomes unclear. Soderlund categorizes the various approaches to this issue into four groups: abbreviation of the LXX, expansion of the MT, mediation between the two, and an editorial or two-edition theory, for which this paper advocates.⁷

The abbreviation approach can be divided into two categories: 1) that of an abridgement of the Hebrew *Vorlage* behind the LXX in the process of translation and 2) that of prior abbreviation of the same *Vorlage* from its previous, fuller form. The first is chiefly supported by

⁴ Emanuel Tov, *The Greek and Hebrew Bible: Collected Essays on the Septuagint* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006), 366-381.

⁵ Peter C. Craigie, Page H. Kelley, and Joel F. Drinkard, *Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 26, Jeremiah 1-25*, ed. John D. W. Watts (Dallas: Word Books, 1991), xliii. Leslie C. Allen, *Jeremiah: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 8.

⁶ Jack R. Lundbom, "Haplography in the Hebrew Vorlage of LXX Jeremiah," *Hebrew Studies* 46, (January 1, 2005): 307, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost, accessed March 30, 2015.

⁷ Sven Soderlund, *The Greek Text of Jeremiah: A Revised Hypothesis* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1986), 11-12.

the prospect that the LXX translators omitted what they considered to be irrelevant or repetitive information,⁸ in addition to rearranging various segments of the book according to their own preferences.⁹ Notwithstanding such possibilities, it is now the consensus that the principal reason for incongruity between the MT and LXX versions of Jeremiah lies not in the work of the latter's translators, but rather in a prior divergence between two *Vorlagen*. Contrary to the above approach, the discovery of 4QJer^b—which agrees with the LXX over the MT—demonstrated that “the Septuagint readings corresponded to actual Hebrew variants and were not free translations of an Ur-MT.”¹⁰ Beyond this, Tov believes that the consistently literal translation of LXX Jeremiah precludes an intentional abridgement of the Hebrew source. Proponents of MT primacy, then, normally hypothesize a previously abridged *Vorlage* of the LXX. The most important support for this theory is the likelihood that the transmission of the Hebrew text suffered from extensive haplography, “the erroneous omission of one of two adjacent letters or words which are identical or similar.”¹¹ Lundbom identifies 330 arguable cases of haplography, which could have led to the loss of up to 1715 Hebrew words, meaning that “haplography can account for well over half” of the 2700 omitted words in LXX Jeremiah. Arguments for greater coherence and structure of MT Jeremiah are also cited to suggest that the MT preserves a more original reading.¹²

⁸ Tiberius Rata, “The History of the Text of Jeremiah,” *Scripture and Interpretation* 2, no. 1 (2008): 47-49, accessed March 30, 2015.

Craigie, Kelley, and Drinkard, *Word Biblical Commentary*, xlv.

⁹ Harrison, *Jeremiah and Lamentations*, 28.

¹⁰ Louis Stulman, “Some Theological and Lexical Differences Between the Old Greek and the MT of the Jeremiah Prose Discourses,” *Hebrew Studies* 25, (January 1, 1984): 18, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost, accessed March 30, 2015.

¹¹ Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2001), 237, 321.

¹² Lundbom, “Haplography,” 304, 306.

The assertion that MT Jeremiah is a predominantly expansionist text has been the majority report among scholars in recent decades.¹³ A principal argument for this hypothesis lies in the general tendency of scribes to add, rather than remove, in the process of textual transmission. Janzen notes: “[C]opyists or revisers often fill out a more spare text, from pronoun to name, from first name to full name, from title to title plus name. The opposite tendency, to shortening or omission, is not nearly as noticeable.”¹⁴ Hence, textual critics often see the various extra details of the MT as later additions to a more original text. The high number of expansions from parallel passages in the Hebrew text, along with the likelihood that variants of divergent texts were conflated in the production of the MT, are among the other significant reasons put forth for the primacy of LXX Jeremiah.¹⁵ It should be noted, however, that most proponents of this approach generally acknowledge that “the vast majority of additions have little bearing on the subject-matter in the common text...[and] are essentially elaborations of the text.”¹⁶

As is evident from the above survey, both the abbreviation and expansion theories of the text of Jeremiah raise important questions. The strength of arguments on either side, along with the limited nature of the available evidence, has led many to opt for a mediating approach, in which “no opinion can be given on the question which textual tradition is superior to the other.”¹⁷

¹³ Tiberius Rata, “The History of the Text of Jeremiah,” *Scripture and Interpretation* 2, no. 1 (2008):47, accessed March 30, 2015.

¹⁴ J. Gerald Janzen, "A Critique of Sven Soderlund's The Greek Text of Jeremiah: A Revised Hypothesis," *Bulletin Of The International Organization For Septuagint And Cognate Studies* 22, (September 1, 1989): 31, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost*, accessed March 30, 2015.

¹⁵ Rata, “History of the Text,” 42.
Jack R. Lundbom, *Writing Up Jeremiah: The Prophet and the Book* (Eugene, OR.: Cascade Books, 2013), 25.

¹⁶ Stulman, “Theological and Lexical Differences,” 19. See also Garrett M. Galvin, *Egypt as a Place of Refuge in the Old Testament* (Ann Arbor, MI.: ProQuest LLC, 2009) 151.

¹⁷ Becking, “Jeremiah's Book of Consolation,” 150.

This essay, however, will advocate for a fourth alternative, commonly referred to as the editorial or two-edition theory. Appearing in academia as early as 1803,¹⁸ this approach postulates that the LXX *Vorlage* was an early edition of the book of Jeremiah, while the MT text represents a later and more complete second edition. In the words of Emanuel Tov, the Hebrew *Vorlage* behind the LXX “does not reflect a different text of Jeremiah but an earlier edition of that book.”¹⁹ What differentiates this from the expansionist theory is its recognition of both textual traditions as authoritative.²⁰

As a prelude to this concept of two separate, equally authoritative editions of the book, it should be noted that Jeremiah was not composed and distributed in a single instance; rather, Jeremianic scrolls were completed at various stages over a period of many years. Tov explains that some biblical books, including Jeremiah, reached a “final stage” more than one time. He also describes the process from which two textual traditions could have emerged:

Upon the completion of each literary stage it was distributed and became authoritative. However, when the next literary edition was created on the basis of the previous edition and was circulated, the previous one could not be eradicated. Therefore, even at a late period such as the time of the LXX translation or in the Qumran period, both literary forms were circulated.²¹

That an early edition of Jeremiah later became the basis for the LXX translation and was partially preserved in 4QJer^b leads Tov to believe it equal in authority to the more complete MT Jeremiah. Gentry also recognizes the possibility that “the parent text behind the LXX represents an earlier stage” of Jeremiah’s text. Yet he remarks that this does not automatically imply

¹⁸ Soderlund, *A Revised Hypothesis*, 12.

¹⁹ Tov, *Essays on the Septuagint*, 364.

²⁰ Jamie Viands, *I Will Surely Multiply Your Offspring: An Old Testament Theology of the Blessing of Progeny with Special Attention to the Latter Prophets* (Eugene, OR.: Pickwick Publications, 2013) 198.

²¹ Tov, *Textual Criticism*, 178.

superiority over MT Jeremiah. The fact that the work was sent to the exiles in Babylon while Jeremiah migrated to Egypt “suggests that perhaps the version in Egypt [from which the LXX was translated] is not the canonical version in the library authorized by Ezra and Nehemiah.”²² Writing on behalf of those who assert the inerrancy of the biblical text, Christensen remarks on the inability “to choose between these separate traditions in relation to a presumed autograph from which either or both of these texts developed.” He suggests that it may be necessary to abandon any search for the “elusive scholarly construct” of an original autograph of Jeremiah.²³

Such a multi-stage nature of the composition and distribution of Jeremiah calls for “a recognition of the blend of text-transmissional and literary-formative stages for the book of Jeremiah.”²⁴ In other words, the editors of the later stages of Jeremiah were themselves authors, as well as copyists.²⁵ Additionally, Tov believes that the editor of MT Jeremiah “had access to genuine Jeremianic material” not present in earlier compositions.²⁶ Some have gone so far as to propose that the editor of the final edition was Baruch himself.²⁷ Whatever the identity of this

²² Peter John Gentry, "The Text of the Old Testament," *Journal Of The Evangelical Theological Society* 52, no. 1 (March 1, 2009): 43, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost, accessed March 30, 2015.

²³ Duane L. Christensen, "In Quest of the Autograph of the Book of Jeremiah: A Study of Jeremiah 25 in Relation to Jeremiah 46-51," *Journal Of The Evangelical Theological Society* 33, no. 2 (June 1, 1990): 145, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost, accessed March 30, 2015.

²⁴ A. R. Pete Diamond, "Jeremiah's Confessions in the LXX and MT: A Witness to Developing Canonical Function?" *Vetus Testamentum* 40, no. 1 (January 1, 1990): 34, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost, accessed March 30, 2015.

²⁵ Tov, *Textual Criticism*, 188.

²⁶ Tov, *Essays on the Septuagint*, 365.

²⁷ Gleason Leonard Archer Jr., "The Relationship Between the Septuagint Translation and the Massoretic Text in Jeremiah," *Trinity Journal* 12, no. 2 (September 1, 1991): 141, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost, accessed March 30, 2015.

editor, the separate preservation of each textual tradition can be partially explained by the predominance of either text in respective localities. Selms explains:

According to a late Jewish tradition both Jeremiah and Baruch were carried off by Nebuchadrezzar from Egypt to Babylonia; the grain of truth in this story might be that not the persons of Jeremiah and his secretary, but the book which was their combined product and spiritual legacy to Israel [MT Jeremiah], was sent from the borders of the Nile to the plain of the Euphrates river. The rough draft, which we could call the "Egyptian copy", was preserved, as a sort of protocol, in Egypt and its text was translated into Greek a few centuries later.²⁸

Such a prospect would make much sense of the parallel canonicity of each textual tradition within separate geographical boundaries.

This understanding of dual-canoncity resolves many of the problems inherent in Christians' and translators' respective searches for an authoritative, original text. Given that "[t]he LXX and MT represent two different points in time...in which the living tradition of Jeremiah was set forth in written form within a sacred context" and "were clearly the canonical 'Word of God' within their respective communities of faith," neither textual tradition need be seen as an inauthentic revision of the other.²⁹ Such a notion of two canonical editions of Jeremiah should not be seen as extraordinary, for the very concept can be inferred from the narrative of chapter 36, in which Baruch is tasked with reproducing the scroll of Jeremiah's prophecies that had been burned by King Jehoiakim. As explained by Sharp, "[T]he fact that Jer. [36] preserves the literary memory of a shorter (but neither deficient nor secondarily abbreviated) earlier scroll and a longer (but neither corrupted nor secondarily expanded) later scroll" demonstrates the inadequacy of any approach that attempts to categorize all variants as deviations from a single

²⁸ Selms, Adrianus van, "Telescoped Discussion as a Literary Device in Jeremiah," *Vetus Testamentum* 26, no. 1 (January 1, 1976): 112, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost, accessed March 30, 2015.

²⁹ Christensen, "In Quest of the Autograph," 152-153.

autograph. Rather, variants of either text may be considered original in their own right.³⁰ In light of this, translators can freely work with the more complete MT, while Orthodox Christianity can be assured that they have “indeed enjoyed the benefit of inspired Scripture, even if in a somewhat abridged form.”³¹

The relatively high level of diversity between the extant Greek and Hebrew editions of Jeremiah has raised a number of concerns among Bible translators and Christians alike. In response, scholars have argued primarily for either the abbreviation of the MT or the abridgement of the LXX from an original autograph, with some opting for a combination of the two approaches. In light of the multi-stage nature of Jeremiah’s composition, however, these approaches are found to be rather inadequate. A two-edition approach, in which more than one textual tradition can be understood as both authoritative and original, seems far more appropriate in understanding the text of Jeremiah. Furthermore, this approach resolves the issues of both of the aforementioned groups who seek after an original, authoritative Jeremiah.

³⁰ Carolyn J. Sharp, “‘Take Another Scroll and Write’: A Study of the LXX and the MT of Jeremiah's Oracles Against Egypt and Babylon,” *Vetus Testamentum* 47, no. 4 (October 1, 1997): 507-508, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost, accessed March 30, 2015.

³¹ Archer, “Relationship,” 141.

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