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Marriage Metaphor in Jer 2:1-4:2. A Diachronic Study Based on the MT and LXX

Doctoral Dissertation

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A Polish Dominican, Łukasz Popko, defended his doctoral dissertation on the 20th of January 2014 in the École Biblique et Archéologique Française in Jerusalem. The members of the examining committee were: the Director of École Biblique and a renowned assyriologist Marcel Sigrist, the director of the thesis Francolino Gonçalves (professor of EBAF, member of the Pontifical Biblical Commission), Adrian Schenker (prof. em. of the Fribourg University, chief editor of *Biblia Hebraica Quinta*) who was the First Reader, Émile Puech (EBAF, CNRS), the Second Reader, and Alexander Rofé (prof. em. of the Hebrew University).

THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH IN ITS TWO FORMS

A comparative study of Jer 2:1-4:2 according to the LXX and MT followed Pierre-Maurice Bogaert's method of differential exegesis. Jer^{MT} is significantly longer than Jer^{LXX}. Additionally the two texts differ also in the order of the chapters. Popko's conclusions are:

First, regarding the quality of the LXX translation. The Jer^{LXX} maintains its character of a word-for-word rendering, where one item in the translation corresponds to one item in the original. The translation technique of Jer^{LXX} makes of this text a valuable source, which usually can be easily retroverted into Hebrew. Second, the *Vorlage* of the LXX has decisively fewer secondary readings than the MT. Of course, this does not mean that every variant of the LXX is preferable. Such a tendency needs to be verified in every single case. Third, the two forms of the Book of Jeremiah are products of conscious creative reworking and did not appear as a sequence of haphazard errors of inattentive scribes. Such mistakes are very unlikely to produce a meaningful text, and even less, to do so in any regular manner.

Therefore, it is justified to consider the long and short form of Jeremiah as “redactions”, i.e. literary ventures.

In the long edition and in the MT the marriage metaphor looks quite different than in the short edition. A more recent, long edition must have significantly developed the marriage metaphor. Here the scribe interlaced especially two strands of prophetic tradition, Ezekiel and Hosea, which are particularly rich in marriage imagery. Thanks to the Book of Ezekiel, the anonymous woman received the name of Jerusalem (2:1^{MT}). Thus the personification became explicit and also closer to the story of YHWH’s unfaithful bride Jerusalem from Ezek 16. In Jer 3:6-11 MT, YHWH’s two wives become two “sisters”, exactly as it is in Ezek 23.

The redactor of the long edition created a more coherent allegory of the national history, which is why he interpreted the ideal time of the girl’s youth by making reference to her “walking after God in the desert” (2:2^{MT}), even though in other biblical writings those years are rather the years of repeated rebellion. The Book of Hosea was the inspiration behind the expansion in the long text of Jer 3:3^{MT} which adds that the זֹנָה was a “prostitute אִשָּׁה”, which is suggestive of a “prostitute wife” like in Hos 1-2. Similarly, the motif of the lack of rain as a divine punishment for infidelity in Jer 3:3 corresponds to the chastisement of the “wife of harlotry” from Hos 2. Some other small changes were introduced to smooth the explicit references to the paternal role of YHWH in 3:5 which did not fit the marriage imagery.

Finally, it is probable that the key term כְּלִיל־חַיִּים referring to ‘the love of your wedding’ in Jer 2:2^{MT} was introduced even later, independently of the longer edition (witnessed first by Aquila in II c. AD). The LXX reads here simply “the love of your perfection”, i.e. “your perfect love”. It seems that the Masorah witnesses to some further modifications which present Jer 2-3 as a more complete allegory of the people’s history. The woman’s words of rebellion (“I shall not serve” – אַעֲבֹד) in the *Ketib* of 2:20 are modified in the *Qere* into her declaration of obedience (“I shall not trespass” – אַעֲבֹר). This reading intended to introduce a reference to the Sinai covenant which was a fundamental event in a thus construed vision of the national history.

REDACTION HISTORY OF JER 2:1-4:2

The differential analysis opened a promising new field for a further study of the text’s past. Previous redaction critical reconstructions took as their starting point the MT and neglected or ignored the importance of the short edition as an older form of the text. For the first time this dissertation took

into serious consideration the LXX as the source of important data also for redaction criticism.

L. Popko proposed the following reconstruction:

- 1) 2:4-37 – primitive poem (exilic; hostile to Egypt; Judean or Babylonian perspective),
- 2) 3:1-5.12-13.19-4:2 – a poem on the return (post-exilic; the point of view of Judah; represents the *golah* and its claims to the land),
- 3) 3:14-18 – “in-those-days” redaction on the ideal future (after the Temple reconstruction; Jerusalem perspective),
- 4) 2:2-3 – the prologue adding the idea of the nation’s faithful youth
- 5) 3:6-11 – the two wives’ allegory.

It seems that the verses concerning the “two wives” in 3:6-11 were the last element added because this insertion cannot be identified with any broader redaction in the Book of Jeremiah. It is a local expansion of a scribe who added it as an exegetical note. Its aim was to explain why Judah’s guilt was relatively greater than that of the Kingdom of Israel.

THE CHANGING IDENTITY OF THE FEMININE PERSONA

The oldest poem, 2:4-37, *does not* present the feminine addressee as a bride cheating on her husband. What the reader learns about the woman is that she is humiliated and justly punished. Her defilement testifies both to her guilt and to her chastisement. She did not want to serve YHWH but now she “bows in her fornication”. She abandons YHWH but she is never called “adulterous”, or threatened with the capital punishment that corresponds to such a trespass. God’s role in the relationship remains to a great extent elusive. There are a number of biblical texts where a city is personified as a prostitute but it says nothing about the woman’s relationship to YHWH. The root זנה serves basically as a sexual metaphor describing a despicable city (this is the case of Tyre, Babylon, or Nineveh). In the prophetic literature, the feminine personification appears in the context of an imminent military assault. It serves to express the fear, weakness, and suffering of the populace. Jer 2 took over the traditional motif of the devastated woman and convinces the reader that her present state results from her own fault. She behaved stupidly and now she is living the consequences.

In the second major stage of the literary development of Jeremiah, the poetry of Jer 3 introduced the theme of the return. Here, the first verse, 3:1, already looks very different in the MT and LXX. Usually it is understood that the use of the *palingamy ban* (i.e. ruling out remarriage with the same

man) presupposes the marriage relationship between God and his addressee. If a divorcée *cannot* return to her first husband, the return of the addressee to YHWH is even less possible. Nevertheless, if one considers these two cases more closely, the disparity could not be greater. The concluding infinitive absolute with *waw* in v. 1 (וַשׁוּב) needs to be rendered as an indicative “You returned to me”. The woman of Jer 3:1 *did return* to YHWH. It is clear that having been divorced from her first husband, a divorcée was free to remarry lawfully. According to Deut 24:1-4 the only defiling thing was not her departure from her first husband, or marrying the second one, but her *return* to the first man. She is not defiled as long as she stays away from her first husband. In Jer 3:1 the position of the addressee is exactly the opposite: defilement accompanies her leaving YHWH and her return is her only salvation.

In Jer 3:1 God speaks rather from a father’s perspective. This comparison presents an antithetic parallelism and not a synonymous one: a legally pure divorcée cannot return unblemished, yet, “you a defiled (daughter) did come back”. This was possible because YHWH is *unlike* a husband, and his relationship with the woman is *not* like one of a married couple. Indeed, the woman’s call, “My Father, guardian of my youth” in Jer 3:4 argues for a paternal role of YHWH. The woman from Jer 2* seems to be God’s ward or a dim-witted daughter or disciple.

What had been imprecise or vague in Jer 2*, the later text of Jer 3* took over and made explicit. The main message of Jer 3* is definitely positive, and yet the feminine figure appears in a negative function, expressing the mischief of the people. Interestingly, among the different charges present already in Jer 2*, Jer 3* concentrated and developed especially the motif of the prostitute. Here the author is not interested in the woman’s motivations but simply in the consequences of her behaviour. In Jer 3* YHWH is clearly called twice a father and consequently the woman appears to be his daughter who came back and could even receive her inheritance.

The third important redactional development also deals with the feminine persona. Jer 2:2-3 becomes a coherent unit if we read it in the light of Lev 22:12-16. Jer 2:3 speaks about the ‘guilt’ אשם of the one who would ‘eat’ Israel which is a ‘holy’ thing קֹדֶשׁ. In Lev 22:14-16, we also encounter the same three key words: אשם, אכל, קֹדֶשׁ. Additionally, both texts – Jer 2:3 and Lev 22:14-16 – refer to the *youth* נְעוּרִים of a woman. According to Leviticus, the childless, widowed, or divorced daughter *may* return to her father’s household. Its rulings explain who can lawfully eat of the sacrificial gifts and therefore they also clarify who belongs to the priestly household. Jer 2:2-3 takes over the text of Leviticus to comment on the prophetic image of Jer

3* which spoke about the return of a disinherited people. Like the woman of Lev 22, the feminine figure addressed and spoken to in Jeremiah has no male guardian, she is childless (Jer 6:26, 38:15) or widowed and rejected. That is why her only chance of survival is to come back to her father's house. These stereotypical traits of the "daughter of my people" of the Book of Jeremiah agree with the legal status of the returning priestly daughter from Lev 22.

The last redactional insertion of 3:6-11 introduces the story of YHWH's two wives. Since the reference to marriage in Jer 2:2 occurs only *secondarily* in the long edition, it means that the marriage metaphor first appeared in Jer 2-3 only in this prose addition. It is woven out of the adjacent motifs found in the poetry of Jer 3 but it was also combined with the terminology of other biblical texts. One can easily point to the allegory of the history of Israel and Judah in Ezek 23, where a similar parable of the two divorced wives of YHWH occurs. There one finds the story of Jerusalem and Samaria as the two sisters Oholah and Oholibah (Ezek 23:4). At a certain stage the book of Jeremiah was read in light of the Book of Ezekiel and indeed the two wives story in Jer 3:6-11 must have originated from the metaphorical narratives in Ezek 23 and 16.

The inserted narrative on the two adulterous wives had at least two important consequences for the further fates of this text. Before the redactional addition of Jer 3:6-11, the two chapters had a form of a poetical dialogue between a rebellious daughter and her worried father. It seems that subsequently the wayward feminine addressee began to be interpreted, wherever possible, as an adulterous wife. This last addition of Jer 3:6-11 marked another important change: the ancient authors moved from poetry to prose. What used to be a poetical composition which juxtaposed a number of disparate images and metaphors, was read more and more as a coherent narrative, as a whole story; and it was the marriage metaphor which provided the plot.

HISTORY OF THE MARRIAGE METAPHOR

The results concerning the history of the marriage metaphor can be listed as follows. 1. In the book of Jeremiah the marriage metaphor is a relatively late invention. 2. Its primary literary source for Jer 2-3 is not Hosea, as commonly thought, but rather Ezekiel. 3. The similarities to Hosea are a product of the most recent harmonisations in the long edition of the Book of Jeremiah (MT). 4. More recent biblical authors did not lose interest in the marriage metaphor. On the contrary, it seems to be particularly developed in the most recent editorial layers of the book. 5. The original role of the marriage metaphor in Jeremiah was, similarly to in Ezekiel, to express the guilt of the people.