

Northwest Semitic Epigraphy and Historicity in the Book of Jeremiah

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Abstract

This thesis examines recent finds in Northwest Semitic epigraphy in an effort to determine their effectiveness for speaking to the historical validity of the prose sections of the Book of Jeremiah. In light of the book's complex compositional issues, many models for understanding its development have been published over the last century; one foundational theory, expounded primarily by Robert P. Carroll, argues that material in *Jeremiah* apart from chapters 2–26 (Source A) fail to provide an accurate picture of the Historical Jeremiah. This claim is examined in light of Hebrew epigraphy.

Chapter one introduces the issues involved in the study while chapter two provides an assessment and history of, as well as a limited response to, the views mentioned above. Chapters three and four examine relevant Semitic epigraphy, including onomastic evidence, and highlight potential correspondences with the Book of Jeremiah. Chapter five is a summary and conclusion of the study, relating each point to the original issue posed by Carroll and others.

The position defended in this work is that Northwest Semitic epigraphy, though limited with regards to some redactional issues, is generally relevant to the discussion of the historicity of Jeremianic prose, namely in the way it fits the historical context of the late seventh and early sixth centuries BCE. It is concluded that onomastic evidence provides the greatest support for the historicity of the biographical narratives in *Jeremiah* on the basis of strong correspondence with data from the epigraphic record.

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Chapter One

Introduction

The Book of Jeremiah, the longest book of the Hebrew Bible, is plagued by more complex issues regarding its composition than perhaps any other canonical book. Numerous scholars over the last century have raised various suggestions in an attempt to make sense of these compositional issues. An older model that had gained acceptance in Jeremianic studies, first based on suggestions by Bernard Duhm and then later developed by Sigmund Mowinckel (and subsequently modified by others), categorized the material of the Book of Jeremiah into three primary sources: the poetical portions (“Source A,” approximately chapters 2–25), the biographical prose sections (“Source B,” approximately chapters 26–45), and the literary prose sermons *passim* (“Source C”).¹ This model posits that Source A material, being poetic in nature, may be attributed directly to Jeremiah himself, while Sources B and C were, for the most part, written *about* the prophet, and must be attributed to those associated with Jeremiah. The commonest attribution of Source B, the biographic material in Jeremiah, has previously been to disciples of the prophet, of whom Baruch the son of Neriah appears to play the most prominent role within the book itself.² Regarding Source C material, most scholars attribute much of the prose sermons to Deuteronomistic redaction(s), with rather varied divergence in opinion, with

¹ Bernard Duhm, *Das Buch Jeremia* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1901); Sigmund Mowinckel, *Zur Komposition des Buches Jeremia* (Kristiania: Jacob Dybwad, 1914); L. Stulman, *The Prose Sermons of the Book of Jeremiah: A Redescription of the Correspondences with the Deuteronomistic Literature in the Light of Recent Text-critical Research* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986); for an excellent summary of views in Jeremianic scholarship, see Leo G. Perdue, “Jeremiah in Modern Research: Approaches and Issues,” in *A Prophet to the Nations: Essays in Jeremiah Studies*, eds. Leo G. Perdue and Brian W. Kovacs (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1984), 1–32.

² John Bright, *Jeremiah*, LXVII; James Muilenburg, “Baruch the Scribe,” in *Proclamation and Presence: Old Testament Essays in Honour of Gwynne Henton Davies*, eds. J. I. Durham and J. R. Porter (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1970), 232; H. M. I. Gevaryahu, “*brwk bn nryh hspr* (‘Baruch son of Neriya the Scribe’),” in *Zer Le’gevurot: The Zalman Shazar Jubilee Volume*, ed. B. Z. Luria (Jerusalem: Kiryat Sefer, 1973), 220.

dates ranging from the mid-sixth century BCE to c. 400 BCE.³ Contrary to this majority view, there are those who, following Robinson, ascribe Source C material to the prophet Jeremiah.⁴

A major question in all this is whether “non-Source A material” (i.e., non-poetical portions of the Book of Jeremiah apart from chapters 2–25) contain a valid historical information about the prophet Jeremiah. There are proponents of a less optimistic view that have concluded there does not exist sufficient evidence for a sixth-century date for the biographical material in Jeremiah and instead attempt to date Sources B and C to the 5th century BCE.⁵ For example, Herbert Gordon May hypothesizes that the themes and theological perceptions throughout the Book of Jeremiah are indicative of lateness on the basis of literary parallels in the Deuteronomistic literature, as well as characteristically late books such as Ezra or Nehemiah, and ultimately argues for a *terminus post quem* of 500–450 BCE.⁶ Concerning Source C, the suggestion is made that a circle of “country Levites” of the Deuteronomistic tradition “shaped” this material at a later point (per Claus Rietzschell), or else Deuteronomists freely composed it

³ Examples include Wilhelm Rudolph, *Jeremia* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1958), xiv-xxii; James Philip Hyatt, “The Deuteronomic Edition of Jeremiah,” *Vanderbilt Studies in the Humanities* 1 (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1951) 71–95; John Bright, *Jeremiah* (AB; 2d ed.; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965), lxvii–lxxxiii.

⁴ Theodore H. Robinson, “Baruch’s Scroll,” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 42, no. 1 (1924): 209–221; Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, trans. Peter R. Ackroyd (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1965), 350–55; John Wolff Miller, *Das Verhältnis Jeremias und Hersekiels sprachlich und theologisch untersucht* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1955); William Holladay, “A Fresh Look at ‘Source B’ and ‘Source C’ in Jeremiah,” *Vetus Testamentum* 25 (1975): 394–412.

⁵ For example, Robert P. Carroll, *From Chaos to Covenant: Prophecy in the Book of Jeremiah* (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1981), 151; Herbert Gordon May, “Toward an Objective Approach to the Book of Jeremiah: The Biographer,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 61 (1942): 139–155; Claus Rietzschell, *Das Problem der Urrolle: ein Beitrag zur Redaktionsgeschichte des Jeremiabuches* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher [Mohn], 1966); K-F. Pohlmann, *Studien zum Jeremiahbuch: Ein Beitrag zur Frage nach der Entstehung des Jeremiabuches* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978).

⁶ May, “Objective Approach,” 151–2.

with no relation whatsoever to the 6th century BCE (per Robert Carroll).⁷ For these scholars, and others who have followed a similar line of thought, prose segments (as well as some poetical segments) do not contain valid information to make conclusions about the “Historical Jeremiah.” In light of the general disagreement that exists regarding composition, there is wide room for further discussion and research.

In the words of Carroll, “No single image of the prophet exists in the tradition. Rather is it (*sic*) made up of many streams of tradition flowing into a central reservoir constructed by the traditionists over a lengthy period of time.”⁸ Regarding Rietzschell’s approach to Source C, Perdue aptly summarizes, “efforts to recover the ‘authentic sayings’ of Jeremiah behind these sermons is generally discouraged as either unsympathetic to the importance of this formulation or an impossibility.”⁹ By assigning a fifth-century date—or even later—to the prose material in Jeremiah, considerably less validity is given to the historicity of the text. When the historical viability of the text is compromised, considerably less credibility can be ascribed to the historical picture of a sixth-century prophet Jeremiah in the text. This view is not unique to Carroll but was largely maintained by other British scholars such as Ackroyd and Nicholson.¹⁰ Georg Fischer writes that Carroll’s contribution was part of a “turn” or “new phase” in Jeremiah studies, and that he ultimately “liberated” the Book of Jeremiah from being too closely associated with the

⁷ See Perdue, “Modern Research,” 19.

⁸ Carroll, *Chaos to Covenant*, 249.

⁹ Perdue, “Modern Research,” 19.

¹⁰ Peter R. Ackroyd, “The Book of Jeremiah—Some Recent Studies,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 28 (1984): 47–59; Ernest W. Nicholson, *Preaching to the Exiles* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1970).

historical individual Jeremiah, thus opening up avenues for “more fruitful” research.¹¹

Furthermore, according to Dalit Rom-Shiloni, the criteria used by Carroll to assess the prophet Jeremiah has become relatively popular in Israeli scholarship.¹²

This thesis will examine modern advancements and discoveries in Northwest Semitic epigraphy in an effort to determine their effectiveness for speaking to the historical validity of the non-poetic sections of the Book of Jeremiah. Data from these inscriptions will be compared with the text of Jeremiah to determine to what degree they correspond to the sixth-century date they are purported to have been written in. As the *Sitz im Leben* of certain portions of the Book of Jeremiah has been called into question, an analysis of the various historical aspects of the book may be in order. By investigating the correspondences between prose sections of Jeremiah and data gleaned from Hebrew epigraphy, questions surrounding the likelihood of a sixth-century dating may be clarified from a historical perspective, or else some of the objections that have been raised against the earlier date for these prose sections will be either affirmed or else met and removed. In other words, these historical intersections will have bearing on the discussion of the probability of accurately attributing the prose segments to the life and time of Jeremiah/Baruch, or shortly thereafter. Although issues in the composition of the Book of Jeremiah are undoubtedly complex, data obtained from Northwest Semitic epigraphy are relevant

¹¹ Georg Fischer, *Jeremiah Studies: From Text and Context to Theology* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020) 3, 62, 73.

¹² Dalit Rom-Shiloni, “From Prophetic Words to Prophetic Literature: Challenging Paradigms That Control Our Academic Thought on Jeremiah and Ezekiel,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 138, no. 3 (2019): 573, footnote 27. Rom-Shiloni cites, Alexander Rofé, “Studies on the Composition of the Book of Jeremiah” [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 44 (1974–1975): 1–29; Yair Hoffman, *Jeremiah 1–25* [Hebrew], *Miqra leYisra’el* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2001), 29–50; and Menahem Haran, *The Biblical Collection: Its Consolidation to the End of the Second Temple Times and Changes of Form to the End of the Middle Ages* [Hebrew], (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 2008), 3:27–102.

to and necessary for the discussion whether non-poetical sections of the book contain valid historical information about the “Historical Jeremiah.”

Chapter Two

Critique of Fifth-Century Dating and Case for Historical Approach

As one sets out to read the Book of Jeremiah, the reader will quickly realize that the book is not written entirely in a chronological order. In fact, a good deal of Jeremiah is not actually historical narrative at all. After the “Call of Jeremiah” (Jer 1:1–19), what follows is much of the poetry that is generally agreed-upon to be original to the prophet Jeremiah as a historical figure. This largely poetical segment has in previous times been referred to as “Source A,” the majority being found between chapters two and twenty-five. After this is a sizable “biographical” section written in historical narrative, most of which constitutes Jeremiah 26–45 and was designated “Source B.” “Source C” would then be the prose sermons found throughout the book, with “Source D” referring to the “Book of Consolation” (Jeremiah 30–31) while the “Oracles Against the Nations” (Jer 46–51) has been generally disputed.¹³ The disparity in content is particularly apparent when the MT text is compared to the LXX; the texts differ widely in order and length (the LXX being about one eighth shorter), demonstrating a complex transmissional history.¹⁴

While Source A is ascribed to Jeremiah himself, Source B is variously identified with Baruch, disciples of the prophet, or other interested person(s). Source C is generally attributed to Deuteronomistic sources—what is less agreed-upon is when Sources B and C were composed. Many scholars have seen no reason to doubt a sixth-century date for “non-Source A material,” believing it to have been written within the lifetime of those named therein, accepting the material as generally historically reliable. There are several others, however, who have solidly

¹³ There is also the final chapter (Jer 52) that acts as a sort of “historical appendix” to the book. While this terminology may be rather outdated, for the sake of clarity it is used for this thesis. For a summary of views in Jeremianic scholarship, Perdue, “Modern Research,” 1–32.

¹⁴ J. Gerald Janzen, “Studies in the Text of Jeremiah” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1973), 1 (endnote).

assigned prose sections (such as the biographical material of Source B and the sermons of Source C) to the fifth century, arguing that these portions of the Book of Jeremiah reveal little to nothing about the historical figure himself. This chapter will analyze the views of English language scholars that have propounded this theory, namely Carroll and May. Carroll's views were apparently influential on "Israeli-Jewish scholarship," as evinced by a number of Hebrew language publications.¹⁵

The relegation of narrative material in Jeremiah to the fifth century BCE largely has to do with methodological differences of various scholars in their treatment of the biblical text. This chapter will assess the views of two scholars (viz., Carroll and May) who have suggested a date for Sources B and/or C well over a century after the events described therein are purported to have taken place. A critique of Carroll's view will follow a summary of his argumentation, followed in turn by a summary and critique of May's position. It is logical that an alternative approach be suggested; reasons will be stated throughout why an approach that examines evidence for historicity is preferable when considering the composition of prose in Jeremiah. Ultimately, the burden of proof rests on one approach or the other to demonstrate its preferability; if issues in historicity are being addressed, a historical approach to the issues is to be preferred. It becomes readily apparent that claims made by scholars like May and Carroll are based more on a sort of "methodological doubt" rather than specific historical evidence. The following discussion will aim to pave the way for an analysis of historical evidence derived from Hebrew epigraphy by providing some essential justification for the process.

¹⁵ For example, Alexander Rofé, "Studies on the Composition of the Book of Jeremiah" [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 44 (1974–1975): 1–29; Yair Hoffman, *Jeremiah 1–25* [Hebrew], *Miqra leYisra'el* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2001), 29–50 (See Rom-Shiloni, "Prophetic Words," 573, n. 27).

Summary of Carroll's View

Carroll, in his work *From Chaos to Covenant*, expertly outlined his approach and goals when undertaking a “quest for the Historical Jeremiah.”¹⁶ Although much may be said about his overall approach to the Book of Jeremiah, this summary will primarily center on his views that led him to consign Jeremianic prose to the fifth century. While this section is by no means exhaustive, examples of views to be treated include issues in authorship (namely linguistic and literary differences between the poetry and prose of Jeremiah), the thematic similarities with what most consider to be Deuteronomistic material, and accounts Carroll simply found to be ahistorical.

Carroll was concerned with the limitations in the endeavor to discover the “Historical Jeremiah”—one of his reasonings has to do with distinctive variance between the poetry and prose of Jeremiah. He seems to have been uncomfortable with the numerous differences in style and in what he considered to be quality. Regarding Jeremianic authorship for prose sections of the book, Carroll stated, “If the poetic tradition as the basis of Jeremiah’s work is to be maintained, then to saddle the prophet with the infelicities of the repetitive and banal pieties of the prose sections is to call in question his poetic abilities and make him more of an inferior scribe than a poet.”¹⁷ It was an impossibility in Carroll’s mind for Jeremiah to be the author of anything more than the poetry ascribed to him in Source A; His argument was that if Jeremiah wrote Source B, then Source A must have been written by someone else—and someone far more competent. This, of course, could be true; it very well may have been the case that Jeremiah was

¹⁶ Particularly in the first chapter, Carroll compares his book to John Skinner’s *Prophecy and Religion: Studies in the Life of Jeremiah* and expresses the need for a different approach.

¹⁷ Carroll, *From Chaos to Covenant*, 9–10.

not the direct author of the rest of the book, particularly the “biographical” segments where he is referred to in the third person. The relation in Carroll’s mind of the Jeremianic prose to the poetry is significant, however, as it forms an initial step in divorcing one from the other. For Carroll, the reduced quality of writing style that he perceived in Jeremianic prose was evidence that different authors were at work; he unequivocally stated that, “Such a reduction of ability cannot be ruled out but, if it is to be maintained, then the poetic material must be attributed to some other poet.”¹⁸ In other words, either Jeremiah lost much of his writing ability later in life, or else there was other authorship at work. In Carroll’s opinion, the prose seen throughout Jeremiah was fabricated to offer the reader a glimpse of Jeremiah “acting *as* a prophet,” and is little more than an attempt “to give flesh to the bones of the poems.”¹⁹ By first distancing the narrative and biographical prose from the life and times of the prophet Jeremiah, the way was prepared for him to address other issues such as Baruch as scribe/compiler and a sixth-century date.

One of the positions that Carroll argued most strongly in favor of was the concept that late Deuteronomistic redaction was most influential on the formation of the biographical narratives, consequentially distancing these accounts further from historical reliability. By his estimation, some elements of these narratives served various interests throughout the sixth and fifth centuries, which would, of course, finally culminate in the forms preserved in the LXX and MT.²⁰ His use of form criticism on the final form(s) of Jeremiah led him to conclude that

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 11.

²⁰ Robert P. Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1986) 69–82.

Deuteronomistic redaction best accounts for the similarity in thematic material. Carroll believed the figure Baruch to be a “deuteronomistic creation.”²¹ Baruch, rather than being considered a historical figure, is merely representative of the scribes and redactors that had arranged, supplemented, or otherwise crafted the text. Carroll admitted the inherent limitations of this approach (as with any approach, naturally) and acknowledged the complexity of the transmissional history; Deuteronomists in either Palestine, Babylon, or Egypt would have carried out their redactions in the exilic or post-exilic periods, and he postulated redaction that was begun by exiles in Babylon was perhaps finished by returned exiles in Palestine.²² This is all ascertained by exploring the motivations behind individual texts, as well as who might have benefited from the implications of the message of one of these texts; an example of this is what Carroll called “conflict narratives” in Jeremiah between the prophet and the king. Ultimately, the “standard deuteronomistic view” of this contention between king and prophet is, in Carroll’s mind, “the informing principle behind the redaction of the Jeremiah tradition.”²³ Points of historical criticism aside, James Muilenburg had prior to this called for a shift “beyond form criticism” to a literary approach, which views the text more as a literary whole.²⁴ This approach naturally balances the rigidity that may be inherent to historicism, while providing another avenue whereby the Book of Jeremiah may be studied.²⁵

²¹ Carroll, *From Chaos to Covenant*, 151; also 15 and passim.

²² *Ibid.*, 20, 72.

²³ *Ibid.*, 149.

²⁴ Muilenburg, “Form Criticism and Beyond,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88 (1969): 5.

²⁵ For example, parallelisms and other literary patterns can be detected in a two-paneled structure covering the narratives of chapters 26–35 and 36–45, demonstrating the literary cohesiveness of the non-poetical segments of the book and offering fruitful avenues of research. See Gary E. Yates, “‘The People Have Not Obeyed’: A Literary and Rhetorical Study of Jeremiah 26–45” (PhD diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1998).

Related to Carroll's emphasis on Deuteronomistic influence on the text is his conviction in the ahistorical nature of the text overall. A good text to exemplify this is the description of Baruch's scribal activity in Jeremiah 36, which has been called "one of the most noteworthy in the entire book" for its description of Jeremiah's words being recorded in a scroll (as well as "many similar words added to them," v. 32), thus detailing the initial stages of composition and collation that ultimately resulted in its finalized form(s).²⁶ However, to consider Jeremiah 36 to be historical is "most unlikely" in Carroll's estimation, since it "has all the marks of a dramatized encounter...and is a literary creation designed to incorporate the scribal influence into the Jeremiah tradition."²⁷ The elements of a prophet contradicting a king resembles other prophetic accounts (e.g., Elijah, Micaiah, the unnamed "man of God" in 1 Kgs 13, etc.), and this leads Carroll to conclude chapter 36 must have been designed to appear this way. Put differently, it must be a story because it sounds like a story. The significance of the account itself becomes suspicious in the way it validates the work of Baruch; Carroll plainly declares it "an attempt to legitimate Deuteronomy by the deuteronomistic historians," much like the account of Hilkiah finding the Book of the Law served to legitimize the Deuteronomistic reform.²⁸ Thus Baruch stands as a symbolic figure of future scribes and redactors well into the fifth century. For Carroll, this belief in the "ahistorical nature" of the text is inextricable from his views on Deuteronomistic redaction; these two objections are, for clarity's sake, treated separately as a.)

²⁶ Bright, *Jeremiah*, 181.

²⁷ Carroll, *From Chaos to Covenant*, 15.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 15–16.

being symptomatic of the narrative accounts not “sounding historical enough” and b.) on the basis of similarity in ideology with the “Deuteronomic School,” respectively.

Response to Carroll’s View

Carroll first sought to distance Jeremiah from authorship of Sources B and/or C, and then proceeded to make conclusions that dated them a century later, concluding that the accounts have little historically to say about Jeremiah as a historical figure. He first seemed to be uncomfortable with the thought of the “Historical Jeremiah” being too closely associated with the “inferior” quality of Source B narrative material. His argument may be restated as: two separate styles of writing must necessarily be the result of two separate authors. While he is not necessarily wrong, this kind of *a priori* reasoning seems to have led Carroll to many of his conclusions. While he was technically correct in that there is no ostensible reason why Jeremiah had to have been the “author,” in the strictest sense, of any of the biographical material, it is apparent that Carroll had reservations against maximalist suggestions that Baruch or unnamed disciples of the prophet were involved in the preservation of a biographical tradition at such an early date.²⁹ For example, the belief that Baruch not only was uninvolved as an amanuensis but that he was entirely fabricated as a character in the story seems to be going too far, especially as Carroll offers no specific evidence except that too little data exist to form “a conclusive account of the matter.”³⁰ Although a sixth-century date for Source B or C material does not necessitate either Jeremiah or Baruch being the author or final compiler of the material in its entirety, it has been the natural supposition—rather than a simplistic assumption—to have no reason to doubt Baruch’s

²⁹ Contra, for example, Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 215–16.

³⁰ Carroll, *From Chaos to Covenant*, 151.

connection to at least part of the process.³¹ Muilenburg opined, “But what are we to say of the prose narratives? While absolute certainty is in the nature of the case excluded, the probabilities strongly favour the assumption that they are the work of Baruch.”³² Carroll himself admits the complexity of the discussion and counsels a “healthy agnosticism” regarding the historicity of sources B and C, while at the same time calling for “openness and toleration of ambiguity.”³³ To take Baruch’s involvement at face value is, technically, impossible to substantiate—but it seems reasonable to conclude that it is almost just as equally impossible to disprove. Bright aptly summarized: “Though it cannot be proved that he [the Biographer] was Baruch, it is entirely likely that he was.”³⁴

The discussion of Deuteronomistic redaction (or composition) in Jeremiah is complex and divisive.³⁵ While it is not the goal of this chapter (nor of this thesis) to form conclusions on this redaction, it is pertinent to address which centuries certain elements of potential redaction(s) may have taken place. It is one thing to argue “country Levites” in the Babylonian Exile collected and expounded on Jeremianic traditions, but it is another thing entirely to consider these “free compositions” by Deuteronomists with no historical connection whatsoever to the Historical Jeremiah.³⁶ Philosophically speaking, one might build a case for Deuteronomistic

³¹ E.g., Muilenburg, “Baruch the Scribe,” 215–38.

³² *Ibid.*, 232.

³³ Carroll, *From Chaos to Covenant*, 19, 59.

³⁴ Bright, *Jeremiah*, lxvii.

³⁵ A thorough discussion of the issues involved is by Iain Provan (*Hezekiah and the Books of Kings: A Contribution to the Debate about the Composition of the Deuteronomistic History* [Berlin: de Gruyter, 1988] 1–55).

³⁶ E.g., Rietzschel, *Das Problem der Urrolle*; Carroll, *From Chaos to Covenant*, 12–13, 249–28. See also Perdue, *Jeremiah in Modern Research*, 19.

redaction through common source-critical practices (i.e., based on perceived thematic correlations between Jeremiah and Deuteronomistic literature), but it does not seem to naturally follow that any amount of evidence would necessarily make it the case that these were “freely composed” by Deuteronomists. It is possible that Carroll perceived the general “untidiness” in the transmission of *Jeremiah* as evidence of redaction; this may be wholly or partially accurate, but a free composition in the fifth century is unnecessary. Even Carolyn Sharp, who seems to similarly approach *Jeremiah* with redaction criticism and tradition history, cautioned that Carroll’s position should be “tempered” in light of the unified redactional themes she perceives in the text.³⁷ Like arguments made above, it is similarly difficult to either prove or disprove beyond any shadow of doubt that associates of Jeremiah in the sixth century were not simply making comparisons between the prophet and Deuteronomistic themes, as opposed to the alternative view that the Jeremianic narratives were invented up to a century later and designed to resemble these themes. Although thematic elements in common between Jeremiah and Deuteronomy are undeniable, they do not warrant an *a priori* conclusion that they are necessarily late fabrications—the similarities themselves do not make it thus, and so it may be that Carroll’s claim would be too great to substantiate with evidence. Much more might be said; however, a continuation of this line of thought is seen in May’s view and addressed further below.

Most significant to this study are the issues surrounding the historicity of specific details in the biographical narratives of Source B as well as in the prose sermons of Source C. Carroll, for the most part, did not so much give reasons why he disbelieved the historicity of narrative material as he gave reasons for why he believed these accounts should be associated with late

³⁷ Carolyn J. Sharp, “The Call of Jeremiah and Diaspora Politics,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 119, no. 3 (2000): 438.

redaction. In response to this, evidence for historical reliability may be derived from material culture and from the biblical text itself. Both Dearman and Glatt-Gilad cite onomastic data from relevant epigraphy as evidence against Carroll's view, in addition to other arguments (discussed primarily in chapter three below).³⁸ Brueggemann, although he allows "for the role of Baruch to be fictive," finds Dearman's arguments in favor of historicity convincing, even as it permits Carroll's emphasis on the Deuteronomic School.³⁹ Once again, Jeremiah 36 serves as an excellent example: Dearman contradicts Carroll's claims against historicity by comparing elements of Jeremiah 36 with the archaeological record, incorporating elements of epigraphic study: the unique term לשכה ("chamber") used in 36:10 seemed to denote a room to house documents that was ostensibly used in some administrative capacity. Dearman finds significance in the sixth-century gatehouse chambers in which several epigraphic caches have been discovered, perhaps constituting physical evidence of the biblical לשכה.⁴⁰ Furthermore, specific locational details such as this within the text of Jeremiah 36—regardless of any complex redactional history—appear to be indicative of a firsthand, eyewitness account.⁴¹ In other words, the level of detail in which the physical layout of the First Temple precinct is described suggests the author(s) would have been present at that location in the seventh–sixth centuries, rather than

³⁸ J. Andrew Dearman, "My Servants the Scribes: Composition and Context in Jeremiah 36," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 109, no. 3 (1990): 403–21; David A. Glatt-Gilad, "The Personal Names in Jeremiah as a Source for the History of the Period," *Hebrew Studies* 41 (2000): 31–45.

³⁹ Walter Brueggemann, "The 'Baruch Connection': Reflections on Jeremiah 43:1–7," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 113, no. 3 (1994): 407, 410.

⁴⁰ Dearman, "My Servants the Scribes," 416–18.

⁴¹ Glatt-Gilad, "Personal Names," 36.

a century after its destruction. Such reasoning demonstrates the value of a historical approach to the discussion, especially regarding data gleaned from epigraphy.

Summary of May's View

The view formulated by May represents an earlier development of the fifth-century biographical material theory.⁴² Building off Mowinckel's thoughts, May stressed the anonymity of "the Biographer," extending Mowinckel's *terminus ante quem* of 480 BCE to a *terminus post quem* of "the first half of the fifth century"—his primary reasons for doing so being literary and ideological similarities between Jeremiah and Deuteronomistic literature."⁴³ A brief recounting of his argumentation, in a similar vein of thought followed by Carroll, will be assessed specifically from May's perspective and reasoning.

The primary thrust of May's argument seems to be that the ideology of Jeremiah's Biographer is Deuteronomistic and therefore is a composition of late Deuteronomistic redactors. He spoke of the Biographer as putting words into Jeremiah's mouth (including prose sermons, "Source C," e.g., Jer 17:19–27) that were "obviously not his."⁴⁴ Parallels between Deuteronomistic literature and Jeremiah abound in May's opinion, one example being the theme embodied by the phrase, "My servants the prophets" (used throughout 2 Kings, also in Ezekiel, Amos, Zechariah, Ezra, and Daniel). Evidence of this "D₂ redaction" was also perceived by May to be present in Second Isaiah and with the redactor of Ezekiel, which led him to relegate the

⁴² Herbert Gordon May, "Towards an Objective Approach to the Book of Jeremiah: The Biographer," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 61, no. 3 (1942): 139–55; "Jeremiah's Biographer," *Journal of Bible and Religion* 10, no. 4 (1942): 195–201.

⁴³ Perdue, *Jeremiah in Modern Research*, 20; May, "Objective Approach," 152.

⁴⁴ May, "Jeremiah's Biographer," 196.

Biographer's work to the fifth century.⁴⁵ His reasoning appears to be straightforward: there are apparent similarities in May's mind between the ideology of specific portions of Ezekiel, Obadiah, First Zechariah, and Jeremiah, and May considered the redactor of Ezekiel (and of Obadiah and First Zechariah) to be the fifth century—therefore, the Biographer (i.e., redactor) of Jeremiah must date to the fifth century as well.

Response to May's View

Although much of what has already been said above regarding Deuteronomistic redaction in Carroll's view is also applicable to May, his in-depth emphasis on literary and ideological features in common with the Deuteronomists invites a revisiting of this topic in addition to what has already been said, with special reference to May's specific arguments (i.e., dates for various redactions). May is, strictly speaking, correct that "the Biographer" is anonymous; however, there is no strong reason offered why this Biographer must necessarily have composed his "Source B" in the fifth century.

Apart from what has already been mentioned regarding literary and ideological parallels between the Deuteronomistic redaction and Jeremiah, the views of other Jeremiah scholars may be here brought to bear. May did not seem to fully respect the complexity of the discussion in making such sweeping claims. Such complexity is evinced in the work of Weippert, with the affirmation of Holladay. Weippert demonstrated through a comparable analysis of "Deuteronomistic phrases" that the context of the phrase is key when criticizing its source; for example, the phrase "with all one's heart and with all one's soul" is used in Jeremiah with vastly differing antecedents when compared with Deuteronomy, and yet is often considered a

⁴⁵ May, "Objective Approach," 152. See "Jeremiah's Biographer," 198 for fifth century redactor of Ezekiel.

Deuteronomistic phrase.⁴⁶ The issue is not sufficiently simple to declare what is or is not Deuteronomistic, regardless of which century one dates the redaction. Although Williams (who disagreed with Weippert) felt that the “Deuteronomistic diction” could be tangibly measured in Source C, it is apparently unclear to what degree this is unequivocally true for Source B.⁴⁷ This further demonstrates complexity in the entire issue, which in turn suggests how May’s confidence in his dating may be unwarranted. Even Carroll admits the lack of agreement between scholars on these issues is symptomatic of insufficient data to make certain unequivocal claims.⁴⁸ This insufficiency can be supplied to a greater or lesser degree by data gleaned from material culture and the field of Northwest Semitic epigraphy.

Conclusion

The claims made by Carroll and May arguing for a fifth-century date for narrative/prose material appear to, for the most part, be based less on specific evidence and more on methodological doubt. In Carroll’s view, Jeremiah is greatly distanced from the biographical narratives, and the prose material was freely composed by Deuteronomists over one hundred years after the Historical Jeremiah is supposed to have lived. May’s view represents an earlier manifestation of this theory of fifth-century Deuteronomist composition and similarly assumes the ideology represented therein is characteristically late. There exists little evidence, however,

⁴⁶ Regarding the Deuteronomistic phrase “with all one’s heart and with all one’s soul,” the eight instances in Deuteronomy (and the four in Dtr^h) refer to the Israelites while Jeremiah’s usage refers to God (Jer 32:41). In the “Temple Sermon” (Jer 7:1–15) the “phraseological variety” is diverse enough to not warrant a Deuteronomistic redaction. She concludes that phrasing in “Source C” is original and distinctive prophetic diction nearer to the Jeremianic tradition than “Source B.” See H. Weippert, *Die Prosareden des Jeremiabuches* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1973); Treated in William L. Holladay, “A Fresh Look at ‘Source B’ and ‘Source C’ in Jeremiah,” *Vetus Testamentum* 25, no. 2 (1975): 394–412.

⁴⁷ Michael J. Williams, “An Investigation of the Legitimacy of Source Distinctions for the Prose Material in Jeremiah,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 112, no. 2 (1993): 193–210.

⁴⁸ Carroll, *From Chaos to Covenant*, 59.

that necessitates these conclusions beyond reasonable doubt; this argumentation is predicated on the assumption that a sixth-century date is unlikely based solely on evidence from source criticism at best and, at worst, what largely amounts to literary conjecture. Ultimately, it seems far more fitting—and perhaps far more profitable—to confront questions of historicity with a historical approach and with specific historical evidence, rather than exclusively with literary comparisons from source criticism.

Chapter Three

Analysis of Late Seventh- and Early Sixth-Century Epigraphic Material

The Hebrew epigraphic remains from the Southern Levant undoubtedly offer an indispensable glimpse into the ancient world; however, they also inform the understanding of biblical scholars through invaluable historical context. Epigraphs from the late seventh/early sixth century BCE may be analyzed and compared with the prose sections of Jeremiah to examine whether or not they might suggest a sixth-century date for Jeremianic prose.

The following research will survey data obtained from epigraphic material, beginning with a delineation of their dates based on archaeological provenance and/or paleographic typology. Secondly, the translation of the epigraph must necessarily be established, along with alternative readings of some significant words or phrases. Although the primary emphasis of this study is historical, it may be helpful to comment on any especially significant linguistic features that arise in the text which lend themselves toward historical understanding.⁴⁹ The significant portion to follow will be dedicated to an assessment of appropriate historical data, as well as a comparison of these data with information from prose material in Jeremiah. In this assessment, information from epigraphy may be compared with textual data from other sources, such as Akkadian tablets or other Hebrew inscriptions, as well as what is already historically known of the period from archaeological excavation.⁵⁰ The onomastics and iconography of a seal/impression is reserved for evaluation in the following chapter.

⁴⁹ Although it goes beyond the purview of this thesis, an interesting case for a sixth-century date on a purely linguistic basis is Aaron D. Hornkohl, *Ancient Hebrew Periodization and the Language of the Book of Jeremiah: The Case for a Sixth-century Date of Composition* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

⁵⁰ Philip J. King, *Jeremiah: An Archaeological Companion* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1993) is one example.

The Ketef Hinnom Amulets from Jerusalem (Ketef Hinnom I and II)

The two amulets recovered from a tomb complex on a hill overlooking the Hinnom valley in Jerusalem are undeniably remarkable finds. Uncovered over 40 years ago, publication has come slowly on the part of the principal investigator, Gabriel Barkay.⁵¹ In “Cave 24” (chamber no. 25), these two silver scrolls, tightly wound, were found buried beneath the floor, along with many other finds spanning from the Late Iron to Hellenistic periods. Although a general scholarly consensus exists, disputes have arisen regarding the date of the plaques, and discussion as to the intricacies of its translation are in many ways ongoing. After determining the find’s date and translation, a discussion will follow concerning its potential relation to the Book of Jeremiah’s composition.

Date

Barkay first dated the two amulets to the second half of the seventh century BCE, while Yardeni paleographically dated them to the early sixth century BCE.⁵² Although a scholarly consensus has crystalized on the seventh-sixth century, pre-exilic date, some contention has arisen from several scholars—some of whom may be considered biblical minimalists.⁵³ These disputes primarily center on issues in archaeological dating, paleography, and orthography of the scrolls themselves, preferring rather to date them in the Persian, Hellenistic (Hasmonean), or

⁵¹ Nadav Na’aman, “A New Appraisal of the Silver Amulets from Ketef Hinnom,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 61, no. 2 (2011): 185–6; Shmuel Ahituv, “A Rejoinder to Nadav Na’aman’s ‘A New Appraisal of the Silver Amulets from Ketef Hinnom,’” *Israel Exploration Journal* 62, no. 2 (2012): 224. For the *editio princeps* of the amulets, see Gabriel Barkay, “The Priestly Benediction on Silver Plaques from Ketef Hinnom in Jerusalem,” *Tel Aviv* 19 (1992): 139–192.

⁵² Gabriel Barkay, Marilyn J. Lundberg, Andrew G. Vaugh, and Bruce Zuckerman, “The Amulets from Ketef Hinnom: A New Edition and Evaluation,” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 334 (2004): 41.

⁵³ A brief history and response to historical/biblical minimalism is Lawrence Mykytiuk, “Strengthening Biblical Historicity vis-à-vis Minimalism, 1992–2008, Part 1: Introducing a Bibliographic Essay in Five Parts,” *Journal of Religious & Theological Information* 9 (2010): 71–83.

even Roman periods.⁵⁴ Each of these issues must be addressed briefly before turning to issues in translation.

Nadav Na'aman sided with Renz in his contention that the amulets ought to be dated later but differed in his conviction that the plaques belong to the early Second Temple period rather than the Hasmonean. Both scholars, along with others, formed their conclusions, in part, based on the archaeological evidence. At the entrance to the repository (no. 25, Cave 24), there were uncovered some Hellenistic objects—leading him, and others, to argue against such an early date for the amulets. However, Renz seemed to have misunderstood the stratigraphic nature of such a find: that, unlike a *tel*, a burial complex would have been reused over several centuries that would not result in clear-cut layers. As a result, one must pay careful attention to the immediate vicinity of a given find in order to determine most accurately its date; the Ketef Hinnom amulets were found several meters away from the Hellenistic items in question, and the first silver scroll, called Ketef Hinnom I was discovered *in situ* beneath the floor (Ketef Hinnom II was found further still from the Hellenistic objects), surrounded by a significant amount of late Iron Age material.⁵⁵ Although Na'aman rightfully chided Barkay for his lack of prompt publication, he posed little other argumentation from stratigraphy aside from suggesting a possible shifting of items from repeated burials over time.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Most notably, Johannes Renz, *Handbuch der althebräischen Epigraphik*, Vol. 1, no. 1: *Die althebräischen Inschriften, Text und Kommentar*, (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1995); John Rogerson and Philip Davies, “Was the Siloam Tunnel Built by Hezekiah?” *Biblical Archaeologist* 59 (1996): 138–49; Angelika Berlejung, “Ein Programm fürs Leben: Theologisches Wort und anthropologischer Ort der Silveramulette von Ketef Hinnom,” *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 120 (2008): 204–230; “Der gesegnete Mensch,” in *Mensch und König: Studien zur Anthropologie des Alten Testaments*, eds. Angelika Berlejung and Raik Heckl (Freiburg: Herder, 2008) 37–62.

⁵⁵ Barkay, Lundberg, Vaugh, and Zuckerman, “Amulets,” 43–4.

⁵⁶ Na'aman, “Appraisal,” 186.

The remaining major objections to the pre-exilic dating of the amulets have to do with the inscriptions themselves.⁵⁷ Paleographically, the letters indicate a seventh- or sixth-century date through similarity in form to other finds such as ostraca from Mesad Hashavyahu, Lachish, and Arad.⁵⁸ It has been contested, however, that the “engraving process must have been very careful,” and that the cursive-like script must be indicative of formality.⁵⁹ The argument is that the miniscule nature of the inscription must have involved great care and that epigraphic finds from the (pre-exilic) period are so scant that the inscription eludes identification. In response, Shmuel Ahituv specified how Gabriel Barkay was correct in his estimation that the writing is more accurately characterized as hasty, careless, even “negligent”—suggesting that the scrolls were never intended to be read, but rather to serve in an apotropaic capacity.⁶⁰ The cursive-like qualities of the inscription may have furthermore been an idiosyncrasy of the scribe in that region at that time.⁶¹

The final problem raised against the consensus dating is the use of *matres lectionis* in both Ketef Hinnom I and II, which is generally thought to be a characteristically late feature.⁶²

⁵⁷ One other archaeological argument made by Berlejung to date the amulets to the Persian period based on similar examples is treated, though not wholly dismissed, by Ahituv (“A Rejoinder to Nadav Na’aman’s ‘A New Appraisal of the Silver Amulets from Ketef Hinnom,’” 223–4).

⁵⁸ Ada Yardeni, “Remarks on the Priestly Blessing on Two Ancient Amulets from Jerusalem,” *Vetus Testamentum* 41, no. 2 (1991): 180.

⁵⁹ Na’aman, “Appraisal,” 187.

⁶⁰ Ahituv, “Rejoinder,” 224; Yardeni, “Remarks,” 178; Barkay, Lundberg, Vaugh, and Zuckerman, “Amulets,” 46; Barkay, “Priestly Benediction,” 169.

⁶¹ The minutiae of each letter’s paleography is dealt with by the following: Yardeni, “Remarks,” 178–80; Barkay, Lundberg, Vaugh, and Zuckerman, “Amulets,” 47–52; Ahituv, “Rejoinder,” 224–5.

⁶² Na’aman, “Appraisal,” 187–8. One would expect a pre-exilic inscription to be written with defective spelling based on the seminal study by Frank Moore Cross, Jr. and David Freedman (*Early Hebrew Orthography* [New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society, 1952]).

Ahituv dismissed this objection by effectively demonstrating through numerous epigraphic examples the process by which Hebrew developed the *plene* spelling was gradual and appears to have taken place earlier than previously thought (i.e., in the late Iron Age).⁶³

Text

The texts of Ketef Hinnom I and II were originally proffered by Barkay in the *editio princeps* but were revised and updated by reason of technological advancements that aided scholars' ability to clearly read the letters.⁶⁴ The generally agreed-upon text and translation for Ketef Hinnom I, with supplied text in the left column, is as follows:

1	יהו[צב	1	]יהו[
2	[את האל ה]	2	[]
3	גד[ל שמר	3	]גד
4	הברית ו	4	הברית ו
5	[חסד לאהב	5	]חסד לאהב
6	[ו] ושמרי [מצ	6	] ושמרי [
7	[ותו מהעולם]	7	[]
8	] ועד העולם [	8	] ועד העולם [
9	[ה] ברכה מכל [פ	9	] ברכה מכל [
10	ח ומהרע	10	ח ומהרע
11	כי בו גאל	11	כי בו גאל
12	ה כי יהוה	12	ה כי יהוה
13	י[שיבנו ו]	13	] שיבנו [
14	צור יבר	14	צור יבר
15	ך יהוה ו]	15	] יהוה [
16	ישמרך [י	16	] ישמרך [י
17	א[ר יהוה	17	] ר יהוה [
18	פנ[ו אלי	18	] פנ
19	[ך ויחנך]	19	[]

]YHW[H of the Ho]sts the Gr[eat God keeper of] the covenant [and the] grace to the ones who love him, the keepers of [his commandments, from eternity to] eternity [...the] blessing from every [tra]p and from the evil, because by him is deliverance, because

⁶³ Ahituv, "Rejoinder," 225–6.

⁶⁴ Barkay, Lundberg, Vaugh, and Zuckerman, "Amulets," 41.

YHWH [will] restore / answer him [and] Rock may bless you YHWH [and] protect you. [May] YHWH cause [his f]ac[e] to shine [upon you and be gracious unto you].⁶⁵

Although there naturally remains some discussion regarding the supplied portions of the text (and, to a certain degree, some of the inscribed letters), other portions of the text are indisputable. Na’aman argued that the (Second) Temple is what is “everlasting, a blessing from any snare and evil, for redemption is in it,” in line with his early post-exilic date for the amulets.⁶⁶ To this, Ahituv defended his reading of *dalet* (ד) for *taw* (ת), and responded with a recounting of the poverty of the Second Temple in its early years from the biblical books of Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, and Ezra-Nehemiah.⁶⁷ With this argument, Ahituv contended that Na’aman’s late sixth-century reading of the text with the Second Temple in mind is unlikely due to the fact that the Temple’s comparatively “miserable” state would give little cause for the people to glory in it as the everlasting blessing and redemption of restored land.

The text of Ketef Hinnom II is comparatively less disputed:

1	ה/ו ברך ה	1	ה/ו ברך ה
2	א [ליהו]ה	2	א [ליהו]ה
3	העזר ו	3	העזר ו
4	הגער ב	4	הגער ב
5	ר[ע יברך	5	ר[ע יברך
6	יהוה י	6	יהוה י
7	שמרך	7	שמרך
8	יאר יה	8	יאר יה
9	ו[ה פניו	9	ו[ה פניו
10	אל[יך וי	10	אל[יך וי
11	שם לך ש	11	שם לך ש
12	ל]ם	12	ל]ם

⁶⁵ Shmuel Ahituv, *Echoes from the Past: Hebrew and Cognate Inscriptions from the Biblical Period* (Jerusalem: CARTA, 2008), 50–1.

⁶⁶ Na’aman, “Appraisal,” 189.

⁶⁷ Ahituv, “Rejoinder,” 227–30.

[For ...]yāhû blessed be he to YHW[H] who helps and who rebukes the evi[I]. May YHWH bless you (and) protect you. May YHW[H] cause his face to shine [upon yo]u and may he grant you p[ea]ce. [...].⁶⁸

Overall, the text of both amulets undeniably points to the Priestly Blessing recorded in Numbers 6:24–26, commonly ascribed to the “Priestly Source” (P), while the upper portion (lines 4–6) of Ketef Hinnom I also seem to reference Deuteronomy 7:9.⁶⁹

Analysis

The Ketef Hinnom inscriptions are almost parabolic in the way they condemn arguments from silence. Although Priestly source material has been commonly thought to be post-exilic, the inscriptions from Ketef Hinnom, in part, challenge this supposition. It seems more profitable to emphasize the data that are available rather than to conjecture too strongly about data that are absent; arguments from silence are weaker because they very well may be predicated on the assumption that information that has not yet come to light does not exist at all.

One of the ostensible tenets of distancing Jeremianic prose from the Historical Jeremiah is a post-exilic Deuteronomistic redaction with roots in pre-exilic Judah (see above). Carroll admitted that the “origins, composition and development of the Jeremiah tradition” was not one of the “main concerns” of his analysis but emphasized that the “latest strands” of the Deuteronomistic tradition as applied to Jeremiah may be the Persian period.⁷⁰ He dismissed issues in composition by turning to “more manageable concerns.”⁷¹ But the burden of proof

⁶⁸ Shmuel Ahituv, *Echoes*, 54.

⁶⁹ Yardeni, “Remarks,” 178.

⁷⁰ Carroll, *From Chaos to Covenant*, 249.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 250.

remains on the claimants of free Deuteronomistic composition in Jeremiah. It is apparent from the allusion or quotation of Deuteronomy in Ketef Hinnom I that Deuteronomistic material was readily available for reference as early as the second half of the seventh century BCE. According to the work done by Weinfeld, the phrase שמר הברית והחסד is a characteristic feature of Deuteronomistic phraseology.⁷² If Deuteronomistic ideology can be historically demonstrated to have been prevalent in the time of Jeremiah's prophetic career, it seems unnecessary to suggest Deuteronomistic references in the Book of Jeremiah are the result of free compositions by post-exilic redactors a century later.

One final point of potential interest is the apotropaic function of the amulets. The magical function of the silver plaques bears strong analogy to inscribed Phoenician and Punic amulets.⁷³ In light of this similarity, these amulets may be indicative of elements foreign to Yahwistic worship. It is impossible to determine the author of the inscriptions; for Na'aman, it was most likely a post-exilic priest, while the majority consensus seems to be it was the work of pre-exilic scribes.⁷⁴ If it were written by a priest in the waning years of the Judean Monarchy, there are numerous references to Jeremiah's opposition to the priests in Jerusalem (despite being part of the priestly caste himself);⁷⁵ aside from this, foreign elements of worship are condemned throughout the Book of Jeremiah. Although it may perhaps be reaching too far, this may also

⁷² Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 330.

⁷³ Jeremy D. Smoak, "amuletic Inscriptions and the background of YHWH as Guardian and Protector in Psalm 12," *Vetus Testamentum* 60, no. 3 (2010): 427.

⁷⁴ Na'aman, "Appraisal," 192; Barkay, Lundberg, Vaugh, and Zuckerman, "Amulets," 46.

⁷⁵ E.g., Jer 1:18; 2:8; 2:26; 4:9; 5:31; 6:13; 8:1; 13:13; 14:18; 18:18; 20:1–3; 23:11, 33–34; 26:7, 8, 11, 16; 32:32; 34:19.

help constitute a small intersection between the preaching of Jeremiah and extant epigraphic material.

The Ostrakon from Mesad Hashavyahu (The “Yavneh-Yam Letter”)

The Mesad Hashavyahu (מצד חשבִיָהוּ) ostrakon was discovered near Yavneh-Yam by Joseph Naveh in 1960. The text of the letter appears to be a judicial plea of an agricultural worker. While the inscription’s date is relatively fixed, there exist several issues in translation that may have some bearing on the discussion of Jeremianic prose. These issues will be addressed after the date and text of the inscription are delineated.

Date

The Yavneh-Yam letter, as it is commonly known, is securely dated to the mid–late seventh century BCE. Naveh, the principal investigator, reported how the ostrakon was uncovered just above a floor dating no earlier than the mid-seventh century (viz., c. 650 BCE); moreover, the paleography of the letters predates the Lachish Letters.⁷⁶ Thus the reign of Josiah is the generally agreed-upon timeframe of the inscription, with Naveh believing the “last third” of the seventh century to be most probable and Ahituv allowing for the “last quarter” of the same century.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Joseph Naveh, “A Hebrew Letter from the Seventh Century B.C.,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 10, no. 3 (1960): 137; Also Frank Moore Cross, Jr., “Epigraphic Notes on Hebrew Documents of the Eighth–Sixth Centuries B.C.: The Murabba’at Papyrus and the Letter Found near Yabneh-yam,” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 165 (1962): 34–41.

⁷⁷ Naveh, “Hebrew Letter,” 139; Ahituv, *Echoes*, 157.

Text

The ostracon itself, broken into six (or perhaps seven) pieces, comprises 14 lines and is comparatively easily read.⁷⁸ The following is based on the commonly accepted reading with some variations, as well as footnotes detailing alternate readings:

Let my lord the governor/commander hear the word of his servant. As for your servant, your servant was harvesting in Hasar-asam, and your servant harvested and finished/measured; and I gathered in and stored as always⁷⁹ before Sabbath.⁸⁰ When your servant had finished/measured his harvest and stored as always,⁸¹ then came Hosha'yahu ben Shobay, and he took your servant's garment After I had finished/measured my harvest as always, he took your servant's garment. And all my brothers will testify⁸² for me those who reap with me in the heat [of the sun], my brothers will testify for me, "Truly," I am innocent of gu[ilt. Restore] my garment. And I will pay the governor to rest[ore the garment to your/his] ser[vant. So gran]t him merc[y and resto]re the [garment of your serv[ant] and do not ignore/confound [me ...⁸³

The disputed phrase "before Sabbath" in line 5–6 is of particular interest, as it would constitute the earliest epigraphic reference to the Jewish Sabbath. Many commentators prefer to

⁷⁸ The text of the Mesad Hashavyahu Ostracon may be compared between the following: Naveh, "Hebrew Letter," 131; Cross, "Epigraphic Notes," 42–5; James B. Pritchard (Translation by W. F. Albright), *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), 568; Dennis Pardee, S. David Sperling, J. David Whitehead, and Paul E. Dion, *Handbook of Ancient Hebrew Letters* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982), 20; K. A. D. Smelik, "The Literary Structure of the Yavneh-Yam Ostracon," *Israel Exploration Journal* 42, no. 1 (1992): 56; Simon B. Parker, *Stories in Scripture and Inscriptions: Comparative Studies on Narratives in Northwest Semitic Inscriptions and the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 15. Ahituv, *Echoes*, 159; For lines 11–14 especially and response, see Victor Sasson, "An Unrecognized Juridical Term in the Yabneh-Yam Lawsuit and in an Unnoticed Biblical Parallel," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 232 (1978): 60–61; Dennis Pardee, "A Brief Note on Mesad Hashavyahu Ostracon 1. 12: w'ml'," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 239 (1980): 47–8.

⁷⁹ Following Ahituv (*Echoes*, 159–60); Naveh misread ם for ן and has "gathered in about a *ynm*," while Parker reads "stored it for days" (Naveh, "Hebrew Letter," 134–5; Parker, *Stories*, 15).

⁸⁰ Following Ahituv (discussed further below).

⁸¹ See note 30, and so throughout.

⁸² Ahituv interprets "answer for me" (*Echoes*, 160).

⁸³ The latter portion of the text varies between interpreters, largely due to the lacunae in the text.

interpret the text as the disgruntled worker finishing his work “before sitting/resting.”⁸⁴ The only linguistic objection to the “Sabbath” reading is the missing definite article one might expect to find.⁸⁵ There are issues with the “sitting/resting” translation as well: both Exodus 21:19 and Ruth 2:7 are cited as examples of this usage, but neither example explains the inscription’s missing pronominal suffix. It falls on the proponents of this reading to satisfactorily explain the ostensibly necessary suffix—otherwise, it seems more natural to accept the translation as “before Sabbath.”⁸⁶

The remainder of the text is either so clear as to not be disputed or else so unclear as to defy certain translation. Several alternative translations exist, such as whether the worker making the plea is saying “Amen” (i.e., “Surely, I am innocent of guilt”) or whether his “brothers” are affirming his innocence (as in the translation above).⁸⁷ Most seem to side with the latter, seeing as the response “Amen” was standard practice for witnesses affirming legal testimonies.⁸⁸

Analysis

The reading that is perhaps most pertinent to the discussion of Jeremiah’s composition is the potential reference to the Sabbath (lines 5–6). It is the opinion of Ahituv that the reason some scholars avoid this reading is that they “find it hard to admit that the institution of rest on the Sabbath could have been a pre-exilic institution,” and “instead prefer to take שבת as an infinitival

⁸⁴ Naveh, “Hebrew Letter,” 134 and Pardee et al, *Handbook*, 20, for example. Cross first follows Albright in reading שבת as “Sabbath,” but then cites a suggestion from Talmon for “time off” or “quitting time” (“Epigraphic Notes,” 44–5, footnote).

⁸⁵ Smelik, “Literary Structure,” 58 (see footnote).

⁸⁶ Ahituv, *Echoes*, 161.

⁸⁷ Sasson, “Juridical Term,” 61; Cross, “Epigraphic Notes,” 45.

⁸⁸ Ahituv, *Echoes*, 163. See also Pardee, Sperling, Whitehead, Dion, *Handbook*, 20; Parker, *Stories*, 15.

form of the verb ‘to sit...’⁸⁹ As mentioned above, this is equally if not more problematic. Speaking of the prose sermon about the Sabbath in Jeremiah 17:19–27 (Source C), May stated, “Critics are almost unanimous in denying it to Jeremiah, in view of the obvious lateness of the conception of the Sabbath found therein.”⁹⁰ Although the unanimity that May stressed might have been hyperbolized, it is true that many scholars have viewed this passage of Jeremiah to be a post-exilic supplement.⁹¹ Carroll, largely avoiding issues of origin, emphasized the post-exilic development of the Sabbath and compared Jeremiah 17 to Nehemiah 13 in the Persian period, as did May.⁹² The natural reading of this inscription, however, would challenge conceptions of later Deuteronomistic activity; “Deuteronomistic” themes can be just as likely to have taken place in the time of Jeremiah, if not more so, than the fifth century as May and Carroll have posited. Furthermore, Fishbane concluded apart from epigraphic evidence of the Jewish Sabbath that Nehemiah would have been more likely to have built on and have drawn from Jeremiah rather than the other way around.⁹³ Ultimately, the conclusion that the Sabbath is a late, post-exilic construct is more an argument from silence than anything else, and it is apparent that the Mesad Hashavyahu ostrakon most likely breaks that silence.

⁸⁹ Ahituv, *Echoes*, 161.

⁹⁰ May, “Biographer,” 144.

⁹¹ Guy P. Couturier, “Jeremiah,” *New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1990), 281; S. R. Driver, *An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament* (New York: Scribner’s, 1950), 258; Muilenburg, “Jeremiah the Prophet,” *Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* Vol. 2 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 832; G. Fohrer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1968), 395; E. W. Nicholson, *Preaching to the Exiles: A Study of the Prose Tradition in the Book of Jeremiah* (New York: Schocken, 1971); Carroll, *Chaos to Covenant*; N. K. Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-literary Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 397–98.

⁹² Robert P. Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1986), 368; May, “Biographer,” 151.

⁹³ Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), 132, footnote.

The Lachish Ostraca (“Lachish Letters”)

The ostraca uncovered at Lachish, commonly referred to as the “Lachish Letters,” represent an incredibly significant epigraphic witness to the times in which the Historical Jeremiah lived. Excavated in 1935 by James Leslie Starkey, the cache of ostraca constitutes a comparative wealth of epigraphic and paleographic data, given the dearth of inscriptional material for Northwest Semitic languages generally. In addition to the first 18, three more were discovered in 1938, bringing the total to 21 ostraca.⁹⁴ While some are names lists or simply illegible, most of the ostraca are letters from one Hosha’yahu to his superior, Ya’ush. For the purposes of this thesis, primarily Letters 3–6 will be analyzed for historical intersections with Jeremianic prose—other letters may also provide additional historical information, such as onomastic data (addressed in the following chapter). Although some details of the exchanges between the soldiers remain obscure, the present author will endeavor to emphasize the issues that apply to the discussion of Jeremiah. As with the other inscriptions heretofore examined, a brief review of the ostraca’s date and text will be succeeded by an appraisal of their relevance to the Book of Jeremiah.

Date

The date for the Lachish Letters is widely accepted to be just before the Babylonian siege of Lachish c. 589/8 BCE.⁹⁵ There appear to be several reasons to support this conclusion: first, the stratum in which the ostraca were found (Lachish Stratum II) is the final occupation of the city, and second, the typology of the ceramic finds serves to support this conclusion.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Pritchard, *Near Eastern Texts*, 321.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 322.

⁹⁶ Ahituv, *Echoes*, 59.

Furthermore, the content of the letters, although in some cases rather vague, generally seems to fit the tense context of national emergency. The issues surrounding the content of the letters is addressed in the following section.

Text

The texts were first translated and published by Harry Torczyner (Tur-Sinai) but were assessed and reviewed by many other scholars as well.⁹⁷ The following are translations of Lachish Letters 3–6 based on those by Ahituv, accompanied by some brief discussion of each translation:

Lachish No. 3:

Your servant, Hosha'yahu, sent to inform my lord, Ya'ush: May YHWH cause my lord to hear tidings of peace and tidings of good. And now, open the ear of your servant concerning the letter which you sent to your servant last evening because the heart of your servant is ill since your sending it to your servant. And inasmuch as my lord said, "Don't you know how to read a letter?" As YHWH lives if anyone has ever tried to read me a letter! And as for every letter that comes to me, if I read it. And furthermore, I will grant it as nothing. And to your servant it has be reported saying: The commander of the army, Konyahu son of Elnathan, has gone down to go to Egypt and he sent to commandeer Hodawyahu son of Ahiyahu and his men from here. And as for the letter of Tobiyahu, the servant of the king, which came to Shallum, the son of Yaddu, from the prophet, saying, "Be on your guard!" your ser[va]nt is sending it to my lord.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Harry Torczyner, *Lachish I: The Lachish Letters* (London: Oxford University Press, 1938); William F. Albright, "The Oldest Hebrew Letters: The Lachish Ostraca," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 70 (1938): 11–17; Cyrus H. Gordon, "Notes on the Lachish Letters," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 70 (1938): 17–18; Raymond S. Haupt, "The Lachish Letters," *The Biblical Archaeologist* 1, no. 4 (1938): 30–32; Joseph Reider, "The Lachish Letters," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 29, no. 3 (1939): 225–239; D. Winton Thomas, "The Lachish Letters," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 40, no. 157 (1939): 1–15; etc.

⁹⁸ Ahituv, *Echoes*, 63.

Notably, this is the only letter to mention both the sender (Hosha'yahu) and the receiver (Ya'ush) by name. Apparently, the previous letter that Hosha'yahu received rebuked him for not being able to read; Cross suggested an alternative reading, "You don't know it? Call a scribe!"⁹⁹ Hosha'yahu considers this an affront, which speaks to the literacy of non-scribes at the time.

Lachish No. 4:

May YHWH cause my [lord] to hear, this very day, tidings of good. And now, according to everything which my lord has sent, this has your servant done. I wrote on the sheet according to everything which [you] sent [t]o me. And inasmuch as my lord sent to me concerning the matter of Beit Harapid, there is no one there. And as for Semakyahu, Shema'yahu took him and brought him up to the city. And your servant is not sending him there any [more ---], but when morning comes round [---]. And may (my lord) be apprised that we are watching out for the fire signals of Lachish according to all the signs which my lord has given, because we cannot see Azekah.¹⁰⁰

The translation of "sheet" for דלת in line 3 of the ostrakon as opposed to "door," as would at first seem more natural, comes from Jeremiah 36:23, where the king cut the scroll and cast it into the fire after every three or four *delatot* (דלתות) were read.¹⁰¹ The place name *byt hrpd* is heretofore unknown, but is significant in the discussion of where the text may have been written. As for "the city" (העיר) in line 7 that Semakyahu was brought up to, it is logical to conclude that it most likely refers to Jerusalem.

Lachish No. 5:

May YHWH cause my [lo]rd to hear tidings of pea[ce] and of good, [now today, now this very da]y! Who is your servant, a dog, that you [s]ent to your servant the [letters?]

⁹⁹ Frank Moore Cross, "A Literate Soldier: Lachish Letter III [1985]" in *Leaves from an Epigrapher's Notebook: Collected Papers in Hebrew and West Semitic Palaeography and Epigraphy* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 129–132.

¹⁰⁰ Ahituv, *Echoes*, 70.

¹⁰¹ Harry Torczyner (Tur-Sinai), "Lachish Letter IV: New Light on the Ostraca of Tell ed-Duweir," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 39, no. 4 (1949): 376; Ahituv, *Echoes*, 71; translated as "columns" (of text); cf. Cross, "Lachish Letter IV [1956]" in *Leaves from an Epigrapher's Notebook* 133–4, who reads "(gate) door."

Like]wise has your servant returned the letters to my lord. My YHWH cause you to see the harvest successfully, this very day! Will Tobiyahu of the royal family c<o>me to your servant?¹⁰²

The phrase זרע למלך may be translated in a variety of ways: it is conceivable that זרע may be read as “arm” rather than “seed,” as Tobiyahu may have been a high-ranking official, the “arm of the king/the king’s arm” (much like the Achaemenid Persian “eyes and ears” of the king), but it most likely refers to the royal family (e.g., 2 Kgs 25:25 and Jer 41:1). The suggestion that “seed” is an agricultural reference (i.e., “seed for the king[’s field]) seems unlikely in light of the reference to the harvest in the preceding line.¹⁰³

Lachish No. 6:

To my lord, Ya’ush, may YHWH cause my lord to see peace at this time! Who is your servant, a dog, that my lord sent him the king’s [lette]r [and] the letters of the officer[s sayin]g, “Please read!” And behold, the words of the [officers] are not good; to weaken your hands [and to in]hibit the hands of the m[en]. [I(?)] know [them(?)]. My lord, will you not write to [them] sa[ying, “Wh]y are you behaving this way? [...] well-being [...] Does the king [...] And [...] As YHWH lives, since your servant read the letters, your servant has not had [peace(?)].¹⁰⁴

The restoration of “inhibit the hands of the men” is interpreted from [ולהש]קט ידי [האנשם], the only reasonable reading given the visible letters.¹⁰⁵

Analysis

The reference to the commander Konyahu son of Elnathan being sent to Egypt is interesting and relatively significant. It is reminiscent of Jeremiah 26:20–23, where Elnathan the

¹⁰² Ibid., *Echoes*, 77.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 80.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 83.

son of Achbor and other delegates journey to Egypt to extradite Urijah the prophet. While this direct association has certainly tempted some scholars,¹⁰⁶ most caution against this identification.¹⁰⁷ Lachish 3, at the very least, speaks to the routineness of this sort of travel between Palestine and Egypt before the exile.

The Lachish Letters also speak to the presence and influence of prophets and prophecy in the time of Jeremiah (false prophets, by Jeremiah's estimation; see Jer 27; 28; 32:32). Note also the correlation between the phrase לאמר השמר in the final line of Lachish 3 and the phrasing of 2 Kings 6:9.¹⁰⁸ Apart from the similarity between Deuteronomy 17 and Jeremiah 28 regarding the "test of a prophet," prophecy was a significant and prolific part of life in Israel at the turn of the 7th century BCE. Furthermore, the Lachish Letters reveal much of the relationship between scribe and prophet; in what Dearman considered to be an "undervalued" point in considering the Historical Jeremiah, the Lachish ostraca reveal a great degree of relatedness between ancient letter writing, the biographical (Source B) material, and the prose sermons (Source C) of Jeremiah.¹⁰⁹ He argued that, "Jeremiah's employment of two sons of Neriah and (at least) one of Shaphan fits perfectly into this avenue of prophetic activity."¹¹⁰ While scholars ought to exercise restraint in making sweeping claims of connections between Jeremiah and the prophet(s) of the

¹⁰⁶ Torczyner (Tur-Sinai), "Letter IV," 373; J. Andrew Dearman, "My Servants the Scribes: Composition and Context in Jeremiah 36," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 109, no. 3 (1990): 411–12, footnote.

¹⁰⁷ R. de Vaux, "Les Ostraka de Lachis," *Revue Biblique* 48, no. 2 (1939): 206; D. Winton Thomas., "The Age of Jeremiah in the Light of Recent Archaeological Discovery," *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 82 (1950): 1–5.

¹⁰⁸ Ahituv, *Echoes*, 63; 69.

¹⁰⁹ Dearman, "Scribes," 420.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

Lachish Letters,¹¹¹ the ostraca reveal a historical context that appears to generally fit nicely with the world of Jeremiah as revealed in the prose associated with him.

One potential contradiction between the biblical account of Jeremiah 34:7 and the epigraphic record is the final lines of Lachish 4. Although at first blush the mentioning of Lachish and Azekah in both the epigraphic and biblical records ostensibly make for a fascinating intersection between the two, issues regarding the chronology of events quickly arise. Source B describes Lachish and Azekah as the last remaining fortified cities in Judah after Jerusalem; Torczyner (Tur-Sinai) suggested a sequence of events recorded in the Lachish ostraca that ended with Azekah being destroyed by the Babylonians, with the “signal fires” no longer visible to the writer of Lachish 4.¹¹² The fortress from which Lachish 4 was written was apparently not destroyed at this point; furthermore, Lachish 4 seems to indicate that free travel to and from Jerusalem was possible—both of which would seem to contradict Jeremiah 34:7.¹¹³ In response to this, Begin identified the most likely region Lachish 4 would have been written based on cited place names and available epigraphy throughout Israel/Palestine; he concluded that ancient Maresha is the most likely candidate.¹¹⁴ From the vantage points of Maresha, Azekah, and Lachish it is possible to determine that Maresha and Lachish were mutually visible, while Maresha’s elevation did not allow for a view of Azekah and was dependent on Lachish to relay

¹¹¹ At least one example of this is R. Dussaud, “Le prophète Jérémie et les lettres de Lakish,” *Syria* 19 (1938): 256–71.

¹¹² Torczyner (Tur-Sinai), “The Lachish Documents: Letters from the Time of the Prophet Jeremiah,” *Knesset Divrei Sofrim in Memory of H. N. Bialik* (1935): 371–388 (Hebrew).

¹¹³ Ze’ev B. Begin, “Does Lachish Letter 4 Contradict Jeremiah XXXIV 7?” *Vetus Testamentum* 52, no. 2 (2002): 168.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 169.

such military information.¹¹⁵ This discovery makes Lachish 4 a confirmation of the historicity of Jeremiah 34 rather than an objection.

Some additional phrases of interest in the Lachish Letters are found in Nos. 5 and 6. The reference to Tobiyahu in Lachish 5 bears semblance to a phrase in Jeremianic prose. As discussed above, the phrase “royal family” (lit. “the king’s seed”) finds parallel in Jeremiah 41:1, which is demonstrative of biographical material in Jeremiah utilizing wording common in the early 6th century. Perhaps more applicable is the reference to the “weakening of hands” in Lachish 6; the phrase is undoubtedly reminiscent of the same accusations made against Jeremiah (38:4).¹¹⁶ While Thomas is correct in stating the usage in Lachish 6 must not necessarily apply to Jeremiah as opposed to any other individual at that time,¹¹⁷ the phrasing of the biographer’s prose material is consistent with what was being used during the events themselves as they were taking place.

The Arad Ostraca (“Arad Letters”)

The Arad ostraca, or sometimes “Arad Letters,” are a collection of 91 inscriptions discovered by Aharoni throughout several strata of the site Arad.¹¹⁸ The most pertinent to this study come from closely-related Strata VII and VI, dating to the late seventh/early sixth centuries BCE; many of these ostraca were written to one Elyashib, who would have obviously occupied the site in both strata since seals and inscriptions bearing his name were found in each.¹¹⁹ Many

¹¹⁵ A detailed explanation and response to potential objections is found in *ibid.*, 170–174.

¹¹⁶ See Albright, “Oldest Hebrew Letters,” 15–16; Torczyner (Tur-Sinai), “Letter IV,” 373.

¹¹⁷ Thomas, “Lachish Letters,” 8.

¹¹⁸ For a bibliography on the Arad ostraca, see Pardee, Sperling, Whitehead, and Dion, *Handbook*, 24–28.

¹¹⁹ Ahituv, *Echoes*, 92.

of the inscriptions are receipts and lists in addition to other military correspondences; many are fragmentary or illegible, so only a few ostraca will be addressed in this section.

Date

Ussishkin sought to redate Aharoni's work on the Arad ostraca by erroneously comparing his own work at the site of Lachish to the littler settlement at Arad; smaller sites typically experience more phases of occupation than larger sites like Lachish.¹²⁰ For the purposes of this thesis, the dating laid out by Aharoni will be followed and each ostrakon will be discussed with regards to its stratum.

Text

The reverse of Arad No. 24, the greatly effaced obverse revealing little else except that it was addressed to Eliyashib, reads:

- (12) From Arad 50(?) and from Qina[h...]
- (13) and send them to Ramat-nege[b in ch]arge of
- (14) Malkiyahu son of Qerabor and he will hand
- (15) them over to Elisha son of Yirmeyahu
- (16) in Ramat-negeb, lest something should happen to
- (17) the city. And this is an order from the king—a life and
- (18) death matter for you. Behold, I have written to
- (19) warn you: The men (must go) to Elisha!
- (20) Lest Edom should enter there.¹²¹

The third feminine verbal form of “enter” reveals נדא should be read “Edom” rather than “man(kind)/men.” The final lines of Arad No. 40 read, “May the king of Juda[h] be apprised

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ahituv, *Echoes*, 128; Pardee, Sperling, Whitehead, and Dion, *Handbook*, 60.

[that w]e are not able to send the [...] and this is the evil whi[ch] Edo[m...has done].¹²² Other scattered references to Edom exist in the Arad ostraca, for example in Nos. 3 and 21.¹²³

Analysis

The Arad ostraca seem to have the least significant application to prose material in Jeremiah. Although relatively numerous, the cache of ostraca reveals little when compared with Sources B or C in Jeremiah. However, the inscriptions that are legible reveal much about the military situation of Judah in the late seventh/early sixth centuries BCE. King wrote that, “The frequent appearance of the name Edom in the Arad inscriptions...underscores the prominence of the Edomites in the eastern Negev” at that time, and that “[i]t is apparent that Edom was a real menace to Judah at that time.”¹²⁴ It should be mentioned that when Arad 40 was recovered it was associated with Stratum VIII (late eighth century), which of course considerably predates the *Sitz im Leben* of Jeremiah—however, the content of the message itself convinces some that it belongs with the late monarchic material, or else it testifies to earlier conflicts between Judah and Edom (e.g. 2 Sam 8:13–14; 1 Kgs 11:14–22; 2 Kgs 14:7; 16:6).¹²⁵ Beit-Arieh postulated that “the Edomites had actually seized and occupied Judean lands at the end of the First Temple

¹²² Ibid., *Echoes*, 142; *Ibid.*, *Handbook*, 64.

¹²³ See Ibid., *Echoes*, 100, 124; *Ibid.*, *Handbook*, 35, 57, although No. 3 is too badly effaced in the authors’ opinion(s).

¹²⁴ King, *Jeremiah*, 57–8.

¹²⁵ Ahituv, *Echoes*, 142.

period.”¹²⁶ In addition to the Arad ostraca, an ostrakon uncovered at Horvat ‘Uza invokes the uniquely Edomite deity Qaos, which appears to corroborate this theory.¹²⁷

Edom plays somewhat prominently in the Book of Jeremiah: first mentioned in what is considered an early poetical oracle of Jeremiah (3:9), Edom is additionally cited with other neighboring nations in the prose of 9:26; 25:21; 27:3; and 40:11. There is nothing particularly special or significant in these citations, and there is ostensibly no connection to the Edomites’ prominence in the Arad ostraca. There is, however, the message to Edom in Jeremiah 49:7–22, in the “Oracles Against the Nations” (46–51); at the very least this may be indicative of a “deep resentment” of Edom’s failure to come to Jerusalem’s aid before its destruction in 586 BCE (see Jer 27:3, 6, 7).¹²⁸ The psalmist seems to record a memory that Edom took part in Jerusalem’s fall in some way (Ps 137:7). Similar to Jeremianic prose, Carroll was more inclined to consider the “Oracles Against the Nations” to be late and secondary, rather than original to the prophet himself.¹²⁹ This resentment towards Edom seen in the prose and poetry of Jeremiah, as well as other portions of the Hebrew Bible, is substantiated in the archaeological record through the medium of epigraphy and seems to substantiate the general historical context.

One final point of interest is the simple phrase מלך יהודה [ה] in line 13 of Arad 40; the title of course plays prominently in the Book of Jeremiah, yet epigraphic references are exceedingly rare

¹²⁶ Itzhaq Beit-Arieh, “New Data on the Relationship between Judah and Edom toward the End of the Iron Age,” in *Recent Excavations in Israel: Studies in Iron Age Archaeology*, eds. Seymour Gitin and William Dever, (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1989), 125.

¹²⁷ King, *Jeremiah*, 58–9; King, “Archaeology and the Book of Jeremiah,” *Eretz-Israel: Archaeological, Historical and Geographical Studies* (1992): 97.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, *Jeremiah*, 47.

¹²⁹ Carroll, *From Chaos to Covenant*, 20, 158, 250, for example.

(cf. “House of David” rather than “King of Judah” in the Tel Dan and Mesha stelae).¹³⁰ With examples such as this, it becomes more difficult to (re)date portions of the Book of Jeremiah on the basis of phrasing that is considered “late.”

Cave Graffiti near Amaziah (Khirbet Beit Lei Inscriptions)

Several difficult-to-read inscriptions were made in a cave at Khirbet Beit Lei, relatively close to Lachish, near Amaziah. Thinly scratched into a chalky limestone, they seem to reflect the hasty and unsettled time of national emergency in which they were written. Although it is difficult to determine with exactness the precise reading, what is clear is that the first seems to be a kind of “declaration of faith,” while the second and third are prayers or entreaties to YHWH, and the last a curse to anyone who might erase the message.¹³¹

Date

The cave at Khirbet Beit Lei probably dates to the early sixth century BCE. Although some Persian period articles were also found—and one might also try to argue on the basis of late sixth-century parallels from the Psalms and Books of Chronicles—the Iron Age cave is pre-exilic based on paleography and archaeology, with parallels elsewhere in Israel/Palestine.¹³² Moreover, the content of the inscriptions seems to indicate they were engraved at the time of the Babylonian destruction of Lachish, discussed in the following section.¹³³

¹³⁰ Ahituv, *Echoes*, 145, 395.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 233.

¹³² Naveh, “Old Hebrew Inscriptions in a Burial Cave,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 13, no. 2 (1963): 74.

¹³³ Naveh wanted to fix the inscriptions to the eighth century BCE (i.e., time of Hezekiah), but this seems less likely (*ibid.*, 92).

Text

Reading the cave inscriptions is difficult. Some of the letters are debatable, and perhaps the most effective way forward is to give the reading of Naveh, Cross, and Lemaire for each inscription:¹³⁴

First Inscription:

Naveh:

“YHWH is the God of all the earth; the mount-
-ains of Juda<h> belong to him, to the God of Jerusalem.”

יהוה אלהי כל הארץ ה
רי יהד<ה> לו לאלהי ירושלם

Cross:

“{I} am YHWH your God. I care for
the towns of Judah and I will redeem Jerusalem.”

[א]ני יהוה אלהיכמה ארצה
ערי יהדה וגאלתי ירושלם.

Lemaire:

“YHWH is the God of all the earth; the mount-
-tains of Judah belong to the God of Jerusalem.”

איוה אלהי כל הארץ ה
רי יהדה לאלהי ירושלם

Second Inscription:

Naveh:

“Moriah you pardoned the encampments of Yah, YHWH.”

המוריה אתה חננת נוה יה יהוה

Cross:

“Absolve Yah, Merciful God; absolve Yah, YHWH.”

נקה יה אל חנן נקה יה יהוה

Lemaire:

“YHWH has remembered, the Merciful God; absolve Yah, YHWH.”

פקד יהוה חנן נקה יה יהוה

Third Inscription:

“Save, [Y]HWH!”

הושע [י]הוה.

Fourth Inscription:

Naveh:

“Cursed be whoever erases!”

{א} ארר
אשר ימחה

¹³⁴ The following is a comparison from Ahituv based on *ibid.*, 74–92; Naveh, “Hebrew Graffiti from the Temple Period,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 51 (2001): 194–207; Cross, “The Cave Inscriptions from Khiret Beit Lei,” in *Leaves*, 166–170; Andre Lemaire, “Priers en temps de crise: les inscriptions de Khirbet Beit Lei,” *Revue Biblique* 83 (1976): 558–568.

As can be seen above, readings may substantially vary, though much has to do with spacing of the letters and similarly spelled words. Given the insecurity of the reading, conclusions formed based on these texts must necessarily be, at least to a certain degree, equally uncertain.

Analysis

The text of these cave inscriptions seems to have little connection with the prose of Jeremiah, except to stand as a testament to the violent and unsettled times described therein. Although linguistic connections may be made based on the “poetic rhythm” that “recalls biblical psalmody both in form and in content” as well as Chronicles (e.g., 2 Chron 21:11; 32:19),¹³⁵ it may be feasibly construed that there also exist some potential thematic connections between the inscriptions and the Book of Consolation (30–31), the so-called “Source D.” Carroll felt that the Book of Consolation, as well as sources B and C, also had little to do with the Historical Jeremiah.¹³⁶ “Land,” “Judah,” “cities,” or perhaps “mountain(s)” are terms that arise in the prose of Jeremiah 31:23, which were either significantly or coincidentally scrawled onto the cave wall in the first inscription. Regardless of whether the reading נקה or פקד is accepted in the second inscription, such verbs are paralleled in Jeremiah 30 (vv. 11 and 20, respectively). “Grace/graciousness” or “mercy/mercifulness” play prominently as well (31:2, 9). The appeal for YHWH’s salvation in inscription three is echoed in Jeremiah 30:10, 11 and in 31:7 (as well as later, as in Jer 46:27). Ultimately, there is no way to unequivocally demonstrate a historical connection between late-dated preaching traditionally ascribed to Jeremiah and the religious

¹³⁵ Naveh, “Old Hebrew,” 89.

¹³⁶ Carroll, *From Chaos to Covenant*, 198–200. He stated, “I suspect that the Jeremiah of the early oracles would have been appalled at the chauvinistic optimism of the salvation oracles.”

markings made by refugees in the early sixth century BCE that gave them hope at that time—though theoretically possible, this is admittedly extremely tenuous.

Conclusions

The corpus of Hebrew inscriptions is, once again, rather small when compared with Egyptian or Akkadian examples. Of course, one must not necessarily expect epigraphy to prove anything when compared with biblical passages; epigraphic evidence can, however, aid in the understanding of certain texts. Furthermore, the historical context that is established, to a certain degree, allows for discussion in issues of historicity.

In discussing complex issues in the Book of Jeremiah's composition, epigraphic evidence arguably plays a supporting role in the conversation. For example, if portions of the book are divorced from the historical prophet and considered late and secondary on the basis of perceived Deuteronomistic ideology in the text, then historical evidence from Hebrew epigraphs may inform this discussion. The Ketef Hinnom amulets and the Mesad Hashavyahu ostrakon each in their own way demonstrate portions of Deuteronomistic thought are undeniably rooted in the pre-exilic era, the scrolls from Ketef Hinnom by way of quotation and the Mesad Hashavyahu by theological concept. This seems to undermine the assumption that Deuteronomistic redaction necessarily must have taken place much later in the fifth century.

The Lachish Letters hold a unique position as the epigraphs most strongly associated with the historicity of Jeremiah. While bold, if misguided, applications have been made to the prophet Jeremiah and/or Urijah, the text of the ostraca undeniably corroborate the historical context seen in the Book of Jeremiah. In addition to this, historical details, such as the reference to Lachish and Azekah in 34:7, reveal the Babylonian strategy are thus substantiated in the epigraphic record. Further evidence may be procured from certain phrases in the Book of Jeremiah being

evinced in relevant epigraphy, as in the “royal family,” “weakening of hands,” and even to a certain degree the title “king of Judah” in the Arad ostraca. There may be further corroborating evidence in the commonalities between sections of Jeremiah like the Oracles to the Nations or Book of Consolation—generally considered to be late—and other Hebrew inscriptions, such as those at the Khirbet Beit Lei cave or the Arad Letters.

Ultimately, epigraphy alone cannot prove the historical relevance of non-poetical material in Jeremiah—but it certainly does not appear to disprove it. Much of what was historically true at the seventh-sixth century transition may also have been true over a century later; at the very least, the historical context seems to be affirmed in most regards, which may weaken the objection raised against genuine preexilic historical memory. Kenneth Kitchen put it succinctly when he stated,

The narrative parts of Jeremiah contain many allusions to well-attested contemporary history, and various Hebrew seals and bullae mention people who are almost certainly (in some cases, certainly) characters found also in Jeremiah...To date much (or any) of Jeremiah to distinctly later periods (e.g., fifth to third centuries) would seem impractical, given the lack of detailed, separate (nonbiblical) knowledge of preexilic history, dating, and people in (say) the fourth/third century, which would prevent anyone concocting then a ‘Jeremiah’ book as we have it now.¹³⁷

The historical background having been addressed through epigraphy of the period, the onomastic data from the aforementioned seals/bullae will be treated in the following chapter.

¹³⁷ Kenneth Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 381.

Chapter Four

Onomastic Analysis of Epigraphy from the Time of Jeremiah

One of the remarkable ways epigraphy can inform historical understanding of the ancient world comes through the medium of onomastic data. The study of onomastic evidence has a particularly significant bearing on the study of the late Iron Age due to the prevalence of biblical names in the epigraphic record. An analysis of these data can provide evidence for or against historical validity throughout the Book of Jeremiah. This onomastic approach has been taken to biblical studies by scholars such as John Andrew Dearman and David Glatt-Gilad, and archaeologists, such as Mitka Golub, have also substantively weighed in on the discussion.¹³⁸

There are a specified number of Jeremianic names in common with those found in various inscriptions, seals, and bullae; statistical analyses have been conducted on the frequency of occurrences, as well as the probability of certain names being the same historical figure described in *Jeremiah*. While the primary focus of this onomastic section is Hebrew epigraphy, uncovered in Israel/Palestine, there is at least one Akkadian inscription of interest that is relevant to the discussion. These names will be assessed individually and analyzed for historicity when compared to name usage in the biographical sections of *Jeremiah*.

There are a total of 42 individuals mentioned in the biographical material in *Jeremiah*, excluding unnamed persons (e.g., “sons of Hanan,” 35:4), Jonadab the Rechabite (a distant ancestor of the Rechabites, 35:6), the kings of Judah, and Jeremiah himself.¹³⁹ Undoubtedly, the

¹³⁸ Dearman, “Scribes;” Glatt-Gilad, “Personal Names;” Mitka R. Golub, “The Distribution of Names on Hebrew Bullae from the Time of Jeremiah: A Comparative Study,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 62, no. 2 (2012): 206–222; Mitka R. Golub and Shira J. Golani, “Judean Personal Names in the Book of Jeremiah in Light of Archaeological Evidence,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 43, no. 2 (2019): 143.

¹³⁹ Glatt-Gilad, “Personal Names,” 32.

most prominent among this number is Baruch the son of Neriah; for this reason, issues surrounding the Baruch bullae will be addressed first. Mykytiuk, building off the work of previous scholars, developed a list of eleven criteria for measuring the likelihood of an accurate identification (ID) of a biblical person in the epigraphic record; these effective criteria have become the widely accepted standard for all such IDs, used by scholars from both sides of any given issue. The process outlined by Mykytiuk, in short, asks a series of questions that acknowledge the circumstances in which a given artifact was procured while assessing whether sufficient information exists from available data for a positive ID:

Question 1. How reliable are the inscriptional data?

Criterion 1: Means of acquisition or access (i.e., was the find excavated, observable above ground, or obtained from the antiquities market?).

Criterion 2: Provenance of the inscription (i.e., the degree of precision that could be said concerning where it was recovered, such as exact site or tell or merely a vague region).

Criterion 3: Authenticity (i.e., does it pass scientific inspection where possible?).

Question 2: Does the general setting of the inscription permit a match between the inscriptional person and the biblical person?

Criterion 4: Date of the person

Criterion 5: Language of the inscription

Criterion 6: Socio-political classification of the person and/or the inscription

Question 3: How strongly do specific data in the inscription count for or against an ID?

Criterion 7: Name of the person in the inscription (viz., does it match? Hypocoristic and orthographic variations notwithstanding).

Criterion 8: Interpersonal relations (i.e., how do available data on family and associates compare with the biblical data?).

Criterion 9: Title information (e.g., “Servant of the king,” “the scribe,” etc.)

Criterion 10: Other identifying information

Criterion 11: ID on grounds of singularity (do all data point to a single individual known biblically?).¹⁴⁰

Each occurrence of a name in common with *Jeremiah* can firstly be measured against these criteria to determine how likely an accurate ID may be; otherwise, the frequency and/or form of the name may indicate a greater likelihood of historicity in the biographical material. Out of the 42 individuals, all but eight have patronymic information, while five out of the remaining eight individuals may be identified by their title, or official position.¹⁴¹

Baruch, Son of Neriah

The primary question of the Baruch bullae is whether they are modern forgeries or genuine artifacts; a discussion on the authenticity of an artifact will have bearing on other epigraphic finds discussed below. Originally brought to light in the East Jerusalem shop of an antiquities dealer in 1975, the bullae from the hoard were published by Nahman Avigad.¹⁴² A second bulla, also from the antiquities market, ostensibly pressed by the same seal was brought

¹⁴⁰ Lawrence J. Mykytiuk, *Identifying Biblical Persons in Northwest Semitic Inscriptions of 1200–539 B.C.E.* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004) 38–9.

¹⁴¹ Glatt-Gilad, “Personal Names,” 32–3.

¹⁴² Hershel Shanks, “Jeremiah’s Scribe and Confidant Speaks from a Hoard of Clay Bullae,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 13, no. 5 (1987): 58–65.

forward in 1996, famously containing a partial fingerprint—presumably of Baruch himself.¹⁴³

The two bullae of interest contain the following:

לברכיהו
בן נריהו
הספר¹⁴⁴

These bullae would undoubtedly have significant implications if their authenticity could be demonstrated. Although considered genuine by Avigad,¹⁴⁵ others have reserved serious doubts and consider them to be illicit fabrications.¹⁴⁶

Although much is necessarily involved in the process of determining an inscription's authenticity, there is comparatively little that may be said for determining the genuineness of a seal impression from the antiquities market. Rollston, among others, have established several criteria whereby scholars can adjudicate in the process: first the general content and orthography can be examined (overall believability and spelling conventions at a fixed point in history), as well as paleography (letter shape may be compared with other examples), while taking special note of salient features or aberrations (these are most likely indicative of originality on the part of the forger rather than authenticity), and lastly it may sometimes be determined whether the find

¹⁴³ Hershel Shanks, "Fingerprint of Jeremiah's Scribe," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 22, no. 2 (1996): 36.

¹⁴⁴ Nahman Avigad and Benjamin Sass, *Corpus of West Semitic Stamp Seals* (Jerusalem: Keterpress, 1997), 175–6.

¹⁴⁵ Nahman Avigad, "Baruch the Scribe and Jerahmeel the King's Son," *Israel Exploration Journal* 28, no. 1 (1978): 52–56.

¹⁴⁶ Christopher A. Rollston, *Writing and Literacy in the World of Ancient Israel: Epigraphic Evidence from the Iron Age* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010), 137.

is decisively a fake based on other factors, such as confessions or convictions.¹⁴⁷ There generally exist sufficient data to compare elements of epigraphs such as orthography and script typology, but seals by nature are more conservative with their “formal cursive script” and length of use, which constitute reasons why “the paleographic dating of Old Hebrew seals is complicated.”¹⁴⁸ However, Rollston concludes on the basis of paleography that the seal used to make the bullae is a modern fabrication, and they are therefore most likely to be modern forgeries—this seems to be the consensus today. This example raises the issue whether epigraphs from the antiquities market are “innocent until proven guilty,” or “guilty until proven innocent;” scholars have naturally fallen on one side or the other of this discussion, perhaps in some cases to the extreme.¹⁴⁹ Jo Ann Hackett rightfully concluded that unprovenanced seals/bullae should not have a voice in linguistic or typological discussions, but epigraphers should rather rely on provenanced epigraphs from stratified excavations for such evidence.¹⁵⁰

A balanced approach may be best regarding the Baruch bullae. Under normal circumstances, the ID would be considered relatively strong, per Mykytiuk’s criteria, since the name, patronym, and title are all included on each bulla. Given such a strong ID, the bullae would strongly indicate that Baruch is a historical figure and that the biographical portion(s) of

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., see also Christopher A. Rollston, “Non-Provenanced Epigraphs I: Pillaged Antiquities, Northwest Semitic Forgeries, and Protocols for Laboratory Tests,” *Maarav* 10 (2003): 135–193; Andrew G. Vaughn and Christopher A. Rollston, “The Antiquities Market, Sensationalized Textual Data, and Modern Forgeries,” *Near Eastern Archaeology* 68, no. 1 (2005): 61–65; Christopher A. Rollston, “Navigating the Epigraphic Storm: A Palaeographer Reflects on Inscriptions from the Market,” *Near Eastern Archaeology* 68, no. 1 (2005): 69–72.

¹⁴⁸ Rollston, “Non-Provenanced Epigraphs,” 155.

¹⁴⁹ Deutsch, for example, was perhaps too confident when he argued that it was impossible to fake a bulla given the fragility of “surface corrosion.” See Robert Deutsch, “Lasting Impressions,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 28, no. 4 (2002): 49.

¹⁵⁰ In Vaughn and Rollston, “Antiquities Market,” 63.

Jeremiah (e.g., Jer 36) are more reliably historical than some have allowed, or at least that the accounts contain a kernel of truth. The bullae are, however, unprovenanced, which makes them almost equally impossible to be proved or disproved as fakes, and there are concerns with the paleography of the finds.¹⁵¹ If genuine, they would have provided powerful evidence in favor of the historicity of the figure Baruch, whose potential involvement in the Book of Jeremiah has, by some scholars, been relegated to others more than a century later. Since authenticity in this case is impossible to prove, such glowing verdicts ought to be tempered by strong reservation, seeing as the finds are most likely modern forgeries.

Jerahmeel, Son of the King

Another bulla, also from the antiquities market, came to light (through the private collector Yoav Sasson) with the following inscription:

ירחמאל
בן המלך¹⁵²

This ostensibly is a direct correspondence to Jeremiah 36:26, which references “Jerahmeel, the king’s son,” a member of the royal family.¹⁵³ For Dearman, this bulla “almost certainly refers to Jehoiakim’s servant of the same name and title (Jer 36:26), who was sent by him to find Jeremiah and Baruch.”¹⁵⁴ Glatt-Gilad felt that both the Baruch bullae and the Bulla of Jerahmeel

¹⁵¹ Rollston believes the *samek* and *pe* in the inscription reveal the probable forger “did not discern the importance of the relative positioning” of these letters “in sequence.” Rollston, “The Bullae of Baruch Ben Neriah the Scribe and the Seal of Ma’adanah Daughter of the King: Epigraphic Forgeries of the 20th Century,” *Eretz-Israel: Archaeological, Historical and Geographical Studies* 32 (2016): 83.

¹⁵² Avigad and Sass, *Stamp Seals*, 175.

¹⁵³ Avigad, “Baruch,” 53–5.

¹⁵⁴ Dearman, “Scribes,” 413–14.

reflect “with a high degree of certainty in the seal corpus.”¹⁵⁵ In light of Mykytiuk’s criteria, this ID seems convincing due to his title (בן המלך) being recorded in the bulla, at the same time posing no difficulty for acceptance on Rollston’s part.

Seraiah, Son of Neriah

The seal of “Serayahu ben Neriyahu” was obtained on the Jerusalem antiquities market in 1974, with both its original provenance unknown and present location “not reported.”¹⁵⁶ Seraiah, the son of Neriah, is described in Jeremiah 51 as the “quartermaster” (Heb. מנוחה, v. 59), aiding the prophet in enacting one of his prophetic oracles. This seal (n. 390 in Avigad and Sass) appears to be genuine, or at least it has not been argued to be a forgery as the Baruch bullae have.¹⁵⁷ Although the seal does not constitute quite as strong an ID as the bulla of Jerahmeel, it still may be described as “reasonably likely,” along with the bullae of the “sons of Shaphan” treated below.

Gemariah, Son of Shaphan

The relationship of the “House of Shaphan” to Jeremiah has been highlighted and outlined by a number of scholars.¹⁵⁸ One can infer from the various biblical texts mentioning members of this prominent Judean family that they generally offered support for Jeremiah’s mission. A reasonably good case can be made that at least one bulla remains extant, testifying of

¹⁵⁵ Glatt-Gilad, “Personal Names,” 34.

¹⁵⁶ Avigad and Sass, *Stamp Seals*, 163.

¹⁵⁷ This, perhaps, may be simply because this seal (as with the Jerahmeel bulla) is not as “sensational” as the Baruch bullae, which is less cause for suspicion.

¹⁵⁸ For example, Dearman, “Scribes,” 408–14; J. Maxwell Miller and John H. Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986), 423; Jürgen Kegler, “The Prophetic Discourse and Political Praxis of Jeremiah: Observations of Jeremiah 26 and 36,” in *God of the Lowly: Socio-Historical Interpretations of the Bible*, eds. W. Schottroff and W. Stegemann, trans. M. J. O’Connell (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1984), 50–53; R. R. Wilson, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 241–2.

Gemariah's existence and prominence in the royal administration. One bulla (Avigad and Sass n. 470) records his personal name and patronym with no official title, although this is apparently not so terribly uncommon as to render ID impossible.¹⁵⁹ Gemariah is mentioned in Jeremiah 36, whose *lishcah* temporarily housed the scroll dictated by the prophet to Baruch. According to Dearman, this was “almost certainly the official named in Jer 36:10.”¹⁶⁰ Glatt-Gilad is more reserved, since the inclusion of the title would strengthen the ID.¹⁶¹ Since the abovementioned bulla was found in a controlled archaeological excavation in Jerusalem, any objections with regards to fraud are effectively removed.¹⁶²

Ahiqam, Son of Shaphan

Another group of bullae, partially preserved and of unknown provenance, appear to read “Belonging to Ahiqam, son of Shaphan.”¹⁶³ This name would correspond to the Ahiqam in Jeremiah 27:24, portrayed as seeking to preserve Jeremiah's life earlier in his ministry; he is also mentioned elsewhere as a significant figure in the Deuteronomistic history.¹⁶⁴ All other citations refer to his son Gedaliah, who plays a prominent role later in the book. The fact that the bulla is partial does not appear to be problematic—there is little else the text might read. As for accurate ID, there is no way to unequivocally prove one way or the other (see above discussion); much

¹⁵⁹ Avigad and Sass, *Stamp Seals*, 191.

¹⁶⁰ Dearman, “Scribes,” 413.

¹⁶¹ Glatt-Gilad, “Personal Names,” 34.

¹⁶² Yigal Shiloh, “A Group of Hebrew Bullae from the City of David,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 36, no. ½ (1986): 29.

¹⁶³ Seven bullae appear to record this name, each fragmentary and none conjoining. Avigad and Sass, *Stamp Seals*, 181.

¹⁶⁴ See 2 Kgs 22:12, 14; 25:22.

like Gemariah, a labelling of his title would strengthen the ID, but seems reasonable regardless. It should also be noted that the bullae were also acquired on the antiquities market, as so many have been.

Gedaliah (“Over the House”/“Servant of the King”)

The bulla and seal belonging to the individual(s) listed here form a sort of “third tier” of confident IDs, being the least certain. The bulla reads “Belonging to Gedalyahu, who is over the house,” while the seal reads “Belonging to Gedalyahu, Servant of the King.” The bulla comes from the 1936 Lachish excavations, while the seal was allegedly found in 1978 at Umm el-Qanafid near Amman (now in the Israel Museum).¹⁶⁵ The likelihood of this being Gedaliah (son of Ahiqam, the son of Shaphan) in *Jeremiah* is not great, given the issues with a possible ID.¹⁶⁶ This Gedaliah was made governor over Judah after the fall of Jerusalem, and an ID cannot be substantiated based on these titles alone (especially considering the lack of mentioning the illustrious family from which he belongs). Regardless, it has still be suggested that this may have been his title before Jerusalem’s fall and remains a possibility.¹⁶⁷

Gedaliah, Son of Pashhur and Jehucal, Son of Shelemiah

Two more significant bullae were uncovered in Jerusalem excavations by Eilat Mazar near the Dung Gate in 2005 and 2008, bearing the names *gdlyhw bn pshwr* and *jhwkl bn slnyhw bn sby*, respectively.¹⁶⁸ Gedaliah ben Pashhur is mentioned in *Jeremiah* 38:1, along with Jucal

¹⁶⁵ Avigad and Sass, *Stamp Seals*, 172, 52.

¹⁶⁶ Bob Becking, “Inscribed Seals as Evidence for Biblical Israel? Jeremiah 40.7–41.15 Par Exemple,” in *Can A ‘History of Israel’ be Written*, ed. L. L. Grabbe (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 75 (see footnote).

¹⁶⁷ Avigad and Sass, *Stamp Seals*, 172.

¹⁶⁸ “Notes and News,” *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 140, no. 3 (2008): 157.

ben Shelemiah, as officials in Jerusalem in the Late Iron Age. The full spelling of Jucal's name is attested in Jeremiah 37:3 as "Jehucal the son of Shelemiah," and is recorded as part of the delegation to Jeremiah on behalf of the king. It is interesting to postulate that the grandfather of this biblical figure must have been named Shebi, an otherwise unknown figure (biblically). Given the included patronyms, these names seem to provide a strong ID. Significantly, these bullae were found a mere three meters apart in the controlled excavations, providing a direct historical connection to the biblical record.

Discussion

Onomastic data can reveal much about the chronology and provenance of a given document. Out of the fifty-five names in *Jeremiah* assessed by Glatt-Gilad, a total of forty-two have been found in the corpus of seals and bullae (i.e., approximately three-quarters).¹⁶⁹ This is not to say, of course, that forty-two individuals have been confirmed in the epigraphic record, but that the names used in Jeremianic prose (and poetry, for that matter) were common in the late seventh/early sixth centuries. A name such as "Gedaliah" (גדליהו), even if it does not refer to the son of Ahiqam, was nonetheless common in the time of Jeremiah.¹⁷⁰ The name "Gemariah," regardless of whether it was the individual mentioned in Jeremiah 36, can be shown to have belonged to the same chronological horizon as the letters at both Lachish and Arad.¹⁷¹ If Jeremianic prose was created more than a century later, it is evident that there must have been some sort of documentation (or some other "historical memory") at the disposal of the author(s)

¹⁶⁹ Glatt-Gilad, "Personal Names," 35.

¹⁷⁰ For example, the Arad ostraca, and those from Horvat 'Uza. Ahituv, *Echoes from the Past*, 123–25, 173–9.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 56–7, 135–40.

that permitted such accuracy in historical detail. This line of reasoning only strengthens regarding specific, historical individuals that lived in the time of Jeremiah.

Regarding the Baruch bullae, a “balanced approach” was advocated in the discussion above; that is to say, when the historicity of Jeremianic prose is being assessed, these bullae can only carry so much weight. The vast majority of scholars ostensibly have no qualms accepting the find as genuine; only the most cautious of scholars (as well as those who perhaps carry a certain predisposition toward biblical minimalism) refer to them as fakes. It is often difficult to remove personal bias from any such discussion, and so the facts as they stand must speak for themselves: it is unknown whether the Baruch bullae are authentic, if they were fabricated the manner in which it was done is apparently wholly unknown, and it is impossible to prove one way or the other. In short, the Baruch bullae are either the greatest evidence in favor of historicity or else constitute no evidence whatsoever. An admittedly “middle-of-the-road” approach would count these bullae as “partial evidence,” if for no other reason but a dose of “methodological doubt.”

Interestingly, there has been no doubt cast on any of the other bullae under discussion, ostensibly for no other reason except they are not considered “sensational” discoveries. The bulla and seal of Jerahmeel and Seraiah, respectively, are very likely to have belonged to the individuals described in the biblical text. This discovery serves as powerful evidence in favor of historicity for the prose sections of Jeremiah. Seeing as a member of the family of Baruch is likely to be a historical figure, it becomes less necessary to view Baruch as an imaginary figure created to further the story of *Jeremiah*.

As a sidenote, there are some instances of relevant Akkadian epigraphic examples as well. From the German expedition to Babylon, several administrative documents (Babylon

28122, 28178) written in cuneiform detail rations to be given to one *Ia-‘ú-kin* (Jehoiachin), among others.¹⁷² This corresponds perfectly with the narrative in Jeremiah 52 and the former king’s kind treatment by Evil-Merodach/Awil-Markduk. Additionally, another text (BM 114789) records the name *Nabû-šarrū-ukīn* as holding the position of *rab ša-rēši*.¹⁷³ This almost undoubtedly corresponds to the Nebo-Sarsekim from Jeremiah 39:3 present at the fall of Jerusalem. Although Akkadian epigraphy certainly falls outside the purview of this thesis, these examples serve at the very least as a sort of “honorable mention,” further corroborating the onomastic support for the historicity in the prose of Jeremiah.

While some have examined the available onomastic data for correspondences between epigraphy and the Book of Jeremiah, Golub comprehensively analyzed onomastic forms and compared this with the diachronic development of Semitic naming conventions. Such onomastic elements include theophoric suffixes/prefixes and hypocoristic forms. The results of her exhaustive study largely uphold the chronological framework proposed in the Book of Jeremiah itself.¹⁷⁴ For example, the use of YHWH (as opposed to another theophoric elements such as *el*) is more common at this time in both *Jeremiah* and the corpus of bullae and seals. It is important to note, however, that it is clear the Book of Jeremiah was inevitably subject to some redaction: the יהו- ending is indicative of earlier periods than יהי-.¹⁷⁵ While *Jeremiah* overall upholds Judahite onomastic traditions, it was more common to shorten a name with its hypocoristic

¹⁷² Pritchard, *Near Eastern Texts*, 308. Jehoiachin is also mentioned in Babylon 28186 as receiving rations from the king of Babylon along with his five sons, being referred to as the king of Judah (*Ia-ku-du*).

¹⁷³ Michael Jursa, “Nabû-šarrūssu-ukīn, rab āa-rēši, und ‘Nebusarsekim’ (Jer 39:3),” *Nouvelles Assyriologiques Brèves et Utilitaires* 2008/1, 9.

¹⁷⁴ Golub, “Comparative Study,” 206–222.

¹⁷⁵ Golub and Golani, “Judean Personal Names,” 143.

version; Golub interprets this as evidence of early composition and a later redaction “updating” the names as the naming conventions changed.¹⁷⁶ She stated, “These similarities between Jeremiah and the archaeological record indicate that Jeremiah reflects Judean onomastic traditions. Thus, they help buttress the scholarly arguments for the historicity of Jeremiah.”¹⁷⁷ This conclusion is far more reasonable than a fifth century group seeking to use “archaic” forms in an effort to sound more “authentic”; if this were the case, one would expect uniformity in usage in the text of *Jeremiah*, when in reality some of the names were updated while many “original” naming conventions were retained.

Conclusion

In summary, the bullae detailed above provide varying degrees of evidence in favor of the essential historicity Jeremianic prose. Most known bullae come from the antiquities market; it is difficult to combat the effect of looting that regularly takes place, and many more are known from private collections that have been in circulation for some time. Out of the eight potential Hebrew individuals mentioned above, four (Baruch son of Neriah, Jerahmeel son of the king, Seraiah son of Neriah, and Ahiqam son of Shaphan) only have witnesses from the antiquities market, while witnesses for three others (Gemariah son of Shaphan, Gedaliah son of Pashhur, and Jehuchal son of Shemeliah) come exclusively from excavations (evidence is mixed and weak for Gedaliah son of Ahiqam). Using Mykytiuk’s criteria, the names with patronyms included are fairly strong even without the title of the biblical figure included—however, provenance of the onomastic inscription is paramount. The strongest IDs are those from excavations with patronyms (Gemariah son of Shaphan, Gedaliah son of Pashhur, and Jehuchal son of Shemeliah).

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

Second to these are those which include patronyms but are from the antiquities market (or worse still, unprovenanced altogether). The weakest ID in my opinion (excepting the likely forgery of the Baruch bullae) is Gedaliah “who is over the house” as Gedaliah son of Ahikam (son of Shaphan), since it is both unprovenanced and the patronym unincluded. The Baruch bullae are a special case, since (as mentioned above) both the patronym and title are included with the name, yet positive ID is tainted by the fact that the bullae come from private collections and are likely forgeries. Although seals/bullae do not normally offer much in the way of orthographic or paleographic data to determine authenticity, Rollston feels certain they are fabrications. It is worth emphasizing that, out of the finds mentioned above, only the Baruch bullae are considered by Rollston to have been fabricated. The Akkadian tablets mentioned above (though patronyms are uncharacteristic in this context) also constitute corroborating evidence. With the statistical probabilities in mind, it would be unthinkable for seals/bullae found *in situ* containing such names to not be considered *very likely* to be the biblical figures. Regarding those from the antiquities market, the probability is again *very likely*, though the enthusiasm must be tempered with the theoretical possibility of fabrication. Ultimately, the statistical probability of an individual’s name—along with that of their father, and at times with their title—occurring within the epigraphic record at the same time and in the same context mentioned in the Bible is too great to dismiss. Even if all such positive IDs were dismissed, the usage of names in Jeremiah unequivocally proven to have been common in the mid–late 7th/early 6th centuries BCE is indicative of the text’s historicity.

Overall, the onomastic evidence from Northwest Semitic epigraphy points to the conclusion that prose segments of *Jeremiah* were more likely to have been composed in the early sixth century rather than the late fifth century. While quite rarely is any study of the ancient

world so conclusive as to be beyond all doubt, the statistical analysis discussed above demonstrates that earlier authorship is probable. If the Book of Jeremiah was composed long after the events took place, powerful arguments exist that this composition would have needed historical sources from the late seventh and early sixth centuries that would not have been readily available—except perhaps as some early form of the Book of Jeremiah as it is known today. Regarding the degree to which the Historical Jeremiah can be known in Jeremianic prose, methodological doubt becomes increasingly unnecessary in light of the statistical probabilities afforded by onomastic data.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

This thesis has sought to examine modern advancements and discoveries in primarily Northwest Semitic epigraphy in order to determine their effectiveness for speaking to the historical validity of the non-poetic sections of the Book of Jeremiah. The notion that portions apart from so-called “Source A” fail to preserve historical memory of the prophet has been critically analyzed in light of this epigraphic data. If only Source A poetical segments are directly attributable to Jeremiah at the turn of the sixth century BCE, then the question naturally arises whether “non-Source A” material contains valid historical details, or else merely speaks to a fifth century or later *Sitz im Leben*, as suggested previously by scholars like Carroll or May.

Some portions of the Book of Jeremiah, such as the textually significant 36th chapter, seem to comprise a first-hand account of events that actually took place. For example, the description of the First Temple *lishcot* (Heb. לשכות) apartments give the impression that the author had seen them for himself before it was destroyed and subsequently rebuilt. Many Hebrew epigraphs, some of which have been discussed here (e.g., Lachish Letters) were discovered *in situ* in gatehouse compartments and may represent physical evidence of these *lishcot*.

The Ketef Hinnom amulets not only directly refer to what became the book of Numbers but also the book of Deuteronomy. The two amulets, Ketef Hinnom I and II, most likely date to the second half of the seventh century BCE and both reference the Priestly Blessing in Numbers 6:24–26, previously thought to be late Priestly material. This firstly demonstrates how portions of the Hebrew Bible often considered to be late may in fact be earlier than expected; secondly, the reference to Deuteronomy 7:9 in Ketef Hinnom I ostensibly applies to the discussion of a

Deuteronomistic redaction of Jeremianic prose. It seems reasonable to suggest that a Deuteronomistic reference in a seventh-century epigraph would discourage efforts to place this redaction in the late fifth century. But differently, it is less likely for Deuteronomistic themes in Jeremiah to be considered evidence of a later date when Deuteronomistic references occur earlier in the epigraphic record.

Next, the ostracon from Mesad Hashavyahu (the so-called “Yavneh Yam Letter”) was analyzed in the framework of the present discussion. Following the same approach as the Ketef Hinnom amulets, the antiquity of certain elements in Jeremiah can be demonstrated through an analysis of various aspects of the epigraph. Most significantly, the document most likely references the Hebrew Sabbath (the phrase *לפני שבת*), which is a theological concept that more skeptical scholars consider to be late, post-Exilic. This has been applied to Jeremiah 17:19–27 by both May and Carroll as an indication of lateness; however, in light of this inscription, the Sabbath is demonstrated to have been in place in the mid to late seventh century.

The Lachish Letters, a collection of ostraca stratigraphically belonging to the final days of the kingdom of Judah, are obviously pertinent to issues of historicity in the biographical prose of Jeremiah. Letter 3 mentions a prophet and describes a son of Elnathan journeying to Egypt with a contingent of soldiers; this is reminiscent of Jeremiah 26:22, where Elnathan the son of Achbor makes a similar journey to Egypt (interestingly involving a prophet). Letter 4 references the cities of Azekah and Lachish, alluding to Jerusalem as well, which were the only remaining fortified cities remaining in Judah at the time Jeremiah 34:7 was written.¹⁷⁸ This further demonstrates that genuine historical memories are preserved in the prose sections of the book.

¹⁷⁸ The inability to see Azekah from the vantage point of the writer of Lachish No. 4 has been explained geographically, and this did not refer to signal fires as had been suggested previously.

Moreover, throughout the letters there is wording that also occurs in Jeremianic prose (i.e., the usage of *delatot* in Jer 36:23, the “king’s seed” in 41:1, and “weakening the hands,” as in 38:4). The Lachish Letters speak to the significance of prophecy and the geo-political landscape in the early sixth century and lend themselves to the historical reliability of the biographical narratives in Jeremiah.

The Arad ostraca (also “letters”), though certainly less applicable, arguably contain some relevance to the Book of Jeremiah. A more tenuous connection to Jeremiah may be argued from Edom’s relation to Judah at that time, although this is mostly argued from the “Oracles Against the Nations” (non-prose, but also considered late). One simple phrase *melech Yehudah* (מלך יהודה) was previously thought to only occur late (compare “House of David” in Mesha and Tel Dan stelae) since it occurs infrequently in the epigraphic record. Its usage in the Arad ostraca precludes this argument being used regarding Jeremiah. Although the Arad letters do not relate to Jeremiah as richly as some others, they do also provide onomastic data (discussed in the previous chapter) for comparison—including the name “Jeremiah” itself (Arad No. 24, line 15).

One final epigraph was assessed for relevance to Jeremiah. The Khirbet Beit-Lei cave inscriptions, near Amaziah, are exceedingly difficult to read, and consequently translations differ. Regardless of the reading, some of the terms potentially used in the various “declarations of faith” or prayers to YHWH remind one of the Book of Consolation (Jer 30–31), which is also considered to be a late addition. Since the Babylonian captivity is not a historically disputed event, there is little reason to mention the physical evidence these inscriptions provide in the form of the prayers of the refugees.

Aside from inscriptions etched into potsherds, silver, or stone, onomastic data from seals and bullae afford a greater ability to apply directly to the Book of Jeremiah. Although many

examples come from the antiquities market and should thereby be treated with some caution, individuals such as Gemariah, Jehucal, Gedaliah, Jerahmeel, Ahiqam, and Seraiah are considered to be confirmed with ranging degrees of certainty. It is even possible that bullae belonging to Baruch, Jeremiah's scribe, have been found, depending on whether they were fabricated or else excavated illegally before finding their way to the antiquities market. Mykytiuk's criteria for positive identifications allow a fairly strong degree of certainty that they contain the names of biblical individuals—especially for those finds obtained in controlled archaeological excavations. Aside from the probability of identifying specific individuals, a statistical analysis of name usage and form strongly corroborate those used in the Jeremianic accounts presently under discussion. In addition to all this evidence, the existence of Babylonian individuals like Nebo-Sarsekim (Jer 39:3) may also be confirmed, and even Jehoiachin named in cuneiform receipts corroborate the events of the final verses of Jeremiah.

The analysis of late seventh- early sixth-century inscriptions each to varying degrees seem to fit the historical picture presented in the prose of Jeremiah and, significantly, none openly contradict it. Collectively, these epigraphs seem to generally substantiate the portions of Jeremiah that fall outside the narrower category of Source A, or at least hamper the objections that have been raised against their acceptance. An unbiased assessment of onomastic data leads one to conclude that, regardless of when the narrative accounts of Jeremiah were composed, genuine historical memory must have been preserved for such correspondence to exist. From all this, it may be concluded that the scant remains of Northwest Semitic epigraphy can still effectively, though not infallibly, speak to the historical validity of the non-poetic sections of the Book of Jeremiah, especially when onomastic data is taken into account.

Ultimately, one must ask (per Dever) what did the author(s) of Jeremianic material know, and when did they know it? If the “non-Source A” parts of the Book of Jeremiah were written after returning from the Babylonian Exile, how would the author(s) know to use the names specific to the seventh-sixth centuries unless accurate historical documents were available to them? A thorough examination of pre-exilic epigraphy poses no difficulties regarding an early sixth-century context for Jeremiah, and the onomastic and historical details embedded in these ancient texts, if anything, serve to corroborate the accuracy of the biblical record. In conclusion, perhaps Dever put it best when he wrote, “Thus Robert Carroll, who has published widely on the book of Jeremiah, seems forced to admit that ‘our knowledge of the processes that gave rise to the book of Jeremiah in the first place is absolutely nil. That is simply untrue. We know a great deal...Such statements simply illustrate how absurdly wrong scholars can be when they are willfully blind to historical context.’”¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁹ Dever, “When Did They Know It?” 28–9.

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