

Tendencies in the LXX version of Jeremiah

A) Short introduction into the history of research

To investigate the Greek text of Jeremiah is a fruitful burden, as numerous studies in recent years have shown.¹

- It is a burden, because of the difficulty and length of the text: Some Hebrew passages are, even now, hardly intelligible, e.g. Jer 11:15; 12:5; 15:11. How could a translator make sense out of these obscure verses?

To this, the size of the book of Jeremiah comes as a second burden: Being the longest book in the Bible (21819 words), it required an enormous effort to translate it into another language. This alone raised special problems, as becomes visible in the discussion about the question of two translators or a revision.²

- But this research in Jer is also fruitful: It provides so rich and abundant material that it allows to perceive more and deeper than in many other biblical books specific traits of the LXX version. Jer proves to be especially fruitful in a variety of repeated features showing certain directions. We would like to call these repeated features with visible orientations ‚tendencies‘, and present several of them.

In the last 50 years, two scholars have dealt with this theme in considerable length. They are Joseph Ziegler³ and Hermann-Josef Stipp.

Ziegler tackles the topic mainly from a grammatical angle; he uses categories like “Wechsel der Personalpronomina, Kasuswechsel, der Artikel”, besides “Transkriptionen” und “Dubletten” which receive his special attention. Unfortunately, he does not summarize his findings in other ways.

1 See e.g. the works of G. Janzen, E. Tov, S. Soderlund, P.-M. Bogaert, L. Stulman, A. Schenker, H.-J. Stipp, among others. Abbreviations: H for the Hebrew text, G for the Greek version.

2 The theory of H.St.J. Thackeray, that the book of Jeremiah has been translated mainly by two translators, responsible for Jer 1-28 and 29-51, has been criticized by E. Tov, *The Septuagint Translation of Jeremiah and Baruch* (HSM 8), Missoula: Scholars Press 1976. Therein Tov conceives the LXX translation of Jer 29-52 as the work of a revision, including also Bar 1,1-3,8. Later on he modified his position, speaking of two editions (e.g. E. Tov, *Some Aspects of the Textual and Literary History of the Book of Jeremiah*, in: *Le Livre de Jérémie* (Ed. P.-M. Bogaert; BETL 54), Leuven: Peeters 1981, p.145-167. – All these theories of separate translators / revisors / editions have recently come under attack. H.-J. Stipp, *Offene Fragen zur Übersetzungskritik des antiken griechischen Jeremiabuches*, in: *JNWSL* 17 (1991) 117-128, presents serious problems with the proposed theories. See also in this volume the contribution of T.S.L. Michael, showing a “continuity of difference” in both parts of Jeremiah.

3 J. Ziegler, *Beiträge zur Ieremias-Septuaginta* (NAWG), Göttingen 1958.

Stipp,⁴ on the other side, profits from the kindled discussion since Janzen's publication⁵ and shows in chapter 4 "Alexandrinische Sonderlesarten"⁶ his new observations, among them glosses, including "Lieblingswörter", and further revisions ("Bearbeitungen"). These revisions lay emphasis on God⁷ and on the negative portrayal of those mainly responsible (Jer 34 // 41), especially Zedekiah (Jer 37f // 44f). Several changes in Jer 43f // 50f clearly point to an Egyptian place of origin for this 'revision'.⁸ Stipp's contribution is marred by the fact that he is far from being complete. Besides, he seeks to explain nearly all the differences between the Hebrew and Greek version by the hypothetical assumption of an originally better Vorlage for the LXX text.

Because of these reasons, our topic seems to be a promising field for research. On the basis of a fresh translation of Jer-LXX and the recent relevant literature we will try a new approach.

B) Main tendencies of Jer-LXX

We bundle up the tendencies into five larger fields:

- changes in the structure of communication
- differences caused by the new social background
- simplification and explanation of very difficult verses
- a 'milder' presentation of God
- liturgical inclination.

The first three mentioned tendencies will be demonstrated by examples within Jer 1:1-25:13, where G is in common closest to H, whereas our argumentation for the fourth and fifth tendency consists of texts within the whole book.

1. Changes in the structure of communication

The first significant difference between H and G is the very beginning of the book:

H: דְּבַרֵי יְרֵמְיָהוּ ↔ G: Τὸ ῥῆμα τοῦ θεοῦ ὃ ἐγένετο ἐπὶ Ἰερεμίας. G emphasizes that the following is God's message. This could lead to the assumption, that it was very important for the LXX-translator to state the character of the book's (or prophet's) words as words of God from the beginning.

In Jer 3:20 H God confronts the house of Israel direct (2d person plural) with the reproach of treachery (בִּי, בַּגְדָתֶם), whereas in G he only states this reproach concer-

4 H.-J. Stipp, *Das masoretische und alexandrinische Sondergut des Jeremiabuches*. Textgeschichtlicher Rang, Eigenarten, Triebkräfte (OBO 136), Freiburg / Göttingen 1994.

5 J.G. Janzen, *Studies in the Text of Jeremiah* (HSM 6), Cambridge 1973.

6 Stipp, *Sondergut* 145-165.

7 E.g. the addition of "of the Lord" to "word", the change of sequence in the "Wortereignisformel"; Stipp, *Sondergut* 152f.

8 Stipp calls these changes with regard to the original text "Bearbeitungen". But it is an open question whether these differences are not connected with the work of the translation.

ning the house of Israel (3d person singular: ἠθέτησεν εἰς ἐμε), so that the attack is not so direct and hard. A similar changing from 2d person singular (“you”) in H to 3d person singular (“it” [Israel]) in G with at least the same consequence is found in Jer 4:1-2.

In Jer 11:18 H only the second half of the verse is direct speech of the prophet to God and in fact the transition seems very sudden: “And JHWH had let me know and I will know; then you showed me ...”. G starts with the direct facing of God and makes the transition more flowing: “Lord, let me know and I will know! Then I saw ...”. This shows the difficulties of a translator, who has to handle a complicate and complex text as well as communication-structure, as Jer MT presents.⁹ The translator here tries to clarify the text in content and form with a minimum of change.

2. Differences caused by the new social background

Within the broader exposition of the representatives of the whole land Jer 1:18 H mentions kings, rulers, priests and people, whereas a term for “priests” lacks in G. This can be explained as a result of the diaspora-situation, where priests did not play an active role among the Jewish people.

In Jer 2:21 H Israel is compared with שׂרֵק, which is a famous Judean wine. G changes to ἄμπελον καρποφόρον (“fertile wine”), which means in a more generalized way the same, but everybody can understand it without being expert in Judean wines.

Jer 21:2,4,7 H speak in the context of a future disaster also about Nebuchadnezzar (v 2,7) or “the king of Babel” respectively (v 4,7). G in all three cases lacks this mention. The reason for this is the fact, that in time and place of the readers of the LXX this power did not have any relevance at all, but the translator wanted to keep the message of Jeremiah also actual for his audience.¹⁰

These three examples show that the translator of Jer LXX was interested in a message, which was widely understood and up to date also in the changed diaspora-society.

3. Simplification and explanation of difficult verses

A lot of differences between Jer H and Jer G are explainable under this category; the following examples show a few of them:

9 Some problems of the communication-structure in Jer are well documented in the contributions of D. Böhler (p. 91-127), C. Hardmeier (p. 187-214) and J. Oesch (p. 215-223) in: *Jeremia und die »deuteronomistische Bewegung«* (ed. W. Groß; BBB 98; Weinheim: Beltz Athenäum Verlag, 1995).

10 For direct Egyptian influence on the LXX-translation, see M. Görg, “Die Septuaginta im Kontext spätägyptischer Kultur”, in: *Im Brennpunkt: Die Septuaginta. Studien zur Entstehung und Bedeutung der Griechischen Bibel* (ed. H.-J. Fabry / U. Offerhaus; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2001) 115-130.

Jer 1:18 H starts with the words: “And I, behold I have made ...”; G omits “And I”. This does not cause any change in the meaning of the sentence, because it is not necessary for it, but the verse is a little shorter.

A similar case is Jer 2:13, where the LXX-translator omits one occurrence of the word “cistern”, which is found two times in H. Again here this lack does not harm, but makes the sentence itself more easy and clear.

In Jer 5:15, where it is said that a strange people will come and conquer Israel and Juda, G is much shorter than H. H states two times that this people will be a people of long existence, and two times that it will speak a strange language. G mentions only once the strange language. It seems that in the translator’s view with this everything important is said. So he again keeps brief, but understandable. Maybe in the diaspora-situation it was too sad or too unwise (or even dangerous?) stating a strange people with – in obvious opposition to oneself – big consistence.

Jer 3:1 compares the acting of Israel before God with adultery. In the second half of the verse H changes the keywords (שׂא, הַשִּׂי) and speaks relatively abrupt about הַאֲרִי and רַעִי, whereas G keeps the image and speaks about “woman” and “others”. Therefore G is much more consistent and easier to understand.

Another example of this category is Jer 22:4. Here H first mentions “kings” in plural, but turns then to 3d person singular in the subordinate clause (“he and his servants and his people”), whereas G keeps consistent and changes to 3d person plural: αὐτοὶ καὶ οἱ παῖδες αὐτῶν καὶ ὁ λαὸς αὐτῶν.

Two very interesting differences can be found in Jer 13:21, namely the 3d person singular masc. form פִּקֵּךְ in H, which G changes to 3d person plural according to the context, and the hardly understandable phrase in H שֵׁרֵפִים לְרֹאשׁ (“rulers as head”), which G changes into μαθήματα εἰς ἀρχήν (“knowledge of acting in power”), which gives more sense to the sentence.

Jer 15:10b,11 H is another example for a text, which as a whole is hardly understandable:¹¹ “Neither did I *lend*, nor did *they lend* me, *all* being cursing me. *Thus said JHWH: Surely I will rescue you* in the time of trouble and in the time of distress to the good of the enemy”. The LXX-translator tries to give it a clearer sense by changing some words as well as eliminating or inserting others: “Neither did I *help*, nor did *anybody help* me, *my power failed among them* being cursing me. *May it be so, Lord, when they walk in a straight way*, I surely *confronted* you in the time of *their* trouble and in the time of *their* distress to the good, *against* the enemy”.

Facing the examples of this third category of differences between Jer H and Jer G, we can conclude with Fernández-Marcos that “the Bible of Alexandria which the Greek-speaking Jew used cannot be considered a simple reproduction of the original Hebrew text but an autonomous literary work organised around a new constellation of meanings within the Greek system. And it can be said that the discrepancy between the original and its reproduction appeared right from the first moment of

11 See therefore the numerous critical remarks in BHS, which point to the large textual problems of these verses.

translation".¹² According to Jer G we can draw a picture of a translator, who is interested in a text, which is well understandable, more or less consistent in content and grammar and not too difficult in construction and syntax.

So the already mentioned tendencies show us the translator of Jer LXX as someone, who was interested in a well understandable and without too much difficulties also readable text as well as in an attractive theological message about the Jewish God. He felt himself obliged to the text, therefore he tried to translate as careful as possible, but he felt also obliged to the potential audience of his translation, and therefore he had to make some smaller and also bigger adjustments.¹³ These adjustments are reflected in what we call "tendencies" of Jer LXX. Therefore it seems that we have to search for the key of the differences between Jer H and Jer G more in the real and realistic problematic and situation of a bible-translator than in the assumption of a Hebrew Vorlage, which is much different from MT.

The last two categories of tendencies, which refer to main topics of the entire book of Jeremiah, will confirm this assumption.

4. A 'milder' presentation of God

We will now turn to a key issue for the whole book, namely the presentation of God. The portrayal of God in the Greek text of Jeremiah differs considerably from the Hebrew version.¹⁴ We select two texts for this, and point additionally to similar traits elsewhere.

a) The announcement of God's judgment (Jer 25,15ff // 32,1ff)

The goblet scene starts with the introduction of the cup of wine (25,15//32,1):

In H it is "this cup of wine of wrath", כוס היין החמה הזו,
 in G "the cup of this unmixed wine" τὸ ποτήριον τοῦ οἴνου τοῦ ἀκράτου τούτου.

The interpretation of the cup as God's judgment follows later:

v30 (H) God shouts אַשׁוּר ↔ v16 (G) God foretells, reveals χρηματιεῖ

He cries "Hedad!" They answer "Aided!"

v31 God "gives" the unjust to the sword ↔ v17 they are given (passive)

12 N. Fernández-Marcos, *The Septuagint in Context. Introduction to the Greek Versions of the Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 2000) 68.

13 See also J.A. Beck, *Translators as Storytellers. A Study in Septuagint Translation Technique* (Studies in Biblical Literature 25; New York e.a.: Peter Lang, 2000).

14 B.M. Zlotovitz, *The Septuagint Translation of the Hebrew Terms in Relation to God in the Book of Jeremiah*. New York 1981, defended the thesis, that G does not avoid anthropomorphic speaking about God (p.183). Although this is true for some cases, the following examples present a lot of instances where there are significant differences, and always in the direction of God being less involved in human affairs in G.

> The two changes of subject, from God to humans, in v30f // 16f, the choice of the verb in v16 and the missing 'wrath' in v1 contribute all together to see God as less aggressive and repelling.

b) Jeremiah's purchase of a field (Jer 32 // 39)

God's reply to the prayer of his prophet contains several differences in the two versions.¹⁵

v28 (H) God "gives" this city into the hands of the Chaldeans ↔ (G) passive

v30 G does not repeat "provoke" וַעֲבֹר , mentioned already in v29.

v31 H has an additional לִי "to me", stressing God's involvement.

v41 (H) The restoration leads to God's joy; "I will rejoice ... with all my heart and with all my soul." ↔ (G) "I will visit (ἐπισκέψομαι) them ... and plant them in their country .. with whole heart and whole soul" ($\text{ἐν πίστει καὶ ἐν πάσῃ καρδίᾳ καὶ ἐν πάσῃ ψυχῇ}$). –The missing personal pronouns underline the difference in the verbs; God's emotions seem to be downplayed.

> The change of subject in v28 is a similar case like above in a); God seems less responsible for Jerusalem's downfall. The other three verses point clearly in one direction, namely to avoid speaking too much about God's feelings.¹⁶

c) Some other passages

The same feature, to omit or to soften God's feelings, is pervasive.

Jer 8:6; 9:2.5.9 tend to avoid in this way that God laments, weeps. Jer G 8:6 and 9:9 offer a 2nd person plural, instead of 1st person singular; in the two other verses the messenger formula, indicating God as speaker, is missing.¹⁷

Jer 19,9 refers to acts of cannibalism, persons eating the flesh of their children. In H it is God who causes them to do so (hiphil, 1st person singular); in G the persons themselves are subject (qal, 3rd person plural).

Jer 31 (// 38), within the booklet of consolation, offers further examples:

v13 (G) God does not comfort, console.

v20 (H) לִי הִמְרוּ מַעֵי "my guts roared for him" ↔ G: ἔσπευσα "I hurried to him".

v32 בַּעֲלֹתִי "I am master above them" ↔ ἠμέλησα "I didn't care for them".¹⁸

15 P.-M. Bogaert, Les documents placés dans une jarre, in: Selon les Septante (FS M. Harl; Hg. G. Dorival / L. Munnich), 1995, 53-77, offers an analysis and interpretation of some of the differences; see also C. Hardmeier, Probleme der Textsyntax, in: Syntax und Text (ATSAT 40; Hg. H. Irsgler) 1993, 49-79, who observes that G levels the grades of the various speeches ('Redeeinbettungen') and, by doing so, the discourse character.

16 Both these statements have to be seen within the whole range of the G translation; they are not general assertions, as if G would never present God's destroying activity or his emotions, but marked tendencies appearing in various places throughout the book of Jeremiah. For this, see c).

17 Compare also Jer 13:12: H uses the messenger formula to introduce a toast; G doesn't bring it. For this see W. McKane, Jeremiah 13:12-14: A problematic proverb, in: Israelite Wisdom (FS Terrien; Hg. J.G. Gammie), 1978, 107-120, esp. 114f.

18 B. Renaud, L'oracle de la nouvelle alliance, in: Lectures et relectures de la Bible (BETL 144; FS Bogaert), Leuven 1999, 85-98, has extensively dealt with the changes in the passage on the New

> These cases listed above among a-c) are just some examples of a broad tendency, but its aspects are quite clear:

- The subject of punishment or other negative actions switches in G sometimes from God to others.¹⁹

- God's personal involvement is diminished in G.

- All kinds of feelings (wrath, joy, ...) of God seem to be reduced in G.

The result is a somewhat²⁰ 'softened' portrayal of God by G, less challenging than H. We suspect that this has been intended to adjust the text to the expected audience of the translation.

5) Liturgical inclination

As last point we want to treat a further salient feature of the LXX version of Jeremiah.

In several passages G emphasizes piety and devotion. Examples are:

The human response in Jer 1:6 = 4:10 (cf. 14:13) is the highly reverential address Ὁ ὤν δέσποτα κύριε, instead of the Hebrew lament אֱהֵא אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה.

In Jer 2:2 G renders "... you followed the Holy One of Israel", attributing holiness to God whereas H reads "holy was Israel ..." in v3.

G reads an additional Γένοιτο κύριε in Jer 3:19.

Jer 17:26 mentions the offerings which will be brought to the Lord's house. In sound-correspondence to מִנְחָה G translates with μαννα,²¹ evoking the people's wonderful nutrition in the desert.

J. Ferry²² observes a marked "coloration liturgique" within the booklet of consolation. She points to the differences in 30(37),18 where the 'palace' of H is rendered in G by 'temple', and further changes in 31(38),8.13.23.40 mentioning the passover, the sons of Levi, the praise of God (instead of Israel) and precious stones, eventually alluding to the temple.

> In our opinion, this point goes together with the last one, the milder portrayal of God. The translation of G seems to have been inspired by the desire to show the biblical God

Covenant. He also points to the correct rendering of בְּעִלְתִּי in 3,14 G with κατακρυπτέω and to another difference in v32: "They have broken the covenant" in H is translated in G by "they have not remained in ..", thus lessening the guilt of the people.

19 A rare case of an exception is Jer 21:7: H expresses three times that Nebukadnezzar will not have pity with the inhabitants of the city (Jerusalem); G attributes this attitude to God, with two verbs. In this instance G's rendering seems to be influenced by the parallel passage Jer 13:14 where God is the subject, also in H.

20 We wish to stress again that the aspects mentioned above are not exclusive, but represent traits. This means, that still quite a number of 'hard' passages remain in G, showing God in his anger, punishing his people, etc.

21 Ziegler proposes the reading μαννα, with just a few manuscripts and Jerome.

22 J. Ferry, Illusions et salut dans la prédication prophétique de Jérémie (BZAW 269; Berlin - New York: de Gruyter 1999) 283.

as attractive and to foster his devotion. This may explain the increase of liturgical elements in G.

C) Assessment

The differences between Jer H and G provide a vast field of research that offers fruits in abundance. Here we wanted to highlight some major aspects, according to their importance and frequency. The high amount of repetition in the features shown above allows us to speak of tendencies and establishes a relatively solid foundation for interpretation.

On this basis, we can even try to create a kind of “translator profile”. Some small elements, but especially the liturgical inclination (B 5), point to a pious Jew as the person²³ responsible for the translation. He lives in Egypt²⁴ and is torn between two cultures, the one of his Hebrew religious origin, and the other one of his Hellenic-Egyptian culture and living situation, probably in the second century BC.²⁵ This “double” (or triple) background might explain why the translator of Jer G

- sticks very rigidly to his Vorlage,²⁶ renders word plays or specific Hebrew constructions (e.g. with the infinite absolute) literally in Greek and sometimes remains so close to the original that he even risks to result unintelligible to a ‘normal’ Greek reader,²⁷

- yet on the other hand is obliged to change and feels free to do so: He makes complex constructions easier (B 1 and 3), adjusts to the new situation (B 2), decreases ‘national’ expressions like “God of Israel”, “our / your God” or names, as well as lessens the guilt of the people.

The wish to transmit the values of his own tradition influenced the adjustments in the portrayal of God and led also to the increase of liturgical elements (B 4 and 5). In order to make his text more accessible for the new addressees, he portrayed God less harsh or anthropomorphic.²⁸

The overall impression is thus not uniform. On the contrary, Jer G is Janus-faced, looking to its Hebrew Vorlage as well as to the social situation of its time.

23 Our preference goes for an individual rather than for two or more translators. In our opinion, the observable differences between the various parts of Jer are to be attributed to the length of the book and to the fluidity of the process of translation. See also n2.

24 Also the changes in Jer 43f // 50f noted by Stipp, Sondergut, 161-163, convincingly argue for this position.

25 A. van der Kooij, *Zum Verhältnis von Textkritik und Literarkritik: Überlegungen anhand einiger Beispiele*, in *Congress Volume Cambridge 1995* (VTS 66; Hg. J.A. Emerton, Leiden 1997) 185-202, here 197, dates in this time the ideological omission in Jer 33 // 40.

26 One of the best examples for this is Jer 24, with just very few differences between H and G.

27 See, e.g., the transliterations $\sigma\omega\nu\mu$ and $\tau\iota\mu\rho\omega\rho\mu$ in Jer 38,21 G.

28 The contribution of J. Joosten in Basel showed a similar picture for “God’s knowing” in other biblical books, too.

In addition to this, we find a high grade of inconsistency within Jer G for the rendering of the same Hebrew expressions. נָדַד “shake (the head)” is translated three times differently in Jer 16:5; 18:16; 22:10; even within smaller intervals we encounter varied translations, so for סוּדָר “council, counsel” in Jer 23:18,22 or for שָׂרָר “prince, official” in 24:1,8. This trait seems to stem from a translation technique which concentrated on the restricted passage being worked on at the moment. The attention to the immediate problems – which are major and long lasting in Jeremiah – prevented a constant representation of similar words or phrases.²⁹

In our opinion, this unbalanced impression lies behind the theory of several translators, but it is due to the way of translating, varying within this long book of Jer. To us, it also hints at the lack of a consistent revision. If there were any, it didn't affect deeply the result.

With all these observations, we face a final question: Are the above tendencies the result of unconscious attitudes or of intentional activity?

There are signs pointing in both directions. Especially the inconsistency in various renderings prevents ascribing all differences between G and H to a planned, conscious effort. Yet, a regular and far-reaching deletion like that of the epitheton “Zebaoth”³⁰ or of other titles and names, and the rearrangement of Jer 25-51, require deliberate decisions. Once again, Jer G seems to be Janus-faced.

However, the distinction between intentional and casual is not that important with regard to the overall result, clearly showing predilections and attitudes of the translator of Jer LXX, and his wish that his readers might better grasp this difficult and fascinating text. To do so, he took upon himself an enormous burden, and it became fruitful for many. He made a foreign language text accessible to an audience of his time and dared to communicate God anew to them. In this he remains a model also for the present time.³¹

29 The best examples for this are the doublets; in Basel T.S.L. Michael presented a paper on them.

30 A. Rofé, „The Name YHWH SEBA'OT and the shorter Recension of Jeremiah“, in *Prophetie und geschichtliche Wirklichkeit im alten Israel* (FS Siegfried Herrmann, hg. R. Liwak und S. Wagner, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer 1991) 307-316.

31 The parts B 1-3 have been written by A. Vonach, and the rest by G. Fischer; but both of us stand behind the whole article. At the end of this paper we would like to thank Mrs. Renate Steidl and David Meconi SJ for having corrected the English of our respective parts.