

“See and Read All These Words”: The Concept of the Written in the Book of Jeremiah

by

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor
of Philosophy in the Department of
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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

Unusually for the HB, the book of Jeremiah contains a high number of references to writers, writing, and the written word. Written during the exilic period, the book demonstrates a key moment in the ongoing integration of writing and the written word into ancient Israelite society. Yet the book does not describe writing in the abstract. Instead, it provides an account of its own textualization, thereby blurring the line between the narrative and the audience that receives it and connecting the text of Jeremiah to the words of the prophet and of YHWH.

To authenticate the book of Jeremiah as the word of YHWH, its tradents present a theological account of the chain of transmission from the divine to the prophet, and then to the scribe and the written page. Indeed, the book of Jeremiah extends the chain of transmission beyond the written word itself to include the book of Jeremiah and, finally, a receiving audience. To make the case for this chain of transmission, this study attends in each of three exegetical chapters to writers (including YHWH, prophets, and scribes), the written word, and the receiving audience. The first exegetical chapter describes the standard chain of transmission from the divine to the prophet to the scribe, demonstrating that all three agents in this chain are imagined as writers and that writing was a suitable conduit for the divine word. The narrative account of Jeremiah's textualization is set forth, with special attention to the way in which the narrative points beyond itself to the text of Jeremiah itself. The second exegetical chapter builds upon this argument by

attending to the written word in Jeremiah, pointing especially to Jeremiah's self-references (e.g., "in this book," "all these words") as a pivotal element in the extension of the chain of transmission beyond the words in the text to the words of the text. Finally, the third exegetical chapter considers the construction of the audience in the book of Jeremiah, concluding that the written word, as Jeremiah imagines it, is to be received by a worshiping audience through a public reading.

Dedication

For Mandy

טובת־שכל ויפת תאר

Contents

Abstract	iv
Abbreviations	x
Acknowledgements	xv
Introduction	1
Prefatory Note on Terminology: On Theology and the Religious	11
1. Writing the Written in Jeremiah	20
1.1 Writing as degeneration	22
1.2 Writing as progress	28
1.3 Writing as dictation	38
1.4 Writing as deconstruction	46
1.5 Righting the written in Jeremiah	51
1.5.1 Transition v. integration	52
1.5.2 Writing's political and religious functions	62
2. Inscribing Writers in the Book of Jeremiah	69
2.1 The chain of transmission	71
2.2 Scribes as writers	75
2.2.1 Scribes as writers behind the text	77
2.2.2 Scribes as writers within the text	86
2.3 Prophets as writers	103
2.3.1 Prophets as writers behind the text	103
2.3.2 Prophets as writers within the text	108

2.4 Divine writers.....	118
2.4.1 Divine writers in the ancient Near East	119
2.4.2 YHWH as writer	126
2.5 Summary	138
3. Inscribing the Written in the Book of Jeremiah.....	140
3.1 Jeremiah’s account of textual inscription	141
3.2 Scrolls beyond the plot.....	156
3.2.1 “This scroll”/הספר הזה.....	160
3.2.2 “These words” / הדברים האלה.....	168
3.3 Scrolls within the plot	176
4. Inscribing Audiences in the Book of Jeremiah.....	189
4.1 Audiences in the book of Jeremiah.....	191
4.1.1 Orality and audiences in Jeremiah (mouths).....	198
4.1.2 Aurality and audiences in Jeremiah (ears)	204
4.1.3 Beyond or/aurality – intermediaries textual and human	209
4.1.4 The worshiping audience	222
4.1.5 Summary	226
4.2 Audiences of the book of Jeremiah.....	227
4.2.1 Audience ambiguity and address	228
4.2.2 Aurality and the receiving audience.....	231
4.2.3 Jeremiah, the Psalms, and the worshiping audience	234
4.2.4 Summary	239

Conclusion	241
Avenues for further research.....	249
Bibliography	258
Biography.....	277

Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> . Edited by D.N. Freedman. 6 vols. New York, 1992
ABRL	Anchor Bible Reference Library
ANET	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i> . Edited by J.B. Pritchard. 3d ed. Princeton, 1969
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
AOTC	Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries
ARA	<i>Annual Review of Anthropology</i>
ARM	Archives royales de Mari
ASNU	Acta seminarii neotestamentici upsaliensis
ATANT	Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments
BCSMS	<i>Bulletin of the Canadian Society for Mesopotamian Studies</i>
BHS	<i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i> . Edited by K. Elliger and W. Rudolph. Stuttgart, 1983
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
BI	Biblical Interpretation
BIFAO	<i>Bulletin de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale</i>
BMGS	<i>Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies</i>
BS	Biblical Seminar
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft

<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
<i>COS</i>	<i>The Context of Scripture</i> . Edited by W.W. Hallo. 3 vols. Leiden, 1997-
<i>CSSH</i>	<i>Comparative Studies in Society and History</i>
<i>CurBS</i>	<i>Currents in Research: Biblical Studies</i>
<i>DBI</i>	<i>Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation</i> . Edited by John H. Hayes. Nashville, 1999
<i>DDD</i>	<i>Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible</i> . Edited by K. van der Toorn, B. Becking, and P.W. van der Horst. Leiden, 1995
DtrH	Deuteronomistic History
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FLP	Free Library of Philadelphia
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
<i>HALOT</i>	Koehler, L., W. Baumgartner, and J.J. Stamm, <i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Translated and edited under the supervision of M.E.J. Richardson. 4 vols. Leiden, 1994-1999
HBM	HB Monographs
<i>HER</i>	<i>Harvard Educational Review</i>
Herm.	Hermeneia
HTIBS	Historic Texts and Interpreters in Biblical Scholarship
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IOSOT	International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament

IRT	Issues in Religion and Theology
JAAR	<i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i>
JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JNSL	<i>Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages</i>
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series
KHAT	Kurzer Hand-Commentar zum Alten Testament
KJV	King James Version
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LXX	Septuagint
MT	Masoretic text
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NCB	New Century Bible
NIV	New International Version
NJPS	<i>Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures: The New JPS Translation according to the Traditional Hebrew Text</i>
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
OAN	oracles against the nations
OBO	Orbis biblicus et orientalis
OTL	Old Testament Library

OTM	Old Testament Message
OTS	Old Testament Studies
OTT	Old Testament Theology
<i>PMLA</i>	<i>Proceedings of the Modern Language Association</i>
<i>RevExp</i>	<i>Review and Expositor</i>
<i>RIA</i>	<i>Reallexikon der Assyriologie</i> . Edited by E. Ebeling et al. Berlin, 1928-
RSV	Revised Standard Version
SAA	State Archives of Assyria
SAAS	State Archives of Assyria Studies
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
SS	Studi Semitici
<i>ST</i>	<i>Studia theologica</i>
<i>TDOT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> . Edited by G.J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren. Translated by J. Willis, G.W. Bromiley, and D.E. Green. 8 vols. Grand Rapids, 1974-
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Supplements to <i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament

WW *Word and World*

ZAW *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*

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Introduction

In the first edition of his book *Who Wrote the Bible?*, Richard Elliot Friedman provides a simple answer to the question posed in the book's title. The prophet Jeremiah was the Deuteronomistic historian, and as such was the driving force behind the composition and compilation of the HB up to the sixth century BCE.¹ Friedman's solution to the exceedingly complicated question of biblical composition and authorship has won few adherents, but many scholars nevertheless hold fast to the related conviction that the book of Jeremiah occupies a pivotal position in the production of biblical literature, whether or not a historical prophet of the same name was involved. With this group, this study assumes that the book of Jeremiah provides significant clues into the production and compilation of biblical literature, most importantly as it subtly communicates sixth-century Israel's theology of writing and the written. Instead of focusing on the *who* of Friedman's query, I attempt to understand *what* it might have meant to write in Israel during Jeremiah's time and *why* acts of inscription feature so prominently in the book bearing the prophet's name.

Those who follow Friedman's impulse to understand Jeremiah as a biblical author employ an ancient idea, as demonstrated by the rabbinic assertion of b. B. Bat. 15a:

“Jeremiah wrote the book that bears his name, the book of Kings, and Lamentations...”

¹ Richard Elliott Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1987), 146-49. In the book's second edition, Friedman tempers his view on Jeremiah as the Deuteronomistic historian considerably, nevertheless maintaining that “it may be best to think of the Deuteronomistic writings [Deut and the DtrH] as a collaboration, with Jeremiah, the poet and prophet, as the inspiration, and Baruch, the scribe, as the writer who interpreted history through Jeremiah's conceptions.” See *Who Wrote the Bible?*, (2^d ed.; San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997), 147. In both editions of Friedman's book, the historical Jeremiah remains a central figure in Friedman's account of the production of biblical literature.

Like Friedman, the rabbis understand Jeremiah as the author of both the book of Jeremiah and a sizeable portion of the Deuteronomistic History.² Unlike Friedman, b. B. Bat 15a ascribes to Jeremiah no unique position among biblical writers, including Moses, Joshua, David, Hezekiah, “the men of the great assembly,” and Ezra alongside the prophet as composers of the HB. Though Jeremiah is just one of many authors responsible for the HB, the prophet stands out in the rabbinic treatment for two reasons: Jeremiah is the lone latter prophet in the group (the second prophet, after Moses) and he writes his own book.³ Why do both the rabbis and Friedman single Jeremiah out among the prophets as a biblical author?⁴ What, if anything, is so special about Jeremiah that theories of this prophet as a writer have persisted across so many centuries of biblical interpretation?

Working from the general observation that writers, scrolls, and audiences of the written appear prominently in the book of Jeremiah, this study is designed to answer these questions. Employing the tools of modern literary criticism, I read and interpret the overarching textualization narrative of Jeremiah, along the way discerning the book’s theology of writing and the written. Once this exegetical basis is provided in each exegetical chapter (chapters two, three, and four), I move beyond the narrative level and ask how such a theology might have functioned in communities that increasingly

² The tradition of Jeremiah as the author of Kings likely derives from the close relationship between Jer 52 and 2 Kgs 24:18-25:30. Also, note that the rabbis do not ascribe to Baruch any authorial role. Given his prominent and innovative role in the book of Jeremiah, the omission is striking.

³ Contrast Jeremiah with the book of Isaiah, which, along with Proverbs, Song of Songs, and Ecclesiastes, the rabbis report, was written by Hezekiah.

⁴ Ezekiel would have been just as likely a choice, but here again the rabbis responsible for b. B. Bat. 15a name a different author of that book: the Men of the Great Assembly.

regarded texts as legitimate modes of divine communication.⁵ In short, this study argues for an incipient concept of sacred text in sixth-century Israel and beyond. The claim for the idea of scripture implies that a theology exists to underwrite such an idea and that a community exists to compose and read such texts.

The design of the study also leads to two ancillary goals. First, this study theorizes and understands writing as an integral part of Israel's religious ritual, and in this respect contrasts markedly with accounts of writing that understand it exclusively as a secular tool of the state. Writing is re-theorized to reflect a broader spectrum of modern scholarship (in particular, anthropological studies) than has previously been attempted. Second, this study shifts attention from the purpose of the book of Jeremiah at a single moment in time to its continuing vitality in the religion of ancient Israel. I attend to the manner in which the book of Jeremiah has been composed and edited so as to speak to subsequent generations of readers. In the rush to get back to the earliest point of composition possible (and often to the *ipsissima verba* of the prophet), the ongoing function of the text has too often been neglected, and this study attempts to understand how the text would have functioned as a whole in the context of Israelite religion following the exile. In this respect this study follows form-criticism to its logical end, attending to the *Sitze im Leben* of the first "complete" texts of Jeremiah.⁶ Against the idea

⁵ Here I distinguish between the discernment of communities or tradents behind the text at their inception in favor of understanding how such texts might have been employed in the decades and first centuries after their initial inscription.

⁶ Since there are two major text traditions (represented in the MT and LXX) of Jeremiah and the book likely continued to develop for centuries after the exile, I attach scare quotes to the word "complete." By it

that the texts of the HB were never composed with their sacred nature in mind, this study argues that some of Jeremiah's tradents did indeed believe that they were producing sacred text.

In its design and goals, this study follows a broad trend in Jeremiah studies to attend to the thematic and theological coherences of the book.⁷ Against the claim that the book is unreadable, a broadly coherent narrative is described for the book, especially when it comes to the book's account of prophetic textualization.⁸ Though the case for coherence should not be pressed too far, this study proceeds on the assumption that one can read the book of Jeremiah across its readily apparent narrative seams.⁹ The increased interest in the *Sitz im Buch* with respect to the prophetic literature provides the perfect methodological framework for this study. Here, I search for the *Sitz im Buch* of the

I intend only those composite texts of Jeremiah available in the years following the exile, as it is impossible to discern the exact content of the Jeremiah corpus at any one point in time.

⁷ A.R. Pete Diamond, Kathleen M. O'Connor, and Louis Stulman, eds., *Troubling Jeremiah* (JSOTSup 260; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999); Walter Brueggemann, "Meditation Upon the Abyss: The Book of Jeremiah," *WW 22* (2002): 340-42. See also Robert Carroll, *Jeremiah* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986), 76, where the theology of the book is discerned in order to see whose interests such a theology serves. For the terminological choice of "theology" instead of "ideology" in this study, see the prefatory note following this introduction.

⁸ Walter Brueggemann, *The Theology of the Book of Jeremiah* (OTT; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 1.

⁹ See the essays contained in Martin Kessler, ed., *Reading the Book of Jeremiah: A Search for Coherence* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2004). I agree with Louis Stulman's more modest statement below that: "... the book of Jeremiah reflects an intentional literary organization and purposeful theological design. Despite its jumbled appearance, Jeremiah is far more than a random accumulation of miscellaneous materials. It is an artistically woven together literary work with unity and purpose that surpasses its individual parts. Put more modestly, despite the book's dense and chaotic character, it is readable, not by standards of linear logic, but as a symbolic tapestry with narrative seams." See Louis Stulman, *Jeremiah* (AOTC; Nashville: Abingdon, 2005), 13.

various *Bücher* that appear within Jeremiah itself. This particular thematic coherence has not yet been treated at length, and as a result this study fills an important lacuna in the recent study of the book of Jeremiah. In focusing on the narrative account of the book's textualization, this study circumvents the usual questions of historicity regarding the book of Jeremiah and goes straight to the question of how and why the book is so replete with references to writing and the written. I contend that the book is less interested in providing a history of its own inscription than it is in authorizing itself as the true and sacred word of YHWH.

The theology of writing is significant not only for the subfield of Jeremiah studies, but for the composition of the biblical literature generally. In recent years an increasing number of scholars have dated the books of the HB to the Persian period and beyond, so that much of the HB is said to have been produced after the exile.¹⁰ Since much of the book of Jeremiah derives from a relatively fixed chronological range, the book of Jeremiah provides an especially important data point for assessing the claim of extensive literary activity in the sixth through third centuries BCE. Does the book of Jeremiah provide the theological foundation for such a literary boom in the post-exilic period?¹¹ Or does the book provide no such justification for an increased interest in texts and textualization in post-exilic Yehud? The description of the book of Jeremiah's

¹⁰ An exhaustive list cannot be provided here, but for an example of a relatively late date for the Torah, see Joseph Blenkinsopp, *The Pentateuch: An Introduction to the First Five Books of the Bible* (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1992). For a late date for the prophets, see Philip R. Davies, *Scribes and Schools: The Canonization of the Hebrew Scriptures* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998).

¹¹ One might also ask whether the socio-historical conditions in the immediate post-exilic period existed to sustain extensive writing and textual compilation.

theology of writing and the written has implications far beyond the possibility of a coherent reading of the book itself. It also provides data significant for the inscription of the entire HB.

The study is organized in five chapters: the first a brief history of interpretation, the three subsequent exegetical treatments designed to describe Jeremiah's theology of writing and the written, and a conclusion. I first attend to the written word as it has been theorized in biblical studies. Describing four theories of writing (as degeneration, progress, dictated speech, and deconstruction), the study situates various concepts of writing in history. In the description of each theory, attention is paid to the book of Jeremiah, which has often been utilized by theorists of the written word to illustrate their particular ideas. Yet the descriptions of writing as degeneration, progress, dictation, and deconstruction all fail as complete portraits of writing and the written in ancient Israel. This is especially the case in biblical studies, where writing is most often theorized as a tool of the state that leads inevitably to cultural evolution. In the first place, then, chapter one theorizes writing as a theological practice, employed in ancient Israel not only for political purposes but also for religious ones.

Once the argument for a theology of the written has been made, the details of that theology in the book of Jeremiah are described in chapters two, three, and four. Organized according to the three essentials of textual communication – writers, texts, and audiences – these chapters explicate each element of the communicative transaction with reference to specific texts from the book of Jeremiah. In the first of these exegetical sections, chapter two, I describe Jeremiah's theology of the author, describing the lengths

to which the book of Jeremiah goes to associate the written word with the divine writer YHWH. Scribes, prophets, and the deity are described as writers, with each successive category emphasizing the text's link to the divine. According to Jeremiah, Baruch writes the words of Jeremiah, who in turn received his words from the divine. The written text, then, is associated in a chain that goes all the way to YHWH, so that what one finds in the book of Jeremiah is truly a theology of the word. Having described this theology on the narrative level, the chapter then goes beyond that narrative to describe the manner with which the book of Jeremiah authorizes itself as a book whose origin may be found in YHWH. To understand this move beyond the narrative surface to the book of Jeremiah itself, however, the book's self-references must be treated.

Chapter three considers the multiple references to scrolls in the book of Jeremiah, noting their unusual personification throughout the book. Jeremiah includes reference to an inordinately high number of scrolls, and they often seem to behave as independent actors within that narrative. In this way they are unusual as part of the plot. But the theology of the written word in Jeremiah goes beyond the prominence of the scroll within the narrative. The book blurs the line between the narrative and historical world, referring to itself and its own production at key points in the narrative. The phrase "this scroll" appears in Jeremiah and thus refers to its own production and nature as a written word. Indeed, there is no part of the book of Jeremiah that goes unaccounted for as a part of the book's textualization narrative. In this way the theology of the written word extends outside of the narrative world and into that of the book of Jeremiah's audience. Self-references advance the theology of the book into the world of its readers, and they

claim its authority as a divine book. Such self-references constitute a remarkable move toward the concept of scripture, and they argue not only that there was a sacred text in ancient Israel in and around the exile, but that this particular text should be understood as such. The theology of the written in Jeremiah, chapter three argues, is not a theology of writing in the abstract; rather, it concerns the particular piece of writing making up the book of Jeremiah. The book of Jeremiah underwrites “this book” (Jer 25:13) in particular.

Having described the theology of the writer and the written, it remains to describe Jeremiah’s theology of the audience. Who, after all, receives the texts in Jeremiah and the text of Jeremiah, especially given the low level of literacy in the ancient world? Once again, the exegetical chapter begins by considering the representation of audience(s) on the narrative level in the book of Jeremiah. There are numerous audiences in the book of Jeremiah, but the primary characteristic of the audience in the book is that it is most often an audience at worship. Moreover, those who receive texts in Jeremiah do not commonly read them on their own, but have them read for them by elites. Even as they hear the word of YHWH, they hear it as conscious receivers of a word whose transmission is partially in writing. Moving beyond the level of the plot, such a characterization encourages audiences to accept the written word as a medium through which the word of YHWH may be heard. Such a characterization of the function of texts fits especially well with the account of the read word of YHWH in Ezra-Nehemiah and also with the earliest stages of Judaism after the exile. Before the word can become a central feature of Israel’s worship life, an argument must be made for its legitimacy as a conduit for divine-

human communication. Such justification for the audience's reception of the written word appears in the book of Jeremiah.

Chapter five concludes by recapitulating the theology of writing and the written in the book of Jeremiah and suggesting new avenues for research. The chapter argues that, given the theology of writing and the written in the book of Jeremiah, arguments for an extremely late biblical composition must be reassessed. Similarly, the presence of an incipient notion of scripture in the book of Jeremiah signals the beginning (or perhaps another stage) of a canonical process that also calls for ongoing research. In Jeremiah, one finds a text that is self-consciously composed as sacred literature, and indeed even makes a self-referential argument towards that end. "This scroll" (Jer 25:13) is not one that is disinterested in its claim to be YHWH's word and only happened to be included within a canon years later. Rather, the tradents of Jeremiah understood the book they composed to be sacred text. Though modern critical scholars need not accept such claims uncritically, they would do well to understand the importance of such a concept for the documents they study. Literature composed as a divine word proves quite different than literature only recognized as "divine" at a later date.

Following Jeremiah's command to Seraiah in 51:61, the goal of this study is to "see and read all these words" in the book of Jeremiah. As interpreters conscious of the visible nature of the text, modern readers partake in a centuries-long process instigated by the tradents of Jeremiah themselves, who encouraged reflection on the nature of the written word and its role in human society. In the broad sense, then, this work is another

in the long line of “words like them” (Jer 36:32) appended to the earliest form of the book of Jeremiah.

Prefatory Note on Terminology: On Theology and the Religious

Attending to Jeremiah's theology of the written word, it is hoped, will help to establish the place of writing and the written in the religious context of sixth-century Israel. Such a way of describing the task at hand begs several questions regarding terminology. Why, first of all, might one understand Israel's concept of the writing and the written as "theology?" Why not "ideology?" The choice between the two reflects a conscious decision to attend most closely to writing's potential in and for ancient Israelite religious life. Rather than attempting to discern the socio-political factors behind the text's treatment of writing (which surely exist, and which are touched upon in what follows), this study treats the book of Jeremiah's claims about writing in relation to the divine. How is YHWH involved in writing, and what part does writing itself play in ancient Israelite religion? These inquiries lead to a second question regarding terminology: what does it mean to understand writing as a religious act? Both writing and reading constitute key rituals of ancient Israelite religion in the sixth century BCE, and the description of writing as numinous accomplishes little towards an explanation of its role in ancient Israel. As I shall discuss below, the language of "numinosity" itself obscures writing's actual use in ancient Israelite religion. For this reason this study avoids the language of the numinous whenever possible, attempting instead to describe the role of writing in its various literary and socio-historical contexts.

It should be acknowledged that the words “ideology” and “theology” mean different things to different people.¹ Norman Gottwald, one of the first ideological critics of the HB, hardly distinguishes between the two.² More recent interpreters take great pains never to use the latter term, wholly subordinating theology to ideology.³ Interpreters who employ the word “theology” may intend by its use something rather simple, like the religious or ethical use of an idea.⁴ Others employ the term to describe ancient Israelite religious history, while still others mean by “theology” something wholly external to the text itself, a task that takes place after discernment of a text’s socio-historical background.⁵ As for ideology, Karl Marx’s definition remains most influential in biblical studies. Part of a society’s religious, legal, and political superstructure, ideology coincides with the economic interests of the ruling class,

¹ Jonathan E. Dyck, “A Map of Ideology for Biblical Critics,” in *Rethinking Contexts, Rereading Texts: Contributions From the Social Sciences to Biblical Interpretation* (ed. M. Daniel Carroll R.; JSOTSup 299; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 108; Gale A. Yee, “Ideological Criticism: Judges 17-21 and the Dismembered Body,” in *Judges and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies* (ed. G.A. Yee; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 146-70; idem, “Ideological Criticism,” *DBI* 1: 534-37; Tina Pippin, “Ideology, Ideological Criticism, and the Bible,” *CurBS* 4 (1996): 51-78.

² *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 257-59. Here, Gottwald describes the theology of Deuteronomism as a kind of ideology. Thus conceived, a theology is always a kind of ideology, but an ideology is not always a kind of theology.

³ Robert P. Carroll, “Biblical Ideology: *Ideologiekritik*, Biblical Studies, and the Problematics of Ideology,” *JNSL* 24 (1998): 101-114; idem, “An Infinity of Traces: On Making an Inventory of Our Ideological Holdings: An Introduction to *Ideologiekritik* in Biblical Studies,” *JNSL* 21 (1995): 25-43; idem, “On Representation in the Bible: An *Ideologiekritik* Approach,” *JNSL* 20 (1994): 1-15.

⁴ Joachim Schaper, “A Theology of Writing: The Oral and the Written, God as Scribe, and the Book of Deuteronomy,” in *Anthropology and Biblical Studies: Avenues of Approach* (ed. L.J. Lawrence and M.I. Aguilar; Leiden: Deo, 2004), 114.

⁵ For the quintessential article on the various types of theology in biblical studies, see K. Stendahl, “Biblical Theology, Contemporary,” *IDB* 1:418-32. For further on the various definitions of theology, see Brevard Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970), 17-27.

justifying their possession of the means of production and creating among oppressed groups a false consciousness of their situation in society.⁶ Thus conceived, ideology relates primarily to the economic situation of a society and understands other facets of that society in materialist terms. According to Marx, theology would be part of the accepted norms of the dominant class, whether or not theologians understood their role in such a way.

As Patrick Miller understands ideology, it is the self-serving, politically interested use of ideas. “Faith,” he asserts, is ideology’s natural critique, especially as such “faith” was articulated by the prophets.⁷ Miller’s definition of ideology as a primarily pejorative concept emerged at a time when the methodology of “ideological criticism” was yet inchoate, and as a result his description may be outdated.⁸ Nevertheless, in so far as he takes ideological criticism’s material/political focus to be all-encompassing, his critique remains trenchant. Ideology itself is insufficient to describe the entirety of the biblical literature, whose contents threaten to upset the status quo of those in power just as often as they serve to underwrite it.⁹ For every tendentious, ideologically-charged chapter of

⁶ Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (London/New York: Verso, 1991), 1-32; David Hawkes, *Ideology* (2^d ed.; New York: Routledge, 2003), 88-116.

⁷ Patrick D. Miller, “Faith and Ideology in the Old Testament,” in *Magnalia Dei: The Mighty Acts of God: Essays on the Bible and Archaeology in Memory of G. Ernest Wright* (ed. F.M. Cross, W.E. Lemke and P.D. Miller; New York: Doubleday, 1976), 470, 473-74.

⁸ A.D.H. Mayes, “Faith and Ideology in the Old Testament,” in *The Critical Spirit: Theology at the Crossroads of Faith and Culture* (ed. A. Pierce and G. Smyth; Dublin: Columba, 2003), 27-41. In this article, Mayes expands upon and corrects Miller’s account of ideology in ancient Israel, noting in particular that his concept of “faith” was somehow untainted by ideology.

⁹ Miller, “Faith and Ideology,” 467-68.

Jeremiah, there exists another whose underlying ideology is unclear or challenges the self-interest of those that preserve it.¹⁰

This does not mean that “faith” or theology is itself non-ideological or pure, but that it has the potential to upset the usual authorization of the status quo and thus to interrupt the ideological cycle of underwriting the economic interests of the dominant class.¹¹ Expanding on Miller’s concept of “faith,” A.D.H. Mayes explains this process by theorizing Israelite theology as a utopian ideal.¹² Adapting and employing the language of the ideology within which they exist, such ideals are particularly compelling as alternatives to the contemporary culture since they speak the same symbolic language.¹³ The prophet in ancient Israel, for example, cannot help but speak within the dominant ideological space of the temple and palace, but he can use this space and its language to express an alternative social vision. Following Miller’s line of thinking, this study

¹⁰ For an example of the former, see the vision of the good and bad figs in Jer 24, which Robert P. Carroll calls “propaganda on behalf of one group [deported Judaeans] . . . a partisan statement.” *Jeremiah* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986), 482. For an example of the latter, see Jer 8:8, a statement against scribes of the Torah included in the literature by tradents who were themselves skilled writers.

¹¹ See Mayes, “Faith and Ideology,” 40: “We do have the capacity to reflect on our situation, even if in an ideological way, and this capacity for a certain distancing implies that we are not wholly bound by our situation.”

¹² Ibid. Mayes further draws upon Paul Ricoeur’s observation that utopias are themselves ideological, but that they can still serve as critiques of the very ideologies in which they are embedded. See Paul Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 310-12.

¹³ Clifford Geertz, “Ideology as a Cultural System,” in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, 193-233 (New York: Basic, 1973).

believes that just such a challenge to ideology is presented by the overarching theology espoused in the book of Jeremiah.¹⁴

By employing the word “theology” to describe Jeremiah’s concept of writing, I resist the modern Western temptation to reduce the religious to an external explanatory framework. A culture’s beliefs about the divine cannot always be easily reduced to the psychological (Freud), the sociological (Durkheim), or the political and material (Marx). This study will not reduce writing in theological context to these other categories.¹⁵ Nor will this study exalt theological claims to such a height that they extend beyond their historical roots in sixth-century Israel.¹⁶ Jeremiah is indeed about the interests of various competing parties in the exilic period, but it is also about the theology by means of which they interpreted the events of their time.

A second terminological choice follows along these lines. Ancient Israel practiced its theology in particular religious contexts, and thus held specific beliefs about writing, not only a vague sense of its supernatural character. Many scholars employ the terminology of “numinosity” when referring to the supernatural or divine nature of the written word and writing. Susan Niditch describes writing’s “numinous” nature as follows: “One of the indicators of a traditional-style culture, in which modern literacy is

¹⁴ Miller, “Faith and Ideology,” 474.

¹⁵ In this respect I follow the theoretical trajectory of Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2003), whose definition of the “secular” Western world resists the absolute reduction to something defined already by Western philosophers (i.e. private, individually experienced spirituality).

¹⁶ As, for example, occurs in Leslie C. Allen, *Jeremiah* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 18. The book of Jeremiah, according to Allen, communicates the ideal of God’s continuing grace to the people Israel.

not the norm, is the special sort of respect accorded writing, the aura that surrounds it, its links to the realm of the supernatural, its capacity to effect transformation, its magical properties and power.”¹⁷ In diachronic accounts of writing in traditional oral cultures, writing only becomes “religious” as it becomes institutionalized as a part of the complex scribal apparatus of ancient temples. Yet according to some of the same writers, a sense of the numinous adheres to the written word from its inception as an economic necessity.¹⁸ According to such inconsistent theorization, there is a vague link to the supernatural in all writing, but there is little to no explicit link drawn to the divine forces until later in the development of writing and the written. In short, writing is “numinous”; but it is not “religious” until it becomes entrenched as part of the temple complex.

The unfortunate effect of such a historical reconstruction in the scholarly discussion is that potential religious praxis is marginalized.¹⁹ Rather than describing specific activity in the context of ancient Israelite religion, interpreters apply a more general description of writing’s numinous nature.²⁰ As more people learn to read,

¹⁷ Susan Niditch, *Oral World and Written Word: Ancient Israelite Literature* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 79.

¹⁸ William M. Schniedewind, *How the Bible Became a Book: The Textualization of Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 24.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* According to Schniedewind, writing’s numinous nature eventually gives way to more practical uses, the first of which include pragmatic government functions and the latter of which include religious functions. So Schniedewind: “Writing had a numinous power, especially in pre-literate societies. Writing was not used, at first, to canonize religious praxis, but to engender religious awe.”

²⁰ Even when scholarly works do an excellent job of explicating and focusing on the specific contexts and uses for writing, they often avoid the theological implications of writing, and use of the adjective “numinous” persists. See David M. Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press), 10.

interpreters assert, writing's numinous character decreases.²¹ Once they learn this skill, writing and reading become a practical part of everyday life and the written word's aura steadily decreases.²² In the earliest stages of its development, then, writing is absolutely supernatural, and in its latter stages it is a part of secular discourse. As Bengt Holbek describes the final stages of writing's magical component, "most of the belief in the magic of writing has been lost, but traces still linger on within the framework of a recognized form of religion."²³ Little room is left for the numinous and the religious to overlap, and rarely if ever does one see the actual context of these supernatural beliefs in either early or late stages of a traditional culture. Thus conceived, religion exists as a pale reflection of ancient supernatural belief, including the conviction that writing had special power. But why should writing in a religious context be less "numinous" than it was in the beginning? The terminology is too vague to be helpful.

Scholars working along Holbek's trajectory often assume too much about what the illiterate think without describing the particular contexts in which writing appears and its uses therein. Here one negative goal will be to avoid describing "what the illiterate think" about writing.²⁴ Instead of psychologizing those who lack the ability to write and

²¹ Bengt Holbek, "What the Illiterate Think of Writing," in *Literacy and Society* (ed. K. Schousboe and M.T. Larsen; Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1989), 191.

²² This particular narrative (Holbek's) stands in contrast to accounts of writing's rise that emphasize writing's inception as a part of ancient Near Eastern statecraft, about which see chapter 1. For a helpful contrast that situates writing in its political and theological context, see Carr, *Writing on the Tablet*.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Such a task is fraught with difficulty in particular because all the inscriptional and textual evidence available is itself written, and thus provides one not with a clear account of what the illiterate think about

therefore lack the social power that may attend writing, this study attempts to situate writing socially in the particular context of sixth-century Israel. More positively and specifically, the goal will be to discern what role writing had to play in Israelite religious life during the exilic period. Towards that goal the word “numinous” will be avoided in favor of describing specific religious acts and fully contextualizing the potential religious functions of writing and the written. Of course, the word “religious” is itself hotly contested, but it nevertheless communicates more clearly than the language of the “numinous.”²⁵ By this choice I hope to understand writing and the written not only as part of ancient Israelite religion, but also in its current context in the HB, itself a document held sacred by many, whose tradents would have had a keen interest in the function of their document in religious contexts.

It is a surprising feature of many treatments of ancient Israelite religion that they fail to describe or discuss writing in any systematic way.²⁶ This is perhaps due to the tendency to understand writing as something that does not fall under the general category of the “religious.” This study attempts to address this omission, and the language of “theology” and “religion” feature prominently as a part of the endeavor. In the book of

writing, but what the literate think about illiterate conceptions of the written. In this way ancient writers are not so different from their modern counterparts in so far as they are literate interpreters of what the illiterate think.

²⁵ For a useful summary of the current state of the debate regarding religion’s definition, see Fiona Bowie, *The Anthropology of Religion: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2006), 18-25.

²⁶ See the classic treatments of George Barton, *The Religion of Ancient Israel* (New York: Perpetua, 1961) and Th. C. Vriezen, *The Religion of Ancient Israel* (trans. by H. Hoskins; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963).

Jeremiah, a theology of writing underscores the religious function of the written word. Writing likely did inspire awe among the illiterate, and those who could write presumably exploited this fact to underscore and serve their interests.²⁷ Yet these facts alone do not exhaust or fully explain writing in ancient Israel (or any culture, for that matter). To understand fully the ancient Israelite conception of writing and the written fully, interpreters must consider writing in all its contexts, not only its nature as an “ideological” tool or a “numinous” medium.

²⁷ Writing itself may have been an act against scribal self-interest, since it made the word potentially available outside the spoken words of the scribal elite.

1. Writing the Written in Jeremiah

The first question that must be asked when examining an ancient writing in a literary, historical way concerns the genre of the writing.

--Hermann Gunkel¹

What is writing? What are its intellectual and social effects when introduced into society? Who writes, and why? Such questions may seem simple, but their answers prove surprisingly diverse over the course of human history. Considering such questions with an ancient text in mind, especially one held sacred in multiple theological traditions, only complicates the already challenging endeavor of biblical interpretation. Yet Hermann Gunkel's insight that the genre of the writing confronts the reader from the start remains. Indeed, though Gunkel sought the oral roots of biblical literature, he understood well that the form immediately available to modern critics was the written word, and that the critic must account for its written nature. As Robert Carroll wryly observed regarding prophetic literature, "The once spoken words now only come to us as the written word."² What that written word is remains a point of contention among scholars and philosophers alike.

Perhaps the greatest obstacle towards apprehension of the "genre of writing" is the role of the interpreter. Often scholars find their own ideology in other cultures, reflecting their assumptions about writing rather than accurately recounting the past.

¹ Hermann Gunkel, *Water for a Thirsty Land: Israelite Literature and Religion*, (ed. and trans. K.C. Hanson; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 85.

² "Manuscripts Don't Burn – Inscribing the Prophetic Tradition. Reflections on Jeremiah 36," in *Dort Ziehen Schiffe dahin: Collected Communications to the XIVth Congress of the International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament* (ed. G.L. Prato; IOSOT 28; New York: Peter Lang, 1996), 37.

This problem is exacerbated by the fact that Western scholars, so deeply involved in the world of written texts, sometimes import deeply-held convictions about their own vocational commitments as academic writers. Indeed, some such commitments derive from the very texts they study, as modern interpreters cannot read ancient texts without having already been influenced by their implicit ideologies of writing and the written.³

In view of these and other hindrances, the history of writing's theorization is a key part of this study, as it exposes old assumptions and helps to guard against ongoing errors. It will allow, in so far as it is possible, a degree of awareness concerning historical concepts of writing and the written in the present description of the theology of writing in Jeremiah.⁴ Certain pitfalls may be avoided and others guarded against. Armed with a wide range of interpretations of writing, the interpreter is better equipped not only to avoid errors in judgment, but to discern various perspectives on writing as they appear in the HB and the book of Jeremiah. To provide a historical framework for the exegetical work of chapters two through four, this chapter describes four writing models that have become especially important in modern critical biblical scholarship: writing as degeneration, writing as progress, writing as dictation, and writing as deconstruction.⁵ In

³ Sometimes such influence is overdrawn, as with respect to the influence of ancient Israelite writing on the West. E.g., William M. Schniedewind, *How the Bible Became a Book: The Textualization of Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 91; Eric Havelock, *Preface to Plato* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 1963), 305.

⁴ It is, of course, impossible to remove entirely the present interpreter from the equation, even if such a thing were desirable. Thus, one may speak only of removing a degree of the assumptions one brings to the text. See James L. Crenshaw, "Qoheleth's Understanding of Intellectual Inquiry," in *Prophets, Sages, and Poets* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2006), 29-41.

⁵ An exhaustive treatment of the history of writing is impossible here. For such treatments, see Henri-Jean Martin, *The History and Power of Writing* (trans. L.G. Cochrane; Chicago: University of Chicago Press,

each section, two theorists of writing are considered in detail. Additional examples are adduced to provide a fuller portrait of those drawing on or explicitly arguing for a particular model, and special attention is paid to the book of Jeremiah in order to illustrate the manner in which one's theory of writing influences one's interpretation of the HB. After describing these four possible models for writing, the chapter proceeds with an extended critique, outlining two significant ways in which this treatment differs in its attempt to theorize writing: the rejection of transitional models and the religious theorization of writing.

1.1 Writing as degeneration

Long before the advent of modern criticism, the nature and function of writing occupied the minds of ancient thinkers. One need only recall Plato's well-known assessment of the written word to see the point:

this invention will produce forgetfulness in the minds of those who learn to use it, because they will not practice their memory. Their trust in writing, produced by external characters which are no part of themselves, will discourage the use of their own memory within them. You have invented an elixir not of memory, but of reminding; and you offer your pupils the appearance of wisdom, not true wisdom, for they will read many things without instruction and will therefore seem to know many things, when they are for the most part ignorant and hard to get along with, since they are not wise, but only appear to be wise.⁶

1988); I.J. Gelb, *A Study of Writing* (rev. ed.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952). No definitive treatment of the history of writing in Israel exists, but see G.R. Driver, *Semitic Writing from Pictograph to Alphabet* (London: British Academy, 1976).

⁶ *Phaedrus* 274e-275b (Fowler, LCL).

Plato's account demonstrates the presence of writing as a controversial topic in ancient discourse. From the time of its inception in ancient Sumer around the year 3500 BCE to the modern period, writing has been a contested practice.⁷ As a result, no single theory of writing accounts for all its uses across temporal and cultural boundaries. Though no theory has gained complete hegemony, certain ideas have proven especially persistent across the centuries. Plato's theory proved influential in the ancient world and also at the beginning of the modern critical period for those who would theorize writing as degeneration.⁸

Plato criticizes writing for what he believes will be a negative effect on human memory. Unlike human speakers, who can interact dynamically with their interlocutors, the written word is static. Plato compares writing to painting:

Writing, Phaedrus, has this strange quality, and is very like painting; for the creatures of painting stand like living beings, but if one asks them a question, they preserve a solemn silence. And so it is with written words; you might think they spoke as if they had intelligence, but if you question them, wishing to know about their sayings, they always say only one and the same thing. And every word, when once it is written, is bandied about, alike among those who understand and those who have no interest in it, and it knows not to whom to speak or not to speak; when ill-treated or unjustly reviled it always needs its father to help it; for it has no power to protect or help itself.

⁷ Martin, *History and Power*, 9; Gelb, *Study of Writing*, 63; Birger Gerhardsson, *Memory and Manuscript: Oral Tradition and Written Transmission in Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity* (trans. E.J. Sharpe; ASNU 22; Uppsala: Uppsala, 1961).

⁸ A similar account of the written word appears in early Christian literature. 2 Corinthians 3:5-6 (NRSV) cautions against the killing letter, though it does not associate the spirit with the oral: "Our competence is from God, who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of spirit; for the letter kills, but the spirit gives life." See Werner Kelber, *The Oral and the Written Gospel: The Hermeneutics of Speaking and Writing in the Synoptic Tradition, Mark, Paul, and Q* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 155-59 for a careful analysis of this passage from the perspective of one deeply engaged in the discussion regarding orality and literacy.

In stark contrast with the spoken words of human interaction, the written word is powerless, subject to abuse and in need of an interpreter. Its use represents a degeneration against which Plato guards, and he attempts to preserve human memory instead of the book as the primary repository of knowledge.⁹

In ancient Greece, the written word was not employed consistently until the fourth century BCE.¹⁰ Understood in context, then, Plato's rhetoric in *Phaedrus* demonstrates ancient uneasiness with the relatively new prominence of writing. Yet it is also clear from inscriptional evidence that not all shared his skepticism, especially those involved in common writing for economic purposes. As a theorist of writing in ancient Greece, then, Plato does not speak for his entire culture when he theorizes writing as a degenerative act within pedagogy. His is not a universal theory that writing constitutes degeneration throughout Greek culture, but that writing constitutes degeneration for teachers and students. The threat is to the educated elite, not to all of society. As others have utilized Plato's theory in the modern period, however, the degeneration extends beyond this particular context to the whole of the culture.

Late nineteenth-century Germany, influenced deeply by Romantic philosophy, had a keen sense of the importance and vitality of the spoken word. Julius Wellhausen,

⁹ Plato criticizes oral proclamation alongside of the written (*Republic* 3.396), so that some wonders whether the real goal here is not to abrogate writing but to appeal for its proper use. See, for example, Martin, *History and Power*, 92-93. This is an important point, as Plato is not setting up orality and literacy as opposite poles but attempting to order particular practices of orality and literacy. He does not criticize writing or literacy itself, but criticizes its use among philosophers who have the training to use their memories rather than the written word.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 75. For the date of *Phaedrus*, see Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff, trans., *Phaedrus* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995), xiii.

one of the great pioneers of modern critical biblical scholarship, judged the advent of the written word as a degenerative change in the history of ancient Israel. This is somewhat surprising given the prominent role that written documents play in his account of the growth of Israelite literature.¹¹ He described its degenerate nature as follows: "... it is a thing which is likely to occur, that a body of traditional practice should only be written down when it is threatening to die out, and that a book should be, as it were, the ghost of a life which is closed."¹² According to Wellhausen, this was especially true with respect to written prophetic words, which were once part of a vibrant spoken prophetic tradition but were subsequently reduced to dead words on a page. Indeed, with the advent of the written law of Deuteronomy (621 BCE, described in 2 Kgs 22-23),¹³ prophecy ceases altogether. "With the appearance of the law came to an end the old freedom, not only in the sphere of worship, now restricted to Jerusalem, but in the sphere of the religious spirit as well. There was now in existence an authority as objective as could be; and this was

¹¹ For a critique of this documentary emphasis, see Susan Niditch, *Oral World and Written Word: Ancient Israelite Literature* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 110-114.

¹² Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994), 405; repr. of *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* (trans. J. Sutherland Black and Allan Enzies, with preface by W. Robertson Smith; Edinburgh: Adam & Charles Black, 1885); trans. of *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels* (2d ed.; Berlin: G. Reimer, 1883). Cited in Jon D. Levenson, *The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and Historical Criticism* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 42. Wellhausen makes this point in connection with the exile, asserting that the word would not have been written down unless it were under the duress of exile.

¹³ Wellhausen allows for early prophetic writing ("it is certainly the case that the prophets had written down some of their speeches before this...", *Prolegomena*, 402), but he contends that with the book of the Torah in 2 Kgs 22-23 the writing was intended "not to remain a private memorandum, but to obtain public authority as a *book*." On these points I agree with Wellhausen's understanding of the texts, though I do not share his dim view of this move's effect in Israelite religious history.

the death of prophecy.”¹⁴ The written word, then, is “objective,” so that it does not engender further legitimate interpretations, but restricts the spirit of the religious person. For both Plato and Wellhausen, writing ironically stultifies the word and encourages abuse and misinterpretation by human actors.

As for the book of Jeremiah, Wellhausen finds himself in a difficult situation, since Jeremiah is said to have been an ally of Josiah and thus must have supported the legal codification behind 2 Kgs 22-23. Wellhausen avoids this difficulty by appeal to Jer 8:7-9, asserting that, while Jeremiah “had a share in the introduction of the law... in later times he showed himself little edified by the effects it produced.”¹⁵ As a prophet, then, Jeremiah eventually came to resist the written law as a dead end in ancient Israel’s religious development. Nevertheless, once the original legislation had been promulgated, it set in motion a process of inscription that could not be stopped. This initial writing was the decisive step by which the written word replaced the oral and led to ancient Israel’s slow degeneration into Judaism.¹⁶

For Wellhausen, writing ultimately leads to canonization, which is a further degeneration of the word and, along with it, the truly spiritual life. By virtue of the fact that Ezra and the signatories to the covenant publically claimed their loyalty to the book

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 403.

¹⁶ Ibid., 410. Wellhausen also associates the written Torah with Judaism, which he distinguishes from ancient Israel. On the topic of anti-Semitism in Wellhausen’s work, see Lou Silberman, “Wellhausen and Judaism,” *Semeia* 25 (1983): 75-82.

of the Torah in Neh 8-10, Wellhausen contends that they are “founders of the canon.”¹⁷

Subsequent to the introduction of written law, the commitment to a canon represents the final result of writing, and Wellhausen describes this event with a rhetorical flourish:

“The water which in old times rose from a spring, the Epigoni stored up in cisterns.”¹⁸

But who were these Epigoni whose inscription and codification of the law had such negative effects on ancient Israelite religion? For Wellhausen, scribes are politically interested Pharisees and rabbis of early Judaism. He draws his critique of the written word and its guardians broadly from the NT, stating obliquely that “What importance the written letter, the book of the law, possessed for the Jews, we all know from the New Testament.”¹⁹ In *Prolegomena*, Wellhausen hardly distinguishes at all among the ancient Israelite scribes, Pharisees, and rabbis of the first two centuries of the Common Era.²⁰ They are all part of a long trajectory of degeneration away from natural religious expression towards allegiance to a dead text.

Among anthropologists, writing also can be seen as a degenerative force in a culture, a fact that is especially important as a counterpoint to the usual account of cultural progress. Kevin Maxwell’s work with the Zambian Bemba tribe depends upon

¹⁷ Wellhausen, *Prolegomena*, 409.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 392.

²⁰ Note how Wellhausen, in his famous article on “Israel” in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, interrupts his summary of Israelite history between sections on “The captivity and restoration” and “The Hellenistic period” in order to describe and distinguish Judaism and Christianity. Like Wellhausen, Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), 23-26 also connects the Pharisees of the Common Era to the scribes of the Second Temple period. His account, however, omits the negative judgment expressed by Wellhausen regarding their role in Israelite religion.

the work of theorists who understand writing as cultural progress, but it extends and implicitly challenges the oral-aural thesis (discussed below) by describing writing's potentially deleterious effects.²¹ Writing and literacy functioned as tools of oppression that were used against traditional Bemba religion by Christian missionaries, and as such led to cultural degeneration.²² But here Maxwell moves beyond Plato, Wellhausen, and other theorists who imagine writing as a neutral tool with deterministic effects in all cultures. He focuses instead on the ideological freight imported and intended by those who use writing, subtly undermining the idea that writing always leads to certain ends, whether degeneration or progress. Yet this is a relatively new insight for scholars of the HB, many of whom imagine writing only as a sign of cultural advancement.

1.2 Writing as progress

Modern interpreters who understand writing as cultural progress often have difficulty with Plato's account, especially when it is applied as a universal critique rather than a specific one. This is especially the case in the modern context, where the dominant model of writing often assumes evolutionary progress in cultures. Though they are certainly not the first to theorize writing as progress, Jack Goody, Walter Ong, and David Olson have proven especially influential across multiple fields, including biblical

²¹ Kevin B. Maxwell, *Bemba Myth and Ritual: The Impact of Literacy on an Oral Culture* (New York: Peter Lang, 1983).

²² Ibid. The degeneration Maxwell describes occurs when literary technology affects increased interiority and an individuated self. Separated from the integrated whole of traditional Bemba society, some who learned to read felt isolated and unable to participate in traditional Bemba social life.

studies.²³ Well-known as proponents of what has become known as the literacy thesis (alternatively, the oral-aural thesis), these scholars contend that

writing is a technology that transforms human thinking, relations to language, and representations of tradition, a technology that also enables a coordination of social action in unprecedented precision and scale, thus enabling the development of unique social and institutional complexity.²⁴

The literacy thesis characterizes writing as a “tool” leading to “the growth of human knowledge and ... the growth of man’s capacity to store and to augment that knowledge.”²⁵ Writing provides the means by which humans can progress intellectually and societies can achieve socio-cultural progress.²⁶ The written word is *the* catalyst by which societies change from primitive to civilized. As a catalytic technology, writing exists as a static, abstract instrument across cultural and chronological boundaries whose

²³ Jack Goody and Ian Watt, “The Consequences of Literacy,” *CSSH* 5 (1963): 304-45. Goody increasingly amended the earliest deterministic iteration of his argument by asserting that alphabetic literacy made empirico-logical thought possible. For examples of the literacy hypothesis’ continuing development, see Jack Goody, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977) and idem, *The Logic of Writing and the Organization of Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 80-82; idem, *Interfaces of the Word: Studies in the Evolution of Consciousness and Culture* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1977); David R. Olson, “From Utterance to Text: The Bias of Language in Speech and Writing,” *HER* 47 (1977): 257-81; idem, “The Cognitive Consequences of Literacy,” *Canadian Psychology* 27 (1986): 109-21; idem, *The World on Paper* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

²⁴ James Collins and Richard Blot, *Literacy and Literacies: Texts, Power, and Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 17.

²⁵ Goody, *Domestication*, 36, 44, 47.

²⁶ James Collins and Richard Blot provide a convenient summary of the various changes that take place, according to the literacy thesis and its proponents. Literacy 1) encourages certain kinds of traditions (histories, not myths), 2) affects the manner by which such traditions are produced and passed on (by critical inquiry, not authorized opinion), and 3) stimulates the manner by which cultures receive such traditions (skepticism, not naïve acceptance). See *Literacy and Literacies*, 77.

effects are remarkably consistent.²⁷ Using the technology of literacy, primitive minds begin to think critically²⁸, democracies are built, and a stark historical transition between written and oral cultures, so prevalent in the earliest anthropological literature, is redrawn.²⁹

For individuals, the written word represents a sharp change from the spoken word because it creates a different set of relationships between words and those who employ them. “Once written down,” classicist Eric Havelock asserts, “the act [of speech] could be visualized and this visual thing could be separated from the act of speaking and laid out in a kind of visual map.”³⁰ Readers could see the word. Such separation altered the consciousness of readers, providing a static “word” with which they could contend.³¹ Spoken words always exist in the temporal moment of their utterance and thus always exist only in relationship to those who speak them. Written words, by contrast, endure

²⁷ For the language of stability with respect to literacy as technology, see *ibid.*, 35.

²⁸ “More than any other single invention,” Walter Ong reports, “writing has transformed human consciousness.” *Orality and Literacy*, 77.

²⁹ I say “redrawn” because great divide theories have existed from anthropology’s beginnings. See E.B. Tylor, *Anthropology: An Introduction to the Study of Man and Civilization*. New York: Appleton, 1898), 179-80, quoted in Collins and Blot, *Literacy and Literacies*, 9, who states: “The invention of writing was the greatest movement by which mankind rose from barbarism to civilization. How vast its effect was, may be best measured by looking at the low condition of the tribes still living without it, dependent on memory for their traditions and rules, and unable to amass knowledge as we do by keeping records of events and storing up new observations for the use of future generations.” Examples from Frazer, Lévy-Bruhl, and others could be multiplied, as such great divide theories not only existed as a part of anthropology’s beginnings, but indeed animated the field’s beginning.

³⁰ *The Muse Learns to Write: Reflections on Orality and Literacy from Antiquity to the Present* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 34.

³¹ Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 77; Goody and Watt, “Consequences,” 317. For more on the means by which literacy increases consciousness, see Olson, “Cognitive Consequences,” 109-21.

beyond the moment of speech, occupying space on the page and achieving relative independence from those who write them. Apart from the authoritative voice of the speaker, the written word may be openly doubted, and as a result skepticism increases in the minds of ancient writers. Such skepticism increases the degree that thinkers increasingly consider the word rather than its speaker, and that shift results in empirico-logical thought and enduring documents. Authority shifts from the speaker to the text, and with increased dependence on the written word the human intellect shifts away from mytho-poetic to logico-empirical thought.³² Writing, conceived as progress, “domesticates” the savage mind.

Armed with these intellectual innovations, humans develop new relationships with social authorities, and the cognitive effects of literacy ultimately lead to a political shift towards democracy.³³ Once the cognitive revolution extends to a sufficiently broad segment of the population, the revolution of the mind effected by the technology of writing becomes a socio-political revolution. Writing liberates not only the mind but also the citizens. Of particular importance for the proponents of the literacy thesis is the example of ancient Greece, where increasing literacy encouraged citizens to challenge the

³² Read also “syllogistic,” for which see Goody and Watt, “Consequences,” 305.

³³ David Diringer, *The Alphabet: A Key to the History of Mankind* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1948), 48, 196. Here, Diringer refers to the alphabet as a “democratic” script and contrasted this form of writing with the “theocratic” scripts of ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia. Such nomenclature unfortunately create a dichotomy between “sacred” and democratic writing where none need necessarily exist. On this latter point, see Gelb, *Writing*, 230-35.

autocratic leaders of the city-states in favor of participatory democracies.³⁴ Though he tempered his ideas considerably after they were first published in *Preface to Plato*, Eric Havelock stated this case most strongly, arguing that alphabetic literacy set into action a democratic revolution in Greece.³⁵ Writing, according to those who theorize writing as progress, has myriad effects that can hardly be overstated. As we shall see, this is not a new insight; John Calvin in some respects anticipated twentieth-century social anthropologists and linguists in noting the effects of writing. Before turning to him, however, it is necessary to consider the literacy thesis further.

Goody is keen to avoid the critique that his work reinforces theories of “The Grand Dichotomy” between “primitive” and “civilized” cultures, yet his commitment to developmental explanations of culture undermines his efforts towards this end.³⁶ John Halverson has recounted the deficiencies of Goody’s treatment. Most importantly for the purposes of the present study, he challenges on empirical grounds the notion that an inherent relationship exists between literacy and logic.³⁷ Halverson especially calls

³⁴ Note Goody and Watt’s characterization of ancient Greece: “The rise of Greek civilization, then, is the prime historical example of the transition to a really literate society.” “Consequences of Literacy,” 319. The example is paradigmatic, more representative of literacy’s power than all other cultures.

³⁵ In addition to the popular work cited above, *The Muse Learns to Write*, see also *The Literate Revolution in Greece and its Cultural Consequences* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982).

³⁶ Goody, *Domestication*, 146-62. In fairness, Goody’s appeal to the development of culture arose primarily in conversation with abstract structuralist accounts of culture that disregard historical difference.

³⁷ John Halverson, “Goody and the Implosion of the Literacy Thesis,” *Man* 27 (1992): 301-17.

attention to the research of Scribner and Cole on the Liberian Vai people.³⁸ Literate in a script of their own creation, Vai writers rarely performed well when tested for logical problem-solving. Only education in Western school environments improved “logical” thinking, not literacy alone.³⁹ Writing, then, abstracted from the specific uses to which it is put, does not necessarily lead to empirico-logical thought or syllogistic reasoning. Literacy among the Vai has not led to the advent of logic, at least not in the sense that the term has been defined in Western academic contexts. In Vai culture, literacy leads to different, culturally specific ends unassociated with the expectations of the Western observer.⁴⁰

Non-literate cultures often achieve high cognitive processes, accumulating certain kinds of knowledge without writing (e.g., knowledge of medicinal aids) and exhibiting a high degree of skepticism when speakers are heard by a careful listener. Written records do not necessarily precede the intellectual skepticism that Goody contends makes empirico-logical thinking possible.⁴¹ In an oral culture, listeners would be as sophisticated as speakers, and different speakers with their divergent voices would have

³⁸ Sylvia Scribner and Michael Cole, *The Psychology of Literacy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981).

³⁹ Halverson, “Implosion,” 311.

⁴⁰ For example, the Vai utilize various literacies, including an indigenous alphabetic script, in different contexts. In Westernized educational settings, they employ English and Arabic writing systems, but in the transmission of their cultural heritage, they employ the indigenous script.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 307-10.

created a lively conversation.⁴² While it may be true that the skill of reading allows for a new kind of critical examination, it does not necessarily follow that skepticism would not already be possible even in an oral culture.⁴³ The assumption that critical thought was impossible (or less possible) in oral cultures betrays the persistence of the oral-literate, primitive-civilized dichotomy. On empirical grounds, Halverson helpfully challenges Goody's foundational cultural observations. Literacy does not always lead to Western rationality, and non-literate cultures often exhibit complex cognition in the absence of writing and writers.

In the sixteenth century, John Calvin theorized writing in opposition to the oral, valorizing the effects of writing for individuals and societies. Whereas many ancient intellectuals defined writing as degeneration away from the spoken (see 1.1) or the direct representation of spoken words (see 1.3), Calvin understands writing as an improvement upon speech. Reflecting on Jeremiah 36, he writes,

We see here, in the first place, what is the benefit of having the Scripture, even that what would vanish away or escape the memory of man, may remain handed down from one to another, and also that it may be read; for what is written can be better weighed during leisure time. When one speaks only, everyone takes in according to his capacity and his attention; but as words from man's mouth glide away, the utility of Scripture does appear more evident; for when what is not immediately understood is repeated, it brings more light, and then what one reads today he may read tomorrow, and next year, and many years after.⁴⁴

⁴² Unfortunately, those oral cultures imagined by scholars often assume a monolithic oral culture that simply draws upon and incorporates divergent and even mutually exclusive positions. The traditions of oral cultures, however, surely had a variety of different speakers and a variety of different messages.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 306.

⁴⁴ John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries* (trans. J. Owen ; 10 vols.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 10: 326.

Rather than the ancient anxiety over the written word, one finds here confidence in the positive mnemonic function of “Scripture.” Spoken words lack permanence and lend themselves to misunderstanding. Written words live on “many years after,” enlightening the one who chooses to read them “during leisure time.” Of course, Calvin speaks not only of writing in the abstract in his reflections on Jer 36, but of the writing of “Scripture.” In so doing he introduces a concept not explicitly employed by the text itself, attributing to Baruch’s scroll a sacred character. In Calvin’s theory of the written, one finds the anti-Plato, a simple confidence that writing makes permanent what was once impermanent and that it does so generally and not only in particular circumstances. Whereas Plato rejected writing as diminishing true wisdom, Calvin states that Scripture, merely because it is written, “brings more light.”

The analogy between Goody and Calvin, however, must not be pressed too far. Most significantly, Calvin’s theory of the written does not privilege the written over the oral in a history of cultural evolution. Rather, in his view both the written and the spoken word were necessary components of the divine word. In his commentary on Jer 36:4-6, Calvin reports that the spoken words of the prophet were at least as important as those that were written. “God,” Calvin asserts, “presided over the mind and tongue of the Prophet. Now the Prophet, the Spirit being his guide and teacher, recited what God had commanded; and Baruch wrote down ... the whole summary of what the Prophet had taught.”⁴⁵ The written word both contains the oral word and animates a new spoken word.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 329.

Calvin's homiletic interest fits well with this view of the written word, since the Scripture serves as the catalyst for a spoken divine word in the sermon. It should surprise us very little, then, that he views the written word of the scroll in Jeremiah 36 as sacred text, so central was it to new performances of the divine word. From Calvin one learns that one may theorize the written without essentializing either the oral or the written.⁴⁶

The idea of (r)evolutionary progress from an oral to a written period has had a great deal of influence across the humanities, not least in biblical studies.⁴⁷ William Schniedewind explicitly depends upon the work of Jack Goody, and his work provides a representative example of the way in which the idea of progress via a transition wrought by writing has been mapped onto the biblical literature.⁴⁸ He describes writing in sixth-century BCE Israel:

With the emergence of literacy and the flourishing of literature a textual revolution arose in the days of King Josiah. This was one of the most profound cultural revolutions in human history: the assertion of the orthodoxy of texts. As writing spread throughout Judean society, literacy broke out of the confines of the closed scribal schools, the royal court, and the lofty temples. Beginning in the burgeoning government bureaucracy, the use of writing spread throughout society. Basic literacy became commonplace, so much so that the illiterate could be socially stigmatized. The spread of literacy enabled a central feature of the religious revolution of Josiah: the religious authority of the written text. This was

⁴⁶ Martin Jaffee, *Torah in the Mouth: Writing and Oral Tradition in Palestinian Judaism 200 BCE-400CE* (London: Oxford University Press, 2001), 9-11, 15-27. Such essentializing, Martin Jaffee contends, is the chief problem with the literacy thesis as it has been popularized by Goody and Watt; see also Helmer Ringgren, "Oral and Written Transmission in the O.T.," *ST* 3 (1950): 34.

⁴⁷ Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 170: "Orality-literacy theorems challenge biblical study perhaps more than any other field of learning."

⁴⁸ Schniedewind, *How the Bible*, 2-3, 13, 119.

the great and enduring legacy of the Josianic reforms in the development of Western civilization.⁴⁹

Schniedewind describes the “emergence” of literacy, a “revolution” that “broke out” of particular circles to enter into the rest of ancient Israelite culture. Such a revolution provides an almost perfect parallel of the similar development in ancient Greece touted by Havelock, Goody, and Watt. Just as there was a great revolution in ancient Greek society, there was also a great revolution in ancient Israelite society. All four scholars, Schniedewind, Havelock, Goody, and Watt, describe a moment when literacy spread far and wide and ultimately leads to great cultural progress. Yet the accounts described by the biblical scholar Schniedewind and the scholars upon whom his work depends (Havelock, Goody and Watt) are not perfectly analogous, however similar they may at first seem.

One difference is particularly instructive. For Havelock, Goody, and Watt, writing’s ultimate effect is socio-political. Writing enables democracy in ancient Greece. For Schniedewind, writing’s primary effect is religious. Writing enhances the authority of religious discourse. In this way Schniedewind echoes Julius Wellhausen, who himself observed the radical change to the authority of the written word but evaluated this shift in an entirely negative way. This point of commonality demonstrates that theories of

⁴⁹ Ibid., 91. Schniedewind’s position seems unclear with respect to the temple’s role in writing. In the above quote he states that writing broke free from the “lofty temples,” but elsewhere (ibid., 111-12), he seems to contradict this point: “Not only had writing spread since the days of Hezekiah, it now had a new social location. Writing was no longer essentially a prerogative of the state, but it had spread to various non-scribal classes as well, as can be seen in the inscriptional evidence discussed earlier. To understand just how the social location of writing had changed, let us return to the famous discovery of the scroll... That it was the high priest [Hilkiah] who found the scroll in the temple is critical for understanding the new social location of writing: the priests and the temple.”

degeneration and progress share one important element. Both theorize writing diachronically, describing its significance by employing the concept of a radical transition from orality to literacy. Other options exist, however, for the theorization of the written word that do not place it within a chronological narrative, and it is to two such prominent theories that this study now turns.

1.3 Writing as dictation

Long before both Calvin and Schniedewind, interpreters theorized writing in order to understand its function in religious contexts. Along the same trajectory as the first scribal traditions of the HB, the rabbis theorized writing from an early period. Rabbinic literature expends a great deal of energy justifying its own traditions by characterizing them as oral Torah once given to Moses and passed down through subsequent generations.⁵⁰ Yet this creates a tension in the oral traditions of the rabbis since these traditions were themselves set down in writing.⁵¹ How did the rabbis understand this difficulty inherent in their tradition, and from what resources in Jeremiah could they draw in order to theorize writing and the relationship between the oral and the written word? According to their theory, writing is neither a degenerative move away from pure orality nor a progression beyond it, but a parallel means by which to record the divine word.

⁵⁰ *m. Abot* 1:1. See also *b. Eruvin* 54b, cited in Jaffee, *Torah in the Mouth*, 3-4.

⁵¹ Martin S. Jaffee, "A Rabbinic Ontology of the Written and Spoken Word: On Discipleship, Transformative Knowledge, and the Living Texts of Oral Torah," *JAAR* 65 (1997): 525-49.

For the rabbis, writing perfectly parallels a spoken word, and in certain cases multiple instances of speech, prior to inscription. Reporting a debate about the final eight verses of Deuteronomy, *b. B. Bat.* 15a records the opinion of R. Judah that Joshua wrote down the words that follow the account of Moses' death. R. Simeon argues against such an assertion:

up to this point, the Holy One, blessed be He, said the words, and Moses said them over again and then wrote them down. From this point onward, the Holy One, blessed be He, said the words, and in tears, Moses wrote them down in line with this: 'Then Baruch answered them, he pronounced all these words to me with his mouth and I wrote them with ink in this book.'⁵²

Whereas most of the Torah was written after two oral recitations, one divine and the other human, in the final verses of the Torah YHWH recites the words only once before they are written. When R. Simeon cites Jer 36:18, he theorizes the written as a word that had to be brought into existence via speech. The spoken word is primary, the written secondary, and both are in perfect correspondence with one another.⁵³ Even the written Pentateuch, itself the most important of documents for ancient Jews, found its first life as the spoken word of YHWH *and* the spoken word of Moses before it was put to the page.

Writing, in perfect correspondence with a spoken word, recreates that which has already been spoken. Just as Baruch was Jeremiah's amanuensis, so was Moses YHWH's. In one short passage R. Simeon subsumes the written words of Torah under

⁵² Cited in Jacob Neusner, *Jeremiah in Talmud and Midrash: A Source Book* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 2006), 341.

⁵³ Note that R. Simeon does not cite Jer 36:32b ("and many others like them were added"), which derives from a very similar verse but would expand the prophetic word beyond that spoken in the historical moment of 605 BCE. Jeremiah 36:32 is twice cited in rabbinic literature to detail Jeremiah's authorship of Lamentations (*Lam Rab* 28.1; 29.1).

the broader category of the spoken. Writing, according to this model, is dictation. The rabbis exist in an oral world that assumes no independence of a text apart from its vitality as a part of speech.⁵⁴ Thus, while textualization was fully incorporated into the ancient world by the time of the rabbinic theorization of writing, writing was nevertheless wholly subservient to the spoken word.

Alongside the theory of writing as cultural progress, writing as dictation has predominated in biblical scholarship, especially among Scandinavian and German scholars of the HB. Here the relationship between a prophet and his disciples has been especially prominent, with the former assumed to have written words down after transmitting prophecy across generations orally.⁵⁵ In biblical studies, Hermann Gunkel considered the oral precursors of ancient Israelite literature. Given this focus of his research as the father of form-criticism, one might expect Gunkel to denigrate the act of writing in a manner similar to Wellhausen.⁵⁶ Certainly Gunkel shared Wellhausen's view of literary deterioration in "Jewish literature," but he does not criticize the act of writing itself, and in fact even occasionally praises the beauty of composite prophetic literature.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Jaffee, *Torah in the Mouth*, 15-27; idem, "Rabbinic Ontology," 534. Texts that were originally oral performances were written down, and the resulting texts were themselves inscribed for future oral "performances."

⁵⁵ Isa 8:16 figures prominently in such descriptions. See James L. Crenshaw, "Transmitting Prophecy Across Generations," in *Prophets, Sages, & Poets* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2006), 167-72.

⁵⁶ For helpful overviews of form-criticism of the HB, see Rolf Rendtorff, *The Old Testament: An Introduction* (trans. J. Bowden; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1991), 77-128; Gene M. Tucker, *Form Criticism of the Old Testament* (OTS; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971).

⁵⁷ For Gunkel's negative appraisal of "Jewish literature" (e.g., Ben Sira), see Gunkel, "Literature of Ancient Israel," 80. For his praise of composite literature, see *ibid.*, 31.

According to Gunkel, writing need not be considered a degenerate act devoid of all vitality, but may itself be a part of the life of Israel's prophets. Indeed, writing is a key cultural advance for Gunkel and not a sign of cultural deterioration.⁵⁸

The compilation of the HB comes at the end of its literary history, and the composite document was collected in order to serve "as a constitution and book of inspiration for the Jewish community."⁵⁹ Prophets compiled their works "in order to give them more force," but not as prophetic books. Ezekiel, Gunkel contends, "composed the first prophetic book," and he did so because he was convinced that his prophecies would be fulfilled generations later and not during his lifetime.⁶⁰ What, then, were those prophetic compilations that preceded Ezekiel's first book? For Gunkel these were collections of sayings meant for the contemporary generation "in order to deliver their words where their own voice could not reach."⁶¹ Writing, then, was in its earliest phase a purely practical concern conducted only to share the prophetic word when the personal presence of the prophet was impossible. "Of course," Gunkel asserts, "such a collection was by no means considered a literary work, which would have required a certain

⁵⁸ For an account of Gunkel's three-stage developmental view of Hebrew literature, see Michael H. Floyd, "Oral Tradition as a Problematic Factor in the Historical Interpretation of Poems in the Law and the Prophets" (Ph.D. diss., The Claremont Graduate School, 1982), 7-37. Floyd compares Gunkel and Albright on the question of early Hebrew poetry, pointing out that they both assume a developmental theory of literary development including 1) an initial stage of oral folklore, 2) a stage of transition brought about by the advent of writing, and 3) new forms of literary composition composed by self-conscious original authors. This developmental theory has continued in recent scholarship in the work of Jack Goody.

⁵⁹ Gunkel, "Literature of Ancient Israel," 27.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 61. Elsewhere, Gunkel considers Ezekiel "a most remarkable poet of powerful dirges and taunting songs, who loves the old mythological themes" (67).

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

structure.”⁶² This “certain structure” of literature remains rather vague with Gunkel, who only asserts that it is often impossible to discern among the prophets. Nevertheless, this lack of literary organization in the books that bear the names of the prophets does not keep Gunkel from positively evaluating the prophets and their work as “great writers.”⁶³ Elsewhere, Gunkel stresses the point that “The prophets were originally not writers but speakers.”⁶⁴ Yet he remains open to the possibility that certain later prophets, including Jeremiah, are indeed partially responsible for their own compositions.⁶⁵

The dictation theory of writing was followed throughout the twentieth century, especially in Scandinavian scholarship, many of whom relied especially on the spoken word to understand the written words of the HB.⁶⁶ Sigmund Mowinckel in particular altered Gunkel’s understanding somewhat, theorizing the written document as an *aide-memoire* to oral performance in a cultic setting: “The recording then was to serve as a support to memory, as “the words on a special occasion were to be recited to the cultic

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid., 55-72.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 60.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 69.

⁶⁶ Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Spirit and the Word: Prophecy and Tradition in Ancient Israel* (trans. and ed. K.C. Hanson; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002); H.S. Nyberg, *Studien zum Hoseabuch* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1935); A.H.J. Gunneweg, *Mündliche und schriftliche Tradition der vorexilischen Prophetenbücher als Problem der neueren Prophetenforschung* (FRLANT 55; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1959); Edouard Nielsen’s *Oral Tradition: A Modern Problem in Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago: Allenson, 1954). For further on the “Uppsala school,” see Douglas A. Knight, *Rediscovering the Traditions of the Old Testament: The Development of the Traditio-Historical Research of the Old Testament, With Special Consideration of Scandinavian Contributions* (SBLDS 9; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1975), 221-54.

congregation.”⁶⁷ Rather than emphasizing that the written words were means of preserving spoken words, Mowinckel describes the means by which the written words animated new oral performances. Thus Mowinckel focuses attention less on how the words came to be written and more on how they functioned once they were inscribed. As it did in the work of Gunkel, orality takes center stage, but now not as an act prior to inscription but as an act following inscription. Note also that for Mowinckel, writing is theorized as an act employed for religious activity.

Mowinckel also went beyond the theories of Gunkel by explicitly describing parallel oral and written traditions that were only later inscribed in a common document.⁶⁸ There was not, according to Mowinckel, a period of orality or a period of literacy, but varying degrees of orality and literacy represented in the literature of the HB. So he states that “from an early period, transmission occurred as an interaction between oral and recorded tradition.”⁶⁹ Yet even here there exists a close relationship between the speaking prophet and the recording disciple, so that Mowinckel’s theory of the written still bears a family resemblance to that of his forebear Gunkel.

Writing according to all the various manifestations of dictation theory takes a back seat to the oral performance of written texts, and this tradition continues in modern biblical studies, perhaps most interestingly in the work of Susan Niditch. Drawing on the fields of orality and literacy studies and folklore studies, Niditch proposes that the texts

⁶⁷ Mowinckel, *Spirit and the Word*, 55.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 56-59.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 59.

of the HB must be understood in the “oral world” out of which they have come.⁷⁰ Her seminal work places a premium on orality, so that the majority of the literature in the HB must be understood as the product of an “oral mentality.”⁷¹ Yet she laudably avoids any naïve treatment, providing multiple models by which the biblical literature may have been produced. These include 1) Oral to Written- Performance Dictated and Copied; 2) Oral to Written and Written to Oral; 3) Literary Imitation; and 4) Written Sources for Written Compositions.⁷² Note that three of her four categories place the oral in a primary position. Like Mowinckel, Niditch never fully separates the oral and the written.

While she has emphasized the inextricability of orality and writtenness in an especially forceful way, Niditch’s notion of an oral-literate continuum still creates an unnecessary polarity.⁷³ Why must a text be more oral than literate, or vice versa? No simple distinction between written text and spoken word may be maintained, especially when a spoken or read text is in view.⁷⁴ Moreover, the question of whether a text may be recognized as originally oral or originally written remains vexed, since scribes could

⁷⁰ Niditch depends especially upon John Miles Foley, *Oral Tradition in Literature: Interpretation in Context* (Columbus: Slavica, 1980); Albert B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (New York: Atheneum, 1968); Ruth Finnegan, *Literacy and Orality* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988); idem, *Oral Poetry: Its Nature, Significance, and Social Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

⁷¹ In this respect Niditch’s work seems similar to that of those who theorize writing as progress. Goody, *Domestication*, 19-35, for example, relies especially on the division between oral and literate mentalities.

⁷² Niditch, *Oral World*, 117-29.

⁷³ Ibid., 39-79. On the interdependence of orality and literacy, Niditch depends especially on Ruth Finnegan, e.g., “What is Orality – If Anything?” *BMGS* 14 (1990): 130-49.

⁷⁴ See chapters four and five below for further on the texts of the Bible as read documents.

easily imitate spoken rhetorical forms in the literature they produced.⁷⁵ Yet the idea of a historical transition often leads to the positing of a similar literary dichotomy whereby one must discern where a text exists on an oral-literate continuum.

In addition to Niditch, a number of scholars have arisen in recent years to support the idea of the oral performance of a text. From the field of performance studies, Mowinckel's notion of the text as an *aide-memoire* has once again gained prominence, as scholars search for the *Sitze im Leben* of prophetic literature.⁷⁶ According to performance criticism, the prophetic literature bears the marks of spoken interaction with a live audience, a fact further underscored by the "stage directions" on offer in various sign-acts not only performed by the historical prophets, but by those who reenact that text for years after. Various performance scenarios are posited, with the focus on the interpretation that takes place in and through a live performance of a written "script."⁷⁷ Here again, writing mirrors a spoken word very closely, though in this situation the "imitation" comes after inscription and not before. Whether or not one can discern an oral performance within a written text remains a difficult question, but the shift in focus is telling. Here the scholar has in mind both the production of the text and its utility afterwards. Gunkel himself

⁷⁵ Niditch herself makes this point (*Oral World*, 125-27), but finally seems not to notice the implications of such an admission on her continuum. If one can imitate oral forms in writing, how then can one distinguish the two categories?

⁷⁶ Raymond F. Person, "The Ancient Israelite Scribe as Performer," *JBL* 117 (1998): 601-09; William Doan and Terry Giles, *Prophets, Performance, and Power: Performance Criticism of the HB* (New York: T&T Clark, 2005); Yehoshua Gitay, "Reflections on the Study of the Prophetic Discourse: The Question of Isaiah I 2-20," *VT* 33 (1983): 207-21; idem, "Prophetic Criticism—'What Are They Doing?': The Case of Isaiah—A Methodological Assessment," *JSOT* 96 (2001): 101-27.

⁷⁷ David Rhoads, "Performance Criticism: An Emerging Methodology in Biblical Studies." http://www.sbl-site.org/assets/pdfs/Rhoads_Performance.pdf (accessed August 12, 2009).

showed an interest in the use of the texts after production, asserting that the earliest prophetic texts were not for ongoing public consumption, but only for the prophets and their disciples. Modern performance criticism of the prophetic literature moves beyond the question of the function of prophetic literature in its earliest period and presses the question forward chronologically: How did prophetic literature come to be used in the years subsequent to its first inscription? In short, it does not ask what writing's singular purpose was in a particular moment, but what its ongoing purposes might have been over time. The text itself, independent of its original producers, could move beyond their intent for its use and social function, an idea that the next theory of writing would push to its limit.

1.4 Writing as deconstruction

Simultaneously the most ancient and modern of writing theories, deconstruction could hardly provide a more stark contrast to the writing as dictation model. Whereas the latter confidently asserts a purpose and social location for writing, the former explicitly eschews such claims. Writing, as an act of deconstruction, undercuts its own theorization, obfuscating its own purpose and functions. Yet the slipperiness of the word does not halt creations of meaning from that word. Rather, it encourages further instances of meaning-making, so that writing is an act simultaneously of tragic desperation and of heroic creation.⁷⁸ A premium is placed not on the meaning contained

⁷⁸ For a reading of Jer 36 that draws upon such Derridean insights, see Mark Brummitt, "Of Secretaries, Secrets, and Scrolls," in *Derrida's Bible: (Reading a Page of Scripture with a Little Help from Derrida)*, ed. Yvonne Sherwood (ed. Y. Sherwood; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 39-48.

by the text (or, for that matter, in the mind of the author), but in the various reading communities receiving that text and their interpretations of it.⁷⁹

At first, this way of theorizing the written may seem to cut off all avenues for interpretation. If indeed all written texts contain infinite meanings, what use is there of arguing for one's own? Yet a number of scholars have contended in the last two decades that Jeremiah is exactly the sort of text that deconstructs itself, at one point undercutting the authority of scribes and at another arguing for their utility and important responsibility in the creation of the biblical literature. If there is any text that demonstrates the validity of deconstructionist philosophy, it is the book of Jeremiah. Robert P. Carroll, one of the foremost commentators on the book of Jeremiah in recent decades, himself turned to this way of reading Jeremiah before his death, summing up deconstructionist methodology (if one can call it a "method") as follows:

As we continue to *read the writings* associated with Jeremiah and Paul we are not in a position to rule out the written as being simply the carrier of death. We know writing as that which also inaugurates life (as so much of the work of Derrida tirelessly tells us).⁸⁰

⁷⁹ On the futility of plumbing the depths of authors' minds, see Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. and ed. S. Heath (New York: Hill & Wang, 1977), 142-48.

⁸⁰ Author's italics. Robert P. Carroll, "Inscribing the Covenant: Writing and the Written in Jeremiah," in *Understanding Poets and Prophets* (ed. A. Graeme Auld; JSOTSup 152; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 74. At the beginning of his piece (61), Carroll quotes Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (trans. G. C. Spivak; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 17, 143: "Writing in the common sense is the dead letter, it is the carrier of death. It exhausts life. On the other hand, on the other face of the same proposition, writing in the metaphoric sense, natural, divine, and living writing, is venerated; it is equal in dignity to the origin of value, to the voice of the conscience as divine law, to the heart, to sentiment, and so forth. ... Death by writing also inaugurates life."

Indeed, in the very same article Carroll offers two interpretations of the book of Jeremiah that confound and undermine one another.

A key text for Robert Carroll is Jer 8:8, the quintessential scribal critique of Jeremiah:

איכה תאמרו חכמים אנהנו ותורת יהוה אתנו
אכן הנה לישקר עשה עט שקר ספרים

How do you say, 'We are wise, and the Torah of the LORD is with us.'?
But behold, the lying pen of the scribes has made (it) into a lie!

Carroll asserts that "8.8 calls into question any writing that claims to represent YHWH's torah."⁸¹ That is to say, Jer 8:8 undermines the great majority of the book itself, which from the outset claims to be "the words of Jeremiah ... to whom the word of YHWH came" (1:1-2). Yet even this is not the final word, for even though such a verse threatens to deconstruct the entire book into a single incoherent contradiction (a written caution against writtenness), the rest of the book (especially 36, see chapter 2) asserts its own written nature as an exact correspondence with the spoken words of Jeremiah.⁸² Writing deals death and increases skepticism regarding its own nature, but it also creates potential for new life, not entirely unlike the two scrolls of Jer 36.⁸³

The effects of writing, according to deconstructionist philosophy, are myriad, but the fundamental effect is the undermining of all signified things by creating a tenuous

⁸¹Carroll, "Inscribing the Covenant," 72. Jeremiah 8:8-9 is treated at some length in chapter two.

⁸² Ibid., 70.

⁸³ Brummitt, "Of Secretaries," 47, who comments that "Jehoiakim, who has clearly not read his Derrida, does not recognize the "other" in this writing."

relationship with their signifiers. Writing unsettles things that once seemed settled. Such a theorization of writing could hardly be more different than that put forth by those arguing for the two diachronic approaches described above, both of which assert for writing a single ongoing effect. Once writing enters a culture, according to those theorizing writing as degeneration or progress, its effect is singular and stable. But the effect of writing is in no way stable, nor could it ever accurately recount the living voice of the speaker, as those who theorize writing as dictation assert. Against such stable accounts of writing, Derrida argues that his entire project in the 1960's was to

detect in these [linguistics, anthropology, and psychoanalysis] an evaluation of writing, or, to tell the truth, rather a devaluation of writing whose insistent, repetitive, even obscurely compulsive, character was the sign of a whole set of long-standing constraints. These constraints were practised at the price of contradictions, of denials, of dogmatic decrees.⁸⁴

Derrida detected in the written word its own undoing.

That is not to say that Derrida was without his critics, of course, chief among them Michel Foucault, who criticized the “relentless theorization of writing” and what appeared to him a refusal to recognize any world beyond the text.⁸⁵ Foucault was especially incensed by Derrida's deconstruction of an entire philosophical framework by attending to only a short part of his work *History of Madness*, a charge that might also be leveled against deconstructionist biblical interpreters who would elevate single verses to

⁸⁴ Jacques Derrida, “The Time of a Thesis: Punctuations,” in *Philosophy in France Today*, ed. A. Montefiore (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 40.

⁸⁵ Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977* (ed. C. Gordon; New York: Pantheon, 1980), 127.

hegemonic status over the bulk of the literature (see Carroll on Jer 8:8 above).⁸⁶ Foucault criticized Derrida for replacing the authors and historical reading communities of a text with (post)modern readers. This critique is especially trenchant when it comes to Jeremiah, where the authors behind the text often come to the fore quite clearly and are related to contemporary readers by means of a long chain of transmission. Baruch, for example, is portrayed as both an author of the scrolls in the narrative and the scroll in which those narratives are contained, so that the reader needs a sense not only of her relationship to the text, but of Baruch's relationship to it as well. Here, the world behind the text confronts its readers in a way that demands serious consideration. The contemporary interpreter must, according to Foucault's critique and the logic of the book of Jeremiah, confront the history behind the text and its producers. Even Derrida's theory of writing, then, exhibits the characteristics of *différance* by which his own theory is shown to be incoherent and imperfect.⁸⁷

These criticisms notwithstanding, the deconstructionist theory of the written remains helpful, as it encourages theorists to recognize the ease with which their theories of the written may be dissected. Moreover, Derrida further demonstrates the lack of control that authors have over their texts once they are inscribed, the simultaneous fragility and durability of the written word, and the need for multiple theories and

⁸⁶ Idem, *History of Madness* (ed. J. Khalifa; trans. I. Hacking; New York: Routledge, 2006).

⁸⁷ For Derrida, *différance* entails different meanings and the deferral of meanings, playing on the two possible meanings of the French verb *différer*. All language ultimately differs with itself, thus deferring any final comprehension of some underlying or authoritative meaning.

ongoing theorization of writing and the written. In what follows I offer a different way of theorizing the written.

1.5 Righting the written in Jeremiah

The theory of writing and the written in this study diverges significantly from the four dominant theories of the written described above. The specific variations are numerous, but it is helpful at the outset to describe two fundamental differences between my treatment of writing in ancient Israel and those dominant since the beginning of the critical period. First, I assume no *transition* from an oral to a literate period in ancient Israel such that Israel's history may be simply divided into two separate epochs.⁸⁸ Instead, writing in Israel was integrated into the culture over a long period of time, and there was never a moment when literacy completely replaced orality (neither was there a period of pure or primary orality). The book of Jeremiah provides evidence for the ongoing *integration* of the written into ancient Israelite culture, not a decisive cultural break between orality and literacy.⁸⁹ Second, writing functioned in Israel as a useful part of Israel's religious life, and not only as a revolutionary political tool. Writing functions in a variety of ways for a variety of agents, and its use in a culture does not always result

⁸⁸ Menahem Haran argues for a transition, but his view is idiosyncratic in so far as he contends that "classical prophecy is ... mainly literary prophecy," none of which "can possibly be regarded as an oration taken down in a kind of 'shorthand.'" "From Early to Classical Prophecy: Continuity and Change," *VT* 27 (1977): 388-89.

⁸⁹ Such integration need not always be moving in a single direction, as there certainly could have been periods when writing was perceived negatively and declined. The idea that writing, once introduced, always and only increases in a culture, may be gainsaid by simple observation of Western culture in the twentieth century. Even students in the American academy of the twenty-first century have become less engaged in writing than previous generations.

in a transition from an oral stage to a literate one. The book of Jeremiah provides ample evidence for written documents whose presence and function can hardly be described by a single universal theory of the written.

1.5.1 Transition v. integration

To understand the dominant theories of writing in ancient Israel, one must first recognize the prominence of the transition idea. For many interpreters of the HB, one of Jeremiah's central features is its account of the transition from oral to written prophecy. The details of this shift vary widely, with some evaluating the move to written prophecy positively (often, but not always, as a marker of cultural evolution)⁹⁰ and others viewing that transition negatively (as a move away from vibrant oral tradition).⁹¹ However one evaluates it, the idea appears non-negotiable as a feature of ancient Israelite history.⁹²

In part, this assured result of critical biblical scholarship derives from a particular interpretation of Jer 36, a chapter ostensibly recounting the Israelite move from oral to written prophecy. Barred from speaking in the temple on his own behalf, Jeremiah sends the scribe Baruch to read a scroll created "from Jeremiah's mouth," containing "all the words of YHWH that he had spoken to him" (36:4 ירמרהו את כל־דברי יהוה אשר־דבר

⁹⁰ Hermann Gunkel, "The Prophets as Writers and Poets," in *Prophecy in Israel* (ed. D. L. Petersen; trans. James L. Schaaf; IRT 10; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987); Schniedewind, *How the Bible*, 91.

⁹¹ See Wellhausen, *Prolegomena*, 405.

⁹² So Ronald E. Clements, "Israel in its Historical and Cultural Setting," in *The World of Ancient Israel: Sociological, Anthropological, and Political Perspectives* (ed. R.E. Clements; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 12, asserts "... a significant consensus is beginning to emerge. The complexity of the transition from orality to literacy is everywhere evident in the prophetic writings of the Old Testament, and it is vitally important to reflect that such a collection of written prophecy is a unique legacy from the ancient world."

אלי).⁹³ Jeremiah's prophecy, once exclusively spoken, now exists in a transformed written state. For years interpreters understood this story as a historically accurate and paradigmatic account, and only in the last few decades has a higher degree of skepticism regarding Jeremiah's historicity thrown this point into question.⁹⁴ While the historicity of Jer 36 has come under fire, however, the larger point regarding the transition that the passage supposedly demonstrates has not. The narrative of this particular event in Jeremiah's life has been generalized as representing not only the broad transition from oral to written prophecy, but beyond that the even broader cultural shift from orality to literacy. Texts like Jer 36 signal a change in the specialized discourse of ancient Near Eastern prophecy as well as a similar shift throughout Israelite society. So large are the implications of this cultural change from orality to literacy that the course of human (read: Western) history was changed forever.⁹⁵

⁹³ Perceptively, Philip R. Davies sees in the phrase "from the mouth of Jeremiah" a tendentious claim arguing for the legitimacy of the dictation model of inscription. See *Scribes and Schools: The Canonization of the Hebrew Scriptures* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 119-20. Contrast this way of reading Jer 36 with that of William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 2* (Herm.; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 16: "One can, of course, question the historicity of the narrative in chapter 36, but although it may be a stylized account, it would seem prudent to accept the basic date offered."

⁹⁴ The leading voice questioning the historicity of the book has been Robert P. Carroll, *Jeremiah* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986), though he is by no means alone in his judgment that historicity must never be assumed when the HB is concerned. See William McKane, *Jeremiah, Volume I* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1985), lxxxix.

⁹⁵ For further on this particular narrative of cultural shift, see the following chapter on the influence of social anthropologist Goody and Watt, "Consequences," 304-45. See also Clements, "Israel in its Historical and Cultural Setting," 12.

An example from modern critical scholarship demonstrates the pervasive nature of the transition model. In a brief critique, Niditch describes the dominant portrait of writing's advent in ancient Israel:

Scholars used to place an oral stage for the Bible or for its separate compositions in a premonarchic phase of Israelite history, be it nomadic or patriarchal— notions of Israel's history that have increasingly fallen into disrepute. Nowadays scholars describe participants in a highland culture practicing subsistence agriculture and write of the village- and kinship-based decentralized world of Israel's origins. These scholars, however, agree with their precursors that the monarchy brings a state, urbanization, schools and writing, courtly records, recorders, and literate authors imagined to be of various kinds.⁹⁶

According to Niditch's portrait of this "diachronic approach," ancient Israel moves beyond an early oral phase and, with the introduction of the monarchy and its concomitant bureaucracy, enters a literate phase.⁹⁷ A strong cultural transition is drawn between early orality and late literacy, so that the two categories remain strictly separate. In this account of the transition, socio-political factors encourage writing more than others. Again, writing not only accounts for major changes in the production of biblical literature (though this of course interests biblical scholars), but also effects a much wider cultural transition. Writing provides the context for the making of the HB and creates a

⁹⁶ Niditch, *Oral World*, 3.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* Niditch decries this approach because it devalues orality in favor of a model of evolutionary cultural progress. Depending on one's perspective, however, one might also understand the division of oral and literate periods as a devaluation of literacy, since the written word has little role in the development of biblical literature in its earliest stage.

“new world” altogether.⁹⁸ The timing of the transition to this “new world” brought about by writing occurs varies greatly among scholars, but the idea of a transition remains.⁹⁹

The prevalence of the transition idea cannot entirely mask its weaknesses: the presumption that literacy can exist independent of orality, the theorization of writing as an ideologically neutral tool, and the dependence of many scholars on evolutionary cultural models characterized by a “Great Divide.” In short, the transition idea imagines writing and its uses in such a way as to distort its role in ancient Israel.

One element of the distorting effect of the transition idea is that it leaves scant room for the integration of the spoken and the written. While pure orality is indeed possible in cultures that had never encountered the written word, literacy always interacts with the oral, so that it is a mistake to imagine a purely literate cultural stage.¹⁰⁰ Even the twenty-first-century American academy, so focused on texts and the written word, retains many features of “oral culture.” There has never been a moment when the written totally replaced the oral, and indeed most scholars maintain that the latter remained at the forefront of ancient Israelite society. However influential the written word became, it remained an “oral world” throughout antiquity and, indeed, all the way into the modern

⁹⁸ Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 77.

⁹⁹ Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology, Vol. I* (trans. D.G.M. Stalker; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 48-56. Von Rad locates the writing transition in the tenth century “Solomonic Enlightenment,” while William Schniedewind locates the major transition at the end of the seventh century BCE. See *How the Bible*, 91.

¹⁰⁰ Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 5-8. See also David M. Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Brian Street, *Literacy in Theory and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

period.¹⁰¹ The idea of a transition between purely oral and purely literate cultural stages necessarily distorts the subtle interactions of the spoken and written word throughout human history.

Second, the transition idea distorts writing in ancient Israel when it characterizes it as a neutral tool with universal effects across all cultures. Rather than embedding writing in a particular socio-historical context, writing is understood as an autonomous technology whose use and meaning remains consistent over time and space. Such claims prove empirically false, however, as modern anthropological research has demonstrated convincingly that literacy and writing do not have the same effect in every culture.¹⁰² On this point, Brian Street asserts that literacy “is not... a neutral technology, with potentialities and restrictions depending simply on how it is used. Rather it is a socially constructed form whose ‘influence’ depends on how it was shaped in the first place.”¹⁰³ Formulated within particular social contexts, writing is unique in each culture and as such is also ideologically charged.¹⁰⁴ Instead of situating writing within its particular socio-historical context in ancient Israel, the transitional historical model relies upon earlier theories of great cultural divides that understand writing as a tool whose effects are

¹⁰¹ For the situation in the second temple period, see Jaffee, *Torah in the Mouth*, 15-27.

¹⁰² See David R. Olson, “Why Literacy Matters, Then and Now,” in *Ancient Literacies: The Culture of Reading in Greece and Rome* (ed. W. A. Johnson and H. N. Parker (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 388.

¹⁰³ Street, *Literacy in Theory and Practice*, 65. According to Street, writing is created anew in each culture and depends also upon its form in the other cultures that helped to introduce it.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 38.

culturally universal.¹⁰⁵ Where the transition is employed, however, there is often a simplistic vision of writing.

Anthropologists John Halverson, Brian Street, and Kevin Maxwell have all drawn from their ethnographic observations to propose more complex theories of the written and its cultural role. Arguing against the notion of a general and universal shift from the oral to the written, Halverson asserts: “the consequences of literacy depend entirely on the uses to which literacy is put and ... both the uses and the consequences are extremely variable.”¹⁰⁶ Each culture reacts uniquely to the variety of ideologies of writing with which they interact. Writing is not always liberating, as Eric Havelock would have it, but can lead to cultural devolution as easily as its evolution. Maxwell’s research on Bemba culture demonstrates the potential of writing as a tool of cultural isolation and fragmentation.¹⁰⁷ The Bemba encounter with writing contributed not to the flowering of democracy, but to the subjugation of a people in the British colonial encounter. Street further elucidates the particular interaction of writing and culture when he asserts that there is no single concept of literacy, but only political uses to which the writing tool is put. The question is not so much how generalized “literacy” (whatever that may be) interacts with oral cultures, but how a particular vision of literacy and its political uses

¹⁰⁵ For more on anthropological theories that rely upon a “Great Divide,” see Goody, *Domestication*, 1-18, 146-62.

¹⁰⁶ John Halverson, “Goody and the Implosion,” 314.

¹⁰⁷ Maxwell, *Bemba Myth*.

fits into a specific environment.¹⁰⁸ Both of these points are especially important as this study attempts to understand sixth century Israel's unique interaction with particular theologies of the written word. Writing can function in multiple ways in different cultures - as a tool for scholars to think critically, yes, but possibly also as a club to fragment and isolate a culture, a means to consolidate political power, or even as an object of religious veneration.

Moreover, in a religious context, perceptions or theologies of writing change over the course of generations or centuries, as seems to be the case even in the relatively brief period of history represented in the book of Jeremiah. There, one can discern competing concepts of the written in the first and second halves of the book.¹⁰⁹ In the first half of the book, the tradents remain wary of the written word (e.g., Jer 8:8), whereas in the second half of the book the tradents argue for the legitimacy of the written prophetic word (e.g., Jer 36; Jer 43:1-7).¹¹⁰ One might describe a series of specific transitions as the theology of the written changes, but not a single large transition that fully excludes or supports writing or its use in prophecy. One does not find in Jeremiah a single moment when written prophecy becomes legitimate, but a series of moments when certain groups accepted writing and the written word for certain purposes.

¹⁰⁸ Street, *Literacy in Theory*.

¹⁰⁹ Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 228-30.

¹¹⁰ Of course, the very fact that Jer 36 has to make an argument for its legitimate existence demonstrates some tension between the positions of those in support of the written prophetic word and those positioned firmly against it.

Instead of searching for a single technological innovation in sixth-century Israel or seeking a moment when that technology was available to a critical mass of the population, it is better to situate writing in a particular socio-historical context.¹¹¹ What changed was not the presence or prevalence of writing, which did not enter ancient Israelite culture *de novo* in the sixth century, but rather the theology surrounding its use in ancient Israelite culture. This is especially important since there is little compelling evidence to suggest that the rank and file of Israelite society had begun to read in any great percentage.¹¹² There was no transition from not writing to writing, or from a writing elite to a writing public, but rather a fuller integration of writing into ancient Israelite society through the elites. This may seem like a subtle distinction, but it focuses attention away from the “technology” of writing to the socio-historical situation in which writing was employed. In so far as the transition idea encourages and sustains a simplistic view of writing itself, it is entirely unsatisfactory as a reconstruction of ancient Israelite history.

The final distorting effect of the transition idea is also its most significant and foundational. Ultimately, the idea of a transition derives from evolutionary cultural models prevalent in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century but now out of favor

¹¹¹ For the latter strategy, see Schniedewind, *How the Bible*, 91.

¹¹² James L. Crenshaw, *Education in Ancient Israel: Across the Deadening Silence* (ABRL; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); Menahem Haran, “On the Diffusion of Literacy and Schools in Ancient Israel,” in *Congress Volume, 1986* (ed. J.A. Emerton; VTSup 40; Leiden: Brill, 1988), 81-95. Contra Andre Lemaire, *Les écoles et la formation de la Bible dans l’ancien Israël* (OBO 39; Fribourg: Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981); Eric Heaton, *The School Tradition of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994).

in most circles.¹¹³ The language of transition creates stark dichotomies where none existed in ancient Israel, and as a result outdated models of evolutionary cultural progress are mapped onto ancient Israelite history. An early, oral culture evolves into a higher, literate culture, which, perhaps not surprisingly, looks remarkably similar to ours. The idea of a transition common to all cultures creates a grand dichotomy of civilized and uncivilized cultures, and more often than not writing has been utilized to draw the distinction. Yet there is finally no reason to draw such a distinction or posit such a transition unless an alien anthropological model has been applied to the situation. As Ruth Finnegan notes,

Once the idea of this basic kind of division is challenged it is no surprise to see the interaction between written and oral modes of communication not as something strange – representing, as it were, two radically different types or even ‘evolutionary stages’ of human development – but as a normal and frequently occurring aspect of human culture.”¹¹⁴

The transition moment effected by writing ultimately derives from the desire to separate cultures into civilized and primitive classes, a dated notion that no longer explains any cultural phenomenon, writing included.¹¹⁵

While the written word creates ruptures in certain cultures, it integrates easily into others. As mentioned above, the specific reaction of the culture depends on the character of the introduction and the character of the introducers of the written word. It also

¹¹³ Lucien Levy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think* (trans. L. A. Clare; London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1925). See the critiques of Halverson, “Goody and the Implosion,” 301-17; Street, *Literacy in Theory*, 23-25.

¹¹⁴ Quoted in Street, *Literacy in Theory*, 95, from an unpublished manuscript.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 38, where Street suggests that it is no longer race or ethnicity that demonstrates cultural superiority, but the fact that they have acquired the technology (writing) to be superior.

depends on the exact character of that word. What sort of literacy enters into the culture, and at what level of society?¹¹⁶ Who introduces the word, and which of their interests does it serve? Writing, as Street has emphasized, always finds itself embedded in different ideologies, never isolated as a single cause demonstrating a developmental transition.¹¹⁷ Assuming a transition reifies the outdated anthropological distinction between oral and literate cultures and thus also reifies evolutionary cultural “progress” from the oral to the written. Not all cultures experience a transition from the oral to the written, and indeed orality and writtenness ought to be removed as developmental cultural markers. Oral and written modes of communication often serve as a kind of chronological shorthand for cultural stages. Yet they do so only as a remnant of an outdated way of conceiving cultures in one or the other category. The “transitions” a culture experiences with respect to the spoken and written word do not always move in a straight line from the oral to the written, but may alternate over time between the two poles. Such changes may be better described as “integrations” or simply conceived as entirely new ideologies of the written.¹¹⁸

Just as pernicious is the idea that the transition always tends towards cultural progress. At different moments in Israelite history the written word may change, but in

¹¹⁶ For a helpful review of universal and situated notions of literacy, see James Collins, “Literacy and Literacies,” *ARA* 24 (1995): 75-93.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 95-98.

¹¹⁸ By describing the relationship of the oral and the written in terms other than “transition,” I do not intend to disregard developmental cultural changes. The intention is, rather, not to eschew the historical, but to eschew the universal transitional assumption that all cultures undergo similar changes when confronted with the writing “tool.”

fact there is no compelling reason to believe that writing was always positively viewed or was always in the ascendance, as has been sufficiently demonstrated above. As it is possible for writing to become fully integrated in a society, it is equally possible for writing to fall out of favor with various groups given certain conditions (as, for example, in twenty-first-century higher education, where students are increasingly less likely to have engaged in sustained writing exercises). One need not assume progress or continuing integration, a notion deeply embedded in transitional historical models that implicitly attempt to show the inexorable progress of human history.

In this study, I attempt to move beyond the prevalent idea of a transition between oral and literate periods of ancient Israelite prophecy towards a model of integration. Instead of changing completely as a result of a technological change, Israel gradually integrated the written word into its public life, simultaneously developing robust theologies of writing and the written evident in the book of Jeremiah. After a careful reading of Jeremiah, interpreters are better prepared to view the various ways that ancient Israel moved toward the full inclusion of writing in its religious life.

1.5.2 Writing's political and religious functions

According to the notion of writing as progress, writing evolves just as the larger culture does. Originally useful to the state for practical bureaucratic purposes, writing developed more complex uses later in its history. Instead of theorizing writing along these evolutionary lines, this study understands writing as a complex feature of a culture

from its earliest inception.¹¹⁹ Since writing likely entered Israelite society under the influence of another culture, it could very easily have entered Israel attached to extremely complex ideologies and functions; and these do not always derive from exclusively “political” functions.¹²⁰ Indeed, writing may have served a role as an element of ancient Israelite religious life, especially since the state and temple are so closely integrated in the ancient Near Eastern world.¹²¹

For many theorists, writing functions initially as a tool of urban bureaucracy and “royal power, useful in the beginning for record-keeping and annals, but not for other purposes.”¹²² Only later in its development does writing serve any religious function. As with the transition model, however, there are problems with this theorization of writing, first as it describes the state as the only agent of writing’s cultural acceptance and second as it relates to the notion of writing’s evolution.

In the work of William Schniedewind, the state serves as the primary agent of writing’s appearance in a culture. Laudably, Schniedewind considers Israel’s ideology of the written in its larger Near Eastern context, but unfortunately he treats only the socio-political character of the written word in the culture he asserts brought it to Israel:

¹¹⁹ According to David W. Jamieson-Drake, *Scribes and Schools in Monarchic Judah: A Socio-Archaeological Approach* (JSOTSup 109; Sheffield: Almond, 1989), the earliest period of writing in ancient Israel was likely the eighth-century reign of Hezekiah.

¹²⁰ But see *ibid.*, 45, who asserts that scribal traditions were not passed down like family heirlooms across cultures.

¹²¹ Martin, *History and Power*, 8, who states that writing “arose in city-states dominated by a theocracy.”

¹²² Schniedewind, *How the Bible*, 85. Here he describes two attitudes towards writing in eighth-century Israel: “Writing is magical; or, writing is a tool of power and royal administration.” Note that these are presented as alternative possibilities.

Assyria moved the Near East toward globalization: one polity, one economy, one language. ... Not only did the Assyrians carve out a true empire that eventually stretched from India to Egypt, they also implemented an imperial administration for governing their vast empire. Writing became an increasingly important tool in administrating the empire.¹²³

The written word in Israel, then, comes from an external state as part of imperial administration. Writing, Schniedewind asserts, is a “tool” implemented by colonialist conquerors and given to the conquered. Here, where the push towards globalization is featured, writing can serve only one simple function: imperial administration. Whatever other functions writing served (political, economic, linguistic), they may be subsumed under this larger category.

In this way Schniedewind strips the written word of its potential religious functions.¹²⁴ Yet there are a number of compelling reasons not to accept such a portrait, chief among them the fact that scribes of the temple and state are not necessarily separable.¹²⁵ The interests of state and temple intersect, a fact nowhere clearer than in Jeremiah, who preaches his Deuteronomistic sermons against Judah and Jerusalem from the temple (7, 26) and finds his chief audience there. One need only consider the phenomenon of Deuteronomism to ascertain the degree to which the interests of state and

¹²³ Ibid., 65.

¹²⁴ Martin, *History and Power*, 18, describes the “solemn” nature of Egyptian writing in the dynastic period.

¹²⁵ Davies, *Scribes and Schools*, 17. In spite of the connection between scribes and the temple, Davies nevertheless asserts that “writing was first used to record economic transactions: receipts, letters, or records, and had little or no use beyond this.”

temple intersect.¹²⁶ If the temple was indeed a part of the state apparatus, then theories of writing that focus primarily on the state must be expanded to include religious functions, however simple they may have been.

Another difficulty with the typical developmental model is the assumption that writing begins as an economic tool, especially those important for the state, but must thereafter develop more varied uses. People first wrote to keep business records, such as deeds, receipts, and the like. Yet ancient Israelite culture did not receive the technology of writing in an ideologically pure state and might have received more complicated ideologies of the written word than those with which writing sometimes begins. One need only think of the various writing ideologies that entered "oral cultures" in the modern colonial period to discern that writing is imported into cultures embedded with certain practices and assumptions about the uses to which writing ought to be put.¹²⁷ Indeed, since writing already served religious functions in ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia at the time of its inception in ancient Israel, it would have been quite remarkable for the recipient culture not to think of the written word as somehow religious in nature.

¹²⁶ Here it is helpful to remember from the introduction that the ideology present in and behind Deuteronomy contains its own utopian critique, as in the requirement for the king to read the Torah in Deut 17. The theological ideal challenges and constrains nationalist ideology, even as the critique itself is ideologically constructed. Deuteronomism in the HB demonstrates an exceedingly complex interaction between the state and its religious functionaries, but there is never a complete separation of the two spheres in the biblical literature.

¹²⁷ One might also add that writing does not always cross cultures as a result of state activity, unless one defines the "state" so broadly as to include every feature of a culture.

Curiously, the position that writing begins as a practical tool often coexists alongside theories of the written as a “numinous” part of the culture.¹²⁸ As a result, competing theories of the written word contradict each other. On the one hand, it is said, written documents move from the practical to the more numinous, as religious professionals employ the written word for their own purposes. On the other hand, the more people become literate, the less exotic and dangerous the written word seems, so that they fear it less and use it more. This is a false dichotomy in the end, since the practical can quite obviously be very religious and spiritual in certain settings, and vice versa. The example of the scroll in Jer 32 provides the perfect counter-example to the practical/numinous dichotomy, as the prophet Jeremiah engages in the written towards ends that are simultaneously practical and numinous, literal and symbolic. The deed is signed so that the prophet may have this property when he returns (literal), but this very act is not only an attempt to retain family property legally (practical) but to communicate a message of hope (symbolic). Indeed, one might even argue that the act is intended somehow to enact that very hope (religious). The point here is that the written word can and does serve a myriad of functions, often simultaneously and for different audiences.

To return to a point made in the previous section, a full account of writing must situate it in its social context in order to describe the range of its cultural place and function. This will include an account of writing in its encounter with other cultures, which will always complicate direct lines of writing’s development. Describing a

¹²⁸ Niditch, *Oral World*, 44.

universal trajectory that applies to each culture separate from intercultural influence has been and will always be a confusing way to portray the written. Scholars of comparative religion have emphasized the degree to which cultures draw upon others when it comes to the written word.¹²⁹ For instance, a culture may have a developed tradition of “scripture” and in the encounter with other cultures similar development may be encouraged, as in the Muslim encounter with and partial appropriation of earlier Jewish and Christian canons.¹³⁰ Such cultural interaction becomes even more probable when the cultural relationship is asymmetrical, as was so often the case in the imperial socio-political situation of the ancient Near East.¹³¹ Even those scholars who believe ancient Israel’s written traditions to be relatively late in Israelite history do not assume an encounter with an ancient Israelite community that was devoid of all notions of the written word and its myriad functions.

Moreover, not only does writing change a society, but its significance and social function may also be changed by the traditions and values of a culture. As a culture with an aniconic ideal among its many traditions, ancient Israel may have in fact been

¹²⁹ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *What is Scripture?: A Comparative Approach* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), ix.

¹³⁰ F.E. Peters, *The Voice, the Word, the Books: The Sacred Scripture of the Jews, Christians, and Muslims* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 135-37.

¹³¹ A similar notion has entered into biblical scholarship with the idea that the Persians encouraged the collation and edition of texts for different cultures as a means of cultic maintenance and indirect imperial control. See Joseph Blenkinsopp, *The Pentateuch: An Introduction to the First Five Books of the Bible* (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1992), 241-42. If it is indeed the case that the primary impetus for the writing of the HB came from Persian imperial powers, how much more striking is the ancient Israelite contention that YHWH wrote their texts! Read this way, the claim flies in the face of those commanding the inscription of the traditions, stating against their conquerors that the inscription of their documents was not from earthly powers, but from YHWH himself. Alternatively, such an assertion may simply be a way of understanding and divinizing an earthly command.

especially susceptible to high doctrines of the written word, just as has been the case in later Islamic religious expression. One culture, for example, under the influence and hegemony of another, might take the bureaucratic “tool” of writing and employ that tool for religious purposes, so that even the ideology of the influencing culture cannot control the socio-cultural effects of what they bring. Since this is the case, writing must be theorized anew for every culture, as no single account of its development may be described. If this is true, the single account of writing’s inception in statecraft and evolution towards more complicated social functions is inadequate as a universal theory of writing, a fact that is nowhere clearer than in the book of Jeremiah. In Jeremiah writing functions in a variety of ways for a variety of agents, and its use in a culture does not always result in a transition from an oral stage to a literate one. In the exegetical chapters that follow, the book of Jeremiah itself provides the primary evidence for a different view of writing in ancient Israel than one usually finds in modern scholarship, focusing on the book’s perspective on writers (chapter two), scrolls (chapter three), and audiences (chapter four). On the basis of this literary evidence, chapter five describes the new theology of writing in ancient Israel and suggests several further implications following from it.

2. Inscribing Writers in the Book of Jeremiah

Assessing Jeremiah, Karel van der Toorn describes the text as a “scribal artifact.”¹

By means of such a designation he points primarily to the role of a scribal culture responsible for the text. Yet Jeremiah is also scribal in the sense that the tradents characterize as writers many figures in the story that they transmit. The two possible understandings of van der Toorn’s phrase are not unrelated. By focusing on scribes in the narrative, the tradents of the book draw attention to the scribes responsible for it.² The tradents’ interest in the scribes behind Jeremiah serves partly to justify their role in the transmission of the prophetic word, yet this does not exhaust the significance of scribal depiction in the narrative.³ Scribal characterization in Jeremiah also plays an important role in authorizing the text itself. Indeed, the tradents of Jeremiah dwell not only on writers (17:1; 32:10; 36:2), but also on the writing process (36:17-18) and the variety of texts they produce (3:8; 22:30; 31:33-34), including the text in the reader’s possession:

¹ Karel van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the HB* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 173-204.

² Van der Toorn reaches his conclusions by beginning with the external scribal culture and proceeding to the text. In this chapter, I attempt to move in the opposite direction, from the text to those responsible for it. In addition, I do not understand description of a scribal presence as the primary goal, but as a means by which modern readers may better understand the book of Jeremiah and its textual focus.

³ As David Meade has put the matter with respect to Jewish and early Christian pseudonymous literature, “attribution is primarily a claim to authoritative tradition, not a statement of literary origins.” David G. Meade, *Pseudonymity and Canon: An Investigation into the Relationship of Author and Authority in Jewish and Earliest Christian Tradition* (WUNT 39; Tübingen: Mohr, 1986), 55, 91, et al. Cited in van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture*, 39. Insofar as the transmitters of Jeremiah attribute their texts to figures portrayed as writers, they appeal not only to authority generally, but to an authoritative tradition that manifests itself in writing.

the ספר of Jeremiah.⁴ In chapters three and four, respectively, the “texts” of Jeremiah and the reading audience they constitute will provide the objects of central inquiry.⁵ Before turning to these subjects, however, it is necessary to consider the writers of these texts as Jeremiah’s tradents present them. Whom do the tradents characterize as scribal figures in the “scribal artifact” of Jeremiah, and why do they attend so closely to writers? The preliminary answer to the latter question is that the focus on writers in the book of Jeremiah leads readers of the text back to YHWH as a writer, and thus the book of Jeremiah may be said to present a theology of writing.⁶ This is the most important part of Jeremiah’s theology of the written word, as it provides the key link in the chain of transmission from the divine to the sacred written word. As a “scribal artifact,” the book of Jeremiah is not only the result of professional scribal writing; it is also the work of prophetic and even divine writers.

⁴ For further on the role of authorship in the HB, see J. P. Weinberg, “Authorship and Author in the Ancient Near East and in the HB,” *HS* 44 (2003): 160. Weinberg reacts to Robert Alter’s contention that, in biblical literature, “the writer disappears into the tradition.” *The World of Biblical Literature* (New York: Basic, 1992): 2-3. Similar to Alter, Meir Sternberg asserts with respect to Genesis, Samuel, and Jonah that “the storyteller appears only as a disembodied voice, nameless and faceless. In all three, for instance, he avoids all reference to the act of storytelling – to himself as maker, recorder, editor, or even narrator – nor does he betray the least consciousness of facing an audience by way of direct address and the like.” *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1985), 71. While the storytellers in these texts might not draw attention to their role as tradents, the same cannot be said of the book of Jeremiah. Here, the scribes behind the story provide a focal point of that story.

⁵ In this context I intend for “texts” to have a broad meaning. While both Baruch and Jeremiah produce material texts (e.g. Jer 29, 32, 36), some texts produced by YHWH are of an entirely different nature, as when the texts produced are human (Jer 31:31-34).

⁶ For the concept of a theology of writing in Israel, see Joachim Schaper, “A Theology of Writing: The Oral and the Written, God as Scribe, and the Book of Deuteronomy,” in *Anthropology and Biblical Studies: Avenues of Approach* (ed. L. J. Lawrence and M I. Aguilar; Leiden: Deo, 2004), 97-98.

2.1 The chain of transmission

The book of Jeremiah carefully links audiences, texts, scribes, and prophets to the divine by describing a chain of transmission and authorizing the various links in that chain. Connected to YHWH's word via the prophets and scribes, texts may be understood as divine words. Further, once the tradents of Jeremiah establish a connection between texts in the narrative and the texts of the narrative (a key shift described fully in chapter three but adumbrated below), the chain of transmission extends beyond its literary context into the world of that written word's contemporary audience (see chapter four). The legitimacy of the entire chain rests on the primary connection to the divine. To link texts to YHWH, the book of Jeremiah authorizes the mode of the divine word's transmission and the people who transmit it. The words of a text, according to the dominant dictation model in the book of Jeremiah, can be the true words of YHWH uncorrupted by prophetic and scribal transmission so long as the original divine words are carefully guarded. In addition to the mode of transmission, the tradents of Jeremiah must establish the individuals responsible as trustworthy participants in the communication of YHWH's word. Writers in Jeremiah do not work outside the bounds of the chain of transmission, but work within it to reproduce YHWH's word faithfully.

Any discussion of the chain of transmission in Jeremiah must first treat its chief scribe, Baruch, who is portrayed as both a character *in* the narrative and as an agent responsible *for* that narrative. Unlike modern interpreters, Jeremiah's ancient storytellers conflate tradents and characters without compunction, and to such a degree that critical

scholars themselves often identify Baruch as the original author of the book.⁷ That modern interpreters have done so is not entirely mistaken as a possible interpretation of the narrative, whether or not one understands Baruch's role as historical. Jeremiah 36:32, for example, describes Baruch as an integral participant in the transmission of the literature:⁸

וירמיהו לקח מגלה אחרת ויתנה אל־ברוך בן־נריהו הספר ויכתב עליה
מפי ירמיהו את כל־דברי הספר אשר שרף יהויקים מלך־יהודה באש ועוד נוסף
עליהם דברים רבים כהמה

Then Jeremiah took another scroll and gave it to Baruch ben Neriah the scribe. He wrote on it from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of the scroll that Jehoiakim king of Judah burned in the fire, and again were added to them many words like them.⁹

Baruch records a text of undetermined length, reproducing “all the words of the scroll”

(כל־דברי הספר) that Jehoiakim had burned and adding to that text “many words like

them” (דברים רבים כהמה).¹⁰ Historically this depiction of Baruch's involvement may be

⁷ Following Bernhard Duhm's famous identification of “das Buch Baruch,” *Das Buch Jeremia* (Tübingen and Leipzig: Mohr, 1901), xiv-xvi, William L. Holladay remains the most forceful force proponent of a historical role for Baruch in the creation of the text of Jeremiah. *Jeremiah 2* (Herm.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 16. For a similar approach, see also the work of Helga Weippert, *Die Prosareden des Jeremiabuches* (BZAW 132; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1973).

⁸ Whether one accepts a degree of historicity in this account or not, the ambiguity of Baruch's role as character and tradent still exists. One reason for historical skepticism with regard to this text is its close relationship with 2 Kgs 22-23. See Charles D. Isbell, “2 Kings 22:3-23:24 and Jeremiah 36: A Stylistic Comparison,” *JSOT* 8 (1978): 33-45. According to Norbert Lohfink, the 2 Kgs account is itself tendentious as a historical source. “The Cult Reform of Josiah of Judah: 2 Kgs 22-23 as a Source for the History of Israelite Religion” in *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross* (ed. P. D. Miller, Jr., P. D. Hanson, and S. D. McBride; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 459-75.

⁹ Unless otherwise noted, all translations belong to the author.

¹⁰ In spite of the best efforts of critical scholarship, the existence and extent of the *Urrolle* remains uncertain. Again, Holladay provides the paradigmatic example of an attempt to reconstruct Jeremiah's two

unlikely, in particular because it is tendentious in favor of the scribes, but from a literary standpoint the characterization functions quite well.¹¹ The tradents of Jeremiah provide readers with a narrator of the text they are hearing, and they argue subtly for the legitimacy of scribal transmission by repeatedly describing the method of dictation by which he has come to narrate such a text (מפי ירמיהו, Jer 36:4, 6, 18, 27, 32). By accepting this characterization of Baruch's role in Jeremiah's transmission, interpreters follow one trajectory of the book of Jeremiah – that which depicts him not only as a scribe but as a scribe active in the production of this text.¹² As both scribe and tradent, Baruch typifies the dual role of writers throughout Jeremiah. He is thus a key figure in the chain of transmission, one who stands astride the gap between scribes in the narrative and scribes responsible for that same narrative.

Despite his prominence, Baruch's role should not obscure the participation of other writing figures in the book of Jeremiah. The scribal characterization of a variety of figures in Jeremiah provides an important interpretive clue to the book's unique textual

scrolls. *Jeremiah* 2, 16-18. For a more recent example, see Mark Leuchter, *Josiah's Reform and Jeremiah's Scroll: Historical Calamity and Prophetic Response* (HBM 6; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2006), 146-68.

¹¹ For a brief summary of the literary characteristics that make this narrative historically improbable, see Robert P. Carroll, *From Chaos to Covenant: Uses of Prophecy in the Book of Jeremiah* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 5-11. From his ideological critical perspective, Carroll assumes that all narratives designed toward certain ends are at best uncertain with respect to their historicity.

¹² Jeremiah 36 authorizes the scribal role in the transmission of the prophetic word, and the presence of so important a figure as Baruch reciprocally authorizes the text.

consciousness.¹³ Kings (36:23), prophets (51:60), and YHWH (31:33-34) act as scribes, not to mention a wide variety of characters associated with one Neriah, especially Baruch (Jer 36:32; 43:1-7; 45) and the Shaphanide scribal family.¹⁴ Thus, the tradents create a world filled with scribes, copyists, and producers of texts. Everyone is imagined as a writer, whether or not many of these actually wrote in ancient Israel.¹⁵ By attributing Jeremiah's written production to YHWH, the prophet, and professional scribes, Jeremiah's tradents focus attention on those responsible for the ספר and thus present another argument in authorizing it *as text*. Every link in the chain of transmission (YHWH, prophet, and, of course, scribe) is imagined as a potential writer.

The three sections below explicate this idea and its importance for authorizing the mode of transmission and the transmitters by exploring passages representative of Jeremiah's scribal characterization in their ancient Near Eastern and canonical contexts. How do specific appeals to writers in Jeremiah argue for a particular mode of

¹³ Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *Estetika Slovesnogo Tvorchestva* (Moscow: Iskustvo, 1979). Bakhtin describes the process of literary criticism as one of "working backward from the composition ... to the author." Quoted in J. P. Weinberg, "Authorship," 159. While I am sympathetic to this methodology, the objective in this study will be to move "forward" once again, from the composition, to the tradents, and then back to the composition again.

¹⁴ David M. Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 117; Walter Brueggemann, *The Theology of the Book of Jeremiah* (OTT; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 72-73.; idem, "The 'Baruch Connection': Reflections on Jeremiah 43:1-7," *JBL* 113 (1994): 405-20.

¹⁵ The debate surrounding ancient Israelite literacy is not an entirely inconsequential one for this discussion, though given the textual focus of this study it is only indirectly related. For a discussion of literacy rates in ancient Israel, see James L. Crenshaw, *Education in Ancient Israel: Across the Deadenng Silence* (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1998); David W. Jamieson-Drake, *Scribes and Schools in Monarchic Judah: A Socio-Archaeological Approach* (JSOTSup 109; Sheffield: Almond, 1991). I agree with the above authors that literacy rates in ancient Israel were relatively low with respect to the general population, even if a scribal class did arise in ancient Israel along with the state infrastructure.

transmission and the trustworthiness of particular agents within the chain of transmission? By characterizing YHWH as a writer, the tradents ultimately ground authority for texts in the sphere of the divine (2.4). To authorize a human text, however, the tradents must also describe the process by which YHWH's words reach humans in written form. They accomplish this in two ways: by portraying the prophet himself as a writer (2.3) and by portraying a specific process whereby the prophet passes on the words of YHWH to a scribe (2.2). The unbroken chain of transmission from YHWH, to prophet, and finally to scribe provides readers with knowledge of the means by which a written text can be the word of YHWH. In short, it provides the basis of the ancient Israelite theology of the written word, that the prophetic words of Jeremiah ultimately come from YHWH.

For human interpreters, of course, it was and is necessary to trace this chain from the mundane, human realm to the divine, and this chapter follows this order to understand the theology of writers in the book of Jeremiah. Beginning with the relatively "hard" data of the professional scribal presence, the chapter follows the chain of textual transmission through the prophet and finally to YHWH. By careful consideration of writers in Jeremiah, a foundation is built by which to learn not only about the writers of the text, but also about the texts they allegedly produced, including "this one" (Jer 25:13), the book of Jeremiah itself.

2.2 Scribes as writers

However the texts of the HB came to modern readers, at some point in the chain of transmission scribes wrote them down. Michael Fishbane describes their role: "the

pivotal position of scribes as tradents of traditions also puts them in a primary position with respect to their meanings.”¹⁶ One might expect as a result of this fact to find scribes featured prominently throughout biblical literature, both as characters in a plot and as producers of a narrative. Scribes are in a position to control how those who hear and read their texts view their role in those texts’ production. Yet they do not often appear as prominent characters in the narratives of the HB, and their presence behind texts must be discerned by circumstantial clues rather than explicit expressions of involvement.¹⁷

Jeremiah stands out in the biblical literature because scribes are prominent here at the narrative level. Instead of existing behind the scenes of a narrative, as so often in the HB, scribes and writers enter into that narrative itself.¹⁸ They appear at pivotal points in a variety of roles: as foils for the (true) prophets (Jer 8:8), as close confidants of the prophet and YHWH (Jer 36), and as royal officials deeply involved in the political machinations of Jerusalem (43:1-7; 45). A certain ambivalence exists in Jeremiah regarding the scribal role in the transmission of the word of YHWH, but the trajectory from Jer 8:8 to Jer 45 moves from anxiety to acceptance, in part because a satisfactory

¹⁶ Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), 23.

¹⁷ Some critical scholars are less sanguine than others when it comes to the discernment of scribal “glosses” in the HB. For an example of skepticism, see Emanuel Tov, “Glosses, Interpolations, and Other Types of Scribal Additions in the Text of the HB,” in *Language, Theology, and the Bible: Essays in Honour of James Barr* (ed. Samuel E. Balentine and John Barton; Oxford: Clarendon), 40-66. For an example of one author who too quickly identifies difficult elements as scribal “glosses” in the HB, see G. R. Driver, “Glosses in the Text of the Hebrew Old Testament,” in *L’ancien testament et l’orient* (Leuven: Leuven University, 1957), 123-61.

¹⁸ J. Andrew Dearman, “My Servants the Scribes: Composition and Context in Jeremiah 36,” *JBL* 109 (1990): 403-04.

theology for writers is produced. So long as scribes attend closely to the divine word through the prophet, the scribe may write without corrupting YHWH's word.

To understand fully the unique presentation of scribes in the book of Jeremiah, it is helpful to consider the role of scribes throughout the ancient Near East and the theological frameworks with which they worked.¹⁹ In so doing a broad context is provided in which to set Jeremiah's description of a chain of transmission. Though unique among the books of the Bible, the self-referential nature of Jeremiah as a scribal artifact has parallels in the ancient parallels that aid the reader in understanding how and why the book populates its narratives so consistently with scribes and writers. Armed with this broad socio-cultural context, four specific examples of scribal presentation in Jeremiah will yield deeper insight into the characterization and function of scribes in the book of Jeremiah.

2.2.1 Scribes as writers behind the text

More than being simple writers, recorders, or scholars, ancient Near Eastern scribes took part in the state /temple apparatus and were primarily supported by royal patrons.²⁰ As an elite class, scribes in Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Israel were charged not

¹⁹ Given recent debates regarding the "comparative method," it is important not to be too quick to apply Old Babylonian and Neo-Assyrian prophetic materials. For a brief review of the debate and the problems with simple comparisons, see Hans M. Barstad, "Comparare necesse est? Ancient Israelite and Ancient Near Eastern Prophecy in a Comparative Perspective," in *Prophecy in its Ancient Near Eastern Context: Mesopotamian, Biblical, and Arabian Perspectives* (ed. Marti Nissinen; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 2000), 3-11.

²⁰ The expense of the "scribal arts" made royal patronage necessary. See Van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture*, 16-20. A. Leo Oppenheim described three roles for the scribe: bureaucrat, poet, and scholar. "The Position of the Intellectual in Mesopotamian Society," *Daedalus* 104 (1975): 34-46. Cited in Phillip R. Davies,

only with meeting the documentary needs of their supporters, but also with “enculturating” their students.²¹ This enculturation included awareness of and involvement in the various temple complexes, most of which were associated closely with kings or local leaders.²² The task of writing formed only a portion of the scribe’s duties. Oral skills were also necessary, as scribes were charged with memorizing and reciting from the important literature of their culture.²³ Moreover, they were charged with the execution of various bureaucratic skills. Thus the “big brother” in an ancient Sumerian scribal dialogue castigates his fellow student for writing without mastering the full range of relevant skills:

You wrote a tablet, but you cannot understand its meaning. You wrote a letter, but that is the limit for you! Go to divide a plot, and you are not able to divide the plot; go to apportion a field, and you cannot even hold the rod and tape properly. The field pegs you are unable to place; you cannot figure out its shape, so that when wronged men have a quarrel you are not able to bring peace...²⁴

Scribes and Schools: The Canonization of the Hebrew Scriptures (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 19. For further on scribes in the ancient Near East, see E. Lipinski, “Royal and state scribes in ancient Jerusalem,” in *Congress Volume: Jerusalem 1986* (ed. J. A. Emerton; Leiden: Brill, 1988), 157-64.

²¹ Carr, *Writing on the Tablet*, 31-35, 55, 101-4, et al; see also Davies, *Scribes and Schools*, 18.

²² Ibid., 19-21. This underscores the point from the introduction that a theology of writing is both appropriate and necessary, given the fact that the scribes were very likely the closest thing to a theologian in the ancient world.

²³ Susan Niditch, *Oral World and Written Word: Ancient Israelite Literature* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 108-9.

²⁴ “The Dialogue Between Two Scribes,” translated by H.L.J. Vanstiphout (*COS* 1.184:589).

Writing alone does not make a complete scribe in the ancient Near East; he also needed to master a host of skills ranging from oral recitation to practical record-keeping.²⁵ One might include in this range considerable theological skill, since “the gods were an integral part of all these textual corpora [ancient Near Eastern scribal literature], and religion infused life in each culture where they were used.”²⁶

When they did write, the scribes of the ancient Near East were not authors in the modern sense of the term. Instead of being individual geniuses who composed “original” works, scribes were the transmitters of a culture, preserving the traditions taught to them across the generations. Nevertheless, scribes were not passive vessels through which the material moved unaltered, but rather active participants in the growth and challenge of tradition. Michael Fishbane’s *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* catalogues the variety of reasons for scribal interpolation into a text, including, among others, theological agenda, corrections, and simple explication of unclear texts.²⁷ In spite

²⁵ A.J. Saldarini, “Scribes,” *ABD* 5:1012-1016. I say “he” here since the vast majority of scribes were likely men. There are, however, exceptions to this general rule, for which see Carr, *Written on the Tablet*, 11-12.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 290, who makes this statement to point out that there was no distinction between literature and Scripture in the ancient world. To him this means that the latter term is inappropriate when applied to the HB, but one might also argue that literature is the less applicable terminology. For further on this point, see the conclusion to this study.

²⁷ Long before Fishbane’s work the effect of scribalism on the HB was observed in the *tiqqune sopherim* (emendations of the scribes). Fifth century CE rabbis noted in various midrashim that the Hebrew text had been altered and attributed such changes either to the scribes, Ezra, or the great men of the synagogue. E. J. Revell, “Scribal Emendations,” *ABD* 5:1011-1012. One example of such a scribal emendation appears in Jer 2:11, where the scribes emend כבודי to כבודו. Though the rabbis observed such emendations for only a handful of texts (twenty-four cases), the concept of such changes to the text signals from an early period the awareness of scribal work in the HB. One also perceives a certain uneasiness in the editorial work of the scribes, since the emendations of the *tiqqune sopherim* are relatively few and their origin is often attributed to some great figure/s in Israel’s history.

of the variety of reasons for a scribe to insert his own thoughts or words into a text, the overall impulse in the ancient world appears to have been relatively conservative once a text achieved a degree of stability. Innovation, so highly esteemed in modern writing, was not valued in the ancient world, and as a result writing was conceived differently in the ancient Near East and the HB than in the modern world. Ancient scribal conventions demonstrate such differences, especially as they may point toward a theological agenda, an example of which may be discerned in the book of Jeremiah's argument for a chain of transmission.

In ancient Near Eastern literature, the scribal presence behind a text may be discerned by the four literary conventions of colophons, superscripts, deictic language, and resumptive repetition (*Weideraufnahme*).²⁸ These are not the only means by which a scribal presence may be discerned, but they provide the most readily available data for critical readers of ancient Near Eastern literature interested in the scribal presence behind a text. By means of these features, readers may discern scribal influence and involvement even when such provenance is not explicitly claimed (as, again, it so often is in Jeremiah). In short, they provide compelling evidence for Fishbane's claim that scribes held the pivotal position with respect to the production of texts in the ancient Near East. Attention to these four features will aid critical consideration of Jeremiah as a "scribal artifact." Establishing the responsibility and role of scribes behind the book of Jeremiah provides a tool by which to assess their relative prominence in the narrative.

²⁸ Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 23-43.

One of the most explicit ways for scribes to alert readers to their presence are colophons. Appearing at the end of texts, these variously state the scribe, date, and other miscellanea about a text and its production (e.g., its length).²⁹ They may also include warnings not to alter the text or to remove it from its current location, complete with threats against those who would do so.³⁰ Examples abound in the ancient Near Eastern literature, including this colophon found at the end of the Assyrian King List:

Written and checked against its original. A tablet of the mashmashu-priest, Belshum-iddin, a native of Ashur. May Shamash take away him who takes (this tablet) away.³¹

Including a statement of authenticity and several details regarding the owner, the colophon pronounces a curse against anyone who would remove the tablet.³² Other colophons include information about the scribe responsible for the text, as in this earlier copy of the Assyrian king List:

²⁹ For the elements of ancient near Eastern colophons, see Hermann Hunger, *Babylonische und assyrische Kolophone* (AOAT 2; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1968), 1-15; Michael Fishbane, "Varia Deuteronomica", *ZAW* 84 (1972) 349-52; idem, "Biblical Colophons, Textual Criticism and Legal Analogies," *CBQ* 42 (1980): 438-49.

³⁰ For such colophons in the biblical literature, see Jer 26:2 ("do not hold back anything"), Deut 4:2; 13:1; Prov 30:6. For more on colophons in the ancient Near East, see J. R. Lundbom, "Baruch, Seraiah, and Expanded Colophons in the Book of Jeremiah," *JSOT* 36 (1986): 89-114; Haim Gevaryahu, "Biblical Colophons: A Source for the 'Biography' of Authors, Texts, and Books," in *Congress Volume, Edinburgh 1974* (ed. G. W. Anderson; VTSup 28; Leiden: Brill), 42-59; Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 78.

³¹ "The Assyrian King List," translated by A. Leo Oppenheim (*ANET*, 566). Cited in Lundbom, "Expanded Colophons," 90.

³² Oppenheim supplies the term "this tablet" and thus implies that the threat comes to one who would move the entire tablet. An alternative interpretation might read the phrase "take away" as a challenge not to alter the text itself.

Copy from Ashur; written by Kandalanu, the scribe of the temple inside of Arbela. Month Lulubu, the 20th day; eponym: Adad-bel-ukin, governor of the inner city of Ashur, in his second eponymy.³³

In this instance the scribe signs his document, dating it and naming its owner Adad-bel-ukin. No curse is uttered, but the nature of the colophons varies according to their scribal authors and the conventions of each culture. In Jeremiah possible colophonic endings include Jer 48:47, עֲדָהֲנָה מִשְׁפֹּט מוֹאָב (“thus far the judgment of Moab”) and Jer 51:64, עֲדָהֲנָה דְבַרֵי יִרְמְיָהוּ (“thus far the words of Jeremiah”).³⁴ In both Jeremiah and ancient Near Eastern literature, colophons provide readers with occasion to consider the contents of the tablet or scroll they are reading, as well as its transmission as text. By means of the colophon, readers are forced to reflect on the text and its producers, and thus they consider those behind the text.

Similar to colophons, superscripts appear at the beginning of texts or textual units and state the “title” of a brief passage, including provenance, generic markers, or intended readers.³⁵ As with colophons, they may also state the collectors or scribes responsible for the text. Legal collections and hymns to various deities often note the topic of their address, as do divine oracles. Though superscripts are less numerous than

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Lundbom, “Expanded Colophons,” 96. Having cited these two passages from Jeremiah, Lundbom goes on to cite Jer 32:6-15 (97-98), Jer 45 (99-101), Jer 51:59-64 (101-4), and Jer 36:1-8 (104-6) as “expanded colophons”.

³⁵ This information is so similar to colophons that H. I. Gevanyahu contends that the superscripts attached to the Psalms were originally colophons. See Gevanyahu, “Biblical Colophons,” 42-59.

colophons in the ancient Near East, hymnic and legal texts still provide some examples.³⁶

The Hymn to Aton begins,

Praising Amon ... by the overseer of the works of Amon, Seth, and the Overseer of the Works of Amon, Horus. They say: Hail to thee...³⁷

Here, at the beginning of a text rather than the end, a general title for the hymn is given (“Praising Amon”) and those who produced the text are also mentioned (“the overseer of the works of ...”). The audience of the hymn is asked to reflect on those responsible for the work, and even as hearers they are directed to the written nature of the work.

Examples of superscripts from Jeremiah include the simple heading from Jer 23:9:

לנבאים, “concerning the prophets” or the “title” to the OAN in Jer 46:1: היה דבר־יהוה

אל־ירמיהו הנביא על־הגוים, “the word of YHWH that came to Jeremiah concerning the

nations.” Like colophons, the superscripts indicate a textual awareness on the part of

tradents. Here, at the beginning of the OAN in Jer 46:1-51:58, the receiving audience

learns about a text’s contents and those responsible for its production.³⁸ Such textual self-

awareness implies an unspecified audience, and the narrative provides some information

regarding the intended receivers of the book of Jeremiah as well (see chapter five).

In addition to inserting relatively explicit admissions of scribal involvement by means of colophons and superscripts, scribes could signal an addition to an earlier text by

³⁶ The situation is reversed in the HB, where superscripts are more common, most notably in the Psalms (e.g., Pss 54:1; 57:1; 67:1; 133:1; 134:1).

³⁷ Cited in Bruce K. Waltke, “Superscripts, Postscripts, or Both,” *JBL* 110 (1991): 587.

³⁸ Other examples from Jeremiah include: 1:4; 2:1; 3:6; 14:1; 21:1-2; 25:1-2; 26:1; 46:1; 46:2; 48:1; 49:1.

means of resumptive repetition (*Weideraufnahme*).³⁹ Having interrupted a text to include additional material, scribes repeated bracketing phrases or themes around a new addition. The repetition signals to the audience the beginning and end of a relatively new “interrupting” text. Genesis 15:12 and 17 exhibit this sort of interpolation in the similar phrases “as the sun was going down / when the sun went down” (ויהי / ויהי השמש לבוֹא) (השמש באה). Between these texts the scribes have signaled an interpolated text that has come into the material at a later time than that surrounding it. Another well-known example appears in Gen 37:36 and 39:1. Having included the story of Judah and Tamar, scribal tradents responsible for the addition of that story repeated the announcement of Joseph’s sale to Potiphar in both verses, picking up the broader narrative thread and signaling to readers that the usual narrative flow had been interrupted.

To add an example from Jeremiah, Fishbane observes the secondary nature of 51:59-64’s presence in the text by detailing the use of the verb ויעֲפֹ in verses 58 and 64.⁴⁰ Signaling the insertion of a narrative at the end of the OAN in 46-51, the repetition of the verb admits that the passage was not first in its current context. Here the simple generic difference between the narrative and the OAN is reinforced by the scribal addition. Jeremiah 51:59-64 is therefore a story about a scroll that is enclosed within two markers of its scribal status. Given the fact that the story itself likely refers to the preceding oracular material in the OAN (51:60), there is an exceedingly high awareness

³⁹ Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 86.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 85.

of the scribal role both within and behind this text in the book of Jeremiah. Once again, by means of *Wiederaufnahme*, scribal tradents signal their presence, focusing the attention of readers on the cumulative nature of a text. The subtle scribal presence leads subsequent readers to ask: who has inserted this text and employed such scribal methodologies?

Finally, scribes signal their presence by the use of deictic elements in the biblical text. Having perceived something obscure in a text, whether toponymic, lexical, patronymic, or otherwise, scribes employ demonstrative pronouns (היא, הוא, זה, or היא) to gloss a text for a contemporary audience.⁴¹ Again, Fishbane most helpfully describes the phenomenon, pointing to numerous examples to make the case that “terms like הוא and זה are not primary exegetical features, but rather indicate secondary annotations of words, persons, or places.”⁴² Examples of this phenomenon are abundant:

Josh 18:13: ועבד משם הגבול לזזה אל־כתף לזזה נגבה היא בית־אל

From there the border crossed to Luz, to the edge of Luz southward – that is Beth El (היא בית־אל).

Gen 36:1: ואלה תולדות עשו הוא אדום

These are the generations of Esau – that is, Edom (הוא אדום).

Hag 2:4b-5: כִּי־אני אתכם נאם יהוה צבאות את־הדבר אשר־כרתי אתכם
בצאתכם ממצרים

⁴¹ For reflection on the terminology of “gloss” in the scholarship, see Tov, “Glosses,” 41.

⁴² Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 44.

For I am with you – oracle of the LORD of hosts, with respect to the promise (את־הדבר) that I made with you when you came out of Egypt...

Psalm 68:9: ארץ רעשה אף־שמים נטפו מפני אלהים זה סיני מפני אלהים
אלהי ישראל

Land trembled, indeed the heavens rained on account of God – the one of Sinai (זה סיני)– on account of God, the God of Israel.

In each of these instances, a deictic particle explicates a part of the text for an audience that might not understand its import. Not unlike a theatric aside, the textual tradent speaks directly to readers. Deictic particles implicitly admit their secondary nature, allowing the scribe to comment on the text from within it.

As this study will discuss in the following chapter, such deictic elements of the biblical text are not limited to simple explications of confusing details in the text. They may also refer to that text itself, as when Jer 25:13 describes כל־הכתוב בספר הזה “all that is written in this book.” As with the other indicators of scribal presence behind texts, such signals encourage reflection on those responsible for them, and the text of Jeremiah does not disappoint in providing its readers with an explanation for its production. To appreciate fully the importance of scribal characterization in Jeremiah, however, it is necessary not only to mention the presence of scribes behind the text, but to understand their narrative characterization in the HB.

2.2.2 Scribes as writers within the text

In ancient Israel, the professional scribe assumed a place of prominence with Israel’s rise as a national power. With a centralized state comes the need for greater

bureaucratic skill, and as a result the scribal class grows.⁴³ In the accounts of David's kingdom the official role of the professional scribe is noted for the first time.⁴⁴ In the Deuteronomistic History a chief scribe appears at key points in the narrative, most notably Shaphan in 2 Kgs 22:8-10, who reads the hidden scroll of YHWH and confirms, alongside the prophet Huldah, its importance and authenticity. Scribes play relatively minor roles in the remainder of the Deuteronomistic History and prophetic literature, but in Jeremiah they make their presence felt, especially in the second half of the book (26-45).⁴⁵ Often portrayed in political roles in the HB, they most often appear as writers in the book of Jeremiah.

Here, those most sympathetic to the prophet and his mission come from two families: the Shaphanides and the sons of Neriah. In Jeremiah five characters in the narrative claim ancestry from the Shaphanide family tree. They are not all scribes, but many important figures in the narrative come from this family: Ahikam (Jer 26), Elasah (Jer 29), Gemariah (Jer 36), Micaiah (Jer 36), and Gedaliah (Jer 40-41). The family tree of Baruch is less developed, as only his brother appears (Jer 51:59-64). The proliferation

⁴³ It is important to recall, however, that the prominence of the scribe as a part of the ancient Near Eastern state included a role in the religious and ritual life of ancient Israel. See the above introduction and chapter one.

⁴⁴ David had several scribes over the course of his monarchy, but of special interest to the student of Jeremiah is Seraiah, a name which apparently persisted in the Shaphanide scribal family that followed centuries later (2 Sam 8:17; in Jeremiah see 51:59, 61). Later in David's kingdom the scribe Sheba participated in Absalom's rebellion against the king (2 Sam 20:25).

⁴⁵ Both J. Andrew Dearman and Rainer Albertz have emphasized the significance of the Shaphanide role in the scribal history behind the HB. Dearman, "My Servants," 418-19; Albertz, *History of Israelite Religion*, 383, 469, 601, 624. Others, including Walter Brueggemann, Robert Carroll, and Christopher Seitz, have emphasized the significance of the "Baruch community" behind the text. Brueggemann, "The Baruch Connection," 407-8; Carroll, *From Chaos to Covenant*, 151; Christopher L. Seitz, *Theology in Conflict: Reactions to the Exile in the Book of Jeremiah* (BZAW 176; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1989), 285-6.

of references to scribes in Jeremiah communicates the growing involvement of scribes in the transmission of YHWH's prophetic word. Not every reference to scribes in Jeremiah is unambiguously positive (Jer 8:8, about which see below), but the general trajectory is towards integration and acceptance of their role (Jer 36; 43:1-7; 45). In the context of the wider canon the evidence of this acceptance appears most clearly in the prophecy of Ezekiel, whose scribal prophecy demonstrates the growing acceptance of scribes and texts in the history of ancient Israel.⁴⁶ Indeed, in the person of Ezekiel the line between prophet and scribe begins to blur, and in the book of Chronicles prophets are characterized as interpreters of texts.⁴⁷

Like Jeremiah and Ezekiel, Ezra-Nehemiah and Chronicles demonstrate a move toward scribal integration in ancient Israel.⁴⁸ This is not to say that scribes had not been integral to the life of certain elite classes in Israel before the sixth century BCE and Second Temple period. Rather, at that time scribes and writing begin to assume a different place in the community. In the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, scribes become central national and religious figures in a way that they were not in previous Israelite literature. Ezra is described as a "scribe skilled in the law of Moses" (Ezra 7:6), but

⁴⁶ Ezekiel 2:9-3:11 may be understood as a shift towards the written, for which see Ellen F. Davis, *Swallowing the Scroll: Textuality and the Dynamics of Discourse in Ezekiel's Prophecy* (JSOTSup 78; Sheffield: Almond, 1989). Other texts in Ezekiel dependent upon the textual awareness of the prophet include Ezek 1; 7:19, and 8-11, all of which may be characterized as *Nachinterpretation* along the lines suggested by Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1* (Herm.; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979); idem, *Ezekiel 2* (Herm.; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983).

⁴⁷ William M. Schniedewind, *The Word of God in Transition: From Prophet to Exegete in the Second Temple Period* (JSOTSup 197; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995).

⁴⁸ Saldarini, "Scribes," 1013.

throughout Ezra 8-10 he functions as a major political player, leading the returnees to resume worship in Jerusalem. According to Nehemiah 8, Ezra reads from the תורה, leading the people in acts of contrition alongside Nehemiah and the Levites.⁴⁹ No longer an independent state, the people of Yehud find unity in the reading of a book. They are led not by a king, but by a scribe.

The history that led to this moment was not without its conflicts, however. In Jeremiah one finds the remnants of a quarrel over the role of the scribes, an anxiety over Israel's theology of the written word. Before Israel became a people of the book, they first had to become a people of the written word more generally, and this is the kind of process one finds in the scribal presentation found in the ספר of Jeremiah. In Jeremiah, there are not only indications of a scribal presence behind the text, there is also strong evidence of an attempt on the part of tradents to describe their role in the transmission of God's word by a particular portrayal of scribes within the narrative. Such descriptions authorize not only the tradents and their role in the chain of prophetic transmission, but also the texts they produce. A review of three key texts in the book of Jeremiah demonstrates this trajectory.

Jeremiah 8:8: Jeremiah first treats the issue of scribal involvement in the word of YHWH in the first half of the book. The passage demonstrates the fact that the transmission of a divine word is fraught with difficulty and that scribes may potentially

⁴⁹ Note the Chronicler's view that the Levites sometimes served as scribes: 1 Chr 24:6; 2 Chr 34:13. See Niditch, *Oral World*, 105-6 on the orality behind Neh 8.

alter and even corrupt the divine word. In short, scribes are potential obstacles in the chain of transmission. In Jer 8:8 the prophet states,

איכה תאמרו חכמים אנחנו ותורת יהוה אתנו
אכן הנה לשקר עשה עט שקר ספרים

How do you say, ‘We are wise and the Torah of the LORD is with us.’?
But behold, the lying pen of the scribes has made (it) into a lie!

The verse is notoriously difficult to translate, as evidenced by the literature on the topic.⁵⁰

Some translations of the passage absolve the scribes of deliberate wrongdoing, as in the NJPS version: “Assuredly, for naught (לשקר) has the pen labored, for naught (שקר) the scribes!”⁵¹ Others, like the NRSV, preserve a stinging critique of the scribal class: “The false pen of the scribes has made (it) into a lie (לשקר).”⁵² Both translations are possible, and modern interpreters have reconstructed a variety of different historical situations to

⁵⁰ Robert P. Carroll, “Inscribing the Covenant: Writing and the Written in Jeremiah,” in *Understanding Poets and Prophets* (ed. A. G. Auld; JSOTSup 152; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 61-76; Lester L. Grabbe, “‘The Lying Pen of the Scribes’?: Jeremiah and History” in *Essays on Ancient Israel in its Ancient Near Eastern Context* (ed. L. L. Grabbe; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 189-204; William McKane, *Prophets and Wise Men* (SBT 44; Naperville, Ill.: Allenson, 1965), 102-7. The major difficulty in the verse is the isolation and function of the various nouns. Which is the subject? William L. Holladay proposes that the subject of the sentence is שקר ספרים, “the lie of the scribes.” *Jeremiah 1* (Herm.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1986), 281-2. Such a reading has the benefit of following the MT without emendation, but the force of the resultant translation seems unclear: “the lie of the scribes has made the pen into a lie.” Rather than the pen’s lying status, this passage concerns the truth of the תורת יהוה. Following the usual understanding of עט שקר ספרים as a triple construct chain (literally “the pen of the lie of the scribes”), the translation above understands the scribal stylus as corrupting rather than corrupted.

⁵¹ The KJV also absolves the scribes of corrupting influence, translating לשקר “in vain”: “Lo, certainly in vain made he it; the pen of the scribes is in vain.” Such translations avoid the usual force of deceit implied by the word שקר (but see Jer 3:23, 1 Sam 25:21). In addition, the following verse makes clear that the problem is not the futility of the work here, but its negative effects.

⁵² NASB, NIV, RSV translate similarly, preserving the scribal critique.

explain the verse.⁵³ The most popular of these by far relies on the latter translation and assumes a conflict between oral prophetic speakers and the written תּוֹרַת יְהוָה.⁵⁴ Yet, as William McKane has pointed out, the nebulous phrase may refer to a historical circumstance of critique against particular scribes rather than a general distrust of all written documentation or all who produce texts.⁵⁵ In the end, such a slim verse resists exact historical placement, but that does not therefore mean that it is insignificant.

On the contrary, the verse demonstrates that not all written words deserve confidence - that the words of scribes do not always equate with the word of YHWH.

Scribes, like prophets, write trustworthy words only when they come from YHWH.

Jeremiah 8:9 goes on to make this point when it continues the critique against the חכמים:

הבישו חכמים חתו וילכדו
הגה בדבר־יהוה מאסו וחכמת־מה להם

The wise have been put to shame. They have been dismayed and captured.
Behold, the word of the LORD they have rejected, and wisdom – what is (it) to them?

⁵³ Caution is necessary since the assumption of a scribal critique can devolve into a critique of dead “Judaism.” Wellhausen himself believed this passage to excoriate the dead religion of the scribal writers of Deuteronomy, and the negative consequences for this decision with respect to the history of Israelite religion is now well known. *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994), 403; repr. of *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel* (trans J. Sutherland Black and Allan Enzies, with preface by W. Robertson Smith; Edinburgh: Adam & Charles Black, 1885); trans. of *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels* (2d ed.; Berlin: G. Reimer, 1883). Cited in Holladay, *Jeremiah*, 281.

⁵⁴ John Bright, *Jeremiah* (AB 21; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1965) 63-64; Carroll, “Writing and the Written,” 64, who states that “the prophet as preacher of that [divine] word cannot be gainsaid by a written scroll of YHWH’s torah” and associates this passage with general skepticism in the Mediterranean world concerning writing.

⁵⁵ William McKane, *Jeremiah, Volume I* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986), 186.

Such a presentation, itself also written by the pen of scribes, provides an instance of remarkable self-critique on the part of its scribal tradents. The problem is not that all written words are somehow inferior to spoken ones, but that neither spoken or written words are always from YHWH.⁵⁶ Just as Jeremiah criticizes false prophecy (Jer 23:9-20; 27-28), so also he criticizes writers who reject the divine word. The problem at issue here is not the written תורה, but the corrupting human element that assumes the possibility of possession or domestication of the divine word. Writers do not, by virtue of taking up their pens, necessarily falsify the divine word, but they may do so, and readers must guard against false prophetic writers and false prophetic texts.

Of course, the written nature of the proclamation in Jer 8:8-9 undermines its own claims, encouraging readers to question whether this word is from YHWH. Once introduced, the critical perspective on scribes extends beyond its immediate literary context to include the rest of the scroll. Who, the reader asks, writes a word that is authentically from YHWH and who does not? Such apprehension manifests itself not only for modern readers, but for those concerned to authenticate the word of YHWH in the ancient world as well. Jeremiah 36 may be read as an extended case for written prophecy, and Jer 43:3 (treated below) explicitly states the anxiety some had with the role of the scribe in the prophetic word. These narrative arguments for scribal involvement in prophecy are themselves written and tendentious, and thus are not immune from the anxiety of Jer 8:8-9. Yet the difficulty of discerning which words were from YHWH

⁵⁶ Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 282: "It is not that writing laws is bad; writing is often a good thing – after all, Jrm dictates to Baruch."

does not appear to have stopped the involvement of scribes in the transmission of words that purported to be from YHWH. The text carries on in the assumption that it can make its case for the relationships that exist between YHWH, prophets, and scribes, even if it cannot finally resolve every tension that exists in written texts. Though it is an isolated example, Jer 8:8 nevertheless reports that scribes can be a threat to the chain of transmission unless their words are carefully controlled, as they are in the narrative of Jer 36 by the dictation model of transmission from prophet to scribe.

Jeremiah 36: While Jer 8:8 criticizes the scribes and their involvement in the production of texts, the second half of the book, Jer 26-52, consistently argues for scribal legitimacy in the life of ancient Israel. Chief among these texts is Jer 36. Parallel to the account of textual production in 25:1-7 and related closely to Jer 26 and 2 Kgs 22, the chapter thematizes royal resistance to the prophetic word while simultaneously focusing attention on the writers of the word from YHWH.⁵⁷ Jeremiah 8:8 characterized scribes as possible corruptors of the divine word. Jeremiah 36 depicts the positive potential of scribes, describing the legitimate roles of prophets and scribes within the chain of transmission.

Forced by his imprisonment to prophesy via the written word, Jeremiah receives a command from the LORD: קח־לך מגלת־ספר וכתבת אליה את כל־הדברים אשר־דברתיך
“take for yourself a scroll and write upon it all the words which I have spoken to you...”

⁵⁷ Isbell, “2 Kgs 3-23:24 and Jer 36,” 35; Martin Kessler, “The Significance of Jer 36,” ZAW 81 (1969): 381-83; idem, “Form-Critical Suggestions on Jer 36,” CBQ 28 (1966): 389-401.

(36:2). Jeremiah reacts to this command by turning to Baruch.⁵⁸ The tradents take great care to describe the prophetic-scribal relationship in some detail, noting in verse four that Baruch wrote *מפי ירמיהו את כל־דברתי יהוה אשר־דבר אליו על־מגלת־ספר* “from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of the LORD which he spoke to him on the scroll.” After the narrator’s description, the prophet himself emphasizes this dictation, noting in his command to Baruch that he is to go and “read out loud the words in the scroll which you wrote from my mouth (*מפי*) – the words of the LORD” (36:6). No other words may be spoken but those that have come from the prophet’s mouth. This concern with the exact dictation from prophet to scribe argues for authenticity, an argument so prevalent that the narrative continually repeats the method of transmission from the prophet’s spoken word to the scribe’s written word.⁵⁹ Having heard Baruch’s reading of the text, the royal scribal class interrogates Baruch, asking in Jer 36:17-18,

הגד־נא לנו איך כתבת את־כל־הדברים האלה מפיו ויאמר להם ברוך מפיו יקרא אלי
את כל־הדברים האלה ואני כתב על־הספר בדיו

Tell us, please, how you wrote all these words from his mouth (*מפי*). Baruch said to them, “From his mouth (*מפי*) he called out to me all these words and I wrote on the scroll with ink.”

Twice the text repeats the direct reception of the words “from his mouth” (*מפי*), echoing the direct transmission reported in verse four. Baruch’s response in particular

⁵⁸ Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 105; Niditch, *Oral World*, 105; J. Edward Wright, *Baruch ben Neriah: From Biblical Scribe to Apocalyptic Seer* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 13-23.

⁵⁹ Carroll, “Manuscripts Don’t Burn – Inscribing the Prophetic Tradition. Reflections on Jeremiah 36,” in *Dort Ziehen Schiffe dahin: Collected Communications to the XIVth Congress of the International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament* (ed. G. L. Prato; IOSOT 28; New York: Peter Lang, 1996), 37-38.

emphasizes the matter by placing the method of transmission at the beginning of his sentence. By the end of this exchange a total of four voices have articulated the dictation model of prophetic transmission. Narrator, prophet, prophetic amanuensis (Baruch), and royal scribes all attest to the fact that these are not only scribal words, but words dictated directly from the mouth of the true prophet Jeremiah. To underscore the point, the narrator twice more reiterates the nature of the scroll in verses 27 and 32, underscoring the fact that these words are written מפי ירמיהו.

The repetition of the mode of prophetic transmission functions not only to communicate the method by which scribes went about their task, but to authorize texts by means of tracing them back to their ultimate author, YHWH. Karel van der Toorn makes the helpful point that, to the extent that authorship is significant in the ancient world, it is important only to authorize a text.⁶⁰ Without the proper “author,” prophecy is false, as Jer 23:16 describes:

אל־תשמעו על־דברי הנבאים
הנבאים לכם
מהבלים המה אתכם
חזון לבם ידברו
לא מפי יהוה

Do not listen to the words of the prophets
who are prophesying to you.
They are deluding you.
The vision of their heart they speak,
Not from the mouth of YHWH.

⁶⁰ Van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture*, 27.

False prophets speak “the vision of their heart” (חזון לבם), “not from the mouth of YHWH” (מפי יהוה; Jer 23:16). At this point it is helpful to recall Jeremiah’s call narrative, wherein YHWH states: “Behold, I have put my words in your mouth” (הנה הנהיית דברי; Jer 1:9). YHWH speaks true words to the prophet, who then speaks these in the hearing of the people. In Jer 36, the dictation of the prophetic word to the scribe extends the chain of transmission to include scribes who attend closely to the words from the mouth of the prophet. The care with which the scribe handles the prophetic word from YHWH contrasts with the attitude taken by Jehoiakim, who himself takes up a scribal tool (תער) and ironically undoes the text produced by YHWH, Jeremiah, and Baruch.⁶¹ This deliberate destruction of the divine written word contrasts sharply with the care with which the other scribes in Jer 36 approach their role. What Jehoiakim destroys, Baruch and the other scribes take great care to preserve. So long as the scribe attends to the word of YHWH as Baruch does in this context, the scribal role is perfectly legitimate as a part of the process of divine transmission.

But how far does such scribal authority extend? The final clause of chapter 36 suggests that scribes had a great deal of authority to supplement the prophetic word that they received. There, immediately after a final repetition of the mode of transmission, the text adds that ועוד נוסף עליהם דברים רבים כהמה, “still many words like them were

⁶¹ Note Jehoiakim’s use of the תער in Jer 36:23. Contrast Jehoiakim’s treatment of the prophetic written word with the ideal Deuteronomic king’s reverence for תורה in Deut 17:18-19.

added to them” (Jer 36:32b).⁶² Interpretations of this final phrase vary.⁶³ Does the clause assume that prophetic dictation continues along the lines of 36:32a, or is it an admission of the freedom with which scribes edited and preserved prophetic texts? As the development of Baruch traditions shows well, Baruch did indeed take on a much larger role than that of Jeremiah’s amanuensis, and this text may well be an early example of that trend.⁶⁴ However one chooses to interpret this final clause, the overall effect of Jer 36 is to show the scribes in an overwhelmingly positive light. The official scribes in Jehoiakim’s court attend closely to Jeremiah’s written prophetic word, and Baruch appears prominently as the link between the prophet and the text of the narrative. Nevertheless, the tradents of Jer 36 do not neglect to answer those who might criticize such scribal involvement, and they answer their critics in chapter 43.

Jeremiah 43:1-7; 45: The combined effect of Jer 8:8 and Jer 36 combines to produce ambivalence in the book of Jeremiah respecting the scribal role in written prophecy. In Jer 43:1-7, the tradents once again appear positive about the scribal role, even going so far as to recount a critique of Baruch’s influence on Jeremiah and to rebut

⁶² The phrase seems a clear (and deliberate?) reversal of the Deuteronomic prohibition against adding words to sacred text (e.g., Deut 4:2). As a result, Bernhard Duhm and others have suggested the exclusion of this final phrase from the rest of the Deuteronomistic chapter. See Duhm, *Das Buch Jeremia*, 296; William McKane, *Jeremiah, Volume II* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 921.

⁶³ Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 663-66, contends that the phrase accurately reflects the scribal situation of the Deuteronomic circles that produced this text, but in so doing he shifts his attention from interpretation to historical reconstruction.

⁶⁴ For an account of the development of Baruch from a scribe to a sage and seer, see Carroll, “Manuscripts Don’t Burn,” 33: “Chapter 36 belongs to Baruch’s story more than it belongs to Jeremiah’s story. It also reflects the beginnings of a *takeover* of the tradition by Baruch, a takeover reflected in 43:3 and in chapter 45 (vv. 2, 4 focus on Baruch) and developed much more fully in the apocalypses of Baruch.”

it. After Gedaliah's murder (41:1-2), the remnant left behind by Nebuzaradan (39:10-13; 40:1) once again had to decide its fate in relation to the Babylonians. Would they submit to Babylon and remain in the land or flee to Egypt in the hope that their fortune there would improve? The entire remnant in the land approaches Jeremiah for an oracle, swearing to YHWH that they would do just as the prophet said so that "it will be good for us when we obey the voice of YHWH our God" (Jer 42:1-6). Unlike false prophets whose oracles come from their own heart and are therefore immediately available (23:16), Jeremiah receives an oracle ten days after the peoples' request. Once more he counsels submission to Babylon, stating in no uncertain terms the consequences of escaping to Egypt:

ועתה לכן שמעו דברי־יהוה שארית יהודה כה־אמר יהוה צבאות אלהי ישראל
 אם־אתם שום תשמון פניכם לבא מצרים ובאתם לגור שם והיתה החרב אשר
 אתם יראים ממנה שם תשיג אתכם בארץ מצרים והרעב אשר־אתם דאגים
 ממנו שם ידבק אחריכם מצרים ושם תמתו

Now, therefore, listen to the word of YHWH, remnant of Judah: "Thus says YHWH of hosts, the God of Israel: If indeed you set your face to enter Egypt and go to sojourn there, then the sword which you fear will be there. It will overtake you in the land of Egypt. The famine which you dread will pursue you to Egypt, and there you will die. (Jer 42:15-16)

The oracle against a return to Egypt lasts from verse 9 to 22 and anticipates a negative reaction from the people (42:18-22). Indeed, Azariah, Jochanan, and the other "insolent"

(הזדים) men react strongly.⁶⁵ They refrain from calling Jeremiah himself a false prophet, instead ascribing to Baruch the false message in 43:2-3:⁶⁶

שקר אתה מדבר לא שלחך יהוה אלהינו לאמר לא־תבאו מצרים לגור שם כי
ברוך בן־נריה מסית אתך בנו למען תת אתנו ביד־הכשדים להמית אתנו
ולהגלות אתנו בבל

A lie you are speaking! YHWH our God did not send you to say, “You shall not go to Egypt to sojourn there.” But Baruch ben Neriah is inciting (מסית) you against us in order to give us into the hand of the Chaldeans to kill us and to exile us to Babel.

The reference to Baruch is especially striking since he was last mentioned in Jer 36, at the end of the unit 26-36.⁶⁷ Since Jehoiakim definitively rejected the word of YHWH, the text has relentlessly demonstrated the truth of all of Jeremiah’s predictions. The claim of the leaders and the insolent men that this particular word does not in fact come from YHWH requires an explanation, one provided by the charge of scribal interference: Jeremiah is speaking a word that cannot be true, and the fault for this corrupted word is not in the prophet, but in his scribal associate Baruch.⁶⁸ The scribe corrupts the prophet,

⁶⁵ In spite of their negative characterization in this context, the remnant contains people who have been quite loyal to Gedaliah and all who wished to remain in Israel. Jochanan, for example, tries to save the governor in Jer 40:13-16.

⁶⁶ Walter Brueggemann, “Baruch Connection,” 412 suggests that the fall of Jerusalem made Jeremiah’s status as a true prophet unassailable.

⁶⁷ Robert Carroll employs this broad textual unit while Seitz delineates a separate “scribal chronicle” in 37-43. See Carroll, *Jeremiah* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986), 669 and Seitz, *Theology in Conflict*, 236-41. Whether one includes 45 or not (Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 280, does not), there is a wide consensus that 37-44 constitute a unified narrative.

⁶⁸ Jeremiah is not thereby completely exculpated by the insolent group, however, since it is he who is charged with speaking falsehood (שקר; 43:2). See McKane, *Jeremiah, Volume II*, 1052.

who speaks a word from his own mouth and therefore falsely claims transmission from YHWH.

According to Walter Brueggemann, the problem Jochanan, Azariah, and all the insolent people have here is Jeremiah's involvement with a "much interested political 'user' of his Yahwistic poetry."⁶⁹ As part of the circle that counseled surrender to Babylon, Baruch is in a position to benefit from the conquerors and is therefore keen to see the people stay. Thus he manipulates Jeremiah towards that end. As Brueggemann admits, however, the simple characterization of scribes as political and prophets as apolitical is a gross oversimplification on the part of the insolent men in Jeremiah and modern interpreters. The scribal community Baruch represents would not likely have thought in terms of separate political and theological categories.⁷⁰ Ultimately, caution is necessary in this context since no explanation for citing Baruch as the inciting party is explicitly stated.⁷¹ The people state strangely that he wishes to hand them over to the Chaldeans for death and exile, but why he should wish to do so remains opaque. Baruch's theo-political commitments may have influenced Jeremiah's prophecy, but this does not demonstrate that the association of scribes and prophets was inappropriate generally. Rather, the implicit rejection of the charge leveled against Baruch would seem to support their association. The insolent men offer one portrayal of the scribal role, but the readers of the text know that their characterization of Baruch the scribe is false, given

⁶⁹ Brueggemann, "Baruch Connection," 411.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 415.

⁷¹ Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 722.

their intimate knowledge of the fact that he has carefully attended the chain of transmission. According to the narratives available to the reader, he has not incited Jeremiah, but has only faithfully recorded the words he prophesies.

If Jer 43:1-7 implicitly subtly underwrites the association of scribes and prophets, then Jer 45 strengthens the tie between the scribe and YHWH. An oracle spoken to Baruch “when he wrote these words on a scroll at the dictation of Jeremiah” (בכתבו) (את־הדברים האלה על־ספר מפי ירמיהו בכתבו), the text answers a lament of Baruch by granting his life as a spoil of war. Though others will lose their life when the Babylonians come, Baruch, like Ebed-Melech before him (39:15-18), will keep his. Dated to the year 605 (as are Jer 26 and 36), the chapter acts as a conclusion to the previous text, at once a word of promise to the scribe and a word of condemnation to those who do not receive their lives as a spoil of war.⁷² In its literary context, the oracle may be read as a response to the charges leveled against Baruch in Jer 43:3. Human agents may question his motives, and Baruch may lament his plight, but YHWH will give the scribe his life.⁷³

Up to this point in the book of Jeremiah, Baruch has been an entirely passive figure, taking commands from the prophet and speaking only when authorized by Jeremiah. In 45:2, readers finally hear Baruch’s own words. The scribe does not speak,

⁷² Marion Ann Taylor, “Jeremiah 45: The Problem of Placement,” *JSOT* 37 (1987): 79-98.

⁷³ Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 746-47. Carroll remarks that such a reading is possible only if one removes the chronological marker that dates this oracle to 605 BCE. Yet the current literary order creates the same effect regardless of what rearranged historical order one may wish to impose on the text.

but is quoted by none other than YHWH, who gives voice to his brief lament. In addition, YHWH speaks to Baruch directly, admonishing him not to seek “great things” (גדלות) for himself. The exact meaning of this advice is unclear, but the simple fact that Baruch himself now receives direct divine advice speaks to the increasing importance of the scribe in the literature.⁷⁴ Once portrayed in Jeremiah as a possible corrupting influence with respect to the prophetic word (8:8), scribes now receive a direct word from YHWH, who rewards scribal faithfulness. Scribes, Jer 45 assumes, are valid recipients of a divine word, worthy of any blessing YHWH chooses to bestow.

Such a blessing in Jer 45 dovetails nicely with the authorization of the scribal role as it is portrayed in Jer 36 and 43:1-7. With the lone exception of Jer 8:8, the tradents of Jeremiah depict themselves as valid participants in the presentation of God’s word to the world. The scribal presence behind the text, signaled by the scribal conventions of colophons, superscriptions, deictic elements, and resumptive repetition, fits perfectly with the scribal presence in the text’s narrative world. Indeed, Jer 36 provides the tradents’ account of their text’s production within the narrative itself. Yet to justify their pivotal role in the transmission of the written word, the scribes had to ensure also that the words they wrote come from true prophets of YHWH. In addition to detailing the dictation model of prophetic transmission via scribes, they make this case by portraying the prophet and YHWH as writers.

⁷⁴ Wright, *Baruch ben Neriah*, 32-34.

2.3 Prophets as writers

Just as the traditions of Jeremiah underwrite the role of the professional scribe in the transmission of the written word, so also does the book authorize the prophet as a writer within the chain of transmission. The prophet participates in the delivery of the prophetic word not only as a transmitter of an oral message subsequently written down by a professional scribe, but as a writer himself. The attribution of texts to the prophet tells readers something about the changing role of the prophet in the sixth century BCE, but it also goes beyond such a biographical role to authorize the text. Coming from the prophet himself, the written word achieves heightened status and the length of the chain of transmission between YHWH and the text is shortened. The portrayal of prophetic writers is more important for authorizing the text of Jeremiah than the historical question of prophetic scribalism. Imagining the prophet as a scribe, the traditions of Jeremiah authorize 1) the prophetic role in written prophecy and 2) the texts for which the prophet is responsible.

2.3.1 Prophets as writers behind the text

“The prophets,” Hermann Gunkel famously asserted, “were not originally writers but speakers.”⁷⁵ Gunkel’s insight into the oral precursors of the biblical literature continues to influence the way modern scholars interpret the prophetic literature, and in recent years a spate of scholars have researched the biblical texts as works of oral

⁷⁵ Hermann Gunkel, “The Prophets as Writers and Poets,” in *Prophecy in Israel: Search for an Identity* (ed. D. L. Petersen; trans. James L. Schaaf; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 22-73.

literature (see chapter 1 above).⁷⁶ According to such work, an oral mentality informs the biblical literature to such an extent that documentary accounts of the HB inevitably misinterpret by assuming textual production.⁷⁷ For Gunkel and his heirs, the written words of the biblical text prove less important than the conjectured *ipsissima verba* of the prophet. Thus he states,

if contemporary readers wish to understand the prophets, they must entirely forget that the writings were collected in a sacred book centuries after the prophet's work. The contemporary reader must not read their words as portions of the Bible but must attempt to place them in the context of the life [*Sitz im Leben*] of the people Israel in which they were first spoken.⁷⁸

One of the greatest mistakes an interpreter can make, according to Gunkel, is to attend too closely to the "sacred book" without attempting to reconstruct the history behind it. The interpreter of Jeremiah, for example, needs to hear the prophet's words rather than simply read them.⁷⁹ Gunkel assumed that careful analysis of the text would lay bare the original spoken words of the prophet, and in so doing he also prioritized these words (and their various historical contexts) over against the continuing development of secondary traditions in Jeremiah.

⁷⁶ Chief among them Susan Niditch, *Oral World*. For a recent attempt to "perform" the oral literature of the prophets, see William Doan and Terry Giles, *Prophets, Performance, and Power: Performance Criticism of the HB* (New York: T&T Clark, 2005). One weakness of such an approach is that no standard definition of orality exists. See Ruth Finnegan, "What is Orality – if Anything?" *BMGS* 14 (1990): 130-49.

⁷⁷ Niditch, *Oral World*, 1. See above (ch. 1) on the influences that have led to this discussion in biblical studies (Finnegan, Lord, Parry, Ong, Goody, Havelock).

⁷⁸ Gunkel, "Prophets as Writers," 24. On this point, see Christopher R. Seitz, *Prophecy and Hermeneutics: Towards a New Introduction to the Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 221, 227.

⁷⁹ As is well known, this was Bernhard Duhm's strategy with respect to the book of Jeremiah; in the end he found very little authentic prophetic speech in the book that bears the prophet's name. See Duhm, *Das Buch Jeremia*, XIII-XIV.

Such a focus on orality in the HB has engendered many strong reactions over the years, as in this example from Robert Carroll: “Even allowing for the orality of its [prophecy’s] original utterance and occurrence, *we now only read the written words*. The once spoken words now only come to us as the written word” [author’s italics].⁸⁰ Alongside Carroll’s simple but important observation stands the thoroughgoing scribalism of Phillip R. Davies, who perceives throughout the HB the effects of late scribal production. Against accounts that stress orality too strongly, Davies contends that prophecy was associated with scribalism from an early period and that attempts to understand it as primarily oral underestimate the degree of scribal participation in the production and canonization of prophetic literature.⁸¹ Even Gunkel himself tempered his prioritization of oral prophecy by highlighting the “rational” prose produced by some prophets.⁸² Some prophets not only spoke in the passion of the ecstatic moment, but also wrote down their short poems and reflected on them at some length. “Men like Amos and Isaiah were not *originally* writers,” but historical circumstances eventually compelled them to fill that role.⁸³ In these disputes the primary point of argument remains the

⁸⁰ Carroll, “Manuscripts Don’t Burn,” 37.

⁸¹ Phillip Davies, “‘Pen of Iron, Point of Diamond’ (Jer 17.1): Prophecy as Writing,” in *Writings and Speech in Israelite and Ancient Near Eastern Prophecy* (ed. E. Ben Zvi and M. H. Floyd; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 2000), 65-81. For a fuller treatment of Davies’ appeal to scribalism, see Davies, *Scribes and Schools*.

⁸² Gunkel, “Prophets as Writers,” 31-32.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 26, emphasis mine. Gunkel went on to assert that Ezekiel and Jeremiah were the first participants in *Schriftprophetie*, and that they symbolize a watershed moment in the transition that took place between traditional oral prophecy and the new scribal prophecy. For an example of the persistence of the idea of a

question of historicity in accounts of prophetic writing. Did prophets write in the ancient Near East? If so, under what circumstances? A consideration of the likelihood of prophetic writing in ancient Near Eastern context is helpful as a background for the representation of Jeremiah as a writer.

In stark contrast to Jeremiah's account of the prophet as a writer, most ANE scholars reject the idea that prophets wrote their own messages. Karel van der Toorn has argued that texts from Mari (especially ARM 26: 192-194; FLP 1674, 2064) demonstrate that prophets occasionally took responsibility for the written transmission of their messages (i.e., they hired a scribe), but that they did not in fact write down their own oracles.⁸⁴ He states succinctly: "Prophets, as we have seen, are not in the habit of writing their messages...."⁸⁵ Marti Nissinen agrees, asserting that, while one cannot absolutely deny the possibility that prophets recorded their own message, the skill of a professional scribe was almost always necessary.⁸⁶ Of the approximately forty Old Babylonian prophetic documents so far discovered, almost all explicitly report the involvement of

"transition" between the oral and the written, see Louis Stulman, *Order Amid Chaos: Jeremiah as Symbolic Tapestry* (BS 57; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press).

⁸⁴ Karel van der Toorn, "From the Oral to the Written: The Case of Old Babylonian Prophecy," in *Writings and Speech in Israelite and Ancient Near Eastern Prophecy* (ed. E. Ben Zvi and M. H. Floyd; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 2000), 228-29. See also idem, "From the Mouth of the Prophet: The Literary Fixation of Jeremiah's Prophecies in the Context of the Ancient Near East," in *Inspired Speech: Prophecy in the Ancient Near East* (ed. J. Kaltner and Louis Stulman; JSOTSup 378; New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 192, where he includes only ARM 26 as a possible reference to prophetic responsibility for written transmission.

⁸⁵ Idem., *Scribal Culture*, 186.

⁸⁶ Marti Nissinen, "Spoken, Written, Quoted, and Invented: Orality and Writtenness in ANE Prophecy," in *Writings and Speech*, 235-71.

some intermediary (not always a scribe) in the transmission process.⁸⁷ From this information, Assyriologists extrapolate that even though documents from the ancient Near East may neglect to mention a scribal intermediary,⁸⁸ they nevertheless intend to communicate that the prophet oversaw the writing of the text by a process of dictation not unlike that described in Jer 36.⁸⁹ Whether a scribal intermediary is specifically mentioned or not, one may be assumed to have been present. The process is laid bare in one Old Babylonian prophetic request: “Send me a discreet scribe! I will have him write down the message which Shamash has sent me for the king.”⁹⁰ In fact, the explicit clarity of prophetic transmission in this example is quite rare, and as a result appropriate caution is called for when reconstructing the historical circumstances by which prophecy took written form. There is little evidence that Mesopotamian prophets ever wrote their own message, but the possibility that such inscription took place on rare occasions cannot be altogether disallowed.

⁸⁷ For this number, see Van der Toorn, “From the Oral to the Written,” 220. According to Marti Nissinen, “Orality and Writteness,” 236, the Neo-Assyrian prophetic corpus includes forty-nine texts.

⁸⁸ The most prominent examples of the lack of prophetic intermediaries were mentioned above in the letters with deities, which are found in ARM 26.192-194; FLP 1674, 2064.

⁸⁹ Ibid., “Orality and Writteness,” 244-47; see also van der Toorn, “From the Oral,” 229. Prophetic activity need not always be understood as an oration that was subsequently written down. In this respect modern scholarship from Gunkel onwards has all too eagerly accepted the model of prophetic textualization described in Jer 36, in spite of recent warnings not to accept the story found therein as simply historical, for which see Robert P. Carroll, *From Chaos to Covenant*, 151; idem, *Jeremiah*, 662-68; McKane, *Jeremiah, Volume II*, 910-21.

⁹⁰ ARM 26.414. The translation belongs to Dominique Charpin, “Le contexte historique et géographiquede prophéties dans les texts retrouvés à Mari,” *BCSMS* 23 (1992): 31. Cited in Nissinen, “Orality and Writteness,” 245-46.

Unfortunately, scholarly preoccupation with a speculated history behind the texts of both biblical and ANE literature misses the larger literary point that, according to the texts, prophets often write their messages. Regardless of whether prophets in the ancient Near East or ancient Israel actually did so, prophets are sometimes presented as writers. When a text states that a prophet wrote, Marti Nissinen points out, one must admit the possibility that no intermediary or scribe is intended.⁹¹ Instead of a typical elision of a standard process of transmission, the presence or absence of the scribe may be literarily significant. At the very least, the omission of the intermediaries involved in the transmission process creates literary immediacy between prophet and text. Instead of dismissing portraits of writing prophets as historically inaccurate, scholars might explore the reasons tradents of prophetic literature would choose to paint their subjects in such a light.

2.3.2 Prophets as writers within the text

The HB exhibits many of the same ambiguities as the ancient Near Eastern material when it comes to prophetic writing. When Jeremiah is said to have written, for example, it is difficult to know if a scribal intermediary is involved. Chief among Jeremiah's canonical predecessors is YHWH's amanuensis, Moses, on whom the portrayal of Jeremiah is dependent.⁹² The first writer in the HB, Moses receives from

⁹¹ Nissinen, "Orality and Writtness," 245-46.

⁹² Christopher R. Seitz, "The Prophet Moses and the Canonical Shape of Jeremiah," *ZAW* 101 (1989): 3-27; William L. Holladay, "The Background of Jeremiah's Self-Understanding: Moses, Samuel, and Psalm 22," *JBL* 83 (1964): 153-64; idem, "Jeremiah and Moses: Further Observations," *JBL* 85 (1966): 17-27.

YHWH a command to write and read aloud in Exod 17:14: “Write this – a reminder in the book, and put it in the ears of Joshua: Indeed, I will totally blot out (אמחה) the memory of Amalek under the heavens.”⁹³ As the recipient of the divine command to write, Moses is not unlike other prophetic figures who receive such commands. Unlike these prophets, however, Moses is closely involved with the inscription of texts of central importance for Israel. After orally receiving the laws of the book of the covenant in Exod 20:1-23:19, Moses “wrote all the words of the LORD” (Exod 24:4; ויכתב משה את כל־דברי יהוה). In Exod 34:27-28, Moses receives a second command to write, on this occasion being told to inscribe the “ten words” previously spoken by YHWH.⁹⁴ The latter of these passages stands in tension with the earlier account of writing in Exod 20, as three of the ten דברים in Exod 34:14-26 are similar to those in the original list of the ten commandments (Exod 20:2-17). Overall, the narrative effect is that several of Israel’s most important legal documents are “over-inscribed.”

In Deuteronomy, the prophet Moses typically delivers speeches rather than writing. Nevertheless, writing does in fact play a prominent role in the book, a significant fact given the role of Deuteronomism in Jeremiah.⁹⁵ Throughout his speech in

⁹³ Note the two texts envisioned by this verse, one that which Moses writes and the other the heavenly book from which Amalek’s name will be removed. Moses writes a memorial that itself references YHWH’s heavenly text.

⁹⁴ For divine writing, see Exod 32:15-16 and 34:1, both of which go to great lengths to describe divine authorship of a very similar text. See Childs, *Exodus*, 615-16 on the difficulty of interpreting these texts.

⁹⁵ For two of the most thorough treatments of Jeremiah’s Deuteronomistic character, see Winfried Thiel, *Die Deuteronomistische Redaktion von Jer 1-25* (WMANT 41; Neukirchen: Neukirchener, 1973) and idem, *Die Deuteronomistische Redaktion von Jer 26-45* (WMANT 52; Neukirchen: Neukirchener, 1981).

Deuteronomy, Moses refers to the written documents of Israel, including the stone tablets given to the people at Sinai (4:10-14; 9:9-11), the written objects of the people Israel (Deut 6:6-9), and the scroll of the Torah to be read by the king (Deut 17:18-20).⁹⁶ In each of these contexts, orality and writtenness stand side by side, much as they do in the book of Jeremiah. Deuteronomic conceptions of prophecy presume a model of speech followed by the subsequent inscription of the spoken words (Deut 18:15-22). The book of Deuteronomy itself is presented as a speech transformed into a text available to subsequent generations. Thus Deuteronomy concludes with phrases such as “when Moses finished writing the words of this teaching on a scroll to their completion...” (Deut 31:24; ויהי ככלות משה לכתב את־דברי התורה־הזאת על־ספר עד תמם) or “Moses wrote down this song on that day” (Deut 31:22; ויכתב משה את־השרית הזאת ביום ההוא). According to the later traditions of Deuteronomy, the people of Israel were to listen to the spoken words of the prophet like Moses, but they were also to “take this book” and let it serve as a witness in their midst to the commitments they had made to God (Deut 31:26).⁹⁷

In the remainder of the HB, there are several other representations of prophetic writers. In Isa 30:8 YHWH enjoins the prophet to “write it on a tablet before them, on a

⁹⁶ Sonnet, *Book Within the Book*, 41.

⁹⁷ On this point, it is helpful to emphasize Michael Floyd’s point that the modern scholar need not accept the Deuteronomic dictation model of prophetic textualization so much as he/she ought to observe its power in the biblical presentation of the matter. Floyd, “Write the Revelation!” (Hab 2:2): Re-imagining the Cultural History of Prophecy,” in *Writings and Speech in Israelite and Ancient Near Eastern Prophecy*, (ed E. Ben Zvi and M. H. Floyd; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 2000), 103-43.

scroll inscribe it” (כתבה על-לוח אתם ועל-ספר הקה). Habakkuk 2:2 contains the command from YHWH to “write the vision; make it plain on the tablets” (כתוב חזון ובאר (על-הלחות). Isaiah issued his own command to “Tie up the testimony; seal the torah among my disciples” (Isa 8:16; צור תעודה התום תורה בלמדי).⁹⁸ Ezekiel, of course, remains the most well-known prophetic writer. The prophet eats the scroll (Ezek 2:9-3:11) and thereby ingests the word of YHWH in written and not spoken form.⁹⁹ His particular (and often peculiar) vision of the prophetic word is that of a written word. Ezekiel’s prophecy is *Schriftgelehrte*, informed by and commenting upon the texts he himself has already received.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, the prophet receives the command to write just as those who preceded him received it (Ezek 24:2). Yet it would be a mistake to reconstruct a history in which prophetic writing arose *de novo* with Ezekiel. In Jeremiah one finds a prophet-priest who is not only speaker, but frequently also a writer. This is especially true of the “second scroll” of Jeremiah (26-52), where the personification of the prophet increasingly points towards this role. A brief look at three such instances of Jeremiah the writer illustrates the importance of the book’s presentation of the prophet as

⁹⁸ The importance of this passage for the transmission of prophecy can hardly be overstated. For decades, groups of disciples were assumed on the strength of passages like these and the last of the servant songs. In recent years, the idea of a band of disciples has faced a stiff challenge, for which see James L. Crenshaw, “Transmitting Prophecy across Generations,” in *Prophets, Sages, and Poets*, 167-72 (St. Louis: Chalice, 2006).

⁹⁹ Davis, *Swallowing the Scroll*, 37, 117. Contrast Niditch, *Oral World*, 83.

¹⁰⁰ As recent research on the Book of the Twelve and Isaiah has demonstrated, far more Israelite texts deserve the adjective *Schriftgelehrte* than those to which the word is usually appended (Jeremiah, Ezekiel). For a synopsis of this research and the effect it is currently having on prophetic research, see Seitz, *Prophecy and Hermeneutics*, 155-253.

one who not only spoke God's Word, but one who also wrote it down. Karel van der Toorn's question seems appropriate: "In what way was Jeremiah a writer-prophet?"¹⁰¹

Jeremiah 29:1: Prior to Jer 29, all writing in Jeremiah comes from YHWH and condemns Israel. Their sin is indelibly inscribed (17:1), they will be written in the dust (17:13), and their king will be memorialized as "stripped" (22:30; ערירי). Beginning with Jer 29, however, a word of hope comes to the people in the form of a prophetic letter. The prophet begins writing out of necessity, to communicate with the exiled people who had already experienced some of the consequences of their inscribed sin, but according to the book the prophet also writes as a response to divine command (30:2). Across long geographical distances, the prophetic word of God through Jeremiah comes to the Israelite exile via a letter. No writer receives explicit mention as the letter begins, though two persons from prominent scribal families do transport the word (29:3; Elisah ben Shaphan and Gemariah ben Hilkiyah). Whether he has written down the words himself or procured a scribal assistant, the text leads readers to believe that the prophet is responsible for the letter.¹⁰²

ואלה דברי הספר אשר שלח ירמיהו הנביא מירושלם אל־יתר זקני הגולה
ואל־הכהנים ואל־הנביאים ואל־כל־העם אשר הגלה נבוכדנאצר מירושלם
בבלה

¹⁰¹ Karel van der Toorn, "From the Mouth of the Prophet," 201.

¹⁰² Assessing the historical probability of the accounts of prophetic writing, van der Toorn, *ibid.*, 196 claims that this is the only historically reliable text with respect to possible writing on Jeremiah's part, though again when he says so he likely intends that Jeremiah was responsible for hiring a scribe to accomplish the task.

These are the words of the letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the remnant of the elders of the exile, and to the priests, prophets, and all the people whom Nebuchadnezzar had exiled from Jerusalem to Babylon.

While the possibility that Jeremiah has in fact hired an unnamed intermediary to write the letter cannot be ruled out, the simple characterization throughout chapters 26-32 is that Jeremiah is “represented as doing his own writing.”¹⁰³ The persistence of this characterization is especially striking given the developing and expansive role of Baruch in the Jeremiah traditions.¹⁰⁴ If scribes are involved in the transmission process, why would scribal tradents neglect to mention their presence? By presenting Jeremiah as the party responsible for the letter to the exiles and also claiming that “these are the words of the letter,” the text asserts for its audience a close and careful mediation of the divine word from prophet to the written page and to the text’s subsequent audience. If in fact a scribal intermediary is intended, the omission of that scribe here is worth noting. Instead of strictly following the dictation model (from YHWH to prophet to scribe to text), in this instance the tradents claim the prophet as the text’s scribe and then reproduce that text. The potential problem of a corrupting scribal intermediary is thus removed, and the embedded text of the letter receives even greater authority with the prophet himself as its writer.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Carroll, “Manuscripts Don’t Burn,” 36; idem, *Jeremiah*, 555; Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 139.

¹⁰⁴ J. Edward Wright, *Baruch ben Neriah*, 1-39.

¹⁰⁵ While the prophet-scribe model stands in tension with the dictation pattern of prophetic transmission, the model accounts primarily for discrete, embedded texts such as the letter of Jer 29, the Book of Comfort (30-33), and the oracle against Babylon in Jer 51:59-64. For third-person accounts of the prophet’s life and work, the dictation model functions more effectively since it treats more openly the role of the scribe and the possibility that many words like them” might be added.

Jeremiah 30:2; 32:10: Prophetic writing in Jer 29 sounds a note of hope, and that message is continued in the following chapter. In Jeremiah 30:2, YHWH commands Jeremiah to write “all the words that I have spoken to you (כל־הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר־דִּבַּרְתִּי (אֵלֶיךָ),” and in so doing introduces the so-called scroll of comfort (Jer 30-33).¹⁰⁶ Strikingly, the prophet in this context receives no command to read aloud or to proclaim, instead receiving only a command to “write in a scroll.” As in Jer 29:1, the textualized prophecy here omits the step of prophetic oral proclamation. The word of the LORD, written by the prophet, provides the hope so important to the ongoing existence of those in exile. Likely a late introduction to the Jeremiah corpus, the scroll of comfort may in fact provide a further piece of evidence that the idea of the prophet as writer continued to develop in the history of the tradition.¹⁰⁷ If this is indeed the case, then it further underscores the trajectory begun in the book of Jeremiah towards the acceptance of the prophetic writer and prophetic writing.

The book of comfort contains two of the most prominent instances of hopeful writing in the book. The first is the new covenant inscribed by YHWH on Israel’s heart (31:31-34, see below), and the second is the symbolic purchase of the fields in Anathoth (Jer 32:10). In the latter, Jeremiah makes a special point to describe his role as a writer: “I wrote in a scroll, sealed it, and had it witnessed (וְאָכַתְבָּ בְּסֵפֶר וְאָחַתְתֶּם וְאָעַד עֵדִים).” All

¹⁰⁶ The extent of “all the words that I have spoken to you” remains ambiguous and resistant to efforts to delineate the extent of the text. Are all the preceding spoken words of Jer 1-25 intended or only those immediately following in the Book of Comfort? See Niditch, *Oral World*, 96.

¹⁰⁷ Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 571.

three of these activities (writing, sealing, and notarizing) occur immediately prior to the entry of Baruch onto the scene. In 32:10 the tradents foreground Jeremiah's prophetic writing, while in 36, 43:1-7, and 45 they accent Baruch as a scribe.¹⁰⁸ By accenting prophetic writing, the scribal role is not downplayed but aggrandized. Portraying the true prophet as a scribe, the scribe and his role is brought into close connection with that of YHWH's messenger.

Jeremiah 51:59-64: Not all of the words the prophet puts down in writing are hopeful. Against Israel's conqueror Babylon, "Jeremiah wrote all the evil that would come upon Babylon in one scroll, all these words that are written concerning Babylon" (51:60; ויכתב ירמיהו את כל־הרעה אשר־תבוא אל־בבל אל־ספר אחד את כל־הדברים האלה (הכתבים אל־בבל)). Susan Niditch reports that "Jeremiah dictates a doomsday prediction to Seraiah," but such a reading once again presumes a particular mode of prophetic transmission that runs counter to the plain sense of the passage.¹⁰⁹ Presumably Niditch bases her reading on the heading in 51:59, "the word which Jeremiah the prophet commanded Seraiah son of Neriah son of Mahseiah . . .," but to assume a dictation model in this situation would be to disregard the simple statement of authorship that immediately follows. Here, the writer-prophet comes to the fore once again, in close tandem with Seraiah (himself from a scribal family) but not necessarily subordinate to him or another scribal figure as a writer.

¹⁰⁸ Walter Brueggemann, "Baruch Connection," 407.

¹⁰⁹ Niditch, *Oral World*, 104.

Similar to the letter transported by Elasah and Gemariah in Jer 29, the model presented is that of a prophet physically passing on his own written words. Seraiah (Baruch's brother) is to read the letter aloud, though the audience, if there is one at all, is unspecified (51:61-63; see chapter four for further on the audience). In addition to reading "all these words," which presumably include the preceding oracle against Babylon in Jer 50-51, Jeremiah commands Seraiah to make two pronouncements against Babylon before weighing down the scroll and throwing it into the Euphrates.¹¹⁰ Given the unique interplay of orality and textuality, scholars have posited that the act of sinking the scroll is incantational in nature.¹¹¹ Writing and reading the prophetic words in Babylon influences the outcomes of history and thus emphasizes the extreme importance of the written word to the book as a whole. The act may also be simply symbolic, intended to communicate to listeners in Babylon the eventual fate of the Neo-Babylonian empire.¹¹² Whichever interpretation one chooses, the centrality of the written word at the end of the book (immediately prior to the historical appendix in Jer 52) signals to readers the significance of text for the history of Israel and its neighbors. Whether the act is "magically" effective or not, the written word remains powerful, full of the authority initially invested in it by YHWH through the prophet.

¹¹⁰ Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2, 433.

¹¹¹ Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 855, refers to the act as "magical." For more on this interpretive possibility, see William McKane, "Jeremiah's Instructions to Seraiah (Jeremiah 51:59-64) in *Pomegranates and Golden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish, and Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom* (ed. D.P. Wright, D. N. Freedman, and A. Hurvitz; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 705.

¹¹² Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2, 433-34.

Texts like Jer 29, 30:2; 32:10, and 51:59-64 yield insight into the role that the prophet played in the prophetic transmission process, providing another link from the divine writer to the text itself in a modified dictation model. They create a relationship of immediacy between the prophet and the text for which he is responsible, eliding the role of the scribe and bringing the text closer to the true prophet Jeremiah. Initially such a move might be seen to undermine the scribal role. Yet the authorization of the embedded texts by direct attribution to the prophet provides the foundation by which others can write a word that is truly divine. Indeed, it provides justification for the long form of the dictation model (i.e., that which includes a scribe).

As Jeremiah developed into its later forms, the multiplicity of models by which the divine word reaches written form are subsumed under the overarching narrative of Jer 36 and its dictation model. Jer 36:32, most importantly, provides an account by which scribes like Baruch inscribe all the words of the prophet. Jeremiah may write short pieces included in the book of Jeremiah, but ultimately scribes are responsible for the contents of the final book. Their voice speaks to the reader via self-reference, and only their exemplar Baruch is given the task of assembling “all the words” (36:2). The dominance of this dictation model notwithstanding, the portrait of the prophetic writer contributes to the over-textualized world of Jeremiah, providing an intermediate step to the authorization of the text as a legitimate mode of transmitting the divine word to human listeners. Of particular importance in this regard is the fact that the word must be divine, and it is to the portrayal of the divine scribe in the chain of transmission that this study now turns.

2.4 Divine writers

The structure of Jeremiah emphasizes that, before the prophet Jeremiah speaks or Baruch the professional scribe writes his words, the words are YHWH's. So YHWH tells the prophet at the time of his calling: הִנֵּה נָתַתִּי דְבָרִי בְפִיךָ, "behold I have put my words in your mouth" (Jer 1:9). YHWH thus begins the chain of transmission that ultimately leads to the divinely-ordained text. To authorize their role and the text of Jeremiah, the tradents of the book must demonstrate that the word they produce is authentically divine. They do so, in part, by means of the dictation model, which traces the written word from the text to scribes to true prophets to YHWH. Yet they also accomplish such authority by means of portraying the divine as a writer. Like the tradents themselves, YHWH the scribe has produced texts for Israel before and does so in Jeremiah as well. The association of textualization and scribalism with the divine writer could hardly do more to underwrite the importance of texts and their producers. Modern critical scholarship on the prophetic literature, as discussed above and in the previous chapter, has primarily focused its attention on the spoken word of YHWH as somehow more authentic, but that interest has created blind spots. In Jeremiah, the portrait of YHWH as a writer illustrates an important shift towards the legitimization of the written word in ancient Israel. Initially an act of condemnation in the book (Jer 17:1,13; 22:30), writing becomes for the people of Israel the hopeful means by which YHWH will redeem his people (31:31-34). Before attending to this trajectory in the book of Jeremiah, it is necessary to consider the notion of the divine writer in both its ancient Near Eastern and canonical contexts. What do gods and goddesses write, and why?

2.4.1 Divine writers in the ancient Near East

Centuries before YHWH took up writing, other deities of the ancient Near East practiced the scribal arts.¹¹³ Anu, Ea, Shamash, Ninurta, Asshur, Marduk, and a host of other deities wrote. Some gods and goddesses shared their skills with humans, as various etiologies of writing demonstrate. In Babylon, scribes learned to write from Nabu, and in Egypt the ibis/baboon deity Thoth conferred similar gifts.¹¹⁴ Purportedly divine writing existed throughout the region and is attested chronologically from the dynasties of ancient Sumer to the early Christian era and beyond.¹¹⁵ While ancient religious communities often intend by such claims that gods and goddesses write *through* specially appointed human agents, occasionally they assert that divine writers produce tangible documents available to human readers. Critical readers, of course, need not accept claims of direct divine provenance, but they would nevertheless do well to take seriously the scribal characterization of goddesses and gods in the ancient Near East. A brief consideration of the Mesopotamian deity Nabu, known to Israel in the exilic period, provides further context for YHWH's role as divine writer.

¹¹³ Shalom M. Paul, "Heavenly Tablets and the Book of Life," in *The Gaster Festschrift* (ed. D. Marcus; New York: Ancient Near Eastern Society, 1974), 345-53. For the terminology "scribal arts," see "The Dialogue Between an Examiner and His Student," trans. by H.L.J. Vanstiphout (*COS* 1.186:592-93).

¹¹⁴ For more on Nabu as "the scribe of Esagila," see A. R. Millard, "Nabu," *DDD*. Similar to ancient Near Eastern writing etiologies, a variety of Greek myths also explain its origin. See Deborah Tarn Steiner, *The Tyrant's Writ: Myths and Images of Writing in Ancient Greece* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994); I.J. Gelb, *A Study of Writing* (rev. ed.; Chicago: Phoenix, 1965), 231-32. For more on Thoth, see "The Assignment of Functions to Thoth," trans. by J. A. Wilson (*ANET*, 8).

¹¹⁵ Revelation 20:12 demonstrates the enduring nature of the concept of divine authorship into the era of early Christianity: "And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Also another book was opened, the book of life. And the dead were judged according to their works, as recorded in the books" (NRSV). See also Luke 10:20; Phil 4:3; Rev 3:5; 13:8.

Rising to the top of the pantheon in the first half of the first millennium BCE, Nabu's ascent in the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian empires parallels the increasing importance of imperial writing during that period.¹¹⁶ As writing became more important in imperial governance, the reverence afforded divine writers increased.¹¹⁷ Naturally, such devotion was particularly important for scribes, but by the middle of the first millennium even kings saw fit to praise Nabu. Ashurbanipal [685-627] in particular devoted himself to the divine scribe, proclaiming him "prince of great gods."¹¹⁸ Subsequent to Ashurbanipal's reign and the defeat of the Neo-Assyrian empire, the personal names of Neo-Babylonian kings demonstrate the deity's enduring popularity (*Nebuchadnezzar*, *Nabopolassar*, *Nabonidus*). Though he took on a number of new roles as a result of his rise to the top of the pantheon, he seems never to have lost his original

¹¹⁶ Millard, "Nabu," 1142. The most thorough study of Nabu, on which Millard's brief article depends, is Francesco Pomponio, *Nabû: Il culto e la figura di un dio del Pantheon babilonese ed assiro* (SS 51; Rome: University of Rome, 1978).

¹¹⁷ This phenomenon is true not only in Mesopotamia, but also in Egypt, where the Egyptian deity Thoth rose to prominence as a scribal deity in the early decades of the Egyptian New Kingdom (roughly the sixteenth through eleventh centuries BCE; R. L. Vos, "Thoth," *DDD*: 1621-28). Before that time, he was regarded as closely tied to the lives of intellectuals, since he was regarded as the thought of the sun-god Re. Unlike Nabu, Thoth never achieved prominence as a supreme deity. His work as Re's scribe included fixing time, measuring fields, adding up taxes, and performing other necessary scribal functions, and in this respect Thoth appears more closely linked to the human scribal realm than Nabu. As mentioned above, Thoth is known especially for inventing both spoken and written language. Serge Sauneron, "La différenciation des langages d'après la tradition égyptienne," *BIFAO* 60 (1960): 31-41. This legend was known not only to Plato, but also to Christians (Eusebius, *Praeparatio evangelica* 1.10; Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 8.27) and Jews, the latter of which associated the god Thoth with Moses himself in the common era.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 79-83; Daniel Arnaud, "Assurbanipal et le dieu Nabû: un nouveau témoignage," in *Mélanges d'histoire des religions offerts à Henri-Charles Puech* (ed. A. Bateau; Paris: University Press of France, 1974), 27-32. For another example of a hymn in praise of Nabu, see Werner Mayer, "Ein Hymnus auf den Gott Nabû" in *Mesopotamica-Ugaritica-Biblica* (ed. M. Dietrich and O. Loretz; Nuekirchen-Vluyn: Butzon & Bercker Kevelaer, 1993), 177-79. Ashurbanipal claimed to have been trained as a scribe by Nabu himself! See Millard, "Nabû," 1142.

status as the “scribe of Esagila” (the primary temple in Babylon).¹¹⁹ However high Nabu rose, he remained a writer. Instead of writing down the divine decrees of Marduk or other deities, he eventually wrote to serve his own ends. Once considered only a divine scribal functionary, the scribe-god rose above all others as the first millennium wore on. There exists no evidence that Nabu was ever revered in Israel, but he was worshipped at Ugarit and in North Syria, and in the post-exilic period the text from Isa 46:1 demonstrates Israelite awareness of the deity.¹²⁰

Ancient Near Eastern deities possessed and produced a variety of texts according to the literature, composing tablets of destiny and even corresponding by letter directly with humans.¹²¹ A few epistolary texts were available to human readers, but more often the exact content of divine writing was hidden to humans. In spite of this difficulty, ancient Near Eastern scribes often described their documents in some detail. They imagined, among other things, that heavenly tablets contained the deeds of humanity, a list of those destined for life and death, the various roles of the gods, and all events that

¹¹⁹ As the chief deity, Nabu may have replaced Marduk in the “sacred marriage” rites, but see Marti Nissinen, “Love Lyrics of Nabû and Tašmetû: An Assyrian Song of Songs?” in *“Und Mose schrieb dieses Lied auf”*: Studien zum Alten Testament und zum Alten Orient (ed. M. Dietrich and I. Kottsieper; Münster: Ugarit, 1998), 585-634.

¹²⁰ Isaiah 46:1: כרע בל קרס נבו היו עצביהם לחיה ולבהמה. “Bel bows down, Nebo stoops; their idols are for the wild animals and cattle.”

¹²¹ Sharon R. Keller, “Written Communications between the Human and Divine Spheres in Mesopotamia and Israel,” in *The Biblical Canon in Comparative Perspective* (ed. K. L. Younger, Jr., W.W. Hallo, and B. F. Batto; Lewiston, N.Y.: Mellen, 1991), 299-313; A. Kirk Grayson, “Literary Letters from Deities and Diviners: More Fragments,” in *Studies in Literature from the ANE by Members of the American Oriental Society* (ed. J. M. Sasson; New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1984), 143-8.

had happened or would happen in the human realm.¹²² In short, the gods inscribed everything that took place, literally documenting the entire world. The wide scope of the divine documentation highlights human ignorance of the tablets' contents, but it also showcases the characterization of the divine as the creator and protector of a heavenly "text."¹²³ With such a multitude of divine texts, it comes as no great surprise, then, that some of the gods' many texts might occasionally come to human eyes and ears. These, however, are the remarkable exceptions that prove the rule when it comes to divine writing.

Chief among heavenly texts unavailable to human readers are the Tablet(s) of Destinies, which were the exclusive domain of the divine.¹²⁴ Once the owner of these tablets, the Babylonian deity Marduk illustrates the zeal with which various deities sought to hold on to them when he speaks of "Babylon, whom I have taken in my hands like the Tablet of Destinies and will not deliver to anyone else."¹²⁵ The tablets confer

¹²² Susan Niditch, *Oral World*, 81, points out in a discussion on the "numinous power of writing" that "God's books in Dan 12:1 and Ps 139:16 have the quality of predetermination."

¹²³ By saying that the divine tablets "documented" human realities, I do not mean to imply that the gods simply wrote down what happened, or that they wrote it and then it happened. That which is spoken, written, and signified was not so easily divisible according to the ancients. Jean Bottéro contends that the ancient Mesopotamian scribe held no distinction between the written signifier and the signified, and in fact held the two together inseparably in their thought. See *Mesopotamia: Writing, Reasoning, and the Gods* (trans. Z. Bahrani and M. van de Mieroop; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 100-102.

¹²⁴ Both singular "tablet" and plural "tablets" appear in the literature. The most oft-cited instance of the Tablet of Destinies occurs in the Babylonian creation epic *Enuma Elish* when, after slaying Tiamat, Marduk retrieved the Tablets from the demonic Kingu. See "Epic of Creation," translated by Benjamin R. Foster (*COS* 1.111:121-22).

¹²⁵ "Erra and Ishum," translated by Stephanie Dalley (*COS* 1.113:413). This text dates from the ninth or eighth centuries BCE.

upon their holder great power, and various deities go to great lengths to possess them.¹²⁶

Not all ancient Near Eastern texts that include the heavenly tablets discuss their contents or production, but that does not refute the underlying assumption that the possessor of the tablets was a potential author of them as well. Scribes portrayed divine books like the Tablets of Destiny as documents in flux, open for revision when their divine holders deemed such a course of action necessary. Written and spoken words issuing from the divine affected and created realities, and as a result humans (especially, but not exclusively, royalty) went to great pains to ensure that their divine patrons would write positively about them in their books. Thus Nebuchadnezzar prays: “On your [Nabu’s] unchangeable tablet, which established the boundaries of heaven and earth, proclaim length of days for me, inscribe long life.”¹²⁷ In spite of the fact that the tablet was “unchangeable,” the king prays for divine favor in the shape of a beneficial inscription.

¹²⁶ Perhaps the best illustration of the importance of holding onto the tablets is “The Akkadian Anzu Story,” (*COS* 3.147:327-35). While the supreme god Enlil bathed, the demonic bird-monster Anzu stole the Tablet of Destinies and flew away with them to a remote mountain. In their description of the theft, the tradents report the magnitude of the event: “To the Tablet of Destinies his hands reached out, the supremacy he took – suspended are the offices!” (lines 81-82). By possessing the documents, Anzu (and subsequently Ninurta) took on the role of the supreme deity in charge of assigning the roles (“offices”) of other deities. In the story of Anzu, the emphasis falls not on the content of the tablet or its production, but on the extraordinary power given to its holder. Neither Enlil, Ninurta, nor Anzu physically write on these tablets, instead gaining by possession of the Tablet extraordinary powers of speech. Once Anzu takes hold of the Tablet, for example, “the utterance of his mouth” becomes “like that of the god, the god (of) Duranki” (line 111). The overall impression of the story emphasizes the intimate connection between speech and writing, a fact all the more striking since the Standard Babylonian text (quoted above) dates from the last half or quarter of the second millennium BCE. From an early period in ancient Near Eastern history one has to deal not only with either speech or writing, but with both.

¹²⁷ Paul, “Heavenly Tablets,” 346. The translation is Paul’s. Note here that oral proclamation and inscription once again stand side by side. Nabu proclaims long life for Nebuchadnezzar and thereby inscribes it in the tablets of destiny. Note also the wide-ranging character of the book, which includes not only the “boundaries of heaven and earth,” but also the king’s destiny. Recall Jer 17:1, which describes one of YHWH’s inscriptions against the king.

The heavenly tablets, then, are vital both to the heavenly realm and to the earth and its inhabitants.

Kings and rulers imagined the divine not only as writers, but also as readers of texts addressed to the divine realm from the domain of humans.¹²⁸ Mesopotamian royalty often sought advice or reported to the divine realm on military matters, presumably sending such information via a cultic intermediary.¹²⁹ Attested from the nineteenth to the seventh centuries BCE in Mesopotamia, the letter-prayer provided a relatively cheap and effective means of communication with the gods, one available to rich and poor alike.¹³⁰ Highly formulaic literary productions, the prayers demonstrate a textual interaction with the gods that likely existed alongside oral proclamation.¹³¹ Thus one ancient Sumerian prayer “To Enki” enjoins the deity to “Speak!” and to “Say!” in response to the dire situation of the petitioner.¹³² Though the nature of a divine oral response remains unclear,

¹²⁸ Keller, “Written Communications,” 300; William W. Hallo, “Letters, Prayers, and Letter-Prayers,” in *Proceedings of the Seventh World Congress of Jewish Studies: Studies in the Bible and the Ancient Near East* (ed. I. Gutman; Jerusalem: The Perry Foundation for Biblical Research, 1977), 17-27; R. Borger, “Gottesbrief,” *RIA* 3: 575-76.

¹²⁹ For more on this process generally, see Marti Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 2003), 5. Letters addressed to the divine realm often received answers via cultic means quite distinct from strictly oral prophetic models. For a treatment of extispicy intermediation in the Neo-Assyrian empire and numerous examples, see Ivan Starr, ed., *Queries to the Sun God: Divination and Politics in Sargonid Assyria* (SAA 4; Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1990), XXX-XXV; Beate Pongratz-Leisten, *Herrschaftswissen in Mesopotamien: Formen der Kommunikation zwischen Gott und König im 2. und 1. Jahrtausend v. Chr.* (SAAS X; Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1999).

¹³⁰ Hallo, “Letters,” 27; idem, “Individual Prayer in Sumerian: The Continuity of a Tradition,” *JAOS* 88 (1968): 71-89.

¹³¹ Maria DeJong Ellis, “The Goddess Kititum Speaks to King Ibalpiel: Oracle Texts from Ishchali,” *Mari* 5 (1987): 254.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 85. For an example of a royal letter-prayer at Mari from Zimri-lim to the river deity, see ARM 26.191.

scholars possess remarkable evidence that the gods responded, at least occasionally, *in writing* to written human communication. Written communication between the human and the divine realm was a two-way street.

Messages from gods in the ancient Near East are reported to have arrived via a cultic intermediary in most instances, as in the majority of the prophetic corpus from Mari and Neo-Assyria.¹³³ The various conveyers of the message between divine and the human communicants are almost always specified, as in ARM 26.194, where a message from Shamash to Zimri-lim is communicated via an *apilum*, a prophetic messenger not restricted to the temple.¹³⁴ However, some of these texts contain no such intermediary identification, implicitly purporting to be directly written words of the divine.¹³⁵ The absence of intermediary identification is especially striking when letters on the same tablet specify the information when others do not. ARM 26.192 and 193 are on the same tablet as 194, yet they betray no explicit awareness of the human agent in their transmission.¹³⁶ To demonstrate the divine textual interaction further, the gods explicitly claim to have read and dealt with human texts. Asshur makes the point succinctly to Asshurbanipal in a Neo-Assyrian text: “You sent a tablet of peace and good tidings and

¹³³ Nissinen, *Prophets*, 5-8. See also the description of Old Babylonian prophecy in Karel van der Toorn, “Old Babylonian Prophecy: Between the Oral and the Written,” *JNSL* 24 (1998): 55-70.

¹³⁴ Nissinen, *Prophets*, 5-6.

¹³⁵ Keller, “Written Communications,” 302, 304; Ellis, “Goddess Kititum,” 237, regards these letters as “literary letters from diviners” and assumes the existence of human intermediaries, contra Keller and Grayson, “Literary Letters,” 147-48. Yet the omission of the transmission is an important bit of evidence that these letters may have been regarded as direct transmissions from the divine realm.

¹³⁶ For two additional Old Babylonian examples of writing purported to be from the divine (FLP 1674 and FLP 2064), see Ellis, “Goddess Kititum,” 235-66.

peace to the presence of my [god]head!”¹³⁷ Other texts from the gods directly quote human documents, as in the case of SAA 3.41 and 42, where the phrase “as to what you wrote to me” appears before a quotation of a previous military report. Such evidence demonstrates convincingly that divine writers were portrayed as responding to human documents. Like the human scribes who described them, the gods of the ancient Near East are more than powerful and compelling speakers. It comes as no great surprise, then, to discover that those tradents responsible for the portrait of YHWH in the HB perceived the divine and the divine’s representatives as similarly skilled in the scribal arts.

2.4.2 YHWH as writer

The HB contains no etiology for writing along the lines of those attested for Egypt or Mesopotamia, proceeding instead on the assumption that certain humans could write and that YHWH himself did so whenever the situation warranted.¹³⁸ In spite of this difference, the Israelite concept of writing remains inseparably related to the wider ancient Near Eastern notion, as appears clearest in the concept of divine records consigning the destiny of humankind to honor or shame. Like other deities, YHWH writes on mysterious documents available only in the heavenly realm, and humans can only request that the deity write in ways that match their agendas. In Ps 69:29 the complaint goes forth regarding the enemies of the speaker: “Let them be wiped out of the

¹³⁷ SAA 3.44:28, quoted in Keller, “Written Communications,” 301.

¹³⁸ For another example of the divine gift of writing, see “Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta,” translated by Thorkild Jacobsen (*COS* 1.170:548).

book of the living (ספר חיים).” Isaiah 34:16-17 counsels readers to “Search in the scroll of the LORD and read aloud” (דרשו מעל־ספר יהוה וקראו), a text that may refer to some other document but likely refers to Tablets of Destiny.¹³⁹ As with other gods and goddesses, YHWH keeps records by writing a variety of documents available only to YHWH.¹⁴⁰ Beyond the private divine tablets, however, YHWH also writes for human readers. According to the HB one of the most important interactions YHWH has with Israel takes place *in writing*.¹⁴¹

At Sinai, YHWH is the writer par excellence. None other than Moses himself describes the scribal activity of YHWH when, in an intercessory plea on Israel’s behalf, he tells YHWH to “wipe me out of the record (ספר) that you have written” (Exod 32:32).¹⁴² For the reader of the HB, this is one of the first explicit introductions to the divine book kept by YHWH,¹⁴³ and it is significant that such a reference appears in the

¹³⁹ Paul, “Heavenly Tablets,” 347.

¹⁴⁰ For other references of divine tablets in the HB, See Isa 4:3; 65:6; Ezek 2:9-10; Zech 5:1-4; Mal 3:16; Ps 40:8; 51:3; 56:9; 109:14; 139:16; Dan 7:10 and Neh 13:14.

¹⁴¹ One example of YHWH’s awareness of writing deserves special mention. In Jer 29:25 YHWH knows about and comments on Shemaiah’s letter: “In your name you sent a letter to all the people who are in Jerusalem...”

¹⁴² Paul, “Heavenly Tablets,” 347. Against the preponderance of evidence both within and external to the HB, some assert that the text described here was a census list. For references, see William H.C. Propp, *Exodus 19-40* (AB 2A; New York: Doubleday, 2006), 565.

¹⁴³ I say “explicit” here because Exod 17:14b may be interpreted as an oblique reference to YHWH’s heavenly document. To understand the passage this way, one must understand the entire verse to refer to two documents, one the document YHWH commands to be written (Exod 17:14a) and the other a book from which the memory of Amalek will be blotted out. Such a reading is strengthened by the fact that the root מחה is employed both here and in the reference from Exod 32:32. Note that in Exod 17:14 and 24:7, Moses is the primary writer, not YHWH.

account of the revelation of the two tablets.¹⁴⁴ The importance of YHWH's characterization as an author appears most clearly in Exodus' account of the divine theophany at Mt. Sinai. Exod 31:18 summarizes events succinctly:

וַיִּתֵּן אֱלֹהִים כְּתָבֵי
בְּאֶצְבַּע אֱלֹהִים

Then he gave to Moses, when he finished speaking with him on Mt. Sinai, the two tablets of the testimony (הַעֲדוּת), tablets of stone written by the finger of God.

In the usual dictation model, YHWH speaks and human agents write down the words of the divine speaker.¹⁴⁵ This passage demonstrates that YHWH is both speaker and writer, with the latter role particularly emphasized by the description of the fact that the tablets were written by the finger of God.¹⁴⁶ Exodus 32:16 emphasizes this point further, observing that the tablets were “the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, engraved upon the tablets.”¹⁴⁷ YHWH had written the tablets in advance of Moses' visit to Sinai and “to teach them” [i.e., Israel] לְהוֹרֹתָם; Exod 24:12). Thus conceived, the

¹⁴⁴ Richard Elliot Friedman, *Commentary on the Torah* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2002), 286, contends that the document referenced here is either the scroll concerning Amalek in Exod 17:14 or the scroll of the covenant code in Exod 24:7. That Moses should be erased from legal or imprecatory texts, however, makes little sense as a threat, whereas removal from the divine book of life fits quite well.

¹⁴⁵ For this process, see Exod 24:4: “Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD,” and Deut 31:24. Upon entry into the promised land, Joshua builds memorial stones “according to what is written in the book of the Torah of Moses.” The reference is to Moses' book (Deut 27:3-8) rather than to YHWH's command! See also Josh 1:8 for “the book of this Torah” (סֵפֶר הַתּוֹרָה הַזֶּה).

¹⁴⁶ In addition to concerning itself with the author of text, the tradents of Exodus also take pains to describe the exact nature of the document that is produced in Exod 32:15. It is written on both sides, front and back. Unfortunately, Exodus is not always so specific on the details of the literary transmission, as in Exod 34:28, where the writer of the Ten Commandments is unclear. See Jean-Pierre Sonnet, *The Book within the Book: Writing in Deuteronomy* (BI 14; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 44.

¹⁴⁷ YHWH not only writes these documents one time, but he also does so a second time, a fact reminiscent of the rewritten scroll in Jer 36. See Exod 34:1; Deut 10:2, 4.

tablets stand apart from an intermediary act of oral transmission. Unlike the mysterious and unavailable tablets of destiny, here are documents produced by YHWH's own hand and made available to human eyes. Here the chain of transmission is broken down entirely, with YHWH transmitting directly to a text.

The characterization of YHWH as a writer in Exodus contrasts somewhat with the deity's role in Deuteronomy. According to both books, the scribe YHWH directly produces Israel's most important written text, the two tablets of the testimony.¹⁴⁸ Like Exodus, Deuteronomy specifies the fact that the tablets are written "by the finger of God" (באצבע אלהים, Deut 9:10), thus emphasizing the divine origin of the tablets' contents. Unlike parallel accounts in Exodus, however, the Horeb traditions in Deuteronomy take pains to associate this written transmission with YHWH's spoken words:

ויתן יהוה אלי את־שני לוחת האבנים כתבים באצבע אלהים ועליהם ככל־
הדברים אשר דבר יהוה עמכם בהר מתוך האש ביום הקהל

Then the LORD gave to me the two stone tablets, written by the finger of God, and on them (it was) according to all the words that the LORD had spoken with you on the mountain from the midst of the fire on the day of the Assembly (Deut 9:10).

YHWH did indeed write the two stone tablets, but he also declared their contents to Moses.¹⁴⁹ Moreover, on Horeb additional *הקנים* and *משפטים* were given to Moses whose

¹⁴⁸ Sonnet, *Book Within the Book*, 43. The content of these tablets is uncertain, even if the tradents of Deut 34:28 attempt to associate their contents with the Ten Commandments.

¹⁴⁹ One might understand the Deuteronomic account of writing transmission as an admission of scribal involvement, a sort of demythologization of sacred written texts taking place alongside Deuteronomic cultic reform. See Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972), 190-243.

inscription was not divine (Deut 4:13-14). There thus exists a distinction between laws written by YHWH and those spoken by YHWH but inscribed only by Moses. Whereas both Exodus and Deuteronomy describe YHWH as a writer, they understand this act's relationship to speech differently.

The production of tangible divine documents available to humans is unique to the theophany at Sinai/Horeb, but divine writing persists in the remainder of the HB. Such writing most often focuses on the hidden divine tablets of YHWH (Isa 4:3; Isa 65:6; Mal 3:16), but also attends to the written documents produced at Sinai/Horeb (Josh 1:8; 2 Kgs 22-23; Isa 30:8-9; Jer 8:8; Ezek 44:24; 43:11). Elsewhere in the biblical literature, the written word plays a mysterious role, a fact seen especially in the divine writing of Dan 5 but also present in Num 5:11-31.¹⁵⁰ Such occasional "magical" documents should not distract from the fact that the two primary kinds of written documents in the HB are the heavenly tablets and the תורת יהוה. To understand the importance of YHWH as a writer in Jeremiah one must keep in mind these two types of inscription, one associated with the mythical writing of the ancient Near East and the other a document particular to Israel and its story.

Three paradigmatic texts demonstrate the importance of YHWH's writing in Jeremiah, with the first two reflecting the notion of the divine writer (Jer 17:1,13; Jer 22:30) and the last departing from that characterization by displaying an entirely different sort of "text," a new covenant written on the hearts of the people (Jer 31:31-34). The

¹⁵⁰ Niditch, *Oral World*, 80.

account of the divine writer validates the propriety of writing in connection with the divine realm, reminding readers of YHWH's previous writing and its significance in the life of Israel. As writers, the scribes and, according to the book of Jeremiah, the prophet himself, simply follow in YHWH's footsteps.

Jeremiah 17:1, 13: To understand Jer 31 and the need for a new written covenant, one must begin by observing the extent of Judah's sin, which is itself written.¹⁵¹ Jeremiah 17:1-4 uses a writing metaphor to communicate the extent of Judah's covenantal failure:

חטאת יהודה כתובה בעט ברזל
בצפרן שמיר חרושה על-לוח לבם
ולקרנות מזבחותם

The sin of Judah is written (כתובה) with an iron pen,
with a diamond point engraved (חרושה) on the tablet of their heart,
and on the horns of their¹⁵² altars.

Neither the utensil nor the writing surface corresponds to what the reader expects. Instead of a reed with a soft point, the writer works with an iron pen and a diamond point. In place of papyrus or a stone tablet, the author inscribes the tablet of the human heart and the horns of altars.¹⁵³ While the writing implements are explicitly described, the writer(s)

¹⁵¹ Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 486 and Carr, *Writing on the Tablet*, 147-48.

¹⁵² The MT preserves the reading מזבחותיכם but here I read with the Peshitta, Vulgate, and the LXX. See McKane, *Jeremiah, Volume I*, 385.

¹⁵³ For a brief summary of the usual writing tools in sixth century Judah, see King, *Jeremiah: An Archaeological Companion*, 85-88.

in this instance is far less clear. Passive participles (חרושה, כתובה) obscure the agent, emphasizing the permanence of the sin without revealing *who* has written it. It may be that Judah has inscribed its sin through repeated transgressions with foreign deities “by every green tree and on every high hill” (17:2). The “writing” that occurred on the horns of the altars likely refers to sacrificial acts performed by human agents. Since humans alone would have inscribed with sacrificial blood, they must be the cause of what is on their heart, but it is YHWH who documents this sin. Their repeated abandonment of YHWH constitutes a metaphorical writing on their heart that could be erased only by the one against whom they sinned.

As has been discussed at some length above, the notion that deities can and do write in ways unavailable to humans is well attested in ancient Mesopotamia. Indeed, in this very chapter (17:13) YHWH asserts that “those who turn aside from me will be written in the underworld” (יסורי בארץ יכתבו).¹⁵⁴ The writer in the verse remains elusive, though the fact that YHWH is speaking suggests that the tradents imagine a divine writer.¹⁵⁵ Robert Carroll avers that the permanence of one’s entry into the book of life is contrasted in this instance with the impermanence of one’s name being written in the “earth.”¹⁵⁶ William Holladay contends that ארץ in this instance does not mean

¹⁵⁴ Here I read with the Qere for וסורי:יסורי . Note once more the passive use of the root כתב.

¹⁵⁵ Paul, “Heavenly Books,” 347.

¹⁵⁶ Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 359.

“land,” but signifies the inscription of Judah’s name in Sheol.¹⁵⁷ YHWH is most likely the one who writes the inscription of sin on Israel’s hearts in 17:1.

Chapter 17, then, contains two verses pointing to YHWH as a writer. Humans indelibly “write” their sins on their heart, and as a result they trigger a similar act of writing on YHWH’s part, an inscription that contrasts strongly with the permanent writing of their sin. Humans are unable to read this writing on their hearts, and indeed only YHWH “searches the heart” (חַקֵּר לֵב; 17:9). Human and divine “writing” become intricately intertwined, the latter a reaction to the former. William McKane helpfully describes the relationship between 17:1 and 13:

The sins of Israelites are incised on their hearts with a diamond point (v.1), but the record which might preserve a memorial of them and save them from oblivion is written with a finger on rootless dust. Over against those who leave behind a ‘name’ and a memorial, apostates disappear into nothingness and are lost in oblivion.¹⁵⁸

With sin written on the tablet of its heart, Judah needs to be written in the book of life but instead is written in the underworld. Though inscriptions in the ancient Near Eastern heavenly books remain open to change, such writing requires revision by none other than the deity. In short, the tablet of Judah’s heart must be rewritten entirely.

Jeremiah 22:30: This is true as a result of the cultic failures of Judah, and also the failures of its royal leadership. Kings, as much of the people, stand in danger of being

¹⁵⁷ Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 503, who compares this passage to Ps 69:29 and relies on the work of Mitchell Dahood, “The Metaphor in Jeremiah 17,13,” *Bib* 48 (1967): 164-66. For more on the translation of “underworld,” see “אֲרִי,” *HALOT* 1:90 and references therein.

¹⁵⁸ McKane, *Jeremiah, Volume I*, 408.

“written” by YHWH for their wicked deeds. After harshly criticizing the rule of Coniah in 22:24-27, YHWH speaks through the prophet in 22:30:¹⁵⁹

כתבו את־האיש הזה ערירי גבר לא־יצלה בימיו כי לא יצלה מזרעו איש ישב
על־כסא דוד ומשל עוד ביהודה

Write this man down: “childless, a man that will not succeed in his days,” for no one from his seed will succeed, a man sitting on the throne of David or ruling any longer in Judah.

As in Jer 17:1 and 13, the implied writer behind the command to “write this man down as childless (ערירי)” is left unspecified.¹⁶⁰ Robert Carroll proposes two interpretive possibilities regarding writer and text (not mutually exclusive options, he is quick to state): a land registration produced by a scribe or heavenly tablets of destiny produced by the divine.¹⁶¹ To these possibilities John Bright adds a royal census list written by a scribe.¹⁶² The exact nature of the document and its author need not finally be decided in a poetic text like this one, especially since the suggestions adduced by Carroll and Bright are not mutually exclusive. If one imagines that Coniah was written in a royal register or

¹⁵⁹ Though Jer 22:24-27 constitutes a likely Deuteronomistic addition to an earlier text, I choose here to consider 22:24-30 as a unit. Thus, descriptions of 22:28-30 that emphasize the character of the last half of the passage in isolation from the Deuteronomistic prose, are disallowed. Walter Brueggemann describes 22:28-30 as “one of the most poignant and pathos-filled units in the Bible.” *To Pluck Up, To Tear Down: A Commentary on the Book of Jeremiah 1-25* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 196. Similarly, John Bright, describes the passage as one that speaks of Coniah “in a tone of deepest pity.” *Jeremiah*, 145. Read in its present form including verses 24-27, however, the figure Coniah hardly seems pitiable as the object of YHWH’s wrath.

¹⁶⁰ For several options in the translation of ערירי, see McKane, *Jeremiah, Volume I*, 550.

¹⁶¹ Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 440-41. While the understanding of YHWH as the recipient of his own command appears strange to modern readers, the notion is not foreign to the HB or to the ancient Near East. One need refer only to the creation stories of Gen for examples of divine self-address.

¹⁶² John Bright, *Jeremiah*, 143. In spite of the fact that Coniah (=Jehoiachin) actually had seven sons (2 Chr 3:17-18), Bright contends that Coniah was considered “childless” since none succeeded him as king.

census list as “childless,” then one must also assume with the ancients that such an event was recorded in the heavenly tablets of destiny. Multiple documents attest the fact, and multiple writers record it. God, prophet, and scribe are all capable of writing, and it is not always immediately clear who is doing what, since all are capable of fulfilling similar functions in the narrative world of Jeremiah. In the book of Jeremiah, the command to write has multiple recipients, including scribes, prophets, and gods. Similarly, the plural command to write in Jer 22:30 may also have multiple recipients. By the power of such a broad command, YHWH makes writers of those who initially hear it, and thus understands the entire audience as a writing audience. In this sense YHWH is not unlike the master Mesopotamian scribe who commands his charges to write.¹⁶³

Jeremiah is not the only place in the HB where YHWH commands writing. In Hab 2:2 and Ezek 24:2, YHWH commands the prophet to write down, respectively, the “vision” (חזון) and the “name of the day” (שם היום):

כתוב חזון
ובאר על-הלחות
למען ירוץ קורא בו

Write the vision!
Inscribe it clearly on the tablets
so that he will run, reading it. (Hab 2:2)

בן-אדם כתב-לך את-שם היום את-עצם היום הזה סמך מלך-בבל אל-ירושלם
בעצם היום הזה

¹⁶³ For the role of the master scribe in the education of Mesopotamian students, see “The Dialogue Between a Supervisor and a Scribe” and “The Dialogue Between an Examiner and a Student,” both translated by H.L.J. Vanstiphout (*COS* 1.185-86:590-93).

Mortal, write down this date, this very day: The king of Babylon pressed upon Jerusalem on this very day. (Ezek 24:2)

In addition to the specified content of the documents, there is little question in these contexts as to whom specifically YHWH addresses. Specific prophets write specific documents in these verses. In Jeremiah itself one finds the most conspicuous example of documentary description when Jer 36 takes great pains to describe the relationship of the prophet to the scribe and the manner by which they transmitted YHWH's word. Contrast these instances of scribal certainty with Jer 22:30, where the question of writer remains unsettled. Nevertheless, such ambiguity should not obscure the clear reference to YHWH as the one commanding the writing. YHWH is interested not only in ending the line of Davidic succession, but in documenting that end. Even if YHWH does not actually write the document, the deity remains behind written records of the world and its history. By his command, YHWH makes of Coniah a written record, remembered only for the impotence of his reign against the onslaught of YHWH's sovereign will.

Jeremiah 31:31-34: Though both Israel and her king have been memorialized in writing as sinful figures, YHWH's heavenly Tablets of Destiny may yet be revised to reflect a "hope and a future" (29:11). To effect a change in the tablets of destiny, however, YHWH must write anew the covenant "with the house of Israel and the house of Judah" (31:31). The old written covenant of Exodus and Deuteronomy, now broken (31:32), is to be rewritten. Verses 33 and 34 describe just such an event:

כי זאת הברית אשר אכרת את־בית ישראל אחרי הימים ההם נאם־יהוה נתתי
את־תורתך בקרבם ועל־לבם אכתבנה והייתי להם לאלהים והמה יהיו־לי לעם
ולא ילמדו עוד איש את־רעהו ואיש את־אחיו לאמר דעו את־יהוה כי־כולם

ידעו אותי למקטנם ועד־גדולם נאם־יהוה כי אסלה לעונם ולחטאתם לא
אזכר־עוד

But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days – oracle of the LORD – I will put my Torah in their inmost being and on their heart I will write it. I will be to them God and they will be for me a people. No longer will a person teach his neighbor or a person his brother saying, “Know the LORD.” Instead all of them will know me, from their smallest to their greatest – oracle of the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will not remember any more.

No longer would the law be written on stone tablets and put in the ark of the covenant;

instead it would be written on Israel’s heart (על־לבם) and placed within them (בקרבם).

YHWH’s new and old covenants remain constant insofar as they are both put *in writing*.¹⁶⁴ As YHWH wrote at Sinai, so also YHWH writes the new covenant in Jeremiah, only in this context the new text is human. Scribal imagery dominates in spite of the covenantal novelty. The passage does not assert a speaker over against a writer, but merely a more effective writer and a more faithful “text.”¹⁶⁵ No longer does the divine write only the heavenly Tablets of Destiny or the written Torah; the notion of YHWH’s texts expands to include human beings. YHWH inscribes Israel’s new covenant in such a way that human hearts become palimpsests, with YHWH the only

¹⁶⁴ McKane, *Jeremiah, Volume II*, 818, who helpfully asks whether the breaking of the covenant in verse 32 intends a periodic rupture or a final one. McKane contends that הִפַּר in this instance conveys a periodic break and thus cites and agrees with David Kimchi, who asserts that “not like the covenant” does not mean “not the covenant,” but rather, “the Sinai covenant fundamentally changed.”

¹⁶⁵ Note here also the fact that YHWH inscribes Israel and thus provides an entrée whereby readers of this text can imagine themselves as textualized beings. See chapter 4 (“Inscribing an Audience”) for further on this passage and its significance for the textualization of Jeremiah’s audience.

scribe able to erase their sin and replace it with something new (17:10).¹⁶⁶ YHWH, who alone is able to read and revise the sinful human heart (17:9), is a unique scribe in Jeremiah, the ultimate authority behind prophetic writers and professional scribes.

YHWH's activity as a writer both outside and within the book of Jeremiah points to the significance of texts and their producers for Israel. Scribes and prophets write in Jeremiah, and as a result of such portrayal the tradents legitimize their similar work. Nevertheless, texts and those who produce them receive their ultimate imprimatur as the divine word from a divine source. While YHWH most often speaks to the prophet, who then begins the process of textualization (sometimes through a scribe, sometimes not), the deity writes occasionally, and in so doing behaves similarly to those who textualize the prophetic word. Associating writers and texts with important prophets and scribes, tradents authorize their texts on a human level. Associating them with YHWH, scribal tradents authorize themselves and the textualized products of their work on a divine level.

2.5 Summary

By means of the chain of transmission, Jeremiah provides a theological account of writers. Though writers can corrupt the divine word, the dictation of divine words from the true prophet to the scribe ensures its faithful reproduction. Moreover, the portrayal of prophets and YHWH as writers underwrites the scribal task, one intimately connected with the divine and full of great potential as a result. Texts related to the divine,

¹⁶⁶ Elsewhere in Jeremiah, the prophet entreats YHWH not to blot out (מחה) Judah's sin (18:23). Other texts encourage Israel's enemies to be blotted out from the heavenly books (e.g., Amalek, Exod 17:14). Only YHWH has the power to write, to rewrite, and to erase.

according to the book of Jeremiah, have great power as a result of their origins in YHWH.

The relationship between writers and that which is written, so abstract in modern theoretical conversations, manifests itself concretely in the book of Jeremiah. The book exhibits an interest not in abstract texts unknown to the reader, but in precisely those texts that constitute the book itself. Like the scribes so prevalent in the book, texts in Jeremiah exist as both literary figures and historical realities, characters and agents in the chain of transmission from YHWH to the text itself. In the next chapter, this study moves from the scribes who produced Jeremiah to texts within that book. Though never wholly separate from those who produced them, texts take on a life of their own, personified and active in the textual world of Jeremiah.

3. Inscribing the Written in the Book of Jeremiah

The book of Jeremiah's account of divine, prophetic, and scribal writers authorizes the prophetic word as text by carefully connecting the written word to its divine source. As a part of such authorization, the book of Jeremiah also endorses the written prophetic word itself by appealing to and endorsing specific documents that appear within and constitute the book of Jeremiah. Similar to writers in the book of Jeremiah, written ספרים serve two roles in the book of Jeremiah. This chapter will show that *within* the represented world of Jeremiah, the tradents represent scrolls as having several distinct characteristics. First, they are increasingly independent actors; second, they are able to speak across geographical and temporal distances; third, they are both fragile and durable, and fourth, they exist in both mundane and divine realms. *Beyond* that represented world, Jeremiah's tradents inscribe prophetic texts by means of self-reference, drawing attention not only to the function of ספרים as characters in the narrative, but also to the texts *constituting* that narrative.¹ These categories of textual inscription are not mutually exclusive, but instead interact to create a coherent account of the book of Jeremiah's textualization. Texts that function within the plot extend beyond it into the world of the reader by means of self-reference, all the while subtly legitimizing the written word as a mode of prophetic communication. As we shall see, the scribes

¹ Following Stefan Wild, I intend by "self-reference" a "text that speaks about itself." "Why self-referentiality?," in *Self-Referentiality in the Qur'an* (ed. S. Wild; Diskurse der Arabistik 11; Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz, 2006), 6. Contrast this understanding of textual self-references with authorial self-references, for which see Benjamin R. Foster, "Self-Reference of an Akkadian Poet," *JAOS* 103 (1983): 123-30; J. Liesen, "Strategical Self-References in Ben Sira," in *Treasures of Wisdom: Studies in Ben Sira and the Book of Wisdom* (ed. N. Calduch-Benages and J. Vermeylen; Leuven: Leuven University, 1999), 63-74.

responsible for Jeremiah offer a consistent and thorough account of the scroll of Jeremiah and its textualization. Thus they produce a self-authenticating text.

3.1 Jeremiah's account of textual inscription

Self-references and ספריים appear consistently at critical junctures in Jeremiah, so that few parts of the book exist apart from an account of their inscription.² This textualization narrative is especially evident in the second half of the book (chs. 26-52), where thirty-two of the thirty-four references to ספריים in Jeremiah occur. Unfortunately, one typical mistake among interpreters of Jeremiah has been to confuse this surprisingly consistent portrait of textualization with a historical account of the move from oral to written prophecy.³ Against the proposals of Holladay, Weippert, Bright, and others that the tradents of Jeremiah provide an accurate portrayal of Jeremiah's textualization, this study seeks to demonstrate that those responsible for the book of Jeremiah sought to present a theological portrait of the book's textualization.⁴ While Jeremiah's tradents

² Pamela Scalise, "Scrolling through Jeremiah: Written Documents as a Reader's Guide to the Book of Jeremiah," *RevExp* 101 (2004): 218. Many of these critical junctures also reveal the hand of scribal redactors, as is most obvious in the movement of the OAN from their original location after 25 (see LXX) to chapters 46-51. While Scalise describes the textualization narratives of Jeremiah as "reading clues," in this study I understand self-references and ספריים as part of a wider narrative account of textualization. Thus understood, references to texts and textualization in the book of Jeremiah are not only clues for ancient and modern readers (though they certainly serve this function), but are also elements of an argument for the legitimacy of reading prophetic texts as a part of the transmission of the divine word.

³ As Walter Brueggemann, *The Theology of the Book of Jeremiah* (OTT; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 27-35 has pointed out, a similar phenomenon exists with respect to the historical personality of the prophet Jeremiah, with some scholars too easily accepting the portrait of the prophet as a historical one.

⁴ William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1* (Herm.; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986); idem, *Jeremiah 2* (Herm.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989); Helga Weippert, *Die Prosareden des Jeremiabuches* (BZAW 132; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1973); John Bright, *Jeremiah* (AB 21; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1965).

draw attention to the text they have a hand in creating, they do not interest themselves so much in an accurate historical portrayal of the process as they attempt to make the case for the legitimacy of the written word as a conduit for the divine word. In short, they develop Jeremiah's theology of writing and the written.

The accounts of texts and textualization in Jeremiah encourage readers to consider the particular scroll of Jeremiah. Together with the characterization of scrolls within the plot, Jeremianic self-references serve two complementary functions: 1) they invite the reader further into the book's narrative world and 2) they propel the scrolls outward from that narrative, into the reader's world.⁵ When a reader or hearer perceives a phrase such as "in this book," they must delve deeper into the narrative to find out what exactly that book is, its extent, character, and the nature of its activity in the plot.⁶ Forced to answer such questions, readers perceive their own position relative to the text before them. Readers attempt to resolve the uncertainty surrounding "this book," and the fact that they do so thrusts the scrolls that figure in the narrative plot outward into the readers' world. As a part of the narrative of Jeremiah, the dual inscription of texts in the book of Jeremiah creates a broadly coherent narrative of textualization that includes the reader as interpreter of the written prophetic word.

⁵ The differences in these two effects are subtle since they both have the similar effect of inextricably intertwining audience and text. Nevertheless, the former effect situates the reader in the narrative world, whereas the latter moves that same narrative out into the world of the hearer/reader.

⁶ Edgar W. Conrad, "Heard but not Seen: The Representation of 'Books' in the Old Testament," *JSOT* 54 (1992): 51-53.

Moreover, the book of Jeremiah creates its own reading audience (as will be discussed in the next chapter), one that can receive it as an authoritative witness.⁷ The first section of this chapter seek to demonstrate the coherence of the book and its textualization narrative – an essential task, due to Jeremiah’s complex literary contours.⁸ Having examined the broad outline of Jeremiah’s textualization narrative, the chapter then delves deeper into the function of Jeremianic self-references and the resulting characterization of texts as conduits of a truly divine prophetic word.

Both within and beyond the plot of Jeremiah, scrolls follow an overarching lost-found literary pattern. Here Edgar Conrad’s insight into the narrative representation of books in the entire HB proves instructive. He points out that in Torah and the Deuteronomistic History, the ספר התורה / ספר הברית (“the scroll of the Torah”/“the scroll of the covenant”), first given by God in Exod 24:4-7, disappears from the narrative for wide stretches of literary space.⁹ The ספר appears throughout Deuteronomy (17:18; 28:58, 61; 29:19, 20, 26; 30:10; 31:24-26) and then several times in Joshua (1:8; 8:31, 34; 23:6; 24:26), but after that only intermittently until its rediscovery under Josiah in 2 Kgs

⁷ The creation of such a reading audience is the subject of the subsequent chapter.

⁸ For a helpful collection of scholars searching for varieties of coherence in the book of Jeremiah, see Martin Kessler, ed., *Reading the Book of Jeremiah: A Search for Coherence* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2004); Louis Stulman, *Order Amid Chaos: Jeremiah as Symbolic Tapestry* (BS 57; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998).

⁹ Conrad, “Representation of ‘Books’,” 50-51. For further on the significance of the divinely written ספר in Exod 24, see chapter three.

22-23.¹⁰ Having observed this feature of the HB, Conrad extends the concept of literary hiddenness into the world of the reader.

Like the Israelites within the story, the intended audience of 2 Kgs 22-23, both ancient and modern, perceives the ספר התורה / ספר הברית as a previously lost scroll that has now been recovered. Conrad states: “For the implied readers, the ספר התורה / ספר הברית is again lost, because the book referred to in the text no longer exists except in the story.”¹¹ Only the narrator knows the character and extent of the ספרים. As a result, the document once missing and subsequently found within the narrative is again lost to the story’s implied audience. The fact that the scroll is lost encourages resolution of the problem, and readers subsequently seek to find the hidden ספר. How the reader resolves the problem of the lost scroll is of less importance in this context than the fact that she perceives herself simultaneously as 1) a part of the story as a scroll-seeker and 2) as someone outside and above the story, able to assess all the scrolls at their disposal (even the entire scroll of Jeremiah) in order to find that which the narrative describes. In this way, the lost scrolls of the narrative extend beyond the narrative world into that of the reader.

¹⁰ The prophecy of Jeremiah himself is dated to the reign of Josiah, so that the parallel stories of lost and found scrolls in 2 Kgs 22-23 and Jer 36 are located in chronological proximity to one another. As presented by the traditions of the book of Jeremiah, the prophet would have almost certainly been familiar with this significant rediscovery of a ספר.

¹¹ Ibid., 51.

A similar lost-found pattern is evident throughout the book of Jeremiah, itself located from the beginning (Jer 1:1) in the reign of Josiah.¹² The interpretive crux of Jeremiah 36 provides a paradigmatic lens through which to view the entire book of Jeremiah, which is itself made up of various documents that are either found by readers (i.e., whose contents are available, e.g. Jer 29, 30, 51:59-64) or are lost (i.e. whose contents are missing or ambiguous, e.g. the ספרים in 25:13, 36:32; 45:1). In Jer 36, the first scroll is lost as a result of Jehoiakim's actions, only to be found again in the narrative through the production of a second scroll. The second scroll of Jer 36 is found within the represented world of the narrative, but beyond that narrative the reader again loses the scroll, since its exact contents are not revealed.¹³ Within the narrative, the characters know the ספר, but beyond the plot the readers remain ignorant with respect to its contents. Jeremiah 36, of course, appears much later in the book of Jeremiah, and by this point in the broader narrative readers have already begun to encounter the question of the lost document. Indeed, by the time readers reach Jer 36, several documents have been both lost and found by means of the narrative ספרים and their self-references.

¹² For more on the relationship between Jer 36 and 2 Kgs 22-23, see Charles D. Isbell, "2 Kings 22:3-23:24 and Jeremiah 36: A Stylistic Comparison," *JSOT* 8 (1978): 33-45.

¹³ Klaas A.D. Smelik, "An Approach to the Book of Jeremiah," in *Reading the Book of Jeremiah: A Search for Coherence* (ed. M. Kessler; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 3, puts the matter this way: "... the authors of the book of Jeremiah have indicated how they understood the origin of the collection of texts concerning Jeremiah, or rather, how they wished the reader to imagine the course of events. In this way they have provided later investigators with an occasion to speculate about what might have been written in the original scroll." These later investigators need not only include modern critical scholars, but might also point to ancient readers of Jeremiah.

From the beginning of the book (Jer 1:1), the reader's attention is turned to the written words of Jeremiah by means of a scribal superscription. The first words of the book are דברי ירמיהו, and they correspond closely to the דברי־יהוה, mentioned in the following verse (Jer 1:2).¹⁴ Only Amos 1:1 contains a similar introduction, and there these are words he is said to have “seen” (דברי עמוס אשר־היה בנקדים מתקוע אשר חזה (על־ישראל). In contrast with Jer 1:1, Isa 1:1 describes “the vision of Isaiah son of Amoz which he saw against Judah and Jerusalem” (חזון ישעיהו בן־אמוץ אשר חזה על־יהודה (וירושלם). Micah 1:1 utilizes the most common form of superscription, describing “the word of YHWH which came to Micah the Morashtite” (דברי־יהוה אשר היה אל־מיכה (וירושלם); see also Jer 1:11, 13; 2:1; and 16:1 for similar first-person accounts). The example from Micah is especially instructive, as it has a parallel in Jer 1:2: אשר היה דברי ירמיהו אליו. Having identified the book as דברי ירמיהו in Jer 1:1, the tradents responsible for the superscription further clarify the relationship between the דברי ירמיהו and the דברי־יהוה, arguing subtly that Jeremiah's words derive from a divine source.

¹⁴ Note the LXX variant for the superscript: τὸ ῥῆμα τοῦ θεοῦ ὃ ἐγένετο ἐπὶ Ἰερემίαν, which William McKane, *Jeremiah, Volume I* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986), 1-3, contends demonstrates an effort on the part of the Septuagint to correspond more closely to superscriptions in Hos 1:1, Micah 1:1, Zeph 1:1, and Joel 1:1. Whether one reads with the MT or the LXX, the nature of the text as a superscription remains intact.

William McKane emphasizes the textual meaning of this superscription by his translation of דְּבַרֵי יְרֵמְיָהוּ: “This is a record of the words spoken by Jeremiah.”¹⁵ Though this translation may seem overly didactic in its concern to point out the textual self-reference (for which further evidence will be adduced below), it helpfully highlights the book of Jeremiah’s claim regarding its textualization. From the very beginning, readers of the book of Jeremiah are asked to reflect on Jeremiah’s prophetic word in written form. This is an especially important point, given the fact that the next twenty-three chapters of the book contain less consistent references to writing and texts (though see 3:8; 17:1; 22:30) than those that appear in the second half. From the first verse of Jeremiah, to quote Bob Becking, “the book of Jeremiah presents itself to the reader as *a single text*.”¹⁶

At the end of the first half of Jeremiah in chapter 25, the narrators provide a summary account of the preceding material and its ongoing effects.¹⁷ Jeremiah

¹⁵ Compare Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 15, who approvingly points to David Kimchi’s understanding of דְּבַרֵי as a word connoting a historical record of Jeremiah’s prophecy. Both Holladay’s and McKane’s translations point to the likelihood of a textual referent here at the beginning of the book of Jeremiah, though McKane isolates the self-reference to the spoken words of Jeremiah and Holladay posits a reference that would include the narrative material of Jeremiah 26-52.

¹⁶ Bob Becking, “Divine Reliability and the Conceptual Coherence of the Book of Consolation,” in Kessler, *Reading the Book of Jeremiah: A Search for Coherence* (ed. Martin Kessler; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 179.

¹⁷ For an alternate account of Jeremiah’s literary seams, see A.J.O. van der Wal, “Toward a Synchronic Analysis of the Masoretic Text of the Book of Jeremiah,” in Kessler, *Reading the Book of Jeremiah*, 13-23. Van der Wal proposes the division of chapters 1-23 and 24-51. He regards chapter 52 as an appendix.

pronounces the final judgment against Judah and Jehoiakim (25:1-13).¹⁸ Taking place in the pivotal “fourth year of King Jehoiakim” (36:1, 45:1), also “the first year of Nebuchadrezzar, king of Babylon,” this passage includes a significant self-reference to “this book” in 25:13:

והבאתי עליהארץ ההיא את־כל־דברי אשר־דברתי עליה את
כל־הכתוב בספר הזה אשר־נבא ירמיהו על־כל־הגוים

I shall bring about against¹⁹ that land all the words that I spoke against it, all that are written in this book that Jeremiah prophesied against all the nations.

This is only the second ספר in the book of Jeremiah (for the first, see Jer 3:8) and this reference appears at a key literary juncture, ending the first half of the book and leading into its second half. By means of this reference, 25:1-13 provides a rough account of the textualization of all that precedes it and foreshadows the growing emphasis on ספרים in the remainder of the book. The self-reference in 25:13 confirms the point made in Jer 1:1 that this is a written record of Jeremiah’s prophecy, and the reader’s attention focuses, perhaps for the first time, on “this ספר.” The self-reference forces the reader into a search for the text to which it refers. At this crucial juncture between the first and second halves of the book, immediately following the textualization account of Jer 25 and immediately preceding the literary unit of Jer 26-36, the reader must consider the extent and nature of

¹⁸ Sigmund Mowinckel, *Zur Komposition des Buches Jeremia* (Kristiania: Dybwad, 1914), 13. See also Robert Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986), 496.

¹⁹ על may be translated either “against” or “concerning,” both of which are possible here. Given the context of divine judgment, the latter seems the better choice.

“all that is written in this book.” The stage is set for the full textualization account that will culminate in Jer 36.

After encountering this major “lost” text in Jer 25:13, Jer 29 provides the reader with a relatively determinate ספר. This document, a letter to the exiles following the first deportation (597 BCE), is “found” in the book of Jeremiah, and as a result it is a further witness to the legitimate textualization of the prophetic word. 29:1-23 provides the reader with the “found” document of Jeremiah’s first ספר. Beginning with a header asserting in verse 1 that “these are the words of the scroll that Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem” (ואלה דברי הספר אשר שלח ירמיה הנביא מירושלם) and ending with the standard oracular phrase נאם־יהוה (23), this chapter has less ambiguity with respect to the extent of Jeremiah’s written word. The letter and its contents put the reader in possession of a written source, and the reader is encouraged to reflect on this constitutive text as a manifestation of the written prophetic word. These texts still play a part in the narrative itself, of course. Jeremiah’s original letter, which the reader has in full, provokes two subsequent missives regarding the truth of Jeremiah’s prophetic ministry, the first from Shemaiah in verses 26-28 (denying that Jeremiah was a true prophet), and the second commanded by YHWH in verses 31-32 (decrying Shemaiah’s earlier letter).²⁰ The reader is able to interact fully with all of these written responses, and thus may enter into the reported debate that took place exclusively via the written word. The fact that an

²⁰ The second letter is commanded by God but is not written in the narrative. Thus, it is only a potential written document followed by the previous two ספרים.

argument over true and false prophecy could take place in writing suggests that the written word was not a foreign or surprising element of Jeremiah's life and work.²¹ Moreover, the reader stands apart from these written sources and may judge them and the various arguments they make.

Moving from the particular inscription of the shorter ספרים in Jer 29, Jer 30 provides the first full accounting of Jeremiah's written prophecy in literary context. In Jer 30:2, God commands Jeremiah to write down "all the words that I have spoken to you on a scroll" (כל־הדברים אשר־דברתי אליך אל־ספר).²² Once again, the exact referent of the phrase is uncertain, and one might assume that the command includes only the "Book of Consolation" of Jer 30-31. However, the words may also refer to the entire book of Jeremiah, including the words of doom recounted in Jer 1-25. Though the referent can never be finally decided, the reader, already alerted by means of the self-references in 1:1 and 25:13 that this is a textualized word of prophecy, hears this account not as a command to write down only these words, but as a command to write down *all* those spoken at this point in the literary and historical context.

Jeremiah 36 returns to the period of Jehoiakim's reign and provides an account of the textualization of all preceding chapters, now including the chapters between 26 and

²¹ For further on the effect of false prophecy in Israel, see James L. Crenshaw, *Prophetic Conflict: Its Effect Upon Israelite Religion* (BZAW 124; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1971).

²² In this phrase, אל־ספר may also be translated "into a scroll." See Bruce Waltke and Marvin O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 193. Since the range of meanings for Hebrew prepositions is so wide, one should not make too much of the distinction. The preposition על is also used with כתב in Jeremiah (e.g., 36:32, 45:1), and אל also appears again (e.g. 36:2).

36 as preceding literary material.²³ As noted in the previous chapter, the narrators of Jer 36 go to great lengths to describe the book's correspondence with "all the words" (Jer 30:2) Jeremiah had spoken by "the fourth year of Jehoiakim" (36:1). But what of those words that had not yet been spoken, including those present in chapters 26-36 and beyond? These chapters include accounts of Jeremiah's encounters with Zedekiah (597-586 BCE), so that the narratives of textualization occurring in "the fourth year of King Jehoiakim" (605 BCE) cannot have included the words spoken with Zedekiah in Jer 27, 28, and 34. Moreover, the letters to those already in exile in chapters 29-33 cannot have been included in an account of textualization that occurred at least eighteen years earlier. By means of the simple clause of 36:32, "and words like them were added to them" (יעודו עליהם דברים רבים כהמה), the scribal tradents account for the continued growth of the Jeremiah tradition, providing for the inscription of Jeremiah's words and deeds both *before* the year 605 and *after* that crucial year. In this way Jer 36 serves as a "bridge" narrative of textualization, encompassing all that preceded it and the narratives that follow.²⁴

No explicit self-reference appears in the text, but there are nevertheless signals that the tradents of Jer 36 intend this narrative as an account of "this book's" textualization, and not only an account of scrolls not in the reader's possession. First,

²³ According to Kathleen O'Connor, chapter 26 lays the groundwork for subsequent growth of the Jeremianic tradition by means of the phrase "do not trim a word" in Jer 26:2 (אל־תגרע דבר), a phrase missing from the parallel temple sermon in Jer 7. God's command to Jeremiah not to "trim a word" applies to subsequent tradents of the Jeremiah tradition as well, as seen in chapter 36. "Do Not Trim a Word": The Contributions of Chapter 26 to the Book of Jeremiah," *CBQ* 51 (1989): 627-28.

²⁴ For the idea of Jer 36 as a bridge text, see Stulman, *Order Amid Chaos*, 84-88.

they set out strict chronological markers denoting the time of Jeremiah's prophecy from "the days of Josiah to this day" (36:2). "This day" takes place "in the fourth year of Jehoiakim" (36:1), so that both a beginning date and an end date are provided for the alleged text Jeremiah is to write. Second, the verse describes the contents of the scroll Jeremiah is to write: "all the words that I spoke to you concerning Israel, Judah, and the nations." Oracles against Israel are confined to the first half of Jeremiah, and the bulk of the material that can be accurately described as oracles of doom are confined to the material prior to this chapter. Now deeply involved in the narrative by means of self-references to "this book" (36:8,10), readers are faced with a choice similar to that of Jehoiakim: they may either reject or accept the written words of "this book" – the second scroll that is before them.²⁵ They must accept this call to repentance as it now comes to them – through the written word. The final clause of the final verse in chapter 36:32 (ועוד נוסף עליהם דברים רבים כהמה) encourages readers to imagine the scroll in their possession as the very scroll that is mentioned, collapsing the narrative within the story and moving the scroll into the world of the reader. Both the first and the second ספר are lost, but the impetus of this final verse opens the possibility to the readers that they possess the second scroll.

The final meta-textual reference in chapter 36 elucidates this point further when the narrator reflects on the textualization of the second scroll and asserts that "still were

²⁵ Scalise, "Scrolling," 219.

added to them many like them” (36:32).²⁶ The comment evokes by contrast the other formulae in the HB that warn against the addition or “trimming” of words (e.g. Deut 4:2; 13:1; 28:61; 29:20; 30:10; see also Prov 30:6). Deuteronomy’s cautions against altering “this book” (28:58; 29:19; 29:26) attempt to set textual boundaries, while the clause at the end of Jer 36 opens up the possible referent of “this book.” Yet the narrative account of Jeremiah does not directly address the audience’s engagement with written text (i.e. it does not address them directly), but instead explains for them the production of Jeremiah’s written word. Jeremiah 36:32 is not a counsel for the audience to go and do likewise, but an apology for the received written account, one with far-reaching consequences. In a single narrative and by means of one small clause, the tradents account for the entire book of Jeremiah and its textualization. Moreover, they provide several authorizations of written texts. On the one hand, Jer 29 provides a clear story about the letter’s initial transmission. On the other hand, 36:32 overwrites this story, making of it a text added to the scroll. This layering of textualization narratives creates an overwritten book deeply concerned with its own character as a document.

Further emphasizing the textualization narrative in the fourth year of King Jehoiakim, Baruch receives a blessing from YHWH “when he wrote these words on a scroll from the mouth of Jeremiah in the fourth year of Jehoiakim, son of Josiah king of Judah” (45:1; בכתבו את־הדברים האלה על־ספר מפי ירמיהו בשנה הרבעית ליהויקים; (בן־יאשיהו מלך יהודה). At the end of chapters 37-44, deemed “the scribal chronicle” by

²⁶ For the “climactic position” of 36:32, see Brueggemann, *Theology*, 130.

Christopher Seitz, the traditions responsible for 45 harken back to the fourth year of King Jehoiakim and the key instance of the writing of “these words in a scroll.”²⁷ Here, at another critical literary juncture, readers receive implicit instructions to think back upon the paradigmatic moment of royal rejection of the written prophetic word in Jer 36, and they are told to do so in a brief chapter praising the scribe intimately involved with the production and promulgation of that scroll. By calling attention to Jer 36, they remind readers and hearers of the account of textualization, of the need to react positively to the written prophetic word, and of the ongoing acts of textualization mentioned in Jer 36:32.²⁸ Chapter 45 provides a scribal capstone to all the preceding chapters of the book.²⁹ This is not only a chance for the scribes to draw attention to themselves as producers of the written word, but to draw attention to that word itself. The self-reference to “these words” in 45:1 fits nicely with the similar phrase at the beginning of the book of Jeremiah (דברי ירמיהו), a detail that directs the reader’s attention to the entirety of the book and not only to part of it.

²⁷ Christopher R. Seitz, *Theology in Conflict: Reactions to the Exile in the Book of Jeremiah* (BZAW 176; New York: de Gruyter, 1989), 282-92. For the important literary role of chapters 25, 36, and 45, see Douglas Rawlinson Jones, *Jeremiah* (NCB; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 483.

²⁸ Contra J. Edward Wright, *Baruch ben Neriah: From Biblical Scribe to Apocalyptic Seer* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 27, who asserts that “A literary or canonical reading of the text will overlook the dating of the oracle in 45:1 historically to the fourth year of King Jehoiakim, explaining it away as a later, incorrect insertion into the narrative or focusing on its position within the surrounding narrative.” According to my reading, the dating of Jer 45 is no mistake, but a purposeful recollection of Baruch as a scribe intimately involved with “this scroll.”

²⁹ For the importance of Jer 45 in its current literary location, see Marion Ann Taylor, “Jeremiah 45: The Problem of Placement,” *JSOT* (1987): 79-98. Taylor argues that Jer 45 belongs in its current location and is not only a literary happenstance affected by the cumulative dislocation of Baruch’s oracle from an original location at the end of Jer 36, for which idea see John Bright, *Jeremiah* (AB 21; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1965), 184-86.

The OAN in 46-51 and the final chapter 52 present significant challenges to the idea of Jeremiah's coherent textualization narrative. Jeremiah 51:59-64 accounts for the writing down of the oracle against Babylon (51:60), but it does not explicitly include oracles beyond that against this nation (50-51:58).³⁰ Nevertheless, the self-reference in 51:60 slows down to point out several unique features of the ספר produced by Jeremiah. He is to write "all these words that are written concerning Babel" (כל־הדברים האלה) (הכתבים אל־בבל) down in "one scroll" (ספר אחד), and this may imply that there are other things written in another scroll and that Jeremiah must distill the specific words against Babylon into one scroll (see 25:13). Thus read, a suggestion of another, larger scroll is implicit in the narrative account. In any event, the reader can immediately recall the words against Babylon prior to this narrative account and supply "all these words that are written against Babylon." Like Jer 29, this scroll is thus easily "found" by the reader, even if it is not explicitly included in the narrative account. Likewise, chapter 52 never attempts an account of its own textualization, though the immediately preceding verse does go to some length to assert that the "words of Jeremiah" had in fact ended in 51:64b by means of the scribal phrase "thus far the words of Jeremiah" (עד־הנה דברי ירמיהו). Perhaps the scribes responsible for the addition of Jer 52 felt little need to note the textuality of this final chapter, since it would have already been familiar as a text adapted from 2 Kgs 24:18-25:30.

³⁰ See above for the likelihood that Jer 25:13 originally acted as a superscription to the OAN before being shifted in MT Jeremiah to the end of the book.

These final chapters notwithstanding, the book of Jeremiah provides a strikingly high number of references to its own textualization, and these occur at crucial literary seams in the book. Throughout the reader finds reason to reflect on the character of scrolls generally and, by means of self-reference, “this scroll” in particular. In chapters 1, 25, 29, 30, 36, 45, and 51 the ספר of Jeremiah returns to the issue of the written word, in several instances turning the gaze of the reader to “these words” and “this scroll.” As a result of these efforts on the part of Jeremiah’s tradents, the careful reader cannot help but reflect on the various inscribed texts that make up Jeremiah and also the entire text of the book itself. To understand Jeremiah’s narrative of textualization in full, however, it is necessary to consider at some length the function and nature of the self-references. These provide the key to unlocking Jeremiah’s textualization narrative, and it is to these that this study now turns.

3.2 Scrolls beyond the plot

The prominence of ספרים in Jeremiah is not entirely unique in the Prophets (e.g. Isa 30:8; 34:4,16; Ezek 2:9-3:11; Hab 2:2; Dan 9:2).³¹ Moreover, writing and ספרים appear in the narratives of a wide variety of biblical books, though of course they must be

³¹ Deuteronomy also demonstrates a high degree of interest in its own textuality, as is evident in the use of the ספר התורה (Deut 28:61; 29:19-20[20-21], 26; 30:10; 31:26) and דברי התורה (Deut 17:19; 27:3, 8; 28:58; 29:28[29]; 31:12; 32:46) to denote written documents. Given the special relationship between Deuteronomy and Jeremiah, this common emphasis should occasion little surprise. For more on this special relationship, see Winfried Thiel, *Die deuteronomistische Redaktion von Jeremia 1-25* (WMANT 41; Neukirchener-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1973) and idem, *Die deuteronomistische Redaktion von Jeremia 26-45: mit einer Gesamtbeurteilung der deuteronomistischen Redaktion des Buches Jeremia* (WMANT 52; Neukirchener-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1981).

understood differently in different literary contexts.³² Jeremiah proves unique insofar as it explicitly points to its own textualization, a concern manifested by multiple “self-references” to the various scrolls comprising the book of Jeremiah and to the entire scroll itself. Such references are rarely unambiguous, especially with respect to their extent: when the tradents of Jeremiah appeal to “this scroll,” how does one discern the beginning and end of the reference? Despite this difficulty, the tradents of Jeremiah make the case in the book of Jeremiah not only for textualization of prophecy in general, but for the textualization of “this scroll” specifically. They do so not only by means of narrative explication and textual characterization, but also by employing self-references that point to texts within the plot of Jeremiah and, ultimately, to the entire text of Jeremiah itself. Two self-references figure prominently in Jeremiah, *הספר הזה* and *הדברים האלה*, but before turning to the specific instances of these phrases, it is necessary to think more broadly about how self-references function in literature.³³ What are they and how do they function? How does their presence affect a reader?

Recent research on Qur’ānic self-referentiality aids in the task of understanding the literary feature of self-reference in Jeremiah. Daniel Madigan’s seminal work has

³² Susan Niditch, *Oral World and Written Word: Ancient Israelite Literature* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 8-24 proposes the placement of writing and written documents along an oral-literate continuum. She points to the important role of reading and writing in both Deuteronomy and Jeremiah, but also describes the manner by which “the world of orality frames and colors a world of writing” (*Oral World*, 107). The point is well taken, even if it does tend to minimize the significance of this world of writing for the scribal tradents responsible for Israel’s body of written documents.

³³ By “self-references” I do not intend to obscure the authors and editors responsible for the texts of Jeremiah. The “self” in this instance is an imperfect terminological choice, meant to convey the textual reflexivity of Jeremiah. The advantage of the terminology of “self-reference” is that it implicitly asserts the independence of the written word from those who initially produced it. Existing apart from its producers, the text is its own “self.”

opened new avenues of research into the meaning and function of the Qur'ān's self-references, which are relatively common and explicit in comparison with those found in the HB.³⁴ One example from Sura 39:2-3 provides a helpful reference point to understand more fully the two manifestations of self-reference:

The sending down of the Book is from God the All-mighty, the All-wise. We [i.e., God] have sent thee [i.e., Muhammad] the book with the truth.³⁵

Explicit reference is made to the Qur'ān (referred to as *the* Book), its divine origin (“from God the All-mighty, the All-wise,” “we have sent”), its direct transmission to the prophet (“we have sent *thee*”), and its character as the book “with the truth.”³⁶ Commenting on these facets of its nature, the Qur'ān is “both itself and about itself.”³⁷ Likewise, the HB is “both itself and about itself,” though the HB never reflects on its own nature so explicitly as the Qur'ān. Such reflexive commentary in the HB must be discerned through a careful review of inner-biblical exegesis and narrative art.³⁸ Instead of making propositional assertions about itself, as Sura 39:2-3 does, the book of Jeremiah makes oblique self-referential remarks as a part of a wide narrative of textualization.

³⁴ Daniel Madigan, *The Qur'ān's Self-Image. Writing and Authority in Islam's Scripture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

³⁵ Cited in Wild, “Why Self-Referentiality?,” 10. The translation is Wild's.

³⁶ For further examples of Qur'ānic self-referentiality, see 16:101-103; 17:22; 25:4-6, 32-33; 36:69-70, 42:51-53; 69:38-51; 75:16-19.

³⁷ Madigan, *Self-Image*, 62.

³⁸ For further on the phenomenon of inner-biblical exegesis, see Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985); see also Bernard Levinson, *Deuteronomy and the Hermeneutics of Legal Innovation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

The HB may never refer to itself as “the book with the truth,” but it does refer to “this book” and “these words” within a story written to demonstrate its truth. To understand the reason for the differences between the kind of self-references extant in the HB and the Qur’ān, one must consider the particular socio-historical functions of these texts. The Qur’ān concerns itself with its authority as scripture in competition with Jewish and Christian sacred texts.³⁹ Distinguishing itself from other such documents, the Qur’ān is the book “with the truth.” In this way, the contrast with the HB is considerable, since the HB as a whole did not exist in close contact with or need definition in relationship to competing written traditions. Self-references in the HB do not function to establish authority distinct from other sacred texts. Rather, they function to establish the basic legitimacy of sacred texts in the first place.⁴⁰ Whereas Qur’ānic self-references claim that the Muslim sacred text is more holy than others, Jeremiah’s self-references attempt to establish the legitimacy of any written prophecy text as truly divine and therefore sacred. In the history of religion, the Qur’ān’s arguments regarding the relative holiness of their text ultimately rest on the assumed sacred nature of texts for which the traditions of Jeremiah had laid the foundation. Before one can argue for the superiority of one sacred document over another, one must first agree that texts can in fact be sacred.

³⁹ Nicolai Sinai, “Qur’ānic self-referentiality as a strategy of self-authorization,” in Wild, *Self-Referentiality*, 103-34. For further on the Qur’ānic reception of Jewish and Christian scriptures, see F.E. Peters, *The Voice, the Word, the Books: The Sacred Scripture of the Jews, Christians, and Muslims* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 273-76.

⁴⁰ Robert Carroll, *Jeremiah* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986), 229. Here it is helpful to recall the controversy that likely attended the growth of scribal prophecy, as evidenced in Jer 8:8.

Like the Qur'ān, the tradents of Jeremiah must show that their ספר comes from the divine realm, that its transmission via the prophets is certain, and that written transmission reliably reproduces the divine word.⁴¹ Since both texts derive from and exist within cultures dominated by oral modes of discourse, Stefan Wild's reflection on Muhammad's recitations characterizes well the situation faced by Jeremiah's tradents: "They had to explain what they were and what kind of utterances they had to be received as."⁴² To convince their readers of both these things, they must first bring their text into the reader's field of vision. By means of self-reference, the book of Jeremiah explains that it must be received as written prophecy.⁴³ In what follows, the two primary self-referential phrases in Jeremiah, הספר הזה and הדברים האלה, are detailed. Once these crucial self-referential phrases have been described, their function and significance within Jeremiah's narrative of textualization will become even clearer.

3.2.1 "This scroll"/ הספר הזה

At the end of Jeremiah's primarily poetic first half (chs. 1-24), Jeremiah's prophecy reaches a turning point. In Nebuchadrezzar's first year (25:1), the pivotal

⁴¹ Note that, even in the example of the divine writing given to Moses in Exod 34:1, the HB is quite explicit about human involvement in the production of the divine message.

⁴² Wild, "Why Self-Referentiality?," 3. Wild goes on to assert that "This overriding concern of the Qur'anic text with itself, which reflects the concern of the Prophet's recitation with itself, is a feature that distinguishes Muslim scripture from Jewish and Christian scripture." This chapter attempts to refute the notion that the HB is unconcerned with itself as prophetic recitation and text.

⁴³ They have to be received as such as a result of their exilic socio-historical circumstance, as commonly takes place in the writing down and compilation of ancient oral traditions. See Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und Politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (Munich: Beck, 1997), 294-5.

fourth year of King Jehoiakim (605 BCE), Jeremiah summarizes his twenty-three years of prophetic speech “from the thirteenth year of King Josiah son of Amon of Judah to this day” (25:3). Though God has sent prophets “early and often” (השכם, 4), the people have declined to listen, and as a result God will bring against “this land” and “all these surrounding nations” the tribes of the north, including Nebuchadrezzar, the king of Babylon (25:9).⁴⁴ As a result of God’s judgment, “this entire land shall become a desolate waste” (והיתה כל-הארץ הזאת לחרבה לשמה, 11).

Having issued this prophecy, the chapter takes a surprising turn to consider YHWH’s punishment of Babylon, the agent of his initial action against Judah. Babylon receives punishment not because they refused to heed prophetic calls for repentance, but because of “their iniquity” (עונם, 12). In verse 13 the reader receives a surprising detail regarding the communication of that punishment:

והבאתי על-הארץ ההיא את-כל-דברי אשר-דברתי עליה את
כל-הכתוב בספר הזה אשר-נבא ירמיהו על-כל-הגוים

I will bring upon that land all my words which I have spoken against her, all that are written in this scroll, that Jeremiah prophesied against all the nations.

All YHWH’s words spoken against Babylon are also “all that are written in this scroll.”

The verse describes three distinct communicative moments: oral transmission from

YHWH to prophet, textualization, and oral transmission from the prophet to the people.

All the words of YHWH are equated with all those that are written in this scroll, and

⁴⁴ Thiel, *Deuteronomistische Redaktion von Jer 1-25*, 271 observes that the phrases ועל הגוים האלה סביב (9) and ועבדו הגוים האלה את מלך בבל (11) were likely inserted to bring verses 1-13 in line with the following OAN. Thiel does so, however, without manuscript support.

these are equated with those prophesied by Jeremiah. The order usually associated with prophetic transmission (from God to prophet to text) is different in this reckoning (from God to text to prophet).

The location of prophetic words in a scroll is unusual, but this verse is all the more remarkable given its location by YHWH “in *this* scroll” (בספר הזה).⁴⁵ The deictic element הזה marks this phrase as a scribal interpolation since it demonstrates a community of readers and their perception of a text. According to Michael Fishbane, such an element demonstrates an early exegetical moment in which scribes have taken an earlier text and commented on it. In this instance, scribes have understood and reinforced the idea that Jeremiah’s prophecies may now be profitably understood as text.⁴⁶ Rather than only legitimizing textualization generally, 25:13 goes beyond broad reference to scrolls to point toward this particular document. As noted above, however, the extent of this first self-reference in the book of Jeremiah is not certain. What exactly does the tradent responsible for this phrase intend by “this book?”

Several options have been proposed for the referent of בספר הזה. Consistent with his approach towards the historicity of the two scrolls, Holladay understands בספר הזה as evidence of the scrolls produced in Jer 36. On the strength of the chronological correspondence between 25:1 and 36:1 (“in the fourth year of King Jehoiakim son of

⁴⁵ Stephen Chapman, *The Law and the Prophets: A Study in Old Testament Canon Formation* (FAT 27; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 207.

⁴⁶ Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 44-55, 447-58.

Josiah”), he concludes that “‘this book’ in v[erse] 13 stands for one of the two scrolls from chapter 36.”⁴⁷ According to Holladay the self-reference is expansive, including a great deal of the book of Jeremiah and not only a small part of it.

On text-critical grounds, McKane contends that the likely referent of the words was the oracle against Babylon, which followed soon after this reference in the earlier form of the book, to which the LXX witnesses (27-28; MT 50-51:58).⁴⁸ McKane argues that the final clause of verse 13 (אֲשֶׁר־נִבְּא יִרְמְיָהוּ עַל־כָּל־הַגּוֹיִם) points in the direction of understanding 25:13 as a superscription to the OAN. Much depends on the object of divine wrath in 25:13. Jeremiah 25:12 and 14 certainly refer to Babylon, but, against McKane’s reading, some scholars excise these verses as late interpolations.⁴⁹ They may then understand verse 13 as a return to the subject of Judah from verses 1-11, further amending הארץ הזאת to הארץ ההיא.⁵⁰ Thus understood, they would have also applied the phrase בספר הזה to the preceding oracles against Judah in Jer 1-25. McKane argues against this interpretation of 25:13, pointing to the reference to the nations in the final clause of MT Jer אֲשֶׁר־נִבְּא יִרְמְיָהוּ עַל־כָּל־הַגּוֹיִם. However, this phrase appears in the

⁴⁷ He does not specify which scroll 25:13 intends. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 664. See also Bright, *Jeremiah*, 163.

⁴⁸ McKane, *Jeremiah, Volume I*, 627. See also Bernhard Duhm, *Das Buch Jeremia* (KHAT 11; Tübingen: Mohr, 1901), 200-202.

⁴⁹ Duhm, *Das Buch Jeremia*, 201-203.

⁵⁰ To understand the verse as a return to the subject of 25:1-11, a number of commentators have proposed that הארץ ההיא be amended to הארץ הזאת on analogy with 25:11. The editors of the BHS suggest the emendation, while Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 663, proposes dropping the demonstrative pronoun altogether. Others decry the emendation as an unnecessary expedient. So also Jones, *Jeremiah*, 32-33.

LXX as a superscription to the OAN and was likely moved from its original location in order to make sense of the introduction of the prophecy against Babylon in the immediate context of 25:11-13.⁵¹

D. R. Jones proposes a third possibility, asserting that a “glossator” added verses 12-14 to 25:1-11 at a time when the oracles against Babylon had become a part of the extant tradition. Thus, the self-referential phrase *בספר הזה* did indeed refer specifically to oracles against the enemy of the North now identified as Babylon.⁵² Yet as a late gloss it can also fit the context of “the oracle on the collected oracles of 627-604” (25:1-11). The tradent responsible for the glosses in verses 12-14 could not help but understand his interpolation as part of a much wider tradition, and so the phrase “all that are written in this book” should be understood to include the words against Babylon but not to consist only of these words. Thus, Jones opens up the possibility that the book in 25:13 “is chapters 1-24 and whatever at this stage followed it, certainly 25.15-29, 50-51, maybe the whole tradition as we now have it.”⁵³

In the final analysis, the ambiguity regarding the exact nature of the self-reference works to the advantage of the scribes producing the book. By not restricting the self-reference *בספר הזה*, they leave open the possibility of an expansive, broad textual reference. The readings of Holladay, McKane, and Jones demonstrate that 25:13 allows a

⁵¹ Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 492.

⁵² Michael Fishbane, “Revelation and Tradition: Aspects of Inner-Biblical Exegesis,” *JBL* 99 (1980): 343-61.

⁵³ Jones, *Jeremiah*, 329.

number of possible interpretations, a fact that underscores the numerous textual referents available in the book. One need not accept any single hypothesis to observe the phrase's significance for Jeremiah's readers. God equates all his words with a text that recounts all the words written "in this book," at least part of which constituted a portion of the larger book of Jeremiah. At this crucial juncture in the book of Jeremiah, the prophecy of Jeremiah is imagined as text available to the reader.

Two further references to *הספר הזה* appear in Jeremiah, the first in Jer 29:29 and the second in Jer 51:63. Both of these texts provide accounts of subordinate, constitutive *ספרים* within the larger *ספר* of Jeremiah, and as such they contribute to the broad account of the Jeremiah's textualization. They contribute significantly to the overall literary effect of self-references, encouraging the reader to search for texts *within* texts.

Referring to self-references in Deuteronomy, Jean-Pierre Sonnet describes the literary effect of "books within books":

What is designated by Moses on stage is also designated by the narrator for the reader's attention. The demonstratives that resonate in the represented world (Moses: "Take this 'book' of the Torah") are echoed by other demonstratives resonating in the reader's world (the narrator: "This is the Torah," "this Torah").⁵⁴

The two *ספרים* in Jer 29 and 51 primarily operate on the level of the "represented world" of the narrative. However, the narrator of Jeremiah also refers to these scrolls and thus collapses the represented world and the reader's world into one. Moreover, in comparison with the uncertain object of the self-reference in Jer 25:13, these self-

⁵⁴ Jean-Pierre Sonnet, *The Book Within the Book: Writing in Deuteronomy* (BI 14; New York: Brill, 1997), 248-49.

references provide the reader with readily available texts of Jeremiah's prophetic words, so that the text in the represented world is easily equated with that available to the reader.

Jeremiah 29:29 recounts Zephaniah's reading of a ספר sent to Jeremiah as a response to his earlier missive counseling the Babylonian exiles. This letter is the second in the narrative (vv. 26-28), following Jeremiah's initial correspondence (vv. 1-23) but preceding and precipitating a third and final letter commanded by YHWH (vv. 30-32). All three letters are portrayed as prophetic texts, though the second is only conceived of as such in retrospect by YHWH ("Shemaiah has prophesied to you...", v. 31). Shemaiah the Nehelamite criticizes Jeremiah's advice to set down roots in Babylon, serving as the book of Jeremiah's first instance of incorrect response to written prophecy. His written response to Jeremiah's original letter receives a written rebuke from YHWH via the prophet.

In the first place, "this scroll" (v. 29) appears as part of a straightforward piece of narrative detail. The phrase immediately follows its reported contents in verses 26-28. The contents of the letter are recounted by none other than God in his initial command to Jeremiah concerning Shemaiah the Nehelamite. God is imagined as a reader fully aware of the content of documents, whether or not he has commissioned them.⁵⁵ Having recounted the contents of "this scroll," YHWH commands that Jeremiah "send concerning the entire exile" (שלח על-כל-הגולה). Though Jeremiah's original scroll

⁵⁵ The end of chapter 29 is confused, as this divine command seems to be cut off after verse 29. Instead, verses 29-32 start the narrative afresh, referring to "this letter" from the previous three verses but also including a new command from God.

contained no divine command to communicate via letter, here God does exactly that, tacitly approving Jeremiah's epistolary prophecy. In the commanded response, God describes Shemaiah's ספר as false prophecy, even though he has not himself claimed to be a prophet. Moreover, his letter to the priests contains no typical prophetic language, instead presenting itself as a straightforward political demand that priests rebuke "Jeremiah of Anathoth who plays the prophet for you" (v. 27). Nevertheless, all ספרים in the exchange are imagined as prophetic words, even if they are not explicitly described as such. "This scroll" that was read (vv. 26-28) is answered by another scroll, dictated word for word by YHWH (vv. 31-32) and now available to the reader, which ends the chapter and the debate between Shemaiah and Jeremiah. Thus the scope of the self-reference expands beyond one brief bit of text, encouraging readers to expect and search for the contents of "this scroll" whenever the phrase appears.

Jeremiah 51:63 also provides an account of "this scroll" positioned in literary proximity to its alleged contents. As in Jer 29, "this scroll" functions as a simple part of the narrative within the represented world of Jeremiah's tradents. "This scroll" designates the ספר already mentioned in 51:60. Yet the fact that this narrative follows a lengthy oracle against Babylon (50:1-51:58) hardly seems accidental, and indeed 51:60 provides a further self-reference to "all these words that are written concerning Babylon" (כל־הדברים האלה הכתבים אל־בבל). By means of this self-reference, "this scroll" in the narrative becomes "this scroll" before the reader. Such a pattern occurs throughout the

book of Jeremiah, but before attending to it at length, the self-reference to “these words” (הדברים האלה) deserves further attention.

3.2.2 “These words” / הדברים האלה

Not all textual self-references in Jeremiah are so simple as those referring to “this scroll.” Others refer more indirectly to the various embedded texts of Jeremiah, employing more common language that is therefore harder to identify as self-reference. דברים provides the most compelling examples of this phenomenon, especially when juxtaposed with תורה. דברים has a wide semantic range, with common and technical translations possible in various contexts. The interpretive challenge here is to discern those instances where less common meanings should be inferred. When does דברים constitute a self-reference in the book of Jeremiah?

As mentioned above, the first phrase in the book of Jeremiah is דברי ירמיהו (Jer 1:1). Based on the late insertion of the superscription and the inclusion of the biographical narratives under this rubric, Holladay argues for an expansive translation of דברי ירמיהו: “the words and deeds of Jeremiah.”⁵⁶ His translation demonstrates one possibility of the word דבר, and it also points to the inherently textual nature of titles and superscriptions.⁵⁷ Given the late nature of the insertion, its scribal provenance, and the

⁵⁶ Holladay, *Jeremiah 2* (Herm.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 15. Note also that הדברים also concludes Jer 51:64, serving as a final note to the prophetic text preceding the historical addition in Jer 52. For another instance in which a text begins with a textual meaning for, see Neh 1:1.

⁵⁷ See above on the typical scribal practice of super- and subscriptions in Jeremiah.

nature of Jeremiah's final form *as a book*, דברי ירמיהו likely points not only to his spoken words, but to the words and narrated events available to the reader in the book. Even if the scroll of Jeremiah was intended as an *aide-memoire* for oral performance, the superscription in this context would refer to that document and not the possible oral utterances derived from them. The דברי ירמיהו are from the beginning of the book textualized words, a point that seems axiomatic but that must be asserted strongly in the face of those who conceive of Jeremiah as a primarily oral text.⁵⁸

Of course, דברים does not always convey a textual self-reference.⁵⁹ In Jeremiah, the references are often to the speech of the prophet (e.g., Jer 5:14; 18:18; 23:16), and even when these words are clearly written out in the narrative they are often conceived of as spoken words. Yet there remain instances in which the "words" referred to are clearly represented in texts. Jeremiah 30:2 and 4, for example, narrate the faithfully reproduced words of YHWH to Jeremiah. In verse 2, God commands that the prophet write down in a scroll "all the words that I have spoken to you" (כל־הדברים אשר־דברתי אליך). Two verses later, the narrator tells the reader in verse 4 that "these are the words (ואלה) that YHWH spoke concerning Israel and Judah." The written words, the tradents take care to establish, are the very same as those spoken by YHWH. "These are

⁵⁸ For example, performance criticism of the prophets asserts that the texts are useful only as documents that create new oral performances. Thus conceived, written prophecy is just a means to the end of spoken prophecy, and is not a useful and important theme in itself. For such a view of prophecy, see William Doan and Terry Giles, *Prophets, Performance, and Power: Performance Criticism of the HB* (New York: T&T Clark, 2005).

⁵⁹ For the possible meanings of דבר, see Werner H. Schmidt, "דבר," *TDOT* 3:104-6.

the words”⁶⁰ echoes the first words of Deuteronomy, where the reader is told from the beginning that “these are the words that Moses spoke to all Israel on the other side of the Jordan” (Deut 1:1).⁶¹ Torah describes the words as those that Moses spoke; the deictic particle specifies that *these* written words correspond exactly to those that were spoken.⁶² The act of reading in the HB always entails a spoken proclamation; silent, individualized reading is a later development in human history.⁶³ This, of course, necessitates an understanding of the written word that incorporates the oral. However, when there is sufficient evidence for recognized textuality among tradents of a text, one must take care not to overemphasize the oral at the expense of the written. In Jer 36:8 and 10, Baruch reads aloud “the words of YHWH” that are “in the book.” These are indeed spoken words, but they are not *only* spoken words. Only through the written textual medium can the audience of the narrative rest assured that Baruch has accurately reported “from the

⁶⁰ Chapman, *Law and the Prophets*, 208. In this section, Chapman relies especially on the work of U. Rütterswörden, “Es gibt keinen Exegeten in einem gesetzlosen Land (Prov 29, 18 LXX),” in *Prophetie und geschichtliche Wirklichkeit im alten Israel* (ed. R. Liwak and S. Wagner; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1991), 326-47.

⁶¹ See Deut 28:58 for an even more explicit location of words in a scroll: כל־דברי התורה הזאת הכתבים בספר הזה, “all the words of this Torah that are written in this book.” Even Susan Niditch (*Oral World*, 95) describes this reference as a likely reference to text.

⁶² See also Deut 12:1.

⁶³ Isolated instances of silent reading occur earlier in human history, but texts were primarily read out loud until the Middle Ages. See Henri-Jean Martin, *The History and Power of Writing* (trans. L.G. Cochrane; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 509; Alberto Manguel, *A History of Reading* (New York: Viking, 1996), 21; Daniel Boyarin, “Placing Reading: Ancient Israel and Medieval Europe,” in *The Ethnography of Reading* (ed. J. Boyarin; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 10-37. For an early instance of silent reading, see Augustine’s *Confessions* 6.3, where Augustine describes Ambrose’s unusual habit of silent reading.

mouth of Jeremiah.” Those who receive Jeremiah as text thus acquire some assurance that their means of reception reliably reproduces the word of YHWH.

A similar deictic phrase, **הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה**, also occurs in the oracle given to Baruch, which is tied to chapters 25 and 36 both by date and event (25:1; 36:1). The oracle is given at the time

בכתבו את־הדברים האלה על־ספר מפי ירמיהו בשנה הרבעית
ליהויקים נְיִיאֲשִׁיחוּ מֶלֶךְ יְהוּדָה

... when he wrote these words on a scroll from the mouth of Jeremiah in the fourth year of Jehoiakim son of Josiah the king of Judah (45:1)

The exact referent of **הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה** is particularly vexing in this instance. Does it refer to the subsequent oracle in 45:2-5? Does the literary placement of the chapter near the book’s end provide a clue to the significance of the self-reference “these words?” Holladay suggests that the chapter might have served as an appendix to chapter 36, and that “these words” might refer to the original scroll produced in those chapters.⁶⁴ If this is so, the separation of the chapter from its original context widens the reference to “these words” beyond that original scroll to include some of the “words like them” added to the second scroll in 36:32. Indeed, this final oracle, originally delivered in the fourth year of King Jehoiakim, might have been added as a part of the second scroll added “in the fifth year of King Jehoiakim” or later (36:9). A final decision on the extent of the self-reference hardly concerns the tradent responsible for Jer 45, who seems content to

⁶⁴ Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2, 308-09. See also Lawrence Boadt, *Jeremiah 26-52, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Nahum* (OTM 10; Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1982), 115; Bright, *Jeremiah*, 184

associate this event with the creation of the first scroll in Jer 36:1-8. The contents of that scroll from Jer 36 have become “these words” in the superscription of Jer 45:1.

Moreover, in this instance there is no ambiguity as to whether or not the words might entail an exclusively oral reference. “These words” are in a scroll, even if they were once spoken and might once again become oral.

Returning to the occurrence of **הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה** cited above (Jer 51:60) from the story of Jeremiah’s final scroll against Babylon, “these words” are located firmly within a text. Commanding Seraiah to “*see* and read all these words” (**וּרְאִיתָ וּקְרָאתָ אֶת כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים**) (**הָאֵלֶּה**), the prophet points out the unique visual medium of the prophetic word and thus locates his prophetic message in the scroll. “These words” are not only heard, but are also seen. Three verses later, the chapter draws to a close with the same words that began the book: **דְּבַר יִרְמְיָהוּ**. In close proximity to the textualized words of 51:60-61, both readers and hearers are encouraged to reflect on the close of Jeremiah as text.

Furthermore, the entire clause **עַד־הִנֵּה דְבַר יִרְמְיָהוּ** (51:64b) functions as a biblical colophon that was almost certainly inserted at a later date by scribes.⁶⁵ Such colophons, Fishbane points out, “only make sense as formal conventions of an established scribal tradition.”⁶⁶ Further emphasizing the scribal nature of the insertion, the literary feature of resumptive repetition occurs in 51:58 and 51:64, repeating the word **וַיַּעַפּוּ** in both verses and thereby providing a subtle scribal signal that the narrative of 51:59-64 was a later

⁶⁵ Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 29.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

insertion.⁶⁷ Whereas the verb fits well at the very end of the oracle against Babylon in 51:58 (ויגעו עמים בדי־ריק ולאמים בדי־אש ויעפו) “peoples expend themselves for what is empty, and nations, for fire they weary themselves”), it seems out of place and tacked on at the end of the narrative of the sunken scroll, as indeed it probably was:

ואמרת ככה תשקע בבל ולא־תקום מפני הרעה אשר אנכי מביא עליה ויעפו

Say, “Thus Babylon shall sink, and she shall not rise on account of the evil which I am bringing upon her, *and they shall weary themselves.*”

More important than the demonstration that the passage was a later insertion is the fact that the tradents responsible for the addition likely perceived Jeremiah as text. Utilizing the method of resumptive repetition, the scribes signal to their readers that the narrative of 51:59-64 entered the story at a later date.

The possibility of a textual reference for דברים is further established by considering the word in tandem with תורה, which may itself refer to an important text available to Jeremiah. When דברים and תורה occur alongside one another, Rütterswörden attributes the fact to parallel bodies of oral teaching, one prophetic (דברים) and the other priestly (תורה).⁶⁸ Though Rütterswörden explicitly eschews the possibility of textual referents for דברים and תורה, the instances presented above for דברים as a textual referent demonstrate that the idea should not be dismissed too quickly. To understand

⁶⁷ The phrase is missing from the LXX.

⁶⁸ Rütterswörden, “Exegeten,” 329.

דברים as a textual reference when juxtaposed with תורה, however, one must first discern when and where the latter word may be understood to describe a written corpus.

In her study of Deuteronomic law in Jeremiah, Christl Maier describes a range of oral and written meanings for תורה.⁶⁹ She allows for a more expansive understanding of the word than Rütterswörden, pointing out that on several occasions in Jeremiah a written corpus may be in view (6:19, 9:12; 26:4).⁷⁰ Jeremiah 26:4-5, for example, implies “the idea of a contemporary written corpus” by the juxtaposition of תורה and דברים.⁷¹ There, YHWH describes the condition of true repentance by referring to both these elements:

אם-לא תשמעו אלי ללכת בתורתִי אשר נתתי לפניהם לשמע על-דברי עבדי הנבאים
אשר אנכי שלח אליכם

if you do not listen to me, walking by my Torah which I set before you, listening to the words of my servants the prophets whom I am sending to you...

Here תורה is set before the people, and they are to walk by it. In addition to listening to the Torah set before them, the people listen to the words of “my servants the prophets,” a possible reference to a nascent corpus of written prophetic words.⁷²

Maier explicates her point further from texts most likely written in a post-exilic period of scribal expansion, pointing to examples like 44:10, from Jeremiah’s oracle in

⁶⁹ Christl Maier, *Jeremia als Lehrer der Torah: Soziale Gebote des Deuteronomiums in Fortschreibungen des Jeremiabuches* (FRLANT 196; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002), 302-4.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 353-5.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*: “die Vorstellung eines schriftlich vorliegenden Korpus.” Maier employs the phrase to describe a similar juxtaposition in Jer 6:19.

⁷² Chapman, *Law and the Prophets*, 207, who describes a “trajectory of references to God’s ‘word’” in the book of Jeremiah.

Egypt:

לא דכאו עד היום הזה ולא יראו ולא ילכו בתורתִי ובחקתי אשר־נתתי
לפניכם ולפני אבותיכם

They were not oppressed unto this day, and they have not feared and they have not walked in my Torah and in my statutes which I set before you and before your ancestors.

Alone, such instances of Torah could in fact hearken back to an oral meaning, given the oral culture of scribal activity.⁷³ In the literary context of the “scribal chronicle,” however, a written corpus of Torah makes especially good sense. Moreover, the verse describes the giving of the Torah, possibly a reference to the same gift at Sinai. Jeremiah 6:19 and 9:12⁷⁴ also demonstrate this connection, especially insofar as they assume that the people could *see* the תורה. In three of these references (Jer 9:12; 26:4; 44:10), the תורה has been “put before them” (נתן + לפניהם/כם) so that they may see and follow the visible path in which they should walk.⁷⁵ The presence of the written תורה in Jeremiah points to the possibility of a written prophetic word as well, even if that corpus was only beginning to receive definition at the time of Jeremiah’s transmission. Most important for the purposes of this study, the inclusion of a written תורה increases the likelihood of דברים as a textual self-reference when the two words appear in close proximity.

⁷³ Here we recall the oral milieu in which scribes operated, for which see David M. Carr, *Written on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁷⁴ McKane, *Jeremiah, Volume I*, 205-7, asserts that 9:11-15 was likely added in its current context to explain the reasons for Judah’s destruction.

⁷⁵ Chapman, *Law and the Prophets*, 204.

Taken together, self-references to “this book” and “these words” in Jeremiah fit seamlessly with the book’s wider interest in scrolls and their characterization. In the end, the categories set up in this section and the following are useful as heuristic tools by which to understand the broader narrative of Jeremiah’s textualization itself, as self-references appear within the narrative of Jeremiah. The third and final section of this chapter considers the characterization of scrolls within the plot in order to demonstrate more fully the coherence of Jeremiah’s narrative of textualization.

3.3 Scrolls within the plot

Jeremiah’s tradents employ the usual mode of narrative representation in the HB to set out their position with respect to the book of Jeremiah as a true, written word of God.⁷⁶ Rather than making direct assertions about ספרים and their significance, they tell stories about them, their authors, and their audiences.⁷⁷ By attending closely to the characterization of scrolls, the frequency of their appearance, and the roles they play in these stories, readers gain insight into the perspective of the tradents on the ספרים. As noted above, I identify four primary characteristics of ספרים in the book of Jeremiah.

⁷⁶ With Robert Alter, I “prefer to insist on a complete interfusion of literary art with theological, moral, or historiosophical vision, the fullest perception of the latter dependent on the fullest grasp of the former.” *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic, 1980), 19. Jeremiah’s tradents never lose sight of religious or theological questions in their handling of the book of Jeremiah.

⁷⁷ As shown above, Jeremiah’s tradents do make relatively direct statements about written scrolls when they make self-references. Even when they do refer to “this scroll,” however, they do so within the narrative, and they never describe the character or function of the ספרים by means of propositional statement (i.e. “this scroll contains a divine word”).

First, texts become increasingly central to the narrative action from the beginning to the end of Jeremiah. The first explicit reference to a ספר occurs in Jer 3:8, where God gives the northern kingdom Israel ספר כריתתיה, “her scroll of divorce.” Here the scroll functions in a static role, powerful as a written document affecting the split but serving no ongoing narrative role in the indictment against Israel and Judah.⁷⁸ The prophet does not pause to consider the document, instead simply observing its delivery and negative effect for the exiled Northern kingdom.⁷⁹ The document appears once in the hands of human actors and then fades from the poet’s view. Contrast this account of a ספר in a legal context with the ספרים that appear in Jer 32:6-44. Here the narrative slows down considerably to describe the exact details of the documentary transaction, pausing in verse 15 to describe the import of the symbolic sale between Jeremiah and his uncle Hanamel:

כי כה אמר יהוה צבאות אלהי ישראל עוד יקנו בתים ושדות וכרמים בארץ
הזאת

For thus says YHWH of hosts, the God of Israel: Again houses, fields, and vineyards will be purchased in this land.

This verse is only the beginning of two extended reflections on Jeremiah’s unlikely purchase. In verses 16-25, Jeremiah reflects on the divine command to “buy for yourself

⁷⁸ In this way Jeremiah follows the original legal context for divorce in Deut 24:1-4, which focuses especially on the irrevocable nature of the ספר once the original husband has given it. Note in Deut 24 that the ספר כריתת achieves a kind of independence from its author (the original husband) in so far as the ספר cannot be rescinded even if the wife becomes free to marry once more. Richard Nelson, *Deuteronomy* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 286-87.

⁷⁹ Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 118.

the field” (קנה־לך השדה),⁸⁰ receiving his answer in God’s long response in verses 26-44.

Verse 44 sums up the import of Jeremiah’s act of textualization:

שדות בכסף יקנו וכתוב בספר וחתום והעד עדים בארץ בנימן
ובסביבי ירושלם ובערי יהודה ובערי ההר ובערי השפלה ובערי הנגב כי־אשיב
את־שבותם נאם־יהוה

Fields will be bought with money, and they shall write in a scroll and seal it and summon witnesses in the land of Benjamin, the surrounding areas of Jerusalem, in the cities of Judah, in the cities of the mountain and the Shephelah, and in the cities of the Negev, for I will restore their fortunes—oracle of YHWH.

Whereas the ספר in Jer 3:8 receives no comment aside from its common legal meaning, the multiple ספרים of Jer 32 occasion a long dialogue between God and the prophet. In both Jer 3 and Jer 32, ספרים function as relatively static legal documents, but only in the latter instance does the scroll take on such a central role in the narrative.

ספרים become most independent in Jer 36, where Jeremiah’s first scroll moves from room to room disseminating its message of doom for Jehoiakim and Judah. The scroll needs an audience, of course, and to this topic we shall turn in the next chapter, but upon reading Jer 36 one has the overwhelming sense that the scroll serves as a primary actor along with its authors and audience in the narrative. This is increasingly the case as the story proceeds. In verses 1-7, Jeremiah and Baruch work together to create the scroll at God’s behest, and at this point there are three major characters in the narrative:

⁸⁰ Note the difference between the account of the initial command to purchase in verse 7, קנה־לך את־שדי אשר, with that in verse 25, קנה־לך השדה בכסף והעד עדים. In Jeremiah’s secondary remembrance of the original command, he focuses less on the right of the redemption than on the details of the transaction. The key difference here may be the witnesses who have seen what Jeremiah has done and can verify it for others in the Judahite community. YHWH himself will focus on the witnesses in 32:44.

Jeremiah, Baruch, and the scroll. In verse 8 Jeremiah departs from the narrative until verse 31 since he is *עצור* (“proscribed”) and cannot enter the house of YHWH (5). Of the original trio there now exist only two agents in the plot: Baruch the scribe and the scroll itself. “Now in the fifth year of King Jehoiakim the son of Josiah (9),” Baruch and the scroll become the focal point in verses 9-18.

The key point here is the relationship between the scribe and the written scroll he has produced, as Baruch’s interlocutors demonstrate by their question to the scribe: “Tell us, how did you write all these words?”⁸¹ The story reaches its climactic point in verses 20-26 when both Baruch and the prophet Jeremiah are separated from and thus are no longer in control of the *ספר* that they have produced. In verse 20, royal officials deposit the scroll “in the chamber of Elishama the scribe,” apart from its producers and its final royal audience. Upon first reading, this may seem like an insignificant detail, but it registers for the reader that the *ספר* is now wholly independent of its human producers. Finally, with the scroll’s original producers gone, Jehoiakim’s encounter is with a scroll and not a prophet.⁸² As both Jeremiah and Baruch have disappeared from the narrative, so also does the first scroll as Jehoiakim burns it in the fire (36:23). With the scroll gone, Jehoiakim turns his attention to its producers, seeking their lives as payment for what he apparently regards as insurrectionist rhetoric, “but YHWH hid them” (*ויסתרם יהוה*),

⁸¹ For more on the importance of this question, see chapter two.

⁸² Louis Stulman, *Jeremiah* (AOTC; Nashville: Abingdon, 2005), 300.

36:26). In the story's denouement (36:27-32) Jeremiah and Baruch return to the fore, and a new scroll is produced at YHWH's command (27).

In volume two of his *Old Testament Theology*, Gerhard von Rad emphasizes the degree to which the scroll of Jeremiah took on an independent role as a "character" in chapter 36:

The story is unique in the Old Testament, since its subject is neither a person, nor an act of Jahweh's providence or appointment, but a book. But the book's fortunes epitomise the fortunes of the message it contained. Once more the *motif* is that of the great failure, which Jeremiah plays with his own peculiar variations. We might therefore speak of a "passion" undergone by the book as well as by its author.⁸³

The fate of both Jeremiah and his book are intertwined, but the latter functions as an independent actor to such an extent that their individual destinies may be said to parallel one another. The scroll, according to von Rad, must be understood in its own right as a major player within the narrative, not as a minor object bandied about by prophets, scribes, and kings. The scroll is not only acted upon, but is itself an active agent in chapter 36 and throughout the book of Jeremiah, moving from the mouth of the prophet, to the text, to the king's fire, and once again to text in 36:27-32.

The ספרים of Jer 29 and 30 further demonstrate the increasing independence of texts from their speakers in the book of Jeremiah.⁸⁴ Whereas the scroll in Jer 29 appears

⁸³ Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* (trans. D.M.G. Stalker; 2 vols.; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 2:45. For a similar idea, see also Yair Hoffman, "Aetiology, Redaction and Historicity in Jeremiah xxxvi," *VT* 46 (1996): 179-89.

⁸⁴ Once written, the word becomes more concrete and may be understood apart from its speaker. See Jack Goody, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 37 on this point, though the necessary consequences of writing are overextended by his literacy thesis. The newly

inextricably attached to Jeremiah the prophet and a particular socio-historical situation in the exilic period, the scroll in Jer 30 shows significantly less dependence on the prophet and a particular situation. Whereas Jer 29:1 describes the exact author, audience, and historical situation of the scroll it contains, Jer 30:1 describes only the author and a future audience. This is one notable instance of a larger tendency away from historical specificity to greater ambiguity with respect to a text's audience. Once observed, this insight leads to the second characteristic of ספרים within the plot of the book of Jeremiah. As scrolls become increasingly independent of their authors, the book of Jeremiah presents ספרים as documents that speak across geographic and temporal distances.⁸⁵

In order to communicate across the *geographical* distance from Judah to Babylon, things have to be written down, even if it would have been preferable in the ancient period for them to be communicated orally and in person.⁸⁶ Thus one finds in Jer 29:1-3 a detailed report of a letter's provenance and historical situation.⁸⁷ The letter describes a

concrete nature of the written word does not always and in every culture lead to historical consciousness or empirico-logical thinking, as the earliest articulations of Goody's hypothesis assert.

⁸⁵ That is not to say that Jer 29 itself could not cross such distances, but that the letter is bound by its historical contextualization in a way that Jer 30 is not. Jeremiah 30 explicitly directs its attention to a future audience, and as a result has fewer obstacles in the way between original and ongoing audience.

⁸⁶ Niditch, *Oral World*, 90-91.

⁸⁷ For a similar account of prophecy by letter, see 2 Chr 21:12-15, which details an oracle from Elijah against Jehoram. Joseph Blenkinsopp argues that this letter is indicative of the transition between oral and scribal prophecy. See *Prophecy and Canon: A Contribution to the Study of Jewish Origins* (South Bend,

specific “author,” Jeremiah the prophet, who sends his letter “from Jerusalem” (29:1).

The text of Jeremiah’s ספר goes on to describe its addressees: “to the remnant of the elders of the exile, to the priests, to the prophets, and to all the people whom Nebuchadnezzar exiled from Jerusalem to Babel” (29:2). The degree of specificity points to the fact that this is a letter whose function, at least originally, was to communicate a message among contemporaries.

The chapter further demonstrates the concrete socio-historical location of this ספר by describing the reactions of Jeremiah’s sixth-century opponents. Following the content of his letter, the narrative provides an account of Jeremiah’s response to a missive from one Shemaiah of Nehelam (29:24-32). This exilic leader had apparently written back to Jerusalem to encourage Jeremiah’s arrest because of his counsel to those living in exile to “plant gardens and eat what they produce” (29:28; see 29:5).⁸⁸ In the entire exchange, the letter is a simple means of communication between separated parties. The example of Jer 29 demonstrates the practical communicative power of the scroll; in order to communicate with one another, those remaining in Jerusalem had to send messages across great distances.

Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977), 99 argues that this letter is indicative of the transition between oral and scribal prophecy.

⁸⁸ Unlike Jeremiah’s scroll, a full report of the text of Shemaiah’s letter is conspicuously absent. Shemaiah inaccurately reports the text of Jeremiah’s letter, which nowhere states that “it will be a long time,” as he asserts (ארכה היא). This inaccuracy further undermines Shemaiah as one who speaks falsely to the people in exile, as Jeremiah contends in his final missive (29:30-32).

Elsewhere in the book of Jeremiah, this epistolary necessity creates a new textual reality whose reach is more than geographic. Immediately following the ספרים of chapter 29, Jer 30:1-4 describes a new reason for writing a ספר:

הדבר אשר היה אל־ירמיהו מאת יהוה לאמר כה־אמר יהוה אלהי ישראל לאמר
כתב־לך את כל־הדברים אשר־דברתי אליך אל־ספר כי הנה ימים באים נאם־
יהוה ושבתי את־שבות עמי ישראל ויהודה אמר יהוה והשבתי אל־הארץ
אשר־נתתי לאבותם וירשוה ואלה דברים אשר דבר יהוה אל־ישראל ואל־
יהודה

The word that came to Jeremiah from YHWH: “Thus says YHWH, the God of Israel: ‘Write for yourself all the words that I have spoken to you on a scroll *for behold, the days are coming –oracle of YHWH – that I will restore the fortune of my people Israel and Judah, says YHWH. I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their ancestors and they will possess it.*’ These are the words that YHWH spoke to Israel and to Judah.”

In the preceding ספר, geographic distance necessitates the sending of letters. The nature of this ספר, however, is quite different. The prophet is once again described as the party responsible for the scroll (30:2), but the addressees are left unspecified. No exact historical situation is given, and no concrete reaction appears. Most importantly, God specifies the reason for the creation of the scroll as a means to overcome the *temporal* distance between the words of the letter and its future readers. God commands the writing of all the words “because – behold! - days are coming (כי הנה ימים באים)” when there will be divine restoration for Israel and Judah. Across time, the scroll can witness to a new reality for the exilic community. By means of this ספר the narrator recognizes the ongoing vitality of the written word to witness to God’s activity for Israel’s restoration. In the plot of the book of Jeremiah, the written word functions increasingly as

a hopeful force in Israel's life, a powerful means by which the people and YHWH may communicate across space and time.

Occasionally texts are composed for the explicit purpose of enduring across generations. When Jeremiah purchases Hanamel's field in Anathoth (32:6-25), Jer 32:14 goes into detail to describe the two scrolls involved in the prophet's symbolic purchase:

כה־אמר יהוה צבאות אלהי ישראל לקוח את־הספרים האלה את
ספר המקנה הזה ואת ספר הגלוי הזה ונתתם בכלי־הרש למען יעמדו ימים רבים

Thus says YHWH of hosts, the God of Israel: "Take these scrolls, this sealed scroll of purchase and this open scroll. Put them in an earthen jar *so that they may endure many days*.

Concrete steps are taken to preserve the documentary witness. As long as these steps are taken, texts may last beyond the lives of their authors through the vicissitudes of war and exile described in 32:15 (see also 32:25).

Nevertheless, Jeremiah harbors no illusions with respect to the durability of the written word, and throughout the book scrolls are characterized as both durable and fragile, as documents at risk. This simultaneous durability and fragility is the third characteristic of scrolls within the narrative of the book of Jeremiah. Consider once more the example immediately above in Jer 32:14. Jeremiah is aware of textual fragility, so he places the ספרים in jars for their protection. By means of this simple step the word preserved in the text is kept for years, demonstrating the written word's durability. A similar dynamic of fragility and durability exists in Jer 36, where Jehoiakim destroys the first scroll with ease (36:23). Nevertheless, he cannot prevent inscription of another

scroll in spite of his destructive efforts (36:32). The written word is at once extremely fragile and remarkably resilient.

Scrolls of divine provenance exhibit special durability in Jeremiah.⁸⁹ God's inscription of sin in Jer 17:1 is written "with a stylus of iron, with an adamantine point engraved upon the tablet of their heart" (חטאת יהודה כתובה בעט ברזל בעפרן שמיר) (חרושה על-לוח לבם). Not with the typical implements of the reed stylus or stone tablet does God inscribe Israel's sin, but with items designed to create lasting inscriptions.⁹⁰ In Jer 31:31-34 the inscription of Torah on Israel's heart speaks both to the fragility of the earlier written covenant and to the permanence of the new "text" that will be created. The earlier covenant has been broken (31:32), but that which is new will endure "in those days" (31:33). Even so great an inscription as the two Sinai tablets, the passage reminds readers, is a fragile text that is ultimately broken (Exod 32:19). Yet the covenant and written word will endure again when it is written on the tablet of the peoples' hearts, resilient in spite of its inherent written weakness. All physical written documents, the passage implies, are at risk, even when written by God. Metaphorically written on the hearts of God's people, the covenant becomes permanent, secured apart from the physical documents so familiar to Israel – yet, as this study suggests, the new covenant also

⁸⁹ Job 19:23 describes an exceedingly positive view regarding the enduring nature of written words:
Oh that my words were written!
Oh that they were inscribed in a scroll!
Oh that with an iron pen and lead
they were graven in the rock forever!

⁹⁰ Philip J. King, *Jeremiah. An Archaeological Companion* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 87-89.

presupposes the inscription of sacred texts.⁹¹ Long before Jacques Derrida discovered the simultaneous strength and weakness of the written word, the ancient Israelites seem to have been aware of this paradoxical characteristic.⁹²

Fourth, texts are both mundane and powerful, and are hardly ever reducible to one or the other aspect. Even a supposedly mundane text like the certificate of divorce in Jer 3:8 performs the change of which it speaks. The ספריים of Jer 32 are certainly put to ordinary archival economic uses, but they also exist as enduring symbols of Judah's hope beyond the exile. Likewise, the scroll in 51:59-64 is a "political act of a special, lyrical kind," but it is also a powerful missive capable of bringing about the curse that both Jeremiah and Seraiah pronounce against Babylon.⁹³ To put the matter another way, texts are rarely devoid of some sense of their performative power in the book of Jeremiah.⁹⁴

This mysterious aspect of the written word in the HB invariably comes not from some abstract notion of magical power, but from the power inherent in YHWH's involvement in that written word. Texts alone never accomplish anything in Jeremiah unless they are tied directly to the word of YHWH. In this respect they are never simply

⁹¹ Christoph Levin, *Die Verheissung des Neuen Bundes in ihrem theologieggeschichtlichen Zusammenhang ausgelegt* (FRLANT 137; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1985), 264 notes that "This time, the new covenant is understood as presupposing the Torah. ברית and תורה are virtually coincident. Therefore the aim of the promise is not to *restore* the broken relationship with God but to *complete* the relationship with God made possible by the Torah." Author's italics. Cited in H.-J. Fabry, "תורה," *TDOT* 15:626.

⁹² For more on Derrida's concept of the written, see Yvonne Sherwood and Kevin Hart, *Derrida and Religion* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 9-11.

⁹³ Walter Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah: Exile and Homecoming* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 487. See also Stulman, *Jeremiah*, 383, who calls the episode a "daring act of resistance."

⁹⁴ Niditch, *Oral World*, 104.

mundane, but are invested with greater significance in every instance by the invigoration of the word of YHWH.

Even in Jer 51:59-64, where the word of YHWH is only indirectly referenced, the prior memory of the divine word is invoked:

יהוה אתה דברת אל־המקום הזה להכריתו לבלתי היות־בו יושב למאדם ועד־
בהמה כִּי־שממות עולם תהיה

YHWH, you have spoken against this place to cut it off so that there will be no inhabitant, human or animal, for an utter desolation forever it will be. (51:61)

The reference to God's prior speech hearkens back to the immediately preceding oracle against Babylon, wherein the word of YHWH was spoken on multiple occasions (Jer 50:1; 51:1). Even here, in a passage that seems to depict the power of a scroll by simple virtue of its written nature (reinforced by the symbolic act of reading and sinking the scroll that goes with it), the text is connected inextricably with the word of YHWH.

The divine word not only endows the word with great power in the sixth century BCE for specific historical situations. It also empowers the word to speak and last beyond the initial instances of their use for future generations. Texts endure, and whenever they do so in the plot of Jeremiah they communicate a hopeful message.⁹⁵ The very presence of the written word of YHWH becomes a means by which the community may invoke and experience YHWH's presence once again. The word of YHWH dwells

⁹⁵ Whether or not the same can be said of the entire book of Jeremiah remains open to debate, but given the late insertion of the Book of Consolation and other hopeful interjections (e.g., Jer 3:11-18), it appears that some tradents, at least, thought the book could convey a hopeful message after the exile.

among the Israelites in exile and Yehud, so that there is hope that the community may continue in the presence of a true, divine word.

The book of Jeremiah consistently paints a portrait of the written word as an important part of the sixth-century world in which Jeremiah and the exilic community lived. The overall effect of these four characteristics is to contribute within the narrative to a positive understanding of ספרים. Together with self-references, the tradents of Jeremiah have used the characterization of scrolls to encourage acceptance of prophetic textualization not only within the narrative of Jeremiah, but also beyond it into the world of the reader. “This book” is fragile yet enduring, independent, mysteriously powerful, and communicative across geographical and temporal distances. Most importantly, like so many of the texts within the narrative of Jeremiah, “this book” can and does serve as a conduit of the divine word.

By means of self-references and careful narrative characterization, the scribal tradents responsible for the MT of Jeremiah present a portrait of Jeremiah’s textualization that serves their interests by authorizing the text through the prophet and his scribe Baruch. Having authorized the scribal activity behind the text (chapter two) and the text itself (chapter three), however, there yet remains another task for the tradents of the book of Jeremiah: they must authorize a reading audience and instruct them carefully in the way by which they must receive this written word. In the next chapter, we consider the means by which Jeremiah accomplishes this important task.

4. Inscribing Audiences in the Book of Jeremiah

Speech too is an event; speech is discourse as event; speech is the instance of discourse, as Benvenuto says; in speech and by speech, the sentences which constitute the discourse signify *hic et nunc*. Reading – as the actualization of the text – gives to writing a similar achievement: the actualized text finds at last an environment and an audience, a world and an intersubjective dimension.

--Paul Ricoeur¹

על־מי אדברה ואעידה וישמע
הנה ערלה אזנם ולא יוכלו להקשיב
הנה דבר־יהוה היה להם לחרפה לא יחפצו־בו

To whom shall I speak and give warning that they might listen?
Behold, their ear is uncircumcised, and they are not able to give heed.
Behold, the word of YHWH has become a reproach to them.
They do not delight in it.

--Jeremiah 6:10

Following the exploration of Jeremiah's concept of both writers and the written, it remains to consider the book's audiences. How do the multiple audiences of the narrative interact with the written word, and how does this idealized portrait influence and create the audience that perceives it? What relationship exists between the constructed addressees of the narrative and Jeremiah's historical audience?² Following

¹ Paul Ricoeur, "What is a Text? Explanation and Interpretation," in David M. Rasmussen, *Mythic-Symbolic Language and Philosophical Anthropology* (ed. D. M. Rasmussen; The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971), 145-46.

² I assume the existence of two audiences, one determined only by the text and another intended to receive such a text in historical actuality. See Sharon E. Jarvis, "Audience: An Overview," in *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric* (ed. T. O. Sloane; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 61, who asserts that "Rhetors can create a construct of a universal audience in order to persuade a particular one ... while being guided by its presumptions." Thus, the debate over whether an audience must be understood as "real" and materially identifiable or an ideal construct is an unnecessary one, as the dichotomy is false. All historical audiences

the pattern established in the previous two chapters, this study attempts to answer these complex questions 1) by attending to the narrative characterization of audiences in the book of Jeremiah and 2) by treating the means by which such characterization encourages extension beyond the narrative into the world of those receiving the book of Jeremiah (or some form thereof). This chapter treats, in sum, the wide array of Jeremiah's audiences, both imagined and historical.

After exploring the wide diversity of audiences and audience reactions in the book of Jeremiah, the first half of the chapter considers three consistent features of the characterized audience: 1) audiences in ancient Israel are presented as part of a larger oral/aural cultural context; 2) they sometimes receive the divine word via additional textual or human intermediaries (i.e., textual or human intermediaries beyond the prophet himself); and 3) they are most often audiences at worship. The second half of this chapter considers the interaction of this characterized audience with the audiences that received the book, arguing that reading audiences of Jeremiah mirror their idealized counterparts in the narrative. Like the ideal audience in the book of Jeremiah, the audience of the book of Jeremiah was a community at worship likely to hear the texts via both textual and reading intermediaries. Three traits of the text point toward this receiving audience for the book of Jeremiah: audience ambiguity, the aural nature of the

are necessarily idealized, and all idealized audiences have some connection, however tenuous, to the realia of human communication. For further on this debate, see Walter J. Ong, "The Writer's Audience is Always a Fiction," *PMLA* 90 (1975): 9-21 and Russell C. Long, "The Writer's Audience: Fact or Fiction?" in G. Kirsch and D. Roen, *A Sense of Audience in Written Communication* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1990), 73-84.

book of Jeremiah's language, and the book's affinity to the Psalms and other liturgical forms.

4.1 Audiences in the book of Jeremiah

Jeremiah's idealized audiences, like its idealized writers and texts, vary considerably throughout the book, so that no interpreter can provide a universal description of the people who receive a word, the means by which it reaches them, or their reactions to that word.³ This diversity should come as no surprise, since the prophet Jeremiah learns early in the book that his audience will be expansive and multi-faceted, as he is a prophet לגוים ("to the nations"; 1:5,10). So large is the prophet's audience (and, by extension, also YHWH's) that he prophesies to the entire land, calling to the ארץ in Jer 6:19, "Hear, O land!" (שמעי ארץ) and Jer 22:29, "Land, land, land, hear the word of YHWH!" (ארץ ארץ ארץ שמעי דבר-יהוה).⁴ Within the land a variety of audiences receive the divine word, as demonstrated when YHWH literally fortifies Jeremiah in 1:18 so that he might stand "against the entire land, namely the kings of Judah, her officials, her priests, and the people of the land" (על-כל-הארץ למלכי יהודה לשריה לכהניה ולעם)

³ Different kinds of messages and speakers are present throughout the book, but for the sake of simplicity this chapter primarily treats the divine message and its recipients. On this point we follow the focus of the book itself, which explicitly concerns itself with the means by which a message is transmitted only where the divine word is concerned. See below on true and false prophecy in Jer 23:9-40.

⁴ Leslie C. Allen, *Jeremiah: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 248, translates ארץ here as "country," a good alternative translation since the word "country" can imply both an institutional nation-state and a connection to the land itself. One might object that the land itself cannot in fact hear the word of YHWH, but that does not keep the prophets from addressing the land elsewhere (e.g., Isa 1:2; Mic 1:2; 6:2). In Deuteronomy, heaven and earth (ארץ) function as witnesses of the covenant between YHWH and Israel (e.g., Deut 4:26; 30:19).

אֲרִי). Beyond the kings of Judah,⁵ officials,⁶ priests,⁷ and the people,⁸ other audiences also appear in Jeremiah, most notably the nations⁹ and various individuals (e.g., Zedekiah, 37-39; Baruch, 45:1; Shemaiah of Nehelam, 29:24). The wide variety of audiences demonstrate that, according to Jeremiah, the דְּבַר־יְהוָה comes to the entire land of ancient Israel and Judah, so that none can justifiably claim ignorance of YHWH's message.

Just as there is no single idealized audience, there is also no common audience reaction to the divine word. On one occasion an audience may react with fear and trembling to the דְּבַר־יְהוָה, as when Jehoiakim's officials (שָׂרִים) receive the prophetic word, tremble with fear at its meaning, and hasten to pass it on to the king (Jer 36:11-20).¹⁰ On another occasion, only a chapter hence, the שָׂרִים rage against Jeremiah and the word he brings, accusing him of deserting to the Chaldeans and throwing him into a

⁵ 2:26; 17:20; 21:3-7, 11; 22:1-2; 23:1-8; 25:34; 32:3-5; 34:6; 36:20; 37:2, 17; 38:17.

⁶ 2:26; 20:1; 26:10, 12; 36:10, 15; 38:1; 40:3; 51:59.

⁷ 26:7, 16; 27:16; 28:1, 5; 29:1, 25.

⁸ 4:11; 5:21; 13:10; 14:10, 16; 16:10; 19:14; 21:8; 25:2; 26:7-8, 11-12, 16-18; 27:16; 28:1; 37:2; et al.

⁹ 1:5; 4:16 6:18; 18:13; 25:30; 31:10; 33:9; 46:12. Of course, the nations themselves may never have heard these divine messages, since they were messages composed by and for an Israelite audience. As such, the nations are an imagined, not a real audience, and they tell us more about how Judah understood their role among the nations than about those nations themselves. For an extended treatment of Babylon's role in Jeremiah and the surprisingly measured response to this nation in the book of Jeremiah, see John Hill, *Friend or Foe? The Figure of Babylon in the Book of Jeremiah MT* (BI 40; Leiden: Brill, 1999).

¹⁰ In chapter 36, contrast the reaction of the שָׂרִים with that of the king's עֲבָדִים, who follow the king by not trembling at the word of YHWH or rending their clothes (36:24). In this chapter, a distinction is drawn between the שָׂרִים and עֲבָדִים, so that the former receive a positive evaluation in contrast to the latter. For a similar evaluation of the שָׂרִים, see Jer 26:11-20, where they stand untied against the priests and prophets in an argument over whether Jeremiah deserves the death penalty.

cistern (37:11-16). Sometimes the people of Israel show remarkable sensitivity to the oracles directed against them (e.g., 3:22b-25), while at other times their disregard for the word of YHWH manifests itself even after they themselves requested the oracle (e.g., 43:1-3). So inconsistent is the audience of the divine word that even the prophet vacillates between the possibility that Judah might turn back to YHWH (4:1) and certainty that they cannot and will not (6:10). Judah's inconsistency in the face of the divine word is itself a consistent feature of the characterized audience in the book of Jeremiah.¹¹ When the word of YHWH reaches its human audience, a real choice presents itself, and the book of Jeremiah portrays all manner of reactions.

Often, individuals in the narrative have conflicting reactions to the דבר־יהוה. One of the best examples of such strikingly inconsistent reactions to divine communication appears in the portrayal of Zedekiah. Jeremiah 37-39 describes the multiple contradictory reactions of Zedekiah to the דבר־יהוה, and the example of the king provides a helpful model through which to perceive both the subtle varieties of reactions to the divine word and the fundamental dichotomy set up by the narrative that one must either obey or disobey the divine word. That is, Zedekiah's example demonstrates that audiences may take a variety of nuanced stances toward the divine word.

¹¹ Indeed, the possibility of both audience reactions to the prophetic word (acceptance or rejection) provides an interpretive crux by which the idealized audience extends beyond the text of Jeremiah into the world of Jeremiah's readers. Jeremiah's characters make choices as to whether or not they will heed the prophetic word when it comes to them, and the text of Jeremiah provides instructions for future hearers to negotiate the same difficult choice.

At the beginning of Jer 37-39, the narrative reports that multiple audiences were unreceptive to the divine word: “But neither he (Zedekiah) nor his servants nor the people of the land listened to the words of YHWH which he spoke through Jeremiah.” (37:2; ולא שמע הוא ועבדיו ועם הארץ אל־דברי יהוה אשר דבר ביד ירמיהו). Such preemptive narration of eventual disobedience removes narrative tension, describing at the outset the result of Zedekiah’s multiple reactions to the divine word. No matter what degree of nuance the narrative introduces to Zedekiah’s various responses, he will finally fail to heed the divine word, and the narrative judges his behavior negatively before attempting to describe it. In the book of Jeremiah, as elsewhere in the HB, only two kinds of audiences exist: those who heed the word of YHWH, and those who do not. Nevertheless, the narratives of the book of Jeremiah do not remain wholly unsympathetic to the plight of the audience of the divine word, a fact demonstrated by the sympathetic treatment of Zedekiah. Often, the divine word can be difficult to hear and to heed, as Zedekiah shows.

Immediately after narrating the king’s imminent failure, the narrative describes Zedekiah’s request for prophetic intercession to YHWH (37:3), indicating royal openness to YHWH’s prophet.¹² Juxtaposed with his imminent failure to heed, the fact that the king initiates prophetic communication with the divine proves surprising. Ominously,

¹² But see Allen, *Jeremiah*, 405, who describes Zedekiah’s request for intercession “perverse,” understanding it as a last-ditch effort to avoid annihilation at the hands of Babylon. Zedekiah, however, is no flat character, but a king trapped between the prophetic word and that of his own officials. Though he finally remains disobedient, he is a more sympathetic character than Allen allows. For Zedekiah as a “tragic figure: cautious, inept, and compromised,” see Louis Stulman, *Jeremiah* (AOTC; Nashville: Abingdon, 2005), 311-12.

the narrative then foreshadows the coming fate of the prophet when he states matter-of-factly that this initial request came when Jeremiah was “coming and going in the midst of the people. They had not put him (in) prison” (4; **בא ויצא בתוך העם ולא־נתנו אתו בית** (הכליא). In addition to this circumstantial information, Jer 37:5 reports the specifics of Zedekiah and Judah’s political situation: “the army of Pharaoh had gone up from Egypt. The Chaldeans laying siege to Jerusalem heard report of them and went up from Jerusalem” (**וחיל פרעה יצא ממצרים וישמעו הכשדים הצרים על־ירושלם את־שמעם ויעלו**) (מעל ירושלם). The details reported in verses four and five provide the reasons for Zedekiah’s intercession, yet the provision of a likely rationale for prophetic intercession does not gainsay the positive posture of the king toward the divine word. In the beginning of his story, at least, the king desires to hear the **דבר־יהוה** from Jeremiah, for he is hopeful that such a word will prompt divine salvation. He is an imperfect audience, but he does seek the word of YHWH. In this respect he is not unlike Judah itself.

Zedekiah does not reappear in the narrative until 37:17, where he asks Jeremiah, in secret (**בסתר**), whether or not he has received a word from YHWH: “Is there a word from YHWH?” (**היש דבר מאת יהוה**). Indeed, the word of YHWH had come to Jeremiah (37:6-10), and he delivers his brief message to Zedekiah: “Into the hand of the king of Babylon you shall be given” (**ביד מלך־בבל תנתן**).¹³ Upon hearing this word, Zedekiah

¹³ While the reported message in 37:17 accurately sums up the report received by the prophet in 37:6-11, the prophet does not relate the exact words of the divine to the king, a surprising turn given the exact command given to the prophet in 37:7: “Thus you shall say to the king of Judah who sent you to me to

reacts only by heeding Jeremiah's additional request for a prison transfer (18-21). Since Jeremiah has not yet delivered YHWH's full instructions to the king, Zedekiah can here only receive the unfortunate news. To the end of chapter 37, then, Zedekiah remains a sympathetic character whose final reaction to such gloomy news remains uncertain.

In chapter 38, Zedekiah finally receives exact instructions from YHWH, though even if these are followed exactly they will not forestall the inevitable destruction of Jerusalem. Stuck between Egypt and Babylon, Zedekiah now finds himself trapped between the prophet Jeremiah and the officials of both Judah and Babylon. Throughout this chapter Zedekiah serves as an audience, listening to his שָׂרִים (4), the prophet's deliverer Ebed-Melech (8-9), and finally Jeremiah (14-23). As an audience, Zedekiah assents to the requests of the officials and to the honorable Ebed-Melech, just as, in the previous chapter, he agreed to Jeremiah's request for a prison transfer (37:18-21). He fails, however, to heed YHWH, who counsels the king via his prophet: "If indeed you go out to the ministers of the king of Babylon, you will live. This city will not be burned with fire, and you and your house will live." (38:17; אִם-יֵצֵא תֵצֵא אֶל-שָׂרֵי מֶלֶךְ-בָּבֶל וְחִיתָהּ). The word from Jeremiah continues through verse 18, until Zedekiah expresses his worry that if he heeds the word of YHWH,

inquire of me" (כֹּה תֹאמְרוּ אֶל-מֶלֶךְ יְהוּדָה הַשְּׁלַח אֶתְכֶם אֵלַי לְדַרְשָׁנִי). There, YHWH's message to the king takes up six verses, while here the message is nowhere near as long.

he will be abused greatly by his conquerors.¹⁴ Here again the narrative sympathizes with the king, describing the difficulty of his situation and his great anxiety. The prophet responds to his fears in 38:20-23, once again encouraging the king to surrender himself and Jerusalem. Yet Zedekiah's fear prevents him from heeding YHWH's word, as the narrative has already predicted would happen (37:2). Zedekiah's example demonstrates the difficulty of receiving and acting upon the divine word, again a feature not only of the individual royal audience, but also of the wider audience of the ancient Judahite community as well.

To close chapter 38, Zedekiah once again conspires with Jeremiah to keep their conversation hidden from the **שרים**, highlighting the fact that what one hears can prove exceedingly powerful. The king counsels Jeremiah, "Let no one know these words, so that you may not die" (38:24; **איש אל-ידע בדברים האלה ולא תמות**). Jeremiah follows the warning of Zedekiah, not allowing the officials to hear what transpired between himself and the king (38:27), in essence restricting his audience. Yet the chapter ends without any decisive action on the king's part, so that no resolution to the situation is found. Only in chapter 39 does Zedekiah finally go out to meet the Babylonian officials, and this he does inadvertently in an attempt to escape Babylon's imminent attack (39:3-4). Just as Zedekiah fails in the final analysis to heed the word of YHWH, so also does all Judah itself.

¹⁴ Indeed, his worries regarding his treatment at the hands of the Babylonians are eminently reasonable given their eventual treatment of the king (39:6-7).

All of this underscores Zedekiah's confused character as an audience in the book of Jeremiah. On the one hand, he seeks out the prophet three times to receive a word from YHWH (37:3, 17; 38:14), actively engaging in the process of communication between kings, prophets, and the divine. On the other hand, Zedekiah does fail to listen, just as Jeremiah predicted in 38:15 and 20 and the narrator predicted in 37:2. His example demonstrates the fact that the hearers of the prophetic word may at one moment heed that word while at other times they fear to receive it. At various times throughout the narrative Zedekiah is open to the word, fearful of its fulfillment, and finally unresponsive to the commands of YHWH. There is great variety, then, not only among the different audiences of the book of Jeremiah, but also in each specific reaction to the דבר־יהוה. Given the wide variety of audiences and their reactions to the divine word, what common elements of audience characterization can be discerned in the book of Jeremiah?

4.1.1 Orality and audiences in Jeremiah (mouths)

One characteristic remains consistent, no matter the audience or its reaction: those who receive a divine message always *hear* the word of YHWH. The דבר־יהוה never comes in silence, but always from the mouth (פה) to the ear (אזן). Observing the primarily oral nature of ancient human communication has become axiomatic in modern biblical scholarship following the seminal studies of Susan Niditch in HB and Werner

Kelber in NT.¹⁵ One can scarcely mention ANE prophecy without emphasizing its primary nature as a spoken word. Yet this scholarly description is sometimes unnuanced, as there are multiple means by which an audience may come to hear a word. While the word in Jeremiah always reaches its audience via the physical organs of oral transmission, it may also pass through other media (written texts, other messengers), thereby complicating the direct path from a human speaker to a human ear. To provide a full account of the audience in the book of Jeremiah, such intermediaries must be taken into full account, but before describing these situations it is first necessary to describe the oral/aural nature of the audience in Jeremiah. To demonstrate this trait, one need only observe the prevalence and function of the physical organs of the mouth (פה) and ear (אזן).

Jeremiah mentions three mouths: YHWH's (9:11, 19; 15:19; 23:16), the prophet's (1:9; 5:14; 36:4, 6, 17, 18, 27, 32; 45:1), and the people's (7:28; 9:7 [8]; 12:2; 44:17, 25, 26). These mouths are not necessarily distinct, as, for example, the prophet's mouth is explicitly correlated with that of YHWH in Jer 15:19a: "Therefore thus says YHWH, 'If you repent, I will bring you back and before me you shall stand. If you bring forth the precious from the worthless, as my mouth you shall be.'" (לכן כה־אמר יהוה אֱמֹת־שׁוּב) (ואשיבך לפני תעמד ואֱמֹת־תוציא יקר מזולל כפי תהיה). The divine word originates from the mouth in the book of Jeremiah and provides the means by which the prophet obtains a

¹⁵ Susan Niditch, *Oral World and Written Word: Ancient Israelite Literature* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996) and Werner H. Kelber, *The Oral and the Written Gospel: The Hermeneutics of Speaking and Writing in the Synoptic Tradition, Mark, Paul, and Q* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983).

word for the people. A discerning audience must listen only to those words that derive from YHWH's mouth, as false prophets "speak the vision of their heart, not from the mouth of YHWH" (23:16b; חזון לבם ידברו לא מפי יהוה). The mouth is explicitly connected to the ear in Jer 9:19, as women are taught to "let your ear receive the word of his [YHWH's] mouth" (ותקח אזנכם דבר־פיו). As a final example, a rhetorical question about the divine mouth describes the transmission of the divine word to humans: "Who is wise and understands this? To whom has the mouth of YHWH spoken that he may declare it?" (Jer 9:11a; מי־האיש החכם ויבן את־זאת ואשר דבר פ־יהוה אליו ויגדה). One possible answer to this question appears to be "no one," but the hypothetical mode of spoken transmission is not in question. When YHWH communicates with humans, YHWH does so via his mouth.

Another possible response to the rhetorical question of Jer 9:11 might be that God has spoken only with the prophet. The prophet's mouth is closely connected with that of YHWH (1:9; 5:14; 15:19), as 1) the words of YHWH are said to be put in Jeremiah's mouth (1:9; 5:14; בפֿיך) and 2) the prophet's mouth is said to be "like my mouth" (15:19; כפֿי). As mentioned in chapter two, the mouth of the prophet becomes especially important in Jer 36, where the royal scribes go to great lengths to establish the connection between the written word and the prophet's mouth (36:17-18). The provenance of the prophetic words is significant enough that it becomes part of the remembrance of the fourth year of the reign of Jehoiakim in Jer 45:1 ("when he wrote these words on a scroll from the mouth of Jeremiah"; בכתבו את־הדברים האלה על־ספר מפי ירמיהו). This was the

year 605, significant in ANE history because of the imperial conflict between Egypt and Babylon at Carchemish, but significant for the composers of the book of Jeremiah because of its relationship to the inscription of the words that originally derived from Jeremiah's mouth (themselves connected early in Jeremiah with the words of YHWH [1:9; 5:14]). Even in the pivotal account of prophetic textualization in Jer 36 and 45, the oral origin of the written words are emphasized by their attachment to the prophetic mouth.

Though the people primarily act as an audience in the book of Jeremiah (and elsewhere in the HB), their mouths are significant insofar as they underscore the oral nature of ancient Israelite culture. Their mouths most often indict them for transgressions against YHWH, as they lack what they most need. "Truth has perished and is cut off from their mouths" (Jer 7:28; אבדה האמונה ונכרתה מפיהם). Indeed, so false is Judah and Jerusalem that their mouths speak of YHWH while he is far from their hearts (12:2; ורחוק מכליותהם).¹⁶ The pronunciation of YHWH's name in the mouths of Judahites is so reprehensible to YHWH that the deity precludes the use of the divine name in their mouths, forbidding his worship in Egypt in Jer 44:26:

Behold I swear by my great name – says YHWH –my name shall no longer be proclaimed in the mouth of any man of Judah in the entire land of Egypt saying, "As YHWH lives."

¹⁶ The word כליה denotes the inmost parts of a person's being for the ancient Israelites and may be translated literally "kidneys." A comparable English translation might employ the word "heart," as above and in the NRSV.

הנני נשבעתי בשמי הגדול אמר יהוה אם-יהיה עוד שמי נקרא בפיו
כל-איש יהודה אמר חיי-אדני יהוה בכל-ארץ מצרים¹⁷

Human mouths, moreover, often work actively towards ignoble ends, as words deriving solely from human mouths result in destruction and death, for “deceit he has spoken in his mouth” (9:7 [8]; (מרמה דבר בפיו). In Jeremiah, then, the mouths of the people are forces of self-destruction except in those instances in which the mouth is explicitly associated with the prophetic voice, which is itself consistently attached to the divine.

The prevalence of the mouth in Jeremiah, however, does not demonstrate that the divine word always and exclusively functions according to a single pattern of orality. A diversity of types of oral pronunciation in the book of Jeremiah may be perceived in the use of the root קרא. Translated “proclaim” or “read aloud,” the word functions in a variety of settings appropriate for oral proclamation.¹⁸ Such ambiguity in translation and context presents a particular challenge for the interpretation of the book of Jeremiah, where the integration of the written word sometimes makes both translations possible.¹⁹ In Jer 51:61, for example, how should one translate Jeremiah’s command to Seraiah:

“כבאך בבל וראית” (“When you enter Babylon, see and proclaim aloud all these words”)

¹⁷ This pronunciation comes after the people assert in 44:17a: “We will surely do all that has come out of our mouth, burning incense for the Queen of Heaven and pouring for her drink offerings.” (כי עשה נעשה) (את-כל-הדבר אשר-יצא מפינו לקטר למלכת השמים והסיד-לה נסכים). YHWH indicts the people in verse 25, pointing to their commitment to fulfill the vows of their mouths (44:25).

¹⁸ HALOT, קרא, 31-1128.

¹⁹ The integration of public reading in the history of ancient Israel may also be traced by study of the word קרא, which increasingly came to denote a word that was read aloud in the development of biblical Hebrew. See Hossfeld/Kindl, קרא TDOT, 123-24: “qārā’ in the sense of ‘read’ is first attested in the exilic period (esp. in Dtr texts).” For further on the point about public reading, see F.E. Peters, *The Voice, the Word, the Books* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 85-86.

כל־הדברים האלה (וקראת את כל־הדברים האלה)? Does Jeremiah command Seraiah to “read” the scroll or simply to “proclaim” the words found therein? Given the textual focus of the chapter’s previous verse (“all these words that are written to Babylon”; כל־הדברים האלה הכתבים; אל־בבל) and the fact that in the following verse the messenger is told to “say” (אמר) something alongside this proclamation, the better translation appears to be “read,” but such a translation does not hold across the book of Jeremiah. In Jer 2:2, YHWH commands Jeremiah to “Go and proclaim²⁰ (קרא) in the ears of Jerusalem saying...” (הלך וקראת באזני ירושלם לאמר).²¹ Here, the translation “read” would seem especially strained given the fact that no texts have yet appeared in the narrative.²² Whether reading a text or exclusive oral proclamation is in view, קרא entails vocal, audible expression. Audiences in Jeremiah always hear the divine word, and this is the most basic point of audience characterization in the book of Jeremiah.

The prevalence of the mouth in Jeremiah underscores the degree to which ancient Israel was an oral culture, but it does not preclude the use of the mouth in mediated discourse. The audiences of the ancient world perceived words to originate in speech, and the crucial question for the interpreter of a message in the book of Jeremiah was to

²⁰ For a similar use of the root קרא, see Jer 3:12, 17; 4:5; 6:30; 7:2; 9:17; et al.

²¹ Throughout this oracle further references to the audience abound, so that the prophetic audience is consistently identified and re-identified. 2:4: יהודה; 2:28: יהודה; 2:31: יהודה; 2:4: כל־משפחות בית ישראל; 2:28: כל־משפחות בית ישראל; 2:31: כל־משפחות בית ישראל.

²² But see Mark E. Biddle, *A Redactional History of Jeremiah 2:1-4:2* (ATANT 77; Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1990), 160-61, who posits that this introductory use of קרא may in fact entail a written document, since that is what the redactor would have been working with. Cited in Allen, *Jeremiah*, 34.

discern the originating mouth and speaker. Here we may contrast modern theories of the word that presume the word's origin in the mind. Given the advances of modern neuroscience, modern interpreters assume that words originate in the brain, which in turn activates other physical organs including the larynx, throat, and mouth for communication.²³ Moreover, we assume that the brain not only creates words, but that it also ultimately receives them. For ancient Israel, however, the ear, not the brain, receives verbal communication, and when it comes to audience characterization the ear is the most important element in the equation. The mouth in Jeremiah turns the reader's attention to the oral nature of human communication, but it is the ear and its various uses in the book that tell us the most about how one ought to receive the divine word. Moreover, the prominence of the ear in the book of Jeremiah provides opportunity for reflection on aurality in the book of Jeremiah.

4.1.2 Aurality and audiences in Jeremiah (ears)

The word "ear" (אָזן) appears twenty-nine times throughout the book, most often to describe Israel's failure as an audience.²⁴ Judah has "eyes but does not see, ears but does not hear" (5:21; עינים להם ולא יראו אזנים להם ולא ישמעו). Ancient Israel is not

²³ Note that we still locate words in a physical organ, just as the ancients did. The only difference is the organ in which we locate lexical origination.

²⁴ 2:2; 5:21; 6:10; 7:24, 26; 9:19; 11:8; 13:15; 17:23; 19:3; 25:4; 26:11, 15; 28:7; 29:29; 34:14; 35:15; 36:6, 10, 13, 14, 15, 20, 21; 44:5. Likewise concerned with the aural nature of the divine word, Isaiah utilizes the root twenty-eight times: Isa 1:2, 10; 5:9; 6:10; 8:9; 11:3; 22:14; 28:23; 30:21; 32:3, 9; 33:15; 35:5; 36:11; 37:17, 29; 42:20, 23; 43:8; 48:8; 49:20; 50:4, 5; 51:4; 55:3; 59:1; 64:3. Compare the references in Isaiah and Jeremiah to the 11 occurrences in Ezekiel (3:10; 8:18; 9:1, 5; 10:13; 12:2; 16:12; 23:25; 24:26; 40:4; 44:5).

only an oral culture; it is an aural one as well, and as such it must listen actively to the word and the speakers responsible for it.²⁵ This is clear throughout the book, but is nowhere more evident than in the Deuteronomistic sermons and prose narratives, where the phrase “incline the ear” (נטה אָזן) appears often to describe Israel’s basic transgression.²⁶ In Jeremiah’s first temple sermon, the prophet emphasizes the people’s aural failure (7:23-24):

שמעו בקולי והייתי לכם לאלהים ואתם תהיו־לי לעם והלכתם
בכל־הדרך אשר אצוה אתכם למען ייטב לכם ולא שמעו ולא־הטו את־אזנם
וילכו במעצות בשררות לבם הרע ויהיו לאחור ולא לפנים

Hear my voice, that I may be your God and you may be my people. Walk in all of the way that I have commanded you so that it will go well for you. But they did not listen and they did not incline their ear. They walked according to the plans, the stubbornness of their wicked heart, backwards not forwards.

In response to YHWH’s command that Israel both “hear” (שמעו) and “walk” (והלכתם), Israel neither listens (ולא שמעו) nor inclines its ear (ולא־הטו את־אזנם). Instead, they follow “the plans, the stubbornness of their wicked heart” (וילכו במעצות בשררות לבם) (הרע). This passage emphasizes the aural nature of Israel’s communication with the

²⁵ Aurality is distinct from orality in so far as it entails not only an understanding of a text’s origin via human speech, but also the “auditory aura” that is present when a word is spoken aloud. That is, an aural culture receives the various speakers of the word as well as the contents of the message. For the phrase “auditory aura,” see Don Ihde, *Listening and Voice: A Phenomenology of Sound* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1976), 78, cited in Lou H. Silberman, “Introduction: Reflections on Orality, Aurality and Perhaps More,” *Semeia* 39 (1987): 3.

²⁶ 7:24, 26; 11:8; 17:23; 25:4; 34:14; 35”15; 44:5. For more on the prominence of the phrase נטה אָזן in Jeremiah, see H. Ringgren, “נטה,” *TDOT* 10: 385.

divine by stating that Israel neither heard nor inclined their ear. In this way Israel's failure as an audience receives a double account. Jeremiah 7 expounds further on this point by noting that the Israelites refused to listen not only to YHWH, but also to "all my servants the prophets" (7:25; כָּל־עַבְדֵי הַנְּבִיאִים), observing that "they did not listen to me, and they did not incline their ear" (7:26; וְלֹא שָׁמְעוּ אֵלַי וְלֹא חָטְוּ אֶת־אָזְנוֹם).²⁷ In the prophet's summarizing indictment of Judah in Jer 25:4²⁸, the twin account of Judah's failure to hear is again emphasized: "YHWH sent to you all his servants the prophets – sending early and often – but you did not listen. You did not incline your ear to listen." (וְשָׁלַח יְהוָה אֵלֵיכֶם אֶת־כָּל־עַבְדָּיו הַנְּבִיאִים הַשְׂכֵּם וְשָׁלַח וְלֹא שָׁמַעְתֶּם וְלֹא הִטִּיתֶם אֶת־אָזְנוֹכֶם (לְשָׁמַע).²⁹ The final phrase of the verse seems unwieldy and unnecessarily repetitive. What other reason could one have to incline the ear? Yet the further repetition serves the purpose of connecting the two phrases even more closely, so that one may understand the purpose behind the "inclination" of the ear.³⁰

²⁷ Other occurrences of the combination (שמע/נטה און) appear in Jer 11:8; 17:23; 35:15; and 44:5.

²⁸ According to McKane, *Jeremiah, Volume I* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986), 620-21, 25:4 is likely a secondary addition to the chapter, which is itself not the oldest layer of material in Jeremiah.

²⁹ LXX omits the final infinitive construct from שמע. Given the fact that the MT likely follows the LXX chronologically, this text-critical situation lends further support to the notion that Israel's fundamental failure, at least in the first half of the book, was their failure to heed the prophets and YHWH. For further on this point, see Allen, *Jeremiah*, 285.

³⁰ Other instances of the combination of נטה און and שמע occur in Jer 11:18; 17:23; 34:14; and 35:15. One final example of a different combination points directly to the exclusively oral/aural nature of the received word on the part of the Israelite audience. In Jer 13:15, YHWH commands via the prophet that the people "Hear! Give ear! Do not be proud, for YHWH has spoken." (שמעו והאזינו אל־תגֹּבְהוּ כִּי יְהוָה דִּבֶּר). In this instance Judah is given a dual command to "hear" and "give ear."

The root שמע (hear/obey) in Jeremiah further underscores the aural nature of the audience in Jeremiah, most often demonstrating the typical pattern of unmediated prophetic communication from the prophet to the people. Having received a message from YHWH, the prophet subsequently conveys that message via the spoken word to his audience.³¹ Examples from Jeremiah could be multiplied, but here a representative sample suffices to demonstrate the usual pattern of proclamation and listening audience. In Jer 17:19-20, the book records a typical speech to an audience in Jeremiah: “Thus says YHWH: Go and stand in the Gate of the People... and say to them, ‘Hear the word of YHWH, kings of Judah, all Judah, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem who are entering in these gates” (כה־אמר יהוה אלי הלך ועמדת בשער בני־העם ואמרת אליהם ... שמעו) (דבר־יהוה מלכי יהודה וכל־יהודה וכל יושבי ירושלם הבאים בשערים האלה). The verses identify the source of the word (YHWH), the prophet who will deliver the spoken message (“me,” i.e., Jeremiah) by proclamation (ואמרת), and the audience (the kings of Judah, all Judah, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and all those entering into these gates). Another example of this simple pattern of exclusively oral prophetic transmission appears in Jer 10:1, when the prophet commands the people to “Hear the word which YHWH has spoken against you, O house of Israel!” (שמעו את־הדבר אשר דבר יהוה עליכם בית) (ישראל). The verse identifies the divine origin of the word and the addressee, the house of Israel. The word is to be heard, as the root שמע implies. In this instance the prophetic

³¹ Other messages, such as symbolic acts, also convey a message to an audience, but in this context we are especially concerned with those communiqués that utilize words, whether spoken or written.

intermediary is left out of the equation, though given the literary context of the oracle Jeremiah's presence may be safely assumed. The prophet receives a word from YHWH, at which point the prophet orally pronounces this message in the audience's hearing.³² The situation of the pronouncement is an explicitly aural one wherein the speaker and the audience are face-to-face, and as a result the audience may react not only to the divine word but to its deliverer.³³

According to this model the prophet is a speaker and the audience the recipients of a word that has always and only been spoken. Whether the entire people of Judah or a single person, the prophetic message is always heard by its audience and never received in silence. They are thus an audience proper, and the book of Jeremiah consistently points to the physical act of hearing by repeated reference to the ear (אָזן) throughout the book.³⁴ Jeremiah 9:19a includes not only the ear but also the mouth, expressing the oral nature of the communicative act: "Hear, women, the word of YHWH. Let your ear receive the word of his mouth" (כִּי שְׁמַעְנָה נָשִׁים דְּבַר־יְהוָה וּתְקַח אֲזִנְכֶם דְּבַר־פִּי). No intermediaries interrupt this communicative act wherein the words proceed directly from the mouth of YHWH to the ear of the women. Similarly, Jer 6:10 describes the spoken and potentially heard word of YHWH: "To whom shall I speak and give warning that

³² Walter Ong contends that the word "audience," given its etymology, can only properly be used in situations presuming oral transmission. See "Writer's Audience," 9-21.

³³ This is an especially important point in Jeremiah, where the issue is never only the message and its contents, but the one who brings that message. In the represented world of Jeremiah, prophet and prophecy never exist independent of one another.

³⁴ In Jeremiah, the noun אָזן occurs in 2:2; 5:21; 6:10; 7:24, 26; 9:19; 11:8; 19:3; 25:4; 26:11, 15; 28:7; 29:29; 34:14; 35:15; 36:6, 10, 13, 14, 15, 20, 21; 44:5.

they might listen? Behold, their ear is uncircumcised, and they are not able to give heed” (על־מי אדברה ואעידה וישמע הנה ערלה אזנם ולא יוכלו להקשיב). YHWH speaks, but Israel is unable to hear as a result of their uncircumcised ear (ערלה אזנם).³⁵ Prophets are speakers. The less often observed corollary to this proposition is the simple fact that their audiences are listeners, a fact no less true in the book of Jeremiah than elsewhere in the HB.

4.1.3 Beyond or/aurality – intermediaries textual and human

Though a great deal of evidence in Jeremiah points toward a pattern of direct oral pronouncement and aural reception, the book also complicates this picture of prophetic communication. Additional human parties interrupt the YHWH-prophet-audience pattern of communication, and other factors also come into play, as in the introduction of textual media between the original prophetic pronouncement and its audience. This is especially the case in the second half of the book of Jeremiah, where the audience shifts from one that hears a word that has always existed only as an oral pronouncement to a word that may have existed at some point in its transmission as a publicly proclaimed text. In this pattern of prophetic communication, the audience still hears the word (i.e., it retains its oral/aural character), but they do so as conscious receivers of that word via a written text.³⁶ The distinction is subtle, but significant in so far as it assumes an audience that

³⁵ The only other occurrence of the word ערל occurs in Jer 9:25, where the entire house of Israel is described as “uncircumcised of heart” (ערלי־לב).

³⁶ Given the probability of very low literacy rates in ancient Israel (common in the ancient Near East), the audience of the prophetic word remains dependent on skilled readers for transmission. As discussed in

tacitly accepts the written word as an acceptable channel for the divine word. Moreover, it paints a portrait of an audience that receives not simply an oral proclamation, but an oral proclamation read from a text. The significance of this shift in the history of Israelite religion (and the history of religion more generally) has implications that persist in modern religious ritual, where even in modern digital culture the act of public reading maintains a central importance.

Further reflection on the use of the word אָזַן yields deeper insight into a portrait of Jeremiah's audiences that goes beyond the basic characterization of audience orality/aurality. Whereas the word primarily appears in Jer 1-25 as an active part of the body, in chapters 26-52 it most often appears as a passive element in the prepositional phrase "in the ears" (בְּאָזְנֵי־ם).³⁷ The attention shifts from the character of the ears and what one does with them to their function in the communicative act. In the first half of the book, ears are inclined (7:24, 26; 11:8; 17:23; 25:4). They are uncircumcised (6:10) and "tingle" when they hear bad news (19:3). In the second half of the book, ears play a more subtle role, grammatically embedded in a prepositional phrase sometimes translated

chapter two, one of the subtle messages of the book of Jeremiah is the idea that these skilled readers can in fact be trusted with such a pivotal role.

³⁷ In Jer 1-25, אָזַן appears ten times, once in the prepositional phrase בְּאָזְנֵי־ם (Jer 2:2) and nine times alone (5:21; 6:10; 7:24, 26; 9:19; 11:8; 17:23; 19:3; 25:4). In Jer 26-52, אָזַן appears eighteen times, on three occasions with the typical Jeremianic phrase "incline the ears" (נָטָה אָזְנִי; 34:14; 35:15; 44:5) and fifteen times in the prepositional phrase בְּאָזְנֵי־ם (26:11, 15; 28:7; 29:29; 36:6, 10, 13, 14, 15, 20, 21).

“in the hearing of.”³⁸ The latter use of אָזַן focuses attention on Israel’s passive reception of the divine word and thus focuses attention more closely on the other elements in the prophetic communiqué: speakers, intermediaries, and texts. The prepositional phrase most commonly appears in conjunction with the word קָרָא and in public reading situations, which is exactly what one finds most often in Jer 26-52.³⁹

A similar shift in biblical conceptions of prophecy may also be perceived in the use of the phrase בִּיד, which creates further distance between the prophet and the divine in prophetic superscriptions. Whereas earlier prophetic superscriptions describe the delivery of the prophetic word directly to the prophet, post-exilic prophecy often describes the word coming “by way of”/“in the hand of” (בִּיד) the prophet. For example, Hag 1:1 states: “The word of YHWH was in the hand of Haggai the prophet” (וַיְהִי (דְּבַר־יְהוָה בְּיַד חַגַּי הַנְּבִיאָה).⁴⁰ Jeremiah 37:2 and 50:1 employ the phrase as well, asserting that the late oracle against Babylon came “through Jeremiah (בִּיד)” rather than “to” (אֶל) him. As the phrase בִּיד distances the prophet from the divine origins of the prophetic word, so also the phrase בְּאָזְנֵי distances Jeremiah’s audiences from the divine origin of

³⁸ So the NRSV and RSV. In order to preserve the presence of the ears in the book of Jeremiah, I prefer to render בְּאָזְנֵי more literally with the phrase “in the ears of.”

³⁹ See Exod 24:7; Deut 31:11; 2 Kgs 23:2; Jer 29:29; 36:15, 21; 2 Chr 34:30.

⁴⁰ Carol L. Meyers and Eric M. Meyers, *Haggai and Zechariah 1-8* (AB 25B; New York: Doubleday, 1987), 7, assert that the use of the word בִּיד “is something of an improvement over *hāyâ ’el* (“came to”), in that it reveals that the transmission of God’s word involves its communication to those addressed by the prophet and not to the prophet himself in the first place.” Even in such a small word, the book of Jeremiah has its audience in view.

the prophetic word. Such distance nicely parallels that which would have also been involved in the addition of textual intermediaries, though of course such a point does not prove the existence of such intermediaries.⁴¹ In prophetic literature, **בְּאִזְנֵי** appears only in Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, a fact that further underscores the ongoing integration of the written word into ancient Israelite religious history and the concomitant change in the audience itself.⁴²

In addition to the textual media by which the prophetic word is transmitted, the pattern of the audience that listens via text also assumes the further intermediary of a reader. The reader may in fact be the prophet himself, but most often the reader in the book of Jeremiah is part of the scribal class, so that the construction of the audience that hears the divine word via text in the book of Jeremiah is inextricably intertwined with the characterization of the reader. The reader may also be the same person as the writer, as in the case of Baruch in Jer 36. This need not always be the case, however, as the reader is often not responsible for the inscription of the document that they read (e.g., Jer 29:3; 51:61). The audience in Jeremiah, then, often receives the divine word not only aurally, but aurally via textual and reading intermediaries.

The first characterized texts of the book of Jeremiah are found in the **ספריים** of Jer 29. As with the exclusively oral prophecies described above, the prophetic oracle beginning in verse 4 asserts its divine origin (“Thus says YHWH of hosts, the God of

⁴¹ Note also that documents in Jeremiah are placed in the hand (בִּיד) of messengers and readers, as in 29:3.

⁴² Isa 5:9; 22:14; 36:11; 37:29; 49:20; Jer 2:2; 26:11, 15; 28:7; 29:29; 36:6, 10, 13, 14, 15, 20, 21; Ezek 3:10; 8:18; 9:1, 5; 10:13; 40:4; 44:5.

Israel”; (כה אמר יהוה צבאות אלהי ישראל); and describes its addressee (“the entire exile”; כל-הגולה). Prior to this standard oracular introduction, however, the chapter has explicitly observed its textual nature (29:1: “these are the words of the scroll which the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem”; ואלה דברי הספר אשר שלח ירמיה הנביא (מירושלם), noted its addressees (1: “to the rest of the elders of the exile, to the priests, to the prophets, and to all the people whom Nebuchadnezzar sent from Jerusalem to Babel”: אלייתר זקני הגולה ואלהכהנים ואלהנביאים ואלכלהעם אשר הגלה נבוכדנאצר מירושלם (בבלה), and named two scribal intermediaries (3: “by the hand (ביד) of Elasah son of Shaphan, Gemariah son of Hilkiah, whom Zedekiah king of Judah had sent to Babel to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon”: ביד אלעשה בןשפן וגמריהו בןחלקיה אשר שלח (צדקיה מלךיהודה אלנבוכדנאצר מלך בבל בבלה). The implied audience, then, is not only one that simply hears the prophecy from the mouth of the prophet, as one might expect from a simple reading of 29:4, but one that receives the prophetic word via text. The intermediaries Elasah and Gemariah serve not only as Zedekiah’s messengers, but also as the messengers of the prophet.

No explicit mention is made of a public reading of Jeremiah’s first missive on the part of these officials(1-28), but there is immediate evidence of such a process in the reading of Shemaiah’s letter to Jeremiah in 29, when “Zephaniah the priest read this letter in the ears of Jeremiah the prophet” (29; ויקרא צפניה הכהן אתהספרהזה באזני ירמיהו (הנביא). Here the audience is the prophet Jeremiah, and the origin of the words is human.

Nevertheless, the passage portrays the means by which an audience might receive a word through the intermediaries of written word and reader. Moreover, verse 20 implies that the text is heard by the people: “But you, hear the word of YHWH, the entire exile which I sent from Jerusalem to Babel!” (אתם שמעו דבר־יהוה כל־הגולה אשר־שלחתי מירושלם (בבלה)). Though the prophetic word comes via text, it is read out loud so that the people hear YHWH’s word. Such a hearing likely took place not only through the written word, but through the vocal proclamation of a written word on the part of an intermediary reader.

In addition to describing an audience that hears via the intermediaries of the written word and a reader, Jer 29 constructs its audience further by showing its considerable breadth. These scrolls are intended for expansive audiences, as evidenced by the fact that all three ספרים in the chapter are addressed not only to individuals but to “all the people” (1; כל־העם), the whole exile (4; כל־הגולה), all the people in Jerusalem (25; כל־העם אשר בירושלם), and, again, to the entire exile (31; כל־הגולה). Moreover, on occasion a text reaches an audience beyond those for whom it is explicitly intended. Shemaiah the Nehelamite originally wrote a letter “to all the people in Jerusalem, to Zephaniah son of Maaseiah and to all the priests” (25; אל־כל־העם אשר בירושלם ואל־צפניה בן־מעשיה הכהן ואל־כל־הכהנים) but it reaches both YHWH (24-28) and YHWH’s prophet Jeremiah (29). In addition, the messages sent back and forth in Jer 29 reach audiences their original speakers do not intend, so that the audiences become ever wider beyond their original moment of transmission.

Returning once again to Jer 36, one finds multiple audiences, including Baruch (4), “the people in the house of YHWH on the fast day” (6; **העם בית יהוה ביום צום**), scribal officials (11-13, 15-16), and Jehoiakim (20-25). In the previous chapter of this study, the shifting nature of the prophetic word from the spoken to the written word was observed. In addition to the word itself, however, the audience shifts. Jeremiah is the first to receive the word, and, though the passage does not tell us explicitly how such a word came to him, the reader may assume that it was not written, as the command that came was to transfer the spoken word to the written page (2; **קח־לך מגלת־ספר וכתבת**; 2; **קח־לך מגלת־ספר וכתבת**). Similarly, Baruch, the second audience, receives a word that has not yet been written down, and these words come directly “from the mouth of Jeremiah” (4; **מפי ירמיהו**). All subsequent audiences in Jer 36 receive the word of YHWH at some distance, so that their original provenance is increasingly less certain.⁴³

The people coming to the house of YHWH on a fast day constitute the third audience in Jer 36. In Jeremiah’s instructions to Baruch, the narrative expends considerable energy on a full portrait of Israel as a group of worshippers:

**ויצוה ירמיהו את־ברוך לאמר אני עצור לא אוכל לבוא בית יהוה ובאת אתה
וקראת במגלה אשר־כתבת־מפי את־דברי יהוה באזני העם בית יהוה ביום צום
וגם באזני כל־יהודה הבאים מעריהם תקראם**

⁴³ The addition of the textual intermediary, it must be noted, is not absolutely necessary, as according to the experts on oral tradition in modern scholarship, oral transmission could take place simply between two speakers. Jeremiah, for example, could have simply spoken his word to Baruch, who himself went on to speak a similar message. One cannot, then, consider the text a direct result of Jeremiah’s disbarment from the temple, but only one of several possible effects.

Jeremiah commanded Baruch, “I am proscribed, and am not able to enter the house of YHWH. Now you, enter and read aloud the scroll which you have written from my mouth, the words of YHWH in the ears of the people at the house of YHWH on the fast day. Indeed, in the ears of all Judah, those who are coming from their cities, you shall read aloud to them.

Though the large audience has been described well by the first description, “the people at the house of YHWH on the fast day,” the narrative expounds further, describing also “all of Judah, those who are coming from their cities.” Once again, the audience is impressively large, encompassing “all Judah.” The prophetic message is to be read “in the ears (בְּאָזְנוֹ)” a striking physical image juxtaposed with the words that have come “from my (i.e., Jeremiah’s) mouth” (מִפִּי), and the passage mentions these organs repeatedly. In so doing the narrative connects the written word closely to the prophet’s spoken words, so that he anticipates the anxiety of the scribal class surrounding the written prophetic word.⁴⁴ In order to alleviate this worry, the description of Baruch’s first reading in 36:8 reports that “Baruch son of Neriah acted according to all that Jeremiah the prophet had commanded him, reading the scroll, the words of YHWH, at the house of YHWH” (וַיַּעַשׂ בְּרוּךְ בֶּן־נְרִיָּה כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר־צִוָּהוּ יִרְמְיָהוּ הַנְּבִיאַ לְקִרְאָה בְּסֵפֶר דְּנַרְיָ יְהוָה בֵּית יְהוָה). The narrative goes to some length not only to describe the fact that intermediaries existed, but to show them acting in a trustworthy manner. The reader Baruch acts only in the manner commanded him by the prophet.

⁴⁴ For further on the need to justify prophecy as a written word, see chapter two above.

The passage explains the actions of the intermediary further. When Baruch reads the words to the audience of those gathered at the house of YHWH, he does so not in some unspecified location, but “in the chamber of Gemariah son of Shaphan the scribe in the upper court at the opening of the new gate of the house of YHWH” (10; בלשכת (גמריהו נן־שפן הספר בחצר העלין פתח שער בית־יהוה החדש sermons, Jeremiah spoke “at the gate of the house of YHWH” (7:2; בשער בית יהוה) and “in the court of the house of YHWH” (26:2; בחצר בית יהוה).⁴⁵ As the reader of the prophetic word, Baruch reads from the official chamber of Gemariah “in the ears of all the people” (באזני כל־העם).⁴⁶ The crowd is large, but the narrative immediately isolates a single listener and his reaction: Micaiah son of Gemariah son of Shaphan heard all the words “from upon the scroll” (מעל הספר), a superfluous phrase that strengthens the connection between the spoken and the written prophetic word. From the chamber (לשכה) of Gemariah, Micaiah travels immediately to the chamber of the scribe (לשכת (הספר), where he finds a new audience for the prophetic word, including his father (36:12). Micaiah then proceeds to transmit orally the same message that Baruch read, once again describing the broad audience of all the people. He never mentions the textual medium by which the message was first transmitted to those worshiping at the temple.

⁴⁵ The location in Jer 36:10 could also be explained as a combination of the two locales in 7:2 and 26:2, but that does not explain the location in Gemariah’s scribal chamber.

⁴⁶ For further on the significance of the Shaphanide family, see J. Andrew Dearman, “My Servants the Scribes: Composition and Context in Jer 36,” *JBL* 109 (1990): 403-21.

After Baruch, the further intermediary of Micaiah introduces the scroll to yet another mediating group, though at this point a simple oral report of the scroll's contents does not suffice.

Micaiah's audience requires their own reading from the original reader, and Jehudi delivers a message to Baruch: "The scroll that you read in the ears of all the people, take it in your hand and go!" (14; המגלה אשר קראת בה באזני העם קחנה בידך וילך). Emphatically positioned at the beginning of the sentence, the scroll takes center stage here (for more on this point, see the previous chapter), and it is characterized not only as a text, but as a publicly read text. In short, this group of officials understands themselves as an audience of the proclaimed written word. Though at least some of the officials present could presumably read the scroll themselves, they ask Baruch to read it, and he does so in verse 15.⁴⁷

This audience reacts as one might expect to YHWH's words of doom, trembling with fear at the prospect of YHWH's wrath: "When they heard all the words, they turned in dread to one another, and they said to Baruch, "We will surely report to the king all these words" (ויהי כשמעם את כל־הדברים פחדו איש אל־רעהו ויאמרו אל־ברוך הגיד נגיד) (למלך את כל־הדברים האלה).⁴⁸ This reaction follows only shortly after the oral report of these words, yet it is only after Baruch's reading that the officials react appropriately.

⁴⁷ For example, Jehudi, the messenger charged with bringing both Baruch and the scroll (36:14), later reads the same scroll to Jehoiakim and all the king's officials (36:21). Elishama is also described as a scribe (36:12).

⁴⁸ For the phrase "all these words" as an implicit reference to written words, see the previous chapter.

Further, the passage underscores the fact that the officials hear “all the words,” repeating twice that Baruch is to read the scroll “in their ears.” The officials react in an ideal fashion, and as such they are also an ideal(ized) audience that attends closely to the word of YHWH through the intermediaries of text and reader.

In stark contrast to the scribes of the temple, Jehoiakim, along with his servants, is portrayed as an exceedingly bad audience. In the first place, he is the recipient of a spoken word from the officials: “They went to the king in the courtyard, but the scroll they deposited⁴⁹ in the chamber of Elishama the scribe. They reported in the ears of the king all the words” (36:20 ויבאו אל־מלך חצרה ואת־המגלה הפקדו בלשכת אלישמע הספר). The message conveyed by the officials is an exclusively oral one, and according to the narrator the message they convey proves wholly accurate. They reported “all the words.” Nevertheless, the king has apparently received a report (whether from these officials or another source is left unstated) that the source of this prophetic word is a scroll. He sends Jehudi, who had earlier sent word to Baruch that he must bring his scroll to the officials (v. 14), to get the scroll, and, once he has done so, Jehudi reads it to the king, “in the ears of the king and in the ears of all the officials standing by the king” (v. 21; ובאזני המלך ובאזני כל־השרים העמדים מעל המלך). Even King Jehoiakim, far from an ideal audience according to this narrative, requires a reading of the scroll, not merely a report of its contents, though in this instance he fails to

⁴⁹ The root פקד occurs also in Jer 37:21, where the prophet himself is placed comfortably in prison to serve as a continuing source of the prophetic word for Zedekiah.

request the scroll's original reader. The narrative goes on to report Jehoiakim's negative reaction to reading of the scroll, explicitly contrasting the officials' reactions with that of the king and his servants (vv. 24-25). They "did not experience dread and did not rend their garments, the king and all his servants who heard all these words" (ולא פחדו ולא קרעו את־בגדיהם המלך וכל־עבדיו השמעים את כל־הדברים האלה). In addition to the contrast drawn between the officials from earlier in the story, Jehoiakim's refusal to rend his garments directly contrasts with the behavior of Josiah in 2 Kgs 22:11. In spite of these contrasts, however, both the officials and the king receive the word of YHWH from a text via a reader, so that the audience is imagined consistently throughout chapter 36. Following this scene, Jeremiah receives another word from YHWH, but in this instance the audience of the word is not spelled out clearly. We shall consider the remainder of this story in the second half of this chapter, but for now it suffices to show the characterization of the ideal expected audience: both good and bad audiences receive the word via a text and reading intermediaries.

At times in the book of Jeremiah there exists no obvious audience, as in Seraiah's reading near the end of the book (Jer 51:59-64). Twice the prophet Jeremiah refers to Seraiah's reading (51:61, 63), but in neither verse does he describe the audience. In light of such audience ambiguity, the fact that there nevertheless remains both a textual and a reading intermediary is even more striking. A multitude of commentators have pointed out the potentially "magical" sense of the text here, and if one chooses such an

interpretation no audience would be required.⁵⁰ Others have posited an assumed audience of Judean exiles, though none appears in the text.⁵¹ In light of Jeremiah's other pronouncements to the land of Judah (6:19; 22:29), another audience may exist: the land of Babylon itself. However one chooses among these possibilities, the intermediary pattern evident elsewhere in Jeremiah continues. The prophetic word, written down in a scroll, is read aloud from a text. Why wouldn't the oral pronunciation of the words pronounced by Jeremiah suffice? Why wouldn't the sign-act of textual deposition, divorced from its full-throated proclamation, accomplish the prophet's intentions? Answers to such questions may lie in the imprecatory practice of ancient cultures, but for the purposes of this study it is enough to note the apparent connection of the written word to a reader.

Regardless of the audience's nature, the pattern of reading a written text continues in Jer 51:59-64, though unlike Jer 29 and 36 the narrative describes only the command to read and not the fulfillment of that command. Jeremiah does give the quartermaster Seraiah certain words to say, a small portion of which corresponds to the oracle immediately preceding this passage: "YHWH, you yourself have spoken against this place in order to cut it off so that there will no longer be anyone in it, human or beast. Indeed, a desolation for all time it shall be" (יהוה אתה דברת אל־המקום הזה להכריתו) (לבלתי היות־בו יושב למאדם ועד־בהמה כִּי־שממות עולם תהיה). The final clause of this

⁵⁰ Robert P. Carroll, *Jeremiah* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986) and Niditch, *Oral World*, 104.

⁵¹ Douglas Rawlinson Jones, *Jeremiah* (NCB; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992) and Allen, *Jeremiah*, 533.

proclamation quotes some of the text of the oracle against Babylon in 51:26, which also states “Indeed an utter desolation it shall be” (כִּי־שִׁמְמוֹת עוֹלָם תִּהְיֶה). If one takes the contents of the scroll against Babylon to correspond with the preceding oracle in 50:1-51:58, this is another instance of a spoken word corresponding to a written one and may provide a small clue into the nature of the spoken proclamation. The oral performance of the written text here receives the direct endorsement of the prophet himself, who commands Seraiah to “See and read all these words” (וּרְאִיתִי וְקִרְאת אֶת כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים) (הֵאֱלֹהֵהּ), thus explicitly authorizing the proclamation of written prophecy. Even when there seems to be no audience, the intermediaries of text and reader appear.

4.1.4 The worshipping audience

Jeremiah characterizes audiences as part of an oral/aural communicative exchange and often audiences receive a message via the intermediaries of text and reader. In addition to these traits, Jeremiah emphasizes the worshipping audience, especially in the prose of Jeremiah 7, 26, and 36. In these chapters and elsewhere, Jeremiah goes to some length to point out that the prophetic word was directed to those who were coming to worship, and not to some other group. Jeremiah’s first temple sermon opens by describing both the place where Jeremiah will speak the prophetic word and the audience to which he must speak it: “In the gate of the temple of YHWH, proclaim (קרא) there this word and say: Hear the word of YHWH, all Judahites who enters these gates to worship YHWH!” (7:2; בשַׁעַר בַּיִת יְהוָה וְקִרְאת שֵׁם אֶת־הַדְּבָר הַזֶּה וְאָמַרְת שִׁמְעוּ דְבַר־יְהוָה (7:2; כָּל־יְהוּדָה הַבָּאִים בְּשַׁעֲרֵים הָאֵלֶּה לְהִשְׁתַּחֲוֹת לַיהוָה). Jeremiah’s audience is, in the first

place, one that hears the prophetic word. Yet the text goes into greater detail to point out that this is a word spoken to a worshipping people, “all those who enter these gates to worship YHWH.” This might seem an odd audience, given the fact that these are the people who have come to fulfill the commandment to worship in the Jerusalem temple; it is a sort of “preaching to the choir.” One could say, of course, that the community of Israel at worship was the largest group available to the prophet (and YHWH) for dissemination of his message, but why not give this message to kings or other official groups, many of whom do receive the *דבר־יהוה* elsewhere in the book? In Jer 26:2, Jeremiah’s “second” temple sermon, the location and the audience differ slightly from those found in Jer 7:2. Instead of “all Judah” (*כל־יהודה*), Jeremiah prophesies to “all the cities of Judah” (*כל־ערי יהודה*). The change of audience is slight and not particularly significant, but the change of the location from which the prophet speaks (“at the gate” [*בשער*] in Jer 7 but “in the courtyard” [*בחצר*] Jer 26) reflects a conscious placement of the prophet in the cultic sphere. The exact location of the prophetic delivery is not an incidental fact, as future audiences will need to know when and where the prophetic word is to be proclaimed. In Jer 36, the tradents combine the locations of Jer 7 and 26, asserting in verse 10 that Baruch read at the house of YHWH, “in the chamber of Gemariah son of Shaphan the scribe in the upper courtyard at the opening of the new gate of the house of YHWH” (*בלשכת גמריהו בן־שפן הספר בחצר העליון פתח שער בית־יהוה*) (החדש). All three of these texts take a special interest in the characterization of the ancient Israel as a community at worship when they receive the divine word.

In other subtle ways Israel is portrayed as a worshipping community, as in Jer 30:20, where YHWH delivers the promise that “his children will be as of old, and his congregation (עדה) will be established” (והיו בניו כקדם ועדתו לפני תכון).⁵² Elsewhere in Jeremiah, Judah is addressed alongside the nations, but among them receives the title of an עדה, a congregation (6:18): “Therefore, hear O nations, and know, O congregation what is among them!” (לכן שמעו הגוים ודעי עדה את־אשר־בם).⁵³ Such designations are unusual in the text of Jeremiah, so that one ought to pay special attention when they do appear. Nevertheless, the word appears as another point along the trajectory towards an idealized worshipping community, and thus strengthens the suggestion that Jeremiah constructs an audience that hears the divine word in a liturgical context. By way of comparison, one might observe that עדה never appears in Isaiah or Ezekiel.

The tradents of Jeremiah also describe the nation as a קהל, itself not an iron-clad demonstration of the liturgical audience construction of Jeremiah, but nevertheless significant. On five occasions the tradents of Jeremiah employ the root קהל (26:9, 17; 31:8; 44:15; 50:9). The first two occasions of the word occur in the pivotal chapter 26, Jeremiah’s second temple sermon. As mentioned above, the chapter explicitly describes Judah as a community at worship, and thus “all the people” are gathered (ויקהל) to hear Jeremiah’s message. Again in 26:17 the elders of the people defend Jeremiah’s right to

⁵² Note that this is a portrayal of Israel and not necessarily the sum total of their life as a community. The tradents may have had strong reasons to understand Israel in cultic terms that do not equate simply with the history on the ground.

⁵³ The BHS posits a textual corruption here, suggesting דעה rather than עדה.

prophecy and in so doing address “the entire congregation of the people” (כל־קהל העם).

This is not only a haphazard assemblage of people, but a group of worshippers who must discern the nature of Jeremiah’s prophetic word. Those who hear the prophetic word before the exile, then, are idealized as a worshipping community. After the promised return from exile, Judah will also exist as a קהל:

הנני מביא אותם מארץ צפון וקבצתים מירכתי־ארץ במ עור ופסה הרה וילדת
יחדו קהל גדול ישובו הנה

Behold, I am about to bring them from the land of the north. I will gather them from the far reaches of the earth – among them the blind, the lame, the pregnant and the one giving birth all together. A great congregation they will return. (31:8)

The syntax of the final clause emphasizes the nature of the returning community as a קהל, placing the noun at the front of the brief sentence. Moreover, the passage goes on in Jer 31:9 to describe the liturgy of grieving that occurs after the exile. “With weeping they will come and with supplications” (בבככי יבאו ובתחנונים), chastened but nevertheless characterized by their acts of worship.⁵⁴ The appearance of עדה and קהל in Jeremiah, coupled with the descriptions of Judah as a worshipping audience, demonstrates the third and final characteristic of the audience in the book of Jeremiah; when Judah hears the word of YHWH, it often does so in and around worship.

⁵⁴ קהל also appears in Jer 44:15 and 50:9, but in these instances the word appears not to have evident liturgical connections, but instead may be translated more simple as a “gathering.” But consider the fact that קהל does appear in Jer 44:15 in the context of a debate regarding the propriety of sacrifices to the Queen of Heaven.

4.1.5 Summary

Audiences in the book of Jeremiah always hear the word, but they are characterized variously as recipients of an exclusively oral message or recipients of a mediated message, sometimes mediated only by a text and at other times mediated by a text and its reader. Recognition of this second audience model provides a necessary first step towards understanding ancient Israelite public reading. It is not enough simply to divide between oral and written periods in the lives of the people. Rather, critical scholars must describe in greater detail the means by which the ancient community delivered and heard the written word. As with writers and texts, Jeremiah's tradents constructed their idealized audience with an eye toward the audiences that would receive their text. They imagined the audiences to which Jeremiah addressed the divine word, and in so doing they imagined the audiences of the book of Jeremiah. Indeed, such imagination not only provides a picture of how things were, but also provides subtle encouragement for how things ought to be.

The ideal audience in the book of Jeremiah hears the word of YHWH, sometimes through textual or human intermediaries, and often as a community primarily defined by their acts of worship. Jeremiah always characterizes the divine word as one that ultimately reaches the people's ears (בְּאָזְנֵי) via human speech. Yet in the second half of the book, there is a key shift in the audience in the second half of the book of Jeremiah. Here, audiences still hear the written word, but they do so via two intermediaries: texts and public readers. In addition to the presence of such intermediaries, the audience in the book of Jeremiah is often at worship, so that the portrait one has is of a community that

receives the word via textual and reading intermediaries in cultic contexts. Perhaps not surprisingly, this portrait matches well with the first audiences that received (and likely adapted) the book of Jeremiah.

4.2 Audiences of the book of Jeremiah

The audiences that received the book of Jeremiah were likely as varied as those described in the text, and it is not the purpose of this section of this chapter to describe the possible historical framework for these communities. Others have done so in great detail, and the conclusion of this study will suggest a few possible historical implications of the potential receiving audience.⁵⁵ Instead, this portion of the study attempts to focus attention on the exact nature of that potential audience. How does the portrait described within the text contribute to the reading audience's self-understanding? Further, how does it teach the audience to receive the text in front of them? What sort of audience does it encourage its readers to be? To answer these questions one must discern clues in the text that encourage reflection beyond the narrative itself. All ancient texts exhibit such features, even if they are difficult to discern, and in the book of Jeremiah three traits of the text help to understand the receiving audience: audience ambiguity, auralty beyond the narrative itself, and affinity to the Psalms and other liturgical forms. Attention to these contours of the text, coupled with the portrait described above, provide one with a portrait of the potential receiving audience for the book of Jeremiah.

⁵⁵ E.g., Christopher Seitz, *Theology in Conflict: Reactions to the Exile in the Book of Jeremiah* (BZAW 176; New York: de Gruyter, 1989).

4.2.1 Audience ambiguity and address

First, the book of Jeremiah often fails to isolate and describe its audience, so that one may imagine any number of potential hearers or readers. To whom, the reader may wonder, does this book speak? For example, Jer 23:9-40 addresses an uncertain audience, counseling all audiences who receive the book as to how they ought to receive prophecy. The text invites readers to consider their reception of the prophetic word, especially in its strong interest on the discernment between true and false prophecy. Jeremiah teaches its readers the sort of audience they must be, not only through subtle narrative identification and association, but also by direct command. More specifically, these verses tell readers not to accept false prophecy (16), specifying the fact that those prophets who speak of a *גִּישָׁא יְהוָה* must not be heeded (38). Prophecy itself will continue, and a good audience must still seek the word of YHWH, but they must not receive prophetic words without skepticism.⁵⁶ Indeed, twice in this oracle on prophecy, the audience(s) are told in the exact same words that they must ask “What is your answer, YHWH? What has YHWH spoken?” (*מָה־עֲנֶךָ יְהוָה וּמָה־דַּבֵּר*) (v. 37, see v. 35).⁵⁷ So the emphasis is not only on the discernment of false prophecy, but on the responsibility of the community to seek YHWH actively. These oracles fall within the narrative of Jeremiah, but they also demonstrate an ongoing need for the community to construct itself in such a way that they discern false prophecy and remain open to the prophetic word.

⁵⁶ One wonders how the ancient audiences of this text reconciled this counsel with the books of Zechariah, all of which employ the heading *גִּישָׁא* (Zech 9:1; 12:1; Mal 1:1).

⁵⁷ Incidentally, this exact phrase is used earlier by the people in Jer 16:10.

Jeremiah often specifies no exact audience, so that the receiving audience may infer from its absence that the text may be received as an ongoing word to the community receiving the text. As a further example, consider the first few verses of Jer 30. No audience is specified when YHWH commands Jeremiah to inscribe the prophetic message in Jer 30:2-3:

כתב־לך את כל־הדברים אשר־דברתי אליך אל־ספר כי הנה ימים באים נאמ־
יהוה ושבתי את־שבות עמי ישראל ויהודה אמר יהוה והשבתי אל־הארץ
אשר־נתתי לאבותם וירשוה

Write all the words that I have spoken to you on a scroll, for behold, days are coming – oracle of YHWH – when I shall restore the fortunes of my people Israel and Judah, says YHWH. I will return them to the land that I gave to their ancestors and they will possess it.

In stark contrast with Jer 29's very specific audience (v. 1), Jer 30 omits reference to the audience of the text Jeremiah inscribes, instead pointing vaguely to a future date for Israel and Judah's restoration to the land of their ancestors. The connection between verses two and three seems unclear unless one assumes that the durability of the written word is at issue. The implied audience, in that case, would be an anticipated audience, one unknown to the first writers but imagined for the future. Such an observation is particularly important not only for Jeremiah but for the prophetic literature as a whole. Jeremiah 30 provides evidence that those writing prophecy did so not only with their contemporary audience in mind, but with those beyond them. In short, the book of Jeremiah refers obliquely to its own future audiences.

The example of Jer 30, among others, expands the number of possible audiences for other portions of Jeremiah with unclear audiences, loosening the text from the

historical moorings of a single era and broadening it to include future readers. Brevard Childs refers to such processes as “dehistoricization,” which may overstate the case given the example of Jer 30.⁵⁸ After all, the expected audience does not include all who might receive the text in the future, but only those whom YHWH restores to the land from the exile.⁵⁹ In this way the prophetic literature opens onto the wide panorama of history rather than only a single moment or a single reading community. This does not mean that the book of Jeremiah fails to provide trajectories or clues as to its more immediate audiences, but it does demonstrate the relatively small degree of control the tradents could exercise over those who would wish to read the text they produced. They can describe an ideal audience and even an ideal reading practice, but they cannot keep readers from transgressing those boundaries or imagining their own ideal reading practices.

Other examples of the unspecified or future audience occur in both the first and second halves of Jeremiah. Jeremiah 23:1-8, for example, pronounces a word of woe to the “shepherds” (רועים) of Judah, a reference necessarily referring to an ongoing and

⁵⁸ Brevard Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Christian Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 79. A text that originally functioned within one context is removed from that history and placed into another context altogether, so that a new context alters its meaning greatly. Childs understands Second Isaiah as the chief example of this process, asserting that in its new context Second Isaiah becomes not an encouraging word to a single Israelite generation, but an eschatological word of hope for future generations (Ibid., 325-27).

⁵⁹ In contrast to Childs, Robert Wilson emphasizes a process of historicization of prophecy, especially on the part of those who produced their material anonymously and appended it to larger works in order to authorize - quite literally in this case - their work. See *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 291-92.

changing audience given the fact that the throne accommodates only one king at a time.⁶⁰ As in Jer 30, Jer 23 also contains a promise to place a future king on the throne, when verse five reports that “behold, days are coming – says YHWH – when I will raise up for David a righteous branch. He will reign as king and be prudent, and he will do justice and righteousness in the land” (הנה ימים באים נאם־יהוה והקמתי לדוד צמח צדיק ומלך מלך) (והשכיל ועשה משפט וצדקה בארץ). The oracle of Jer 23 exists not only for various kings over time, but for a future audience looking back on former reigns and forward to future ones.

4.2.2 Auality and the receiving audience

Second, Jeremiah constructs an audience beyond its narrative by means of its nature as an aural text. This statement does not simply reiterate the point from the first section of the chapter but rather is complementary to it. There, the point was that the traditions of Jeremiah characterize the audience as recipients of the divine word in an oral/aural context. Here, I attempt to show that the text itself is meant to be heard and thus itself fits best into a similar context. Since prophetic literature was originally meant to be heard, as some proponents of the new methodology of performance criticism of the Bible have attempted to show, the potential historical contexts for prophecy must imagine a context for such prophetic speech and audience reception.⁶¹ Two features of the text of

⁶⁰ But note the fact that Jer 20 locates this counsel firmly in the reign of Zedekiah, associating it explicitly with the narratives found in Jer 37-39.

⁶¹ William Doan and Terry Giles, *Prophets, Performance, and Power: Performance Criticism of the HB* (New York: T&T Clark, 2005); Yehoshua Gitay, “Deutero-Isaiah: Oral or Written?” *JBL* 99 (1980): 185-

Jeremiah help to demonstrate this point: a preponderance of words focused on the sounds of Israel's judgment and suffering, and a focus in the narrative on the type scene of nations deriding Israel. By such means, the tradents of Jeremiah create a text that operates especially well when read aloud. Hearing the prophecy of Jeremiah, the receiving audience hears the same sounds that Israel heard before, during, and after the exile, so that they become not only an audience but fellow participants in the suffering of their ancestors.

The book of Jeremiah exhibits an unusual number of words demonstrating the centrality of that which is heard. Consider, for example, the onomatopoeic word שרקה, which occurs in various forms nine times in the HB, with six of these occurrences in Jeremiah.⁶² One who speaks the word שרקה hisses. Once destroyed, Jerusalem will actually become "hissing," and the audiences hear what their beloved city has become. Sounds in Jeremiah are key to the "terror-all-around" Jeremiah, Judah, and Jerusalem. With the residents of Jerusalem and the surrounding countryside, the recipient of this text via the spoken word hears the coming judgment of YHWH through the warning blasts of the shofar (Jer 4:5, 19, 21; 6:1, 17; 42:14; 51:27), the hisses of those observing

97; D. A. Dorsey, "Literary Architecture and Aural Structuring Techniques in Amos," *Bib* 73 (1992): 305-30. The flaw of this movement has been in their account of the textualization of the prophetic literature. Few would disagree that the HB is meant to be performed in some sense, but what kind of performance might one expect in ancient settings?

⁶² Jer 19:8; 25:9, 18; 29:18; 51:37; Mic 6:16; 2 Chr 29:8. The related form שריקה occurs in Jer 18:16 and Judg 5:16.

Jerusalem's desolation, and other sounds of warfare surrounding them. Jer 4:19 demonstrates the fear of the sounds of war: "My guts! My guts! I writhe. The walls of my heart! My heart seethes within me. I cannot be silent, for the sound of the shofar I have heard: the alarm of war." (מעז מעז אחולה קירות לבי המה-לי לבי לא אחריש כי קול) (שופר שמעתי נפשי תרועת מלחמה). Within the narrative, the prophet shudders to hear the sounds of approaching destruction. With mention of the shofar blast, the sound is also made audible for future audiences. What the people within the narrative hear, the people receiving that narrative hear.

Consider further a brief type scene from the book of Jeremiah. Once destroyed, Judah must face the spoken taunts of the surrounding nations, and the prophet invites the hearers of Jeremiah to imagine the taunts of their enemies alongside hearers in Jeremiah.⁶³ In Jer 24:9, YHWH's punishment turns Judah into words: a "reproach/taunt" (חרפה) in the mouths of enemy nations, a "proverb" (משל) in the mouths of enemy nations, a "sharp, cutting word" (שנינה),⁶⁴ and a "curse" (קללה).⁶⁵ To this ignominious list Jer 42:18 adds another word for "curse," אלה. Once YHWH has exacted his punishment against Judah, it will remain only as the enemies' derisively spoken words. Throughout the book, Jeremiah imaginatively sounds the prophetic warning, tuning

⁶³ Similar scenes appear in Jer 24:9; 29:18; 42:18; 44:8, 12; 49:13. In the last of these examples, 49:13, Bozrah and not Judah is the subject of the nations' scorn.

⁶⁴ Both שנינה and קללה occur together in Deut 28:37, a signal that this sort of language in Jeremiah may derive from the Jeremiah deuteronomists.

⁶⁵ For other occurrences of these words, see Jer 25:18; 42:18; 44:12, 22; 49:13.

Israel's ears to the sounds of destruction if they fail to return to YHWH. The characterized audience hears these terrifying and awful sounds, and future audiences listen along with them. Indeed, the immediate future audiences of Jeremiah must surely have known the pain of such taunts from other nations more intimately than those who first feared such consequences.

The emphasis on sound in Jeremiah has a secondary effect on the receiving audience, turning the attention of its secondary hearers to sounds, and in turn reinforcing those that they are hearing: the written word spoken aloud. Thus, the audience characterized by its oral/aural interactions in the book of Jeremiah continues into the world beyond the characterized audience. These words are written not only for the people in the text, but for those that would receive such written material.

4.2.3 Jeremiah, the Psalms, and the worshiping audience

Third, Jeremiah encourages the emergence of a worshiping audience by its subtle but certain relationship to psalms, an oft-recognized feature of the book whose significance has been perceived only as a historical datum by which one may understand the genetic relationship between them and the book of Jeremiah. Jeremiah, as Walter Baumgartner's seminal work argues, is somewhat dependent on psalms and not the other way around.⁶⁶ Yet scholarly concentration on the historical-critical implications of Jeremiah's genetic relationship to the psalms obscures the effect of their presence in the

⁶⁶ Walter Baumgartner, *Jeremiah's Poems of Lament*, trans. David E. Orton (HTIBS 7; Sheffield: Almond, 1988), 101. See also Henning Graf Reventlow, *Liturgie und prophetisches Ich bei Jeremia* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1963).

book of Jeremiah. First, the presence of the lament psalms (or “confessions,” for some)⁶⁷ encourages readers to understand the entire book of Jeremiah in a worshiping context. Second, the presence of the psalms invokes the divine audience in the book of Jeremiah, and as a result moves the entire book further into the realm of the book’s readers and beyond the original historical audience, whoever that may have been.

Jeremiah’s psalms appear within a much wider literary context and as such serve a variety of different purposes.⁶⁸ The flurry of recent studies on the place and function of laments in Jeremiah concentrate primarily on how their presence affects the portrait of the prophet Jeremiah in the book, and to be sure they do portray the prophet in a particular light. For the purposes of this study, however, the psalms are more important as an expression of communal lament, an interpretation made possible by the fact that the laments themselves are only loosely connected to the historical personality of the prophet Jeremiah.⁶⁹ Jeremiah 15:15-21, for example, appears immediately following an oracle against Judah (15:11-14) and in this position makes sense not only as an individual lament but also as an expression of lament from an entire community. This may seem

⁶⁷ Here I prefer the word “laments” since the word “confessions” overemphasizes the role of the prophet as an author.

⁶⁸ For more on the literary purpose of the psalms in literary context, see A.R. Diamond, *The Confessions of Jeremiah in Context: Scenes of Prophetic Drama* (JSOTSup 47; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987); Kathleen M. O’Connor, *The Confessions of Jeremiah: Their Interpretation and Their Role in Chapters 1-25* (SBLDS 94; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987); Mark S. Smith, *The Laments of Jeremiah and Their Contexts: A Literary and Redactional Study of Jeremiah 11-20* (SBLMS 42; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990).

⁶⁹ On this point I am sympathetic to Robert Carroll’s perspective that the connection to a historical prophet remains tenuous in the biblical book. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 55-64. Jeremiah is a product of a particular community, and – I would emphasize – a particular worshiping community that found multiple uses for Jeremiah’s laments beyond their viability as tools for prophetic characterization.

odd given the fact that throughout the lament the first person singular address is employed when the speaker considers himself (e.g., 15:15: יהוה זכרני ופקדני והנקם לי (מרדפי). However, the singular is similarly utilized in the previous oracle when YHWH speaks, and here the object of address seems clearly to expand beyond the prophet. In Jer 15:13, for example, YHWH addresses the sin of the entire nation: “Your wealth and your treasure as plunder I will give, without value on account of all your sins in all your territory.” (חילך ואוצרותיך לבז אתן לא במחיר ובכל־חטאותיך ובכל־גבוליך). The language of “territory,” “wealth,” and “treasure” speaks of a nation, not an individual, and as a result the possibility must be held out that the lament that follows comes not from the prophet but from the community of Judah.

Jeremiah’s other laments (11:18-12:6; 17:14-18; 18:18-23; 20:7-18) connect more intricately to the narrative stories of the prophet himself, so that they are “historicized.” Yet even here Israel’s story and that of the prophet interact in ways that do not preclude Israel’s ongoing understanding of their communal life as a reflection of the prophet’s. Jeremiah 17:14-18, for example, appears in a literary context that could function for an entire community, though verses 15 and 16 points to the activity of a single prophet:

הנה־המה אמרים אלי איה דבר־יהוה יבוא נא ואני לא־אצתי מרעה
אחריך ויום אנוש לא התאיתי אתה ידעת מוצא שפתי נכח פניך היה

Behold, they say to me, “Where is the word of YHWH? Let it come!” But as for me, I have not run away from shepherding after you, nor have I sought the day of disaster. You yourself know what my lips have brought forth. It was before your face.

Only a prophet would possess the word of YHWH, and the text focuses closely on the words that come from the mouth of the speaker. Yet such an emphasis on speech and the word of YHWH need not necessarily entail an individual throughout the lament, as the increasingly general language of the lament could fit a number of situations. The rest of the psalm contains general requests for YHWH to “let my pursuers be shamed” (v. 18; יִבְשׁוּ רַדְפָּי) or to “let them be dismayed” (v. 18; יִחַתּוּ הַמָּלָה). Such generalized lament language makes perfect sense not only in an individual literary context, but also in a broader communal worship setting. Whether or not these psalms ought to be imagined in the mouth of Jeremiah or a community in Israel that followed the life of the historical prophet, the psalms leaven the entire book of Jeremiah with the words of worship, and focus attention on the divine audience YHWH.

The psalms focus the attention of the critical interpreter on the worshipping communities behind the book of Jeremiah, but they also affect these communities themselves by focusing attention on the divine audience of their words. Indeed, the divine audience appears throughout Jeremiah, as in Jer 10:6-16. In a context of oracles against false idols (10:1-5) and impending judgment against Judah (10:17-25), a doxology to YHWH arrests the attention of the reader. Indeed, the piece seems so out of place that for years scholars have puzzled over its inclusion.⁷⁰ The text relates well to the idol material that precedes it in verses 1-5, but clearly draws upon a different tradition when it states: “There is none like you, YHWH. You are great, and great is your name in

⁷⁰ James L. Crenshaw, *Hymnic Affirmation of Divine Justice: The Doxologies of Amos and Related Texts of the Old Testament* (SBLDS 24; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars, 1975).

strength!” (מאין כמוך יהוה גדול אתה וגדול שמך בגבורה). Here, in the midst of the first half of Jeremiah, where most often Judah and Jerusalem constitute the audience, YHWH enters the field of vision for the reader. Here, as in Jer 15:15-21, the prophet Jeremiah fades into the background and the people sing YHWH’s praise. The shift from the oracle against false idols is sudden, so that the effect on the reader is jarring, not to mention confusing. Whence came such words of praise? What does their idiosyncratic presence in the book of Jeremiah do for its ongoing readership?

Scholarly consensus holds that the hymnic fragment in Jer 10 derives from a later redactor, and that seems perfectly reasonable given their unusual nature in the literary context of Jeremiah as a whole.⁷¹ The piece’s inclusion was likely stirred by the mention of false idols in the first six verses, and the nature of Jer 10:6-16 demonstrates further that the book of Jeremiah provided an acceptable repository for psalms of lament and praise. Parts of the Israelite community received the fragment and burst forth in a hymn of praise. The connection to the rest of the section may seem tenuous, but then again the inclusion may point out for modern critical readers that no text stood outside the bounds of the community at worship, and thus always possessed potential for doxological augmentation.

In addition to the laments and the occasional doxological fragment in the book of Jeremiah, there also exist several direct quotations from the Psalter itself, including Ps 55:6-8 (Jer 9:1-2). Such quotes demonstrate that the tradents of the book of Jeremiah felt

⁷¹ Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 254.

free to draw upon the traditions of the Psalms and thereby to include in their own document the worship texts of the “songbook of the second temple period.” This free dependence illustrates an affinity between the two emerging text traditions, and given the likely worship context of the psalms, should encourage scholars to ask what liturgical connections or usage the book of Jeremiah itself might have had.

4.2.4 Summary

Audience ambiguity and direct address, the aural nature of Jeremiah, and the presence of liturgical terminology (עדה, קהל) and psalms do not necessarily demonstrate that a worshipping community is solely responsible for the text, but they do point to the fact that one stands in front of it. Many of Jeremiah’s latest layers understand the book of Jeremiah as a piece of prophetic literature useful for worship, and in subtle fashion they construct a text and an audience that are fit for worshipping contexts. In this respect the characterized audiences of Jeremiah parallel the audience that receives the book of Jeremiah. The book of Jeremiah evokes its future audiences through its characters, and, likewise, those audiences perceive themselves as participants in the narrative. This process of reciprocal interaction enables and encourages an audience that receives “this scroll” as a text that can be trusted as the word of YHWH. In short, they may understand this piece of prophetic literature as an inchoate form of prophetic scripture.

In the final analysis, the previous two chapters of this study were also about the construction of an audience. Insofar as Jeremiah inscribes writers, it argues that an audience may receive the written word as a truly divine word. As Jeremiah inscribes

texts, it more directly makes a similar argument, that the current audience receiving the book of Jeremiah may receive it as YHWH's word. Only as it treats the audience more explicitly, however, does Jeremiah divulge the specifics of how human actors may engage the texts before them. In Jeremiah, audiences receive the divine word as a community that always hears the words it possesses via texts. Such an insight brings this study back to one of its initial points regarding the importance of situating ancient Israel's texts by inquiring into ancient reading practices. If the primary location for a text like the book of Jeremiah (or some form thereof) was in a liturgical context, how then must contemporary scholars think differently about the purposes of the ancient prophetic literature found in the HB? Whether or not a liturgical audience characterized by the reading practices I have suggested can be proven for the sixth century BCE and the book's earliest recipients or not, the potential of the book of Jeremiah to create such audiences for itself as a text remains.

Conclusion

The prophet's command to Seraiah in Jer 51:61 to "see and read aloud all these words" (וראית וקראת את כל־הדברים האלה) extends beyond the prophet's messenger to the implied audience of the book of Jeremiah. With Seraiah, the audience perceives the written nature of "all these words" (i.e., they see them) and they proclaim them with the spoken voice (i.e., they read them aloud).¹ To establish this connection between YHWH and the ongoing audiences of the book of Jeremiah, the tradents describe each stage in the chain of transmission, blurring the line between the written word in the plot of the narrative and the written words of the book of Jeremiah.² Yet this chain from YHWH to the audience is not an end in itself, but a means to authorize the particular text of Jeremiah as a conduit of the divine word and the audience that receives it. When the tradents of Jeremiah describe writing and the written, they do not participate in the modern "relentless theorization of the written word," but instead concern themselves with the inscription of "this scroll" (the book of Jeremiah) and the construction of its audience.³

¹ Because of the low level of literacy in the ancient Near East, every audience member does not read, of course. Nevertheless, they participate in the reading as hearers of the proclaimed written word. For further on the participatory nature of speech in oral cultures, see Eric Havelock, *The Muse Learns to Write: Reflections on Orality and Literacy from Antiquity to the Present* (New Haven: Yale University, 1986), 70.

² For a similar blurring, see Jean-Pierre Sonnet, *The Book Within the Book: Writing in Deuteronomy* (BI 14; New York: Brill, 1997).

³ Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977* (ed. C. Gordon; New York: Pantheon, 1980), 127.

Because YHWH ultimately authorizes “all these words,” Jeremiah’s theorization of writing is inherently theological.⁴ As a result, the book challenges modern interpreters who understand writing as a secular act primarily employed in professional or economic contexts. Though relatively few in the modern West adhere to a theological account of writing, such interpretive frameworks were par for the course in the ancient Near East, and an adequate understanding of Jeremiah’s account of writing must include YHWH.⁵ More specifically, the book of Jeremiah cannot be comprehended without situating the act of writing within the theological framework provided by the book about itself (i.e. the chain of transmission). Accounts of writing and the written word that disregard the divine omit an essential element of the equation in the book of Jeremiah and will thus have difficulty appreciating the tradents’ understanding of the book as divinely-inspired written words.⁶

The opening chapter of this study explicated various theories of writing and the written word, some of which clarify and others of which confound writing and the written

⁴ Joachim Schaper, “A Theology of Writing: The Oral and the Written, God as Scribe, and the Book of Deuteronomy,” in *Anthropology and Biblical Studies: Avenues of Approach* (ed. L. J. Lawrence and M. I. Aguilar; Leiden: Deo, 2004), 114.

⁵ Just as modern critical scholars cannot assume too heavy a documentary emphasis in the composition of the HB (see Susan Niditch, *Oral World and Written Word: Ancient Israelite Literature* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996], 131-32), they also must be careful not to import their understandings of the act of writing itself. As David Carr and Michael Fishbane have shown so well in their different ways, scribes in the ancient world are very creatively involved in writing as a theological act. See David M. Carr, *Written on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005) and Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985).

⁶ I do not intend by such a statement that modern readers must become theologians themselves and either accept or reject the theological claims of the book of Jeremiah in order to understand that book, but that they should attempt to understand the theological claims of the book on their own terms rather than forcing them into alien secular contexts.

word in Jeremiah. Negatively, the deficiencies of four major theories of writing were described, and, positively, the advantages of theorizing theologically with the book of Jeremiah were explicated. Theories of writing as degeneration, progress, dictation, and deconstruction yield some insight as descriptions of writing and the written in the book of Jeremiah, but ultimately the frameworks such theories provide fail because they differ so markedly from the book's own account of writing in sixth-century Israelite culture. Of special importance are the criticisms leveled against theories of writing that assume a single cultural effect in every context. Writing does not always lead to cultural progress, as Goody, Havelock, and others claim, nor does it inevitably lead to the degeneration of ancient Israelite religion, as Wellhausen so strongly asserted.⁷ Against such reductionist claims, other theorists (e.g., Maxwell, Collins, Blot) have claimed that writing must be situated carefully in its distinct cultural contexts.⁸ Writing plays a variety of roles in different cultures, and one cannot reduce its meaning to a single category, whether that category is economic/material, religious, or ideological in nature.⁹ For ancient Israel,

⁷ Jack Goody and Ian Watt, "The Consequences of Literacy," *CSSH* 5 (1963): 304-45; Eric Havelock, *The Literate Revolution in Greece and Its Cultural Consequences* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982); Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994); repr. of *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* (trans. J. Sutherland Black and Allan Enzies, with preface by W. Robertson Smith; Edinburgh: Adam & Charles Black, 1885); trans. of *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels* (2d ed.; Berlin: G. Reimer, 1883).

⁸ Kevin B. Maxwell, *Bemba Myth and Ritual: The Impact of Literacy on an Oral Culture* (New York: Peter Lang, 1983); James Collins and Richard Blot, *Literacy and Literacies: Texts, Power, and Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); James Collins, "Literacy and Literacies," *ARA* 24 (1995): 75-93.

⁹ To this I might add the important point that writing itself may play multiple roles in a single culture, as it does in the Vai culture of Liberia. See Sylvia Scribner and Michael Cole, *The Psychology of Literacy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981). This study significantly challenged the role of the

such a context would surely include their major religious institutions and the theological ideals they espoused, and this study has attempted to theorize writing as a part of that framework. In understanding writing as a theological/religious act, this study has not attempted to exclude all other understandings of writing, but to nuance them and add an integral element to the understanding of writing and its theorization.

The claim for a theological account of writing in Jeremiah may seem to make too much of the importance of the divine, yet that book itself understands writing as a potentially divine act. Chapter two of this study sought to highlight the connections drawn between YHWH and the written, observing the means by which Jeremiah's traditions describe each link in the transmission of prophecy from YHWH to the written text. YHWH's words are given directly to the mouth of the true prophet (Jer 1:9), who usually transmits these words "from his mouth" to a scribe (Jer 36:4), who subsequently writes them down as the true, written word of YHWH (Jer 36:4, 18, 32).¹⁰ This is the first feature of Jeremiah's theology of the written: YHWH can be the source of written words, and his inspiration of such words can be discerned if one accounts for each agent in the chain of transmission.¹¹ Without the link to the divine, of course, the chain of

literacy hypothesis in social anthropology, on which see John Halverson, "Goody and the Implosion of the Literacy Thesis," *Man* 27 (1992): 301-17.

¹⁰ On other occasions in Jeremiah, the prophet himself appears to be the writer, whether or not such inscription was historically likely (e.g., Jer 30:2).

¹¹ To say that YHWH "can be" their source is to admit that, as with spoken false prophecy, not all written words are "from the mouth of YHWH" (Jer 23:16).

transmission from the written word only traces back to a prophet, and as Jeremiah shows so forcefully (Jer 23:9-22; 27-28), false prophets were abundant in sixth-century Israel. For a text to qualify as divinely-inspired, the words of the prophet have to be “from the mouth” of YHWH and not “from their heart” (Jer 23:16).

In addition to providing the link in the chain of transmission connecting the written word to the divine, the book of Jeremiah authorizes scribal activity in three other ways. First, all three agents of the chain of transmission, YHWH, prophet, and scribe, are imagined in writing roles. While it comes as no surprise that scribes write, the narrative presentation of prophets and YHWH in this role deserves greater recognition than it has yet received in critical biblical scholarship. Second, the book of Jeremiah highlights the activity of scribes in the narrative in a way rarely seen in the HB. In addition to Baruch, the families of Shaphan and Neriah appear in prominent positions throughout the story, arguing subtly for the legitimacy of the scribal interaction with the prophet and the divine word. Finally, the book of Jeremiah communicates the activity of scribes behind the text via the presence of colophons, superscriptions, deictic particles, and *Wiederaufnahme*. Just as scribes are key figures within the narrative, they are also key figures responsible for that narrative. Yet the distinction between the plot and the audience that hears it is a modern heuristic one unfamiliar in the ancient world. The book of Jeremiah confounds the distinction between the scribes within and beyond the narrative, and by means of such blurring encourages the extension of the chain of

transmission beyond its usual terminus in the text.¹² This narrative blurring occurs not only with respect to writers in the book of Jeremiah (YHWH, the prophet, scribes), but also with respect to scrolls and the audiences that receive them.

The second feature of Jeremiah's theological account of the written consists of the book's nature as a self-authorizing text. The written word that claims its origins in the sphere of the divine justifies itself by means of self-references that connect the text of Jeremiah to the chain of transmission described within the text. References to "this scroll" and "these words" shift the reader's gaze from the plot to the text they possess – the book of Jeremiah (e.g., Jer 1:1; 25:13). For the modern critical reader such self-authorizing claims seem circular and hardly provide satisfactory justification for the connection of the text to YHWH. Yet even in the modern world such claims are still made and in certain communities function as persuasive arguments.¹³ Self-referential textual claims are persuasive in part because their object is uncertain. Do Jeremiah's claims about "this book" belong only in the narrative or in the world of the reader and the narrative she possesses? Once the line between the narrative and the historical reality it describes has been obscured, ambiguity is introduced as to the exact object of Jeremiah's

¹² But see William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1-2* (Herm.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1986-1989) and Mark Leuchter, *Josiah's Reform and Josiah's Scroll: Historical Calamity and Prophetic Response* (HBM 6; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2006). Neither of these authors observe this feature of the text, but they offer interpretations that assume it. In other words, they assume that Baruch is not only a scribal author in the text but also of it.

¹³ Consider, for example, the common assertion that 2 Tim 3:16 justifies Christian claims about the NT. Examples could be multiplied, but here perhaps the best course is to take a single example from the classic Fundamentalist compendium *The Fundamentals*: James D. Orr, "Holy Scripture and Modern Negations," in *The Fundamentals: The Famous Sourcebook of Foundational Biblical Truths*, ed. R.A. Torrey, 35-46 (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1958).

claims about textualization. Instead of hampering the book, this allows the tradents of the book of Jeremiah to draw on and trade in the book's internal claim to derive from the true prophet Jeremiah. Whereas the former chain of transmission consisted only of the links YHWH, prophet, sometimes a scribe, and texts in Jeremiah, the extended chain includes YHWH, prophet, scribe, texts in Jeremiah, and the text of Jeremiah.

As in Jeremiah's account of writers, the book's treatment of scrolls underscores the parallel worlds of the book's narrative and audience(s). Scrolls become increasingly central parts of prophetic activity from the first to the last chapter of Jeremiah, and indeed even achieve a degree of separation from their original writers. Such separation from the original author allows the written text to speak across both temporal and geographic distances, and in this capacity the written word becomes a word of hope to exilic communities. Even the narrative of the sunken scroll in Jer 51:59-64, designed to describe and narrate YHWH's destruction of Babylon, would have been a word of hope for the conquered Israelites. Following the cruelty dealt out by the Babylonians, their destruction signals the equitable judgment of YHWH against Israel's enemies.¹⁴ The text of Jeremiah itself most likely functioned in a similar way in sixth-century Israel, so that the audience that reads the book of Jeremiah receives the same word of hope originally composed for audiences within the book of Jeremiah. Indeed, certain of the ספרים of the book of Jeremiah were likely composed for the post-destruction community precisely to instill hope (Jer 29-33). It is striking that the tradents of Jeremiah describe one such

¹⁴ John Hill, *Friend or Foe? The Figure of Babylon in the Book of Jeremiah MT* (BI 40; Leiden: Brill, 1999) 164-72.

composition not as the direct words of Jeremiah, but as a letter and a text for the exilic community (29:1; 30:2). Some of the latest texts in Jeremiah, then, choose to cast a hopeful message in the form of a written missive from the prophet to the people. On both the narrative and the historical levels, scrolls are conduits of the divine word to the people.

The difficulty of the terminology of “self-reference” with respect to the book of Jeremiah is that it can obscure the human tradents and recipients of the book of Jeremiah. Yet the self-reference actually helps to construct the audience in subtle ways. The use of the deictic particle “this” and “these” (זה, אלה) in Jeremiah’s self-references implies a relationship between the reader and the text before him/her. For the demonstrative pronoun to function properly, there must be someone in a position to perceive the qualified object’s distance (“that,” “those”) or proximity (“this,” “these”). Thus, the extension of the chain of transmission -- from YHWH to the text *in* the narrative to the text *comprising* that narrative -- continues to the audience that receives the narrative *as* text, oral or written. In chapter four, the book of Jeremiah articulates a theologically informed construction of the audience. It is composed, not primarily of readers, given the relatively low level of literacy in the ancient Near East, but rather of those who hear a proclaimed text. This suggestion follows from the portrait of the audience as it is presented in the book of Jeremiah: specifically in the context of worship. Audience ambiguity and direct address, the aural nature of Jeremiah, and the presence of both liturgical terminology (קהל, עדה) and doxological material contribute to the idea that a worshipping community stands behind and in front of the book of Jeremiah. This

community is responsible for this particular theological account of writing and the written word, and it is the most likely recipient of this account of writing and the word.

This proposed audience fits well with the usual historical reconstruction of early Judaism after the exile, namely that this was a community increasingly invested in the written word and eager to hear it when it was read to them by a trained scribe.¹⁵ The suggestion of public reading as the likely socio-historical context for portions of the book of Jeremiah is reinforced by other texts of the HB, especially the key instance of public reading in Nehemiah 8.¹⁶ Moreover, Jeremiah's theological account of the written word demonstrates that the people do not receive the written as hearers only, but as an audience aware of the medium through which the words are coming. The final piece of this communicative model, then, argues for an audience that self-consciously receives the word of YHWH via the written word. Thus conceived, the chain of transmission described by Jeremiah begins with YHWH, extends through the prophet (either orally, in writing, or via both modes of transmission), is written down by a scribe, and finally reaches an attentive audience via the proclaimed text.

Avenues for further research

These observations about the divine source of writing and the self-authorizing character of the text are significant for multiple reasons, but in this context it suffices to

¹⁵ Martin S. Jaffee, *Torah in the Mouth, Writing and Oral Tradition in Palestinian Judaism, 200 BCE-400CE* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 15-27.

¹⁶ The audience receiving Nehemiah 8 need not make an argument for the written divine word, as Jeremiah has already helped to make this argument. There exists between Ezra-Nehemiah and the book of Jeremiah a family resemblance with respect to the written word, with the latter demonstrating the debates that would lead to the settled ideals of the later period evidenced by Ezra-Nehemiah.

suggest three possible effects of these insights for ongoing research. First, the description of Jeremiah as a sacred text challenges the common claim among biblical scholars that the texts of the HB were not written as scripture but were only later accepted or recognized as such by religious communities. The book of Jeremiah provides evidence that some texts of the HB were indeed composed as a divine word of YHWH from their first inscription, and thus it raises the question as to the exact nature of the HB. Second, claims for an increasingly late composition for the HB must be reassessed with the book of Jeremiah in mind. Given the relatively fixed chronology of the book of Jeremiah, scholars possess a data point following the exile but bounded by the release of Jehoiachin in Jer 52:31-34. Of course, material present in the current MT of Jeremiah may have entered the corpus at a later date (e.g., Jer 30-33, a section which, as we have seen, contains significant information regarding the textualization of prophecy), but the book nevertheless provides an important portrait of writing and the written in the sixth century BCE. Third, the tradents' understanding of the book of Jeremiah as text suggests that the category of "oral literature" must not be understood as a diachronic designation but as a description of the way the literature functioned in ancient Israel. Orality did not always precede inscription in ancient Israel, and the spoken nature of a text must not gainsay its importance as written word. All of these points of significance underscore the core insight that the book of Jeremiah must be understood from the beginning of its transmission as a text that functioned in and for a community defined by its commitment to YHWH.

The usual description of the HB is that it gained authoritative status within a religious community only after it had been written down and read in religious communities for many years.¹⁷ Jeremiah challenges such a view, asserting instead that the texts inscribed by the prophet and his contemporaries (Baruch, Seraiah) were divine from the start and were thus an inchoate form of scripture.¹⁸ Such a contention is fraught with difficulty, as the definition of “scripture” itself is hotly contested, but it points to a larger hypothesis of this study, that the religious framework of ancient Israel must be considered if one is to understand the narratives of the HB as a whole.¹⁹ One need not accept the contention of Brevard Childs that the HB as a whole must be understood in canonical framework in order to argue the point for certain texts, in particular here the book of Jeremiah.²⁰ Put simply, the observation that parts of Jeremiah were originally composed as sacred text forces interpreters to reconsider the nature of the object of their study. What, after all, is the HB?²¹

Multiple alternatives to the religio-canonical description of the HB are available.

One could describe the HB as a nationalist document or as a compendium of wisdom.

¹⁷ For a recent articulation of this view, see William G. Dever, *What Did the Biblical Writers Know and When Did They Know It?: What Archaeology Can Tell Us About the Reality of Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 4.

¹⁸ See Geo Widengren for more along these lines, though his conclusions are extended beyond the evidence. Geo Widengren, *Literary and Psychological Aspects of the Hebrew Prophets* (Uppsala: Lundequistska Bokhandeln, 1948).

¹⁹ As an example, see the relatively restrictive definition of “scripture” in Lee M. McDonald, *The Formation of the Christian Biblical Canon* (rev. ed.; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1995), 138-45.

²⁰ Brevard Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 67-68.

²¹ To call it the “Bible” is itself a contentious terminological choice, as this connotes a religious text for a religious community.

Certainly there are portions of the corpus whose religious usage is less clear than others (e.g. Job, Ecclesiastes). Even in Jeremiah texts like Jer 24 seem to serve little to no religious purpose. To discern the motivations behind various texts one must consider them in turn and observe from their specific context how they might have functioned in ancient Israel. The key here is not to reduce the possible meanings or functions of various types of biblical literature to a single function, whether religious, nationalist, or ideological. Indeed, these categories are not always easy to distinguish. No part of the HB may be described as entirely nationalist or entirely religious in nature. Such a point is significant primarily because many scholars have tended to argue for one over against the other, thereby creating unnecessary blind spots. The HB is a complicated document whose purposes and contents cannot be described by a single qualifier but must be expanded to include a variety of uses and interpreting communities, including but not limited to its religious use. Though it does not provide the exclusive lens through which the HB was composed and must be interpreted, the religious nature and function of many texts in the HB is not an incidental feature applied to the texts at a later date, but rather a key part of their composition. This is true not only for texts like the Psalms, but for prophetic literature as well, as Jeremiah demonstrates.

Along these lines, another significant area for further research may be found in the dating of the HB's composition and canonization. If indeed it is the case that the tradents of Jeremiah self-consciously constructed the book as sacred text, then what other

texts composed prior to this one and soon after it were also composed as sacred text?²² Was the book of Jeremiah an anomaly among the books of the HB in its inscription, or was it common in its composition/textualization? On the one hand, since the book is unique as a text explicitly interested in its own inscription, it may very well be an outlier among the texts of the HB. On the other hand, the explicit claims made by Jeremiah might also represent implicit assumptions about earlier textualization and thus argue for prophetic literature something that was assumed for texts long held sacred (e.g., the Torah written by YHWH). Furthermore, one might ask whether the book of Jeremiah inspired further prophetic inscription and thus served as a catalyst of sorts? Since the book straddles the usual divide between “early” and “late” dating of the HB, it could be used to support either position, with one side asserting that Jeremiah stands later in the process of the HB’s composition and the other stating that it stands at the beginning of the same process.

Though inseparable from the conversation regarding the HB’s composition, the observation of Jeremiah’s sacred character also has important implications for the canonization of the HB. If scripture exists at an earlier period, the dates of canonization (as well as the definitions the word connotes) for the HB must be reconsidered, as the existence of texts held sacred represents an early step in the process of canonization. The prophets, for example, are often described as an open canonical division until the third

²² Dating the final form of Jeremiah is itself an especially difficult task, since portions of it seem rather late compared to the first half of the book (Jer 1-25). But the account of Jehoiachin provides a rough, if not absolute *terminus ad quem* for the book. Certainly the Book of Hope (29-33) is one of the latest portions of the book, and its most likely provenance is the exilic period itself, wherein the message to exiles would have made most sense.

century BCE, centuries after the book of Jeremiah made its case to be scripture from the very beginning. In view of the data that the book of Jeremiah claims for itself, however, such notions of the HB's canonization must be reevaluated to include an earlier period of sacred status. The challenge to the claim that little or none of the HB was written as sacred text changes the debate, as it obscures the centuries of liturgical use that would be necessary to make a text scriptural. Instead, texts begin (within certain communities, certainly not all) as sacred text and are recognized as such.

The nature of the HB is often perceived as a compendium of oral literature shaped by scribal *literati* in subsequent years, but the evidence from Jeremiah argues for a different picture of the scripturalization process. First, at key points it may be considerably shorter than has been envisioned. Second, a revised view of scribal activity calls into question the very notion of oral literature, as it demonstrates just how difficult (perhaps impossible?) it is to distinguish between original oral proclamations and scribal productions shaped to be perceived as oral in nature. Whether a scholar perceives the book of Jeremiah to be mostly oral or largely written in its origins drastically affects the way she reads the texts at hand, as such designations often entail diachronic assumptions regarding the relative antiquity of the oral and the late nature of the written. As this study has shown, the oral is not always early, just as the written is not always late.

Jeremiah's theological account of the written demonstrates that an oral culture may have robust and complex theories of writing. These theories understand the written

word and the oral as parallel and equally valid conduits for the divine word.²³ Thus, proponents of performance criticism and oral literature must become more fully aware that the performances of the scribes were different than the types of performances often described by those who argue for scripture as an *aide-memoire*. In the first place, the performer is bound by the chain of transmission. For the words to be truly divine, they must adhere closely to the words “from the mouth of YHWH” (Jer 23:16) and “from the mouth of the prophet.” Second, the text is not an incidental feature of the performance to the audience, but a key part of their link to the divine in the performance, so that the varieties of text performance must fit into the overarching theological logic of the text itself, which explicitly disallows innovation and extemporaneity in the reading of the prophetic word. According to Jeremiah, at least, a performing reader would be suspect as soon as she or he took liberties of which the people were aware.

Furthermore, the prophetic words now in our possession are written, and their written nature must be better understood before their oral aspects can ever be fully described. Just as the written nature of biblical literature cannot be understood without comprehending its function within an oral society, so also the oral nature of the HB cannot be understood without understanding its function as written word.²⁴ Here I do not

²³ As noted in the introductory chapters below, Susan Niditch’s continuum idea has several weaknesses, not the least that it ultimately preserves the false dichotomy between the spoken and the written. For the idea of the continuum, see also, Deborah Tannen, ed. *Spoken and Written Language* (Norwood, N.J.: Ablex, 1982).

²⁴ Niditch (*Oral World*, 131-34) and others have made this point, yet there is still a tendency to neglect the important question of how or why texts were written down if the stories they recounted functioned so well as oral folktale.

propose a return to the late nineteenth/early twentieth century's exclusivizing emphasis on literary sources in the reconstruction of the history of the HB's composition, an approach against which experts on oral literature have made a compelling case. Instead, I believe that the pendulum has perhaps swung too far in the direction of orality. The pressing question in the current scholarly climate is not whether an oral culture lies behind the text of the HB, but why and how an oral culture chose to write down so many of its traditions. While I do not assume that all texts of the HB had oral precursors, many of them surely did, and the important point at this juncture in scholarly discourse is to discern why and how they came down to us in written form. This study has pointed to some of the reasons that prophetic words took written form (e.g. worship in exile), but further study remains for a full understanding of the import of this particular moment in ancient Israel.

In Jer 36:32b, a key text for this study and a pivotal moment in the emergence of full scribal authority in ancient Israel, the narrator describes the supplementation of the prophet's second scroll over time: "yet were added to them many words like them." Certainly that was the case with the scroll of Jeremiah, which was itself enhanced over many years after its initial creation, but it is also true of commentaries and literature on the text of Jeremiah. The book of Jeremiah, like so much of the HB on the whole, has spawned a centuries-long conversation about the meaning of its words, their arrangement, and their significance for various communities of readers. If indeed it is true that the traditions of Jeremiah make of their audiences both writers and readers, then this state of affairs might have pleased those who composed this book. In the future one may hope

that, whether or not all words come “from the mouth of YHWH,” many words like them will be added.

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Biography

Born in Carrollton, Georgia on August 25, 1978, Chad Eggleston attended Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama, where he received his B.A. in Religion cum laude on May 20, 2000. Upon graduation, he matriculated at Duke Divinity School in Durham, North Carolina and began study for his Master of Divinity, which he received magna cum laude on May 11, 2003. While attending Duke for his Master of Divinity, Eggleston was the recipient of scholarships from the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and the Baptist House of Studies at Duke Divinity School. He also won the 2002 Duke Divinity School award for Excellence in Bible. In the Graduate School at Duke University, he has been the recipient of a Lilly Fellowship, the Summer Research Fellowship, the National Association of Baptist Professors of Religion dissertation scholarship, and the Dean's Award for Excellence in Teaching. He has also been selected for and participated in the dissertation working group of the John Hope Franklin Center at Duke University. Eggleston is the author of the article "Confessing Interpretation: Alternative Nomenclature for the Practice of Theological Interpretation," in *The Scholarly Vocation and the Baptist Academy: Essays on the Future of Baptist Higher Education* (R. Ward and D. Gushee, eds.; Macon: Mercer University, 2008). Eggleston currently teaches at Huntingdon College, Montgomery, Alabama, as Assistant Professor of Religion.