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THE PROPHET JEREMIAH AND THE REFORMS OF KING JOSIAH

The Book of the Prophet Jeremiah gives an account of the prophet's vocation as well as of his mission which lasted from the thirteenth year of Josiah's reign until "then in the days of Jehoiaquim son of Josiah, king of Judah until the end of eleventh year of Zedekiah son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the deportation of Jerusalem which occurred in the fifth month" (Jer 1,2-3). In the second Book of the Kings we read about the reign of Josiah (641–609 B.C.), the discovery of the Book of the Law, the consultation with the prophetess Huldah and the renewal of the covenant. There is no mention there of the Prophet Jeremiah and of his part in the reform introduced by King Josiah. We would like, therefore, to reflect on the relation between the ministry of the prophet and Josiah's reform.

1. The beginning of Jeremiah's prophetic ministry

The Book of Jeremiah says that the prophet carried out his prophetic mission in Jerusalem during reign of kings Josiah, Jehoiaquim, and Zedekiah. Jehoiaquim ruled as a king of Judah (Jer 22,18; 36,28-30). The book of the Prophet Jeremiah also mentions the reign of Jehoiaquim (Jer 25,1; 26,1; 35,1; 36,1-9; 45,1; 46,2). Similarly it mentions king Zedekiah (Jer 34,1-7; 37,1; 38,5 nn. also Jer 24,8; 27,12; 29,9; 32,1; 34,2; 39,2; 51,59). There is no mention of a meeting between the Prophet and King Josiah. The book merely refers to the fact that Yahweh spoke to the Prophet "in days of King Josiah". The second Book of Kings speaks frequently about King Josiah but doesn't mention Jeremiah. It is not certain whether Jeremiah acted as a Prophet during the time of King Josiah or whether we can rely on the information about the beginning his mission and whether he really began his ministry in the thirteenth year of King Josiah, i.e. in 627/6 B.C.

The Prophet doesn't mention the religious reform introduced by King Josiah. In the light of the doubts about the date of the beginning Jeremiah's ministry we can wonder about his attitude towards King Josiah's religious reform. According to the modern exegesis Jer 1,1-3 is an editorial text and v. 2 is a later addition¹.

¹ S. Herrmann, *Jeremia (BK. AP XII/1)*, Neukirchen 1986, p. 18 nn.

It seems to the editors that the ministry of Jeremiah during the reign of Josiah is too long (627–609 B.C.) Apart from the mention in Jer 3,6 that Yahweh addressed His Word to Jeremiah, there is no reference to his prophetic mission during King Josiah's reign. It has been suggested therefore that there is an error in the text and that it should read "the twenty third year" instead of the "thirteenth"². In that way the long period (18 years) would be shortened to about 10 years, but there is no evidence in the text to support this thesis³.

Many exegetes consider that it is necessary to revise numbers of years in Jer 1,2 and this data concerns only the first part of the Book of Jeremiah. The historical starting point for the ministry of the Prophet would be the expression: "Enemy from the North" about which the prophet speaks in Jer 1,13-15; 4,6; 6,1; 10,22; 13,20. He takes up this topic in the description of his prophetic vocation (Jer 1,4-19). Verses 13–15 have been edited by a Deuteronomist writer and both missions (v. 11 n. and 13 n.) are similar to what is described in Am 7,1-9 and 8,1-3. Both say that Jeremiah is a true prophet of Yahweh.

The year 627/6 B.C. could be a sign indicating the possibility of an imminent danger from the North. It is probably the year of the death of Assurbanipal⁴. It is not possible to determine this date exactly but historians accept that he died between 630 and 627 B.C. In those years, Nabopolassar assumed power in Babylon (626 B.C.) and created a new Babylonian dynasty. His successor was his son Nabuchodonozor who took over in 605 B.C.⁵

There is a danger of not understanding the expression "Enemy from the North". It would have been different in years 614–612 B.C. when the danger was clear. Kyares the King of the Medes conquered Assyria in 614 B.C. Nabopolassar made an agreement with Kyares. Nineveh fell two years later as did the Babylon – Medes treaty⁶. This was the situation, 10 years after the introduction of Josiah's reform in 621 B.C., that is in 611 B.C., when Jeremiah began his prophetic ministry⁷. It is possible that between 627/6 and 611, dates which delimit his prophetic work, that Jeremiah began to prophesy about the future. In all probability he warned against the threatening dangers. His prophecy during the time of Jehoiakim and Zedekiah can be seen as an example of this. The battle of Carchemish in 604 can be seen as the beginning of his prophetic ministry⁸. Jer 25,1 seems to speak for the date "The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah, in fourth year of Jehoiakim, son of Josiah, king of Judah (that is the first year of the

² T. C. Gordon, *A New Date for Jeremiah*, "Etudes" [= ET] 14 (1932/33), col. 562–565.

³ J. Ph. Hyatt, *The Beginning of Jeremiah's Prophecy*, "Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft" [= ZAW] 78 (1966), p. 207.

⁴ F. M. Jr. Cross, D. N. Freedman, *Josiah's Revolt against Assyria*, "Journal of Near Eastern Studies" 12 (1953), p. 56.

⁵ S. Herrmann, *Jeremia...*, p. 8 n.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 14.

⁷ J. Ph. Hyatt, *The Beginning of Jeremiah's Prophecy...*, p. 208.

⁸ C. F. Whitley, *The Date of Jeremiah's Call*, "Vetus Testamentum" [= VT] 149 (1964), p. 467.

reign of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon)”. The date of the battle seems to be reliable⁹. During this battle Egypt has defeated and the Babylonian empire stretched as far as Syria. Jeremiah surely knew who “the enemy from the North” was. The beginning of verse 25,1 is a general expression, expressing admonition and threat proclaimed by Jeremiah but without reference to a specific date. The Prophet refers to a significant moment in history. We cannot determine the date of the beginning of Jeremiah’s prophetic work.

Perhaps we can speak with greater certainty about the call of the prophet, when we read of his intervention in Jer 25,1. This idea was proposed by F. Horst: “The chronology which has been used up till now, which places the beginning of the public activities Jeremiah in the year 626 B.C. is historically unreal and is based on an artificial and tendentious tradition. The original tradition suggests that his public ministry started directly after the battle of Megiddo”¹⁰. The date of the thirteenth year of Josiah’s reign is based on the oldest prophecy of Jeremiah (Jer 22,10.13-15). It shows that he outlived Josiah’s reign. But Chr. Levin writes: “It is his tragic end that caused him to speak”¹¹. The dating of the beginning of prophet Jeremiah’s ministry allows us to answer three difficulties: “The enemy from the North” points to the Babylonians; the time of the Prophet’s activity; Jeremiah’s attitude to Deuteronomy and to Josiah’s reform¹².

Jeremiah’s attitude to Josiah’s reform is not certain, because the Prophet might have tried to reach a conclusion after the introduction of the reform and its negligible effects. One could suppose, if one were to accept that Jer 26,1 speaks about the beginning of his activities as a prophet and that the year 608 B.C. marked an end of his prophetic ministry, that his first major public intervention was his speech in the temple (Jer 7,26)¹³. The suggestion that the date of his call can be fixed on the thirteenth year of Josiah’s reign is based on the text Jer 1,2. S. Hermann writes: “There are efforts to remove doubts concerning the thirteenth year of Josiah’s reign in order to shorten the period of his prophetic activity and to remove difficulties in explaining a longer period of silence in the prophet’s life during Josiah’s reign”¹⁴. The text of Jer 1,2 speaks about the date of the call of the Prophet. E. Vogt says that Jer 1, 2 was the first verse in the original text that Jeremiah dictated to Baruch and which the latter rewrote after it had been burnt¹⁵. The passage from verse 1 to verse 2 is difficult to accept, because there is no other similar example in the Old Testament. Another convincing suggestion is that the thirteenth year of Josiah’s reign refers to the date of Jeremiah’s birth, referred to in Jer 1,5. This suggestion

⁹ H. Donner, *Geschichte des Volkes Israel und seiner Nachbarn in Grundzügen*, Göttingen 1986, p. 363.

¹⁰ F. Horst, *Die Anfänge des Propheten Jeremia*, ZAW 41 (1923), p. 94–153.

¹¹ Ch. Levin, *Noch einmal: Die Anfänge des Propheten Jeremia*, VT 31 (1981), p. 433.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 436.

¹³ J. Ph. Hyatt, *The Beginning of Jeremiah’s Prophecy...*, p. 214.

¹⁴ S. Hermann, *Jeremia...*, p. 22.

¹⁵ E. Vogt, *Verba Jeremiae filii Helciae (Jer 1,1-3)*, “Verbum Domini” 42 (1964), p. 170.

would remove many difficulties¹⁶. In 622 B.C., Jeremiah would have been a 5 or 6 year-old child. The suggestion that this verse is not the original text doesn't seem sure. Everywhere in the Old Testament where the date "in days of the King", there follows the exact determination of the year¹⁷. Verse 2b is an essential addition. The asar at the beginning of verse 2 refers to it, and not to the expression "Words of Jeremiah", but rather in order to specify the place – "In Anathot, in the Land of Benjamin"¹⁸.

The author wanted to point out that the prophetic message, proclaimed in the time of Josiah, occurred in Anathot, and not in Jerusalem. According to this thesis apart from the prophecy in the time of Jehoiachin and Zedekiah, the Prophet proclaimed his message earlier; in Jer 2,2–4,2 and 30.31, the Prophet addresses Israel and, in Jer 4,3–6,20, Judah¹⁹. The Prophet in Jer 2,4–6,20 according to the deuteronomical editing does not speak with his admonitions and warnings only after 609 B.C.²⁰ In verse 2b, there is an editorial introduction which speaks of the same period in which Jeremiah just admonished and warned: 5 years before the finding of "The Book of the Law". His intention was the same. "He saw it as a preparation for the reform"²¹. It is necessary to ask however if this thesis is right.

We can say that the call of Jeremiah as a prophet in 627/6 B.C. according to the sources cannot be disproved²². The text, which has been edited, when read together with the text Jer 1,4-9, speaks of the appearance of the Prophet in the thirteenth year of King Josiah's reign. New scientific research tends to indicate that the text should be understood as being historical-biographical. Exegetes still question the dates: "the beginning of Jeremiah ministry in the thirteenth year of the King Josiah's reign continues to remain doubtful"²³.

2. King Josiah's reform of the cult

At the outset, one should ask whether we are dealing with a reform, or with the introduction of another way of the performing of the cult and the removal of certain elements of the cult. Yet, the expression "the reform of the cult" remains in the thought of the editor of the two books of Kings. The Book of Jeremiah (1,2) alludes to the Books of Kings, which tell us less about the actions of the King in the area of external politics (2 Kgs 23,28-30), and more about his action in the religious field.

¹⁶ W. L. Holladay, *A Coherent Chronology of Jeremiah's, Early Career* P. Bogaert (ed), *Le livre de Jeremie*, "Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium" 54 (1981), p. 62.

¹⁷ Am 1,1: "two years before the earthquake".

¹⁸ S. Herrmann, *Jeremiah...*, p. 4.

¹⁹ R. Albertz, *Jer 2–6 und die Frühzeitverkündigung Jeremias*, ZAW 94 (1982), p. 23.

²⁰ E. Ruprecht, *Ist die Berufung Jeremias "in Jünglingsalter" und seine "Früherkündigung" eine theologische Konstruktion der deuteronomistischen Redaktion des Jeremiabuches?*, [in:] *Festschrift C. Westermann* 1989, p. 80.

²¹ Ch. Levin, *Noch einmal...*, p. 7.

²² S. Herrmann, *Jeremia...*, p. 7.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 4.

The stories about the reform of the cult are theological and evaluate Josiah's activities in this field. We can compare the text 2 Kg 12,10 nn. with 18,4. It says that the behaviour of the king and the word of the prophet were based on the book, which was found in the Temple. The question arises: What kind of the book was it? The Fathers of the Church maintained that it was "The Book of the Law" (lost, discovered, found) which included the contents of the Book of Deuteronomy²⁴. Some exegetes maintain that that book of Deuteronomy was earlier than the present-day Book of Deuteronomy, which is found in the Pentateuch²⁵. On the basis of this, J. Wellhausen developed his well-known theory of the Pentateuch²⁶. This theory requires continuous explanations which 2 Kg 22,1–23,14 speaks about²⁷. There is an on-going discussion among exegetes about the meaning of these two chapters in the development of the theory about the beginning of the Pentateuch, the religious history of Israel and the theology of the Old Testament²⁸. It seems that it is necessary to determine a historical starting point from which one could work out conclusions.

This date was not only a moment telling about the activity of the King and the Reform of the cult, but about the means and the aim of his activity. It is necessary to compare it with the present Book of Deuteronomy which contained the Book which was found at that time. There is a conviction that "The Book of the Law" was written and made up in the Temple and that it was found immediately afterwards. F. Horst accepts this thesis²⁹. He has reasons to place the beginning of the activity of Jeremiah in the year 608 B.C. It appears from the text (1 Kg 22–23) that this is not a work with a uniform literary style, language and contents. Th. Östereicher distinguishes the description of the finding of the Book of the Law" (2 Kgs 22,4–23,3.21–27) and the description of the Reform (2 Kgs 23,4–20)³⁰. He says that there is a difference in the literary style. In the description of the finding of the Book of the Law there are more historical scenes. In the other one, there are more regulations of the Reform. W. Dietrich says that these differences in literary style allow us to understand the historical conditions of the time of Josiah³¹. The events, which are described in 2 Kgs 23,4–20, are not necessarily connected with description of the finding of the Book. It is possible that these texts were written separately. E. Wurtwein says that we should check the historical value of the description 2 Kgs 22,1 ff³². He says one should analyse the structure of the literary style and

²⁴ E. Nestle, *Miszellen*, ZAW 22 (1902), p. 170 n., 312 n.

²⁵ H. J. Kraus, *Geschichte der historisch-kritischen Erforschung des Alten Testaments von der Reformation bis zur Gegenwart*, Neukirchen 1956, p. 162.

²⁶ J. Wellhausen, *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels*, Berlin 1886.

²⁷ H. D. Preuss, *Deuteronomium*, Demustadt 1982, p. 1 n.

²⁸ N. Lohfink, *Zur neueren Diskussion über 2 Kön 22–23*, [in:] *Das Deuteronomium Entstehung, Gestalt und Botschaft*, Leuven 1985, p. 26.

²⁹ F. Horst, *Die Anfänge des Propheten Jeremia*, ZAW 41 (1923), p. 96.

³⁰ Th. Östereicher, *Das deuteronomische Grundgesetz*, Gütersloh 1923, p. 32.

³¹ W. Dietrich, *Josia und das Gesetzbuch*, VT 27 (1977), p. 15.

³² E. Würtwein, *Die Josianische reform und das Deuteronomium*, 2, ZThK 73 (1976), p. 398.

of the different accounts. The findings can lead to an objective evaluation of the text. According to Würtwein, research into the text allows us to state that:

1. The Second Book of Kings (22,1 ff) is not a completely reliable source of historical information (because of the pre-Deuteronomy description of the reform, concerning Josiah's conflict with Assyria).

2. The same chapter 22 of the Second Book of Kings doesn't give us exact information about the date of origin of Deuteronomy and its various strata.

3. 2 Kgs 22 should to be understood as a description of the realization of the cultic-ritual regulations of Deuteronomy in the life of the Jewish Community. We read in a commentary of the Second Book of Kings 22,2-20: "The description of the scene with the Prophetess Huldah and the description about the infidelity of the people which led to the catastrophe of 586 B.C. and to the untimely death of the pious King but the Reform was not completely carried out. It doesn't include historical records but is rather a kerygmatic account of the events. Our analysis comes to the conclusion that the description of the Reform contains a few layers. Besides the elements of information, there are different descriptions of various institutions according to the Deuteronomy regulations. These regulations abolished objects of foreign cult. These accounts originate from Deuteronomy and are of later date"³³.

Scholars initiated new discussions about the Josiah's Reform described by the authors of Deuteronomy and looked for different descriptions of the reform in order to better describe its process. In 1977 W. Dietrich asking about the contents of the Pre-Deuteronomy text, which can be found in the deuteronomistic version, stated that the story of renovation of the Temple during the time of Josiah is taken from the text of 2 Kgs 12,10 nn.³⁴ This is not a historical account. According to W. Dietrich, there exists a pre-Deuteronomic version of the fundamental document v. 3. 8. 10. 12. 13, which was written "in the court by official writers". The second version (2 Kgs 23,4 nn.) contains a "historical basis", which comes from a later period of Josiah, because it speaks about the removal of Assyrian objects of cult by Josiah and we find the words "hekal" and "bajit". The latest account of the Reform probably came from a later period, possibly from an editor of the time of Chronicles. The reality however, is that there is a certain kind "legend of the finding". It is generally accepted that one can speak about a possible finding of the Torah in the Temple in Jerusalem, which was the base of a new religion³⁵.

N. Lohfink, concerning these discussions on the subject of origin of the literary style of the description of Josiah's Reform, says that there is no agreement about the literary structure of the text, its oldest layer, about the meaning of archaeological studies and written materials for a better understanding of the text³⁶. There is

³³ Idem, *Die Bücher der Könige* (ATD 11,2), p. 448.

³⁴ W. Dietrich, *Josia und das Gesetzbuch* (2 Reg, XXII), VT 27 (1977), p. 15.

³⁵ B. J. Diebner, C. Neuerth, *Die Inventio des spr htwrh in 2 Kön 22. Struktur, Intention und Funktion von Auffindungslegenden*, Die Botschaft des Alten Testaments (1984), p. 99.

³⁶ N. Lohfink, *Zur neuen Diskussion...*, p. 31.

a common conviction that 2 Kgs 22 and 23 come from deuteronomical authors, who expressed their opinions. It should be said that both of these chapters do not give a clear historical description and that one cannot overestimate them.

3. Jeremiah and the Josiah's reform of the cult

In connexion with King Josiah's reform of the cult, we have to deal with another question, namely: Who or what was Jeremiah – a person or a figure?

“On the basis of the Book of Jeremiah, we know that a prophet by the name of Jeremiah appeared in Jerusalem in the last quarter of the seventh century B.C., after he had left his previous place of residence in Anatot. It is also certain fact that he survived the exile of Jerusalem in 597 and 586 B.C. He wasn't taken as a prisoner to Babylon, but he went to Egypt”³⁷.

The same Book of Jeremiah does not give this certainty regarding all events of the life of the Prophet. If one takes, for example, the text Jer chapter 1–6, the latest commentaries cast doubt on the historicity of some of the events described therein³⁸. Carroll writes that “the book of Jeremiah is more a work of tradition than its author”. McKane sees in the Book of Jeremiah “small disconnected poetical units, which do not necessarily have to come from Jeremiah. It is difficult according to him to give a proper biography of the Prophet. In the Book of Jeremiah there is more reference to a literary figure than to the real person of Jeremiah”³⁹.

If one accepts the thesis that the prophet is a literary figure there is no argument in the Old Testament that the historical Jeremiah had anything to do with the Josiah's Reform. If he lived in the time of the last King of Judea, why don't the Books of the Kings mention him? Why don't the prophetic writings of the Deuteronomic tradition say anything about it? “Though the ancient history of Israel was characterized by a prophetic word. It should be made clear, however, that the crisis of the exile which had constantly been foretold by Yahweh depended on the repentance of the people to which the prophets had called them before the exile”⁴⁰. According to Jer 3,19–4,4, Jeremiah spoke about repentance and gave advice to the King – the possibility of help, if he were to surrender to the King of Babylon (38,17). It is accepted, however, that the Jeremiah tradition was edited by a Deuteronomic writer and made into a special collection in the Book of Jeremiah⁴¹. Even if Jeremiah is

³⁷ S. Herrmann, *Jeremia...*, p. 166.

³⁸ C. C. Torrey, *The Background of Jeremiah 1–10*, “Journal of Biblical Literature” 56 (1937), p. 193–216.

³⁹ H. Weippert, *Hieremias quadruplex. Vier neue Kommentare zum Jeremiabuch*, “Theologische Revue” 87 (1991), p. 185.

⁴⁰ K. Koch, *Das Prophetenschweigen des deuteronomistischen Geschichtswerkes*, [in:] *Festschrift H. W. Wolff*, Neukirchen 1981, p. 121.

⁴¹ H. D. Hoffmann, *Reform und Reformen. Untersuchungen zu einem Grundthema der deuteronomistischen Geschichtsschreibung*, Zürich 1980, p. 267.

mentioned in the Second Book of Kings, it is not excluded that he is only a literary figure and not a real person⁴².

Exegetic research is not in agreement as to whether and how Josiah's reform took place. The Kings had the possibility to determine the cult and to change it⁴³. King Josiah tried to remove Assyrian elements from the cult in Jerusalem. But can we find such elements in the biblical text? The centralization of the cult took place after the Babylonian Exile. This agrees with the time of Josiah, who probably wanted to expand his reign over the territory which used to belong to Israel. He also wanted to introduce to the towns he had conquered the cult as practiced in Jerusalem.

What could have been the political advantage of removing the high places in Judea? The argument that the place of cult chosen by Yahweh was the central element of the theology of Deuteronomy isn't the most important argument. Already, G. Holscher considered 2 Kgs 23,8a.9 as an editorial addition. "The Author of the version of the Reform didn't know about the removing of high places in the whole Judea". There arises therefore the hypothesis that these versions concern the cult.

The memory of the year 627/6 as the year of the call of Jeremiah and of Josiah's reform raises a question as to the attitude of the Prophet towards this Reform. There are at present different theories:

1. Jeremiah had nothing in common with the Reform, because he was called after the death of Josiah.
2. Jeremiah accepted the Reform.
3. Jeremiah disapproved of the Reform.
4. Jeremiah kept silent during the Reform:
 - a) because he agreed with it, therefore he didn't see any reason to speak during the time of Josiah;
 - b) or, also, he was sceptical about it.

If one were to accept the year 627/6 as the beginning of Jeremiah's prophetic activity, one would then accept point 2 or 3 as the attitude of the prophet. One would also see the finding of the Book of Law in the Temple as a result of the prophet's activities and accept his contribution to the Reform of the cult. Jeremiah would have participated in its preparation⁴⁴.

J. Scharbert writes: "by his prophetic activity he wanted to bring the people back to Yahweh and by establishing the Law and justice to prepare a basis for its observance. Therefore, "The Book of the Law" found in the Temple was quickly accepted and put into practice. However in the message of Jeremiah there is no

⁴² K. F. Pohlmann, *Erwägungen zum Schlusskapitel des deuteronomistischen Geschichtswerkes*, Göttingen 1979, S. 109.

⁴³ R. H. Lowery, *The Reforming Kings, Cult and Society in First Temple Judah*, Sheffield 1991, p. 211.

⁴⁴ E. K. Holt, *The Chicken and the Egg – or: Was Jeremiah a Member of the Deuteronomist Party?* "Journal for the Study of the Old Testament" 44 (1989), p. 112.

reference to Josiah's Reform and his decisions. There is no reference to the events described in 2 Kgs 22,3–23,26⁴⁵.

Accepting Jer 1,2 as a later editorial text, the author of this paper wanted to present the Prophet and his message in the spirit of Deuteronomy, as an announcer of truth and fidelity of Yahweh before Josiah's Reform as a preparation to its implementation. It is in this way that we should read the Book of Jeremiah and try to understand it.

PROROK JEREMIASZ I REFORMY KRÓLA JOZJASZA

S t r e s z c z e n i e

Księga Jeremiasza ukazuje działalność proroka podczas rządów ostatnich królów przed niewolą babilońską. Chociaż jej pierwszy okres przypada na czas reformy króla Jozjasza (641–609 przed Chr.), wzmiankowanej przez Drugą Księgę Królewską, to w Księdze Proroka Jeremiasza brak wzmianek o tego rodzaju działaniach. Fakt ten jest przedmiotem rozbieżnych interpretacji. Działalność Jeremiasza, rozważana w duchu deuteronomistycznym, może być widziana jako przygotowanie do reformy religijnej, dlatego wydarzenia opisane w 2 Krl 22,3–23,26 mogą być traktowane jako rezultat działalności prorockiej.

⁴⁵ J. Scharbert, *Jeremia...*, p. 44.