

GEDALIAH'S MURDER IN 2KGS 25:25 and JER 41:1-3

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INTRODUCTION

After the Babylonians conquered Judah, they appointed Gedaliah, son of Ahikam, son of Shaphan, as governor over the remaining Judeans. His governorship turned out to be short. He was murdered by Ishmael, who, according to 2Kgs 25:25, was of royal blood. The Hebrew Bible contains four texts that describe Gedaliah's murder: The Hebrew (MT) and Greek (LXX) versions in both 2Kgs 25:25 and Jer 41:1-3. Because the Greek and Hebrew texts of 2Kgs 25:25 are word for word identical, there are, in effect, only three different versions of the story. Although the passage is short, the differences are considerable. Comparison of the three texts illustrates the *Fortschreibung* processes that took place in the transmission of the Hebrew Bible. It shows how an originally short text gradually grew by small but constant additions. It also shows what kinds of additions were made to the text.

I will present the development of the passage that can be reconstructed by using the three available textual witnesses. It is possible that the shortest text, reconstructed by using such 'empirical evidence', is not the original text, because texts of the Hebrew Bible also developed in the earlier stages of transmission of which we possess no textual evidence. In such cases one has to use literary critical methods. However, this is not the aim of this paper. I will concentrate on the development that can be observed when we compare the available witnesses.

In most passages of the Hebrew Bible we do not possess textual evidence of the text's development, and therefore parallel texts are of essential importance in helping us understand how the Hebrew Bible developed. If the textual witnesses show considerable development of the text, this likewise has considerable consequences for understanding the early development of the text. This is important in view of the increasing tendency in research to belittle or even ignore the historical development of Biblical texts and concentrate on the final text.

First I will present the three main witnesses in parallel columns. In order to facilitate the comparison, a reconstructed Hebrew *Vorlage* of the Greek text of Jer 41:1-3 (= LXX 48:1-3) is provided instead of the Greek. The plusses in the MT of Jer 41:1-3 are written in bold, whereas plusses of both Greek and Hebrew versions of Jer 41:1-3 in relation to 2Kgs 25 are underlined. Relocated words are written in italics.

Jer 41:1-3 – MT	Jer 48:1-3 – LXX	2Kgs 25:25 – MT/LXX
ויהי בחדש השביעי בא ישמעאל בן־נתניה בן־אלישמע מזרע המלוכה ורבי המלך ועשרה אנשים אתו <u>אל־גדליהו</u> בן־אחיקם <u>המצפתה</u> <u>ויאכלו שם לחם יחדו</u> במצפה <u>ויקם ישמעאל</u> בן־נתניה <u>ועשרה אנשים אשר־היו אתו</u> ויכו את־גדליהו בן־אחיקם בן־שפן בחרב מִת אתו <u>אשר־הפקיד מלך־בבל בארץ</u> ואת <u>כל־</u> היהודים אשר־היו אתו את־גדליהו במצפה <u>ואת־הכשדים</u> <u>אשר נמצאו־שם</u> את אנשי המלחמה הכה ישמעאל	ויהי בחדש השביעי בא ישמעאל בן־נתניה בן־אלישמע מזרע המלך ¹ ועשרה אנשים אתו <u>אל־גדליהו</u> <u>המצפתה</u> <u>ויאכלו שם לחם יחדו</u> <u>ויקם ישמעאל</u> <u>ועשרה אנשים אשר־היו אתו</u> ויכו את־גדליהו <u>אשר־הפקיד מלך־בבל בארץ</u> ואת <u>כל־</u> היהודים אשר־היו אתו במצפה <u>ואת־הכשדים</u> <u>אשר נמצאו־שם</u>	ויהי בחדש השביעי בא ישמעאל בן־נתניה בן־אלישמע מזרע המלוכה ² ועשרה אנשים אתו ויכו את־גדליהו וימת ואת־ היהודים ואת־הכשדים ³ אשר־היו אתו במצפה

¹ The Greek text reads *ἀπο γένους του βασιλέως*.

² The Greek text reads *ἐκ τοῦ σπέματος τῶν βασιλέων*, which would literally correspond to מזרע המלכים but it is possible that the Greek is a free rendering of מזרע המלוכה.

³ The position of ואת־הכשדים (the Chaldeans) differs. Both the Hebrew and Greek version of Jeremiah relocate the words after במצפה אתו אשר־היו אתו.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE THREE VERSIONS OF THE STORY:

2Kgs 25:25 is generally shorter than the corresponding Hebrew and Greek texts in Jeremiah. However, in one instance, 2Kgs 25:25 contains a longer reading than the Greek text of Jer 41:1-3 (LXX 48:1-3). The LXX does not contain an equivalent of *וימת*. The issue is complicated by the fact that the vowels of the two Hebrew versions differ. In Jer 41:2 the verb is a hiph. (*מַתַּת*), making Ishmael the subject of the verb, whereas in 2Kgs 25:25 it is a qal (*וימת*), Gedaliah being the subject. The MT in Jer 41:2 also contains an object marker with a suffix, which refers to Gedaliah. One possible solution to the problem is to assume that the shorter Greek in Jeremiah is the result of rendering two Hebrew words with one Greek word (*ויכו ... וימת* ⇒ *ἐπάταξαν*). The root *πατάσσω* often also refers to killing. For example in Jer 41:4 (LXX 48:4), the root *מות* is rendered with the *πατάσσω* (hiph. *המת* ⇒ *παταξάντος*). The minus would in this case be the result of translation only and would not have been a minus in the Hebrew *Vorlage* of the Greek text. The difficulty with this assumption is that if the Greek translator understood *וימת* as a hif., as in the Hebrew text of Jer 41:2, the Hebrew *Vorlage* of the Greek version would also have had to contain the object marker *אתו*. Without an object, *וימת* would be a qal, making Gedaliah the subject. In other words, if we assume that *ἐπάταξαν* in Jer 48:2 of the LXX version represents the same text as the MT in Jer 41:2, we would have to assume that the translator also omitted *אתו* and rendered the whole *אתגדליהו וימת אתו ויכו* with *ἐπάταξαν Γοδολιαν*. In view of his rather literal method of translation, this is improbable. Consequently, it is more likely that the Hebrew *Vorlage* of the Greek text in Jer 48:2 did not contain *אתו וימת/וימת*. That *וימת* is a later addition is further suggested by the fact that it disturbs the connection between the listed objects: *אתגדליהו ואתיהודים ואתהכשדים*. It is also improbable that the Greek translator used a Hebrew *Vorlage* which contained a *וימת* without the object as in 2Kgs 25:25. In this case he would have had to omit a reference to Gedaliah dying. His translation technique is too literal for such an omission. In other words, the omission of *וימת* in the Greek text of Jer 41:2 (LXX 48:2) is probably original.

In all other cases where the texts differ, 2Kgs 25:25 always provides the shortest text. The other plusses in Jeremiah are the result of later editing. The nature of the differences between 2Kgs 25:25 and Jer 41:1-3 (LXX 48:1-3) does not give any reason to assume that 2Kgs

25:25 is a shortened version of the story. Additions are often caused or inspired by factors and details in the older texts, as we will see.

There are considerable differences between the Greek and Hebrew versions of Jer 41:1-3 (LXX: 48:1-3). The MT contains many plusses in relation to the Greek text, whereas the Greek text does not contain any plusses in relation to the Hebrew text. Although omissions should not be categorically rejected, none of the differences gives reason to assume that any text was intentionally omitted in the Greek text or in its Hebrew *Vorlage*.

The MT of Jer 41:1 reads רבי המלך ('of the king's officials'), which is missing in the other versions. One possibility is that these words were dropped by a (partial) homoioteleuton in the *Vorlage* of the Greek text, because the LXX of Jeremiah reads ἀπο γένους του βασιλέως, which corresponds to מזרע המלך. One would expect ἀπο γένους τῆς βασιλείας (= מזרע המלוכה). In other words, ἀπο γένους του βασιλέως corresponds to the first and last words of מזרע המלוכה רבי המלך. On the other hand, the LXX in 2Kgs 25:25 translates ἐκ τοῦ σπέρματος τῶν βασιλέων, for which one would expect מזרע המלכים in Hebrew, but it is unlikely that the Hebrew *Vorlage* of the Greek translator had contained the plural. It is more probable that ἐκ τοῦ σπέρματος τῶν βασιλέων in the LXX of 2Kgs 25:25 is a free rendering of מזרע המלוכה. Therefore, it is possible that the LXX in Jer 48:1 is also a free rendering of מזרע המלוכה. This would mean that the LXX in Jer 48:1 did not contain רבי המלך. When we also consider the fact that רבי המלך do not play any role in the rest of the passage, it is probable that they were added to the text. This is supported by the fact that 2Kgs 25:25 does not contain רבי המלך. Consequently, the LXX probably preserves an earlier stage of the text than the MT of Jer 41, but because of the rather literal method of translation in Jeremiah, the possibility of a homoioteleuton in the Hebrew *Vorlage* of the LXX in Jer 48:1 should not be completely ruled out. Some scholars assume that the addition in the MT was an accidental dittography, but this would mean that a copyist misread four letters of a word (מזרע ⇒ ורבי),⁴ which is not very probable.⁵

With the reservations made above on רבי המלך in mind, it is probable that all the plusses in the Hebrew text of Jeremiah in relation to the Greek text are the result of expansions by later

⁴ Thus e.g., Wilhelm Rudolph, *Jeremia* (HAT 12; Tübingen: Verlag von J. C. B. Mohr – Paul Siebeck, 1947), 230, and following him Robert P. Carroll, *Jeremiah. A Commentary* (London: SCM Press, 1986), 706.

⁵ Dominique Barthélemy, *Critique textuelle de L'Ancien Testament 2* (OBO 50/2, 1986), 741-743, speculates about the possibility that the רבי המלך is Ishmael's grandfather, but this is improbable and also irrelevant for the discussion on which text, the MT or LXX, is to be given priority.

editors in the Masoretic tradition. Therefore, the Masoretic text of Jer 41:1-3 appears to represent the latest stage in the development of the passage.

The plusses of both versions in Jeremiah derive from later editing. This editing is of considerable interest. It provides us with ‘empirical evidence’ of how passages of the Hebrew Bible developed through editing. In order to perceive the diachronic development of the story in a more illustrative way, the following text provides the complete text found in the MT of Jer 41:1-3. The oldest text, as witnessed by the MT/LXX versions of 2Kgs 25:25, is provided as a normal text. The second phase of additions, as witnessed in the LXX version of Jer 48:1-3, is underlined. The final phase is written in bold, whereas *וימת*, which is probably a later addition in 2Kgs 25:25 and in the MT of Jer 41:2, is in italics.

THE HEBREW TEXT:

ויהי בחדש השביעי בא ישמעאל בן־נתניה בן־אלישמע מזרע המלוכה ורבי המלך
ועשרה אנשים אתו אל־גדליהו בן־אחיקם המצפתה ויאכלו שם לחם יחדו במצפה ויקם
ישמעאל בן־נתניה ועשרה אנשים אשר־היו אתו ויכו את־גדליהו בן־אחיקם בן־שפן בחרב
וימת אתו אשר־הפקיד מלך־בשל בארץ ואת כל־היהודים ואת־הכשדים⁶ אשר־היו אתו
את־גדליהו במצפה ואת־הכשדים אשר נמצאו־שם את אנשי המלחמה הכה ישמעאל

ENGLISH TRANSLATION:

In the seventh month Ishmael, son of Nethaniah, the son of Elishama, who was of royal seed **and one of the king's high officers,**⁷ came with ten men to Gedaliah, son of Ahikam, to Mizpah. When they were eating a meal together at Mizpah, Ishmael, son of Nethaniah, and the ten men who were with him, stood up and struck down Gedaliah, the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, with the sword so that he died and thus killing him, whom the king of Babylon had appointed as governor over the land, and all the Judeans and Chaldeans who were with him, with Gedaliah, at Mizpah, and the Chaldeans who were found there, the soldiers, Ishmael struck down.

⁶ The sentence was restructured in both Jeremiah versions so that ואת־הכשדים were integrated into the next sentence. The position of the Chaldeans in 2Kgs 25:26 is original.

⁷ An alternative reading would be ‘and officials of the king’. Both readings are represented in research as well as Bible translations. Although both readings are grammatically possible, officials of the king do not play any role in the rest of the passage, so that a reference to them would be unmotivated. Moreover, the idea that Ishmael was an official of the king may be a later editor’s attempt to increase his standing.

After comparing the texts and marking the additions that can be shown by text critical means, the resulting development seems radical. The original text is only a fraction of the final text, and the result was not reached by literary critical 'speculation'. The oldest text that is available to us contains 22 words and 124 characters, whereas the Greek text in Jer 48:1-3, which represents an intermediary phase, contains already 39 words and 225 characters, thus almost doubling the amount of text. The youngest text of the three, the MT in Jer 41:1-3 contains 54 words and 308 characters. In other words, the youngest witness contains almost 2.5 times more text than the oldest witness. This means that the oldest text was radically and substantially expanded. Before making further conclusions about this observation, it is necessary to examine the nature of the additions in more detail.

ADDITIONS ONLY WITNESSED IN THE MT OF JER 41:1-3:

ורבי המלך. Some scholars assume that this plus is the result of dittography,⁸ but, as we have seen, this is unlikely because it only partly explains המלך and does not explain ורבי. It is more probable that we are dealing with a short gloss that attempted to increase the standing of Ishmael: He had been one of the king's highest officers and thus part of the ruling elite. Two possible motives may be behind this addition. The editor either wanted to increase his treachery (= even as an officer of the army, he rebelled), or to provide a justification for the murder (= he represented a pre-exilic institution, the military, instated by the last king). In view of Jer 41:4-15, a passage which does not have a parallel in 2 Kings, the former alternative is more probable. Ishmael killed pilgrims and fled to the despised Ammonites. The addition of ורבי המלך in Jer 41:1 may have been inspired by the idea that he was of royal blood. Additions that further develop ideas of the older text are common in Jeremiah.

בן־נתניה and בן־אחיקם. The fathers of Gedaliah and Ishmael were added. Genealogical additions are very typical in Jeremiah as well as in other parts of the Hebrew Bible. The later editors often added details about ancestry. The original text usually contained genealogical details, such as father's or grandfather's name, only at the beginning of the passage. Later in the passage, only the name of the person in question was used, and the genealogical details were not repeated.

⁸ E.g., Rudolph, *Jeremia*, 230, and following him, Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 706.

2Kgs 25 is a good example of how the genealogical details are provided only at the beginning of the passage, in v. 22, when Gedaliah is introduced for the first time. However, later editors tend to add these details to different parts of the passage, even if it would seem unnecessary. Therefore, one should be suspicious of repeated genealogical details.

בן־אחיקם בן־שפן. An editor added the name of Gedaliah's grandfather as well. The secondary nature of this addition is seen in the fact that the grandfather is introduced in the middle of the passage, although previously only Gedaliah's father was mentioned. That Shaphan was Ahiqam's father is mentioned in many passages, any of which may have inspired an editor to add this detail to Jer 41:2 as well.

בחרב is a typical addition that tried to be more specific about details concerning the murder: Gedaliah was killed with the sword. Such short expansions are found throughout the Hebrew Bible. They are often caused by an older text which lacks details, but which arouse the editor's imagination. The editor may also have had any of the numerous passages in Jeremiah in mind which refer to killing with the sword.⁹

את־גדליהו is a rather awkward addition. Its intent is to make clear that the previous suffix in אתו refers to Gedaliah. The addition may seem somewhat unnecessary, but an editor may have wanted to be explicitly clear on this point.¹⁰

אתו after וימת was added after the verb was understood as a hiph. instead of qal as in 2Kgs 25:25, which is probably older than the MT of Jeremiah. With the change, the subject of the verb was also changed from Gedaliah to Ishmael. The hiph. required an object. It is probable that the reason for this development is in the older addition of וימת. As noted above, the omission of both אתו and וימת in the LXX of Jeremiah is probably original. וימת broke the connection between the three objects, ואת־גדליהו ואת־היהודים ואת־הכשדים, that were originally

⁹ E.g., Jer 26:23; 27:13; 34:4; 38:2; 42:17, 22. For example, Jer 26:23 refer to striking down with the sword in a very similar way as Jer 41:2: ויכו בחרב.

¹⁰ Some scholars, e.g., Rudolph, *Jeremia*, 230, assume that the suffix in אתו refers to Ishmael instead of Gedaliah, but this seems rather awkward. As noted by William McKane, *Jeremiah* (ICC; Edinburgh – New York: T & T Clark, 1996), 1015, “this places unacceptable strains on the grammar of the sentence.”

subordinate to the verb ויכו. In 2Kings the latter two objects (ואת־הכשדים ואת־היהודים) are located after the new verb, which is grammatically confusing. The qal וימת cannot take an object, which means that the objects have to belong to the previous verb (... וימת ואת־הכשדים). An editor either wanted to correct this disturbance, or he understood the unvocalized וימת to refer to Ishmael and to be a hiph. In either case, he added the object marker with a suffix אֶתוּ, an operation which removed the disturbance and made Ishmael the subject. Of course, even the final text preserves the incongruence between the plural ויכו and singular וימת, but this was probably regarded as a smaller problem. The addition is a good example of an attempt to correct a confusion in the text caused by an older addition. Such additions are frequent throughout the Hebrew Bible.

את אנשי המלחמה הכה ישמעאל. According to this addition in the MT of Jeremiah, Ishmael attacked the military at Mizpah. The text does not specify whether it refers to the Babylonian soldiers stationed at Mizpah or Judean soldiers. In either case, the addition is unrealistic. The author of the expansion forgot the original setting, according to which Ishmael only had ten men with him. That he would be able to kill Babylonian or Judean soldiers without a fight and casualties is improbable. Although the original text may also be a fiction, one would expect that it was written as an account that was meant to be credible. The added details derail this aim. Additions that overlook the original setting and develop the text in an unrealistic direction are common throughout the Hebrew Bible. The editors of such additions primarily had their own ideas that they wanted to add to the text and ignored the original setting.

ADDITIONS WITNESSED BY BOTH THE MT AND LXX OF JER 41:1-3 (48:1-3)

אל-גדליהו is an addition that tries to be more specific than the older text in 2Kgs 25:25. The fact that Ishmael and his men come to Gedaliah is clear in the older text as well, but the addition of the idea that Ishmael had a common meal with Gedaliah before killing him (see below), necessitated a reference to Gedaliah before the meal. For example, the יחדו would be meaningless without a prior reference to Gedaliah. It is therefore probable that the same editor who added the reference to the meal is behind this addition.

המצפתה may also be related to the common meal, because the שם of the following addition is dependent on a location. In the oldest text in 2Kgs 25:25, it was not necessary to refer to Mizpah,¹¹ because 2Kgs 25:23 referred to Mizpah as the location of the following events. However, for the editor who added ויאכלו שם לחם יחדו it was necessary to have a clearer reference to the location where the event took place. The addition of המצפתה shows how additions necessitate other additions in order to better accommodate the text to the addition.

ויאכלו שם לחם יחדו has the function of increasing the treachery of Ishmael. It attempts to show that he was a traitor because he even ate together with Gedaliah. In Semitic cultures, eating together is a sign of trust and friendship. That one kills a person who he has just eaten with is a sign of despicable behavior. ויקם ישמעאל may also derive from the same editor, because it is dependent on the idea that Gedaliah and Ishmael ate together. The repetition of ועשרה אנשים probably also derives from the same editor because the following verb ויכו required a plural subject. In the original text, the ten men were referred to immediately before the verb ויכו, but after the addition of ישמעאל, it became necessary to add a new reference to Ishmael's companions.

אשר-הפקיד מלך-בבל בארץ is dependent on 2Kgs 25:22 or Jer 40:7, both of which refer to the appointment of Gedaliah by the king of Babylonia (מלך-בבל הפקיד/ויפקד את-גדליהו). A reference to an appointment to an office is equivalent to a title or a genealogical reference, both of which

¹¹ Mizpah is mentioned at the end of verse 25, but there it only has a marginal function in a sub-sentence.

were commonly added by later editors. The original author would not need to repeat the reference to the appointment.

כל- was frequently added in Jeremiah. When we compare the MT with the LXX text, this word seems to have been added very often. In most cases, the definite article provides the same information, but later editors, with their typical tendency, wanted to be explicitly clear and specific.

אשר נמצאו־שם is a clarifying comment that does not provide much new information. However, after an editor separated ואת־הכשדים from its original location where it was followed by אשר־היו אתו, and placed it after the reference to the location (Mizpah), it was necessary to add that only the Chaldeans that were in Mizpah were meant. Otherwise the text would have implied that Ishmael killed all Babylonians. It is probable that the same editor is behind the addition of אשר נמצאו־שם and behind the separation of ואת־הכשדים from its original location.

OBSERVATIONS

Many of the additions are glosses, short explanatory additions, inspired by factors in the older text, or additions that increase details. Many of them may be unrelated to each other and may have been spontaneous additions by copyist-editors. There is no evidence of a comprehensive redaction in any of the additions. Only the addition of the idea that Ishmael and Gedaliah had a common meal before the murder necessitated a larger intervention in the text. The addition may be connected with Jer 41:4-15.

Since even the textual witnesses show such radical differences, it seems evident that the text was still developing in a relatively late period. This is emphasized by the fact that the *final* text of 2Kgs more than doubled in size in Jeremiah. The LXX in Jer 48:1-3 provides a glimpse of an intermediary phase, after which the text continued to develop. The end of the development can be seen in the Masoretic text of Jer 41:1-3.

That we have three versions, each of which provides a window to different periods in the text's development, shows that the text was gradually inflated. As many of the expansions seem

to be small and unrelated to each other, is it probable that the text was constantly expanded by different hands over several centuries. Before the text became too holy to be altered, each copyist was a potential editor, who put his views in, and left his mark on, the text.

Since the textual witnesses provide clear evidence for constant editing at the later stages of the text's development, one has to be open to the possibility that similar additions were made in the earlier stages of the text's development as well. If texts can more than double in size during a late period when the text was becoming more and more authoritative and holy, it is fair to assume that editorial interventions were not more limited in the earlier periods. Quite the contrary, it is probable that editorial activity was more common when the text did not yet have such an authoritative status as in the later periods. We may have to expect even larger interventions in the text.

In most cases we do not possess parallel texts which would provide information about the development of a passage. This means that we have to resort to literary criticism if we wish to understand the earlier stages of the text. Literary criticism may be the only possibility to gain more information about texts and about what lies behind them. The 'empirical evidence', gained by comparing parallel texts, provides information about how the editors and copyists expanded the older texts in the later periods, but this information is of crucial importance for understanding their methods in the earlier periods as well. The passage also suggests that one cannot make a clear separation between text and literary criticism. Text critical issues are often intertwined with literary critical ones and vice versa.

The comparison of these three witnesses once again confirms that because of the massive and constant editing, textual and literary criticism must be the basis of any scientific use of Biblical texts for historical purposes. As noted by Hugo Gressmann already in the 1920's, "without them, one is only building fairytale castles in the air, hypotheses without scientific importance."¹²

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¹² Hugo Gressmann, "Die Aufgaben der alttestamentlichen Forschung", *ZAW* 42 (1924): 1-33, 3.

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