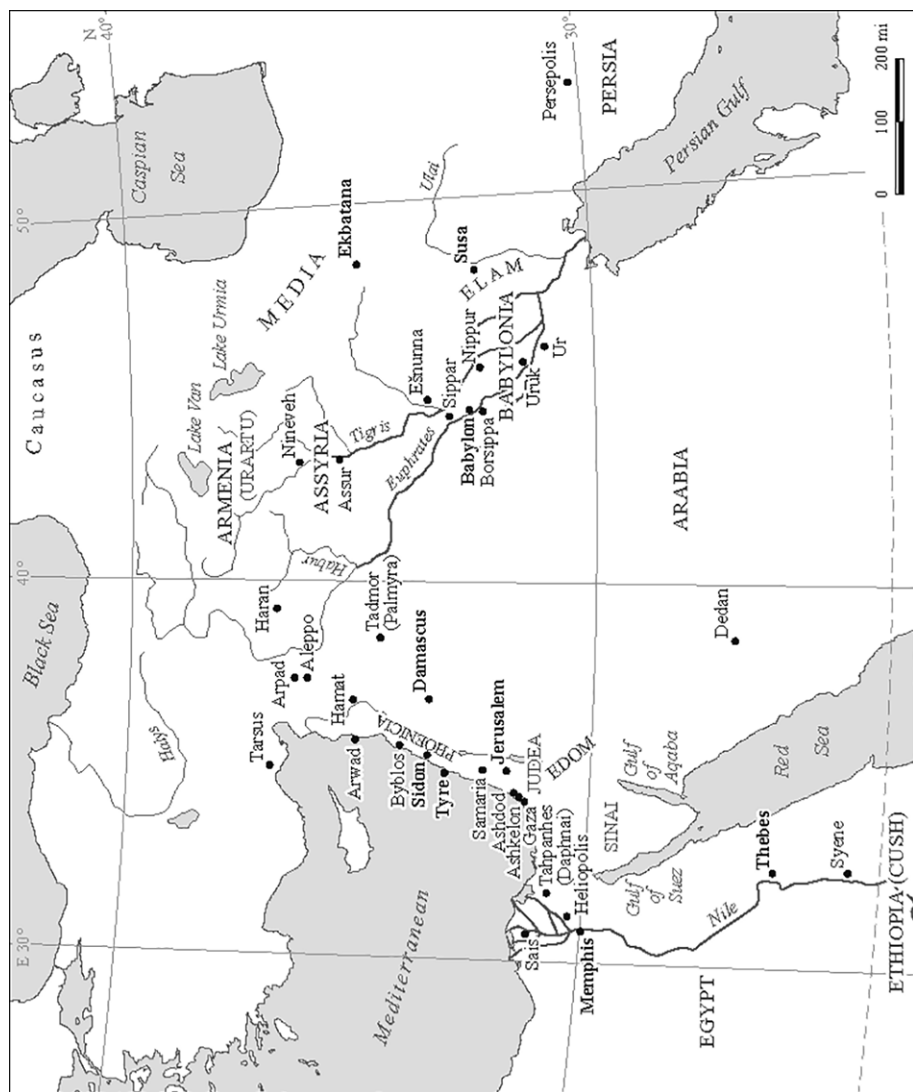


Abbreviations

ANEATP	James B. Pritchard, ed., <i>The Ancient Near East: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures</i> (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011)
ATSAT	Arbeiten zu Text und Sprache im Alten Testament
BCT	<i>The Bible and Critical Theory</i>
BigS	<i>Die Bibel in gerechter Sprache</i> (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2006)
BMW	Bible in the Modern World
CrStHB	Critical Studies in the Hebrew Bible
Dtr-Jer	Deutero-Jeremianic
fp	feminine plural
fs	feminine singular
HALOT	<i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann J. Stamm. Translated and edited under the supervision of Mervyn E. Richardson. 5 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1994–2000.
IBHS	Waltke, Bruce K. and M. O'Connor, <i>An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax</i> (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990)
JAJ	<i>Journal of Ancient Judaism</i>
Jer ^{LXX}	the Septuagint text of Jeremiah
Jer ^{MT}	the Masoretic text of Jeremiah
JSJSup	Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism
mp	masculine plural
ms	masculine singular
NEAEHL	<i>New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land</i> , ed. Ephraim Stern (Jerusalem: vols. 1–4, The Israel Exploration Society and Carta, 1993; vol. 5, The Israel Exploration Society, 2008)
NZB	Zürcher Bibel, 2 nd ed. (2007)
OEANE	<i>The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East</i> , Eric M. Meyers, editor in chief (New York: Oxford, 1997), 5 vols.
PGOT	Phoenix Guides to the Old Testament
RRBS	Recent Research in Biblical Studies
RVR	Reina-Valera Revision (1995)
SBTS	Sources for Biblical and Theological Study
SSL	Studies in Semitic Languages and Linguistics
TCT	Textual Criticism and the Translator
W/O	Waltke, Bruce K. and M. O'Connor, <i>An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax</i> (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990)

Map of the Ancient Near East



Introduction to Jeremiah 26–52

Jeremiah 26–52 is an ancient record of Judeans struggling to make sense of political and social catastrophe. As the Neo-Babylonian imperial juggernaut approached Jerusalem, readying its warriors to strike at the core of Judean communal and religious life, terror must have settled on the hearts of Judeans like a leaden shroud. Those gifted with prophetic vision, those with priestly responsibilities, and those in political leadership would have been desperate to guide Judah toward responses that could guarantee the protection of their God. Among those swept up in the maelstrom of fear created by this crisis were Ezekiel son of Buzi and Jeremiah son of Hilkiah. Both were priests. Both had experiences of prophetic commissioning, hearing a divine voice that urged them to take up theological and political positions that would be deemed by their compatriots to be radical, offensive, even risible. The crisis they faced would be protracted. Anxieties simmering from the time of the assassination of Judean king Josiah at Megiddo in 609 BCE (2 Kgs 23:29) became acute with Nebuchadrezzar's first deportation of Judean elites in 597. The sense of political urgency may have been subterranean for a time, as Judeans sought to go on with their lives despite their growing alarm. But it would have percolated insistently during the reign of Zedekiah.

The crisis erupted into a deadly state of emergency during Babylon's eighteen-month siege of Jerusalem from January 588 to July 587. As deprivations during the siege became more severe, residents of the city would have seen the weakening and death of loved ones from starvation. When the Babylonians finally breached the walls of Jerusalem, many would have witnessed or experienced beatings and sexual violation; survivors would have seen the slaughter of family members and neighbors. The horror continued with the Babylonians' defiling and plundering of Jerusalem, their maiming of Zedekiah and execution of Judean officials at Riblah, and their forced deportation of traumatized survivors in 587. Those Judeans who fled to Egypt would have had the screams of their neighbors still ringing in their ears. Their lives as refugees in Egypt would have continued in the social and psychological ruination of trauma, the days of many surely marked by survivor's guilt and cultural disorientation. Judah lay in ruins, in every way that ruination may be conceived: the capital city was left undefended, the temple had been desecrated, and the social corpus of Judah had been grievously injured. A few years later, in 582, traumatized survivors eking out an existence in Judah would have to endure a third deportation aimed at snuffing out any lingering sparks of political resistance.

Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and other prophets would mine Judah's sacred traditions to make sense of all they had witnessed: terrible suffering of Judeans in every sector of society, the brutal dismantling of their country's political infrastructure and cultural resources, the evisceration of Jerusalem's economic stability, and more. To undertake this work, the prophets and the scribes who preserved and amplified their traditions would have had to muster all the wisdom, creativity, and cultural acumen at their disposal in circumstances that must have been challenging, whether exilic or postexilic. They strove, sometimes with blistering polemic, sometimes with soaring lyricism, to take account of the past and imagine a future

Jerusalem
under siege

Prophetic
responses to
trauma

for this decimated community—or better, communities plural, given the realities of some Judeans’ militarized captivity in Babylon and others’ migration to Egypt or another locale. To write scrolls that could take nuanced account of sacred traditions, ongoing and bitter arguments about political responsibility, and contested visions for recovery would have been extraordinarily demanding work for these scribes, even generations after the disaster. The contemporary reader might well balk at the harshness of victim-blaming rhetoric or the narrative strategy of honoring vicious invaders as doing God’s work. Indeed, this commentary will balk over and over again at such interpretive moves, explicating the text from a feminist position that declines violence in rhetoric and lived politics. But we may still be awed by the monumental accomplishment of these prophets and scribes. As Kathleen O’Connor observes, the book of Jeremiah “is a work of resilience, a moral act for the rebuilding of the community from the ashes of catastrophe.”¹

The prose narratives in Jer 26–52 are charged with political conflict, an inevitable result of enormous pressures that were put on the leadership of Judah not only in the Babylonian crisis proper, but in the aftermath when leaders and visionaries had to work, despite their trauma, despite dislocation and cultural disorientation, to devise a way in which Judah could become whole again. The survival of their people depended on a pragmatically sound plan for assimilating the catastrophic losses and injuries that the Judean social body had sustained. Jeremiah 26–52 is a textual site of deep cultural injury.² The reader who examines it closely can see its inflammations and fractures, its wounds barely healed, its long angry scars still in the process of formation when Jeremiah reached its final forms in what became the Septuagintal and Masoretic traditions. Fierce internecine arguments knife through this material. Vitriolic disputes bubble up through dialogues between characters in the story and through uncompromising theological pronouncements made by Jeremiah and his God, making visible a toxic antagonism in the social body of Judah regarding how to respond to the Neo-Babylonian threat and—because much of this material was shaped in the aftermath—how to explain the injury that the Judean body had suffered.

Poetry, lyrical and passionate, is to be found in the Book of Consolation (chs. 30–31) and the oracles against the nations (“OAN,” chs. 46–51). Intense theological and political drama is characteristic of the entire book of Jeremiah. But the drama performed in poetic registers catalyzes differing effects in the implied audience than do the prose narratives. In early chapters of Jeremiah, poetic oracles express the looming punishment of Judah in elliptical terms, heightening suspense for the implied audience. The chaos of potential response to the divine threat is expressed, for example, in the command to the implied audience to run frantically through the streets of Jerusalem seeking even a single person who acts justly, so that YHWH might relent from punishing Judah (5:1); as the oracle unfolds and Jeremiah himself undertakes the search, it is clear that such efforts will be futile. The inhabitants of Benjamin are to flee Jerusalem (6:1)—the implied audience may feel compelled to run and hide as well from the monstrous foe approaching from

1 O’Connor, *Jeremiah: Pain and Promise*, 17.

2 For the ancient Judean historical context from the perspective of trauma studies, see David M. Carr, “Jerusalem’s Destruction and Babylonian Exile,” in *Holy Resilience: The Bible’s Traumatic Origins* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 67–90.

the north. By contrast, the prose of Jer 26–52 reads as the product of authoritative voices that have mastered the ambiguities of the earlier poetry, claiming the purposes of YHWH with robust confidence and referential specificity. Stylistically, this yields the impression that the terrifying uncertainties and chaos that animated the earlier prophetic oracles have yielded to political clarity about the inexorable purposes of YHWH for harm against the covenant people and the inescapable fate sweeping over Judah, Jerusalem, and Judeans in diaspora in Babylon and Egypt. Within this prose onslaught, the poetry in the Book of Consolation stands as a beacon of hope. These poems' articulations of hope are not positioned as the final word of the book, as in Amos or Ezekiel. In the structure of Jer^{MT}, that final word belongs to the artfully vitriolic OAN and the grim scene of the despoliation of Jerusalem and its people in Jer 52. But these oracles serve as an oasis, a way-station for building resilience for the journey, replenishing the spirits of readers making their way through the wasteland (שמה) of a wrecked Judah.

The Formation of Jeremiah 26–52

There are competing models for understanding diachronic processes of composition and redaction of the book of Jeremiah. All astute readers agree that the book is in places turbulent and chaotic, this quality generating fascination for the reader eager to follow the twists and turns of theological logic and the dominant streams and contrary eddies of its imagery. An underlying literary structure may be glimpsed here and there, with linkages among smaller larger units of text especially in the prose; some of the more volatile poetic material may be understood in light of that structure as well. But there are also poetic oracles and snippets of prose that add sheer difference and complexity, rather than congruence, to their local literary context and to the larger contours of the book. Some readers find the shifts in perspective, thematic foci, metaphORIZATION, and ideology that unfold within Jeremiah to frustrate systematic interpretation. Others, notably redaction critics who argue for coherent layers through large swaths of diverse material, pursue systematic analysis of linguistic and semantic features. Still other readers delight in what they perceive to be an artful quality like that of a tapestry or mosaic, the Jeremiah traditions taking on richness and depth from the strategic interweaving of disparate threads and the assemblage of smaller pieces even if the purposes and provenances of those pieces cannot be determined fully.³

Traditional source-critical scholarship on Jeremiah has worked in light of a series of assumptions about earlier and later materials that were given influential articulation by Bernhard Duhm (1847–1928) in a 1901 commentary and Sigmund

3 Stulman sees Jeremiah as “a rich and labyrinthine tapestry reflecting a plurality of social locations and pieties” (*Order Amid Chaos*, 184). For Jeremiah as mosaic, see Fischer, *Stand der Theologischen Diskussion*, 113 and the literature cited there.

Mowinckel (1884–1965) in a 1914 work.⁴ While varied positions and differences regarding historical dating had been explored in source-critical scholarship for decades, the overarching framework dominating the scholarly reconstruction of Jeremiah at that time is simple enough to describe. Poetic oracles from early in the prophet's career (dubbed Source A) were expanded by prose biographical material about Jeremiah (Source B) and Deuteronomistic prose additions (Source C). The increasingly complicated book was supplemented, finally, by other materials considered to have been generated in the late exilic and postexilic periods (Source D). Source-critical arguments have been contested, emended, and critiqued in more recent scholarship. For example, a sharp rebuttal is offered by Bernard Levinson on grounds of methodological weakness:

In the case of Jeremiah scholarship, the efforts of Bernhard Duhm and Sigmund Mowinckel to work out the book's compositional layers have provided the foundations of most subsequent research. So entrenched are the questions asked ... that the contours of the text are obscured, along with the reality of its intellectual and theological life.... The harder the models are pushed to explain the evidence, the more they break down into contradiction.⁵

Whatever one's position as regards preexisting literary sources, it seems evident that the formation of the Jeremiah traditions into the book we have today is the result of expert scribal practices of editing and shaping materials over time, the textual artisans enjoying a significant measure of creative freedom in the process.⁶ Many scholars are convinced that the existence of redactional layers in Jeremiah, and even diverse "editions" of the book, can be proved from literary and text-critical evidence. There is no gainsaying the historical data regarding differing Greek and Hebrew streams of the Jeremiah traditions and ongoing expansion in the MT tradition; as is well known, the Greek tradition of Jeremiah seems to be roughly one-seventh shorter than the Masoretic tradition. How one interprets those divergences, in local instances and in macrostructural theories, depends a great deal on one's governing premises.⁷

Redaction critics debate numerous larger points and smaller details of the schemata they propose for understanding the compositional history of Jeremiah. Seismic shifts do occur over time in this arena of Jeremiah study, as in every scholarly terrain. Scholars of an earlier generation spoke with assurance of the *ipsissima verba* of the historical prophet Jeremiah, understood to have been pre-

4 Bernhard Duhm, *Das Buch Jeremia*, KHC 11 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1901); Sigmund Mowinckel, *Zur Komposition des Buches Jeremia* (Kristiania: Jacob Dybwad, 1914). For an assessment of ways in which the persona of Jeremiah has been constructed in the work of Duhm and other traditionally historicist commentaries, see Joe Henderson, "Duhm and Skinner's Invention of Jeremiah," in Holt and Sharp, eds., *Jeremiah Invented*, 1–15.

5 Bernard M. Levinson, "Zedekiah's Release of Slaves as the Babylonians Besiege Jerusalem: Jeremiah 34 and the Formation of the Pentateuch," in Dubovský, Markl, and Sonnet, eds., *Fall of Jerusalem*, 313–327 (314).

6 For a review of Jeremiah scholarship from 1970 to 2010, see the four-article series by Liwak, "Vierzig Jahre Forschung zum Jeremiabuch."

7 On influential analyses of the textual relationship(s) between Jer^{LXX} and Jer^{MT}, see Liwak, "Vierzig Jahre Forschung I," 163–173.

served in the early poetic oracles in particular; but this way of understanding an earlier historical core or *Kern* encrusted with later accretions is no longer the governing model in scholarly conversations. Redaction-critical analyses are compelling for those who find it viable to tie many different sorts of philological and historical evidence, from minor to major in scale, to proposed layers of editorial reworking, these usually theorized to be demonstrable especially on the basis of shared language and congruence of perspective. Superb redaction critics include my feminist colleague in this commentary project, Christl Maier, as well as Rainer Albertz and Hermann-Josef Stipp. Much can be learned from their painstaking work. Other scholars, in whose ranks I include myself, prefer to analyze literary effects of editorial interpolations, these signaled by such clues as irresolvable ideological tensions and awkward shifts of emphasis in the flow of material, without seeking to tie a host of individual verses or motifs too closely to hypothetical layers of editorial intervention conceived as having been worked systematically through large swaths of material.

Throughout this commentary, the literary readings on offer should not be taken as an implicit defense of a presumed unity of particular narratives in their historical provenance. Some would frame the politics of scholarship in such a way that there seem to be only two sides: those who accept multiple layers in a biblical text (vigorous dispute of the details is welcomed), and those who defend the “unity” of the narrative. But those are not the only options. In my view, literary criticism offers excellent proposals that clarify our understanding of particular textual tensions, while acknowledging that editorial interventions may have been enacted that can neither be proved nor read in definitive ways *qua* interventions. The logic of a proposed interpolation may remain unclear; perhaps it was simply preserved without having been intended as part of a larger ideological program. It may be the case that shifts of emphasis, unexpected developments in characterization, and so forth are best understood as literary effects designed to illumine new or deeper dimensions of the plot. Whatever the case, the reader would do well to remember the literary-critical notion of the intentional fallacy, viz., that authorial intention is never truly available to those who engage a work of literature. Shifts and unexpected developments in a narrative may have amplifying, complicating, or other interesting consequences in particular reading contexts, and these can be explored even though it can never be proved that a scribe intended those consequences. Thus, some readers hold literarily-focused interpretation to be more productive than redaction-critical speculation on putative compositional layers. This is not the same as defending the unity of the narrative or as implying that a single author was responsible for the literary production of the text. On that last point, a few scholars do conceive of Jeremiah as having been created, in the main, by a single scribal hand, sometimes identified as the historical Baruch. As regards literary coherence interpreted historically, one should note the arguments of Georg Fischer that the book of Jeremiah, while literarily complex and artful in its use of sources, was created by a single author in the late Persian period.⁸

8 For Fischer’s perspective on compositional issues and redaction-critical theories and his view that Jeremiah is a unified work, see his *Stand der theologischen Diskussion*, 91–114.

Scholars of a postmodern bent, led a generation ago by Robert Carroll (1941–2000) and Pete Diamond (1950–2011) and growing in numbers to the present day, have problematized methodological assumptions underlying historical empiricism and contest totalizing claims about the origins, structural features, and ideological purposes of the Jeremiah traditions.⁹ Claire Carroll frames contemporary research on Jeremiah in terms of a dialectical quest moving between two poles: theorizing that honors coherence and theorizing that honors decentering and disorder.¹⁰ Ongoing debates enliven scholarship regarding the extent, goals, and characterization of the authorship and editorial activity that formed the complex book of Jeremiah.

Scribal culture

The scribes of ancient Israel and Judah have been understood in recent scholarship to have portrayed the figure of Jeremiah and shaped the contours of the book from the perspective of postexilic reflection. Karel van der Toorn reminds us that technologies of writing in ancient Near Eastern oral environments were very different from those activities in contemporary Western cultures. Collections of prophetic oracles—as well as other discrete units such as aphorisms and laws—may have been organized more by loose parataxis than by an overarching design or incrementally unfolding plot.¹¹ Given this, the literary significance of juxtaposition and other structuring elements should be considered; scholars of the prophetic literature look for catchwords, doublets, and other signs of locally performed linkage as potentially having semantic value. No mere copyists, scribes were erudite composers and editors of texts in their own right. The diligent and imaginative work of teams of scribes was essential for the generation and preservation of prophetic literature that would be intelligible in their social contexts.¹² Of course, the scribes could be critiqued as well as honored for what they expressed and taught; ancient scribal contestations seethe through the Jeremiah poetry and prose. Jeremiah fulminates against (some of) the scribes, “How can you say, ‘We are wise, and the law of [YHWH] is with us, when, in fact, the false pen of the scribes has made it into a lie?’” (8:8).¹³ Scribes wrote up economic documents such as trade inventories and deeds for financial transactions (see Jer 32). But they also produced halakic, theological, and political literature, whether that literature was attached to an authoritative name—Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah—or not. They assuredly worked in circles of traditionists. As van der Toorn observes, “the notion of the author as an autonomous agent of creative genius is a historical construct” that reflects early

9 In Hauser, ed., *Recent Research on the Major Prophets*, see Robert P. Carroll, “Surplus Meaning and the Conflict of Interpretations: A Decade of Jeremiah Studies (1984–95),” 195–216; idem, “Century’s End: Jeremiah Studies at the Beginning of the Third Millennium,” 217–231; A. R. Pete Diamond, “The Jeremiah Guild in the Twenty-First Century: Variety Reigns Supreme,” 232–248.

10 Claire E. Carroll, “Another Decade: A Dialectic Model of the Decentred Universe of Jeremiah Studies 1996–2008,” *CBR* 8 (2010): 162–182.

11 Van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture*, 15.

12 On the historical contingency of constructions of prophecy in the ancient Near East and in modern scholarship, see Martti Nissinen, “Prophecy as Construct, Ancient and Modern,” in *Thus Speaks Ishtar of Arbela: Prophecy in Israel, Assyria, and Egypt in the Neo-Assyrian Period*, Robert P. Gordon and Hans M. Barstad, eds. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 11–35.

13 The NRSV is the default translation I use for biblical texts outside of Jer 26–52. I substitute “[YHWH]” for “LORD” as needed to avoid importing theological resonances via translation that may not have obtained in the Hebrew original.

modern European sensibilities.¹⁴ Social and political dimensions of the scribal literature of ancient Israel and Judah are of importance for historians and ideological critics interested in the politics of literary revision. This ancient literature matters also for literary critics interested in the philology and grammar of ancient composition, poetic acumen, and scribal skill in fashioning narratives with drama, suspense, and nuanced characterization.¹⁵

Engagement of the implications of scribalism and scribal technologies in ancient Israel and Judah has proceeded along multiple trajectories. Chad Eggleston reviews four theories of writing visible in biblical scholarship on the scribal composition and redaction of Jeremiah.¹⁶ First is writing as degeneration, texts growing from original oral inspiration to later prosaic expressions assessed as stultifying and tendentious by comparison with oral charism; here Eggleston cites the work of Julius Wellhausen. Second is writing as progress, technologies of recording and reiterating making possible an increasing scribal sophistication. Third is writing as dictation, a perspective which underlines the importance of capturing the quality of originary speech utterance or dialogue; on this, Eggleston cites scholarship on a spectrum from Hermann Gunkel (1862–1932) and Sigmund Mowinckel to Susan Niditch. Finally is writing as deconstruction, a perspective that explores written texts as expressions of contradictions and contestations that can unravel or complexify their own claims; here, Eggleston cites Robert Carroll as an early practitioner of this approach within biblical studies. Contemporary scholarly engagements of scribal culture understand that oral, written, and remembered traditions exist and develop side by side in multiple forms, with many fluid directions of influence, rather than being enacted on a diachronic trajectory wherein one technology supplants another. Of relevance for the study of Jeremiah are four clues to scribal activity highlighted by Eggleston: the “literary conventions of colophons, superscripts, deictic language, and resumptive repetition.”¹⁷ The scribes may have obscured some of their redactional decisions and linguistic choices as they preserved and amplified the Jeremiah traditions. But they also left visible traces that show the intentionality of their work with the heritage of the prophet.

Redactional Theories

Jeremiah 26–52 comprises, for the most part, Deutero-Jeremianic (Dtr-Jer) prose and later additions. In Christl Maier’s volume on Jer 1–25 in this series, the reader will find

14 Van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture*, 31.

15 On the scribal practice of revision through the technique of adding introductory material, see Sara J. Milstein, *Tracking the Master Scribe: Revision through Introduction in Biblical and Mesopotamian Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016). Expert literary critics working with biblical texts are too many to name. One might start with the foundational contributions of Robert Alter, Adele Berlin, Meir Sternberg, and Phyllis Trible, explore the work of Timothy Beal on narrative and F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp on poetry, then move to essays in the magisterial three-volume work edited by Susanne Scholz, *Feminist Interpretation*, esp. Vol. III.

16 Eggleston, “See and Read All These Words,” 17–38.

17 Eggleston describes these scribal interventions in “See and Read All These Words,” 56–60. He observes that Jeremiah “provides a strikingly high number of references to its own textualization, and these occur at crucial literary seams in the book” (123).