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## **The Author(s) of the Book of Jeremiah**

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## 1. Biblical Prophecy, the Prophet Jeremiah and His Book

In this short article, I will deal with a simple matter, namely, who wrote the book of Jeremiah, one of the major prophetic books in the Bible. As is often the case, such a straightforward question has quite an intricate answer. However, before proceeding, given the specificity of the topic (many, I am sure, will be familiar with the Bible as a collection of books, but fewer might be acquainted with the *minutiae* of the prophet Jeremiah and the book named after him), some introductory notes are necessary. Counting fifty-two chapters, the book of Jeremiah is the longest book ascribed by the biblical tradition to one of the so-called ‘writing prophets’.<sup>1</sup> Traditionally, Jeremiah bears the title of ‘prophet’ (in Hebrew, *nāvi*), and *Prophets* (Hebrew, *Nevi'im*) is also the title for that part of the Bible that goes from the book of Joshua to that of Malachi. As a prophet, Jeremiah acts as a mediator between the divine and the humane spheres,<sup>2</sup> and, although Hebrew prophets are sometimes involved in the prediction of future things, they are not merely foretellers. They represent the link between Yhwh, the god of the Bible, and his people; thus, they report the will of the deity to the community to actively influence their doings.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In the biblical canon, the tradition considers fifteen prophets as individual authors of the fifteen prophetic books. They are divided, according to the length of their work, into three Major (Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel) and twelve Minor (Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Naum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi) prophets.

<sup>2</sup> As regards the characteristics of human-divine communication in the ancient Near East, a thorough analysis is found in Martti Nissinen, *Ancient Prophecy: Near Eastern, Biblical, and Greek Perspectives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 4-54.

<sup>3</sup> For detailed introductions to the roles of religious officials in ancient Israel, including “prophets”, see Lester L. Grabbe, *Priests, Prophets, Diviners, Sages: A Socio-Historical Study of Religious Specialists in Ancient Israel*

As for its content, the book purports to present the words spoken by Jeremiah, son of the priest Hilkiyah, living in Anathoth, a village situated in the territory of the tribe of Benjamin (Jeremiah 1. 1–3). The prophet is said to be active in between the decline of Assyria and the rise of the Neo-Babylonian empire (based on the book's internal references, the prophetic ministry of Jeremiah goes from 630 to 570 BCE). Those years, as per the biblical account, represented the latest decades of independence of the small kingdom of Judah. In fact, at the beginning of the sixth century, Babylonian armies guided by Nebuchadnezzar II invaded Judah. In 597, Jerusalem was besieged, and its ruling class deported in Babylon, while a new king (loyal to the Babylonians) was installed on the throne. However, ten years later, in 587, Jerusalem was invaded again, the temple looted and destroyed and all the population deported to Mesopotamia.<sup>4</sup> Within this critical political scenario, the prophet Jeremiah promoted repentance in the population of Judah, which had abandoned Yhwh, so the nation could avoid the deity's punishment issued in the form of the enemy army bringing destruction and desolation.

In spite of its title, to the eyes of the modern reader the book of Jeremiah would hardly resemble a 'book', at least in the contemporary sense of this term, as it lacks the coherence and structure that characterize modern literature.<sup>5</sup> In fact, the reader will encounter mostly self-standing oracles, in a constant alternation of poetry and prose (often interrupting

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(Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1995), pp. 66-118. Cf. also David L. Petersen, *The Prophetic Literature* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), pp. 5-8; Reinhardt G. Kratz, *The Prophets of Israel* (trans. by Anselm C. Hagedorn and Nathan MacDonald. CSHB 2; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2015), pp. 19-20.

<sup>4</sup> According to the biblical account (found in II Kings 24–25), Nebuchadnezzar II besieged Jerusalem a first time under the rule of King Jeconiah. He conquered the city, looted the treasure of the temple and deported the king, the princes and all the mighty men of Jerusalem, leaving in the land only the poorest members of society (cf. II Kings 24. 14). Then, King Jeconiah was replaced by his uncle, Zedekiah. In a few years, Zedekiah rebelled against Babylon again, which led to another siege (cf. II Kings 25. 1). Once the Babylonians entered Jerusalem, they burnt the royal palace, destroyed the temple, and took all the population of the city into captivity (cf. II Kings 25. 9–11). As regards extra-biblical sources, an Akkadian chronicle registers Nebuchadnezzar's western campaigns in Palestine and the siege of 597; see ABC 5 (lines 11-14).

<sup>5</sup> As observed by the major commentators of the book; see John Bright, *Jeremiah. Introduction, Translation and Notes* (AB 21. New York: Doubleday, 1965), p. lvi; Ernest W. Nicholson, *The Book of the Prophet Jeremiah. Chapters 1-25* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), p. 14; Robert P. Carroll, *The Book of Jeremiah: A Commentary* (London: SCM Press, 1986), pp. 33-36; Craigie *et al*, *Jeremiah 1-25* (WBC 26; Dallas: Word Books, 1991), pp. xxx-xxxii; Douglas R. Jones, *Jeremiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), p. 17.

each other), with little-to-no introduction. Moreover, double accounts of the same events are also frequent, along with doublings of the same verses and alternation between first and third-person narratives. Such a peculiar collection of writings includes (appearing in the book with no chronological order) prophetic oracles, poetic laments, prose narratives, and biographical and historical accounts.<sup>6</sup>

Different textual traditions from antiquity have transmitted the book of Jeremiah, but in this concise discussion, it is important to mention only two of them. The first (and most studied) is the Hebrew version preserved in the Masoretic text,<sup>7</sup> based upon the oldest, complete manuscript of the Hebrew Bible, the *Leningrad Codex*, which dates to year 1008 CE. The second one is found in the *Septuagint*, an earlier Greek translation of the Bible from an original Hebrew which dates to the third century BCE. The Masoretic text provides a considerably longer text than the Greek version, with mostly minor variations.<sup>8</sup> Significantly, the disposition of the chapters sometimes varies between the Hebrew and Greek versions. Why these two editions need to be considered when dealing with the authorship of the book of Jeremiah relates to the phenomenon of editing in the redaction history of the Hebrew Bible.

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<sup>6</sup> Exhaustive presentations of the outline of the book of Jeremiah are given in the introductions of all the major commentaries (cf. the ones cited in note 5 above). However, the recent work of Mary E. Mills, *Jeremiah. Prophecy in a Time of Crisis* (T&T Clark Study Guide to the Old Testament; London, New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), represents an excellent introduction to the book for all those who approach it for the first time; it also offers a good and concise outline of its content and structure (pp. 8-16).

<sup>7</sup> This version is named after the Masoretes, a group of scribes active in Jerusalem in between the sixth and tenth centuries CE. The Masoretes noted and corrected the text of the Hebrew Bible (most notably adding the vowels and thus fixing the text in a univocal reading), providing the standard version of the Bible used today by Jewish communities.

<sup>8</sup> It is widely accepted that the Masoretic text (MT) represents an expanded form of Jeremiah compared to the hypothetical Hebrew source of the Septuagint (commonly indicated by the term *Vorlage*, which is German for *prototype*); see Gerald J. Janzen, *Studies in the Text of Jeremiah* (HSM 6; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), p. 127; William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 2. A Commentary on the book of the Prophet Jeremiah. Chapters 26-52* (Hermeneia. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), p. 3; William McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah I-XXV*, Vol I (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986), p. xvi. Nonetheless, as argued by Tov, an even more radical conclusion is that the *Vorlage* of the Greek not only was shorter, but was also significantly different from that presupposed by MT, so that the Greek version and the MT simply represent different editions of the book of Jeremiah; see Emmanuel Tov, 'Some aspects of the Textual and Literary History of the Book of Jeremiah', in P.-M Bogaert (ed.), *Le Livre de Jérémie: Le Prophète et son Milieu, les Oracles et leur Transmission* (BETL 54; Louvain: University of Louvain Press, 1981), pp. 153-57. Similarly, Carroll, *Jeremiah*, p. 55.

## 2. The Book and its Ancient Editors

As said above, the Masoretic text of Jeremiah is neither the only textual tradition available to the biblical scholar, nor represents a ‘superior’ one by any means.<sup>9</sup> In fact, all the texts that appear in the Hebrew Bible are the product of editing that lasted several centuries; furthermore, the work of the editors was not, as some have considered, a marginal, even negligible, phenomenon,<sup>10</sup> but on the contrary was of substantial importance in producing the given form of the biblical books. This is an essential notion for everyone who aims to deal with authors and authorship in the Bible, which represents an anonymous collection of (vastly edited) books. Hence, it seems evident how simplistic it is to claim one single author, whether it be Jeremiah or another, behind most of the content of the book. And yet this was (and still is) not an unusual position in the guild of Biblical scholars.

Differently from other parts of the Old Testament, prophetic books include superscriptions introducing their content as the product of the prophet whose words and actions they report. The *colophon* of the book of Jeremiah reads, ‘The words of Jeremiah, the son of Hilkiah, one of the priests living in Anathoth in the territory of Benjamin’ (Jeremiah 1. 1). Given such an explicit statement, it is no surprise that for centuries the book was read as the original work of Jeremiah. Besides, Jeremiah’s story appears to be the most promising as to the possible reconstruction of the life and thoughts of a sixth-century Hebrew prophet. In

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<sup>9</sup> A lasting prejudice in the field of Biblical Studies is that the Masoretic text, a medieval manuscript, would be more authoritative, and thus more reliable, than other more ancient biblical sources, as the Greek version or the Qumran scrolls, dating from the third century BCE to the first century CE; see Bruno Chiesa, *Filologia storica della Bibbia ebraica I: da Origene al Medioevo* (Brescia: Paideia, 2000), p. 3. However, comparison between the Greek and the Hebrew shows that almost all the texts in the Hebrew Bible have been edited, expanded and sometimes even shortened. A detailed study as to the empiric evidence of the work of the editors is found in Reinhard Müller *et al*, *Evidence of Editing: Growth and Change of Text in the Hebrew Bible* (SBL 75, Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014). For a study that focuses instead on the omissions practiced by the editors, see Juha Pakkala, *God’s Word Omitted. Omissions in the Transmission of the Hebrew Bible* (FRLANT 251; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013).

<sup>10</sup> As considered by John Van Seters, *The Edited Bible: The Curious History of the “Editor” in Biblical Criticism* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2006); see also, from the same author, “Editing the Bible: The Romantic Myths about Authors and Editors, *HeBAI* 3 (3), (2014), 343-54. Less radical reactions as regards the results of redactional analyses of biblical texts are found in Raymond F. Person & Robert Rezetko (eds.), *Empirical Models Challenging Biblical Criticism* (Ancient Israel and its Literature 25; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016).

fact, Jeremiah often speaks of himself and presents to the reader his intimate thoughts. In the passages labelled by scholars as the ‘confessions’ of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 11. 18–12. 6; 15. 10–21; 17. 14–18; 18. 18–23; 20. 7–18), the prophet speaks of the suffering that the call to rebuke his people has caused to him. Within these laments, Jeremiah voices even his personal resentment against Yhwh for the task bestowed upon him, and he emerges as a solitary champion, who fights against the corrupt leaders of the community (king and priestly officials included), and never rests from reminding a nation gone far from their god that only repentance will save them when the inevitable divine judgement will strike. In the book, Jeremiah is a tragic, solitary hero who opposes everyone and that everyone despises. The lament in the bicolon Jeremiah 20. 7–8 sums up perfectly Jeremiah’s essence as a prophet: ‘You deceived me, Yhwh, and I was deceived. You seized me and prevailed. I am a laughingstock all the time; everyone ridicules me. For whenever I speak, I cry out, I proclaim, “Violence and destruction!” so Yhwh’s word has become my constant disgrace and derision.’ The possibility of reconstructing the life of such a vivid figure, the man Jeremiah, by reading the book as his autobiography, has fascinated scholars up to very recent times. Comments have been written in order to explain the psychological dimension of this prophet; assumptions have been made as regards his inner turmoil, his education as a priest, his acquaintance to Mosaic law, his knowledge of other prophetic books, and his ability and style as writer.<sup>11</sup>

Nonetheless, the assumption that the prophet Jeremiah would be the only hand behind the book was shelved at the beginning of the twentieth century. In his commentary *Das Buch Jeremia*, Bernhard Duhm was the first to concentrate his critical analysis on the evident

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<sup>11</sup> Scholarly approaches that privilege the investigation of the life and thoughts of the ‘historical’ Jeremiah have always been prevalent in Biblical Studies. Besides the already cited works of Bright, Holladay, Jones and Craigie, other examples are John A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980); Leslie C. Allen, *Jeremiah* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008).

differences between the poetry and prose materials in the book.<sup>12</sup> In fact, the poetic parts generally consider the inhabitants of Judah as incapable of correction and hence doomed, while the prose materials instead appeal to the community to encourage correction for salvation. In addition, the prose closely resembles the repetitive style seen in other parts of the Hebrew Bible, namely in Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, I–II Samuel and I–II Kings, which are suspected of having undergone a uniform stage of redaction,<sup>13</sup> so that a similar uniform stage of redaction has been assumed for the book of Jeremiah as well. Duhm concluded that only the poetic oracles in the first half of the book (chapters 1–25) represented the *ipsissima verba* of the ‘historical’ prophet, which were later collected by his scribal circle.<sup>14</sup> To this original nucleus later editors added some notes on the life of Jeremiah, along with other prose materials.<sup>15</sup>

Following Duhm’s example, it was believed that a careful reading of the book would have allowed the reader to separate all the later editorial additions from the original sayings of the prophet.<sup>16</sup> As reasonable as this supposition may seem, it comes with prejudicial assumptions that irremediably undermine its value. First, there is no objective criterion to reconstruct among these texts the words that the ‘historical’ prophet may have uttered in his lifetime, so much so that even the identification of one single original saying should be deemed unattainable.<sup>17</sup> Secondly, even if we were able to set apart the original words from the additions, that would not diminish the importance of the secondary materials found in the

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<sup>12</sup> See Bernhard Duhm, *Das Buch Jeremia* (KHC 11; Tübingen: Mohr, 1901).

<sup>13</sup> This collection of books is generally called Deuteronomistic History, although the extent and characteristics of this literary corpus are still debated; for an assessment of the matter, see Thomas Römer & Albert de Pury, ‘Deuteronomistic Historiography (DH): History of Research and Debate Issues’, in Albert de Pury et al (eds.), *Israel Constructs its History: Deuteronomistic Historiography in Recent Research* (JSOTS 306; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), pp. 24-141.

<sup>14</sup> See Duhm, *Jeremia*, pp. xi-xx.

<sup>15</sup> See Duhm, *Jeremia*, p. xvi.

<sup>16</sup> It would be too long to list here (even shortly) all the contributions to the current understanding of the formation of the book of Jeremiah. However, Mowinckel’s study, which implemented Duhm’s work, deserves to be mentioned; see Sigmund Mowinckel, *Zur Komposition des Buches Jeremia* (Oslo: Jacob Dybwad, 1914).

<sup>17</sup> As considered by Carroll, *From Chaos to Covenant: Uses of Prophecy in the Book of Jeremiah* (London: SCM Press, 1981), pp. 8-11; Kratz, *The Prophets of Israel*, pp. 33-34.

book.<sup>18</sup> We cannot simply discard later insertions as less worthy, because the simple fact that they are now part of these books clearly accounts for their value in the eyes of the editors who shaped them in the given form. However, aside from the important role of the editors, yet another obstacle stands in the way of Jeremiah as author of even parts of the book, namely his elusive and contradictory portrait in the text.

### 3. One, No One and One-Hundred-Thousand Jeremiahs

It has been surprisingly easy for numerous scholars to isolate the inner thoughts of Jeremiah, in so accepting his depiction as an intellectual dissident and praising his inexhaustible polemical verve in rebuking the corrupt religious and political leaders of Judah.<sup>19</sup> Despite finding some ground in the book, it should be said that this portrait of the prophet is not the only one, nor is it always the most prominent. The scrupulous reader—but I would dare to say the less careful as well—cannot fail to notice that Jeremiah does and says contradictory things throughout the book. Many times, he speaks of the Babylonians as an implacable enemy from which all the population of Judah should escape (Jeremiah 4. 5–6; 6. 1, 22; 25. 8–11); yet, in other parts of the book, he accepts the coming of the Babylonian army as part of Yhwh’s divine plan for the nation (Jeremiah 27. 5–8; 28. 12–14; 29. 4–7). He even goes as far as saying that King Nebuchadnezzar II is the servant of Yhwh and all Judah should bow down before him not to be destroyed (Jeremiah 27. 6). Likewise, Jeremiah generally sees and speaks of Jerusalem as the den of all evils, full of idolaters, adulterers and sinners (among many, consider the passages Jeremiah 2. 18–25; 11. 9–14; 13. 9–11; 15. 5–6; 18. 11–12; 23. 15). Nonetheless, Jeremiah 30–31 are entirely occupied by oracles of hope for

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<sup>18</sup> The dichotomy between *ipsissima verba* and secondary materials cannot help but take the latter as less important, as some sort of ‘unwanted material’ that precludes the investigation of the real prophet, as noted by Terence Collins, *The Mantle of Elijah. The Redactional Criticism of the Prophetic Books* (The Biblical Seminar 20; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), pp. 14–15.

<sup>19</sup> This is the traditional depiction of the prophet Jeremiah; see Bright, *Jeremiah*, pp. lxxxvi–lxxxix; Holladay, *Jeremiah I*, pp. 15–33; Craigie *et al*, *Jeremiah 1–25*, pp. xxx–xxxii; Jones, *Jeremiah*, pp. 24–28.



the salvation of Jerusalem. Occasionally, Jeremiah attacks the institutions of the royal palace and the temple, in a clear anti-establishment crusade (Jeremiah 7. 4; 21. 3–7; 22. 6–9); other times, he is depicted as an intimate friend and advisor of King Zedekiah, the ruler of Judah (Jeremiah 37–38).

At times, he speaks freely in the temple, in front of the priests and the people (Jeremiah 7; 26; 28); other times he is forced into hiding because the temple officials are plotting to have him killed (Jeremiah 18. 18; 36. 26). He accuses his fellow prophets of idolatry (Jeremiah 2. 8, 26; 23. 13), adultery (Jeremiah 23. 14–15; 29. 23) apostasy (Jeremiah 23. 11), vanity (Jeremiah 5. 13) and falsehood (Jeremiah 5. 31; 6. 13; 8. 10; 14. 13–15; 27. 10, 14; 28. 15; 29. 9, 21); yet he states elsewhere that Judah will be destroyed because the people have refused to listen to the prophets, the true and only servants of Yhwh (Jeremiah 7. 25; 25. 4; 26. 5; 35. 15; 44. 4)!

To these inconsistencies, we can add the fact that often Jeremiah appears to experience the same events twice. He speaks his famous temple sermon in Jeremiah 7 and later again in Jeremiah 26, and twice he attacks the cult of the queen of heaven in a surprisingly similar fashion (Jeremiah 7 and 45). The more interesting case however regards his imprisonment, followed by a secret meeting with King Zedekiah. The event is described in Jeremiah 37 and immediately retold in the subsequent Jeremiah 38. The pattern is the same. Jeremiah shows support to the Babylonians who are besieging Jerusalem (Jeremiah 37. 7–10, 13; Jeremiah 38. 2–3), so he incurs the disapproval of the leaders of the community who put him into jail (Jeremiah 37. 14; 38. 4–6). Later, King Zedekiah rescues him and consults him in secret (Jeremiah 37. 17; Jeremiah 38. 14, 24). Jeremiah says to Zedekiah that Jerusalem will eventually fall, but the king will not die (Jeremiah 37. 17; Jeremiah 38. 17). In the end, Jeremiah begs not to be put in jail again, and the king allows him to stay in the courtyard of the prison (Jeremiah 37. 21; Jeremiah 38. 26–28). These similarities have long

been noted, and although some commentators defend the nature of Jeremiah 37 and 38 as two consecutive biographical episodes that occurred to the prophet,<sup>20</sup> it seems more reasonable to think that the editors have inserted two parallel accounts of the same episode, clearly connected to a literary tradition presenting Jeremiah in jail (surprisingly enough, Jeremiah was already imprisoned in Jeremiah 32).<sup>21</sup>

It should be clear by now that any reconstructions of the ‘historical’ Jeremiah must cope with the numerous (and conflicting!) depictions of the prophet, and the attempt to harmonize all these traits to recreate a uniform and coherent narrative is a task that would discourage even the most tenacious of scholars. Based on the content of the book, no plausible reconstruction of the life and times of the man Jeremiah can be attained;<sup>22</sup> hence, the search for the ‘historical’ Jeremiah can safely be shelved, likewise his supposed active role in the composition of the book that bears his name.

#### 4. The Literary Self: Editors as Authors and Jeremiah as a Character

In conclusion, the hypothesis of Jeremiah as the author of the book, or even parts of it, can hardly be upheld. Nonetheless, the point of this brief article is not to negate the historicity

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<sup>20</sup> See Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 284 and Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37-52: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 21C; New York: Doubleday, 2007), p. 73.

<sup>21</sup> This is the understanding of Skinner, *Prophecy and Religion: Studies in the Life of Jeremiah* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), p. 258; Bright, *Jeremiah*, 233 and Nicholson, *Jeremiah 26-52*, p. 118. Even more accurate would be to take Jeremiah 37 and 38 as independent narratives arisen from the same traditional motif of Jeremiah’s imprisonment, as suggested by Carroll, *Jeremiah*, p. 670. In fact, significant differences are observed between these materials (Jeremiah is confined in the house of Jonathan the scribe in Jeremiah 37, while in Jeremiah 38, he is put into the cistern of Malkijah; Zedekiah sends for Jeremiah directly and speaks with him in Jeremiah 37, while in Jeremiah 38, the king commands Ebed-Melek the Cushite to fetch the prophet from the cistern, and only then speaks with him), which question their origin as parallel accounts of the same episode.

<sup>22</sup> The first voice to raise this point was that of Carroll who undertook a ‘sceptical reading’ of the book of Jeremiah. He did not investigate the contributions (if any) of the ‘historical’ Jeremiah but focused instead on the redactional activity that contributed to the literary depiction of the prophet. Carroll has always been quite critical of what he called the ‘Skinnerian approach’ (based on John Skinner’s *Prophecy and Religion*), which has long dominated the study of Jeremiah (clear examples are Bright’s and Thompson’s commentaries). Carroll considers this approach neither uncritical nor excessively conservative, but too trusting of the possibility of accessing the man Jeremiah through the content of the book; see Carroll, *From Chaos to Covenant*, p. 6.

of the figure of Jeremiah and claim that he never existed so he could not have participated to the creation of the book that bears his name. In the last decades, the sharp distinction between fact (= true) and fiction (= not true) has been dismissed by recent theories of history, which have acknowledged that fictional stories often contain some historical truths.<sup>23</sup> This concept clearly affects also Biblical Studies, in which the historicity of the biblical text is still very much up for debate.<sup>24</sup> Personally, I am inclined to accept that a charismatic man named Jeremiah existed, because ideas never exist in a vacuum and the authority of the book must come from somewhere. However, I am sceptical that from the book itself, this ‘historical’ Jeremiah (whoever he was, whatever he did, whenever he lived) can be even partially recovered. It seems more reasonable to approach the book of Jeremiah as ‘a fictitious story’, meaning that the story of Jeremiah could have happened, although most likely did not.<sup>25</sup>

To explain how this concerns the issue of authorship in Jeremiah, let us now go back to the main question of this article (“who is the author of the book of Jeremiah?”). This is, unfortunately, not a question that can be answered—not satisfactorily at least, but only in very general terms. Redactional analyses appear to point out that the book developed from a short collection of anonymous poetic oracles. The main focus of said oracles was the coming of an invading army from the North who would have ravaged the country (fragments of this

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<sup>23</sup> Post-modernist epistemological questions as regards the nature of history and historiography have challenged the positivistic model of objective history writing, in which the historian can completely access and understand the past and write a ‘factual’ history. A thorough explication of this shift in the theory of history is found in Joyce Oldham Appleby *et al*, *Telling the Truth About History* (New York, London: W. W. Norton, 1995).

<sup>24</sup> The issue of the historicity of the Hebrew Bible cannot be addressed here. A good assessment of its problems, relating to the shift in the conception of history as a discipline can be found in Grabbe (ed.), *Can a History of Israel be Written?* (JSOTSup 245; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997). Similarly, see Hans M. Barstad, *History and the Hebrew Bible* (FAT 61; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008); Ingrid Hjelm & Thomas L. Thompson (eds.), *History, Archaeology and the Bible Forty Years after Historicity. Changing Perspectives 6* (CIS; London, New York: Routledge, 2016).

<sup>25</sup> Such a position relating to biblical texts has been expressed by Barstad, ‘A fictitious story is a historically untrue story that could have happened, but did not happen’; in Barstad, ‘What Prophets Do: Reflections on Past Reality in the Book of Jeremiah’, in Barstad and Kratz (eds.), *Prophecy in the Book of Jeremiah* (Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 2009), p. 28.

core collection are found in Jeremiah 4. 5–6; 6. 1, 22).<sup>26</sup> Later, this first nucleus was expanded by scribal circles (the editors) who added new materials and developed further the figure of Jeremiah. Each of these circles had their own agenda and ideological interpretation as to significant key events in the history of the nation, such as the Babylonian invasion, the fall of Jerusalem, the destruction and looting of the temple, the duty of a prophet, the theodicy of Yhwh, and also the role that civil and religious leaders of the community played in past events and the trajectory of the history of the Hebrew people in the Persian and Hellenistic periods.<sup>27</sup> Thus, given our current data as to the formation of the book, it is impossible to establish with any precision who wrote the book of Jeremiah (agreed that Jeremiah did not). Conversely, we can answer other, more relevant questions, such as ‘why’ the book was written, and ‘how’, which, I believe, represent much more cogent and engaging aspects when it comes to biblical texts.

The case of the book of Jeremiah hopefully offered some (very general) insights as to the theme of authorship in the books of the Hebrew Bible. When this paper was conceived, it was meant to use the book of Jeremiah as a good example of how authorship worked within the biblical context, but it seems evident now that, given how tenaciously the search for the

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<sup>26</sup> That the materials found in Jeremiah 4. 5–6. 30 represent the oldest oracles in the book is considered by Christoph Levin, *Die Verheißung des neuen Bundes: in ihrem theologiegeschichtlichen Zusammenhang ausgelegt* (FRLANT 137; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985), pp. 153-56; Karl-Friedrich Pohlmann, *Die Ferne Gottes. Studien zum Jeremiabuch. Beiträge zu den "Konfessionen" im Jeremiabuch und ein Versuch zur Frage nach den Anfängen der Jeremiatradition* (BZAW 179; Berlin: De Gruyter, 1989), pp. 129-32; Konrad Schmid, *Buchgestalten des Jeremiabuches: Untersuchungen zur Redaktionsgeschichte von Jer 30–33 im Kontext des Buches* (WMANT 72. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1996), pp. 330-35; Kratz, *The Prophets of Israel*, 57, p. 128.

<sup>27</sup> This interpretation of the book of Jeremiah emerges from the works of scholars such as Carroll, *Jeremiah*, p. 65ff; and Pohlman, *Studien zum Jeremiabuch: ein Beitrag zur Frage nach der Entstehung des Jeremiabuches* (FRLANT 118; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978), pp. 19-31. Similarly, McKane, *Jeremiah vol. I*, pp. lxii-lxxxiii (although he still accepts a dating of part of the book to the early sixth century and acknowledges the active role of the ‘historical’ Jeremiah in its composition). Others instead, although accepting the evidence of the role of the editors, generally consider a more uniform work of redaction upon the nucleus written by the prophet; see Nicholson, *Preaching to the Exiles. A Study of the Prose Tradition in the Book of Jeremiah* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1970), pp. 122-23, 131-33; Winfried Thiel, *Die deuteronomistische Redaktion von Jeremia 1-25* (WMANT 41; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1973), pp. 301-2; of the same author, *Die deuteronomistische Redaktion von Jeremia 26-45* (WMANT 52; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1981), pp. 107-12.

'historical' Jeremiah has endured (and still endures) the test of time, these considerations say just as much about antiquity as they do of more recent times. However, it seems that the person who has long been perceived to be the author of the book, the prophet Jeremiah, should be instead considered as the mere protagonist. The fictional framework of his life, sayings, deeds, adventures and travels in sixth-century Judah provided the scenario that groups of *literati* (active much later) used to express themselves (their theology, their ideas, their hopes) through the mouth of the charismatic character Jeremiah and his privileged relationship with Yhwh. It is true that Jeremiah may have not written a single word, but it seems undeniable that the *auctoritas* behind the book should belong to his figure, one single voice to express the selves of many anonymous authors.

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