

The Folio

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FAREWELL TO THE ABMC!

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It has been my pleasure and privilege to serve as CEO/Director of the Ancient Biblical Manuscript Center for Preservation and Research since 2003! By action of the ABMC Board, I was appointed CEO of the ABMC in 2003. By action of CST, I was appointed Director of the ABMC. Prior to that time, I served as a Faculty Board Member of the ABMC since 1994 when I joined the CST Faculty as Professor of Hebrew Bible. As a graduate student at Claremont, I served as Research Assistant, Research Associate, and finally as Head Cataloguer, 1979-1983. I have learned immensely from all of my roles at the ABMC.

During the term of my appointment as CEO/Director of the ABMC, I have striven to ensure that the resources of the ABMC would be available for researchers and students. I have been able to mentor a number of Ph.D. students in Hebrew Bible and New Testament at Claremont who have served as ABMC Staff during the term of my appointment, including Dr. Mariko Yakiyama, Tokyo Union Theo-

logical Seminary; Dr. Tyler Mayfield, Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary; Dr. Hye Kyung Park, Chang Jung Christian University; Dr. Shelley Long, Azusa Pacific University; Ms. Soo Jung Kim, Ph.D. student at Claremont School of Theology; and Dr. Pamela J. W. Nourse, Ph.D. student Claremont School of Theology. It has always been a pleasure to work with student staff members at the ABMC and to prepare them for their future roles as scholars in the field!

I have been appointed as Visiting Scholar at Chang Jung Christian University, Tainan, Taiwan, to explore institutional cooperation in Ph.D. education. I will be in residence at Chang Jung Christian University June 7-29, 2015, and plan to present public lectures and classroom presentations while I am in residence. I will also continue my roles as Professor of Hebrew Bible at Claremont School of Theology and Professor of Tanak at the Academy for Jewish Religion California.

The ABMC will now be administered as part of the CST Library, which will continue to ensure that its resources be made available to scholars and students. All contributions to support the work of the ABMC should be directed to the Claremont School of Theology, 1325 N. College Ave., Claremont, CA 91711.

I am deeply grateful for the support offered to the ABMC by the many individuals who have sent contributions, by the Claremont School of Theology, and by the Claremont students who have staffed the ABMC! I look forward to continued support for the ABMC by all!

The Folio

The Newsletter of
The Ancient Biblical
Manuscript Center

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shedding light

on the

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Transforming Minor Characters in *Jeremiah*

Shelley Birdsong Long, Ph.D.

In the Spring 2014 edition of *The Folio*, I said, “Au Revoir” to the Ancient Biblical Manuscript Center. I wrote about my dissertation and how the ABMC was an integral part of my research process, providing me with images of Codex Marchalianus and Codex Barberinus. These manuscripts were a small but important part of my text-critical argument concerning the developing portrayal of King Zedekiah (and his Greek counterpart Sedekias) in the two versions of *Jeremiah*. A year later, I am proud to announce that my work is now being published in Mohr Siebeck’s *Forschungen zum Alten Testament II* series under the title, *The Last King(s) of Judah: Zedekiah and Sedekias in the Hebrew and Old Greek Versions of Jeremiah 37(44):1-40(47):6* (forthcoming, Fall 2015).

This volume makes several contributions to the field of biblical scholarship. First, in *Jeremiah* studies, it moves beyond Mark Roncace’s compartmentalized literary analysis of Zedekiah in the Masoretic text (MT) by also exploring the king in the Old Greek (OG) from a variety of methodological vantage points. As a result, I was able to argue for a complex development of Zedekiah’s characterization via redaction, text, and socio-historical criticism. In biblical studies in general, it fortifies the claims of Septuagint scholars that the Greek text cannot be ignored when investigating characterization; to disregard this sacred scripture is to do injustice to the biblical texts and their characters. Finally, it substantiates the theological perspective of scripture as dialogic and regenerative; that is, it contains multiple countering

voices and becomes a new utterance as it moves through time and space and engages new readers.

In this issue of *The Folio*, I would like to share another small piece of my work, which involves the characterization of the minor character Ebed-melech in MT *Jeremiah* 38 and his counterpart Abdemelech (OG 45). Similar to Richard Weis, and contra Hermann Yosef-Stipp, I contend that the editors of pre-MT (the Hebrew version of *Jeremiah* before it reached the Masoretes) deliberately castrated the character of Ebed-melech as well as his words. This was part of a greater redaction that desired to portray Zedekiah as a tragic anti-hero. To do so, the editors shifted Ebed-melech’s indictments regarding Jeremiah’s attempted murder away from the king and toward the Judahite officials. In addition, they tamed his tongue and forced him into the subordinate role of a eunuch. As a result, he is no longer Abdemelech, the bold accuser; instead, he has become Ebed-melech, the subservient slave. Below I will demonstrate how this came to pass, but first we need to take a look at the texts themselves.

OG *Ieremias* 45:7-13

⁷ And Abdemelech, the Ethiopian, who was in the king’s house, heard that they had put Ieremias into the cistern. But the king was at the gate of Benjamin. ⁸ So he went out to him and he spoke to the king and said, ⁹“You have been evil in what *you* have done—to kill this man because of famine; for there is still not bread in the city.” ¹⁰ So the king commanded Abdemelech saying, “Take in your hands from these thirty men, and bring him up out of the cistern so that he does not die.” ¹¹ So Abdemelech took the men and he went to [a place] beneath the king’s house, and he took [from] there old rags and old cords; and he threw them to Ieremias in the cistern. ¹² And he

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Transforming Minor Characters...

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said, “Place these under the cords!” And Jeremias did so.¹³ And they drew him up by the cords and they brought him up out of the cistern. And Jeremias stayed in the court of the prison.

MT *Jeremiah* 38:7-13

⁷ And Ebed-melech, the Cushite, **a male eunuch**, who was in the king’s house, heard that they had put Jeremiah into the cistern. But the king was sitting at the gate of Benjamin.⁸ So Ebed-melech went out **from the king’s house** and he spoke to the king saying,⁹ **“My lord, the king! These men have been evil in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet, whom they threw into the cistern. He will die there because of famine; for there is still no bread in the city.”**¹⁰ So the king commanded Ebed-melech, the Cushite, saying, “Take in your hand from these thirty men, and bring Jeremiah the prophet up from the cistern before he dies.”¹¹ So Ebed-melech took the men in his hand and he went to the king’s house to a storehouse beneath, and he took from there worn out rags and worn out clothes, and he sent them down to Jeremiah in the cistern by cords.¹² And Ebed-melech the Cushite said, “Please put the worn out rags and clothes between your armpits and between the cords!”¹³ And Jeremias did so. And they drew Jeremiah up with the cords and they brought him up from the cistern. And Jeremias remained in the court of the guard.

If one scrutinizes these two passages, it becomes clear that they are different in many ways. However, I want to focus on the variants that are significant to Ebed-melech and Abdemelech’s characters. The first, and most obvious, is the plus in MT describing Ebed-melech as an *’iš sārîs*, which I have translated as “male eunuch.” Now, *sārîs* can be translated simply as “official.” However, two clues in this text point to the preference of “eunuch” instead of “official.” First, if Ebed-melech was just an “official,” why would the author or editor feel compelled to articulate that he was a *male* official? This seems superfluous in Iron Age Judah. Instead, it makes more sense to see the two words functioning together to identify Ebed-melech’s gender and sexual status. Second, as Tom Parker suggests, understanding Ebed-melech as a eunuch is crucial to the irony of the MT narrative. The castrated Cushite will portray godly courage and reap divine salvation while the cowardly king will display apathetic indecision and earn divine destruction. Hence, I believe that Ebed-melech is a eunuch and Zedekiah’s subordinate.

In OG, Abdemelech has no such designation of subservience. This becomes even more evident in verse 8. In MT, Ebed-melech is described as leaving the house of the king, but in OG he simply goes out. MT is, once again, drawing attention to Ebed-melech’s servanthood. In contrast, almost nothing in OG points to Abdemelech’s inferiority—when he goes out to the king, he is portrayed solely as Sedekias’ opponent.

In verse 9, the divergence grows starker. First, Ebed-melech greets the king in MT; he speaks respectfully towards Zedekiah by calling him “my lord, the king.” The salutation reinforces the picture in MT of Ebed-melech as subservient; he dutifully tells his lord about the injustices occurring in his kingdom. As such, he creates a courteous environment for the ensuing dialogue.

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Transforming Minor Characters...

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This is not the case with Abdemelech; with his entrance, tensions rise. Portrayed as one on equal ground with Sedekias, he circumvents a polite address and darts right into a personal attack. He shows no sign of respect toward the king and bluntly exclaims, “*You* have been evil in what *you* have done—to kill this man because of famine....” Clearly, Abdemelech knows that Sedekias was involved in the maltreatment of Ieremias, and he fearlessly accuses the king of attempted murder. Meanwhile in MT, the mannerly Ebed-melech does not hold the king responsible at all; rather he accuses *the officials* of every evil done to Jeremiah. *They* are the culprits in this odious crime.

So who’s really to blame? From the text, it seems that Abdemelech and Ebed-melech are both right. For in OG, Sedekias exposes himself as the culprit when he tells Abdemelech to retrieve Ieremias *from the cistern*—a detail not mentioned by the Ethiopian and thus already known by the evil king (v. 10). In MT, Ebed-melech reveals Jeremiah’s location in the cistern (the plus in v. 9), making Zedekiah’s command to save him a declaration not of his guilt but of his true concern for the prophet. Thus, in OG, Sedekias and Abdemelech are depicted as equal opponents and caricatures of good and evil in relationship to the prophet. Yet, in MT, Zedekiah and Ebed-melech band together as servant and king to rescue Jeremiah.

How Can We Claim Abdemelech Turned into Ebed-melech?

It should now be evident that the characterizations of Ebed-melech in MT and Abdemelech in OG are distinct. But how can we be

sure that it was the editors of MT that created these variances? In other words, can we be certain that they are responsible for castrating Ebed-melech, rather than a Greek translator or editor altering Abdemelech?

The most genuine answer to this question is that we cannot. Nevertheless, there are manuscript clues that, when viewed in conjunction with past scholarship on *Jeremiah*, strongly suggest that the variants between the two traditions are largely late changes in the transmission history of the Hebrew text. This is done by comparing OG with later recensional Greek texts, which were trying to correct toward the Hebrew. There are two groups of recensional texts that are of import here; they are the Origenic and Lucianic manuscripts. These recensional texts clearly diverge from OG and align more closely with MT in relationship to our particular variants. In other words, these recensional Greek texts have readings that are closer to the Hebrew than the Old Greek presented above. Moreover, many of the differences discussed here are marked with an asterisk in the Origenic texts identifying them as additions. This tendency supports the majority of post-Qumran scholarship in the opinion that there were two Hebrew editions of *Jeremiah* circulating; one, earlier, form was the basis for the Old Greek translation, and a second, later, form underwent several additions and changes, which became the parent text of MT. Thus, we can make an educated guess that Abdemelech was turned into Ebed-melech by editors who desired to recontextualize the extant tradition in order to effectively speak to their own generation and community.

Publications and Upcoming Events



Marvin A. Sweeney

CEO and Director, ABMC
Professor of
Hebrew Bible,
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Appointments:

Director, Ancient Biblical Manuscript Center for Preservation and Research. Appointment Completed, June, 2015.

Chair of the Faculty, Academy for Jewish Religion California. Appointment Completed, May, 2015.

Visiting Scholar, Chang Jung Christian University, Tainan, Taiwan. June, 2015.

Publications:

Hebrew Bible Editor. *The SBL Handbook of Style, Second Edition: For Biblical Studies and Related Disciplines* (ed. B. J. Collins et al; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014), xiv + 351 pp.

“The Prophets and the Prophetic Books, Prophetic Circles and Traditions—New Trends, Including Religious-Psychological Aspects.” In *Hebrew Bible—Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation. III/2: The Twentieth Century* (ed. M. Saebo; Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2015) 500-530.

“The Books of Kings.” In *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Bible and Ethics* (ed. R. Brawley et al; Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press).

“The Ezekiel that G-d Creates,” in *The G-d Ezekiel Creates* (ed. Dalit Rom-Shiloni and Paul Joyce; LHBOTS 607; London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2015) 150-161.

“Foreword: The Oracles Concerning the Nations in Prophetic Literature.” In *Concerning the Nations: Essays on the Oracles against the Nations in Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel* (ed. E. K. Holt et al; LHBOTS 612; London and

New York: Bloomsbury, 2015) xvii-xx.

Lectures, Courses, and Events:

“Divine Absence in the Song of Songs.” Paper to be presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, Nov. 21-24, 2015, Atlanta, GA.

“The Literary-Historical Dimensions of Intertextuality in Exodus—Numbers.” Paper to be presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, Nov. 21-24, 2015, Atlanta, GA.

“The Jacob Narratives: An E-Stratum Text?” Paper to be presented at the International Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, Buenos Aires, Argentina, July 20-24, 2015.

“Shabbat as Epistemological Principle of the Pentateuch.” Paper to be presented June 5, 2015, at the Claremont Whitehead Conference, Claremont, CA.

“Jeremiah and Ezekiel.” Academy for Jewish Religion California, Spring 2015.

“The Dead Sea Scrolls,” Newport Center Methodist Church, Newport Beach, CA, May 27, 2015.



James A. Sanders

Professor Emeritus,
Claremont School of
Theology/Claremont
Graduate University

Publications:

The Monotheizing Process: Its Origins and Development. (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014).

“Memories of My Father: Robert E. Sanders.” In *The Dixie Flyer* (Nashville Chattanooga and St. Louis (NC&StL) Preservation Society, November 2014) 14-15.

“Foreword” for *Christianity in Stained Glass*, Lynne Alcott Kogel (author and publisher).

Lectures, Courses, and Presentations:

“Introduction to the First Testament.” Episcopal Theological School at Claremont/Bloy House, Claremont, CA. Fall 2014.

Dr. Sanders continues to serve on the editorial boards of several journals in the fields of First Testament and Early Judaism.