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Jeremiah 44: What if ‘the Queen of Heaven’ is YHWH?

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Abstract

Jeremiah 44 provides an image unusual within prophetic literature—the prophet’s female adversaries are not portrayed in terms of sexuality. Jeremiah denounces a group of Judean women and men who revere ‘the Queen of Heaven’. His central accusation is that they have caused YHWH’s anger, and thus the fall of the kingdom of Judah. Yet, this article maintains, there is sufficient textual evidence for readers to construct an alternate scenario that vindicates the Queen of Heaven’s supporters in their counter-accusation that it was not their actions that angered YHWH but the actions of the Judean kings who opposed making offerings to the Queen of Heaven. In this case, what relations between the Queen of Heaven and YHWH might be portrayed?

Keywords: Queen of Heaven, gender, polemic, divine marriage, failed prophecy, multivocality.

Perhaps prophecy, far from seducing the ear with pretty images, sometimes actively courts its own rejection and defeat... Perhaps prophecy, perversely, is a liminal discourse that thrives on its own rejection, that vindicates itself by resistance, by the scroll being burnt.¹

1. Yvonne Sherwood, ‘Prophetic Scatology: Prophecy and the Art of Sensation’, *Semeia* 82 (1998), pp. 183-224 (213), citing Amos 7.10-17 and Jer. 36 as the scrolls.

The biblical book of Jeremiah presents readers with a claim and a counter-claim: the character Jeremiah claims that a group of Judeans who revere ‘the Queen of Heaven’ are idolaters, and the group itself denies the accusation of *idolatry* and claims that they worship ‘YHWH our God’. Either assertion could be valid—but what if we read the claim by the Queen-of-Heaven group as ‘true’? In that case, as a minimal formulation, worshipping ‘the Queen of Heaven’ does not preclude worshipping YHWH, and to put the proposition in its most extreme form, worshipping ‘the Queen of Heaven’ is identical with worshipping YHWH.

In this article, I will identify Jeremiah’s claim and the counter-claim as parts of two distinct strands of discourse in the book of Jeremiah that construct different limits to the legitimate worship of YHWH. Both discursive strands—Jeremiah’s and the Queen of Heaven’s—develop across many chapters of the book. Although the viewpoint that favors Jeremiah dominates in terms of its textual expanse and the violence of its rhetoric, it is, to some degree, a self-defeating polemic that allows both views to be equally present in the text. The goals of this demonstration are to expand the range of possible identifications for ‘the Queen of Heaven’ and to position the topic for further discussion in the larger context of the prophetic divine-marriage metaphor that figures worshipping ‘other gods’ as *adultery*.

Translation of מַלְכֶּת and Other Notable Words

The ‘Queen of Heaven’ appears twice in the book of Jeremiah, featuring in a brief reference in ch. 7 and an extensive passage in ch. 44. The definitive Hebrew phrase לַמַּלְכֶּת הַשָּׁמַיִם is usually translated as ‘for the Queen of Heaven’ although the vowels of לַמַּלְכֶּת do not match the construct form מַלְכֶּת of מַלְכָּה, the expected word for ‘queen’.² I will

2. William McKane surveys textual variants and concludes that ‘*malkat*...should be adopted’ (‘Worship of the Queen of Heaven [Jer 44]’, in Ingo Kottsieper *et al.* [eds.], *Wer ist wie du, Herr, unter den Göttern: Studien zur Theologie und Religionsgeschichte Israels: Festschrift für Otto Kaiser zum 70. Geburtstag* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994], pp. 318–24 [318]). In David J.A. Clines (ed.), *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993–) (hereafter *DCH*), V, p. 327, the translation of מַלְכָּה is ‘queen’, as it is in L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner *et al.*, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament—Study Edition* (ed. and trans. M.E. Richardson; 2 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 2001) (hereafter *HALOT-SE*), p. 593, which adds another possibility: מַלְאכָה (‘the army of the Lord’), based on several Hebrew manuscripts and on the use of στρατιά for Jer. 7.18 in the LXX.

analyze the texts in terms of two opposing factions, and translate מַלְכָּה differently for the two groups.³ For the polemic that opposes the female figure I read מלכה as מַלְכָּה and translate the word as ‘queen’, and for the group venerating her, the word is מַלְכָּה, translated as ‘sovereign’.

The participle מַלְכָּה is an appropriate description for a woman who reigns by her own qualifications and not as the wife of a king.⁴ The word מַלְכָּה appears in the phrase וַעֲתָלְיָה מַלְכָּה עַל־הָאָרֶץ (‘and Athaliah [was] reigning over the land’, 2 Kgs 11.3; 2 Chron. 22.12) and in another instance where הַמַּלְכָּה could be either the woman’s name or her role (1 Chron. 7.18). מַלְכָּה is the feminine singular qal active participle of the verb-root מלך. In Jer. 22.11, the masculine form of the participle is used as a noun in Jeremiah’s pronouncement about Shallum, הַמֶּלֶךְ תִּחַת יֹאשִׁיָּהוּ, that he ‘[became] the one who reigns, in place of Josiah his father’. The presence of the masculine participle could indicate that the feminine form מַלְכָּה was also part of the vocabulary available to the author(s) of the book of Jeremiah. The connotation of מַלְכָּה as a female ruler who is not the wife of a king is an important distinction, since the hostile polemic figures ‘the Queen of Heaven’ as the consort of a foreign god, Baal.

Other choices of translation require comment. Those who revere the Sovereign of Heaven claim two activities: לְקַטֵּר (‘to burn grain-offerings’) to the Sovereign of Heaven and הִסִּיד (‘pour out libations’) to her. Words from the verb-root קטר are frequently translated as ‘burn incense’ because the noun קֶטֶר is ‘incense’. Following Menahem Haran and Diana Edelman, I am translating לְקַטֵּר as ‘to burn grain-offerings’.⁵ The word paired with הִסִּיד (‘pour out a libation’). In the Temple, ‘a *nesek* (libation) would have been poured out to the deity at some point during all three sacrificial rituals’,⁶ including the daily מִנְחָה (‘grain offering’). Thus, the paired practices of ‘burning grain-offerings’ and

3. All translations are mine, unless otherwise noted, and are from the MT, viewing it as a single discursive tradition. These are literal, working translations.

4. מַלְכָּה refers to the ‘wife of the king’ (*HALOT-SE*, p. 592) or is ‘usually of wife of non-Israelite king’ or—citing the Queen of Sheba—‘a sovereign’ (*DCH*, V, p. 323).

5. Both scholars note that the verb is intransitive and that although it is used elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible for sacrifices in the Temple, the piel form is never used for incense. See M. Haran, ‘The Uses of Incense in the Ancient Israelite Ritual’, *VT* 10 (1960), pp. 113–29 (116); D.V. Edelman, ‘The Meaning of *Qittēr*’, *VT* 35 (1985), pp. 395–404 (395, 399, 400).

6. Edelman, ‘Meaning of *Qittēr*’, p. 398.

‘pouring out libations’ that are claimed by those who venerate ‘the Sovereign of Heaven’ appear similar to the practices of Temple rituals.

The last problematic translation is that of *לְהַעֲצֹבָהּ*, found only in Jer. 44.19:

...Was it apart from our husbands that we made for her devotional-cakes
לְהַעֲצֹבָהּ (to copy her) and poured out libations to her?

HALOT-SE translates the word/phrase *לְהַעֲצֹבָהּ* as ‘to copy her/it’.⁷ What aspect of *מְלֶכֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם* is to be ‘copied’? McKane translates with reference to her symbols, relating *לְהַעֲצֹבָהּ* to ‘the shape of the *kwnym* offered to the Queen of Heaven’, stating that ‘in baking star-shaped or crescent-shaped cakes the women are “imaging” the Queen of Heaven’.⁸ The activities of *מְלֶכֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם* are another aspect that the women could ‘copy’, thereby incorporating a meaning of the piel stem of *עֲצַב*, as ‘shaping or forming’. The term could refer to ‘shaping’ fetuses in the womb, or ‘shaping’ a prosperous future, and could include connotations of the word *עָצַב* (II *עֲצַב*) ‘hard labor’ that describes the labors of Eve and Adam in bearing children and producing bread (Gen. 3)—two areas in which people would wish for divine aid in shaping a favorable outcome. The women who revere the Sovereign of Heaven would therefore be emulating her activities by ‘shaping’ or ‘forming’ the dough that the group will offer to her.

For the *מְלֶכֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם* controversy, I translate the word-phrase *לְהַעֲצֹבָהּ* two ways. As part of the hostile discourse, *עֲצַב* relates to *idolatry* and to the women making cakes in the image of the Queen of Heaven or her emblem, and the translation is ‘to image her’ or ‘in her image’. As part of the defending group’s discourse, *עֲצַב* relates to copying the Sovereign of Heaven’s activities of forming or shaping, and the complete translation of *לְהַעֲצֹבָהּ* would be ‘to copy her [activities of forming]’.

‘The Queen of Heaven’ as *Idolatry*

Interactions within groups of characters in Jeremiah 7, 43, 44, and 45 produce two distinct strands of discourse. The dispute about the

7. *HALOT-SE*, pp. 864-65. The suffixed object pronoun of *לְהַעֲצֹבָהּ* is sometimes amended as a possessive pronoun, ‘as her copy/image’.

8. McKane, ‘Worship’, p. 319. See also Karel J.H. Vriezen, ‘Cakes and Figurines: Related Women’s Cultic Offerings in Ancient Israel?’, in Bob Becking and Meindert Dijkstra (eds.), *On Reading Prophetic Texts: Gender-Specific and Related Studies in Memory of Fokkelien van Dijk-Hemmes* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), pp. 251-63 (260-63).

reverence of the female figure מלכת השמים occurs through these competing discourses, as one group denounces the practice as *idolatry* and the other group disputes the denunciation. These competing viewpoints do not always correspond exactly to the sum of their parts—for example, the text’s delineation of a character such as Jeremiah may exceed what that character contributes to a particular strand of discourse. Therefore, I will distinguish between the individual characters or textual functions—such as ‘Jeremiah’ or ‘narration’—and the competing viewpoints to which they contribute. I will use the label ‘JerGod’ (Jeremiah/God) for the hostile strand of discourse that develops primarily through those characters and through narration. The group that champions the Sovereign of Heaven will have the label ‘SoH’. This strand develops through characters figured as opposing the ‘word’ of Jeremiah, including Johanan (Jer. 43.2) and the women and men who venerate the Sovereign of Heaven and speak in her favor (Jer. 44.16-19). Within the discursive topic of *legitimate worship*, the JerGod discourse constitutes מלכת השמים as an emblem of *idolatry*, the Queen of Heaven, and the SoH discourse constitutes the veneration of מלכת השמים as *legitimacy*.

Figure 1. *Jeremiah 7.4-9*

List 1		List 2
Jer. 7.4 Trust not in lying words אלֹדְבְרֵי הַשָּׁקֶר...	←	Jer. 7.8 Behold, you trust in lying words...
7.6 DO NOT DO THESE:		7.9 STOP DOING THESE:
(a) oppress strangers, orphans and widows,	←	(a ₁) steal,
(b) shed innocent blood, and	←	(b ₁) murder, and
(c) go after OtherGods to do evil to yourselves.	←	(c ₁) commit adultery.
—	←	(c ₂) swear falsely, הַשָּׁבַע לַשָּׁקֶר,
—	←	(c ₃) burn grain-offerings to Baal, and
—	←	(c ₄) go after OtherGods whom you do not know.

In Jer. 1.16, the people of Judah are denounced for forsaking God and ‘burning grain-offerings to OtherGods’. From this beginning, the foundation of the JerGod strand of discourse develops in ch. 7 by means of two lists of misdeeds, shown below in Fig. 1. The lists are not random itemizations—together they create a taxonomy of the ‘evils’ for which the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem deserve to suffer and to die. The first list has three accusations and the second list has six, in two sets of three.

List 1, which itemizes what the people must do so that God will allow them to remain in the land, opens with an exhortation not to ‘trust in lying words’. List 2 begins with the accusation that the people *have* ‘trusted in lying words’, positioning this list as the outcome of the first.

The (a) and (a₁) sections are related, since v. 9’s ‘stealing’ enacts v. 6’s ‘oppress strangers, etc.’; the (b) and (b₁) sections are related, since ‘murder’ enacts ‘shed innocent blood’; and the (c) and (c₁) sections are related, since ‘going after OtherGods’ figures as ‘committing adultery’ against YHWH, thus situating this polemic within the divine-marriage metaphor. The last set of accusations in v. 9 expands on 6(c), giving three variants of ‘going after OtherGods to do evil to yourselves’.

The phrase ‘swear falsely’ in 9(c₂) introduces the theme of *words and vows* that is a major weapon in the Sovereign-of-Heaven controversy, as when the SoH group is forbidden to ‘invoke’ God’s Name (Jer. 44.26). ‘Burn grain-offerings’ in 9(c₃) and ‘go after OtherGods’ in 9(c₄) echo the accusation from 1.16, of ‘burning grain-offerings to OtherGods’. The discursive process has now established those phrases as code-words for the theme of *idolatry*—whatever literal meanings they may have in the following chapters, they also function as empty placeholders, pointing at the target of the theme of *idolatry*. Categories (a) and (b) of vv. 6 and 9 do not relate to the SoH faction directly—only category (c) is operative.

A classificatory system has been set in place, and in vv. 13 to 15 the speech continues, ‘and now, because you have done all these things (says YHWH)... I will do to this house [*the Temple*]...as I have done to Shiloh. And I will cast you out of my sight, as I have cast out all your brethren, the whole seed of Ephraim’. In other words, because of the activities stated in vv. 4 through 9, the people of Judah deserve to be—and will be—exiled, as were the people of the northern kingdom, and Jerusalem’s Temple will be razed, as was that at Shiloh. The analogy between Judah and Israel is made here explicitly by the declaration, but it is also made through a semantic link. ‘These things’ that the people of Judah are alleged to have done echo the allegations against Israel in 2 Kgs 17.7-16—the reasons given for exiling Israel—where the people of Israel ‘feared OtherGods’, ‘burned grain-offerings’, and ‘served Baal’:

ISRAEL	burn grain-offerings	serve Baal	fear OtherGods	2 Kgs 17.7-16
JUDAH	burn grain-offerings	—	to OtherGods	Jer. 1.16
	burn grain-offerings	to Baal	go after OtherGods	Jer. 7.9

The worship-practice of ‘burning grain-offerings’ has been constituted as *idolatry* by associating it with ‘Baal’ and ‘OtherGods’, which are definitive markers for *idolatry*. Hereafter, any person or group accused of the practice is automatically outside the bounds of *legitimate worship*.

The first association of מַלְכַּת הַשָּׁמַיִם with OtherGods occurs nine verses after the association of OtherGods with Baal. The JerGod discourse continues, as Jeremiah speaks ‘the word...from YHWH’ in the gate of the Temple:

Do you not see what they are doing in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? The sons gather wood, and the fathers light the fire, and the wives knead dough—to make devotional-cakes for the Queen of Heaven, and to pour out libations to OtherGods, in order to provoke Me (Jer. 7.17-18).

Here, the passage links ‘the Queen of Heaven’ with ‘OtherGods’, one of the marked categories in the schema of vv. 4 to 9. The use of אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים ‘other gods’ echoes the commandment to have ‘no other gods before’ YHWH. The phrase אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים originates in the commandment in Exodus (Exod. 20.3)⁹ and appears in an exhortation, ‘the name of other gods you shall not mention/praise—it shall not be heard on your mouth’ (Exod. 23.13). In Deuteronomy, the phrase appears in the commandment (Deut. 5.7) and in a later chapter, ‘you shall not go after other gods from the gods of the peoples surrounding you’ (Deut. 6.14).

If the accusation by JerGod is accurate—meaning that the families are worshiping ‘other gods’ when they ‘pour out libations’—then the families are violating the commandment. The link with OtherGods is the major charge against the Queen of Heaven, and a secondary, indirect link with Baal occurs elsewhere through the association of both figures with OtherGods. The Queen of Heaven is figured as *being* an OtherGod, and as *associating with* Baal, presumably as a consort.

There appears to be an absolute distinction between how the SoH faction speak of themselves and how Jer/God speaks of them. The appearance of complete opposition is accomplished by means of editorial comments such as those in the chart below that use the word תועבה (‘abomination’). Figure 2 shows all eight instances of תועבה in the book of Jeremiah, with associated code-words ‘Baal’, ‘burn grain-offerings’, and ‘OtherGods’:

9. ‘Originates’ in terms of semantic priority, without reference to the provenance of the text.

Figure 2. Accusations of *תועבה* ('Abomination') in the Book of Jeremiah

Verses	Accused	Accusation
2.8	Houses of Judah, Israel	'and you have made my possession/land into an abomination'. → 2.7 Prophets prophesy by Baal .
6.15	Priests/prophets	'They have acted shamefully, for they have done an abomination'.
7.9, 10	<i>People of Judah, Jerusalem</i>	'[swear falsely, burn grain-offerings to Baal , go after OtherGods] and you will say "We are delivered, in order to do these abominations"'.
8.12	Priests/prophets	'They have acted shamefully, for they have done an abomination'.
16.18	Israelites? Judeans?	'and [with] their abominations they have filled my possession/land'. → 16.11 OtherGods
32.35	<i>Men of Judah, Jerusalem</i>	'[built <i>בֵּית</i> of Baal to offer up sons and daughters to Molech...] to do this abomination in order to bring sin upon Judah'. → 32.29 Burn grain-offerings to Baal , libations for OtherGods
44.4	<i>Judeans in Egypt</i>	'[God sent prophets] saying "Please, do not do this abominable-thing that I hate"' → 44.3, 5, 8 Burn grain-offerings to OtherGods
44.22, 23	<i>Women and men, SoH group</i>	'[When YHWH could no longer bear] the abominations that you did, [land became desolate... because you burned grain-offerings]' → 44.15 Burn grain-offerings to OtherGods

In Fig. 2, code-words of the JerGod faction appear in **bold-faced** type and labels for groups allied with the SoH faction appear in *italicized* type. The first 16 chapters of Jeremiah have five instances of *תועבה*, as part of accusations that repeat in an ABCBA pattern around ch. 7, the first installment of the Sovereign-of-Heaven material. Chapter 44—the other installment—has two instances, strategically located in the JerGod speeches before and after the speech by the SoH group. The repetition of 'abomination' in concert with the specific instances of abominable behavior builds the image of an implacable polemic by JerGod that will oppose its target at every opportunity. However, the appearance of absolute discord that builds through these many chapters has no effect on the semantics of the two Sovereign-of-Heaven passages.

I will examine the Sovereign-of-Heaven passages in terms of the discourse of *legitimate worship*. A specific worship-practice, to be legitimate, must be correct in all its component categories. To constitute a valid performance, the event needs to satisfy standards in at least four areas: *actant*, *ritual* (the correct objects, words, and actions combined in

Figure 3. *The Worship-Practice in Jeremiah 7 and 44*

<i>Verse</i>	<i>Actant</i>	<i>Ritual Action</i>	<i>Target</i>	<i>Locale</i>
7.17, 18	children...	gather wood...	—	<u>towns</u> of Judah, <u>streets</u> of Jerusalem
	fathers...	make fires...	—	"
	wives/women...	knead dough for cakes...	מלכת השמים	"
	"	pour libations...	OtherGods	"
44.2-6	inhabitants...	burned grain- offerings... (abominations)	OtherGods	<u>towns</u> of Judah, <u>streets</u> of Jerusalem
44.8	Judean men, women, children...	burn grain- offerings...	OtherGods	Egypt
44.9	men + wives, fathers, kings of Judah + wives...	(evil-deeds)	—	<u>towns</u> of Judah, <u>streets</u> of Jerusalem
44.15	all Judean men + wives who...	burned grain- offerings...	OtherGods	Egypt
44.17, 18	<i>all Judean men, + wives...</i>	<i>will burn grain- offerings...</i>	מלכת השמים	<i>Egypt</i>
	"	<i>will pour libations...</i>	"	"
	<i>men + wives, fathers, kings of Judah + wives...</i>	<i>burned grain- offerings...</i>	מלכת השמים	<i>towns of Judah, streets of Jerusalem</i>
	"	<i>poured libations...</i>	"	"
44.19	<i>all Judean men, + wives...</i>	<i>burn grain- offerings...</i>	מלכת השמים	—
	"	<i>pour libations...</i>	"	—
	<i>wives/women...</i>	<i>made cakes, to copy...</i>	מלכת השמים	—
	"	<i>poured libations...</i>	"	—
44.21, 22, 23	men + wives, fathers, kings of Judah, etc...	burned grain- offerings... (evil acts + abomina- tions)	—	<u>towns</u> of Judah, <u>streets</u> of Jerusalem
	"	burned grain- offerings... (sinned → God + no torah)	—	"
44.25	men + wives...	will burn grain- offerings...	מלכת השמים	Egypt
	"	will pour libations...	"	"

the correct order), *target* (object of veneration), and *locale*. Which of these categories are sites of conflict in the Sovereign-of-Heaven controversy? Figure 3 (above) shows the viewpoints of the JerGod faction in **bold-faced** type and those of the SoH faction in *italicized* type within a wavy-lined box.

The shaded column, ‘Target’, is the only one in which the SoH entries contradict the JerGod entries. Several verses have JerGod editorial comments in the ‘Ritual action’ column (Jer. 44.4, 9, 22, 23), but these do not disrupt the taxonomy of the worship-practice by inserting a different ritual-action, such as ‘burning sons as offerings to Baal’ (19.5), which could have been linked through the association of ‘burning grain-offerings’ with Baal-worship (7.9; 11.13, 17; 19.13; 32.29). The worship-practice’s ‘Target’ is the only category in which the terminologies mobilized by the two strands of discourse are not congruent—therefore it is the site of contention. In the next section I will analyze the Sovereign-of-Heaven passages with particular attention to this dispute over the relation between מלכת השמים and OtherGods.

Analysis of the מלכת השמים Controversy

The dominant discursive strategy in the book of Jeremiah constitutes ‘the Queen of Heaven’ as a foreign goddess. What is remarkable is that the characters who oppose the dominant discourse speak for themselves in Jeremiah 44 and accuse those who accuse them. I will now focus on ch. 44, viewing chs. 43 and 45 as its frame.

Summary of Preliminary Events—Chapters 40 to 42

King Nebuchadrezzar, after defeating the Judeans and taking away many captives, appoints Gedaliah as governor of those left in Judah. People join him at Mizpah. Johanan warns Gedaliah that Ishmael means to kill him, but Gedaliah says Johanan is ‘speaking a lie’ about Ishmael—שֶׁקֶר אֵתָּה דֹבֵר. Johanan is right: Ishmael does kill Gedaliah, but later he also kills many other people and takes the rest captive. Johanan frees the captives:

And they went and stayed at Geruth Chimham near Bethlehem, intending to go to Egypt because of the Chaldeans—for they were afraid of them because Ishmael had slain Gedaliah, whom the king of Babylon had made governor over the land (Jer. 41.17-18).

Johanan and other leaders ask Jeremiah to inquire of God what they should do, and say they will obey whatever answer Jeremiah tells them. ‘And at the end of ten days the word of YHWH came to Jeremiah’ (Jer. 42.7). But the text does not quote God’s message—only Jeremiah’s report that God said to stay in Judah and not go to Egypt and that ‘all the men who set their faces to go to Egypt to sojourn there—they shall die by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence’ (Jer. 42.17).

Use of the Character ‘Baruch’ as a Framing Strategy: Chapters 43 and 45

Chapters 43 and 45 mention the character Baruch unfavorably, in terms related to the theme of *words and vows*. Chapter 42 ends with the threat quoted above, and as ch. 43 opens, Johanan and others respond to Jeremiah:

You are *speaking a lie* (שָׁקֵר אַתָּה מְדַבֵּר)! YHWH our God did not send you to say, ‘You shall not go to Egypt, to sojourn there’. For Baruch son of Neriah is *inciting* you against us, in order to give us into the hand of the Babylonians, to kill us and to exile us to Babylon (Jer. 43.2-3).

What could be the background for Johanan’s allegations? From the JerGod point of view, Johanan could hope to invalidate his promise to obey what Jeremiah will tell him—if Jeremiah is lying, the promise is void. However, from the standpoint of the alternate discourse, Johanan—who is the leader of what will become the SoH group—has already judged one man’s treachery correctly, in the case of Ishmael, and so may be a competent judge of this situation. The two scenes are linked by the phrase שָׁקֵר אַתָּה דֹבֵר (‘you are speaking a lie’) that Gedaliah uses (inaccurately) against Johanan and that is echoed in Johanan’s denunciation of Jeremiah. Furthermore, the reference to ‘YHWH our God’ is a strong claim to *legitimacy*. What if Johanan is correct that Baruch is more responsible for Jeremiah’s speech than is YHWH? Like the speech by the SoH group in ch. 44, the most remarkable aspect of these verses is their existence. In the next scene of the narrative, Johanan takes the remnant of the Judeans, including Jeremiah and Baruch, to Tahpanhes in Egypt (Jer. 43.5-7). There, Jeremiah gives the first of a series of falsifiable predictions that Nebuchadrezzar will invade Egypt and destroy the Judean colony.

Chapter 45—which is only five verses long—is set before the defeat of Judah, and refers to events narrated in ch. 36:

The word that Jeremiah the prophet spoke to Baruch son of Neriah *when he was writing these words upon a scroll from Jeremiah's dictation*, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim son of Josiah, king of Judah. Thus said YHWH, the God of Israel, concerning you, Baruch: 'You have said, "Woe is me! for YHWH has added sorrow upon my pain—I am weary with my groaning, and I have not found repose"'. Thus you shall say to him, 'Thus said YHWH: Behold! What I have built I am breaking down, and what I have planted I am uprooting—and it is the whole land. And *you, yourself, seek for yourself great-things!* Do not seek—for behold, I am bringing evil upon all flesh (a saying of YHWH). And I will give you your life—as plunder, in all the places you shall go' (Jer. 45.1-5).

Not only is the passage out of chronological order, but also it has no apparent relation to the material that precedes or follows it. Taken together, the sequential and semantic dislocations invite consideration of the passage as a discursive strategy.

The first verse positions the passage within the theme of *words and vows* by dating it according to a scribal/verbal chronology—dating it to the time 'when Baruch was writing these words upon a scroll from Jeremiah's dictation'—and only secondarily mentioning the royal chronology. Baruch's scribal activity thus relates to the accusation in 45.5 that he 'seeks great things for himself'. Robert P. Carroll translates גְּדֹלוֹת, in 45.5, as 'self-aggrandizement',¹⁰ and the emphasis on Baruch's self-interest shows clearly in a literal translation of the message to Baruch, וְאַתָּה הַמְבַקֵּשׁ לְךָ גְּדֹלוֹת. The accusation that 'Baruch, himself, seeks aggrandizement for himself'—in his activity of 'writing these words'—can cover a range of meanings, especially if read together with 43.2 and 3, the SoH accusation that Baruch exerts such influence on Jeremiah's reporting of 'the word of YHWH' that the reports are 'lies'.

Chapters 43 and 45 are the only passages that mention Baruch after the scroll-scenes in ch. 36. The positioning of these two uncomplimentary references to Baruch may cast doubt on the veracity of the JerGod strand of discourse that is sandwiched between them in ch. 44, thereby strengthening the claims of the SoH group. However, from the JerGod viewpoint, ch. 45 could refute ch. 43's charge that Baruch is tampering with 'the word of YHWH', since it is unlikely that Baruch would concoct this scolding-speech against himself. Thus, through the references to 'Baruch', chs. 43 and 45 act as a frame for ch. 44, the three chapters together being the culmination of the discourses related to the identity of 'the Sovereign of Heaven'.

10. R.P. Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary* (London: SCM Press, 1986), p. 745.

Chapter 44

Figure 4 (overleaf) shows three recurring themes in the speeches in Jer. 44. The operative theme *words and vows* is shaded; JerGod ‘words’ appear in **bold-black** type and those of the SoH group in **bold-white**.

In ch. 44, Jeremiah speaks in vv. 2 to 14, the SoH group speaks in vv. 16 to 19, and Jeremiah speaks again for the remainder of the chapter. The themes *evil kings and families* and *sword and famine* appear in the introductory speech by Jeremiah that establishes the Judeans in Egypt as inheritors of a legacy of depravity for which they deserve, collectively, to suffer and die. The people’s ancestors and rulers have all been evil and have done the abominable-thing that the current group does now—‘burning grain-offerings to OtherGods’ (vv. 4 and 8). For this offence they will suffer in Egypt as their ancestors suffered in Jerusalem, being ‘consumed by the sword and by famine’ (vv. 12, 13). A final JerGod accusation of ‘burning grain-offerings to OtherGods’ is delivered against the SoH group through narration, rather than speech, but the narrated accusation is no more valid than those that emerge through a character’s speech. It is still the JerGod faction that is speaking about the SoH group, in saying that ‘they answered Jeremiah—all of the men knowing that their wives were burning grain-offerings to OtherGods, and all of the wives’ (v. 15). In v. 16, the SoH group begins to speak for itself.

The Judeans respond to Jeremiah’s speech. Presumably, the group includes Johanan, who accused Jeremiah of lying in claiming to speak for ‘YHWH our God’ (Jer. 43.2). The same charge occurs in the opening of the Judeans’ response to Jeremiah: ‘The *word* that you have spoken to us—“in the name of YHWH”—none of us hearken to you’ (Jer. 44.16). The Judeans challenge Jeremiah’s claim to be speaking ‘the word’ of YHWH by offering a ‘word’ of their own. This gambit activates the operative theme *words and vows*, as members of the Judean SoH group declare that they will ‘fulfill every *word*’ they have spoken, to ‘burn grain-offerings’ and ‘pour out libations’—but ‘to the Sovereign of Heaven’ (v. 17). This statement stands in opposition to the JerGod contention that they offered ‘to OtherGods’ (v. 15). They continue to speak, turning Jeremiah’s theme of *evil* back against him by claiming that their devotional enterprise had resulted in *good*, not in *evil*, and furthermore, that ceasing these practices had caused them and their ancestors to suffer from *sword and famine* (v. 18).

Figure 4. Recurring Themes in Jeremiah 44

<i>Themes that repeat</i>	<i>Jeremiah 44 (box around speech by the SoH faction)</i>
<i>Evil kings and families—no Torah ‘burn grain-offerings to OtherGods’, vv. 4, 8</i>	(9) [Jeremiah quotes God] Have you forgotten the <i>evils</i> of your fathers, and the <i>evils</i> of the kings of Judah, and the <i>evils</i> of his wives, and your <i>evils</i> , and the <i>evils</i> of your wives—which they did in the land of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? (10) They are not humbled to this day—and they have not feared and <i>they have not walked in my Torah and in my statutes that I set before you and before your fathers...</i>
<i>Sword and famine ‘burn grain-offering to OtherGods’, v. 15</i>	(12) I will take the remnant of Judah who have... come to the land of Egypt to sojourn there, and <i>they shall be consumed</i> —all in the land of Egypt shall fall, <i>by sword [and] famine they shall be consumed</i> (×2)... (13) And I will punish those dwelling in the land of Egypt as I punished Jerusalem— <i>by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence.</i>
<i>Words and vows</i>	(16) ‘The word that you have spoken to us—“in the name of YHWH”—none of us hearken to you. (17) For surely we shall do every word that has gone forth from our mouth—to <u>burn grain-offerings</u> to the Sovereign of Heaven and <u>pour out libations</u> to her
<i>Not evil kings and families</i>	as we did, <i>we and our fathers, our kings</i> and our princes, in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem—for we had abundance of bread, and we were <i>good</i> and we did not see <i>evil</i> .
<i>Sword and famine</i>	(18) And from the time we ceased to <u>burn grain-offerings</u> to the Sovereign of Heaven and to <u>pour out libations</u> to her, we have lacked everything and we have been <i>consumed by the sword and by famine</i> . (19) And when we <u>burn grain-offerings</u> to the Sovereign of Heaven and <u>pour out libations</u> to her—is it apart from our husbands that we <u>have made</u> for her <i>devotional-cakes</i> , to copy her, and <u>poured out libations</u> to her?’
<i>Evil kings and families—no Torah</i>	(20) And Jeremiah said to all the people—concerning the males and the women and all the people answering him a word —saying, (21) ‘The <u>grain-offerings</u> that you <u>burned</u> in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem— <i>you and your fathers, your kings</i> and your princes, and the people of the land—is it not so that YHWH remembered them and it rose up upon his heart? (23) Because you <u>burned grain-offerings</u> and you sinned against YHWH—and you did not hearken to the voice of YHWH and <i>you did not walk in his Torah and in his statutes and in his testimonies</i> —therefore this <i>evil</i> has befallen you, as it is this day.’

<i>Words and vows</i>	(24) And Jeremiah said to all the people and to all the women, 'Hear the word of YHWH ... (25) Thus says YHWH of Hosts, the God of Israel, saying: You and your wives, they/you have spoken with your mouths and with your hands you have fulfilled, saying, "Surely we shall perform our <i>vows</i> that we have vowed—to burn grain-offerings to the Sovereign of Heaven and to pour out libations to her". Surely you shall confirm your <i>vows</i> and surely you shall perform your <i>vows</i> ! (26) Therefore hear the word of YHWH , all of Judah dwelling in... Egypt: Behold, I have sworn by my great Name—says YHWH—that my Name shall no more be invoked in the mouth of any man of Judah—saying, "As my lord YHWH lives!"—in all the land of Egypt.
<i>Sword and famine</i>	(27) Behold, I am watching over them for <i>evil</i> and not for <i>good</i> ! <i>They shall be consumed</i> —every man of Judah who is in the land of Egypt— <i>by the sword and by famine</i> ...
<i>Words and vows</i>	(280 And those who escape the sword, they shall be returning few in number from the land of Egypt to the land of Judah. And they shall know—all the remnant of Judah coming to the land of Egypt to sojourn there— whose word shall stand, Mine or theirs .'

Thus, the SoH speech reverses the values for both of the JerGod themes—*good* replaces *evil*, and 'ceasing to offer' replaces 'offering' as the cause of the affliction of Judah by *sword and famine*. McKane acknowledges the skill of those who speak in opposition to Jeremiah, commenting that 'the women too can employ this mode of argument and who is to say whether their conclusion or that of Jeremiah is superior'.¹¹

The speech by the SoH group ends with v. 19. The verse appears below with v. 15 from the JerGod narration, to which it responds:

And they answered Jeremiah—all of the men knowing that their wives were burning grain-offerings to OtherGods, and all of the wives standing before a great congregation, and all of the people settling in the land of Egypt, in Patros—saying... (Jer. 44.15).

And when we are burning grain-offerings to the Sovereign of Heaven and pour out libations to her—is it apart from our husbands that we have made for her devotional-cakes, to copy her, and poured out libations to her? (Jer. 44.19).

The group vehemently, though implicitly, denies the accusation of making offerings to OtherGods, by a four-fold declaration—twice here, once in v. 16 and once in v. 18—that they offer a paired set of worship-practices, and that they offer them to the Sovereign of Heaven. The

11. McKane, 'Worship', p. 324.

JerGod accusations against the SoH group do not mention OtherGods again.

The remainder of ch. 44 is a speech by Jeremiah. Verses 20 to 23 resume the theme of *evil kings and families*. Without invoking divine authority, Jeremiah contends that the people and their ancestors offended God by ‘burning grain-offerings’, and that therefore ‘this *evil* has befallen you’. This declaration directly contradicts that of the SoH group, whose members claimed they had prospered while making offerings to the Sovereign of Heaven and that the evils occurred when they discontinued the offerings (v. 17). Jeremiah’s argument is a repetition of that made in his first speech (v. 9). The current speech also repeats the accusation that the SoH group ‘did not walk in [God’s] Torah and in his statutes’ (vv. 10, 23)—a crucial charge, since the allegation that the Sovereign of Heaven is one of the OtherGods is based on the commandment against ‘other gods’, an important element of the ‘Torah’ and ‘statutes’.

The next section of Jeremiah’s speech deploys the theme *words and vows*. The JerGod attack begins with the reconstruction of the people’s vow (v. 17) as a gendered taunt (v. 25). Verse 25 is a complex mixture of feminine and masculine grammatical forms. The verse appears below. Relevant verbs are underlined, and the words/phrases are keyed **bold-white** for grammatical feminine gender and **bold-black** for masculine:

Thus says YHWH of Hosts, the God of Israel, saying: **You** and **your wives**—**you/they have spoken** with **your mouths** and with **your hands** **you have fulfilled**, saying, ‘Surely we shall perform our vows that we have vowed—to burn grain-offerings to the Sovereign of Heaven and to pour out libations to her’. Surely **you/they shall confirm** **your vows** and surely **you/they shall perform** **your vows!** (Jer. 44.25).

The pattern of the grammatical gender mixture seems too systematic for ‘scribal error’: in three of four cases a feminine plural verb-form is paired with a noun that has a masculine plural pronominal suffix. Some commentators propose to repair the grammatical gender dissonance by incorporating changes to the MT based on versions of the LXX and other ancient sources.¹² From the methodological viewpoint of discourse theory, these proposed changes are not persuasive since the awkwardnesses of grammatical gender in the MT may contribute to the discourse by facilitating a range of interpretations.

12. McKane, ‘Worship’, p. 321. McKane argues for the women, only, being addressed by Jeremiah in vv. 24 and 25, basing his conclusion on the LXX.

The SoH group represents v. 17's project of 'performing vows' as the united efforts of both women and men. What arrangement does the response by the JerGod discourse represent? Verse 25 quotes part of v. 17, 'For surely we shall do every word that has gone forth from our mouth—to burn grain-offerings to the Sovereign of Heaven and to pour out libations to her'. In what way could v. 25 be an antithetical re-ordering of v. 17 that would enhance the JerGod polemic? If we read the feminine plural verbs as third person forms rather than second-person, this is the result:

Thus says YHWH of Hosts, the God of Israel, saying: *You and your wives—they have spoken with your mouths and with your hands you have fulfilled, saying, 'Surely we shall perform our vows that we have vowed—to burn grain-offerings to the Sovereign of Heaven and to pour out libations to her'. Surely they shall confirm your vows and surely they shall perform your vows!* (Jer. 44.25).

The verse now looks like a gendered taunt against the men—their wives have given the orders and they have carried out the orders. Furthermore, the taunt reverses the biblical gender-roles for vows, with the women 'confirming' the men's vows and 'performing' them.¹³ This interpretation is reasonable, given the high degree of patterning in the grammatical gender-mismatches of v. 25, the vituperative nature of the JerGod polemic, and the perennial availability of gender as a discursive weapon.

Verse 25 contributes to the theme of *words and vows*. The restatement of the SoH group's vow lays out its members' 'word', which is to 'perform our vows...to burn grain-offerings to the Sovereign of Heaven and to pour out libations to her', positioning it to be opposed by the 'word of YHWH' that is declared in v. 26:

Therefore hear *the word of YHWH*, all of Judah dwelling in... Egypt: Behold, I have sworn by my great Name—says YHWH—that my Name shall no more be invoked in the mouth of any man of Judah—saying, 'As my lord YHWH lives!'—in all the land of Egypt (Jer. 44.26).

This verse works with v. 25 to constitute מלכת השמים and YHWH as mutually exclusive categories within the JerGod discourse—'mouths' that have vowed to the Sovereign of Heaven shall not invoke YHWH. The two verses recall the accusation of 'swearing falsely' that was made in ch. 7's taxonomy of 'evils', as shown in Fig. 1.

13. McKane, 'Worship', p. 321. McKane mentions the issue of women's vows, but he draws different conclusions.

However, the wording of the command that the SoH group can ‘no more’ invoke the Name of YHWH (v. 26) implies that they had invoked the Name often—and, according to Carroll, ‘swearing by the name of Yahweh is a mark of the genuine worship of Yahweh’.¹⁴ The SoH group’s previous statement about ‘YHWH our God’ (Jer. 43.2) also supports the discursive claim that their practice of ‘burning grain-offerings’ to מלכת השמים is not *idolatry*. In contrast, the JerGod faction constitutes ‘burning grain-offerings’ as a primary marker for *idolatry*, and therefore claims that מלכת השמים is a foreign goddess—one of the ‘OtherGods’ whose worship is forbidden by the commandment against ‘other gods’ (Exod. 20.3; Deut. 5.7). Another discursive link to the second commandment occurs through references to the SoH group’s unwillingness to ‘walk in [God’s] Torah and in his statutes’ (Jer. 44.10, 23).

The unspoken entailment to both claims is that the alternative to OtherGods is YHWH. There are two categories in the second commandment: ‘YHWH’ and ‘other gods’. Therefore, since the strands of discourse oppose each other only in the matter of the relationship of מלכת השמים to ‘other gods’,¹⁵ and since the controversy invokes the authority of the second commandment, either the Sovereign of Heaven belongs in the category of ‘OtherGods’ or else she belongs in the category of ‘YHWH’. There are no other categories for the commandment—however, the implicit nature of the SoH group’s claim may allow a recalibration of the categories: ‘burning grain-offerings’ to מלכת השמים is either ‘offering to OtherGods’ or else it is ‘offering to YHWH’. Thus, although the Sovereign of Heaven is not identical to YHWH, worshipping her is discursively figured as an aspect of worshipping YHWH.

Chapter 44 ends with a brief application of the *sword and famine* theme (v. 27) and a final flourish of *words and vows* (vv. 28–30). The theme of *words and vows* culminates in v. 28 with the declaration that the SoH group, when they are destroyed, ‘shall know... whose word shall stand, Mine or theirs’. The chapter closes with another falsifiable prediction (vv. 29–30), discussed in the following section.

14. Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, p. 742.

15. See Figure 3, which shows that the only area of disagreement is the ‘target’ of the SoH group’s worship-practice.

Evaluations of the Controversy

The JerGod faction makes a set of predictions in Jeremiah 43 and 44, with the claim that their fulfillment will prove that the JerGod ‘word’ is correct, and thus that מלכת השמים ‘the Queen of Heaven’ is one of the OtherGods. The predictions center on the invasion of Egypt by King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon, who will act as God’s agent in punishing the Judean SoH group sojourning there. Jeremiah 46.13-28 covers the same topic.

The set of predictions in chs. 43 and 44 involves two steps. In step #1, the fulfillment of a ‘sign’ about Pharaoh Hophra is a precondition for other events. Step #2 is the events’ fulfillment—Nebuchadrezzar’s invasion of Egypt and his destruction of Egyptian temples (43.11-13) will show that the JerGod ‘word’ has prevailed against that of the SoH group. This outcome proves that the SoH group is worshipping one of the OtherGods, ‘the Queen of Heaven’. If the JerGod predictions are unfulfilled, then the ‘word’ of the SoH group prevails—therefore they are justified in fulfilling their vow because ‘burning grain-offerings and pouring libations’ to the Sovereign of Heaven is an aspect of offering to YHWH.

The set of predictions from ch. 46 is part of a sequence of oracles against ‘the nations’,¹⁶ a context that disassociates these predictions from the set in chs. 43 and 44 that relates to the Sovereign of Heaven. Although the two sets of predictions have many similarities, there is an important difference concerning ch. 44’s precondition for the fulfillment of the predictions against the Judean SoH group in Egypt. The precondition is that ‘[God] is delivering Pharaoh Hophra, king of Egypt, into the hands of his enemies and into the hands of those who seek his life, as [God] delivered King Zedekiah of Judah into the hands of King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon, his enemy who sought his life’ (Jer. 44.30). Here, the identity of ‘the enemies’ into whose hands Pharaoh Hophra will be ‘delivered’ is uncertain, since the analogy to Zedekiah’s being delivered ‘into the hand of Nebuchadrezzar’ may, or may not, indicate that Nebuchadrezzar is also Pharaoh Hophra’s enemy. The relevant

16. Jer. 46.1-12 concerns Nebuchadrezzar’s defeat of Pharaoh Necho at Carchemish in the time of King Jehoiakim of Judah. Pharaoh Necho was the grandfather of Pharaoh Hophra, the target-figure for ch. 44’s precondition. Jer. 46.13-28 is a separate poem, though with a similar theme. It names Egyptian cities associated with the SoH group, though it does not give details, such as the pharaoh’s name.

verses in ch. 46 clearly state that God will deliver a pharaoh 'into the hands of Nebuchadrezzar' but do not name the pharaoh (Jer. 46.25, 26).

Evaluating the Predictions about Egypt

The biblical text does not state that any of the events predicted in chs. 43, 44, and 46 took place. Figure 5, below, shows evidence from the historical record that relates to the outcomes of the falsifiable predictions. In the left-hand column of the chart, the sections labeled 'a' are predictions from chs. 43 or 44, and those labeled '(b)' are from ch. 46.

Figure 5. *Outcomes for the Predictions about Nebuchadrezzar's Invasion of Egypt*

Prediction	Results
(a) Precondition: Pharaoh Hophra will be delivered 'into hand of his enemies and into the hand of those who are seeking his life' in a parallel to God's delivering 'Zedekiah, king of Judah, into the hand of Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon, who was his enemy and was seeking his life' (44.30). If this occurs, then (1a) and (2a) will also occur.	Pharaoh Hophra: 570 BCE, deposed by Pharaoh Amasis II but protected; in 567 is killed by the populace. <i>Yes</i> → Hophra/Zedekiah both deposed. <i>No</i> → in ch. 44, might mean being deposed by Amasis II, but ch. 46 clearly says a pharaoh is killed by Nebuchadrezzar <i>et al.</i>
(b) God will deliver an unnamed Pharaoh 'into the hand of those who seek his life, and into the hand of Nebuchadrezzar' (46.26).	
(1a) King Nebuchadrezzar will 'smite' Egypt—some [who?] are 'for the sword' (43.11).	<i>Yes</i> → 568 BCE, Nebuchadrezzar attacks Amasis II of Egypt. <i>No</i> → Attack ends in a standoff. Amasis II is friendly with Babylon, later.
(1b) King Nebuchadrezzar will 'smite' Egypt—sword devours [Egyptians] (46.13).	
(2a) Nebuchadrezzar will burn the temples of Egypt and 'wrap himself in the land of Egypt' (43.12) and break the obelisks of the Temple of the Sun (43.13).	<i>No</i> → this implies a major invasion, which did not happen.
(2b) Memphis shall become a waste—a ruin, without inhabitant (46.19). God inflicts punishment on Amon, and on all Egypt's gods and kings, gives them into the hand of Nebuchadrezzar (46.25).	

We may consider the precondition about Pharaoh Hophra (Jer. 44.30) fulfilled only if we disregard ch. 46, and the events for which it was to be

a ‘sign’ happen on such a small scale that the specific predictions are unfulfilled. Events 2a and 2b presuppose a major invasion, and the one record we have describes an inconclusive confrontation. A fragmentary clay tablet of a ‘religious text’¹⁷ in the British Museum (BM 33041 = *ANET*, p. 308) includes the information that

in the 37th year, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon marched against Egypt to deliver a battle. Amasis, of Egypt, called up his army...from the town Putu-Iaman...distant regions which are situated on islands amidst the sea... many... carrying weapons, horses and chariots...he called up to assist him... (*ANET*, p. 308).¹⁸

Peter James clarifies the information, adding that ‘though the Babylonian record is fragmentary, enough survives to show that Amasis “called on” troops not only from Egypt, but from “the town Putu-Iaman” (agreed to be Cyrene) and “distant regions amidst the sea” (manifestly the Aegean in this context)’.¹⁹ The inscription shows that there was hostile contact between Nebuchadnezzar II and Amasis II in 568 BCE, but tells us nothing about the location of this contact or about its outcome. Georges Roux comments that the inscription on the clay tablet ‘cannot be regarded as sufficient proof that the Babylonians ever set foot in the Nile valley’.²⁰ According to Carroll, ‘the evidence for the Babylonian incursion into Egypt suggests a military campaign to curb Egyptian interference in Babylonian matters rather than a punitive campaign of destruction’, since ‘Pharaoh Amasis appears to have retained his throne and to have established friendly relations with Babylon’.²¹

Summarizing the results for the JerGod faction’s prediction in ch. 44: The precondition about Pharaoh Hophra in step #1 fails if we consider chs. 43 and 44 together with ch. 46, though it might be fulfilled if we consider only chs. 43 and 44. The ensuing events predicted for step #2 do not occur. Therefore, the ‘word’ of the JerGod strand of discourse is *at*

17. D.J. Wiseman, *Chronicles of Chaldaean Kings (626–556 B.C.) in the British Museum* (British Museum Department of Egyptian and Assyrian Antiquities; London: Trustees of the British Museum, 2nd edn, 1961), p. 94.

18. J.M. Miller and J.H. Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (Philadelphia: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1986), p. 427.

19. P. James, ‘Naukratis Revisited’, *Hyperboreus: Studia Classica* 9.2 (2003), pp. 235–64 (248), citing *ANET*, p. 308; for the identifications, see E. Edel, ‘Amasis und Nebukadrezar II’, *Göttinger Miszellen* 29 (1978), pp. 13–20 (15–16); A. Leahy, ‘The Earliest Dated Monuments of Amasis’, *JEA* 74 (1988), pp. 183–99 (191–92).

20. G. Roux, *Ancient Iraq* (London: Penguin Books, 3rd edn, 1992), p. 317.

21. Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, p. 727.

most half-fulfilled, and the 'word' of the SoH group is *at least* half-fulfilled.

A Self-rebutting Polemic?

'And they shall know—all the remnant of Judah coming to the land of Egypt to sojourn there—whose "word" shall stand, mine or theirs!' (Jer. 44.28). After this dramatic challenge to a battle of 'words', it is surprising to conclude that the final score is almost equal—and that the discursive strand from which the challenge originates fares worse, being *at most* only half successful. How could this situation occur? I will demonstrate that the JerGod strand may actually undermine its own arguments and thus give clandestine support to those of the SoH group.

The unspoken entailment to the claims made by both strands of discourse is that, according to the categories supplied by the second commandment, the only alternative to 'other gods' is YHWH. Thus, by the logic of the taxonomy through which the strands of discourse oppose each other, either מלכת השמים is 'part of' the category of OtherGods, in which case offering to her is *idolatry*, or else she is 'part of' the category of YHWH, in which case offering to her is *legitimacy*.

Jeremiah 7.3-20, the first of the Sovereign-of-Heaven passages, provides a list of misdeeds associated with the SoH group. The list includes oppressing strangers, orphans and widows, shedding innocent blood, stealing, murder, committing adultery, swearing falsely, setting idols in the Temple, burning sons and daughters as offerings to foreign gods, 'going after' OtherGods, burning grain-offerings to Baal, pouring libations to the Host of Heaven, and committing an 'abomination'. Succeeding chapters imply these accusations again, yet in the direct confrontation between the two strands of discourse (Jer. 44), the only accusation against the SoH group is that they burn grain-offerings to OtherGods, which is an abomination. The SoH group agrees that they burn grain offerings—but to the Sovereign of Heaven. The practice of burning grain-offerings is not disputed, in itself. Haran notes that

the denunciation of these (meal)-offerings is *purely incidental* to the actual act of making them, being directed, in every case, against the 'strange gods' to whom they were made—Baalim, the Queen of Heaven and the like. But this does not mean that there was anything to prevent such offerings being made to Jahweh as well.²²

22. Haran, 'Uses of Incense', p. 117. Edelman ('Meaning of *Qittēr*', p. 402) agrees that it is not the קטר act that is condemned, but its being offered to 'other deities'.

This is the gist of the SoH claim—they are not offering to the foreign goddess, the Queen of Heaven, but to the Sovereign of Heaven (who is ‘part of’ YHWH), therefore the offerings are legitimate. But why is the explicit accusation made by the JerGod discourse so mild, after such a dramatic build-up of implied abominations in Jeremiah 7? A discursive structure has been set in place to mobilize these more extreme accusations, but such accusations do not occur. This discursive act of renunciation would equalize the actual balance of power by weakening its own position and strengthening that of the SoH group, all the while maintaining the appearance of absolute antagonism.

The predicted destruction of the Judean SoH group in Egypt fails to happen, in spite of the apparent fulfillment of the ‘sign’ mentioned in Jer. 44.29. Why give a two-part prediction whose second part fizzles? By declaring that one side of a debate is the winner if, and only if, certain specific events trigger others, the predictor must prove—or at least claim to have proven—that both parts of the prediction have been fulfilled. However, a two-part prophecy that is only half-fulfilled is an appropriate outcome for a double discursive function such as that of the Sovereign-of-Heaven controversy. The double strands of discourse that constitute the topic of *legitimate worship* are not resolved by the outcome of the predictions—neither the ‘word’ of JerGod nor the ‘word’ of the SoH group prevails.

Summary—and Extension

In the preceding analysis of Jeremiah 44, I have demonstrated that the seemingly dominant discourse that appears to condemn the Sovereign-of-Heaven faction may be surreptitiously providing a platform for the SoH discourse. The ostensible attitude of the dominant discourse—implacable hostility toward the Sovereign-of-Heaven group—implodes due to the reader’s perception of semantically engineered flaws, so that the dominant strand may actually undermine its own arguments. By this device the seemingly marginalized Sovereign-of-Heaven group gains discursive parity: the accusation that מלכת השמים is one of the ‘other gods’ is not corroborated, and the connection between מלכת השמים and YHWH is established as *at least* a possibility.

The Sovereign-of-Heaven controversy is introduced in Jeremiah 7 through a discursive model that figures ‘going after OtherGods’ as ‘adultery’, the formula that underlies the divine-marriage metaphor.

However, the female characters among the Sovereign-of-Heaven group are a rarity in prophetic texts: they are not metaphorical images of sexual abuse. These characters are thus a strong contrast to the female figures in Jeremiah 2 and 3 that also function within the divine-marriage metaphor. Speaking of those figures, Athalya Brenner states that

the 'woman', the community, Judah and Jerusalem and/or Israel, is never asked to defend 'herself': 'her' voice is not heard, for an adulteress deserves to be punished.²³

The women of the Sovereign-of-Heaven group *do* defend themselves through their voices—they speak for themselves but also for the group. They are constituted as 'real' women with human 'husbands' and the human activities of 'baking cakes' and 'pouring libations', and the specific charges against them never include the sexual misconduct or animalistic behavior mentioned in Jeremiah 2 and 3.

What might it mean that these two contrasting types of female images co-exist in the book of Jeremiah, both introduced under the rubric of 'adultery'? By my reading of Jeremiah 44, the self-rebutting nature of the polemic against the Sovereign-of-Heaven faction destabilizes a reading of the divine-marriage passages as straightforward projections of domination fantasies. The resulting shift of balance tips the interpretation toward the situation proposed by Yvonne Sherwood, in which 'prophecy...sometimes actively courts its own rejection and defeat':

Perhaps prophecy, perversely, is a liminal discourse that thrives on its own rejection, that vindicates itself by resistance, by the scroll being burnt.²⁴

'Resistance' may be located within the text as well as being a readerly response to it. The liminality of a double-discourse such as that of 'the Sovereign of Heaven' presents opportunities for rethinking the surrounding text. The immediate topic of the controversy—the legitimacy of a female divine image—is available for debate, but so also are underlying issues that could necessitate the treatment of such a topic in such a way. As an interpretive strategy, the double-discourse of 'the Sovereign of Heaven' facilitates a process of questioning the apparently dominant discursive assumptions of the book of Jeremiah.

23. Brenner, 'On Prophetic Propaganda and the Politics of "Love"', in Fokkelen van Dijk-Hemmes and Athalya Brenner (eds.), *Reflections on Theology and Gender* (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1994), pp. 87-107 (95).

24. Sherwood, 'Prophetic Scatology', p. 213, citing Amos 7.10-17 and Jer. 36 as the scrolls.