JER. 23:29 - AN EXPANDED COLON IN THE LXX?

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The simile of Jer. 23:29 compares the word of God to fire and to a hammer that splits the rock. 1 Unfortunately, our appreciation of this verse is impaired by textual difficulties in the MT and the LXX alike.

LXX²  
(1) οὕτως οἱ λόγοι μου
–
λέγει κύριος
(2) οὐχὶ  oἱ λόγοι μου ἔσπερ πῦρ
(3) καὶ ὃς τέλειος κόσμων πέτραν

The Old Greek has the longer reading, containing three stichs, whereas the MT presents us with two cola only. The

1 On dynamic features and magical power of the Divine word see L. Durr, Die Wertung des Göttlichen Wortes im Alten Testament und im Antiken Orient, MVAeg 42 (Leipzig, 1938) 61 f.

2 This reading, presumably the main variant, has been reconstructed according to the apparatus of Ziegler’s edition. Representing the B group (MSS B* S, 239) it is almost identical with the text of Swete’s edition.

3 οὐχὶ according to MSS B (original reading), S, 239. Swete follows the late corrector of codex B (cp. MSS 198-407), reading οὐχ ἵς χωσέ.
first colon has שמע for predicate. The deitic כה has no function of its own; it is but a dummy for the real predicate. A similar construction reads:

כון כה היה בקור האור במים, נקוה דית בעדלאת או כולה בער

(Is. 24:13). Still, in our verse it remains perplexing that the predicate and its dummy occur in one and the same clause. Therefore one might delete כה as a doublet of שמע. On the other hand, the deictic is warranted by the LXX; so some scholars have accepted it as the residue of a text that was similar to the Greek version. But no suggestions have been offered as to the actual reading of this text. In this paper we suggest a solution in terms of ancient Hebrew prosody. When seen from this point of view the LXX variant might well prove to be the original reading.

As witnessed above, the last two stichs of the LXX reading add up to a complete sentence. The first stich is incomplete, as it has no predicate. It is but a partial replica of the second one, interrupted as it is by the quoting formula λέγει υπέροχος. Ziegler deletes this phrase as

4 The Targum reads 'כון for כה. This variant might reflect mistaken analysis for *ךְּלָּבַּר* (cp. Dan. 4:14 as against 2:30). B. Duhrm (Das Buch Jeremia (Tübingen-Leipzig, 1901) 192) considers the deictic as the introduction to the quotation - 'לָשָׁן', 'כֹּם', cp. Ex. 35:3. For use of כה as a predicate cp. also Gen. 15:5.

5 C.H. Cornill, Das Buch Jeremia (Leipzig, 1905) 273 f. The resulting text is similar to Vulgata and Peshitta, where the deictic is not being reflected.

6 J. Bright, Jeremiah, Anchor Bible (Garden City, 1965) 150; cp. also A.W. Streane, The Double text of Jeremiah (Massoretic and Alexandrian) Compared (Cambridge, 1896) 176.
a doublet; the quoting formula was omitted as a free addition. However, this very structure is characteristic of a well-known device of Hebrew prosody, viz. the expanded colon (also known as climactic or repetitive parallelism) with its typical intervening phrase and repetition of the first clause. In order to take a closer look at this variant it might be helpful to reconstruct the underlying Hebrew Vorlage; the resulting text may be compared with another instance of the expanded colon, e.g. Ps. 92:10.

Ps. 92:10
Jer. 23:29 (Vorlage LXX)

כִּי הַגָּה אָבָבָר "כִּי הַגָּה אָבָבָר"
לָא הַגָּה אָבָבָר.
הָלָא הַגָּה אָבָבָר כָּאָשׁ
יִתְפֹּרֵד לְכָל פִּילָא אָוְר.

The resemblance is striking.

1. In both verses the first clause lacks the predicate; it just serves to state the theme with special emphasis, in

7 J. Ziegler, Beiträge zur Jeremias-Septuaginta, Mitteilungen des Septuaginta-Unternehmens VI (Göttingen, 1958) 100. This treatment is based on the later recensions (O-L); the outcome is similar to the emendation by Cornill.

8 S.E. Loewenstamm (JSS 14 (1969) 176-196) adduces many instances from Biblical and Ugaritic literature with detailed analysis.

9 RaSHBaM (on Ex. 15:6) asserts: אִדַּ֫בֵ֫ט הַגָּה אָבָבָר מְדָכִּיר
בֵּמי הַגָּה אָבָבָר, a fine anticipation of modern Discourse Analysis. It might be useful to consider the expanded colon as a special case of 'thematic partitioning'; see Joseph E. Grimes, The Thread of Discourse (The Hague, 1975) 338 ff.
keeping with the sublimity of the subject matter.

2. In both verses the place of the expected predicate has been taken by an intervening phrase. In Ps. 92 this is the vocative 'יה. In our verse it is the quoting formula as in Ps. 124:1 f., 129:1 f., Qoh. 1:2.10

3. The second stich repeats the theme from the first clause and presents us with the predicate, to be followed by a parallel colon in the third stich.

Accordingly, the LXX version of Jer. 23:29 reflects an expanded colon in the Hebrew Vorlage; it is not due to inner-Greek expansion or corruption.11

Still, the deictic נֶ֖וּר/וּרְגוּ לָלֶֽשׁ remains problematic. In the typical expanded colon the first stich is an exact replica of the opening phrase of the second stich, witness Ps. 92:10 (see above). However, in our verse the second clause opens with the interjectory נַמַּֽה/וּרְגוּ לָלֶֽשׁ, whereas the first stich has the deictic.12 But it may be shown that this anomaly does not invalidate our proposal. On the contrary, this peculiarity may be due to the particular structure of the expanded colon,


11 Admittedly, this is the only instance from the book of Jeremiah. However, this book offers examples of other poetic devices of ancient Canaanitic stock, e.g. the action-result sequence, noted by U. Cassuto, Biblical and Oriental Studies II, translated by I. Abrahams (Jerusalem, 1975) 58 f., M. Held, JBL 84 (1965) 272-282; or the double rhetorical question, cp. M. Held, Et. 9 (1969) 76 f. For repetition patterns cp. Jer. 16:21, 31:21. The expanded colon of Jer. 23:29 is another instance of this device in the verbless clause, cp. Gen. 49:22 and in Ugaritic: CTA 2:1, 36 f. (UN 137, 36 f.) as noted by E.L. Greenstein, UF 9 (1977) 82.

12 Y. Avishur (ibid. 5) notes similar deviations in Cant. 4:10, 6:1.
as its repetitiousness hampers the natural flow of discourse.
The first stich merely states the theme. It does not impart
any information, because it lacks such necessary elements as
the predicate (see above) or the indispensable object (Ps.93:3).
In our verse, at least according to the LXX, this awkwardness
has been eased somewhat by means of the deictic נָּר/οὗτος. This
serves as a dummy for the real predicate ( tremendum), paving the way,
as it were, for the second stich. This function of the deictic
נָּר is not unlike its use in the long verse Is. 24:13 (see
above). Note the distance between the verbal part of the pre-
dicate (ניֵיה) and its nominal components (כָּהֵן עַיְנוּלֵי
).13

The same principle may serve to clarify the reading of
the MT. According to this reading the first colon presents us
with the selfsame elements as the first two stichs of the LXX,
but these two clauses have been compressed into one single
colon.14 The resulting sentence includes the predicate tremendum
and presents all information at once without repetition or
delay. In this process the dummy נָּר has lost its function.
Nevertheless its has been included in the condensed variant,
in juxtaposition with its pendant אַלָּלֵה. May we conclude then
that the MT variant is but a secondary condensation of the
original longer reading; and that the LXX still reflects this
reading?

13 The LXX renders the deictic by πᾶντα, serving as a
general cataphoric substituens; the Peshitta omits נָּר.

14 Secondary condensation of the expanded colon is well-
known from the LXX of Jud. 5:12 and Ps. 92:10; cp. Loewenstamm,
ibid. 191 f. The Greek translator of Cant. 4:8 renders נָּר as
στῦο (אָלָלֵה); thus he turns the first stich into a complete
sentence.