

NOTES AND COMMUNICATIONS

AMEN AS AN INTRODUCTORY OATH FORMULA*

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I

The opening words of MT Jer. 15:11 — אָמַר ה' were rendered verbally by most of the Versions¹ to the exception of the LXX and the upon it dependent VL. The Greek reading γένοιτο δέσποτα² which is mirrored in *fiat* of the VL, has been taken by many scholars to reflect a Hebrew *Vorlage* which contained the formula אָמַן ה'.³ It is the purpose of this note to adduce further support for this proposition and to reaffirm its validity in face of the implicit or explicit doubts repeatedly raised against it, most recently by E. Gerstenberger.⁴

Let us first restate the main difficulties inherent in the present Hebrew text:

1. The formula אָמַר ה' usually comes at the close of a divine pronouncement, whereas in the present case it serves as an introductory formula.⁵ We can adduce only one other somewhat similar instance — Jer. 46:25 — where, though, a whole series of divine epithets follows upon this formula: אָמַר ה' צבאות אלהי ישראל.⁶
2. אָמַר ה' without doubt is meant here to introduce a divine speech. This, however, contextually is impossible or at least highly improbable,⁷ since v. 11

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1 T: אָמַר יי'; S: אָמַר מַרְיָא: ὁ, σ': εἶπεν κύριος.

2 Some MSS read γένοιτο κύριε.

3 E.g. P. Volz, *Studien zum Text des Jeremia* (Leipzig 1920) 130; J. Bright, *Jeremiah*, AB (New York 1965) 106, 109; W. Rudolph, *Jeremiah*, HAT (Tuebingen 1947) 90; Sh. Blank, *Jeremiah, Man and Prophet* (Cincinnati 1961) 241. — γένοιτο is employed by the LXX recurrently to render 'āmēn, e.g. Num. 5:22; Deut. 27:15–26; 1 Kings 1:36; Jer. 11:5; Ps. 41:14, 72:19, 86:53, 106 etc.

4 E. Gerstenberger, "Jeremiah's Complaints", JBL 82 (1963) 402. Cp. F. Giesebrecht, *Das Buch Jeremia*, GHAT (Goettingen 1907) 90; A. B. Ehrlich, *Randglossen zur hebraeischen Bibel IV* (Leipzig 1912) 282.

5 Commentators were aware of the stylistic difficulties presented by the MT and set out to remedy it by suggesting that ἵσχυς at the end of v. 10 in the LXX which has no basis in the MT, may have derived from a misread כה which originally had preceded אָמַר ה' (cp. e.g. Giesebrecht, *ib.*).

6 In the LXX the opening formula is missing. It is found, though, in Aq., Th. and in O with an asterisk.

7 Herein we differ from Ehrlich, *ib.*, Giesebrecht, *ib.*, and Gerstenberger, *ib.*

must be attributed to the prophet, following as it does upon v. 10 which clearly opens Jeremiah's complaint against his fellow countrymen: they had pursued and persecuted him without any reason whatsoever, in spite of his care and his concern over the weal of the people. The tone of this complaint is echoed in other passages of the Book in which the prophet recurrently calls upon God to give witness, as it were, to his intercession with him in favour of the people (Jer. 17:16 and especially 18:19).

The attribution of v. 11 to the prophet can be fully maintained irrespective of whether one considers its direct continuation to be v. 12,⁸ or whether one prefers linking v. 11 with v. 15, as has been advocated by some commentators.⁹ The former view assumes a change in the tenor of Jeremiah's words from 'complaint' (vv. 10-11) to an 'oracle of woe' (vv. 12-14) which ends in a cry for personal vengeance (v. 15). The latter presupposes a secondary intrusion of vv. 12-14 into the prophet's speech.

The passage Jer. 15:10-15 as a whole certainly requires full exegetical treatment, however in the present exposition we shall deal only with the opening phrase of v. 11, for which, in view of the above strictures against the MT, the LXX reading γένοιτο δέσποτα should be considered preferable.

II

The doubts that have been raised against the originality of the Greek reading and the assumedly underlying Hebrew אמן ה', derive from the following main contentions, one based on stylistic considerations, the other on implied translators' idiosyncracies:

1. It has been argued that אמן is employed in O.T. literature exclusively as an affirmative response formula of a preceding speech, predominantly of a judicio-liturgical character (*e.g.* Num. 5:22 and esp. Deut. ch. 27), as a closing benediction formula (*e.g.* Ps. 106:48, Neh. 8:6; 1 Chron. 16:36) or again as a conventional expression of agreement and affirmation (*e.g.* 1 Kings 1:36; Jer. 11:5).¹⁰ Since 'âmên is not found in an opening statement, it is maintained that the LXX reading of Jer. 15:11 which reflects such an employment must be secondary, and supposedly arose out of the graphic interchange of the *resh* of 'âmar with the *nun* of 'âmên.

2. The above assumed erroneous graphic interchange, it is presumed, was helped along by the further presupposed predilection of the Greek translators

8 *E.g.* Ehrlich, *ib.*, Giesebrecht, *ib.*

9 *E.g.* Rudolph, *ib.*, Bright, *ib.* by whom vv. 12-14 are considered an inserted divine speech. — For אַתָּה יִדְעָה ה' (v. 15) as a suitable direct continuation of the verse introduced by אָמֵן ה' (v. 11) cp. Jer. 12:3, 17:16, 18:23.

10 For this and the following arguments see Gerstenberger, *ib.*

for inserting a rendition of *'âmên* into their version even where the Hebrew *Vorlage* has no equivalent for it.

3. To all this was added the assumption that the Greek reading which made the verse part of the prophet's speech, was intended to bring the passage in line with the parallel prophetic utterances of complaint to which attention already was drawn above, namely Jer. 17:16 and 18:19.

These strictures hardly can stand the test of a detailed analysis:

1. It will be argued further on that also in the other two instances in which the MT apparently has no equivalent for Greek γένοιτο (Is. 25:1 and Jer. 3:18 [19]), a case can be made for declaring the Greek rendition to be sufficiently borne out by the present MT, or alternatively for maintaining that the LXX reading reflects a better Hebrew *Vorlage*.

2. The explanation of the LXX reading γένοιτο δέσποτα as a secondary variant which was intended to bring the verse in line with the above mentioned parallels, must be considered an altogether gratuitous *tour de force*. The similarity with 17:16 and 18:19 is so striking that no introductory formula is needed to make evident that 15:11 is an utterance of the prophet. Admitting indeed an erroneous interchange of *resh* and *nun* which is attested to also elsewhere,¹¹ there is still no justification for preferring the *lectio difficilior* — *'mr* of the MT¹² over the straightforward LXX reading γένοιτο which appears to reflect an underlying *'mn*.

11 E.g. 1 Kings 1:36 MT: כן יאמר ה'

G: οὕτως πιστῶσαι (יאמן) κύριος

Hosea 12:1 MT: ועם קדושים נאמן

G: καὶ λάος ἅγιος κεκλήσεται (נאמר) θεοῦ

T here has a doublet: ואנן דהוון פלחין קדמי מתקרין עמא קדישא בכין הוון קיימין

Jos. 15:18 MT: ותצנח

G: καὶ ἐβόησεν (ותצרה)

Jud. 1:14 MT: ותצנח

G: καὶ ἐγγόγυξε καὶ ἔαγραξεν (ותצרה)

This interchange may further be observed in proper names, e.g.

Gen. 14:24 MT: ענר

G: Ἄουναμ (ענן)

Josh. 7:1 MT: עכן

G: Ἄχαρ (cp. Hos. 3:17)

Josh. 10:3 MT: דביר

G: Δαβιν

It will also occur in Hebrew parallels, e.g.

2 Sam. 22:33 — ייתר

Ps. 18:33 — ייתן

Ezra 2:2 — רחום

Neh. 7:7 — נחום

Is. 48:10 MT — בחרת־ך

1 Q Isa — בחנת־ך

Cp. Further 1 Sam. 24:11 MT: ... ואמר להרגך ותחסס. Where G has a double translation: καὶ οὐκ ἦ βουλήθην (ואמאן) ἀποκτεῖναι σε καὶ εἶπα (אמר).

12 Cp. S. Talmon, "The Hebrew Letter From the Seventh Century B.C. in Historical Perspective," BASOR 176 (1964) 34-35.

3. This *'mn* is not to be identified with the widely used closing formula אמן or אמן ואמן. In its conjunction with the tetragrammaton, it should be considered a special phrase which is only once more employed in the O.T., and again in the Book of Jeremiah (11:5, cp. above). This leads to the supposition that it may constitute a specifically Jeremianic stylistic feature which though, as will be shown, can yet be traced in Biblical and also in extra-Biblical Hebrew.

III

We propose that the reading אמן, reconstructed from the Greek γένοιτο, in fact represents an introductory formula of oath or assurance, preserved for us only in some rare cases.

This introductory *'âmên* may be found in an extra-Biblical document on a potsherd of the late sixth century B.C.E., (*i.e.* contemporaneous with Jeremiah), which was discovered several years ago near Yabneh-Yam. It contains the words of a reaper in royal corvée service who addresses a complaint to the officer in charge of the district against an overseer who had impounded his garment. The reaper begs to defend himself against an implied charge of negligence. Recurrently asserting his innocence, he declares under oath that he had discharged himself of his duties. *'mn* [*n*]q*ty* m' [*š*m] or m' [*l*tk] – 'verily, I am free of guilt', and calls upon his fellow reapers to be his witnesses: *'hy y'nw ly* – 'my brethren will give evidence in my favour' (lines 11–12).

This same oath formula *'âmên* seems to be adduced twice in Is. 65:16. In view of the above proposition, the present MT reading *'âmên* should not be emended to *'ômen*¹³, as has been suggested. Instead, a slight emendation of the vocalization of the preceding *'êlôhê* may be in order.

We suggest to read the verse in question as follows:

(אשר) המתברך בארץ יתברך באלהי: אָמֵן
והנשבע בארץ ישבע באלהי: אָמֵן

"he who blesses himself on earth shall bless himself in (the name of) my God: 'Amen'; and he that sweareth on earth shall swear by my God: 'Amen'." The twice employed formula refers back to the word 'oath' or 'curse' (לשבועה) in v. 15.

The introductory *'âmên* is synonymous with initial *'omnâh* (and *'omnam*),¹⁴ which will precede an oath or a statement of legal nature. The very antithesis to the above quoted declaration of innocence of the unknown reaper from Jeremiah's days — *'mn nqty* — is Achan's admission of guilt (Josh. 7:20):

13 Cp. *e.g.* Ehrlich, *op. cit.*, 229. אמן altogether is a *hap. leg.* in the O.T. See below the discussion of Is. 25:1.

14 Cp. Gen. 20:12; Ruth 3:12 and Job 36:4. In a somewhat looser form of affirmation, the word is found *e.g.* in 2 Kings 19:17 = Is. 37:18; Job. 9:4, 5.

'*omnâh hâtâ'ty* – 'verily, I have sinned'. It is probable, in fact, that the introductory '*âmên* and '*omnâh* are but two ways of writing one and the same word, one *plene*, the other defective.

The similarity in external form and in content may have caused that an original '*âmên* sometimes was emended, intentionally or unintentionally, into the more prevalent '*omnâh*. This leads us to believe that this initial '*âmên* can yet be restored in some cases, *e.g.* in the two already referred to instances in which the LXX allegedly introduced *γένοιτο* into their rendition where the Hebrew seems to have no equivalent.

The crucial words in the MT at the end of the verse Is. 25:1 אִמְנָה אִמְנָה (= 1Q Isa) were rendered by the LXX: ἀληθινὴν γένοιτο κύριε. In view of the above, it is suggested that the Greek γένοιτο reflects a Hebrew '*âmên* which was succeeded by the abbreviated tetragrammaton indicated by the initial *he* only. This is represented in the MT by אִמְנָה. Greek ἀληθινὴν translates אִמְנָה of the MT, which though should again be vocalized '*âmên* and should be viewed as a doublet of the preceding אִמְנָה. Taken together, the doublet which in the MT comes at the close of v. 1, actually is the introductory formula of the following verse. The resulting reading of Is. 25:1–2 thus would be:

(1) ה' אלהי אתה ארוממך אודה שמך כי עשית פלא עצות מרחוק.

(2) אמן ה' כי שמת (מ)עיר לגל קריה בצורה למפלה.

(1) 'O Lord, thou art my God; I will exalt thee, I will praise thy name; for thou hast done wonderful things, counsels of old.

(2) Verily, o God, thou hast made of a city a heap *etc.*

The reconstructed Hebrew reading *כי אמן ה'* of Is. 25:2 is a simple variation of the formula *אמן ה' אם* of Jer. 15:11, brought about by the interchangeability of *כי* and *אם* which is well attested to in O.T. literature. One is inclined to discover the same formula in Jer. 3:18 (19):

MT: ואנכי אמרתי איך¹⁵ אשיתך בבנים

G: καὶ ἔγω εἶπα γένοιτο κύριε ὅτι τάξω σε εἰς τέκνα

Slightly differing from an already suggested conjectured reading *אמן ה' כי*¹⁶, we would propose that the *Vorlage* of the LXX had *אמנה כי*, a formula by which God introduces his pronouncement: *אשיתך בבנים*. The final *he* of '*omnâh* was mistaken as the abbreviation of the tetragrammaton, and at some stage of text tradition was fully written. Hence κύριε in the LXX. In the text underlying the MT, the resulting three words, *אמן יהוה כי* were recorded by their first letters only *א' י' כ'*. Once their being abbreviations was forgotten, they

15 It has been suggested to read here אך (Ehrlich, *op. cit.*, 246) or אליך (Giesebrecht, *op. cit.*, 21).

16 See Volz, *op. cit.*, 22. This reading is unacceptable since God himself is the speaker.

were contracted to become אֵיךְ of the MT. We suggest to restore the original reading of Jer. 3:18 as follows:

וּאֲנֹכִי אָמַרְתִּי אִמְנָה כִּי אֲשִׂיחַךְ בְּבָנִים

'And I (God) said, verily, I will put thee among children' (i.e. 'make thee numerous').

The employment of 'amen as an opening formula which precedes a legal statement can yet be traced in post-Biblical Hebrew and also in some N.T. writings.

In dealing with the judiciary procedure pertaining to a married woman suspected of adultery, the Mishnah (Soṭah 2: 5) quotes Num. 5: 22 where the accused woman is enjoined to use the 'amen 'amen formula in responding to the admonitions recited by the priest. In a piece of rabbinic exegesis, R. Meir then clearly presents this double 'amen response as the introductory formula by which the woman prefaces her declaration of innocence in the past and promise of fidelity in the future: אָמֵן שְׁלֹא נִטְמַאתִי, אָמֵן שְׁלֹא אֶטְמָא. This may be best translated: 'I swear that I have not sinned, I swear that I shall not sin'.¹⁷

It would seem that the introductory oath or assertion formula 'âmên may also be discerned in some passages of the N.T. in which sayings of Jesus are reported. The formula has been considered unusual because of its very position at the beginning of a pronouncement. It now would appear that we may have here a late echo of O.T. language which, especially in Luke 23:43 and John 1:51, has the character of an oath formula. The term carries a less technical meaning e.g. in Matthew 5:18; 26:13; Luke 21:32; John 1:51; 3:3. This comparison with the restored introductory 'âmên appears to be preferable to linking the N.T. usage with Jer. 28:6¹⁸ where the term is employed by way of an affirmative response which, though, opens a statement.

In conclusion we can state that there is enough evidence for maintaining the authenticity of the LXX reading in Jer. 15:11 γένοιτο δέσποτα which reflects a Hebrew original אָמֵן ה'.

17 Cp. also Tos. Soṭah 2:2 (ed. Zuckermann 294, 14).

18 See W. Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the N.T.* (translated and edited by W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich), s.v. ἀμήν.