

Article

Epistles from Jerusalem: The Paratexts of Syriac 2 Baruch and the Peshitta Jeremiah Corpus

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Abstract: This article explores the paratexts of the epistles attributed to Baruch, the scribe of Jeremiah, in Syriac, Peshitta Old Testament manuscripts. In early manuscripts, the epistles ascribed to the figure Baruch are, most commonly, either included in the Jeremiah corpus or embedded in the work known as 2 Baruch. This article argues that 2 Baruch has had a larger influence on the Syriac Christian corpus-building and literary imagination than has been hitherto acknowledged. This hypothesis would explain both the inclusion of two epistles of Baruch in the Peshitta Jeremiah corpus and the appearance of unprecedented readings in the titles and introductory addresses of the epistles attributed to Baruch in this corpus.

Keywords: Baruch; paratexts; epistles attributed to Baruch; 2 Baruch; Jeremiah; Peshitta



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1. Introduction

Recent decades have seen a marked increase of interest in paratextual features in manuscripts (e.g., [den Hollander et al. 2003](#); [Scherbenske 2013](#); [Andrist 2018](#); [Allen 2020](#)). This focus on paratexts, such as titles and introductory addresses, has provided new insight into the cultural conceptions of the communities that produced and engaged with the manuscripts.¹ Titles and introductory addresses are intriguing precisely because they serve as windows into the literary imagination of the communities that preserved copies of a text, showing how the manuscript producers identified, represented, and communicated that text to their readers.²

In the present article, I will explore the titles and introductory addresses of the epistles attributed to the biblical figure Baruch, the scribe of the prophet Jeremiah, as they are attested in Syriac, Peshitta Old Testament manuscripts³ that contain the book of 2 Baruch⁴ and/or the Jeremiah corpus.⁵ What can these titles and introductory addresses tell us about the literary imagination of Christians who used Syriac as their liturgical and literary language regarding the writings associated with Baruch and Jeremiah, and how can they add to our knowledge about the relationship between 2 Baruch and the Jeremiah corpus?⁶ The hypothesis that I am putting forward in this article is that the Syriac version of 2 Baruch has influenced the Peshitta Jeremiah corpus and, hence, that 2 Baruch played a larger role in the Syriac corpus-building and literary imagination than has so far been acknowledged. This is a bold hypothesis about a book that scholars normally consider to be marginal; 2 Baruch has commonly been understood as a writing with no reception history to speak of and as a work that has had little influence on Jewish and Christian traditions (e.g., [Schürer 1909](#), p. 313; [Violet 1924](#), p. xciii; [Bogaert 1969](#), pp. I:458–59; [Henze 2011](#), p. 8). However, it is my contention that a close study of the paratexts of the epistles ascribed to Baruch in Peshitta manuscripts will show that the hypothesis is both relevant and interesting.⁷

2. Epistles Ascribed to Baruch in Peshitta Old Testament Manuscripts

Peshitta manuscripts attribute all together four epistles to Baruch. Three of these epistles survive as extant texts: the “First Epistle of Baruch the Scribe, Which He Sent from the Midst of Jerusalem to Babylon”;⁸ the “Second Epistle of Baruch”;⁹ and the “Epistle of

Baruch the Son of Neriah, Which He Wrote to the Nine and a Half Tribes".¹⁰ The fourth epistle is known only by mention as an epistle sent by Baruch to those who dwell in Babylon (2 Bar 77:12, 17, 19).

The first two epistles—the First Epistle of Baruch the Scribe and the Second Epistle of Baruch—are most commonly transmitted with the Jeremiah corpus.¹¹ In the Peshitta, this corpus typically contains the book of Jeremiah, Lamentations, and the Epistle of Jeremiah, in addition to the epistles ascribed to Baruch. In the manuscripts, the three epistles in the corpus (i.e., the First Epistle of Baruch the Scribe; the Second Epistle of Baruch; the Epistle of Jeremiah) tend to appear together as a block, copied one after the other, following Jeremiah and Lamentations.¹² Sometimes, end titles, running titles, demarcation marks, or the use of illuminations in the manuscripts suggest that the three epistles are included in the Jeremiah corpus.¹³ Other times, their relationship to Jeremiah is more ambiguous: the epistles are attached to Jeremiah and Lamentations, copied directly after them, but appearing after the end title of Jeremiah.¹⁴ The titles of the epistles ascribed to Baruch reflect their association with the Jeremiah corpus. The title of the First Epistle of Baruch the Scribe identifies Baruch as “the Scribe”, that is, the scribe of Jeremiah. The titles of both epistles reflect their order and the connection between them in the corpus: they are the first and the second epistle.

The remaining two epistles ascribed to Baruch are embedded in the book known as 2 Baruch. In scholarship, 2 Baruch is commonly approached as a first or second century CE Jewish writing, but 2 Baruch survives mainly in Syriac manuscripts. This Syriac manuscript transmission is interesting in its own right because it offers traces of Syriac Christian engagement with and imagination of 2 Baruch. There is only one (assumedly) complete copy of 2 Baruch in Syriac manuscripts: it appears on folios 257r–267r of the Codex Ambrosianus (Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, B 21 inf. and bis inf.). This codex is a sixth- or seventh-century *pandect*—the oldest Syriac Peshitta Old Testament *pandect* that survives. The Epistle of Baruch the Son of Neriah makes up chapters 78–86 of 2 Baruch. That means that we have access to this epistle as an extant text, in the shape of a subsection within the literary text of 2 Baruch. It is identified with a subsection heading in red ink, but it is not otherwise separated from the running text of the larger book.¹⁵

Similar to the titles of the First Epistle of Baruch the Scribe and the Second Epistle of Baruch in the Jeremiah corpus, the title of the epistle in 2 Bar 78–86 (“Epistle of Baruch the Son of Neriah, Which He Wrote to the Nine and a Half Tribes”) also reflects its immediate work context. In this title, Baruch is identified as “the Son of Neriah”, in accordance with his identification in the main title of the book that it is part of: “The Book of Revelation of Baruch the Son of Neriah, Which Was Translated from Greek into Syriac”.

The other epistle in 2 Baruch is the one that is known only by mention. This is an epistle “to those who were in Babylon” (ܠܗܘܢ ܕܒܒܝܠ) (2 Bar 77:19, cf. 77:12 and 17), that is, the two tribes/the two and a half tribes in exile there (e.g., 8:5).¹⁶ The text of the epistle does not survive as an extant text. It is a “book within a book”, known only by mention through the medium of 2 Baruch and serving the literary contents of this book. Its mention in 2 Bar 77 ensures that letters of Baruch reach not only the nine and a half tribes but also the two and a half tribes. Together, his two letters reach all the twelve tribes of Israel.

3. Epistles to Babylon: The Titles and Introductory Addresses of the Epistles Ascribed to Baruch

The current study of the epistles ascribed to Baruch in Peshitta manuscripts builds on my autoptic investigation of the titles and introductory addresses of these epistles in twenty-three of the Syriac manuscripts that preserve copies of one or more of them.¹⁷ I have consulted digital images and microfilms of several other manuscripts. The remaining ones I know only through their mention in critical apparatuses and from the *List of Old Testament Peshitta Manuscripts* (Peshitta Institute 1961).¹⁸

The study applies the titles and introductory addresses of the epistles copied in the Codex Ambrosianus as its main case. The reason for using the Codex Ambrosianus is that

the Syriac tradition are clearly related, but that the Codex Ambrosianus identifies them by different titles and locates them in distinct collection contexts: they are in this sense different *works* (Lied 2017, 2021).²³

The full initial title of the First Epistle of Baruch the Scribe in the Codex Ambrosianus is the “First Epistle of Baruch the Scribe, Which He Sent from the Midst of Jerusalem to Babylon” (f. 176v).²⁴

The introductory address reads:

ܘܢܘܨܟܬܘܢ ܕܡܪܝܩܘܢ ܒܪܘܚܝܢ ܒܢܝܘܢ ܕܢܪܝܐ ܒܢܝܘܢ ܕܢܪܝܐ ܒܢܝܘܢ ܕܡܪܝܩܝܢ ܕܒܒܝܒܠܝܢ ܘܢܘܨܟܬܘܢ ܕܡܪܝܩܝܢ ܕܒܒܝܒܠܝܢ ܘܢܘܨܟܬܘܢ ܕܡܪܝܩܝܢ ܕܒܒܝܒܠܝܢ ܘܢܘܨܟܬܘܢ ܕܡܪܝܩܝܢ ܕܒܒܝܒܠܝܢ

And these are the words of the epistle that Baruch the son of Neriah sent to the nine and a half tribes, those who were across the river Euphrates, in which these things were written.²⁵

Two elements deserve our attention. First, although this epistle mentions the nine and a half tribes as the recipients in its introductory address, the initial title does not: this title rather mentions the geographical destination of the epistle. Second, the address is almost identical with the one in the epistle of 2 Bar 78–86, but it adds “Euphrates” (ܕܒܒܝܒܠܝܢ). Despite retaining mention of the nine and a half tribes in the address, the title of the First Epistle of Baruch the Scribe specifies explicitly that this is an epistle to Babylon.

If we compare the two epistles, it seems that the epistle of 2 Bar 78–86 adheres to the tradition that situated the nine and a half/ten tribes in Assyrian captivity, frequently referred to in the context of 2 Baruch. Furthermore, there is coherence in the title and the introductory address of the epistle of 2 Baruch between the identification of the addressees and their place of dwelling: the nine and a half tribes dwell beyond (the many waters of) the river. However, the specification of Babylon in the title and the addition of “Euphrates” in the introductory address of the First Epistle of Baruch the Scribe in the Jeremiah corpus introduce a tension that is not present in the epistle of 2 Bar 78–86. It runs against the traditional location of the nine and a half tribes in Assur, claiming that they too were located in Babylon.

3.3. “The Second Epistle of Baruch”

The writing that Syriac Peshitta manuscripts commonly refer to as the Second Epistle of Baruch is a writing that is well known also from other language traditions as, for instance, “Baruch” or the “Book of Baruch” (i.e., 1 Baruch).²⁶ The initial title on folio 177v of the Codex Ambrosianus is in line with most other Peshitta manuscripts and reads “Second Epistle of Baruch”.²⁷ The introductory address says,

ܘܢܘܨܟܬܘܢ ܕܡܪܝܩܝܢ ܕܒܒܝܒܠܝܢ ܘܢܘܨܟܬܘܢ ܕܡܪܝܩܝܢ ܕܒܒܝܒܠܝܢ ܘܢܘܨܟܬܘܢ ܕܡܪܝܩܝܢ ܕܒܒܝܒܠܝܢ ܘܢܘܨܟܬܘܢ ܕܡܪܝܩܝܢ ܕܒܒܝܒܠܝܢ ܘܢܘܨܟܬܘܢ ܕܡܪܝܩܝܢ ܕܒܒܝܒܠܝܢ

And these [are] the words of this epistle, that Baruch the son of Neriah, son of Maaseiah, son of Zedekiah, son of Sheraia, son of Helakiah wrote: these [words] he wrote to Babylon.²⁸

This title and introductory address include several noteworthy features. First, the introductory address refers to the writing explicitly as an “epistle” (ܕܒܝܒܠܝܢ). The title does not use the more generic Syriac terms for “book” (ܟܬܒܐ, ܫܘܒܪܐ), and so it differs from most other versions, such as the Greek (βίβλος). This identification of the writing as an epistle may not be surprising because the document that Baruch pens is described in the text as a document on the move (2 Ep. Bar. 1:7, 14). Re-imagining it as an epistle, or being explicit in the paratext about this genre, or function, of the document, may have been an intuitive, subtle change. However, it is noteworthy that the title and introductory address apply a different term (ܕܒܝܒܠܝܢ) than the rest of the writing. The term ܚܘܠܐ, “roll, scroll, volume, codex”, appears in other passages of the Syriac text of the epistle to describe the material document that Baruch inscribed (2 Ep. Bar. 1:3, 14).²⁹

Second, the introductory address says that Baruch wrote the epistle ܠܒܒܠ. This is a consistent reading in Peshitta manuscripts.³⁰ The prepositional particle *lamad* has a wide usage in Syriac, including “to, unto”, “for”, “of”, and “on account of, according to”.³¹ This means that the prefixed *lamad* in ܠܒܒܠ may be translated in many ways, including the locational “to Babylon”, the genitive “of Babylon”, or “for Babylon”, indicating purpose.

Due to the larger paratextual and manuscript context the introductory address appears in, I prefer the reading “to Babylon”, assuming that the *lamad* indicates geographical direction towards the city and its inhabitants.³² An argument that favors “to Babylon” is that this is a common usage of the prepositional particle *lamad*. Furthermore, the title and introductory address of the Second Epistle of Baruch in Peshitta manuscripts relabel the Book of Baruch as an epistle. An epistle is a document that moves geographically: it has to be sent, or it must be imagined to be sent. In addition, in the manuscript context of the Jeremiah corpus, the Second Epistle follows the First Epistle, which is explicitly said to be sent from Jerusalem “to Babylon” (ܠܒܒܠ ܥܠܡ ܕܗܘܐ ܕܒܒܒܠ), and it is common in Syriac manuscripts to shorten the title of the second (et cetera) writing in a series of writings copied in sequence. Finally, the introductory address of the First Epistle stresses that the river the epistle must cross is the Euphrates. In other words, several subtle changes in the titles and introductory addresses of the two epistles suggest that the Peshitta Jeremiah corpus rephrases these paratextual features such that both writings are understood as epistles of Baruch, sent from Jerusalem to Babylon.

No matter how we translate it, the Peshitta has a different reading here than, for instance, the Greek version of the Book of Baruch, which says ἐν Βαβυλωνί, “in Babylon” (Cf., [Tov 1975](#), p. 12). The reading in the Syriac paratextual layer of the Second Epistle of Baruch also differs from the Syriac text of 2 Ep. Bar. 1:7 and 14. These passages retain the assertion that the document was sent from Babylon to the high priest and priests in Jerusalem. The introductory address has the epistle being sent in the opposite geographical direction to the one found within the text that it introduces.

4. Corpus-Building and Literary Imagination: 2 Baruch and the Jeremiah Corpus

The hypothesis that I present in this article is that Syriac 2 Baruch influenced the Peshitta Jeremiah corpus and that 2 Baruch has played a larger role in the Syriac corpus-building and literary imagination than has so far been acknowledged.

The first aspect that deserves attention is the fact that the Peshitta Jeremiah corpus incorporates two writings ascribed to Baruch, not one, as is the case in most other versions. Most traditions that produced and preserved biblical manuscripts, such as the Greek, commonly include only the Book of Baruch, in addition to Jeremiah, Lamentations, and the Epistle of Jeremiah.³³ The First Epistle of Baruch the Scribe is found in the Peshitta only.

It is noteworthy that the tradition that includes the First Epistle of Baruch the Scribe in the Jeremiah corpus is the same tradition that preserved the book of 2 Baruch in full in an early Old Testament *pandect*.³⁴ As pointed out above, the First Epistle of Baruch the Scribe shares large parts of its text with the epistle that makes up the final chapters of 2 Baruch. Some Syriac Christian milieux employed 2 Baruch as an Old Testament book, prescribing lections from it in lectionary manuscripts.³⁵ These milieux read lections originating with 2 Baruch, for example, on Easter Sunday ([Lied 2021](#)). In other words, the manuscript tradition in which some groups preserved and employed 2 Baruch as an Old Testament book also included an additional writing of Baruch in the Jeremiah corpus.

Second, the above comparison of the paratextual layers of the Epistle of Baruch the Son of Neriah (2 Bar 78–86) and the First Epistle of Baruch the Scribe suggests that the First Epistle of Baruch the Scribe was adapted from the epistle in Syriac 2 Bar 78–86—not the other way around. Although the First Epistle of Baruch the Scribe shares large parts of its text with the epistle that makes up the final chapters of 2 Baruch, the title and introductory address are distinct in each epistle.

As noted in the presentation above, the title and introductory address of the epistle in 2 Bar 78–86 are internally consistent. They both refer to the recipients of the epistle,

the nine and a half tribes. The introductory address locates these tribes beyond the river, presumably subscribing to the traditional location of these tribes in another place than the two and a half tribes, who dwelled in Babylon. The title and introductory address of the First Epistle of Baruch the Scribe, on the other hand, complicate this picture. Whereas its introductory address upholds that this is an epistle to the nine and a half tribes, the title underscores the geographical location of the recipients instead of their tribal affiliation: the First Epistle of Baruch the Scribe is sent from Jerusalem to Babylon. This change in the paratextual layer is relatively striking. It overwrites the traditional location of the nine and a half tribes in Assur and it conflates biblical chronology by situating them in Babylon.

The question of the origins of the Epistle of Baruch the Son of Neriah (2 Bar 78–86) and the First Epistle of Baruch the Scribe (Peshitta Jeremiah corpus) is a long-standing one (Lied 2017). Some scholars have suggested that both originated with 2 Baruch as a single epistle (e.g., Ceriani 1883), whereas others have proposed that they originated with a common ancestor (e.g., Charles 1896).³⁶ For scholars of 2 Baruch, a major motivation has been to approximate the original or, at least, an early version of 2 Baruch—the text that existed before it got translated into Syriac. However, as some of the scholars who have explored the manuscript history of the epistles have noted (e.g., Bogaert 1969; Lied 2017), the origins or early versions of the epistles are not immediately accessible. The oldest extant manuscripts of either epistle date to the sixth/seventh centuries.³⁷ At that point, the two epistles were already treated as two different works by Syriac Christians, copied in two different contexts under two different names. They were even copied in the same codex (the Codex Ambrosianus) as such—one epistle within 2 Baruch and the other as part of the Jeremiah corpus. Hence, we cannot access any purported original epistles, but we can access the traces of texts in circulation in the way that they have come down to us in the surviving Syriac manuscripts. In such an approach, the paratexts become a source for the study of a hypothetical inner-Syriac development and a supplement to previous studies of the textual changes that occurred in the Syriac transmission (Dederling n.d.; Albrekton et al. 2019).

The third aspect that deserves attention is the role of Jerusalem and the preference for two epistles of Baruch in the Syriac literary imagination. In Peshitta manuscripts, the First Epistle of Baruch the Scribe is immediately followed by the Second Epistle of Baruch, and as I showed above, some small but important details in the paratextual layers of this writing differ from other versions. In the Peshitta, the Book of Baruch is explicitly named an epistle, and it is no longer written *in* Babylon but rather sent *to* Babylon. In other words, the Peshitta Jeremiah corpus states that Baruch sends two epistles—both to Babylon.

Now, sending epistles from Jerusalem to addressees in Babylon is certainly not unheard of in the context of the Jeremiah corpus. According to Jer 29:1–5, Jeremiah sent an epistle to the exiles in Babylon while he was still in Jerusalem. The introductory address of the Epistle of Jeremiah—the third epistle in the Peshitta Jeremiah corpus—also represents it as an epistle sent by Jeremiah to those in exile in Babylon. However, Peshitta manuscripts add two more epistles to Babylon, and they are ascribed to Baruch, not Jeremiah.³⁸

At this point, a closer look at the literary content of 2 Baruch is warranted, looking closer at Baruch's geographical location and the role of the two Baruchian epistles in the book. 2 Baruch underscores Baruch's location in the vicinity of Jerusalem (Lied 2008, 2021). In 2 Baruch, Baruch leaves Jerusalem with his followers just before the destruction of the temple and the city, gathering them in the nearby wilderness location (2 Bar 1:1–2:2; 5:5–6:1; 80:4–7). Baruch returns to the site of the destroyed temple in Jerusalem (10:3; 13:1; 21:3; 35:1) and then goes to Hebron (47:2) and sits under a tree (55:1) in order to receive revelations from God. He communicates the interpretations of these revelations to his steadily increasing audience. From his location “under an oak”, he writes epistles to the tribes that he cannot reach orally and in person (77:18–19).³⁹

This imagination of Baruch's whereabouts in Jerusalem and the surrounding area runs counter to claims about his location in other writings. According to Jer 43:6–7, Jeremiah and Baruch went to Egypt. Greek 1 Bar 1:1–4 locates Baruch in Babylon. In 2 Baruch,

however, Baruch sends Jeremiah to Babylon to support the captives held there, while he himself remains behind in the Jerusalem area (2 Bar 10:2, 4–5; 33:1–2). As I have argued elsewhere (Lied 2021), this stress on the Jerusalem location may be one of the reasons why the Codex Ambrosianus contains a copy of 2 Baruch: 2 Baruch provides a detailed, alternative narrative about the fall of the first temple and continues with an account about the extraordinary events that took place in Jerusalem and Judah after the last inhabitants of the city were brought to Babylon. This information was probably valuable for Syriac Christian readers for historiographical reasons. In addition, and given the importance of Jerusalem to Syriac Christians, Syriac readers may also have regarded knowledge that originated in Jerusalem as particularly authentic. To the extent that Syriac Christians saw themselves as heirs to the old covenant, its texts, and revealed knowledge, 2 Baruch's narrative about epistles sent to the north and the east of Jerusalem may have served to substantiate a claim to the past knowledge transfer from Jerusalem to their own communities.⁴⁰ In other words, it is possible that the stress of 2 Baruch on the context of Baruch in the Jerusalem area and the description of his acts of knowledge distribution from that place influenced the Syriac literary imagination about the location of the originator of the epistles. As we have seen, the introductory addresses of both the First and the Second Epistle of Baruch in the Jeremiah corpus underscore that these epistles were sent *to* Babylon—even when this contradicts the contents of the text that follows, differs from other versions, and runs against the tradition of associating the place of exile of the nine and a half/ten tribes with Assur, at a distance from the place of exile of the two and a half/two tribes. Hence, it is possible that what we are looking at here is the literary impact of the narrative of 2 Baruch regarding the spatial context of Baruch's revelations and knowledge distribution on the Syriac literary imagination.

It is also possible that the unprecedented inclusion of two epistles of Baruch in the Peshitta Jeremiah corpus was influenced by the narrative of 2 Baruch. As I have shown above, 2 Baruch contains one extant and named epistle and another epistle that is known only by mention. The extant epistle, which 2 Bar 77:19 mentions first, is the one that shares large parts of its text with the First Epistle of Baruch the Scribe from the Jeremiah corpus. It is tempting to suggest that the second epistle that 2 Bar 77:19 refers to, which is known only by mention as the epistle that was sent "to those who were in Babylon", materialized in the Peshitta Jeremiah corpus as an extant text by converting the already existing Book of Baruch into an epistle "to Babylon". This paratextual transformation of the Book of Baruch into a second epistle of Baruch would fill the void left by the lack of an extant text in 2 Baruch and meet the potential need that 2 Baruch may have created for two epistles of Baruch in the Jeremiah corpus.

5. Concluding Remarks: Two Epistles from Jerusalem

It may not be the only possible explanation, but one way of explaining both the overlaps and the differences in the titles and introductory addresses of the various epistles ascribed to Baruch in Peshitta manuscripts is to propose that Syriac 2 Baruch influenced the Syriac literary imagination and corpus-building and, along with this, the paratextual communication of the Peshitta Jeremiah corpus.

If this is correct, Syriac 2 Baruch has made a lasting contribution to the Syriac biblical tradition. The literary impact evidenced by the paratextual features of the various Syriac epistles ascribed to Baruch would suggest a more important role for 2 Baruch in the Syriac tradition than has hitherto been recognized. As pointed out above, 2 Baruch is found in the oldest surviving Syriac Old Testament *pandect*. We do not know if 2 Baruch was part of Old Testament manuscripts before it was included in this sixth or seventh century full-bible codex, nor if it was part of other contemporaneous manuscripts that have not survived. However, the possibility remains that it may have been, and that it may have influenced the literary imagination that shaped the paratexts of Peshitta manuscripts. The First Epistle of Baruch the Scribe certainly continued to circulate with success among Syriac Christians, maybe at the cost of the Epistle of Baruch the Son of Neriah and the larger book of 2 Baruch.

However, it remains possible, and even likely, that 2 Baruch’s tale of two epistles penned by Baruch in the Jerusalem area affected the literary imagination of the Syriac Christian biblical tradition more than we have so far assumed. This influence is observable for us today in the collection of writings of the Peshitta Jeremiah corpus and in the titles and introductory addresses of its epistles.

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Notes

- I employ the term “paratext” to refer to textual elements that serve to communicate between a text copied in a manuscript and its producers on the one hand and its audiences on the other. Paratexts share the page with the literary text, appear alongside that text and communicate beyond it, but remain relevant primarily due to their relationship to that text (Lied 2021, p. 191). I take Gérard’s (1997) understanding of “paratext” as my point of departure, but I have adjusted his definition in accordance with ongoing debates about the term in manuscript studies. Cf., the excellent overview in (Andrist 2018, pp. 130–35).
- Eva Mroczek applies this concept to talk about “the literary world as it might have looked like to their producers and audiences”, and to help us draw nearer to “the contours and holdings of [their] literary world” (Mroczek 2016, pp. 5, 18).
- I use the term “Peshitta” to refer to (what became) the standard Syriac version of the Bible.
- “2 Baruch” is the name commonly applied in scholarship to refer to a first or second century CE, Jewish, apocalyptic book (e.g., Charles 1896; Bogaert 1969; Henze 2011). The text of this book is attested in the Syriac manuscript, Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, B 21 inf. and bis inf. (the so-called Codex Ambrosianus). In this manuscript, the book bears the title, $\text{ܩܘܪܝܢܘܨܘܬܐ ܕܒܪܚܝܢ ܒܢܝ ܢܪܝܐ ܕܩܘܪܝܢܘܨܘܬܐ ܕܒܪܚܝܢ ܒܢܝ ܢܪܝܐ}$, “Book of Revelation of Baruch the Son of Neriah, Which Was Translated from Greek into Syriac”. “2 Baruch” is also known as the “Apocalypse of Baruch” and as the “Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch”.
- I apply the term “Jeremiah corpus” in this paper to refer to the collection of books ascribed to, or associated with, the prophet Jeremiah that are traditionally copied together in Peshitta manuscripts.
- This article developed from the 1.5 page excursus in Lied 2021, pp. 218–20.
- The main ideas of this article were conceived during my 2020/2021 stay at the Centre for Advanced Study in Oslo. I wish to thank the two anonymous reviewers, as well as the editors Garrick V. Allen and Kelsie G. Rodenbiker, for their generous and helpful input to the article.
- $\text{ܩܘܪܝܢܘܨܘܬܐ ܕܒܪܚܝܢ ܒܢܝ ܢܪܝܐ ܕܩܘܪܝܢܘܨܘܬܐ ܕܒܪܚܝܢ ܒܢܝ ܢܪܝܐ}$ (Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, B 21 inf. and bis inf., f. 176v), from here on, “First Epistle of Baruch the Scribe”.
- $\text{ܩܘܪܝܢܘܨܘܬܐ ܕܒܪܚܝܢ ܒܢܝ ܢܪܝܐ ܕܩܘܪܝܢܘܨܘܬܐ ܕܒܪܚܝܢ ܒܢܝ ܢܪܝܐ}$ (Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, B 21 inf. and bis inf., f. 177v)
- $\text{ܩܘܪܝܢܘܨܘܬܐ ܕܒܪܚܝܢ ܒܢܝ ܢܪܝܐ ܕܩܘܪܝܢܘܨܘܬܐ ܕܒܪܚܝܢ ܒܢܝ ܢܪܝܐ}$ (Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, B 21 inf. and bis inf., f. 265v), from here on, “Epistle of Baruch the Son of Neriah”.
- The manuscripts that contain the Peshitta Jeremiah corpus date from the sixth to the twentieth century. Some of the manuscripts are *pandecks*, that is, full Old Testament/Bible codices (e.g., Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Syr. 341; Cambridge, Cambridge University Library, Oo I. 1,2). Others contain the Prophets or preserve the Jeremiah corpus only (e.g., London, British Library, Add. 18,715 and Add. 17,105). Excerpts of the epistles also appear in so-called masoretic manuscripts and in lectionary manuscripts (e.g., London, British Library, Add. 14,684; Add. 14,482; Add. 14,485).
- The order of the Epistle of Jeremiah vis-à-vis the two Baruch epistles may vary, but the First Epistle of Baruch the Scribe always precedes the Second Epistle of Baruch. Cf., the convenient overview in (Albrektson et al. 2019, pp. 228–29).
- Cf., e.g., Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, A 145 inf., f. 342 r.
- Cf., e.g., Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, B 21 inf. and bis inf. and Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Syr. 64. Note the use of running titles ܩܘܪܝܢܘܨܘܬܐ , “Jeremiah”, (f. 123v) and ܩܘܪܝܢܘܨܘܬܐ , “Baruch”, (ff. 119v and 127v) in London, British Library, Add 17,105. After the tenth century, some Old Testament codices would exclude the epistles from the Jeremiah corpus (See Lied 2019, pp. 49–51). From the sixteenth century onwards, the three epistles known from the Jeremiah corpus sometimes also appear in a collection of books identified as ܩܘܪܝܢܘܨܘܬܐ , “Maccabees”, in some East Syriac codices (e.g., Manchester, John Rylands Library, Ryl. Syr. 3; Berlin, State Library, Sachau 90). In addition to the epistles of Jeremiah and of Baruch, the collection also includes 1–3 Maccabees, Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah, Proverbs, Judith, Esther, and Susanna. Also, one or more of the epistles ascribed to Baruch and known from the Jeremiah corpus sometimes appear in codices that contain less frequent collocations of writings. For example, in London, British Library, Add 12,172, the First Epistle of Baruch the Scribe appears together with a selection from Genesis and the History of Eleazar, Shamuni and Her Seven Sons.
- It could have been separated out by, for instance, the skipping of lines and by the use of decorations. These features appear elsewhere in the codex to mark the beginning of the copy of a discrete book.

- 16 2 Baruch sometimes refers to “the two and a half tribes” and other times to “the two tribes” (cf., 2 Bar 1:2; 62:5; 63:3; 64:5). Likewise, the book refers both to “the nine and a half tribes” and the “ten tribes” (Cf., 1:2; 62:5; 77:19). According to 62:5–6, the nine and half/ten tribes are the tribes that were brought to Assur. The two and half/two tribes are the tribes that were brought to Babylon after the destruction of the first temple in Jerusalem (1:2). Cf., Lied 2008, 38n.40.
- 17 Cambridge, Cambridge University Library, Dd 7.13; Cambridge, Cambridge University Library, Oo I. 1,2; Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Or. 58; London, British Library, Add. 12,172; London, British Library, Add. 12,139; London, British Library, Add. 12,178; London, British Library, Add. 14,482; London, British Library, Add. 14,485; London, British Library, Add. 14,486; London, British Library, Add. 14,487; London, British Library, Add. 14,684; London, British Library, Add. 14,686; London, British Library, Add. 14,687; London, British Library, Add. 17,105; London, British Library, Egerton 704; Lund, Lund University Library, Medeltidshandskrift 58; Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, B 21 inf. and bis inf.; Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, A 145 inf.; Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Syr. 11; Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Syr. 64; Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Syr. 341; Rome, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat.sir. 7; Rome, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat.sir. 8.
- 18 For an overview of the manuscripts, see (Lied 2021, pp. 193–95).
- 19 The term “title” has many usages and, like the term “paratext”, scholars debate how fruitful it is to apply it to manuscripts (cf., e.g., Dickey 2007). The term may not be universally applicable, but for my study of the epistles ascribed to Baruch in Syriac manuscripts, I find that it is helpful. (Cf., Lied 2021, p. 31).
- 20 As mentioned above, this is the only surviving Syriac occurrence of the epistle embedded in 2 Baruch and therefore the only surviving example of the title and introductory address.
- 21 Literally, “on the other shore of the river”.
- 22 The Textual Comparison Module of the Logos Bible Software, accessed via Logos Bible Software on 18 April 2016. Put differently, Albrektson et al. (2019, p. 237) note that the epistle in 2 Bar 78–86 has 120 unique readings.
- 23 Note that the First Epistle of Baruch the Scribe circulated widely. This epistle is known from fifty-four surviving and identified manuscripts—and counting. These Syriac manuscripts suggest that this epistle was used in worship and in educational contexts. It is mentioned in book lists as part of the Old Testament, for instance in Abdisho of Nisibis’s *Catalogue of the Books of the Church*, and it is cited by commentators of the Syriac Bible, for instance by Dionysius Bar Salibi in the *Treatise against the Melchites*. If we judge by the surviving sources, the Epistle of Baruch the Son of Neriah (2 Bar 76–86) was not equally successful among Syriac Christians. This epistle appears only in the Codex Ambrosianus as part of the larger book 2 Baruch.
- 24 This is the intital title of the epistle as it appears in the Codex Ambrosianus (B 21 inf. and bis inf.), f. 176v. The initial title of the epistle varies across the manuscripts that contain it. As Albrektson et al. (2019, p. 229) have shown, most of the manuscripts that contain the complete form of the text, keep the numbering of the First and the Second Epistle in the intital title. However, some manuscripts, particularly manuscripts that Albrektson et al. identify as belonging to “the Eastern Tradition”, leave out the numbering (“first”, “second”). On these occasions, the numbering most commonly occurs in the end title. Some manuscripts leave out ܐܠܘܟܢ, “in the Midst of” (e.g., London, British Library, Add 17,105, f. 116r; Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Syr. 341, f. 159r). Others add ܘܥܘܠܐ, “next”, as the first word of the title (e.g., London, British Library, Add 12,172; Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, Sachau 90). Many manuscripts use the abbreviated form of the title: ܐܘܪܘܚܐ ܕܒܪܚܝܐ ܕܫܝܒܐ ܕܢܪܝܐ, “First Epistle of Baruch the Scribe” (e.g., Cambridge, Cambridge University Library, Oo I 1,2, f. 161r); ܐܘܪܘܚܐ ܕܒܪܚܝܐ ܕܫܝܒܐ, “Epistle of Baruch the Scribe” (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Lamb. 4, f. 37v); ܐܘܪܘܚܐ ܕܒܪܚܝܐ ܕܫܝܒܐ, “First Epistle of Baruch” (Lund, Medeltidshandskrift 58, f. 153v). However, with one intriguing exception (London, British Library, Add. 12,178, f. 111v, which reads ܐܘܪܘܚܐ ܕܒܪܚܝܐ ܕܫܝܒܐ ܕܢܪܝܐ, “First Epistle of Baruch the Son of Neriah”, the main, identifying elements of the title remain constant, and importantly, they never get confused with the elements of the title of the epistle in 2 Bar 78–86. Baruch is consistently “the Scribe”, not “the Son of Neriah”, the numbering (“first”) is most commonly retained in either the intital title or the end title, and the full format titles mention the destination, not the addressees of the letter. Note also that the lectionary manuscripts that contain lections from the First Epistle of Baruch the Scribe and the Second Epistle of Baruch refer to them as lections from Jeremiah (See Lied 2021, pp. 208–11).
- 25 The variance among the manuscripts concerns minor, mainly orthographic issues and does not affect my current argumentation. See, (Albrektson et al. 2019, p. 302).
- 26 Note that the Armenian version also calls it the “Letter of Baruch” (Doering 2019, p. 3).
- 27 Some manuscripts add ܘܥܘܠܐ, “next”, ܘܥܘܠܐ, “his”/“the same”, or ܐܘܪܘܚܐ, “the Scribe” to underscore the relationship between the First and the Second Epistle (Cambridge, Cambridge University Library, Oo I 1,2, f. 161v; London, British Library, Egerton 704, 374r; Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Syr. 341). In many manuscripts, the initial title is abbreviated: e.g., ܕܫܝܒܐ ܕܢܪܝܐ, “Second Epistle” (London, British Library, Add 17,105, f. 121v; London, British Library, Add. 12,178, f. 112v); ܕܫܝܒܐ, “(The) Second” (London, British Library, Add., 14,482, f. 48r); ܘܥܘܠܐ ܕܫܝܒܐ, “His Second” (London, British Library, Add 14,684, f. 24v). These abbreviations also stress the link to the epistle copied just before it. Note that some manuscripts add “the Scribe” in the end title (e.g., Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Syr. 341; Cambridge, Cambridge University Library, Oo I 1,2; Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, A 145 Inf.). In some late manuscripts, the Second Epistle of Baruch is named the ܐܘܪܘܚܐ ܕܒܪܚܝܐ ܕܫܝܒܐ, “Prophecy of Baruch” (e.g., Cambridge, Cambridge University Library, Oo I 7; Rome, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat.sir. 7). For an overview of the variance, see (Albrektson et al. 2019, p. 319).

- 28 I follow the naming convention of (Walter et al. 2013). For variance across manuscripts, see (Albrektson et al. 2019, p. 319).
- 29 The term *ܠܡܢܗ* tends to refer to the material aspect of a document. Hence, it could also be used about the material aspect of an epistle—the material artefact that is brought to a recipient. Note that 2 Bar 77:12 uses both terms (*ܠܡܢܗ* and *ܠܡܢܗ*) to refer to the epistle that is sent to Babylon. 2 Bar 77:19 and 23; 86:1 and 87:1 consistently applies *ܠܡܢܗ* to refer to the epistle to the nine and a half tribes.
- 30 According to Albrektson et al. (2019, p. 319), *ܠܡܢܗ* is omitted in Woodbrooke, Selly Oak College Library, Ming. Syr. 279. I have not studied this manuscript myself.
- 31 Smith (1999, pp. 232–33). I am grateful to reviewer 2 for their input.
- 32 I acknowledge that the meanings “to Babylon” and “for Babylon” may easily overlap and fluctuate. Compare the use of the *lamad* in letters of the Peshitta New Testament: e.g., 1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:1; Gal 1:2; Phil 1:1; Rev 1:4.
- 33 Note that the Ethiopic tradition also includes two writings ascribed to Baruch: it includes 4 Baruch in addition to the Book of Baruch (Heide 2019, pp. 74–76).
- 34 One ninth-to-eleventh-century, Arabic, manuscript copy of 2 Baruch, which includes its epistle, survives (St. Catherine’s Monastery, Arabic Manuscripts 589). Apart from this copy, all other attestations of 2 Baruch and its epistle are Syriac (Cf., Lied 2021, pp. 249–50).
- 35 London, British Library, Add. 14,686 and Add. 14,687; Deir al-Surian, Ms. Syr. 33 and Pampakuda, A. Konat Collection, Ms. 77.
- 36 For a larger and more nuanced debate, see (Bogaert 1969; Dederling n.d.; Whitters 2003; Henze 2011; Doering 2013; Lied 2017, 2021).
- 37 London, British Library, Add 17,105 and Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, B 21 inf. and bis inf.
- 38 It is of course possible that some readers would have understood all the epistles in the Jeremiah corpus as Baruchian epistles, because they were imagined to be penned by Baruch, Jeremiah’s scribe.
- 39 For the importance of this location in the context of the Codex Ambrosianus, see (Lied 2021, pp. 60–67).
- 40 The Syriac literature that deals with the Baruch figure seems to connect Baruch to the preservation and circulation of knowledge. He is the steward of old knowledge and of lost books. In the Book of Jeremiah and in the other writings in the Jeremianic corpus, Baruch is Jeremiah’s scribe. He preserves Jeremiah’s words by writing them down and by recording them again when a scroll is burned with fire (Jer 36). According to the eighth/ninth-century letter of the East Syriac patriarch Timothy I, a rumor has it that someone had discovered books in a cave, which Baruch and Jeremiah hid before the destruction of Jerusalem. The First and Second Epistles of Baruch describes the movement of knowledge from Jerusalem to the tribes in exile.

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