

Taking Broken Cisterns for the Fountain of Living Water; (On the Background of the Metaphor of the Whore in Jeremiah

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In Jeremiah 2-3, the people of Israel (and of Judah) are depicted as a whore. Apparently, the composer of that text had a specific concept of the people in mind that could appropriately be expressed by זנה and its derivatives.¹ Usually, this metaphor of the whore is considered to be suitable because of Israel's alleged involvement in sexual cult activity. An illicit sexual activity would thus be the basic similarity between the image of the whore and the author's concept of the people.² The inherent assumption is that זנה and cult prostitution are to be connected. However, the results of some recent studies question this quasi-evident connection. The root זנה is denied the sense of cult prostitution. Even the mere existence of sacred prostitution in the context of the Canaanite fertility cult is disputed. Consequently, the question of the logical connection between the image of the whore and concept of the people in Jeremiah is still unanswered. Is it the sexual behaviour of the people that makes of the metaphor of the whore an evident image? Or are we to look for another logical link between Jeremiah's view on the people and the image that the author(s) use(s)?

1. THE WHORE AND THE CULT: AN EXPLORATION

Generally speaking, the basic meaning of the root זנה in non-figurative speech is defined as the involvement in sexual relationships outside a normative sexual code regulating the female/male sexual behaviour.³ A further subdivision can be made between the illicit

¹ Following a cognitive linguistic interpretation of metaphor, as in the definition of E. KITTAY, *Metaphor. Its Cognitive Force and Linguistic Structure* (The Clarendon Library of Logic and Philosophy), Oxford, 1987, p. 14: "metaphor provides the linguistic realisation for the cognitive activity by which a language speaker makes use of one linguistically articulated domain to gain understanding of another experiential or conceptual domain, and, similarly, by which a hearer grasps such an understanding". For a thorough research on metaphor in biblical context, especially as regards the pastoral metaphor, see P. VAN HECKE, *Koppig als een koe is Israël en JHWH zou het moeten weiden als een schaap in het open veld? (Hos 4,16). Een cognitief-linguïstische analyse van de religieuze pastorale metaforiek in de Hebreeuwse bijbel*, Doctoral Dissertation at the Catholic University of Leuven, Leuven, 2000.

² This analysis aims at the final text of Jeremiah. With "author" or "composer", I refer to the person(s) responsible for the final text.

³ Cf. S. ERLANDSSON, art. זנה *zanah*, זנותים *zenûnim*, זונה *zenû*, תאונה *taznû*, in *TWAT 2* (1977) 612-619, c. 613: "zanah bezeichnet primär ein sexuelles Verhältnis, das nicht in einem Bund eingeordnet ist". J. KÜHLEWEIN, art. זנה, *znh huren*, in *THAT 1* (1971) 518-520, c. 519: "Ursprünglich ist mit זנה einfach das unregelte, unrechtmäßige geschlechtliche Verhalten zwischen Mann und Frau gemeint."; G. H. HALL, זנה, in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis 1* (1996) 1122-1125, p. 1123: "זנה is a broad term for sexual misconduct, including adultery".

extramarital sexual activity (thus including adultery) and the prostitution strictu sensu (hiring the body for money or some material reward).⁴ Applied to the relationship between Israel and God, the term can be used for Israel's abandonment of God, as well as for the pursuing of other gods.

S. Erlandsson remarks that in some texts the activity of women behaving as a זונה is presented without negative judgement.⁵ Indeed, no negative statement is made upon Judah's visit of Tamar (Gen 38) or of Simson's visit of a זונה (Judg 16,1). The description of these women has no negative connotations either.⁶ In a more recent article, Erlandsson's observation is connected with an evolutionary hypothesis on the meaning of the root זנה. H. Schulte argued that in the pre-monarchic period the זונה is not a prostitute, but a woman who is self-dependant, in a matrilineal family system. It is not until the monarchic period that the patrilineal system became normative. From this moment onwards, זנה is negatively assessed, and prostitution arose both because of the need of men (for whom otherwise sexual relationships outside the patrilineal marriage has become problematic) and of women (especially for widows or repudiated wives who had no other income). According to Schulte, the monarchic period is the moment that a shift in meaning of זונה towards the sense of prostitute arose.⁷ Whatever the assessment of the matrilineal versus patrilineal marriage system may be, there seems to be an evolution in the way זנה is used in pre-monarchic and later times. The stricter the legal code on extramarital sexual behaviour, the more זנה is being condemned. Erlandsson explains this evolution as a reaction against the fertility cult in Canaan. Israel is protecting itself (without much result) against the influence of that cult, which made of fornicators and prostitutes people who were devoted to the deity.⁸ In his opinion, the verb זנה occasionally indicates this illicit sexual intercourse and the serving of other gods at the same time (e.g. in his view Jer 5,7).

The idea of devotion to the deity in connection with prostitution is often based on a common translation of the Hebrew term קדשה (male קדש), namely cult / sacred / temple / shrine prostitute, which sometimes seems to occur as a synonym of זונה (e.g. Gen 38,15.22-23.25; Hos 4,14) and is sometimes mentioned in the context of the shrines and offerings (1 Kgs 14,23-24; Hos 4,15). However, the last decade, several authors have studied the so-called cult prostitution, and their findings can be summarised by the categorical statement of J. Goodnick Westenholz: " 'Sacred prostitution' is an amalgam of misconceptions, presuppositions, and inaccuracies".⁹ E. J. Fisher denied the existence of cult prostitution (based on an analysis of קדשה and its cognates). Though admitting "ritual intercourse as a practice in parts of the ANE", Fisher concludes that "the translation 'cult prostitute' be dropped from usage".¹⁰ A

⁴ So G. H. HALL, art. cit. (n. 3), p. 1123.

⁵ S. ERLANDSSON, art. cit. (n. 3), c. 613-614.

⁶ It is not until found pregnant that Tamar and her activities are expressed with זנה in a negative sense.

⁷ H. SCHULTE, *Beobachtungen zum Begriff der Zônâ im Alten Testament*, in ZAW 104 (1992) 255-262.

⁸ S. ERLANDSSON, art. cit. (n. 3), c. 614-615.

⁹ J. GOODNICK WESTENHOLZ, *Tamar, Qedesa, qadistu and Sacred Prostitution in Mesopotamia*, in *Harvard Theological Review* 82/3 (1989) 245-265, p. 263.

¹⁰ E. J. FISHER, *Cultic Prostitution in the Ancient Near East: A Reassessment*, in *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 6 (1976) 225-236, p. 236. R. A. Oden even goes one step further: "That it [sacred prostitution] existed in ancient Syria-Palestine or Mesopotamia is not demonstrated in any of the evidence to which appeal is so frequently made", see R. A. ODEN, *Religious Identity and the Sacred Prostitution Accusation*, in ID., *Bible without Theology. The Theological Tradition and Alternatives to It* (New Voices in Biblical Studies), Cambridge-Hagerstown-New York e.a., 1987, 131-153, p. 153.

similar stand is taken by M. I. Gruber who argues that neither קדשה nor its Canaanite and Akkadian cognates indicate cult prostitution, though the Hebrew term may indicate a (common) prostitute.¹¹ Schulte, however, argues that even when a woman is called both זונה and קדשה, she is not a prostitute. If a woman, being a temple functionary, is prepared to have sexual intercourse with men sacrificing there (as in her view in Hos 4,14), this has nothing to do with hiring the body for money or involuntary sex. Hosea 4,13-14 does not suggest that women of the people systematically took part in initiation rites in the cult. Rather, the bad example of the men gave rise to a less strict sexual behaviour of the women they were responsible for.¹² A. Brenner suggests that at least in some cases, women are called "זונה", not because they are prostitutes, but because they are not fitting the normative pattern, such as women with leading capacities (Jezebel, 2 Kings 9,22), women who leave their husband to turn back to their father's house (the concubine, Judg. 19,2), and unmarried women found pregnant in their father's house (cf. Deut 22,21 and Gen 34,31). In these cases, זונה, "harlot" is an abusive rather than a factual description.¹³ To summarise: the forms of זונה indicate behaviour that is not conform to the normative man-woman relationships. In some instances, this indicates prostitution. On other occasions, it is rather (an accusation of) illicit sexual behaviour. Though the woman behaving promiscuously may be a temple servant, this would be coincidence rather than a fixed institution of "sacred prostitution".

2. THE "WHORE" IN JEREMIAH: SOME CURRENT INTERPRETATIONS

"Upon every high hill and under every green tree you bowed down as a harlot" (Jer 2,20, RSV). This prophetic accusation depicts the behaviour of the people of Israel, metaphorically referred to as a female "you", in the image of the whore. The setting of this metaphorical "whoring" is the high hills and the green trees. These¹⁴ are the site of cultic activity for other deities than YHWH. According to Deuteronomy 12,2, these shrines (indicating altars, pillars, and carved images) should be destroyed. In the context of the shrines, 1 Kings 14,23-24 refers to the קדש (usually translated as "male cult prostitute", also mentioned in 1 Kgs 15,12; 22,46; 2 Kgs 23,7). Hosea 14,13 mentions as cultic activity on the hills and under the oaks sacrifices and burn offerings (cf. 2 Kgs 16,4; 17,10-11; 2 Chr. 28,4; Ezek 6,13; 20,28), and concludes "therefore your daughters play the harlot and your brides commit adultery" (RSV). Yet, God

¹¹ M. I. GRUBER, *The Hebrew Qedesah and her Canaanite and Akkadian Cognates*, in ID., *The Motherhood of God and Other Studies* (South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism, 57), Atlanta Georgia, 1992. The root meaning of the term would be "she who is set apart", in the Hebrew this may be a prostitute (so in Gen 38,15 and Hos 4,14). He is followed by A. BRENNER, *The Intercourse of Knowledge. On Gendering Desire and 'Sexuality' in the Hebrew Bible* (Biblical Interpretation Series, 26), Leiden/New York, Köln, 1997, pp. 147-149.

¹² H. SCHULTE, art. cit. (n. 7), pp. 260-261.

¹³ A. Brenner, op. cit. (n. 11), p. 150. Brenner also mentions the unfaithful married woman (Proverbs 7); the seducing woman (Tamar in Genesis 38); the domineering woman (as in Ezek 16). Also Jephthah's mother (Judg 11,1) can hardly have been a whore, since this fits hardly Jephthah's status in his father's house. I would argue, however, that the description of the disguised Tamar is that of a whore, taking a material reward in turn for her favours. Yet, the description of Judah having intercourse with this whore does not sound negative (in contrast with the description of Tamar as a whore when found pregnant though promised to Judah's son).

¹⁴ The references in the text only mention the passages in which a high place is combined with a green tree. To these passages, a long list of biblical passages referring to shrines, sacrifices, offerings on high places can be added, such as 1 Kgs 3,4; 22,43; 2 Kgs 12,3; 14,4; 15,4,35.

will not punish these women, "for the men themselves go aside with harlots, and sacrifice with cult prostitutes" (v. 15, RSV). The reference to the זונה (prostitute) and the קדשה (usually translated as "cult prostitute") in the context of the service to other deities, gave rise to the interpretation of the cult of those deities as involving sacred prostitution. Consequently, many commentators on Jeremiah 2-3 link the image of Israel as the whore and the sexual activities in the context of the fertility cult.

The image of Israel as a whore in Jeremiah would supposedly be an extension of the behaviour of some (or many) Israelites, who take part in the fertility cult.¹⁵ Since the rebuked sexual behaviour is part of a heathen cult, it can stand as a symbol for abandonment of YHWH. Not only the trespassers, but also the whole people can therefore be depicted as a prostitute. W. L. Holladay for instance, remarks: "The high hills and leafy trees were the site of fertility cult worship... But as elsewhere in prophetic descriptions of this sort, it is not only that specific Israelites resorted to fertility rites in the Canaanite fashion, but that Israel as a whole is personified as a prostitute who had abandoned her true husband Yahweh in favor of Baal deities".¹⁶ Also J. Bright takes 2,20 as a reference to the sacred prostitution and the dedication of women to the god of fertility, hence bringing the sexual activity of women as well as men to the fore.¹⁷ Even when the metaphorical nature of this language in Jeremiah 2-3 is emphasized, the factual background for this image of the whore is considered to be the sexual activities connected with the Baal cult.¹⁸ C. L. Feinberg sees adultery as the main metaphor, and considers the harlotry to be spiritual, but ends: "it must not be forgotten that sexual immorality of the lowest order was always a part of this [i.e. Canaanite] so-called worship."¹⁹ S. Herrmann postulates an explicit link between the sexual rites in the Baal cult and the Hebrew term זנה: "Die Wendung auf jedem hohen Hügel und unter jedem grünen Baum" ist in Verbindung mit Fremdkult in mancherlei Variationen im Alten Testament verbreitet, sei es daß man an diesen Orten räuchert, opfert oder sich Sexualriten hingibt. Für

¹⁵ J. BRIGHT, *Jeremiah* (Anchor Bible, 21), Garden City NY, 1965, p. 15; P.C. CRAIGIE, P.H. KELLEY, J.F. DRINKARD, *Jeremiah 1-25* (Word Biblical Commentary, 26), Dallas Texas, 1991, p. 37; C.L. FEINBERG, *Jeremiah* (Expositor's Bible Commentary, 6), Grand Rapids MI, 1986, p. 393; S. HERRMANN, *Jeremia* (BKAT, 12/2), Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1990, p. 140; W.L. HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah 1. A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah Chapters 1-25* (Hermeneia), Philadelphia, 1986, p. 98; B.J. OOSTERHOFF, *Jeremia. Deel I: Jeremia 1-10* (Commentaar op het Oude Testament), Kampen, 1990, p. 118; J.A. THOMPSON, *The Book of Jeremiah* (New International Commentary on the Old Testament), Grand Rapids MI, 1980, p. 177; B.N. WAMBACQ, *Jeremias, Klaagliederen, Baruch, Brief van Jeremias* (De Boeken van het Oude Testament, 10), Roermond-Maaseik, 1957, p. 37.

¹⁶ W.L. HOLLADAY, *Jeremiah* (n. 15), p. 98.

¹⁷ J. BRIGHT, *Jeremiah* (n. 15), p. 15; J.A. THOMPSON, *The Book of Jeremiah* (n. 15), p. 177.

¹⁸ See e.g. B.N. WAMBACQ, *Jeremias* (n. 15), p. 37. B.J. Oosterhoff also takes the sacred prostitution as the "literal" meaning of Jer. 2,20 (next to a metaphorical reference to Israel as an adulterous woman). Cf. B.J. OOSTERHOFF, *Jeremia* (n. 15), p. 118. According to S. Erlandsson, the root זנה can, applied to the relationship between Israel and God, be used for Israel's abandonment of God, as well as for the pursuing of other gods. Occasionally, the verb זנה simultaneously indicates this illicit sexual intercourse and the serving of other gods (e.g. in his opinion Jer 5,7), see S. ERLANDSSON, art. cit. (n. 3), c. 613. G.H. Hall remarks, with a reference to Hos 4,13-14: "The idolatry being attacked was the Canaanite cult that Israel and Judah had adopted. If the cult included sacred sex, then the power of the metaphor was grounded in real sexual misconduct as well" (G. H. HALL, art. cit. (n. 3), p. 1124).

¹⁹ C.L. FEINBERG, *Jeremiah* (n. 15), p. 393.

*letzteres steht das Wort זָנָה, das nicht nur den Fremdkult allgemein umschreibt, sondern konkrete Handlungen ins Auge faßt.*²⁰

All these commentaries betray an overall consensus that the image of the whore stands for the abandonment of YHWH, and that the "whore" is a suitable expression of the author's concept of Israel because of an illicit sexual activity which is present both in the actual behaviour of the people and in the image of the whore. Yet, precisely this link between זָנָה and the fertility cult, and often even the very existence of a sacred prostitution in Canaan, is questioned in more recent literature.

In the next section, I will examine the actual sexual behaviour of the Israelites, as portrayed in Jeremiah, in order to examine the plausibility that it was the sexual behaviour in the context of the Baal cult which makes of the whore an appropriate image for Israel in this prophetic text.

3. THE ACCUSATIONS OF ACTUAL ILLICIT SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR IN JEREMIAH

As said before, the image of the whore is considered appropriate because of the alleged sexual behaviour of the Israelites in the context of the cult for other deities. The hills and the green trees are the site of this cult, as is common in Old Testament texts, and made apparent by Jeremiah 3,13 and 13,27. Yet, is the metaphorical description of Israel playing the whore at that location a convincing proof that the Israelites engaged themselves there in illicit sexual activities? In Hosea 4,13-14, the service of other deities, especially the sacrificing, may go together with forbidden sexual behaviour.²¹ However, is this the case as well in Jeremiah?

On several occasions, the prophet accuses the people in the name of God of having illicit sexual relationships. The location, however, is not the shrine on the hills or under the green trees, but the brothels (Jer 5,7, literally: the house of the harlots). Visiting the brothels is put on the same level as committing adultery (זָנָה, Jer 5,7). Moreover, these adulterous men are described as "well-fed lusty stallions, each neighing for his neighbour's wife" (Jer 5,8 RSV). The combination of זָנָה, commit adultery and אִשֵּׁת רֵעֵהוּ, his neighbour's wife, reminds of the laws regulating the sexual life of the Israelites in Leviticus 20: "if a man commits adultery with the wife of his neighbour, both the adulterer and the adulteress shall be put to death" (Lev 20,10 RSV). Hence, the accusation is against the transgression of God's law rather than against the service of other gods. In Jeremiah 7,9, committing adultery is one of the four transgressions of the Ten Commandments mentioned, the others being stealing, murdering and swearing falsely (cf. Exod 20,14-16; Deut 5,17-20). Together with burn offerings for Baal and the following of other gods, it portrays the abomination the people commit. Though in this context indeed the service of other gods is mentioned, the placing of the sexual misconduct in line with other crimes against God's commandments, suggests again a transgression of God's law rather than an indication that this sexual offence was committed during the burn offerings or in the context of the service of other gods. In Jeremiah 9,2, the people are considered adulterous and treacherous. Again, the emphasis is on untrustworthiness and falseness rather than on sexual misconduct in the context of a Canaanite cult. The prophetic word concerning the prophets (Jer 23) suggests that the land is full of adulterers (v. 10). Especially the prophets of Jerusalem are attacked for committing

²⁰ S. HERRMANN, *Jeremia* (n. 15), p. 140 (italics mine).

²¹ Strictly speaking, it is also possible that the women connected to both actions of the men are not to be identified. The men are then accused of visiting the harlots on the one hand, and of offering with female temple servants (hence: in a not accepted way) on the other hand.

adultery and "walking in lies". Moreover they support those who do evil, so that nobody repents. Again, this is to be set in the context of true YHWH service rather than in the context of some obscure sexual rite in the Baal cult.

We can conclude, that neither the location, nor the description of the nature of the sexual offence fits the idea that the sexual behaviour in the context of the Canaanite cult on the hills and under the green trees is the link to the image of Israel as the "whore". The actual sexual misbehaviour is that of Israelite men, committing adultery, which is seen as a transgression of God's law. Hence, it is unlikely that for the author(s) of the book Jeremiah actual sexual activity in the context of the Baal cult was the obvious link to use the metaphor of the whore. Yet, how come this metaphor still fitted the overall message of this book?

4. THE CONTEXT OF THE METAPHOR OF THE WHORE IN JEREMIAH

All references to the whore and the whoring (in metaphorical sense, hence not including Jer 5,7) are found in chapters 2 and 3 of Jeremiah. Four of them occur in the prophetic word to the house of Jacob (Jer 2,4-3,5), and three in the word of God during the reign of Josiah (Jer 3,6-20, especially vv. 6-10). The prophetic word to the house of Jacob sets the stage for Jeremiah 3,6-10. Therefore, this passage must be seen together with - and against the background of - the foregoing.

4.1. *The Immediate Context of the Whore and the Whoring*

The prophetic word to the house of Jacob and the families of the house of Israel (Jer 2,4-3,5) is a remarkable passage. The text is vivid. The people are spoken about and spoken to, rhetorical questions are posed, the accused are quoted, and God refers to what he has done in the past. As A. R. P. Diamond and K. M. O'Connor remarked,²² the passage contains a sequence of "masculine" (2,4-16; 2,26-32) and "feminine" blocks (2,17-25; 2,33-3,5). The accusation that the people are whoring under the green trees (2,20); are involved (וְנָה) in love affairs with many lovers (3,1) and have the forehead of a whore (3,5) all occur in both "feminine" blocks. The people are addressed in the second feminine singular. In other words, they are depicted as a woman. Despite the alternation in grammatical gender, the prophetic word forms a clear unity, both formally and contentwise. Each block contains rhetorical questions, direct addresses, and quotations. Though several images are used, the thematic line remains the same: male and female Israel is accused of abandonment of YHWH and of preferring other relationships.²³ This double accusation comes explicitly and expressively to the fore in Jeremiah 2,13: "For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns, that can hold no water" (RSV). Because of this unity in form and content, the reference to the whore is to be interpreted against the background of the complete passage. Since Jeremiah 3,6-10 is building further on the images of the feminine blocks of Jeremiah 2,4-3,5, I will first put the occurrences of the root וְנָה in the immediate context of the three passages (Jer 2,17-25; 2,32-3,5; 3,6-10), to continue with the interpretation in the overall background of Jeremiah 2-3.

²² A. R. P. DIAMOND – K. M. O'CONNOR, *Unfaithful Passions: Coding Women Coding Men in Jeremiah 2-3*, in ID. ea. (eds), *Troubling Jeremiah* (JSOT.SS, 260), 1999, Sheffield, 123-145, p. 129.

²³ Cf. A. R. P. DIAMOND – K. M. O'CONNOR, *Unfaithful Passions* (n. 22), pp. 129-131.

4.1.1. Occurrences of זנה in the First "Feminine" Block (Jer 2,17-25)

The first "feminine" block in Jeremiah 2,4-3,5, Jeremiah 2,17-25,²⁴ contains one occurrence of the root זנה, namely the feminine participle in verse 20.

The whore is one in a series of images. Israel behaves as obstinately as an ox, is whoring under every green tree, degenerated into a wild vine, and is having such stains that even a thorough washing can not wash it away. The idea of pollution and the sexual behaviour implied in the image of the whore is taken up by the next sentences. Going after the Baals is what caused the defilement of female Israel. Her behaviour is here compared to a camel and a lusty ass.

How is the image of the whore useful in this direct context? A whore is, as an ox bursted out of its bonds, not bound: not by the sexual code of marriage, not even to loyalty to one partner. The image of the choice vine, planted by God, contrasts this idea of complete freedom. It is God who planted Israel. Though marvellous unto the God who planted her, she degenerated. The degeneration is depicted as ineffaceable stains. The image of a washing woman, trying hard to remove those stains, contrasts with the declaration: I am not defiled. This denial of defilement is explicated by the following sentence: I have not gone after the Baals. The image of the camel and ass compare the going after the Baals with lusty animals: not restrainable (cf. the ox breaking out, though this image has no sexual connotations) and easy to find. Despite all warnings is Israel determined to follow the strange (gods): it is them she loves. The sexual image stands for the following of other gods than YHWH. The nature of the concrete link between the image of the whore and the foregoing is, however, not sexual. It is being unbound that links the ox bursting out of its bonds and the whore. The sentence "I will not serve" is in this context quite ambiguous. In the image of an animal breaking its bonds, it means that the animal refuses to work. Standing for Israel, it also means that Israel refuses to serve God. The image of the whore "working" on every hill and under every green tree, makes clear that this refusal is actually a shift in servitude: from YHWH towards the service of Baal at shrines on the hills.

4.1.2. Occurrences of זנה in the Second "Feminine" Block (Jer 2,32-3,5)

In the second "feminine" block, Jeremiah 2,32-3,5,²⁵ the root זנה occurs three times. Jeremiah 3,1 begins with a rhetorical question. Would a man return to his repudiated wife once she belongs to another? The answer obviously should be "no" (cf. Deut 24,1-4). A new case is presented: Israel played the harlot (זונה) with many lovers and she would come back to God? The reasoning is a fortiori. If a man does not turn towards his former wife, even if the woman belonged to only one (new) partner, the woman who was romantically involved with many lovers certainly cannot return to her former husband. In the first case, the land would be polluted because of the husband returned to his first wife. In the second case, the land is already polluted because of the harlotry (זנות) and evil of the woman (v. 2). The verb זנה, with the land as object, occurs elsewhere in Jeremiah in metaphorical language only (3,9). In this passage, the pollution of the land is connected with the service of other gods, made of stone and wood. The idea of polluting the land is also present in Jeremiah 16,18 (with the verb חלל). The

²⁴ Jer 2,17 is actually a transitory verse: the verb form is masculine. The following preposition with suffix can be both masculine (with altered vocalisation because of the accent) or feminine. The second part of the verse is feminine.

²⁵ Jer 2,32 is a transitory verse: the forgetting of the people (masculine) is compared with the forgetting of a young woman and bride (feminine).

people polluted the land with the "carcasses of their detestable idols (RSV)". Since the whore is whoring on all the hills and under every green tree (Jer 2,20), which are exactly the locations of the altars and pillars (Jer 13,27), the harlotry which pollutes the land, may indicate the placing of altars and pillars or the service of other gods. Outside the book of Jeremiah the verb חָנַף, with the land as direct object occurs only twice (Num 35,33; Ps 106,38). The land is in those instances polluted by blood shed. This may also be implied in the "evil" of female Israel, since she was already accused of having the blood of the innocent on her clothes (Jer 2,34).

The last occurrence of זָנָה in this block is in verse 3. Female Israel is accused to have the forehead of a whore, which is elaborated as a refusal to be ashamed. Apparently, the forehead functions here as a mirror of the heart (cf. Ezek 3,7-9). Since God provides the rain (cf. Jer 5,24; 14,22), the lack of rain is seen as a punishment (cf. Jer 5,25). Yet, female Israel refuses to admit her guilt or even to be ashamed. To the author(s) of Jeremiah, this seems to be a typical attitude of a prostitute. Shame is the appropriate feeling when one is guilty. Though a whore is acting against the normative sex code, she is not ashamed. Lack of shame will lead to God's punishment (Jer 6,13-15; 8,11-12). Here, God has already disciplined the people (cf. Jer 2,30), and still they are not ashamed.

4.1.3. Occurrences of זָנָה in Jeremiah 3,6-10

In Jeremiah 3,6, God speaks to the prophet, with a comparative comment on Israel and Judah as wives of the divine husband. Several images of the feminine blocks of the previous prophetic word are taken up. Israel played the harlot (זָנָה) on every hill, under every green tree (Jer 3,6; cf. 2,20). Though God said her to return/to repent (שׁוּבָה), she did not return/repent. Verse 8 takes up again the image of the man sending away his wife. This time, a reason for the divorce is given: adultery. Though the consequence of adultery is divorce, Judah did not fear but played the harlot (זָנָה) as well. Again, it is said that the harlotry (זָנָה) polluted the land (3,9; cf. 3,1-2). This time, the link between the harlotry and the false gods is made with a reference to Jeremiah 2,27: she committed adultery with stone and wood.

4.2. Thematic Message of Jeremiah 2-3

4.2.1. The Core Accusation: Taking Broken Cisterns for the Spring of Life

The prophetic word to the house of Israel (Jer 2,4-3,5) as well as Jeremiah 3,6-10, which builds further on this passage, repeats over and over again, in several images and diverging terminology, that the people chose to follow other deities and therefore abandoned YHWH. The people abandon God (עָזַב, 2,13.17.19), forget YHWH (שָׁכַח, 3,32), have no fear for him (וְלֹא פָחַדְתִּי אֵלַיךְ, 2,19), the people who handle the law do not know YHWH (יָדַע, 2,8). Not recognising YHWH as the Lord results in transgressions against the law of YHWH and against the poor (e.g. 2,8.29.34). Moreover, the choice against YHWH implies choices for others: Assyria and Egypt on the political level (Jer 2,18.36) and deities of stone and wood on the religious level (e.g. Jer 2,23.27). The shift in the confession of the people is a sign that they now acknowledge other deities. The people do no longer ask for YHWH (v. 6.8), but say to stone and wood "you are my father, you gave my birth" (v. 27). The confession of female Israel in 3,4-5 "you are my father" is mere lip service and does not prove to be sincere by acting consequently.

The language in Jeremiah 2-3 is remarkably spatial in nature. The double crime of the people, abandoning the fountain of living water in favour of broken cisterns, is mostly expressed in a

double movement: away from YHWH and towards other deities (or political powers). Verbs expressing such a movement are *הלך*, *עזב*, and *פנה*. The people go after worthlessness (Jer 2,5-6). Priests go after things without profit (2,8). The people walk after Baal and decide to go after the strange gods they love (2,23.25). Female Israel goes in order to play the harlot (3,6.8). The people refuse to go back to God (2,32); abandon YHWH (2,13.17.19), and turn their back to God instead of their faces (2,27). Other spatial images are the challenge of God to travel to Cyprus and Kedar to see whether a nation ever changed its gods (2,10); the way as image for the political move towards Assyria and Egypt (2,18.36) or for the moral behaviour in general (2,33); or more specifically the ways where the whore is waiting (3,2); and the image of the camel/ass which can easily be found (2,23-24).

4.2.2. *God's Movements Towards the People*

Not only the behaviour of the people, but also that of God is expressed in spatial terms. Whereas the attitude of the people is fairly constant throughout the generations, the behaviour of God shifts. At first, God is the one who made his people go out of Egypt (עלה, 2,6) and go through the desert (הלך, 2,6); who brought them into a plentiful land (בוא, 2,7) and who is still leading his people when they abandon him (הלך, 2,17). Now that the people have abandoned God, God portrays a different reaction. When called upon in times of distress, YHWH refuses to arise: let the gods you made stand up and save you! (קום־שע, 2,27-28). Jeremiah 3,1 implicitly compares YHWH with a husband who sends away (שלח) his wife, and suggests that YHWH will not return to his repudiated wife (שיב). At this point, the possibility of a return of Israel towards YHWH is mentioned, but rejected, since she played the harlot with many lovers. Moreover, she has the forehead of a whore. Despite the warning of God, she refuses to be ashamed, despite her seemingly remorseful words, she keeps on doing evil things. The most extreme situation has now been reached: God far away from his people, the people far away of their God.

4.2.3. *The Required Shift: Turn Back, You Who Were Turned Away*

The words of God towards Jeremiah in the days of Josiah (Jer 3,6-20) take up the lead of the foregoing passage, but bring in a new perspective: the possibility of the return/repentance of Israel and of a forgiving God. As said before, Jeremiah 3,6-10 takes up the comparison between YHWH/Israel and the divorced couple of Jeremiah 3,1. Yet, whereas the idea of the husband returning to his repudiated wife once she belongs to another, and a fortiori the idea that the whoring Israel could return to YHWH is rejected in verse 1, the whoring of Israel is no reason not to come back in verse 7. God actually hopes that she would come back. To the woman who is turned away (שיב) from him, he says: come back (שוב)! Which she does not. Therefore, God sends Israel away and gives her a letter of divorce. Despite the fact that Judah saw all what happened, Judah did the same as Israel. Her return to YHWH was insincere (verse 10). This insincerity is judged as worse than the faithlessness of Israel. Therefore, the prophet may call Israel back. From verse 11 onwards, the language shift is complete. Not the accusations (though present), but the call for repentance and the promises for the future are predominant. The movement of return/repentance (שוב) of the people will coincide with God's shift towards leading again his people. Israel, Judah and even the nations will be brought back towards Jerusalem/God. The theme of repentance is expressed in spatial terms, as was the theme of abandonment: שוב (3,12.14.19.22); בוא (3,14.18), and הלך (3,17-18).

4.2.4. Conclusion: Theme and Narrative line of Jeremiah 2-3

The core theme of Jeremiah seems to be "the choice of God", in a double meaning: the choice of the people for or against God; and the choice of God for or against the people. The people chose against God and drifted further and further away and are now called upon to return/repent. God, who always led the people on their ways, shifts from a refusal to save it once more towards the sending away of the people. Yet, this is not the end of the movement: God calls for repentance, and will in the future lead his people. God truly remembers his people (Jer 2,1).

This theme of the "choice of God", mainly expressed in spatial language, also comes to the fore in many evocative images. Among these images is that of the whore. How come this image was such a suitable image in line of this general theme?

4.3. Taking Broken Cisterns for the Fountain of Living Water: the Whore and the Choice for or against YHWH

Thusfar, I argued that the background of the image of the whore in the book of Jeremiah is not the alleged sexual activity on the hills and under the trees. Among many other offences, the people do transgress God's law by their sexual activity. Yet, this is not described as the partaking in a fertility cult on the hills, but rather as a transgression of the Ten Commandments. If not the sexual aspect made the image useful, what did? I argued that the image of the whore must be seen against the background of the text in which it occurs, namely Jeremiah 2-3.

Does this text reveal why this image of the whore was appropriate to be fitted in the overall theme?

Chapters 2-3 of Jeremiah have as a main theme the choice of God. One aspect of this choice is the choice of Israel: for or against YHWH. This choice is vividly expressed in several images, such as the broken cisterns versus the fountain of living water and the whoring after strange gods versus the return of the repudiated wife towards her Husband. It seems to me, that the image of the whore suits the theme well because of both its connotations and its logical-grammatical structure. To start with the latter: I showed, how the choice for or against God mainly is expressed in spatial terms: moving to or away from YHWH. Whoring is in the Hebrew Bible also seen as a movement. The idea of *נָה* is often expressed in a construction that points out the abandoned partner (with *בֵּן*) or the new partner(s) (e.g. with *אֶחָדִי*).²⁶ In other words, *נָה* expresses a movement away from or towards someone. In Jeremiah 2,20-25, the image of the whore is elaborated by the comparison with a lusting animal. The whore Israel walked after Baal, after strange gods. Playing the harlot describes vividly how the people chose against YHWH in favour of other deities. Yet, not only the inherent logical and grammatical structure "towards/away from" suits the theme. Several connotations of *נָה* made this terminology interesting for the author(s) of Jeremiah. First of all, the root *נָה* has – at least at the stage of the prophetic literature- a negative connotation. It is a transgression against the sexual (marital) code. Consequently, the root *נָה* does not express Israel's choice for other gods in a neutral way. On the contrary: precisely the use of *נָה* for this choice already indicates how reprehensible this action is. Moreover, the harlot is not bound to one person or place. Therefore, one and the same image can be used to express several aspects of the same reality. The image of the whore indicates how Israel refused to be bound to one deity, YHWH, but broke out of her bonds like an ox and, like a lusting wild ass cannot be

²⁶ S. ERLANDSSON, art. cit. (n. 3), c. 613; J. KÜHLEWEIN, art. cit. (n. 3), cc. 518-519.

restrained. The harlot chooses her own (and many) lovers: the strange gods, those are the ones she will follow. Israel can hardly be further off from her former attitude of following YHWH in the desert as a bride her broom (cf. Jer 2,1). The prostitutes "work" in their houses (Jer 5,9). As such, whoring could happen everywhere, as Jeremiah 2,2 suggests: the whore is waiting for her lovers on the ways (cf. Tamar in Genesis 38). Since the service for those deities took place on the hills, that is where the activity of the "whore" Israel is situated. A last aspect that is ascribed to the whore and that fits the behaviour of the people, is the shamelessness. As a whore, refusing to be ashamed, the people call upon YHWH but simultaneously commit evil.

5. CONCLUSION

The image of the whore in Jeremiah is often mentioned with a reference at the alleged sexual activity in the context of a fertility cult, which would take place on the hills and under the green trees. However, I showed that this is an unlikely background for the image in Jeremiah. The actual sexual transgressions Israel is accused of, are not linked with a heathen cult, but described as a crime against the Ten Commandments. Moreover, they do not take place on the hills, but in the houses of the whores. On top of that, recent studies of the so-called "cult prostitution" argue that systematic prostitution in the context of a fertility cult is absent in Canaan. Consequently, I argued that the text of Jeremiah 2-3 should provide the logical background for the image of the whore, since that is the context in which this image occurs. It turned out how suitable this image actually is. It suits the double accusation that Israel moved away from God, to turn to other deities. In this way, it builds the theme: the choice of God. This theme is expressed in spatial language. Since a certain movement is inherent to the image of the whore (away from one partner, towards other partners), this is an appropriate image. Moreover, it contains several connotations which suit the context as well: the whore is not bound to one partner or to one place; she is said to be shameless; and above all: the terminology of the whore is fundamentally negative, since it is principally a transgression of the normative sexual code. Therefore, the image of the whore is a very appropriate metaphor to indicate the movement away from the Husband and towards other deities. It is another powerful image to indicate the double crime of the people: they have taken broken cisterns for the Fountain of Living Water.

In a first step, some current interpretations of the whoring in Jeremiah are presented. Afterwards, a survey is offered of the recent interpretations of the term זנה, especially as far as the cult connection is concerned. Thereafter, the actual sexual transgressions that Israel is accused of in non-metaphoric passages of Jeremiah will be analysed. Is this illicit sexual activity connected with the Baal cult? If the link between זנה and the cult is rather loose, and the actual illicit sexual activity in Jeremiah not connected with any cult service, it is unlikely that for the book of Jeremiah prostitution in the context of the cult for foreign gods is the logical background of the usage of this metaphor. I will therefore argue that the metaphor of a whore suited the conceptualisation of Israel for another reason. The image of a whore corresponds well to the overall message of Jeremiah 2-3: the people abandoned JHWH in favour of powerless gods.