Story and History

The Kings of Israel and Judah in Context

edited by

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1. Biblical Historiography:
the So-called Deuteronomistic History

When one begins to read the Hebrew Bible, one first reads a coherent narrative starting with the book of Genesis and ending with the last chapter of the books of Kings. This is a long history ranging from the creation of the world and of man to the destruction of Jerusalem and the deportation of the Judeans to Babylon, going through the history of the Ancestors of Israel, the origins of the people in Egypt and their exodus under the leadership of Moses, their mediator and legislator. The narrative continues with the conquest of the land of Canaan, the story of the installation of the monarchy and the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah until the end of Israel and Judah. It is only when we reach the book of Isaiah that we see a rupture. In Isaiah 1:1 the chronological progression is abandoned: we are back to the period of the two kingdoms. The literary genre also changes: instead of a narrative, one now finds prophetic oracles. Consequently, it is possible to consider the books of Genesis to Kings as a literary unit, which is organized according to a progressive chronology that binds together the books from Genesis to Kings as an "Enneateuch."[2]

However, if we consider the three part-canon of the Hebrew Bible, the first main break takes place in Deut 34. This chapter relates Moses' death and concludes the Torah. However, at the narrative level, the end of the Torah is not really a conclusion, since the promise of the land that constitutes the *leitmotif* of the Pentateuch is not fulfilled. The final chapter of the Pentateuch indicates that the narrative has not come to its end, since Deut 34:9 mentions Moses' successor, thus indicating a continuation in the book of Joshua, where the Israelites will actually take possession of the land. It is therefore logical to regard Joshua as the necessary conclusion of the narrative of the first five books of the Bible and to support the concept of a Hexateuch. The idea of a Hexateuch is probably not a modern one, but was already the idea of the redactors who added the second

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[1] Parts of this article are published in a slightly different form in Römer 2016, 375–87.
[2] Gosse 2000, 513–26.

farewell speech of Joshua in chapter 24. For that reason one may consider that there was indeed a competition between two parties in the middle of the Persian period about the extent of the Torah, a competition that was finally won by the Pentateuchal faction.[3]

Inside the Pentateuch, there is a break between the first four books and Deuteronomy, which contains a new introduction conceived to mark the beginning of another literary unit. In several passages of this "testament of Moses" the author refers to the conquest of the land, to the disobedience of the people vis-à-vis YHWH, their god, to the history of kingship and to the forthcoming disaster: the deportation and dispersion of the addressees among other nations (Deut 28). Similarly, the baroque and repetitive style, vocabulary and syntax that support the conditional proposals and the exhortations are also found in the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings. Because of these similarities, Martin Noth had postulated the existence of a Deuteronomistic (Dtr) history or historiography (in German "*deuteronomistisches Geschichtswerk*") that would have been written after the destruction of Jerusalem around 560 with the purpose of providing an etiology of the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of the Judeans.[4] The reason given in the "Deuteronomistic History"[5] is the inability of the people and above all of most of these kings to comply with the laws stated in Deuteronomy.

These different literary compositions, Pentateuch, Hexateuch, Enneateuch and Deuteronomistic History, each construct a story in its own way. For the Pentateuch and the Hexateuch, this history is a mythical history, as it has been recognized since Spinoza[6] and de Wette[7] who have shown that these compositions provide little information to the historian. The Pentateuch presents itself as a sort of biography of Moses (the books of Exodus and Deuteronomy are framed by his birth and death) and attaches all the laws to some mythical origins, in the desert, in a no man's land to signify that the rites and prescriptions that are the basis of Judaism depend neither on political autonomy nor on the possession of a land. Unlike the Pentateuch, which ends with the death of Moses outside the land, the literary logic of the Hexateuch focuses on the necessity of possessing the land, for it ends with the book of Joshua and the conquest of the land. But this construction is also mythological because there is no doubt that the conquest recorded in this book does not reflect historical reality but is an ideological

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[3] Fore more details see Römer and Brettler 2000, 401–19.

[4] Noth 1943. English translation: idem 1991.

[5] This theory has been modified and challenged. For an overview about the current state of discussion, see Römer 2015a, 43–66.

[6] Spinoza 1951.

[7] De Wette 1807.

construction inspired by literary and iconographic conventions borrowed from the Assyrians and the Babylonians.[8]

How should one qualify the presentation of Israel's history in the so-called "Deuteronomistic History"[9]? The use of the term "historiography" to describe this composition suggests in fact that its author (or rather its authors) wanted to be a historian (or historians). The Deuteronomists of the Babylonian or Persian periods, descendants of the scribes and other officials of the Judean court, were obsessed with the end of the monarchy and the deportation of the elites of Judah. They therefore sought to explain the end of the state of Judah and to do this they built a story from the beginnings under Moses to the destruction of Jerusalem and the deportation of the aristocracy (Deut 1–2 Kgs 25). They construct a coherent history, which they divide into periods (Moses, conquest, Judges, the advent of the monarchy, the two kingdoms, the history of Judah from the fall of Samaria to that of Jerusalem) and present all the negative events that occur in this history – the division of the Davidic dynasty or the Assyrian and Babylonian invasions – as "logical" consequences of the disobedience of the people and their leaders towards YHWH's will. YHWH himself provoked the Babylonian invasion (2 Kgs 24:3 and 20) to punish Judah for the worship of other deities.

There are in Antiquity other examples of a link between a crisis situation and historiography. Thucidydes wrote the *History of the Peloponnesian War* in the 5th century BCE, for those "who desire an exact knowledge of the past to help them to interpret the future" (1.22). In the same way Herodotus composed his *Inquiry* in order to give the reasons for the Persian wars (cf. the introduction of Book I). In the 3rd century BCE, the Babylonian priest Berossus wrote down a historical account of the Babylonian civilization in response to the cultural crisis induced by the spread of Hellenism.[10] To characterize the Deuteronomistic History as historiography is questionable but, after all, it is a question of definition: it is not about historiography or history in the Greek sense (the biblical author does not speak in the first person and does not "investigate") nor in the modern sense as Ranke notes ("how did it actually happen?").[11] Marc Brettler is right to point out that "no concept of history as dependent on historicity applies profitably to the biblical corpus."[12]

The aim of the Deuteronomistic historiography is certainly not historicity in a modern sense of the term. It is a very partial history from a "Southern", Judean

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[8] Younger 1990.

[9] In German, Noth used the term "Geschichtswerk" that can be translated as "historical work."

[10] For similarities between Berossus and biblical historiography see Gmirkin 2006.

[11] Perhaps this famous statement ("wie es eigentlich gewesen") should rather be translated "as it was essentially," see Evans 2000, 14.

[12] Brettler 1995, 11. See also Knauf 1991, 26–64.

perspective and equally according to an ideology that is based on cult central-ization (with Jerusalem as the "chosen place") and monolatry (YHWH is the only god to be worshipped).

2. Rewriting the Reigns of "Bad" Kings

This means that the Judean redactors of the books of Kings understood Israel, the Northern kingdom, as "deviant" from the very beginning. They also con-sidered several southern kings as "doing the evil in the eyes of YHWH", espe-cially Manasseh, who is presented in 2 Kings 21 as the main responsible for the destruction of Jerusalem and the Babylonian exile.[13]

Manasseh, son of Hezekiah, had a very long reign of 55 years, but we have remarkably few details about it. For the editors of the books of Kings, he is the very model of a bad king who did everything 'that displeased YHWH'. Histor-ically speaking, his acceptance of Assyrian dominance guaranteed a period of calm and stability for the kingdom of Judah. He probably rebuilt Lachish and put in place a series of fortresses dependent on Jerusalem and it is possible that Assurbanipal restored to him some annexed Judean territory, notably the She-phelah, as a reward for his loyalty.[14] It is even possible that certain of the most remarkable achievements which the Bible attributes to Hezekiah are actually his doing. Ernst Axel Knauf claims that the construction of the tunnel that ac-cording to the biblical account was built by Hezekiah would have taken a very long time, so long in fact that it would not have been possible for it to have been initiated and completed during the reign of Hezekiah. Therefore it was probably constructed under Manasseh, who wanted to use it to irrigate a royal garden on the Assyrian model.[15] Since the editors of the books of Kings utterly detested Manasseh, it makes perfect sense of them to have attributed these achievements to his successor. This thesis gains increased plausibility if Hezekiah did not in fact begin his reign until 715 BCE.[16]

A similar phenomenon can be observed in Israel with regard to Omri and to Jeroboam II. Omri, who is considered by the Assyrians as the founder of the Northern kingdom and who built Samaria as the capital of Israel, also receives little attention in the books of Kings. Although he ruled twelve years, 1 Kings 16:15–28 only reports his putsch against Zimri and his fortification of Samaria. For the Deuteronomists "Omri did what was evil in the sight of YHWH; he did more evil than all who were before him" (v. 25) perhaps because he also built a

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[13] This blame on Manasseh may be an insert due to a dtr revision from the Persian period, see Schmid 1997, 87–99.

[14] Finkelstein and Na'aman 2004, 60–79 and Fantalkin 2004, 245–61.

[15] Knauf 2005, 164–88.

[16] For the problem of the beginning of Hezekiah's reign see Young 2012, 9–32.

temple in Samaria. We may observe a similar phenomenon in regard to Hezekiah and Manasseh. The redactors of Kings transferred the building activities of Omri to king Solomon, especially if we follow the so-called low chronology of Israel Finkelstein.[17]

The description of the reign of Jeroboam II, in 2 Kings 14 is again astonishingly short, despite the fact that he ruled for about forty years:

In the fifteenth year of King Amaziah son of Joash of Judah, King Jeroboam son of Joash of Israel began to reign in Samaria; he reigned forty-one years. 24 He did what was evil in the sight of YHWH; he did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he caused Israel to sin. 25 He restored the border of Israel from Lebo-hamath as far as the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of YHWH, the God of Israel, which he spoke by his servant Jonah son of Amittai, the prophet, who was from Gath-hepher. 26 For YHWH saw that the distress of Israel was very bitter; there was no one left, bond or free, and no one to help Israel. 27 But YHWH had not said that he would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven, so he saved them by the hand of Jeroboam son of Joash. 28 Now the rest of the acts of Jeroboam, and all that he did, and his might, how he fought, and how he recovered for Israel Damascus and Hamath, which had belonged to Judah,[18] are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel? 29 Jeroboam slept with his ancestors, the kings of Israel; his son Zechariah succeeded him (2 Kgs 14:23–29).

Forty-one years of rule are summarized in seven verses, although Jerobom's reign is the longest of the Northern kingdom. His reign is presented tersely and the passage does not give much information about the king's political and military achievements.

The note begins with the statement that Jeroboam did evil in the eyes of YHWH and that he imitated the sins of Jeroboam, his namesake. But the nature of this "evil" is not explained. If we follow the biblical account he did continue the sins of the "first Jeroboam", which are the cultic activities in Dan and Bethel (see below).

On the other hand one may observe a certain embarrassment, especially in v. 26–27 which are often considered to be the work of a later (post-dtr) redactor.[19] In this passage the long reign of Jeroboam is justified with the idea that Jeroboam was a tool of YHWH by whom he saved Israel from her enemies. V. 27 apparently contradicts prophetic announcements that YHWH would destroy the North, which may be a critical allusion to the prophecies of Amos,[20] although this is not a clear quotation. The expression "*mḥh šm*", which is used in v. 27, occurs elsewhere only in Deut 9:14 and 29:19. The latter passage appears

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[17] Finkelstein 2000, 114–38 and idem 2003, 81–101.

[18] This idea is strange. It was often argued that this note refers to Iaudi/Sam'al (Zinjirli), as e. g. Würthwein 1984, 375. But the Akkadian references to Iaudi refer to the kingdom of Judah. Therefore, one may speculate whether the original text here was "Israel", a term which was later changed into Judah by a Iudean glossator, cf. Cogan and Tadmor 1988, 162.

[19] Würthwein 1984, 375–76.

[20] Crüsemann 1971, 57–63; Hasegawa 2007, 92–102.

in the context of curses,[21] so that 2 Kings 14:17 can also allude to these texts, claiming that these curses did not (yet) apply to the time of Jeroboam.

A similar insertion concerning YHWH's concern for the North also occurs in 2 Kings 13:23 where Jeoahaz's victory against the Arameans is also explained with YHWH's compassion and his covenant with the Patriarchs. This verse is quite clearly another addition, underlining YHWH's concern for the Northern Kingdom:

22 Now King Hazael of Aram oppressed Israel all the days of Jehoahaz. 23 But YHWH was gracious to them and had compassion on them; he turned toward them, because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and would not destroy them; nor has he banished them from his presence until now.[22] 24 When King Hazael of Aram died, his son Ben-hadad succeeded him. 25 Then Jehoash son of Jehoahaz took again from Ben-hadad son of Hazael the towns that he had taken from his father Jehoahaz in war. Three times Joash defeated him and recovered the towns of Israel.

V. 23 interrupts the account of the military conflict with the Arameans and presupposes the priestly texts of the Pentateuch, according to which the covenant with the Patriarch is the reason for YHWH's intervention in favor of the Israelites.[23] Those late redactors wanted to emphasize the fact that the military successes of Jehoahaz and Jeroboam were only possible because of YHWH's help, although they were rulers of the Northern kingdom.

Turning back to the notation on Jeroboam II, we see that he is credited with a territorial restoration that recalls the borders of the "United Monarchy" under David and Salomon (for Lebo-Hamath cf. 1 Kgs 8:65). This could mean that Jeroboam is presented here as "achieving the glories of David and Solomon."[24] However, the idea that Lebo-hamath is the Northern boundary of Israel appears mostly in late texts from the Persian period such as Num 13:21; 34:8, Josh 13:5, Ezek 47:20, 48:1; 1Chr 13:5, 2 Chr 7:8. For this reason Volkmar Fritz and other have considered V. 25 to also be a later addition[25] since it anticipates the notation in v. 28 which seems to be an older tradition according to which Jeroboam extended the Israelite borders in the North controlling Aramean territories. According to Israel Finkelstein and others this information cannot be taken as historical; it seems quite clear however that Israelite territorial gains in the north are evident:[26] Amos 6:13 presupposes that Karnaim became Israelite in the first

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[21] "All the curses written in this book will descend on them, and YHWH will blot out their names from under heaven."

[22] The expression עד־עתה may refer to the fact that this rejection will only happen in 2 Kings 17 (see especially v. 20; Würthwein 1984, 369), or if this insertion comes from a Persian period redactor, it may even be a claim that Israel/Samaria are finally not definitively abandoned by YHWH.

[23] See Römer 1990, 387–88.

[24] Cogan and Tadmor 1988, 162.

[25] Fritz 2003, 324.

[26] Finkelstein 2011b, 227–42.

half of the 8th century and the domination of Israel over the Upper Jordan valley is shown by 2 Kings 15:29 which describes the campaign of Tiglath-Pileser in this region (732 BCE). Archaeology has shown that in the first half of the 8th century BCE Israel (probably under Jeroboam II) took over Dan and retook Hazor from Aram. According to Israel Finkelstein: "This was the first time that the 9th century BCE Aramaean towns of Dan, Abel-beth-maacah … and Bethsaida shifted hands to the Northern Kingdom",[27] so that under Jeroboam II Israel reached its maximal territorial extension.

The deuteronomistic editors of 2 Kings 14:23.28–29 (if we admit that verses 25 and 26–27 are later additions) are astonishingly brief concerning Jeroboam II. They only mention his deed and strength and refer to the annals of the kings of Israel. This extremely short comment about the longest-ruling Israelite king may perhaps be explained by the fact that the Deuteronomists transferred events that happened under Jeroboam II to Jeroboam I. According to 1 Kings 12, Jeroboam built two sanctuaries in Bethel and Dan, in order to compete with the Temple in Jerusalem. However, the mention of Dan in 1 Kings 12 is intriguing. According to Eran Arie, Israel Finkelstein and others, Dan only became part of Israel in the 8th century.[28] According to Arie, Dan was destroyed at the end of late Iron I, and was apparently unoccupied during most of Iron IIA. It was later rebuilt by Hazael and was conquered by Israel for the first time around 800 BCE or somewhat later. If we follow this reconstruction, the golden calf story in 1 Kings 12 cannot be placed under Jeroboam I. This narrative is a polemical fiction that transfers an event from the time of Jeroboam II to the beginnings of the Northern kingdom. As Angelika Berlejung puts it, 1 Kings 12 does not contain "reliable historical information about the time of Jeroboam I, but reflects historical facts … of the time of Jeroboam II".[29]

For these reasons the narrative of 1 Kings 12:26–33 should be considered as a transfer from the time of Jeroboam II to the beginnings of the Northern kingdom. The establishment of Dan and Bethel as "border sanctuaries" would indeed fit well into the time of Jeroboam II. In regard to Bethel, one may quote the confrontation between Amos and Amaziah in Amos 7:10–17. Amaziah chases Amos, who announces Jeroboam's death in war and Israel's exile from Bethel by qualifying the place as "the king's sanctuary and the temple of the kingdom" (מקדש־מלך הוא ובית ממלכה הוא, v. 13).

The rise of Bethel as a state sanctuary can be supported by archaeological investigations. Finkelstein and Singer-Avitz have argued that in the first millennium BCE Bethel was settled in an important manner only during the 8th until the beginning of the 7th century and declined during the Babylonian and

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[27] Finkelstein 2011b, 241.
[28] Arie 2008, 6–64; Finkelstein 2011b, 230.
[29] Berlejung 2009, 1–42, 24.

Persian periods.[30] If 1 Kings 12 refers to Bethel as a religious center of the North, this fits neither into the 10th century nor satisfactorily into the Babylonian or Persian periods. "1 Kgs 12 re-projects the flourishing Bethel of Jeroboam II into the times of Jeroboam I."[31]

3. The Fall of Samaria in 722 BCE

From the 9th century onward, the influence of the Neo-Assyrian empire grew steadily in the Levant and under the reign of Tiglath-Pileser (745–727) all the kingdoms of Syria and Palestine were *de facto* under Assyrian domination. This was also the case for Israel, after Jeroboam II's death although it attempted on several occasions to oppose Assyrian domination.

According to 2 Kings 17, King Hosea of Israel sought support from an Egyptian ally named "So, king of Egypt." The identity of this character is strongly debated (there is no pharaoh of this name: is it the city of Saïs,[32] an allusion to Osorkon IV,[33] or simply a transcription of the Egyptian word for king [*nj-swt*]?[34]). The idea of soliciting help from Egypt seems plausible; such attempts are, moreover, criticized in the book of Hosea.

In 724 begins the siege of Samaria, which lasts about 3 years until the fall of the city in 722. This event is reported in the Hebrew Bible and in the Assyrian and Babylonian annals. According to the *Annals* of Sargon II, it was Sargon who captured the city, whereas according to the Hebrew Bible and the Babylonian Chronicles, the capture was the work of Salmanassar V. Given the difficulties that Sargon had encountered to seize power, it seems plausible that he attributed the capture of Samaria to himself for ideological reasons. Here, the Bible is apparently right:[35] the city was probably taken under Shalmaneser V, whereas Sargon then set up the administrative structure of Israel and incorporated it into the system of the Assyrian provinces, deporting a portion of the inhabitants of Samaria and reorganizing the city:

… With the power of the great gods … against them I fought. 27,280 people together with their chariots, and the gods in whom they trusted, as spoil I counted. With 200 chariots for [my] royal force from them I formed a unit. The rest of them I settled in the midst of Assyria. I repopulated Samerina more than before. People from countries, conquered by my hands, I brought in it. My commissioner I appointed as Governor over them. I counted them as Assyrians.[36]

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[30] Finkelstein and Singer-Avitz 2009, 33–48.

[31] Berlejung 2009, 23.

[32] Galpaz-Feller 2000, 338–47.

[33] Accordingly Schipper 1998, 71–84 and Kang 2010, 241–48.

[34] Thus among others Würthwein 1984, 392, n. 2.

[35] Macchi 1994, 88–91.

[36] Translation of the Nimrud Prism after Hallo 1997, 295–96.

The biblical indications concerning deportation and mixing of populations is broadly confirmed by Neo-Assyrian documents and iconography. After the deuteronomistic presentation of the fall of Samaria in 2 Kings 17, the authors or redactors of Kings are totally silent concerning what was going on in the former kingdom of Samaria after 722 BCE. The only thing later redactors of 2 Kings 17[37] acknowledge is the fact that the cult of YHWH continued, although they describe this cult as a syncretist one by telling a strange story about an invasion of lions sent by YHWH in order to reestablish his cult in Bethel. Although the author of this text can barely hide his negative attitude toward the sanctuary at Bethel, it is probable that this sanctuary continued to play some role even after the events of 722. The author of this episode in 2 Kings 17:24–28 clearly intends to put into relief the power of YHWH who kept watching over the continuity of his own cult. Some have thought that the invasion by lions was an actual historical event.[38] However this motif could just as well and even more easily be explained as an invention. In any case the author of this passage admits that the cult of YHWH continues in Samaria, despite the importation of other deities, most of whom are difficult to identify.[39]

4. Josiah's Reform

Contrary to the fall of Samaria, which allows us to compare biblical documentation with texts from the Ancient Near East, the case of Josiah's reform is more complicated because there is no direct extra-biblical evidence of such an event. The beginning of the reign of Josiah coincides more or less with the decline of the Assyrian empire. Around 627 BCE Babylon regains its independence and the Assyrians relax their presence in the Levant, which for a short time returns to Egyptian control. The biblical account of Josiah reign deals almost exclusively with the "reform" (rather, the political, economic and religious changes) that this king would have undertaken.

2 Kings 22–23 narrates the discovery of a scroll during renovation works in the Temple of Jerusalem in the eighteenth year of the reign of Josiah. This discovery by the priest Hilkiah and the reading of the scroll to the king by the high official Shaphan provokes a very strong reaction. Josiah seems seriously affected by the curses contained in the discovered scroll. He sends Hilkiah, Shaphan and other officials to consult the prophetess Huldah on the meaning of the scroll. She confirms the divine judgment that YHWH will exercise against Jerusalem and Judah. Concerning King Josiah, she conveys a more positive message: since he

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[37] Kartveit 2014, 31–44.
[38] For instance Gray 1977, 594.
[39] For more details see Römer 2015, 173–79.

was attentive to the words of the book, he will be buried in peace (2 Kgs 22: 18–20). After his officials had conveyed the message, Josiah himself read the book to "all the people" and concluded a treaty with YHWH (2 Kgs 23:1–3). Josiah then implements important cultural changes in Jerusalem and Judah. He eliminates the religious symbols and the priests of the divinities Baal and Asherah, as well as the celestial army, implying the abandonment of representations of the Sun, the Moon and the Stars. He profanes and destroys the *bamôt,* open-air sanctuaries (the "high places") devoted to YHWH, as well as the *tophet*, apparently a site of human sacrifices. According to 2 Kings 23:15, he even demolishes the altar of Bethel, the former main Yahwistic sanctuary of Israel. The acts of destruction have their positive counterpart in the conclusion of a (new) treaty between YHWH and the people, and in the celebration of a Passover (verses 21–23). The two rites are celebrated by Josiah and presented as prescriptions of the discovered scroll.

The book in the Temple is traditionally identified with the book of Deuteronomy, since the acts of Josiah and the centralization ideology of his reform correspond to the prescriptions of the Deuteronomic Law. The story of 2 Kings 22–23 certainly cannot be taken naively as an eyewitness report of the so-called reform. First we have to remember that 2 Kings 22 is constructed as a parallel to king Jehoash's restoration of the Temple in 2 Kings 12. Interestingly Jehoash is said to have begun his reign at the age of seven, so that one may wonder whether the information that Josiah was eight years when he mounted the throne (23:1) is dependent on 2 Kings 12:1. The *topos* of the discovery of a book is very common in ancient literature,[40] and is generally used to legitimize changes to the religious, economic and political order.

Is the whole story of the Josiah's reform therefore a literary invention?[41] It is true that we have no first-hand evidence of the events that are described in 2 Kings 22–23. There are, however, some indications of political and religious changes in Judah at the end of the 7th century BCE, that can be used in order to give some plausibility to religious, political and economic changes under the reign of Josiah.[42]

According to 2 Kings 23, Josiah eliminates many elements relating to an astral cult, an important aspect of the Neo-Assyrian religious ideology. The reference to the horses and chariots of Shamash, the God of the Sun (23:11) is historically plausible for the Assyrian period. Such cult objects related to the cult of Shamash were very popular in Neo-Assyrian times as indicated by many iconographic representations of horses and horsemen and other horse-related images of the Sun god.[43]

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[40] See especially Diebner and Nauerth 1984, 95–118.
[41] Thus for instance Niehr 1995, 33–56.
[42] For the following see also Uehlinger 2005, 279–316.
[43] Schroer 1987, 282–300.

A comparable element is the destruction of an altar situated on a terrace in 2 Kings 23:12. This verse may allude to a cult on the roofs of Jerusalem devoted to the army of Heaven. Ahaz was a vassal of the king of Assyria and it is possible that he erected a place of worship on a terrace to demonstrate his loyalty to the Assyrians (2 Kgs 16).[44] Isaiah 38:8 also alludes to a staircase of Ahaz. Jeremiah 19:3 also mentions this worship in private houses, all of which had terraces: "all the houses upon whose roofs offerings have been made to the whole host of heaven and libations have been poured out to other gods." The attempt to eradicate these practices can therefore very well be understood in the context of the decline of the Assyrian empire.

A supplementary argument in favor of the plausible dimension of a political and religious reform lies in the comparison which can be made with other reformist kings in the Ancient Near East,[45] beginning with Akhenaton (1353–1337), who also undertook a sort of "centralization of worship" in the new town of Akhenaton decreeing the veneration of a single god. Upon the capture of Babylon in 689, the Assyrian king Sennacherib, destroyed the temples and statues, or deported them. In place of Babylon he wanted to raise "his" city Assur and made the god Assur, who before that moment had no important role outside the capital, the most important deity. The creation epic *Enuma Elish* is rewritten in order to replace Marduk by Assur, who becomes the "god of heaven and earth." However, his successor, Esarhaddon, who was crowned king of Babylon, restored the worship of Marduk and other Babylonian divinities. Nabonidus (556–539) came to power following a putsch. He was a pious follower of the lunar god Sin and wanted him to be the only god people would worship. His long stay at Teima (553–544) remains mysterious.[46] Did he want to create a new capital for Sin in Teima? On his return he reinforced lunar worship, restoring many temples.

All these reforms which aim at elevating a divinity to the rank of principal deity originate in the initiative of a king. The fact that the reform of Josiah did not last is quite comparable with what can be seen in the cases we have just mentioned.

In summary, the biblical presentation of Josiah and his reign cannot be understood as historical.[47] Yet some indications suggest that there were attempts to introduce cultural and political changes under Josiah.

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[44] For a discussion on the Assyrian evidence for such roof altars, see Uehlinger 2005, 305.

[45] On the following see Na'aman 2006b, 131–68.

[46] See the discussion in Henze 1999, 60–61.

[47] If there was an attempt to introduce religious and political changes under Josiah this attempt was not triggered by the discovery of an old scroll.

5. The Exile of Jehoiachin

The books of Kings end with a rather laconic notice of the fate of King Jehoiakim, exiled to Babylon:

In the thirty-seventh year of the exile of King Jehoiachin of Judah, in the twelfth month, on the twenty-seventh[48] day of the month, Evil-merodach[49] King of Babylon, in the year that he began to reign, released[50] King Jehoiachin of Judah from prison. 28 He spoke kindly to him and gave him a seat above the other seats of the kings who were with him in Babylon. 29 So Jehoiachin put aside[51] his prison clothes. Every day of his life he dined regularly in the king's presence. 30 For his allowance, a regular allowance was given him by[52] the king,[53] a portion every day, as long as he lived (2 Kgs 25:27).[54]

This text seems at first to reflect a historical situation, for tablets of the time of Nebuchadnezzar II (595–570) mention deliveries of oil, barley and sometimes dates and spices for the Palace of Babylon and for royal and other prisoners who were kept there. In one of the texts[55] we find:

"A Sutu to [Ya]'ukînu, king of the country of Yahudu. Two *qû* and half to the fi[ve sons] of the king of the country of Yahudu."

Another text mentions:

"A Sutu to Yakukînu, son of the king Yakudu, two *qû* and half to the five sons of the king of Yakudu."

In this variant, Jehoiachin does not appear as king, but as his son. Is this an allusion to the fact that the Babylonians considered Jehoiachin's uncle, Zedekiah, as the only legitimate king? But since the other references present him as king, it could also be a scribal error.[56] The fact that the king (with different variants

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[48] There are differences about the exact day: Jer 52:31 has the 25th and JerLXX the 24th day, another Hebrew manuscript the 28th. The number 24 can easily be understood as a symbolic number, as can "27" (both appear in references of the canonical books of the Hebrew Bible).

[49] The Masoretic vocalization is an intentional and pejorative corruption of the name "Awel-Marduk."

[50] Jeremiah 52:31 and other manuscripts of 2 Kings contain the precision: "He brought him forth"; this is probably a *lectio facilior*.

[51] The change of the *wayyiqtol* into *w-qatal* is explained by the fact that this form often replaces the narrative in recent prose texts or, and this is the option we retain, because *w-qatal* introduces an anterior action to that previously expressed (the more-than-perfect, cf. Joüon 1923, 322).

[52] LXX reads "from the king's house"; this variant does not change the meaning.

[53] The Syriac manuscripts and Jeremiah 52:34 contain the precision "King of Babylon." This precision does not change the meaning of the verse.

[54] Jer 52:34LXX ends with "until the day of his death" (while JerMT adds also "all the days of his life"). This lesson, as we shall see, is secondary. It tries, among other things, to avoid the doublet that exists in the last words of v. 29 and 30.

[55] The English translation of these texts is based on the German translation of Weippert 2010, 423–30.

[56] For a discussion see Briend and Seux 1977, 145–46.

as to his name) is so frequently mentioned could underline his important status in the palace of Babylon, which is also reflected in 2 Kings 25. Contrary to 2 Kings 25, the Babylonian texts speak of the sons of the king, as does the book of Chronicles.

The last verses of the Kings are therefore based on a historical memory. But the author of these verses transforms this memory into an episode that reflects his ideological position. The author of 2 Kings 25:27–30 knew that kings and notables exiled to Babylon benefited from allowances from the King of Babylon, but he gave this practice a new meaning by situating it under a king whose reign inaugurates the end of the Babylonian empire.[57] The change in the status of the king in exile described in 2 Kings 25 uses the literary conventions of the so-called "Diaspora novels": the stories of Esther and Mordecai, of Joseph (Gen 37–45) and the narratives contained in the first part of the book of Daniel (Dan 2–6). In all these stories, an exile leaves his prison and becomes in a sense second to the king (2 Kgs 25:28, Esth 10:3; Gen 41:40; Dan 2:48), his accession to this new status being marked by a change of clothing (2 Kgs 25:29; Esth 6:10–11; 8:15; Gen 41:42; Dan 5:29). All these narratives insist on the idea that the country of deportation has become a place where Jews can live and even have interesting careers. In the last verses of Kings, Exile has become a diaspora. Thus the fate of the last king of Judah can be understood as an invitation made to the Judeans of Babylon to accept life in a diaspora situation and it is elsewhere known that many Judeans integrated themselves very well into their new homeland.

In summary, our investigation of the books of Kings demonstrates that the construction of a biblical historiography obeys the ideological preoccupations of Judean scribes of the 7th to the 5th centuries. Nevertheless, these scribes do not totally invent their materials; they draw them from earlier memoirs, archives and documents, and give them a new meaning. Thus, the biblical account, although integrating historical memories, is a theological construction.

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[57] Awel-Marduk was very quickly dethroned, and thereafter palace revolutions multiplied until the advent of Nabonidus, cf. for example Albertz 2001, 58–65.