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Biblical Perspectives on Cult Reforms in Judah: Why They Probably Did not Happen

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Introduction

The cult reforms of Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:4) and Josiah (2 Kings 22–23) have had considerable impact on Biblical Studies. Especially Josiah's reform has been widely understood as a crucial moment and turning point in the development of Israel's[1] religion.[2] Accordingly, the biblical accounts have been assumed to preserve important historical information from the time of Hezekiah and Josiah. For example, in the last century Hölscher argued that 2 Kings 22–23 is a prime example of authentic history writing.[3] Noth assumed that 2 Kings 23:4–20 was taken from royal annals.[4] Although most scholars nowadays would acknowledge that the biblical accounts are not unbiased historical sources, the kings are usually assumed to have taken at least some measures to renew the cult.[5] Some scholars assume that they purified the cult of foreign elements, whereas others argue that only the location of the cult was at issue.[6] There are also some critical voices that have questioned the historicity of the reforms altogether, but they still represent the minority.[7]

1 In this paper Israel's religion denotes the religion of both, Judah and Israel, practiced during the monarchy.

2 According to Albertz (1994) "[t]he most important decision in the history of Israelite religion is made with a dating of an essential part of Deuteronomy in the time of Josiah." (199). Cf. the later discussion about this statement by Albertz in Davies (2007), 65–77, and Albertz (2007), 27–36.

3 Hölscher (1923), 208.

4 Noth (1967), 86. Thus also Gray (1963), 663.

5 For example, Lohfink (1987), 459–475; Collins (2007), 86, 150–151; Sweeney (2007), 402–403, 446–449, and Petry (2008), 395 n. 19. Römer (2005), 55, writes: "The Biblical presentation of Josiah and his reign cannot be taken as a document of primary evidence. On the other hand, some indicators suggest nevertheless that some attempts to introduce cultic and political changes took place under Josiah."

6 Hoffmann (1980), 269, has concluded that in almost all details the author of 2 Kings 22–23 presents an idealistic picture of the reform, but that the events have a historical basis in the time of Josiah.

7 For example, Levin (1984), 351–371; Davies (2007), 65–77.

Nevertheless, it is evident that skepticism about the historicity of the reforms has grown in the last decades.[8] It should also be added that the historicity of Hezekiah's reform has been challenged more often than that of Josiah.[9]

The reform accounts have had considerable impact on Biblical Studies and the study of ancient Israel, its history and religion. Many histories of Israel and introductions to the Hebrew Bible refer to the reforms as important events that took place in the late 8th and late 7th centuries BCE.[10] Many central or even defining concepts of later Judaism, such as cult centralization, exclusive worship of Yahweh, idol criticism and law-based religion, would have been introduced by one of the reforming kings. The reforms have also had considerable impact on the study of Biblical books. For example, because of the evident similarities between the Deuteronomy and 2 Kings 22–23, the dating of Deuteronomy is often connected with Josiah's reform.[11] Some scholars who have questioned the historicity of most events in 2 Kings 22–23 have still connected the Deuteronomy with King Josiah or the late 7th century BCE.[12] The Deuteronomy would then be a witness to the religious changes that took place during this time.

The reforms have also influenced the dating of the Deuteronomistic History. Many scholars, traditionally in Anglo-Saxon scholarship, have linked the editorial development of the composition with the reforms. According to the 'Double Redaction Model', one of the main editorial phases of the composition was written during the time of Josiah.[13] One has also tried to correlate archaeological data with the cult reforms. Especially in earlier research, the destruction of the cult sites at Arad

8 This development can be seen, for example, in recent commentaries and histories of Israel; e.g., Werlitz (2002), 305–311; Grabbe (2007), 204–207.

9 For a review, see Hoffmann (1980), 151–154, who himself assumes that 2 Kings 18:4 contains a memory of a historical event. Similarly also Collins (2007), 148. Earlier scholarship assumed that 2 Kings 18:4 contains an excerpt from the royal annals, e.g., Benzinger (1899), 177.

10 See, for example, Liverani (2005), 175–182; Miller/Hayes (2006), 413–414 (the historicity of Hezekiah's reform is left open; see n. 28), 457–460.

11 Thus many scholars, e.g., Driver (1902), xliii–lxvi; Veijola (2004), 2–3; Römer (2005), 55. In earlier research and already since de Wette (1805), Dissertatio critico-exegetica, the book found in the temple (2 Kings 22:8) was assumed to have been the Deuteronomy or its early edition.

12 Thus, e.g., Levin (2005), 91. According to Schmid (2008), 106, the argumentation about the relationship between 2 Kings 22–23 and the Deuteronomy runs the risk of circular reasoning, but dates the oldest version of the Deuteronomy to the 7th century BCE.

13 Cf. Cross (1973), 274–289, and many following him. Similarly also Lohfink (1987), 459–475. Provan (1988), 172–173, has connected the first edition of the composition with Hezekiah's reign.

Tel Beer-sheba was seen as a result or proof of the biblical cult reforms.[14] It has also been discussed whether figurines from Iron Age Judah show any signs of intentional destruction, which could then be used as evidence for Josiah's reform.[15] In more recent scholarly discussion, the decrease in iconographical motives from the 8th century BCE onward has been connected with the reforms.[16]

Confidence in the biblical texts in question as reliable historical sources is problematical, because it is evident that 2 Kings 18 and 2 Kings 22–23 were extensively edited. 2 Kings 23, where the whole discussion about the reforms culminates, may be the most edited chapter in all of 1–2 Kings, if not in the entire Hebrew Bible, and its complicated editorial history is also usually acknowledged. Indicative of the problems is the fact that the scholarly views on its development differ to a great extent, with very little consensus in sight.[17] Nearly any and all parts of the chapter have been variably ascribed to the basic text and to various later editors or to the royal annals. Consequently, the text is, at best, a problematical historical source and thus a poor basis for reconstructions of Israel's history and theories about the development of biblical books.

Even without the problems caused by editing, the texts in question were evidently written from a strongly theological perspective, which means that their historical reliability as a source should be carefully scrutinized. It is hardly possible to use them as such for any historical reconstruction of the monarchic period. The theological profile of the different authors has to be understood before we may even start seeing behind the theology and possibly gain information about historical events. It would be hazardous to neglect the painstaking analysis of the source texts and assume that, despite evident problems, they somehow reflect historical realities during the monarchy. Such an approach to the texts is not uncommon, but can hardly provide a solid historical basis. In this paper, I will try to show that the available texts are not so solid historical sources that we should use them as cornerstones of theories about Israel's religion and the birth of biblical books. The possibility that the reforms are projections of later ideals to the monarchic period and thus are completely without any historical basis also has to be

14 See Aharoni (1968), 233–234; Mazar (1992), 495–498.

15 Kletter (1993), 54–56, has shown that there is no evidence for an intentional destruction of Judean pillar figurines.

16 See Uehlinger (2007), 292–295.

17 See, for example, Benzinger (1899), 189–196; Hoffmann (1980), 169–270; Würthwein (1984), 452–466; Levin (1984), 351–371; Kratz (2000), 173, 193; Hardmeier (2007), 123–163.

taken into consideration or at least discussed. Some features may even indicate that they never happened.

Lack of Evidence for the Reforms

There are several problems with the biblical accounts and thus with the traditional scholarly view that assumes that significant cult reforms, in any form, took place during the times of Hezekiah and/or Josiah. The problems begin with the fact that no other biblical text that is not directly dependent on 1–2 Kings (such as 1–2 Chronicles) makes any reference to the reforms. Without a strong presupposition that the reforms must have happened, it is hard to find even vague allusions to the events described in 2 Kings 18:4 and 2 Kings 22–23.[18] If a significant reform with considerable changes in Israel's religion took place, one would expect that it left at least some traces in the biblical record. Since some biblical texts are usually assumed to have been written in the final decades of Judah, such as parts of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, one cannot ignore the silence, especially over Josiah's reform.

Nevertheless, some scholars maintain that there is evidence of Josiah's reform in Jeremiah. For example, Albertz has suggested that the author of Jer. 5:4–6 and 8:7–8 was aware of the reform.[19] However, a closer look at these passages shows that there is only a reference to a law being written by scribes,[20] but this can refer to many things. There is no reference in these passages to any *indicative features* of Josiah's reform.[21] It is doubtful that the brief references to a law, which the author did not specify further, could be used as any kind of indication of Josiah's reform. In fact, these passages in Jeremiah can be connected with Josiah's reform only with a strong premise that it must have taken place. In addition to these problems, the origin and dating of the heavily edited and problematical text in these chapters of Jeremiah is hotly debated.

According to Albertz, the apparent lack of reference to the reform by Ezekiel – or even a contradiction with the reform because the

18 One exception is the Ezra story in Ezra 7–10 and Neh. 8, which may have been partly modeled after Josiah's reform, see Pakkala (2004), 233, but this is a very late text.

19 Albertz (2007), 43: "The often repeated argument that contemporary texts like the book of Jeremiah do not know anything of the reform is not correct."

20 E.g., Jer. 8:8: אֵיכָה תֹּאמְרוּ חֲכָמִים אֲנַחְנוּ וְתוֹרַת יְהוָה אִתָּנוּ אָכֵן הִנֵּה לַשֶּׁקֶר עָשָׂה עֵט שֶׁקֶר סוֹפְרִים.

21 In order to argue for a connection one would have to demonstrate that the Deuteronomy was meant, that the text was written in the wake of Josiah's reform and that the Deuteronomy was the legal basis of the reform. All these are disputed and very uncertain.

prophet accused the Judeans of syncretism during the decades after the alleged reform – may be because "Ezekiel could easily misunderstand or overstate a rumour from Jerusalem."[22] If one discredits the main texts from the period under investigation by assuming that the ancient witnesses' viewpoint may be based on a misunderstanding of a rumor, one can justify almost any theory about the reform. If one assumes that Ezekiel is a witness to the early exilic Judean community, it would appear that the author of this text was not aware of any reform. Further on, Jer. 22:15 speaks positively about Josiah, but instead of referring to any cultic accomplishments, his characterization seems to be based on him having been a just king (וְעָשָׂה מִשְׁפָּט וּצְדָקָה). There is no evidence that the author of this verse connected Josiah with any cult reform, and the same applies to the entire Books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel.[23]

One also does not find any reception history of the cult reforms in the later books of the Hebrew Bible or in the later expansions of earlier books, which is in contradiction with the importance of the events for the author(s) of 1–2 Kings. The heavily edited books of the prophets do not allude to the reforms, although many passages in them share the concerns of 2 Kings 22–23, attacking the other gods and criticizing 'foreign' aspects of the cult. The only exception in the Hebrew Bible is 1–2 Chronicles, which contains a later version of the reforms, but here we are already dealing with a composition that is a further development of the entire 1–2 Kings, written at a much later stage.

In those few extra-biblical sources from the Persian Period that deal with the Jewish community, there is no evidence that the reforms had had any impact on the practice of religion. For example, the Jewish community at Elephantine planned to rebuild a temple for Yahweh at Elephantine, which clearly contradicts the main target of Josiah's reform, the existence of cult sites outside Jerusalem. As late as the late 5th century BCE, this Jewish community did not seem to be aware of any of the restrictions on the location of the sacrificial cult allegedly introduced by the biblical reforms. That the community was also in friendly contact with Jerusalem and Samaria emphasizes the contradiction with the biblical account.[24] In other words, the correspondence of the Jewish community at Elephantine does not sup-

22 Albertz (2007), 43.

23 As noted by Ben Zvi (2007), 64, "[T]he prophetic books do not provide identifiable, independent sources for the reconstruction of the historical circumstances in Josianic Judah."

24 Cf. Cowley (1923), no. AP 32 (which can be dated shortly after 407 BCE). The communities ask permission to built the temple and receive a friendly reply from Jerusalem and Samaria. The replies are not preserved but a memorandum (AP 35) refers to both replies, which give a permission to build a temple at Elephantine.

port the view that the principles of the Josianic reform had been put into practice, or were even known in Jerusalem, Samaria or within the wider Jewish community. This undermines the historicity of the cult reforms, as described in 2 Kings.

The Past as Constant Rebellion

It is very peculiar that the monarchic period is portrayed in 1–2 Kings as a period of constant rebellion of the kings and the people against their own religion, and a period when only some kings fulfilled its demands. The idea that a nation and its kings repeatedly failed the demands of their own religion is exceptional in the Ancient Near East and even absurd. It implies that there is a fundamental contradiction between the reality and the ideals implied by the authors of 1–2 Kings. Of all the kings evaluated in 1–2 Kings only two, Hezekiah and Josiah, received a fully positive evaluation for their cultic standing and they are described as reformers who stood against all others. With the exception of the last four kings of Judah, who are generally assumed to be evil, the others failed in their cult policy.[25] One has to ask whether this picture of Israel's monarchic religion is realistic at all and whether it is possible that there were two kings who had entirely different conceptions of the religion than all the others. What is the background of such a peculiar view of one's own religious past?

Traditionally, one has assumed that Hezekiah or Josiah introduced the new religious ideals, which would have then contradicted the religion practiced by the other kings. However, the traditional theories fail to explain where the new ideas, which in many ways eradicated several parts of the traditionally accepted religion, came from.[26] Such a reorientation and an attack on one's own religion are in many ways so radical that they can only be explained by external influence or a fundamental change in circumstances.

Many scholars are conscious of the problem and find the reasons in the changed circumstances caused by the collapse of the Assyrian empire. As a vassal of Assyria Judah would have been influenced by Assyrian religious concepts or, as a sign of subjugation, even be forced to accept some religious cult items in the temple of Jerusalem. But does

25 However, not all kings are characterized as evil, even if they failed in their cult policies.

26 If one assumes that the ideas came from a law book, such as the Deuteronomy, one would still have to explain where it came from and why it criticized the traditional religion in such a radical way.

this provide an explanation for criticizing one's own religion? The reforms are primarily targeted against religious phenomena that were common in 9th–7th century BCE Palestine, including the kingdoms of Israel and Judah: standing stones, holy trees, Asherah, Baal, Yahweh's solar aspects and local cult sites. For example, the Asherah, one of the main targets of cult criticism was closely connected with Yahweh and his cult, as shown by the inscriptions from Kuntillet Ağrud and Khirbet el-Qom. The attack on all local cult sites is also a self-evident attack on local religion. Consequently, one cannot avoid the conclusion that the reforms, as described in 2 Kings 18:4; 22–23, were directed against Israel's own religion as practiced during the monarchy.

Moreover, the introduction of radically new religious concepts would have disturbed many traditional structures of the society – religious, political and economic – and challenged the interests of many established groups. For example, if one assumes that the cult centralization is a historical event, the abolition of the local cult sites would have meant an economic catastrophe for many towns where there was an important cult center (such as Bethel, Shiloh or Gibeon). In other words, there would have to be very good reasons for the introduction of such new ideas that would have had the potential to destabilize the entire state and society, and even the monarch's power over the kingdom. It is questionable whether the turbulent times of King Josiah, when the Assyrian empire was collapsing, would have been an ideal time to rock the boat even more. The traditional view leaves many questions unanswered, and the reforms remain an unexplained structural oddity in monarchic times.

Rather than following the biblical account and assuming that the reforming kings introduced the new ideas and represented the turning point in Israel's religion, it is more probable that the fundamental change began only as the result of the destruction of the temple, monarchy and state in 587/6 BCE. From the perspective of long-term historical developments, 587/6 BCE must have represented a crucial turning point in political, religious and economic structures in Judah. It meant a collapse of the main supporting institutions of Israel's religion, the monarchy and the temple. It would be difficult to comprehend how the destruction of the temple would not cause, or force, a radical transformation of the temple-based state religion.[27] The divinity was certainly bound to the temple in some way, as also implied by some vestiges in the Hebrew Bible that refer to him being bound to the Ark of

27 For the sake of the current argument it is not necessary to discuss the nature of the popular religion practiced at private homes and on the local level. 1–2 Kings primarily deals with the 'official' religion of the state.

the Covenant (e.g., 1 Samuel 4–6; 2 Samuel 6).[28] If the religion of Judah was at least in some way similar to the better-known religions of the Ancient Near East, the king also must have been an essential part of the official cult of Yahweh. Some of the vestiges in the Hebrew Bible even imply that the king was the son of Yahweh (2 Sam. 7:14; Ps. 2:6–7). Although still relatively little is known about the religion practiced in monarchic Judah and Israel, it is fair to assume that the temple cult of Jerusalem and the king were an integral and crucial part of it. Their destruction in 587/6 BCE would have forced a major reorientation in the religion.

Since the reforming kings represent ideals that were established in Judaism only during the Second Temple period, one has to ask whether it is realistic to assume that these two kings already introduced the new ideas, in the case of Josiah just decades before the destruction and forced reorientation. Instead of assuming the historicity of the controversial biblical texts in question, the reforms may be historically unfounded projections of post 587/6 BCE ideals into monarchic times. This would explain the contradiction that we have between the reforming kings and the religious reality of the monarchic period.

To put it in other words, we know that the religion of Israel in the 9th–8th centuries BCE differed fundamentally from the emerging Judaism of the Second Temple period. Because of the lack of reliable sources from the 7th and 6th centuries BCE, we do not know when and under what circumstances the crucial change took place and whether it was gradual or sudden. Many scholars follow the biblical account and assume that Josiah (or Hezekiah) already introduced many of the new ideas. My point is that the biblical accounts in 2 Kings 22–23 and 2 Kings 18:4 are too uncertain to be used as historical sources. They provide more questions than answers. If we follow the biblical accounts of the reforms, the whole construction of Israel's religion stands or falls on their reliability alone, because it does not receive any support from other sources. The destruction of 587/6 BCE would be a more natural place to seek the turning point in religion, because it meant a forced 'reform' in any case.

If the main changes in Israel's religion were the result of the destruction caused by the Babylonians, it is understandable that the biblical authors would have tried to show that the changes were already initiated earlier by pious kings who tried to restore with reforms religious ideals demanded by the divinity in the mythical past. The new

28 That Yahweh had an image in the temple has become increasingly probable. Cf. the discussion in van der Toorn (1997); esp. Becking (1997), 157–171; Niehr (1997), 73–95; Uehlinger (1997), 97–155.

religion had to be seen as a restoration of religious ideals that were put into practice before the destruction, because, without some continuity with the monarchic religion, one could easily receive the impression that the new religious ideals were actually the forced result of the destruction caused by Babylonian actions. This would then undermine their credibility and authority. It would not have been in the interests of the biblical authors to emphasize the factual break with the older religion, but instead to try to show at least some continuity with the past. In this scenario it would have been necessary to condemn the past as an almost constant sin, because the past simply did not correspond to the demands of the new religion, but at the same time show that there were some kings who were faithful to the divinity and who represented the ideal.

It is understandable that the later authors would have wanted to eradicate positive references to the older religion, especially in areas where it had proven to be a dead end and where there would be a clear contradiction with the new religious concepts. For example, if we assume that there was an Asherah in Yahweh's temple and it was destroyed in 587/6 BCE, the later authors would have certainly tried to remove all positive references to it and instead interpret it as an illegitimate or foreign element.[29] Rather than referring to the forced destruction of Asherah by the Babylonians, its 'controlled' destruction already before the Babylonians by a pious Judean king, who was executing Yahweh's commandment, would have given much more legitimacy to the new religion that rejected Asherah as a foreign element. Similarly, all references to a pictorial representation of Yahweh would have been highly problematic after his image in the temple had been destroyed. The biblical authors would have had, for obvious reasons, great interest in removing all references to Yahweh's cult image. With slowly increasing archaeological and textual evidence, it has become increasingly evident that the Hebrew Bible mainly contains only vestiges of the monarchic religion and that in most cases they are found in the biased criticism.

Dating of the Main Sources for the Reforms

It is probable that both, the Deuteronomy and 1–2 Kings, the main sources for the reforms, were written after 587/6 BCE. The majority of

29 However, some passages may have preserved positive references to a tree, probably an Asherah, growing in Yahweh's temple (Josh. 24:26). The same passage refers to a large stone, evidently a *Massebah*, which Joshua sets inside the temple under the tree.

scholars assume that the Deuteronomy is a product of 7th century BCE[30] or of Josiah's time[31] and it is often connected with this period even by scholars who assume that the description in 2 Kings 22–23 is mostly a later literary construction and a pious invention.[32] In view of the book-finding episode in 2 Kings 22:8, 10–11 and/or the parallels between the measures undertaken by Josiah and the laws in Deuteronomy, many scholars have suggested that the oldest version of the Deuteronomy was the basis of Josiah's reform.[33] Although the book-finding episode is now generally accepted as a later addition, many scholars still assume a closer connection between Deuteronomy and Josiah's reform. It is used as a witness to the religious conceptions that emerged during the time of King Josiah.

However, it is very unlikely that the book, even in its earliest forms could derive from the time of Josiah. Several factors suggest that the first edition of Deuteronomy (*Urdeuteronomium*) was written in a context when there was no king, temple or state. I have presented more detailed arguments for dating the *Urdeuteronomium* to a time after 587/6 BCE in another context,[34] and will only provide a summary here:

1. The monarch does not play any role in the *Urdeuteronomium*, which would be exceptional from a legal document in the Ancient Near East. The document implies a setting when there was no king.
2. The Deuteronomy does not imply or refer to any state infrastructure and organization, which one would expect from a document regulating Judah's religion and society.
3. There is no reference to Judah, which one would expect if it was the legal or religious foundation of the state of Judah.
4. The temple is never mentioned, although its main goal was to centralize the sacrificial cult, allegedly to the temple in Jerusalem. This implies a context where there was no temple and the author was not even certain that there would ever be one in the future.
5. The Deuteronomy never mentions Jerusalem. To avoid a direct reference to the city implies very special circumstances, or a motivation and background in a narrative context. In this form,

30 For example, Otto (1999), 364–378; Nelson (2002), 6; Schmid (2008), 106.

31 Veijola (2004), 2–3.

32 Thus Levin (2005), 91; cf. Levin (1984), 351–371.

33 The connection was made already by de Wette (1805), Dissertatio critico-exegetica, in the early 19th century CE. This view has been assumed by many.

34 Cf. Pakkala (2009), 388-401.

the Deuteronomy cannot function as an independent document, as assumed in historical reconstructions that argue for a monarchical dating.

6. Deut. 12:14[35] is dependent on the late concept of Israel consisting of (twelve?) tribes, because it refers to a place in 'one of your tribes' (באחד שבטיך).[36]
7. The Deuteronomy is formally set in the future, which implies a literary context, like its current narrative framework, that justifies the use of the future (see 5 above).
8. According to Deut. 12:21, Yahweh will place his name to live in the place he will choose. The conception that only the divinity's name lives in the temple implies that the temple had already ceased to be the actual dwelling place of his cult image or of his Presence.
9. The Elephantine papyri (see above) imply that the principles of the Deuteronomy were not commonly known in the late 5th century BCE.
10. Many laws in the Deuteronomy are idealistic rather than laws meant to be put into practice. If we connect the Deuteronomy with Josiah or his reform, this implies that the laws were put into practice during his time.

Consequently, several features indicate that the oldest version of the Deuteronomy was written after the destruction of the monarchy, state and the temple in 587/6 BCE. Even if one could question some of the arguments above, the weight of the evidence suggests a dating much after Josiah's reign. This would also mean that the Deuteronomy primarily contains religious conceptions of a post-monarchic setting. The factors presented above imply that the consequences of the destruction had already been drawn and that the authors had already moved away from conceptions that a monarchical setting would necessitate.

As for 1–2 Kings, it is not possible here to go into the debate about the relationship of 2 Kings 24–25 to the rest of 1–2 Kings, which has played a central role in the different dating of the composition by the 'Double Redaction Model' and the Göttingen School. If one assumes that the final chapters are part of the oldest version of 1–2 Kings, then the work was obviously written after 587/6 BCE, or 562 BCE if 2 Kings

35 Pakkala (2009), 395, erroneously refers to Deut. 12:13. I am grateful to Robert Whiting for the correction.

36 The late dating of the concept of Israel consisting of twelve tribes has been shown by Levin (1995).

25:27–30 is also regarded as part of the oldest text.[37] Regardless of the final chapters, some factors imply that the first edition of 1–2 Kings cannot have been written during monarchic times.[38]

The author of the main edition of 1–2 Kings judges the Judean (and Israelite) kings as if he were superior to the dynasty. He is in a position to criticize the kings and to judge many of the kings of the dynasty as evil. This is always possible, but very improbable in circles close to the monarch or within the court, because it would seriously undermine the authority and legitimacy of the entire dynasty, even if the current king were judged to be good, like Josiah. It would mean that the royal house had placed itself not only under the evaluation of scribes, but indirectly of all readers. The dynasty would no longer exist in its own right, but would be under continuous scrutiny and subject to theological evaluation. Therefore, the document could not have been commissioned by the royal house or circles close to the royal house, but rather implies a situation where there was no king or when the king was not in power. In the author's context the theologians appear to be in power.

One could suggest that the document was written by circles critical of or out of the reach of the royal house, but this is improbable, because the authors evidently had access to the royal annals and other royal documents. During the time of the monarchy, this would be possible only if the author(s) were very close to the royal house, because it is very unlikely that the annals were in free circulation to be edited by anyone. Moreover, a book like 1–2 Kings was a major undertaking in the ancient world and would require financial resources and professional expertise, which implies an influential and powerful group at the background. The best solution for this paradox is to assume that 1–2 Kings was written by the royal scribes, or a group representing their followers or pupils, *after* the royal house was no longer in power. In this situation the royal scribes would still be a powerful group, but would be in a position to evaluate the deeds of the royal house. Their background in the royal court would also explain why they interpreted and evaluated the past through the actions of the royal house.

Unless one acknowledges that the attack on other gods is a later theme (see below), the criticism of the temple cult also implies a setting after 587/6 BCE. 1–2 Kings effectively undermines the temple as an

37 Because of the evident contrast between Jehoiakin and Zedekiah, it is probable that 2 Kings 25:27–30 belongs to the same literary layer as 2 Kings 24:18–25:7.

38 Here, it is necessary to distinguish between the royal annals of Judah and Israel, which functioned as the main source for the events during the reigns of each king, and the composition by the history writer, whose perspective was essentially theological.

institution by presenting it as a place of constant sin and rebellion. As with the royal house, the open criticism and style of writing opens the institution to be evaluated by readers. In the author's context the temple and its priests could not have been the center of the religion anymore, whereas it is reasonable to assume that in monarchic times the temple was the highest authority of the religion, which effectively defined it. The author of 1–2 Kings is able to place himself above the temple and criticize it in a way that was possible only after the temple had been destroyed and the temple elite had lost their power in the society.

Consequently, the documents used to argue for the historicity of the cult reforms were written in a time after the destruction of Jerusalem in 587/6 BCE.[39] This does not necessarily mean that they could not preserve any information about events before the destruction, but since their religious context of writing most likely differs essentially from the monarchic one, it is probable that the past was evaluated from a very new perspective. With these considerations in mind, we can now turn to the two passages in question.

Hezekiah's Reform

Hezekiah's reform is restricted to one verse only, 2 Kings 18:4.

הוּא הֵסִיר אֶת־הַבָּמוֹת וְשִׁבַּר אֶת־הַמַּצֵּבֹת וְכָרַת אֶת־הָאֲשֵׁרָה וְכִתַּת נְחַשׁ הַנְּחֹשֶׁת
אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה מֹשֶׁה כִּי עַד־הַיָּמִים הָהֵמָּה הָיוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מְקַטְּרִים לוֹ וַיִּקְרָא־לוֹ נְחֻשְׁתָּן

Hezekiah is said to have abolished the high places (הוּא הֵסִיר אֶת־הַבָּמוֹת). It is very probable that this was part of the history writer's text, although some scholars, such as *Benzinger* and *Würthwein*, have assumed that this would also be a later addition.[40] Without this comment in 18:4aα[1] it would be difficult to see why Hezekiah was evaluated so positively and likened to David. He was the first, and one of the only two, who removed the high places. Without the high places, the theological profile of the history writer would diminish and it would be difficult to see what his criteria for evaluating the past were. Also, the systematic reference to the high places implies that we are dealing with one of the main theological issues of the history writer. In comparison, most of the other religious phenomena are criticized only irregularly.

39 For a detailed discussion, see Noth (1967), 91–95.

40 Benzinger (1899), 177; Würthwein (1984), 406–412. According to Benzinger, only v. 4a is a later addition to v. 4b, which would have been taken from the annals, whereas Würthwein assumes that the entire verse was added after the history writer.

For example, of all the kings of Judah only Rehabeam and Manasseh are accused of harboring Asherah. There are also no literary critical arguments for removing 18:4aα[1] from the text.

It has traditionally been assumed that the removal of the high places derives from the royal annals,[41] but this seems unlikely because the other probable excerpts from the annals are found in v. 7b–10, divided from v. 4 by several theological comments about Hezekiah in v. 5–7a. Moreover, before Hezekiah the verb is always used in connection with the high places when a Judean king is characterized as good:

1 Kings 15:14	Asa	וְהַבָּמוֹת לֹא־סָרוּ
1 Kings 22:44	Jehoshaphat	אַךְ הַבָּמוֹת לֹא־סָרוּ
2 Kings 12:4	Joash	רַק הַבָּמוֹת לֹא־סָרוּ
2 Kings 14:4	Amaziah	רַק הַבָּמוֹת לֹא־סָרוּ
2 Kings 15:4	Azariah	רַק הַבָּמוֹת לֹא־סָרוּ
2 Kings 15:35	Jotam	רַק הַבָּמוֹת לֹא סָרוּ
2 Kings 18:4	Hezekiah	הוּא הֵסִיר אֶת־הַבָּמוֹת

Although the verb is used slightly differently in connection with Hezekiah than with the other kings (qal. vs. hif.),[42] it would be difficult to avoid the impression that its systematic use in this connection is intentional. The regular reference to the high places with the same verb implies that the references were an intentional creation by the editor of the whole composition. The emphasis הוּא before the verb in 2 Kings 18:4aα[1] connects Hezekiah's action with the accounts of the previous kings, where the sin still continued. As an excerpt from the annals the emphasis would not make much sense. That the author of 2 Kings 18:4aα[1] did not specify what was meant by the high places is a further indication that he assumed the readers to have read the preceding text where the problem is specified. Several passages, such as 1 Kings 22:44, tell the reader that sacrifices by the people were meant (עוֹד הָעָם מְזַבְּחִים וּמְקַטְּרִים

41 For example Montgomery/Gehman (1951), 481; Hobbs (1985), 251–252 and Fritz (2003), 359. Also Steuernagel (1912), 365 (but with some hesitation). According to Gray (1963), 608, verse 4 "reads like an excerpt from an annalistic source."

42 Whereas Hezekiah is the subject of 2 Kings 18:4, the subject of the verb in the other passages is in the plural and therefore either refers to the high places themselves or to the people. As a consequence the verb must be understood in a slightly different way. Hezekiah removed (הֵסִיר) the high places, but during the time of the other kings, the high places did not stop (from operating) (high places being the subject) or the people did not turn aside from the high places. Neither of the solutions is ideal, and the problems are reflected already in the Greek translations where the subject is changed from the plural to the singular (□ξ□ρεν, e.g., 1 Kings 15:14, 22:44) or the verb is translated in the passive form (μετεστ□θησαν, 2 Kings 12:3/4). The author of the original evaluation may have wanted to avoid a direct accusation of the kings, who he regarded as good, and therefore avoided having the king as the subject.

בַּבָּמוֹת). This had been repeated so many times that the author of 2 Kings 18:4aα[1] did not need to repeat it again. As an excerpt from the royal annals, however, the short comment would be puzzling. In other words, v. 4aα[1] implies that the reader knew what was said about the high places in the rest of 1–2 Kings.[43] The author's viewpoint was the entire history of Israel and Judah, which the authors of the annals, writing in very many different contexts in different centuries, could not have had. This undermines the assumption that the reference was taken from the royal annals or from another source. Several scholars have similarly argued that הוּא הֵסִיר אֶת־הַבָּמוֹת was written by the history writer.[44]

It has been shown by Provan that the rest of v. 4aα[2]βb derives from a later editor.[45] The main technical reason for assuming an interpolation is the cop. perf., which is peculiar and even grammatically incorrect in such a prose context. In other passages that contain lists of further sins that were practiced or removed the verbs are typically expressed with a cons. impf,[46] which is also the standard prose form throughout 1–2 Kings. The use of the perfect is probably due to Aramaic influence where the perfect is the usual mode of expression in a prose text.[47] The use of an Aramaic form of expression implies that the expansion was made at a much later stage when the editor already had difficulties with the basic rules of classical Hebrew. In other passages in the Book of Kings the atypical cop. perf. is often regarded as a sign of later expansion or other disturbance.[48] That we are dealing with a very late interpolation is further suggested by the probable dependency of 2 Kings 18:4 on Exod. 34:13 (or Deut. 7:5) and Num. 21:9.

Exod. 34:13	כִּי אֶת־מִזְבְּחֹתָם תִּתֹּצוּן **וְאֶת־מַצֵּבֹתָם תְּשַׁבֵּרוּן**	וְשִׁבַּר אֶת־הַמַּצֵּבֹת
	וְאֶת־אֲשֵׁרָיו תִּכְרֹתוּ	וְכָרַת אֶת־הָאֲשֵׁרָה
Deut. 7:5	מִזְבְּחֹתֵיהֶם תִּתֹּצוּ **וּמַצֵּבֹתָם תְּשַׁבֵּרוּ**	
	וַאֲשֵׁירֵהֶם תְּגַדֵּעוּן וּפְסִילֵיהֶם **תִּשְׂרְפוּן** בָּאֵשׁ	

43 In comparison, 1 Kings 3:4 represents a different editorial phase because the author does not seem to be aware that the high places were forbidden.

44 E.g., Hoffmann (1980), 146–148; Provan (1988), 85–88 (but with a very early dating of the author); Sweeney (2007), 402–403 and Levin (2008), 146.

45 Provan (1988), 85–88; similarly Levin (2008), 146–147. On the other hand, Hoffmann (1980), 146–148, has argued that all of v. 4a derives from the history writer.

46 For example in 2 Kings 21 Manasseh is said to have וַיָּשָׁב וַיִּבֶן אֶת־הַבָּמוֹת . . . וַיָּקֶם מִזְבֵּחוֹת . . . וַיַּעֲבֵר הַקְּדֵשִׁים מִן־הָאָרֶץ וַיָּסַר אֶת־כָּל־הַגִּלֻּלִים . . . לְבַעַל וַיַּעַשׂ אֲשֵׁרָה . . . וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ . . . אֲשֶׁר עָשׂוּ אֲבֹתָיו (1 Kings 15:12). Asa is said to have

47 Levin (2008), 146, and already Gesenius/Kautzsch (1995), §112 pp.

48 Thus Stade (1907), 201–26. According to Gesenius/Kautzsch (1995), §112 pp, the cop. perf. in 1 Kings 12:32; 2 Kings 11:2; 14:14; 23:4, 10, 12, 15 may indicate an interpolation.

וְכִתַּת נְחַשׁ הַנְּחֹשֶׁת אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה מֹשֶׁה

וַיַּעַשׂ מֹשֶׁה נְחַשׁ נְחֹשֶׁת Num. 21:9

It is unlikely that Exod. 34:13 (or Deut. 7:5) and Num. 21:9 could have used 2 Kings 18:4 because then one would have to assume that two editors of the Pentateuch independently adopted two different parts of 2 Kings 18:4 without any overlap. Although one could argue that the references in 2 Kings 18:4 derive from two different editors (v. 4b being a further development), the similar use of the atypical perfect and the use of the Pentateuch suggest that we are dealing with the same late editor who added all additional measures to purify the cult. Consequently, in the history writer's text, Hezekiah's reform is reduced to a short note that he removed the high places.

What remains of the reform for the historical reconstruction of Israel's history? The preserved excerpts from the annals do not contain any reference to a reform or any other measure that was connected to the cult, which means that the only source for the event consists of a couple of words in a theologically oriented composition written at least more than a century after Hezekiah. It is evident that one cannot build any broader historical reconstruction of Israel's history or religion during the monarchic period on this comment. Its background is in the history writer's theological conceptions of a much later time.

The reason for the invention of Hezekiah's cult reform may be the fact that he was otherwise considered as a very able and successful king. During his 29-year reign the economic and political importance of Jerusalem and Judah grew considerably, probably because of the destruction of Israel, which had earlier been the center. The refugees from Israel may have brought in additional technical skill and financial potential. The extensive building activities during his time, which are commonly acknowledged and which have also left traces in the archaeological record, were not left unnoticed by the history writer (see 2 Kings 20:20). That Hezekiah opposed the Assyrians may have been regarded as a positive factor as well, because Judean kings who allied with the Assyrians were regarded as very evil (Ahaz and Manasseh), while those who opposed them received a favorable evaluation (Hezekiah and Josiah).[49] That Hosea, the king of Israel, rebelled against Assyria may have been the reason he was regarded as less evil than other kings of Israel (2 Kings 17:2–4). One should further note that the collapse of Israel was an ideal time to abolish the high places, because the main sin of Israel, the cultic separation of Israel from Jerusalem,

49 Josiah may have tried to fight the Egyptians who went to help the Assyrians (2 Kings 23:29). The meaning of this verse is disputed.

ceased to be a problem. That Hezekiah was able to retain independence when Israel was not was perhaps a further positive factor. It is likely that the history writer's conviction that Hezekiah removed the cult sprang up from some or all of these elements. In any case, here we are already in post-monarchic times, where he is building his view of this able king on the basis of late conceptions. There is no reason to assume any cult reform during the time of this king.

Josiah's Reform

Josiah's reform is a puzzle of themes and literary layers, which may have lost so many pieces that it will always remain unsolvable. One cannot exclude the possibility that the available text is partly corrupted and/or rewritten. Even if all the pieces of the puzzle were still present in 2 Kings 22–23, the text is so complicated that one can find problems in all solutions. It is difficult to get a grip on anything that holds. Nevertheless, the nature of the problems is such that any solution has to assume a complicated redaction history where the text was repeatedly corrected and expanded. This is implied by the repetitions, thematic inconsistencies and tensions, as well as several grammatical and other problems.[50] In addition, many parts of the text are literarily connected to other passages of 1–2 Kings,[51] which implies a complicated history of dependence and influence to and from other texts. Further complicating any solution, vocabulary and phrases typical of the attack on foreign cults abounds in this passage. The text has been so heavily edited that, if it is used for any historical purpose, the extent of the later additions has to be understood. We cannot penetrate the theology of the later editors without identifying their contributions. A failure to do so would leave us with the theology of the later editors, but would hardly give a reliable picture of what the older textual phases said about Josiah. In other words, without an argued solution to the problems, we do not have a source at all. The countless problems and literary connections of the text are generally accepted, but the consequences are often not seen.

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50 For example, the king is suddenly introduced as the one who removes or destroys the illicit cultic items (in 23:4b, while in v. 4a he commands the priests to do so). The text atypically uses the cop. perf. (for example in 23:4b, 5, 8b, 10, 14). The singular is used when the context clearly would necessitate a plural (v. 5: וַיְקַטֵּר). There are words that do not seem to fit the context, for example, הִשְׁבִּית (to cause to stop) referring to the killing (?) of priests.

51 E.g., 1 Kings 11:5, 7; 15:12–13; 2 Kings 23:12, 15–17, 19.

Several scholars have tried to find external fixed points for 2 Kings 22–23 by using archaeological finds[52] but so far one has only been able to show possible broader lines of development that could make sense if there were a reform. Clearly, the nature of the archaeological evidence is such that it would be difficult to find direct evidence for a specific event such as a reform. Archaeological evidence cannot distinguish between the reign of Josiah and 587 BCE, or between the reigns of Manasseh and Josiah. Therefore, much of the discussion about archaeological evidence is tied to attempts to validate or disprove what the Bible says. But the dangers and limitations of this approach have to be acknowledged. For example, if seals from Judah are increasingly aniconic towards the end of the monarchy, should we assume on the basis of 2 Kings 23 that iconographical representations of the divine were banned by Josiah? One cannot exclude this possibility, but 2 Kings 23 does not say anything about Yahweh's iconic representations and it has often been shown that the ban on making an idol or other pictorial representation of Yahweh belongs to the latest editorial phases of Deuteronomy and 1–2 Kings.[53] A cult reform would, for example, not explain why one would not carve a picture of an ibex or a flower, unless one assumes that Josiah's reform included a systematic iconoclasm. In other words, the tendency to increasingly prefer aniconic seals cannot be directly connected with 2 Kings 23.

The main problem with these attempts is that we still know very little about the historical and religious context of the late 7th century BCE in Judah. Much of what is usually assumed about the religious context of the late monarchic period in Judah has been built on Josiah's reform, or on an interpretation of what it is thought to have been. Many of the earlier archaeological attempts to find fixed points about the reform have later been shown as highly unlikely. The archaeological evidence was interpreted in view of the biblical text.[54] Without the biblical text, no archaeological findings or non-Biblical ancient text would have given any reason to assume a cult reform in Judah.[55] In more recent discussion, parts of the biblical text have been compared with external evidence in the hope of finding connections that could then give indica-

52 For example, Uehlinger (2007), 279–316. For further discussion, see below.

53 Cf. Köckert (2007), 272–290.

54 .For example, Aharoni (1968), 233–234. For review and criticism, see Uehlinger (2007), 287–292.

55 As noted about the archaeological evidence by Uehlinger (2007, 279, "'Josiah's reform' […] is essentially a scholarly construct built upon the biblical tradition; without that tradition no one would look out for a 'cult reform' when studying the archaeology of Judah of the Iron Age II C."

tions about the original historical background and dating of the texts in question. For example, it has been discussed whether the reference to the chariots of the sun in 2 Kings 23:11 could correspond to something in the Assyrian religious cult, which would then be used as an argument for the Assyrian origin of the verse (for discussion, see below). Some possible connections may even be established, but one should not lose sight of the fact that such a discussion is bound to 2 Kings 22–23 and about its reliability as a source. Consequently, it is necessary to understand the development and other complexities of the biblical text before we even have a source that can be compared with other evidence. For example, a passage may consist of several additions from different centuries. If we can establish that one part of the passage was very probably aware of an Assyrian cult practice, it does not mean that the whole passage was written during the Neo-Assyrian period.

Of all the countless redaction critical solutions offered to 2 Kings 22–23 that of Levin may be the most convincing.[56] Although often characterized as minimalistic and radical,[57] the reconstructed text corresponds well with what we know about the history writer and the later editorial stages in the rest of 1–2 Kings.[58]

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56 See Levin (1984), 351–371, reprinted in Levin (2003), 198–216. Some further comments in Levin (2008), 149–150.

57 E.g., by Uehlinger (2007), 298–300.

58 Similarly Niehr (1995), 39–41, who has taken Levin's redaction critical analysis as the basis for his own reconstruction of Josiah's time.

Excursus: The Main Editorial Phases of 1–2 Kings

1–2 Kings is the product of several authors and editors, but three main phases of development can be distinguished: 1. Excerpts from the royal annals, which may provide substantial evidence from the monarchic period. 2. The edition by the history writer, who, by using the annals as source material, created a theological interpretation of the past. 3. Nomistic additions, which represent several successive editors. In addition to these editorial phases, the text contains several individual additions and glosses. Some of the very latest additions attack idols and idol worshippers.

The most evident differences between the editors are met especially in the conceptions about the divine, which implies that considerable changes took place in the context of the authors or in Israel's religion. One of the main aims of the nomists was to show that the worship of other gods is against Yahweh's will and that it was one of the main sins of the past. These editors were not monotheists, because the main problem was that the Israelites worshipped the gods of other nations. According to them, the Israelites should only worship Yahweh. The worship of other gods, Baal, Asherah and the Host of Heaven was one of the main reasons that led to the destruction of Israel in 722 BCE and Judah in 587/6 BCE. These editors also emphasized the Law as the basis and center of Israel's religion, but the emphasis is particularly evident in the later stages of the nomistic texts. The nomistic editors represent a large editorial phase in 1–2 Kings so that their viewpoint is very dominant in the 'final' edition of the book.

The main aims of the history writer were to provide a history of the Davidic dynasty and to show that Jerusalem is the only legitimate place of worship. All kings of the North were systematically condemned because they 'followed the sins of Jeroboam' and continued to sacrifice outside Jerusalem. Jeroboam's sin only referred to the location of sacrifice and not to the idols or worship of other gods.[59] The golden bulls were added later by editors who wanted to connect Jeroboam with idol worship. The sin for both, Judah and Israel, was in principle the same. Both sacrificed outside Jerusalem, but Israel's sin was more severe because they only sacrificed outside Jerusalem, whereas the Judeans sacrificed in Jerusalem as well. The North had broken all cultic contact with Jerusalem and thus with the Yahweh of Jerusalem, and this was an

59 For details see Pakkala (2008), 501–525.

unforgivable sin, whereas Judah always preserved the cultic connection with the Yahweh of Jerusalem. The location of sacrifice was the main religious criterion by which the history writer evaluated the past. The history writer was not concerned about idols or other gods.

The Davidic dynasty played a dominant role in the history writer's text. He wanted to show that the dynastic succession was unbroken from David to Jehoiakin. The contrast with the North, with its constant *coup d'états* and changing dynasties, is evident. The history writer's message is clear. Jehoiakin would represent the legitimate dynastic line if the dynasty were ever to continue.[60] He wanted to show that Zedekiah could not represent the legitimate line. It is probable that the question of dynastic succession was a central issue in the author's context.

Levin's solution also explains how the text developed later by a chain of associations. It has often been assumed that the oldest text consisted of a list of more or less independent reform measures,[61] which is always possible, but certainly less convincing than a theory that is also able to explain their interrelationship and development from one to another. Moreover, in trying to find a historical core and some evidence from the time of Josiah, most solutions have neglected how heavy the impact of later editors has been.[62] However, some important alterations to Levin's reconstruction are necessary, as we will see.

It has become evident that the main interest of the history writer in 1–2 Kings is the location of the cult.[63] His main criticism of the kings deals with the high places. Every king from Rehabeam to Hezekiah is criticized for having allowed sacrifices to continue in the high places. Hezekiah removed the high places, but they were rebuilt by Manasseh. If Josiah did not defile them and thus abolish their worship, the problem would remain unsolved. The problem is never mentioned after

60 For details see Pakkala (2006), 443–452.

61 E.g., Gray (1963), 663–677; Hoffmann (1980), 212–270, esp. 264–265. According to Fritz (2003), 406, "[t]he reform includes numerous measures that may have been introduced over a long period of time."

62 Many maximalist solutions have been carefully argued, e.g., by Hoffmann (1980), 212–270, but many histories of Israel and introductions to the Hebrew Bible have adopted a maximalist view without any discussion of the problems and the development of the texts that were used as the basis of the view. E.g., Miller/Hayes (2006), 413–414; Collins (2007), 150–151.

63 It is not possible to discuss here the relationship between 1–2 Kings and the other books of the so-called 'Deuteronomistic History'. It seems increasingly probable that the connection between the different books is much weaker than traditionally assumed. It is probable, however, that 1–2 Kings, at least from 1 Kings 12 onwards, can be treated as a single composition.

Josiah, which implies that Josiah solved the problem.[64] If Josiah did not destroy the high places, it would be difficult to comprehend the history writer's main religious conceptions of evaluating the past.

2 Kings 23:8a is the only passage in 2 Kings 22–23 that describes the destruction (or defilement) of the Judean high places. Without this verse, the problem would remain. Moreover, several later additions in the following and preceding text are evidently dependent on v. 8a, which implies that the verse belongs to an early stage in the development of the text. Consequently, any reconstruction of 2 Kings 22–23 should include 23:8a in the basic text of the history writer. Although some scholars have assumed that it is a later addition,[65] it would be hard to see how the chapter could have developed into its present form and scope without v. 8a being at least one of the cores.

By reporting the killing (הִשְׁבִּית) of the priests of the high places, v. 5 partly competes with v. 8a. One could argue that instead of v. 8a, v. 5 is the core of the passage. However, it is more probable that this verse is a later addition. The use of the cop. perf. הִשְׁבִּית suggests that this verse was written by an editor who was uncertain about the rules of classical Hebrew. Moreover, it makes the priests of the high places worshippers of other gods, which was not the history writer's concern. At least there is no evidence in other passages of 1–2 Kings that other gods were worshipped at the high places. Later editors of some passages have made additions that may give such an impression, but these are later (2 Kings 21:3b). In any case, v. 5 would be dependent on v. 8a, because v. 5 does not report the destruction of the high places. Without v. 8a the high places would remain. That v. 5 is not a part of the same literary layer as v. 8a is suggested by the fact that the priests are killed in v. 5, whereas in v. 8a they are brought to Jerusalem. That v. 5 uses an atypical word for the priests (כְּמָרִים vs. כֹּהֲנִים) is not necessarily an indication that v. 5 is early,[66] but certainly implies that different authors are behind the verses.

According to Kratz, the core of the reform should be sought in 2 Kings 23:4a, 11 and 12aα[1], parts of which could also derive from the annals.[67] This reconstruction has the advantage of connecting the removal of the symbols of astral worship with the removal of the horses and chariots of the sun. The main problem with this view is that the

64 Israel is also criticized for the same sin because Jeroboam's sin was to build the temples of the high places (1 Kings 12:31 בֵּית בָּמוֹת).

65 E.g., Würthwein (1984), 411–412; Kratz (2000), 173, 193.

66 Nevertheless, according to Uehlinger (2007), 303–305, כמרים may be a sign that the verse is early. For further discussion on the word כמרים, see below.

67 Kratz (2000), 173, 193.

high places would play no role in the history writer's text of 2 Kings 22–23. The high places, which were the main problem until Hezekiah, would then remain after Manasseh had restored them in 2 Kings 21:3a.[68] In view of many other passages in 1–2 Kings that clearly show that the high places are the main sin, this, as we have seen, seems very unlikely.

Several technical and thematic considerations suggest that 22:10–23:3 derive from a late stage in the development of 1–2 Kings.[69] That 2 Kings 23:4a originally followed 22:3–7, 9 is seen in the way the verse continues the king's orders to Hilkiah. Moreover, 2 Kings 23:4 is thematically connected with 22:3–7, 9. Both deal with changes made in the temple, whereas the text in between develops the passage towards a reform that was caused by the finding of the Book of the Law. Everything between verses 22:9 and 23:4 was added later, but in several stages. Here, we are already in a stage where the Law had replaced the temple as the center of Israel's religion, and where the cult reform was based on the Law.

Although older than 2 Kings 22:10–23:3, it is unlikely that 23:4–7 is part of the history writer's text. In these verses the foreign cults are the main issue. A similar development where the cult centralization represents the older text, but which the later editors expanded to an attack against illicit cults, idols and other gods is met in other parts of 1–2 Kings[70] as well as in the Deuteronomy.[71] 2 Kings 23:8b–20 contains many interpolations that have added, in several stages, more and more locations where the high places were removed. Levin has shown the literary growth and chain of development in 2 Kings 23. The arguments need not be repeated here.[72] A chart showing the development of the chapter should suffice:

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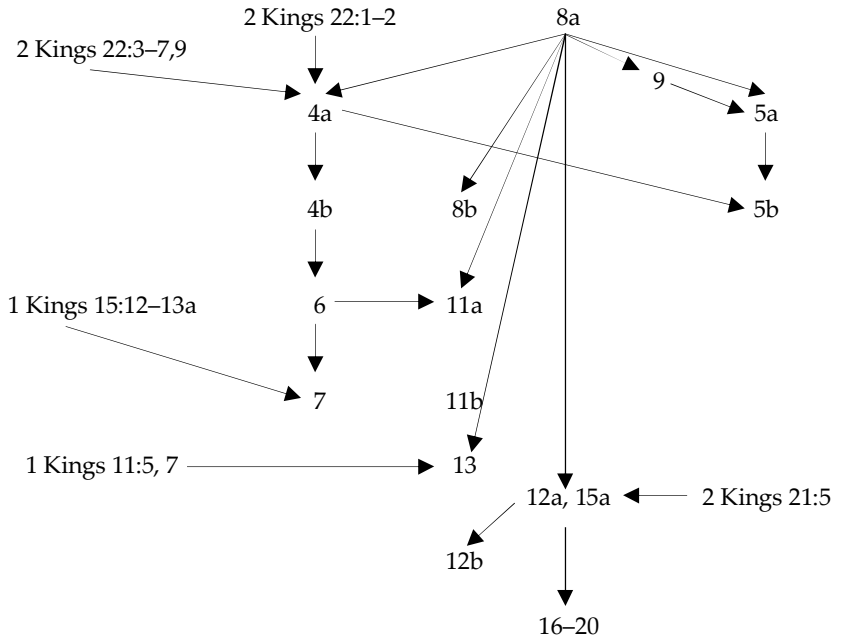
68 Note that Kratz, op. cit., ascribes 2 Kings 18:4aα[1] and 2 Kings 21:3a to the source (but both with hesitation). Without 18:4aα[1], it would be difficult to see the reason for characterizing Hezekiah as the most pious king after David. Similarly, without 2 Kings 21:3a there would be no reason for the extremely negative evaluation of Manasseh.

69 For argumentation see Levin (1984), 355–360; id. (2003), 207–209; Pakkala (1999), 171–175.

70 For example in 1 Kings 15:12–13; 18:4.

71 Deut. 12:8–12, 13–14, 17–18, 21 represents an earlier literary phase and deals with the location of sacrificial cult, whereas later editors have made several additions (Deut. 12:2–7; 12:28–13:19), which primarily deal with the worship of other gods. Cf. Veijola (2004), 262–293; Petry (2007), 101–103.

72 See Levin (1984), 355–360; id. (2003), 207–209. See also Pakkala (1999), 170–180.



According to Levin, v. 8a is the only core of the reform and "everything else is younger, nothing is from a source."[73] That the original text is so radically shorter than the final text would be surprising, but not impossible. The reigns of many other kings are similarly short reports. It is also understandable that an important turning point in Israel's religion would have attracted considerable attention from later editors. In most cases Levin's argumentation is persuasive. He is able to demonstrate the chains of dependencies and associations.

The main problem with Levin's reconstruction is that it does not provide any explanation why Josiah was made the champion of the cult centralization. If the sources of the history writer did not contain anything that would have given the author a reason to make Josiah the most pious king, one would have to assume that the reform was a pure and calculated invention. This is always possible, but not necessarily probable. Many biblical authors were creative authors, but they were usually inspired by what they found in the older texts.[74] New ideas are often reactions to the older text, which is developed further. The chain

73 Levin, (2003), 207. 2 Kings 22:1–2; 23:25a* and 28–30 would also have been part of the history writer's text.

74 For an excellent discussion and examples of the innovative nature of biblical authors and editors, see Levinson (1998).

of associations and additions in 2 Kings 23:4–20 is a prime example of this.

It is surprising that Levin takes out 2 Kings 22:3–7, 9 as an addition to the history writer's text.[75] He assumes that it was a separate fragment from an unknown source or from the royal annals, but not yet part of the history writer's text. The reason for his assumption is that 2 Kings 22:3–7, 9 broke the original connection between 22:1–2 and 23:8a.[76] It is also probable that 2 Kings 22:3–7, 9 and 23:8a were not written by the same author, because in 22:3–7, 9 the king orders Hilkiah the priest to take measures to restore the temple, whereas 2 Kings 23:8a suddenly implies that the king is the executor of the reforms. 2 Kings 23:8a would then be a fitting continuation to 22:2 where the king is similarly the subject. But these problems may only indicate that 22:3–7, 9 was probably written by a different author than 22:1–2 and 23:8a. The question is, which one preceded the other, 22:3–7, 9 or 23:8a.

If we assume that the passage developed by way of associations here as well, a development from 2 Kings 22:3–7, 9 to 23:8a is more understandable than the opposite direction of influence. If we assume that the annals contained a passage about Josiah making repairs in the temple, it would have been logical for the history writer to interpret Josiah as a pious king who cared for the temple. It is only a short step from there to a king who fights for the exclusivity of the temple and who removes the cult sites that competed with the temple. The original idea of cult centralization would not have come from the annals, but from the history writer's own theology, but 2 Kings 22:3–7, 9 would explain why Josiah was made the most pious king and hence became the pivotal figure in the cult centralization. Without 22:3–7, 9 it remains a puzzle what the background of 23:8a was, and there would be no explanation why Josiah, of all kings, was made the cult centralizer *par excellence*. In Levin's reconstruction the annals would not have contained anything that gave a reason to make Josiah the one who removed the high places and one would then have to conclude that Josiah's reform was a calculated fabrication.

If 2 Kings 22:3–7, 9 was a later addition to 23:8a, it would also be difficult to explain why the passage was added. The removal of the high places is only a vague background for repairing the temple, and 22:3–7, 9 does not seem to develop the idea any further. 2 Kings 22:3–7, 9 would remain an isolated passage without a clear function. Additions

75 2 Kings 22:8 is certainly a later addition by an editor who connected the reform with the Law. The passage may contain other additions as well, but they need not concern us here. According to Levin, op. cit., 4b, 5bα, 6, 7 were added later.

76 Levin (2003), 201; id. (2008), 149–150.

usually have a function in the new text. Such an isolated later addition from an external source, which is not integrated to the older text, would be exceptional in 1–2 Kings. Of course, some later editors then used these verses as a background for the finding of the Law, but this is a much later addition, as shown by many. Consequently, it is probable that 2 Kings 22:3–7, 9 was the spark and foundation of Josiah's reform and already an integral part of the history writer's text, most likely taken from one of his sources.

According to Levin, v. 11 is one of the latest additions to the chapter because it may be a further *Fortschreibung* of v. 4–6, which consists of many phases of late additions. Josiah would not only have removed the priests who sacrificed to the sun, but also destroyed the items used to worship the sun.[77] Verse 5a is already a very late addition (note the cop. perf.), which is then further expanded in v. 5b by a reference to the sacrifices to the sun (and other gods). Verse 11 would then be a further development inspired by at least v. 4 and 5b and thus be one of the latest additions to the chapter.

Levin's conclusions are in manifest contradiction with those of most other scholars because it is usually assumed that this verse may preserve an excerpt from the annals[78] and be the clearest indication that Josiah took some measures to renew the cult. According to Uehlinger, "the removal of the horses and chariots of the sun […] can be traced back to Josiah with great probability."[79] Spieckermann has pointed out that v. 11 does not use vocabulary typical of the attack on other gods and their cults.[80] Horses or chariots of the sun are unknown in the biblical attack on foreign cults. Spieckermann has argued that the Assyrian period in the 7th century BCE is the most probable context for the horses and chariots. He connects the verse with the Assyrian *tāmītu* ritual, where both, living horses and a chariot, have a function. That the horses were kept beside the chamber of the city governor could indicate that the official, as part of the Assyrian administration, had a supervisory function in the cult. Spieckermann further identifies the שֶׁמֶשׁ of v. 11 with the Assyrian god Shamash. Verse 11 would then witness to the Assyrian cult being officially practiced in Jerusalem, possibly in the temple of Yahweh, under Assyrian supervision.[81]

77 Levin (2003), 206.
78 Thus many; for example Würthwein (1984), 453, 459.
79 Uehlinger (2007), 301.
80 Spieckermann (1982), 109.
81 See Spieckermann (1982), 245–251.

Although some of Spieckermann's conclusions may be overdrawn[82] and considerable uncertainties remain as to the exact meaning and background of the horses and chariots, it has become apparent that an Assyrian background of 2 Kings 23:11 is more probable than a later context. It would be problematic to reject the connections with the Assyrian period outright.[83]

Uehlinger has pointed out that since Yahweh himself was probably regarded as a solar deity since the 10th century BCE,[84] it would have been logical that Assyrian religious customs and items with a solar aspect could have found their way into the temple of the Judean solar God in the 8th and 7th century BCE. In other words, an amalgamation of Assyrian practices or influence with Judean beliefs and customs would be quite possible so that one would not have to assume a cult forced and/or supervised by the Assyrians. However, it would require a very good reason, if not a complete catastrophe, for a religion to attack aspects of its own god or to change him into something else. Uehlinger's implication is that Josiah stripped Yahweh of his solar status, but why would he do that and where did the idea come from. The destabilizing aspects would also have to be taken into consideration (see above).

On the other hand, it is not an unreasonable assumption that the collapse of the Assyrian empire and the ensuing liberation of Judah from Assyrian vassalage would have meant the removal of symbols of Assyrian domination from Jerusalem. This would probably happen even if there had been no coercion. The removal of symbols is a powerful and itself a symbolic act. From these two alternatives, acknowledging the very difficult nature of the source text, it is much more probable that it was Assyrian solar symbolism that was attacked rather than the solar aspects of Judah's own God. It is necessary to stop here – before becoming involved in excessive speculation on the basis of a very unclear verse.

If we assume that v. 11 or parts of it were taken from the royal annals, it would explain even better why Josiah was made a pious reformer. With 2 Kings 22:3–7, 9 it would provide an understandable background for the literary development. Not only was Josiah seen as a defender of the temple, but he also made changes in the religion. At the present state of knowledge it seems that the birth of the reformer Josiah

82 For discussion see Uehlinger (2007), 301–303.

83 Thus Levin (2003), 206, who is certain, that the verse is not from the 7th century BCE.

84 See Uehlinger (2007), 302–303; Keel/Uehlinger (1994), 269–306.

is still a post-monarchical phenomenon, although vestiges like 2 Kings 23:11 may have contributed greatly to the process.[85]

In the wake of 2 Kings 23:11 verses 5 and 12a[86] are also brought up in the discussion about potential vestiges and excerpts from the annals. Although in v. 11 we can talk about the probability, in vv. 5 and 12a we can, at most, talk about the possibility. Verse 5 has already been discussed and only one word, כמרים, can be presented as a possible indication of an early origin,[87] but this is not sufficient. We do not know enough about how the word was used in different periods to be able to assume a 7th century BCE dating. Uehlinger appeals to its use in Hosea 10:5 and Zeph. 1:4 and its disappearance in the later books of the prophets, especially Ezekiel and Jeremiah. This would then be an indication that the word was 'typical for the 7th century BCE'. However, it is hardly possible to use these passages for dating. Zeph. 1:4–5 is immersed in Deuteronomistic phraseology and possibly even dependent on 2 Kings 23.[88] The problems, tension with v. 8 and especially the use of the cop. perf.[89] tip the balance to assume a late origin.

Verse 12a is evidently connected with 2 Kings 21:5:

23:12a	21:5
וְאֶת־הַמִּזְבְּחוֹת אֲשֶׁר עַל־הַגָּג עֲלִיַּת אָחָז	
אֲשֶׁר־עָשׂוּ מַלְכֵי יְהוּדָה	
וְאֶת־הַמִּזְבְּחוֹת אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה מְנַשֶּׁה	וַיִּבֶן מִזְבְּחוֹת לְכָל־צְבָא הַשָּׁמַיִם
בִּשְׁתֵּי חַצְרוֹת בֵּית־יְהוָה נָתַץ הַמֶּלֶךְ	בִּשְׁתֵּי חַצְרוֹת בֵּית־יְהוָה

At least the second part of the half verse was written in view of 2 Kings 21:5, which suggests that we are not dealing with an excerpt from the

85 This verse is an example of a case that stresses the importance of being open to the possibility of early fragments within heavily edited texts that are mainly late. Any redaction critical analysis cannot live in a vacuum and ignore historical observations. If a context seems probable with the current knowledge, the consequences should be drawn and they should have an impact also on the redaction critical analysis. Or, at least, one would have to challenge the connections argued to exist between v. 11 and the Assyrian background.

86 Because of the evident dependence on v. 6, verse 12b should be regarded as a later addition.

87 Cf. the discussion in Uehlinger (2007), 303–305. According to him, the word may refer to priests involved in astral worship and "probably go[es] back to Aramean influence" (304).

88 Zeph. 1:4–5 refers to the destruction of Jerusalem and Judah, and to their ensuing purification of all vestiges of Baal, Host of Heaven and Moloch/Melech. Contrary to what Uehlinger, op. cit., implies in his argument, it would be very difficult to avoid the conclusion that these verses were written after the destruction of Jerusalem.

89 Admitting that the verse is "rather muddled", Uehlinger (2007), 304, suggests that the use of the cop. perf. "should perhaps express the definite elimination of the כמרים", but such a use of the cop. perf. is atypical.

annals. The author was viewing the whole history and made Josiah remove the altars made by Manasseh. A similar technique is met in 2 Kings 23:13 where Josiah destroys the high places built by Solomon. The first part of the verse may also try to make a connection with the evil Ahaz. Ahaz constructed a new altar after the one he saw in Damascus (2 Kings 16:10–16) and an allusion to the event would have been fitting in 2 Kings 23. On the other hand, v. 23:12a refers to many altars and the עֲלִיַּת אָחָז may be a later addition to the verse. Consequently, the second part of the half verse is very probably late, whereas the first part is potentially an early fragment, especially if one could show a connection with some early religious phenomena that are not met later. However, this does not seem to be the case. Uehlinger reasons that roofs would have been a natural place to worship astral divinities, but concedes that "no primary sources support this hypothesis" and that it does not seem to have been "an Assyrian or Aramean custom."[90] Consequently, verse 12a may be part of the same late addition as v. 12b and, if we follow Levin's argumentation, it is part of the expansion of the reform measures to revoke all sins committed by other kings.

Discussion and Conclusions

Many features in the texts and the broader historical context suggest that the cult reforms, in any form intended by the biblical authors, did not take place. It is more probable that they are literary inventions and projections of later ideals into the monarchic period. The probable excerpts from annals in 2 Kings 22:2–7, 9 and 23:11 are significant fragments, but, solely on their basis, there is no reason to assume that any cult reform took place. Although they should not be used uncritically as authentic documents, perhaps something can be extracted from them about events during the time of Josiah.

According to 2 Kings 22:2–7, 9, Josiah restored the temple. This seems to have been a rather neutral reporting of a restoration of the main state sanctuary and may have a historical background in the time of Josiah. 2 Kings 23:11 is much more difficult to interpret and its authenticity is more uncertain. If authentic, it could be connected to the liberation of Judah from Assyrian vassalage. Cult items and symbols associated with the Assyrian domination would have been destroyed. One would expect some reference to the end of the Assyrian domination – surprisingly missing in the whole composition – but any other

90 Uehlinger (2007), 305.

interpretation faces more problems. The verse remains perplexing as there is no explanation for or reference to the function or meaning of the horses or chariots of the sun in the rest of the Hebrew Bible. The author may have assumed that every reader would know what was meant, or the original context of the fragment is missing. In any case, one needs much more evidence than this verse to assume an attack on the solar aspects of Yahweh took place under Josiah. Without more textual evidence the verse may never be unlocked.

2 Kings 22:2–7, 9 and 23:11 provided an excellent background for making Josiah the great reformer king. Without at least one of these fragments it would be difficult to comprehend why Josiah was made what he is in the 'final' text. The history writer, already convinced that the cult should be centralized to the temple in Jerusalem, probably found these passages in the annals, and was consequently convinced that Josiah was a pious king who took care of the temple. Perhaps he thought that such a king would have certainly defended the temple from the illicit high places. 2 Kings 23:11 gave a further reason to assume that the king was willing to act and remove anything that was not acceptable to Yahweh. Consequently, Josiah was made the centralizer, who removed the high places (23:8a). At this stage, perhaps in the mid to late 6th century BCE, the question was only about the location of the cult. The other gods, foreign cults and vessels connected to these cults were not the target of criticism, but 2 Kings 23:8a became the core and incentive for further development. Later authors ascribed more and more reform measures to the already pious king. In the nomistic texts Josiah was made to attack the Asherah, the standing stones and other gods. Gradually, he was made the one who purged all possible illicit aspects of the religion (2 Kings 23:4–7, 24). These measures were also extended to all possible locations (2 Kings 23:13–20). Finally, the measures were connected with the finding of the Book of the Law (2 Kings 22:8).

In Hezekiah's case the development is much more subtle. The annals gave an impression of a dynamic and able king, who even opposed the Assyrians and saved Judah during a time when the Assyrians defeated and annexed the more powerful Israel. He was made a cult centralizer, although his measures were later canceled by Manasseh, one of the most evil Judean kings. Later some further measures were added to his reform as well, but the development remained much more modest than in 2 Kings 23.

It is fairly evident that the destruction of 587/6 BCE meant a dramatic reorientation in the political, religious and economic structures of Judah. Due to the many gaps in our knowledge, much of the discussion

about what 'really' happened – for example, what can be shown to be early in the biblical texts – has to resort to discussions about probabilities and possibilities. Probable is that 587/6 BCE was a turning point in Israel's religion, because the basic fundaments of Israel's religion and society, the temple, Yahweh's temple cult, monarchy and state, had collapsed to the extent that the practice of the old religion would have been impossible except in a radically altered form.

The fragments that we have in 2 Kings 23 do not justify the assumption that the dramatic shift took place under Josiah. The conventional view also does not provide any explanation for why Israel's religion suddenly turned on itself and rejected many traditional conceptions. The coerced reorientation of 587/6 BCE would provide the explanation. With entirely new conceptions rising out of changed circumstances, later authors would have had to turn on Israel's older religion and attack many of its earlier traditions. There would therefore have to be very solid evidence to assume that any significant change in religion, such as an extensive cult reform, took place very shortly, just decades, before the catastrophe, as if anticipating the catastrophe and preparing for a templeless time when there was no monarch, and that such extensive changes came unscathed through the catastrophe.

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