BN 81 (1996)

Prelude to a Reconstruction of the Historical Manassic Judah[1]

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The reign of Manasseh (ca. 696-642 BCE) stretches over slightly more than half of the seventh century BCE and is a turning point for both biblical Israel, and for the historical, monarchic Judah, though for different reasons.[2] This paper focuses, of course, on historical Judah. Some considerations concerning biblical Israel, however, will be unavoidable.

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1 This paper represents a written (and enlarged) version of a paper presented at the SBL/ASOR Hebrew Bible, History and Archaeology session organized by Prof. Diana V. Edelman, and dedicated to the memory of Gösta W. Ahlström, at San Francisco, November 23, 1992. The proceedings of this session were supposed to be published in a separate volume. Unexpected circumstances, however, made this impossible. May this paper be a tribute to Prof. Ahlström, who had a great interest in the period here, and also be considered a token of appreciation to Prof. Edelman, for all her work in this respect.

2 The term biblical Israel refers to a theological/literary construction, namely Israel as described in biblical texts. The term historical, monarchic Judah points to the historical kingdom of Judah. These two terms should not be confused. On this and related issues see P. R. Davies, *In Search of Ancient Israel* (JSOTSup 148; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992) 1-74.
The reign of Manasseh is explicitly mentioned as a turning point (for biblical Israel) in 2 Kgs 23:26-27; 24: 3-4; Jer 15:4. The reasons for considering the Manassic period a turning point for monarchic Judah will become evident later in this paper.
As for Manasseh as a monarch, it has been proposed that he was the junior co-regent from 696/95 to 685. See N. Na'aman, "Historical and Chronological Notes on the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah in the Eighth Century B.C.," *VT* 36 (1986) 71-92; R. E. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings* (3rd. ed., Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 1983) 173-74, 176-78. According to 2 Kgs 21:1, Manasseh became a king when he was twelve years old.
As to the reference to his regnal period as "ca. 696-642 BCE," rather than "696-642 BCE," there is no consensus concerning the precise years of Manasseh's reign. It has been proposed, for instance, that he reigned from: (a) 697 to 642 BCE (e.g., J. M. Miller and J. H. Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986] 363; G. H. Jones, *1 and 2 Kings* [NCB; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans/ London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1984] I, 28); cf. R. E. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers,* 176-78);
(b) 698 to 642 BCE (e.g., M. Cogan and H. Tadmor, *II Kings* (AB 11; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1988) 341;
(c) 699 to 644 BCE (so J. H. Hayes and P. K. Hooker, *A New Chronology for the Kings of Israel and Judah* [Atlanta: Knox, 1988] 80, 109-11);
(d) 694-640 BCE (so J. Hughes, *Secrets of the Times* [JSOTSup 66; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990] 223); and (e) 696/95 to 642/1 (so N. Na'aman, "Historical and Chronological Notes," 90-92).
An analysis of these chronological suggestions and the set of historical proposals on which they rely (such as the change from an ante-dating to post-dating system in the chronological note about Manasseh's reign) is beyond the scope of this paper. Concerning the mentioned change of chronological systems, see H. Tadmor, "The Chronology of the First Temple Period. A Presentation and Evaluation of the Sources," J. A. Soggin, *A History of Israel. From the Beginnings to the Bar Kochba Revolt, AD 135* (London: SCM Press, 1984) 380.

From a historical point of view, the reign of Manasseh was a period of economic and political integration into the general area under neo-Assyrian hegemony. This integration brought about several related effects such as,

(1) a flourishing trade together with intensive crops designed to support it;

(2) local centers channeling humanpower, production, and military resources, including the building and strengthening of fortresses[3] and walled urban centers[4] to meet the needs of this trade; and

(3) a correlated development of the service-sector in society, together with an increasing tendency to centralization and urbanization, which is well attested in Jerusalem.[5]

This integration led also to a greater variety in the attested material culture[6] and to an increased contact between Judahites and non-Judahites, in which not only the Judahite elite took part.[7]

The combined effect of the destruction of most of Judah--except Jerusalem--at the end of the eighth century and the integration into the neo-Assyrian system in the seventh century resulted in the creation of a "new" Judah, quite different from the one that existed before 701 BCE.

Shifts in the geographical pattern of settlement represent one important aspect of this change. These shifts are discussed at length by Finkelstein.[8] It is important to stress,

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3 Such as Hurvat ᶜUza, Tel Arad, and Kadesh Barnea.

4 Such as Tel ᶜIra and ᶜAroer.

5 The tendency to centralization and urbanization is congruent with well-known Assyrian policies, as A. L. Oppenheim has written:

> It had always been the policy of Babylonian as well as Assyrian kings to organize into settlements those elements of the population who lived outside the cities. Complete urbanization of the realm was one of the chief aims of royal policy throughout the Near East until the Roman period. This policy . . . favored the ascent of the capital at the expense of the other cities in the realm. Forced urbanization of outlying sections . . . allowed the safe passage of caravans engaged in overland trade . . . Furthermore, such endeavors, . . . increased agricultural production and provided the administration with tax income, corvée workers, and soldiers."

See A. L. Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia* (Chicago & London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1964) 118; cf. J. N. Postgate, "The Economic Structure of the Assyrian Empire," M. T. Larsen (ed.) *Power and Propaganda* (Mesopotamia 7; Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1979) 193-221, esp. 197-98, 216-17.

As will be shown below, Oppenheim's remarks are also relevant to the situation in seventh century Judah. On the policies of urbanization in Ancient Palestine, see G. W. Ahlströhm, *Royal Administration and National Religion in Ancient Palestine* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1982).

6 See, for instance, O. Zimhoni, "Two Ceramic Assemblages from Lachish Levels III and II," *TA* 17 (1990) 3-52, esp. 48-49; A. Biran, "Tel ᶜIra and ᶜAroer in the Latter Days of the Kingdom of Judah," *Cathedra* 41 (1986) 26-33 (Heb.).

7 Serving the needs of traders, corvée work, and the like are hardly the kinds of occupation that one may attribute to the Jerusalemite elite. Significantly, the non-Judahite partners in this interaction constitute a relatively heterogeneous group, which most likely included, among others, Assyrians, Aramean-Assyrians, Philistines, Edomites, Phoenicians, Arabians, and Egyptians. As diverse as this group may seem, a shared feature unified them, namely they all lived and participated in the neo-Assyrian political and economic system.

however, that Jerusalem not only remained the urban, socio-political and economic center, but also its share in the Judahite urban population grew substantially.[9] This fact reflects both the new socio-economic system with its centralizing tendencies and the success of Sennacherib's policy of integrating local elite/s into the Assyrian hegemonic system. This policy not only saved Assyria the costs of creating new and effective local centers of power but also secured the support of the old-traditional local elite/s, who had now much to gain from the new status-quo and much to lose in case of rejecting it.[10]

Other differences between eighth century and seventh century Judah are more subtle, and perhaps more difficult to track, but nonetheless, significant. Halpern, for instance, noticed a difference in the average size of cooking pots and ovens as well as in shift in burial customs. Both changes have clear implications for our understanding of the social history of Judah. Significantly, both point to a similar tendency to smaller social units, which is also most likely related to the new patterns of economic activity and of settlement.[11]

In sum, the economic and political integration of Judah into the general neo-Assyrian hegemonic area had, in fact, many and far reaching effects. International and transnational trends strongly influenced now the geographical and occupational distribution of the Judahite population. Correlated social, cultural, and politico-administrative developments took place at that time. The "break" between the "old" Judah of the eighth century and the "new" Judah of the seventh century was even sharper than what might have been, because much of the former did not evolve into the latter, but was violently destroyed in 701 BCE.

The historical overview of the Manassic period sketched above relies minimally in the biblical accounts of Manasseh's reign. Is it possible to sharpen this image of the historical Manassic period by resorting to the biblical accounts of Manasseh's reign in 2 Kgs 21:1-18 and 2 Chr 33:1-20?

The account in Kings anchors Manasseh in the list of the kings of Judah that follow the interregnum of Athaliah. It also provides a chronology that is corroborated in its main

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8 I. Finkelstein, "The Days of Manasseh: The Archaeological Background," paper presented at the SBL/ASOR Hebrew Bible, History and Archaeology session dedicated to the memory of Gösta W. Ahlström, at San Francisco, November 23, 1992.

9 See Finkelstein, "Days of Manasseh. "

10 On this policy, see, for instance, R. Gane, "The Role of Assyria in the Ancient Near East during the Reign of Manasseh," paper presented at the SBL/ASOR Hebrew Bible, History and Archaeology session dedicated to the memory of Gösta W. Ahlström, at San Francisco, November 23, 1992. The support of the local dynasty, or of local, traditional and hereditary ruling elites serve also the purpose of legitimization of the integration of the local state into the imperial system, and therefore, stabilizes it. (See, S. N. Eisenstadt, *The Political Systems of Empires* [London: Collier-Macmillan, 1963], p.19.)

11 See B. Halpern, "Jerusalem and the Lineages in the 7th Century: Kinship and the Rise of Individual Moral Liability," B. Halpern and D. W. Hobson (ed.), *Law and Ideology in Monarchic Israel* (JSOTSup 124; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), pp. 71-73.

lines by external evidence.[12] In addition, it suggests a peaceful succession of power between Hezekiah and Manasseh.[13]

Most of the account in Kings concerns itself with the cultic innovations and practices (or mispractices) of Manasseh. This report is a central piece in a theological and literary structure that shapes the books of Kings, and especially the accounts of Hezekiah, Manasseh, and Josiah. Significantly, networks of similar expressions relate these accounts one to the other and to those of Ahab and Ahaz, and to Deuteronomy either by comparison or contrast.[14] This being the case, it is highly questionable whether the deuteronomistic account, or as matter of fact, any of its redactional levels,[15] reflects pre-compositional written sources, and if it does, to what extent.

Doubts concerning the reliance (or the degree of reliance) of the deuteronomistic writers of Kings on historically-oriented written sources increase because of the fact that Manasseh's cultic policies are described as a return to the practices of people who were vanquished from the land long ago because of just these practices. This description certainly hints at the results that this policy is about to bring. Moreover, it is worth noting that

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12 According to this chronology Manasseh became king of Judah when he was twelve years old and reigned fifty-five years. In its general outline, the deuteronomistic chronology of the Judean kings from Ahaz to Zedekiah is corroborated by external sources. The same does not hold true, however, for its details. Since this chronological system assigns twenty-nine years to Hezekiah, in order to keep it within the constraints of the extra-biblical evidence, one has to either reject the historicity of the reference to the fourteenth year of Hezekiah in 2 Kgs 18:13 or assume that Manasseh was only a junior co-regent of his father for thirteen years (ca. 698-686; see note 1). Neither of these options is supported by the text itself, and both imply, at least, the existence of deuteronomistic circles in which the details of the chronology for these kings of Judah were either unknown or considered irrelevant. (It is worth noting that Chronicles, despite all its divergences from Kings, *consistently* follows the [MT] regnal chronology of Kings. A study of this feature and its potential implications are beyond the scope of this paper. I plan to write a separate article on this issue.)

13 See 2 Kgs 20:20-21. One may assume that had the author of the report known about an "irregular" succession, the writer would have likely mentioned it after . . . ויתר דברי, and before . . . י מ ל ך. See, for instance, 2 Kgs 12:20-22; 21:23-26; 23:28-30.

14 See E. Ben Zvi, "The Account of the Reign of Manasseh in II Reg 21,1-18 and the Redactional History of the Book of Kings," *ZAW* 103 (1991) 355-74, and the bibliography mentioned there.

15 As it is well known, the redactional history of 2 Kgs 21:1-18 is a moot point in modern research. Among those scholars who accept the idea of, at least, one monarchic edition of the Book of Kings, I. W. Provan (*Hezekiah and the Book of Kings* [BZAW 172, 1988, Berlin: de Gruyter, 1988] 145-47) claims that the entire account of Manasseh is post-monarchic, whereas F. M. Cross (*Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1973] 285-87) claims that most of the account (2 Kgs 21:2-15) belongs to a postmonarchic Dtr2. R. D. Nelson (*The Double Redaction of the Deuteronomistic History* [JSOTSup 18, Sheffield: JSOT Press; 1981] 65-69) proposes that 2 Kgs 21: 1-3*, 16-18 belongs to the pre-exilic edition of Kings, and S. L. McKenzie (*The Trouble with Kings*, SVT 42, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991) follows Friedman and claims that 2 Kgs 21:1-7 is a part and parcel of the Josianic edition. Of course, those scholars who think that there was no monarchic edition of Kings (e.g., W. Dietrich, *Prophetie und Geschichte* [FRLANT 108, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1972]; H. D. Hoffmann, *Reform und Reformen* (ATANT 66, Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1980) will consider the entire pericope, 2 Kgs 21:1-18 post-monarchic, but may disagree concerning its redactional history. I argued elsewhere for a certain understanding of the compositional and redactional history of 2 Kgs 21:1-18, see E. Ben Zvi, "The Account."

Manasseh's cultic actions are described in Kings as a personal decision unrelated to the social and political circumstances of his time, including Assyrian suzerainty.[16]

One may claim that despite its clear theological agenda, and despite the doubt concerning its reliance on written, historically-reliable sources, the work of the deuteronomistic writers may reflect a solid knowledge of the cultic past of monarchic Judah, at least from Hezekiah to Zedekiah. But, even in such a case, to assess the relation between their description of the past and the actual historical situation one must understand/decode their discourse. To achieve this goal, one must deal with the basic concepts that shaped their discourse--and perhaps their image of the past--and their likely historical referents. Thus, to begin to assess the historicity of the account of Manasseh's cultic deeds in Kings, one must deal with questions such as:

* What did they mean by "baal" and what was the historical referent of this term? Was Baal, a separate, "alien" deity with its own features and own sancta, or was it one of the ways in which the LORD was seen to be manifested and worshipped in non-deuteronomistic circles?[17]

* Was the solar cult an expression of solarized Yahwism?[18] If so, were the deuteronomistic writers and their audience aware of that?

* Was the cult of the Ashera incompatible with the cult of the LORD or part of it?[19] If so, for whom? What was the historical referent of Ashera in Manassic Judah? Was only one single historical referent for Ashera at that time? What did the

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16 This situation led some scholars to wonder about the personal motives that Manasseh may have had. See, for instance, Y. Kaufman, *Toldot haEmunah haIsraelit* (4 vols.; Tel Aviv: Debir, 1976) II, 234 (cf. b. San. 101b). A significant number of scholars have claimed the existence of a close relation between political vassaldom to Assyria and Manasseh's cultic practices (e.g., M. Noth, *The History of Israel* [London: Adam and Charles Black, 1958] 268-69; for a qualified expression of this position, see J. A. Soggin, *A History,* 240). But neither the worship described in the account is Assyrian nor did Assyria compel vassal states to worship its gods. See J. McKay, *The Religion in Judah under the Assyrians* (London: SCM Press, 1973), and M. Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion: Assyria, Judah and Israel in the Eighth and Seventh Centuries BCE* (SBLMS 19; Missoula, Montana: Scholars, 1974); but cf. H. Spieckerman, *Juda unter Assur in der Sargonidenzeit* (FRLANT 129; 1982) 307-362. It seems that the "strongest evidence" marshaled in support of the idea that the Assyrian compelled the people of the vassal states to worship Assyrian gods is the setting up of "ṣa-lam ilani rabû-ti beli-ia ṣa-lam sarru-ti-ia" by Tiglath-Pileser III in the palace of Hanun, King of Gaza, in 734, but this does not necessarily imply the establishment of a forced Gazan worship of the Assyrian gods, or--for the sake of the case, of the Assyrian king. (I am indebted to N. Na'aman who several year ago drew my attention to this text.) For a different approach see Spieckerman, *Juda unter Assur,* esp. pp. 325-29.

17 See 2 Sam 5:20; cf. Hos 2:18.

18 See, for instance, Mark S. Smith, "The Near Eastern Background of Solar Language for Yahweh," *JBL* 109 (1990) 29-39.

19 See Deut 16:21 and, of course, the texts of Kuntillet ʿAjrud and Khirbet el-Qom. On Ashera see, for instance, J. A. Emerton, "New Light on Israelite Religion: The Implications of the Inscriptions from Kuntillet ʿAjrud," *ZAW* 94 (1982) 2-20; P. D. Miller Jr., "The Absence of the Goddess in Israelite Religion," *HAR* 10 (1986) 239-48; B. Margalit, "The Meaning and Significance of Ashera," *VT* 40 (1990) 264-97, and the bibliography mentioned in these articles.

deuteronomistic writers mean by Ashera in both their polemical discourse and in their implied vision of the past?

Due to the complexity of the issues involved in these questions, one may safely assume that in the near future there will be no scholarly consensus on a set of "most likely" answers. Certainly, to even attempt to answer these and similar questions is beyond the scope of a summary paper, such as this one. But, for the purpose of this article, it will suffice to indicate that these kinds of questions severely undermine the critical value of reconstructions of the Judahite cult that are based on a plain reading of the account in 2 Kings 21, and on the assumption that such a reading reflects the historical situation during Manasseh's days.

It may be claimed that whereas the details of Manasseh's actions reported in Kings cannot be taken as historically reliable material, the same does the same hold true for the general image of Manasseh, especially as the leader of a significant contra-reform in cultic issues.

But, as is self-evident, only if there was a reform to be undone, may one consider Manasseh the leader of a contra-reform, a traditionalist who fought against the legacy of his "unorthodox" father.[20] It is worth stressing that the emphasis in the last sentence must be on the word "reform," in the sense of an intentional change in cultic norms and practices. For instance, if Hezekiah simply gathered to Jerusalem the *sancta* from different cultic centers so they would not be taken by Sennacherib[21] (just as Merodach Baladan II did in 709,[22] and the Babylonian rulers of Sippar in 625)[23] then a return of the *sancta* to their original places when peace was restored is certainly expected, and cannot be considered a counter-reform. Moreover, given the tendencies that shaped Kings, one can reasonably doubt whether this "restoration" took place during Manasseh's reign--as narrated in Kings--rather than in Hezekiah's days, sometime after 701 BCE.

Similarly, it is reasonable to assume that the building of new settlements during Manasseh's days may have led to the establishment of new cultic centers. Such an action, however, cannot be construed as a "contra-reform" step, unless one assumes the existence of a centralizing "deuteronomist" reform in Hezekiah's days. In fact, such an action cannot be construed even as act of traditionalism, unless one reconstruct the period as one of confrontation between a deuteronomic or deuteronomistic movement and an "orthodox/traditionalist" movement, represented by Manasseh. If this historical confrontation

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20 So Ahlström, *Royal Administration*, 80.

21 See L. K. Handy, "Hezekiah's Unlikely Reform," *ZAW* 100 (1988) 111-15. Handy suggests that Hezekiah's removal of cultic implements was not fully accomplished, at least in Lachish.

22 The event is discussed in M. Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion,* 30-31. Following victory, Sargon restores the gods to their cultic centers, so they continued to be worshipped as before.

23 Before an attack from Sin-sar-iskun; see N. Na'aman, "Chronology and History in the Late Assyrian Empire (631-619 B.C.)," *ZA* 81 (1991) 243-67, esp. 260-61.

never existed, if the deuteronomic or deuteronomistic thought and movement postdates Manasseh, then the erection of local cultic centers in some of the new settlements (and to some extent, new areas of settlements) is nothing but a quite expected action, to which no radical meanings can be attached.

In sum, not only cannot be assumed that the reported details of Manasseh's actions are reliable historical material, but even the general image of Manasseh cannot be accepted unless one follows the deuteronomistic writers of Kings, and assumes with them that deuteronomistic ideas, and most likely a deuteronomistic movement, existed already in the days of Hezekiah. Whether this is the case or not deserves a special study of its own. For the purpose of this paper, it will suffice to point out that unless a convincing case is made for a Hezekianic deuteronomic/deuteronomist-driven reform, the historicity of the general image of Manasseh in Kings will remain doubtful.

An attempt to reconstruct the history of the religion or religions of Judah, or of its elite, during the Hezekianic and Manassic periods is certainly beyond the scope of this paper. But, in any case, given the plethora of problems involved in the use of the account in Kings, it seems more reasonable for such an attempt to take as its starting point archaeological, epigraphic, and historical-comparative material rather than elusive, supposed historical kernels underlying the deuteronomistic account--even if they may well exist. In addition, such an attempt should also take into account that no society is monolithic, and therefore, distinctions between "official" and "popular" or "establishment" and "non-conformist" religion and cult are unavoidable.[24] In any case, equating the historical Judahite cult in the Manassic era with the report in Kings is simplistic, and most likely misleading.[25]

The deuteronomistic account also accuses Manasseh of shedding much innocent blood (2 Kgs 21:16). The language of this reference is general and quite stereotypical.[26]

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24 Among recent contributions to the study of the historical religion (or religions?) of late monarchic Judah whose starting point is archaeological, epigraphic, and historical-comparative material, one may mention J. S. Holladay, Jr., "Religion in Israel and Judah Under the Monarchy: An explicit Archaeological Approach," P. D. Miller, Jr., P. D. Hanson, and S. D. McBride (eds.), *Ancient Israelite Religion Essays in Honor of F. M. Cross* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987) 249-99; and J. H. Tiggay, *You Shall Have no Other Gods. Israelite Religion in the Light of Hebrew Inscriptions* (HSM 31; Atlanta: Scholars, 1986). For the categories of "establishment" and "non-conformist," see Holladay, "Religion."

25 Of course, the same holds true for attempts to take deuteronomistic remarks out of its own theological and literary context to buttress a certain historical reconstruction of the period. To illustrate, it has been suggested that Manasseh sacrificed his own son (2 Kgs 21:6) because of "extreme national danger." This suggestion is offered as a possible support for the historicity of the account of Manasseh's captivity in Chronicles--on this issue see below. See R. Nelson, "Realpolitik in Judah (687-609 BCE)" W. H. Hallo, J. C. Meyer, L. G Perdue (eds.), *Scripture in Context II* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1983) 182, n. 21.

26 See Deut 19:10; 2 Kgs 24:4; Jer 7:6; 22:3, 17; also cf. Isa 59:7, Prov 6:17; Lam 4:13. Ps 106:38 may represent an ancient line of interpretation of the shedding of much innocent blood mentioned in 2 Kgs 21:16. Another line of interpretation, namely that Manasseh murdered the faithful prophets of the Lord, is probably based on a reading of the text in v 16, against the background of vv 10-15. This line of interpretation is well attested in many later sources, such as Mart. Isa. 5:1-16; *Lives of the Prophets* 1:1; *Ant.* 10.38; b San. 103b; b Yeb. 49b. Perhaps, the omission of any reference to the reign of Manasseh in the superscriptions of the prophetic books is due to the belief that this king executed all prophets (cf. *Ant.*

Accordingly, this reference does not constitute solid evidence pointing to the existence of a strong opposition, unknown from any other source, to Manasseh's policies, and certainly does not allow any historico-critical characterization of this proposed opposition in religious or political terms.[27]

Finally, it should be stressed that the Book of Kings does not recognize Assyrian hegemony over Judah in Manasseh's day. According to this book, Judah is an independent country and Manasseh an independent king. In this regard, the lack of correspondence between the historical events and the account of Judah's past as reported in Kings is remarkable. Moreover, it should be noted that this lack of correspondence is not unique to 2 Kings 21, as the description of the results of Hezekiah's revolt in Kings clearly shows.[28] These two very significant examples concerning the late monarchic period may serve as a warning against the uncritical acceptance of the "plain" testimony of Kings as a historically reliable source for the late monarchic period in any instance in which it is not clearly contradicted by unambiguous external data (such as in these two examples).

Turning to Chronicles, this book accepts most of the deuteronomistic image of Manasseh's reign but claims that it reflects only one period in his long reign. According to Chronicles, Manasseh was taken captive by the Assyrians, then he returned to the Lord, who in turn returned him to the throne (2 Chr 33:11-13). This was the beginning of a second, and very different period in Manasseh's reign, one characterized by a religious/cultic pious reform (vv 15-16) and military-related building activities (v 14). According to Chronicles, Manasseh's reform was later followed by Amon's contra-reform, which in fact sets the scene for the great reform in the 12th year of Josiah's reign (2 Chr 34:3).

If the report that Manasseh was taken captive by the Assyrians is historically reliable, one may assume--though the Chronicler does not say so--that he rebelled or plan to rebel against Assyria. Since (a) the Chronicler's account of the captivity is part and parcel of the larger theological discourse of the book;[29] (b) the style and language of the account are

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10.38). The general deuteronomistic usage of the expression in v 16, namely שׁפך דם נקי, points, however, to unlawful administration of justice and social oppression (see Deut 19:10; 2 Kgs 24:4; Jer 7:6; 22:3,17 and cf. M. Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion*, 90-91.)

27 So, for instance, Y. Kaufman, *Toldot haEmunah haIsraelit* II, 235, 268; J. A. Soggin, *A History*, 238-39.

28 On the latter issue, see E. Ben Zvi, "History and Prophetic Texts," M. P. Graham, J. Kuan, and W. P. Brown (eds.), *History and Interpretation: Essays in Honor of John H. Hayes* (JSOTSup, Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993) 106-20.

29 The account is important not only as an explanation of Manasseh's longevity, but also as a demonstration of the power of repentance, of the importance of warning before punishment, and as a pre-figuration of the history of Israel. From the point of view of the Chronicler, both Manasseh and Israel were warned but did not listen, and because of their sins both were taken into captivity to Babylon, where both repented and then were restored to Jerusalem.

consistent with those of the Chronicler;[30] and (c) some of the accounts in Chronicles are unlikely to mirror the actual events of the monarchic period;[31] one has to conclude that this account, by itself, does not provide reliable information on whether Manasseh was taken captive, nor on his Assyrian policy.[32]

Historical considerations strongly suggest that a Judahite rebellion against the Assyrian overrule is unlikely in Manasseh's days.[33]

First, simple geographical considerations should be taken into account. Judah was surrounded by Assyrian presence in the North, West (e.g., Gezer), and Southwest (e.g., Tel Sera^{c}, Tel Jemmeh). Significantly, the "heart" of the Judahite kingdom, Jerusalem, was less than one day's marching from the Assyrian border.

Second, a rebellion against Assyria would have been an unrealistic endeavor without Egyptian support. Thus, such a revolt is unlikely during the periods of peace and "co-operation" between Egypt and Assyria.[34]

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30 בבלה . . . ויאסרו in 2 Chr 33:11 recalls the text of 2 Kgs 25:7 and Jer 52:11. But notice that the Chronicler changed from יבאהו to הובילהו and cf. 2 Chr 36:6. Concerning חחים, as related to the action of bringing a Judahite king into exile, see Ezek 19:4,9; cf. 2 Kgs 19:28.

31 E.g., the invasion of Zerah the Cushite in 2 Chr 14:8-14 and Abijah's conquest of Beth-el in 2 Chr 13:3.

32 The methodological principle followed here--and in the discussion concerning the deuteronomistic account of Manasseh--is based on the premise that if the historical information given by a certain source has been proven unreliable in certain instances, then one cannot simple assume the historicity of this information in other instances only because it cannot be ruled out. (In fact, as Bentzen already noticed, one may not be in a situation to completely rule out even the claim of b B. Bat 15a that Jeremiah was the author of Kings. Of course, this does not mean that one should accept such a claim). In general terms, the methodological issue at stake is one of *ad verecundiam*, i.e., it concerns with the critical use, or abuse, of an appeal to authority. In this case, an appeal to the authority of the writers of Kings or Chronicles. As in any case of an appeal to authority, the weight of the appeal depends on both a correct interpretation of the statement of the authority and on the competence of the authority on the subject under discussion. Thus, in our case, the strength of the appeal to the authority of these authors of Kings and Chronicles concerning the history of monarchic Judah in Manasseh's days certainly depends on their expertise on these issues and on our understanding of their narratives as necessarily pointing to monarchic historical referents. Their expertise is clearly not beyond doubt. But even if it were beyond doubt, the assumption that they always pointed historical referents from the monarchic period is extremely dubious. This being the case, the force of the appeal to the authority of Kings or Chronicles (in fact, to that of their authors and redactors) seems insufficient to critically decide the issues at stake concerning the history of monarchic Judah. This conclusion does not mean that all the on-the-surface historical information in these books should be summarily disregarded. Instead, it means that the plausibility of such an information must be critically evaluated. This evaluation may be made, in part, by an analysis of the degree of consistency between the claims of this information and historical reconstructions of the period based on independent sources.

33 The present paper concerns itself only with the Manassic period, but I wrote elsewhere that Judah never rebelled against Assyria after the failure of the Hezekianic foreign policy in 701 BCE. I addressed this issue in my paper "History and Prophetic Texts."

34 Significantly, during the decade from 650 to 640 BCE (the last of Assurbanipal's annals is from 639 BCE), the Assyrians were quite active in the West. They put down the revolt in Usu and Akko in 644, fought against Arabians groups, defended Moab, etc. From 647-627 BCE peace and economic prosperity seemed to have reigned in Babylon, a situation that is inconsistent with the idea that the neo-Assyrian empire was either losing control or was seen as losing control of its realm. On these issues, see N. Na'aman, "The Kingdom of Judah under Josiah," *TA* 18 (1991) 3-71, esp. 34-36, and the bibliography cited there; cf. N. Na'aman, "Chronology and History in the Late Assyrian Empire (631-619 B.C.)," *ZA* (1992) 243-67.

Third, there is no evidence that Manasseh supported the anti-Assyrian side in the decade of the Assyrian-Nubian/Egyptian wars (673-664/3), or its immediate prelude.[35] Significantly, none of the centers of power in the region that can be compared to Judah acted against Assyria during these two periods.[36]

Fourth, there is no evidence that Manasseh supported the side of Shamash-shum-ukin (652-648 BCE) during his rebellion against his brother Assurbanipal, nor that Egypt or regional powers similar to Judah did so.[37]

Fifth, the few pieces of evidence that can be assembled describe Manasseh as loyal vassal of the legitimate king of Assyria,[38] and none of them refers to him as a rebel.[39] Similar

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35 The four main campaigns were in 673, 671, 669 and 664/3 BCE; significantly Necho I of Sais fought--and died--for the Assyrian side in 665/64. Tension between Assyria and the 25th dynasty preceded the first campaign, as the campaign against Arza (679 BCE) suggests. Abdimilki of Sidon, beheaded by the Assyrians in 677 BCE, may have enjoyed the support of Taharqa. On these issues, see A. Spalinger, "Esarhaddon and Egypt: An Analysis of the First Invasion of Egypt," *Or* 43 (1974) 295-326; idem, "Assurbanipal and Egypt: A Source Study *JAOS* 94 (1974) 316-28.

36 Not only is there no evidence that Judah and comparable regional powers (such as Edom, Moab, Ammon, Ekron) supported the Egyptian side during these campaigns, but also there is clear evidence that these countries collaborated with the Assyrians. The Phoenician cities and, to some extent, some of the Philistine centers represent a different geopolitical group. They depended, at least partially, on maritime routes and trade. In addition, some Philistine centers, and esp. Ashkelon may have been under Egyptian control for short periods of time in this decade. Cf. A. Spalinger, "Esarhaddon and Egypt," esp. 301; idem, "The Foreign Policy of Egypt Preceding the Assyrian Conquest," *Chronicles d'Egypt* 53 (1978) 22-47, esp. 42. Elsewhere I suggested that the absence of king of Gaza from the list of kings paying tribute to Sennacherib in the plain of Usu in 701 BCE was due to a similar instance of Egyptian control. See Ben Zvi, "Judah in the Days of the Assyrian Hegemony: History and Historiography" (MA Thesis; Univ. Tel Aviv, 1987) 286.

37 Only some Arabian tribes supported Shamash-shum-ukin.

38 See R. Borger, *Die Inschriften Asarhaddons Königs von Assyrien* (Afo Beiheift, 9; Graz, 1956) 60 l. 55; M. Cogan and H. Tadmor, *II King* (AB 11; New York: Doubleday, 1988) 339; ANET 291. Manasseh is mentioned there as one among twenty-two kings (including ten from Cyprus/Iadnana) who are to commanded to transport building materials to Nineveh. A similar list is found in Cylinder C of Assurbanipal (Borger *Die Inschriften,* 48 l. 80-82; ANET 294). According to this text, Manasseh and the other kings joined Assurbanipal in his first campaign against Egypt. The fact that twenty out of twenty-two kings are mentioned in both inscriptions suggests that by the time of the composition of Cylinder C (646 BCE), the list (or a similar one) became a stereotypical list of faithful vassal. If this is the case, then the position that Manasseh was indeed a faithful vassals is certainly reinforced. For other Assyrian material, most likely referring to the Manassic era and clearly showing Judah as an Assyrian vassal state, see R. Gane, "The Role of Assyria."

39 Sometimes it is claimed that since Assurbanipal allowed Necho to return to Sais and to his throne, he may have allowed Manasseh to return to his throne, following his rebellion and captivity. True, Necho was taken captive along with other kings from the Delta because of their cooperation with Tarhaqa and against Assyria, and was sent back to Sais as a king. But, from the fact that Necho was taken captive and sent free does not follow that the same happened to Manasseh, or to any other contemporaneous king. At best, the way in which Assurbanipal dealt with Necho (but not the way he treated others) may support the likelihood that had Manasseh rebelled, he may have been allowed to return to his throne, but it says nothing concerning the question of whether Manasseh rebelled or not.
It is worth noting that the claim of a general knowledge of a precedent of Assyrian kings pardoning rebels has been used as an argument that "reinforces rather than diminishes the likelihood that the fact of Manasseh's own arrest is learned by the Chronicler by theological inference rather than from the materials in his sources or in historical reality." See R. North, "Does Archaeology Prove Chronicles Sources?" H. N. Bream, R. D. Heim and C. A. Moore (eds.), *A Light unto My Path. Old Testament Studies in Honor of Jacob M. Myers* (Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press, 1974) 385.

fragmentary evidence is generally understood as pointing to an uninterrupted situation of faithful vassaldom, whenever it deals with Judah's neighbors, such as Ammon, Moab, Edom, and the Philistine cities. The reason behind this position is very simple and persuasive, namely: if the few pieces of clear evidence point to an existent situation of vassaldom at certain points in time, then according to the principle of consistency and simplicity, it is more reasonable to assume an ongoing situation of vassaldom than to assume a succession of rebellions and defeats. The burden of proof, in this case, is on the shoulders of those proposing failed revolts.[40] Applying the same rules to the study of Judah's political record, one has to conclude that Judah was most likely a loyal Assyrian vassal during the Manassic period.[41]

As mentioned above, according to Chronicles, the release of Manasseh from captivity initiated a new period in his reign. The very questionable historicity of the account of the captivity heavily looms over the historicity of the related accounts of the Manassic (and Amon's) reform and of Manasseh's building activities.[42] Yet one may claim that the latter reflect in some way historically reliable sources known to the Chronicler, even if in their present form these accounts are integrated into a narrative that includes questionable historical information. Of course, to buttress such a case one must find some evidence supporting the existence of these assumed historically reliable pre-chronistic sources. Is there such evidence?

As to Manasseh's reform,

(a) There is no other independent source that mentions his pious reform, or Amon's contra-reform.[43]

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40 See my article, "History and Historical texts." There I quote from Tadmor's classical article on Philistia under Assyrian rule, who summarizes Gaza's political record after the deportation of Hanun in 720 BCE as follows:
"She (Gaza) seemed to have learned her lesson well, and henceforth, despite the unrest which continued to prevail in Palestine during the reigns of Sargon and his successors, remained loyal to Assyria," (H. Tadmor, "Philistia under Assyrian rule," *BA* 29 [1966] 86-102, quotation p. 91). I also mention in this paper that similar evidence has led Bartlett and Haak, among many others, to the conclusion that Ammon, Moab, and Edom were faithful vassals; and Gitin, Haak, and many others to the conclusion that Ekron was a loyal vassal (see, for instance, J. R. Bartlett, *Edom and the Edomites,* 137-40; R. Haak, "Prophets and History: Zephaniah," forthcoming; S. Gitin, "Urban Growth."

41 Cf. J. M. Miller and J. H. Hayes, *A History*, 374-76.

42 The vast majority of scholars who accept the historicity of these accounts, also accept that of Manasseh's captivity. See, for instance, J. McKay, *The Religion,* 24-27. Conversely, scholars who do not accept the historicity of the account of the captivity, tend to reject the historicity of the related accounts, and especially that concerning the Manassic reform. See, for instance, J. M. Miller and J. H. Hayes, *A History*, 374-76.

43 Of course, the report on Manasseh's reform in 2 Chr 33:15-16 stands in tension with 2 Kgs 21:1-18; 23:4-28; Jer 15:4; and Chr 33:22. For a qualified attempt to suggest a historical background to the Manassic reform that is compatible with a reconstruction of his reign based on the acceptance the historicity of the account of Manasseh's captivity and on the premise of a strong Phoenician and Arabian influence during the first Manassic period, see J. McKay, *The Religion*, 24-27, and H. G. M. Williamson, *1 and 2 Chronicles,* (NCB; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans/ London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott; 1982) 394-95.

(b) There is no indication, linguistic or of any other kind, that the Chronicler is dependent in vv 15-16 on any written pre-chronistic source, whether historically-reliable or not.

(c) Within the theological discourse of Chronicles, it would have been impossible to claim on the one hand that Manasseh humbled himself and recognized "the Lord is the God," and God accepted his repentance, and on the other that Manasseh left the cultic situation exactly as it is reported in vv 3-7.

In light of these considerations, one has to conclude that there is no convincing evidence supporting, directly or indirectly, the claim that the Chronicler relied on received, and reliable, historical sources when writing the account of Manasseh's cultic reform.[44]

As to the report concerning the building activities of Manasseh:

(a) It is well known that building activities are common topoi in the literary-theological characterizations of kings who behaved piously according to the Chronicler.[45]

(b) Manasseh's activities outside Jerusalem are described only in very general terms (see 2 Chr 33:14b); moreover, the text shows no lexical or linguistic indication of relying on any monarchic written source (שׂרי חיל "army officers" occurs only in Neh 2:9; concerning הערים הבצרות see 2 Chr 32:1).

(c) The description of his activities in Jerusalem is more concrete. This fact may be understood either as a reflection of a historical source or as a rhetorical attempt to enhance the verisimilitude of the account. Significantly, the geographical concepts and terminology used in this description are all attested in the so-called Late Biblical Literature. Note the use of the word מערב, quite frequent in material found in Chronicles without any parallel in Kings (see 1 Chr 26: 16, 18; 7:28; 12:15; 26:30; 2 Chr 32:30; 33:14). Both עפל and עיר דויד are attested in Chronicles and Nehemiah (see 2 Chr 27:3; 33:14 for עפל and passim for עיר דויד; see Neh 3:15; 12:37 and Neh 3: 26,27; 11:21, respectively). הדגים שער is also attested in Nehemiah (Neh 3:3; 12:39; cf. Zeph 1:10).

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44 Of course, the simple fact that the Chronicler reported such a reform, and that one cannot ruled it out, cannot be considered convincing evidence by itself. For the methodological reasons of this position, see note 31.

45 In Chronicles, military-related building activities are considered to be an expression of the divine blessing that generally follows righteous behavior, see 1 Chr 11:8; 2 Chr 26:9-10; 27:3-4; 32:5. On these topoi, see P. Welten, *Geschichte und Geschichtsdarstellung in den Chronikbüchern* (WMANT 42; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1973) 9-78. For his detailed analysis of 2 Chr 33:14, see pp. 72-78.

Thus, there is no need to assume that the Chronicler was relying on a written document from the monarchic times, and therefore, following Ockham's razor, one should not assume the existence of one.

It is worth noting that archaeological data pointing to building activities during the seventh century are irrelevant to the question of the historicity of the account in Chronicles. True, as expected of a period of economic development, and because of reasons mentioned at the beginning of this article, new settlements were established and Jerusalem grew larger, and the built area in Judah grew consistently throughout the seventh century, from its nadir in the aftermath of Sennacherib's campaign. These developments certainly characterized the reigns of Manasseh, Amon, and Josiah. But what do these developments tell us about the existence or non-existence of historically reliable sources underlying the Chronicler's account of Manasseh? An appeal to the archaeological data to answer this question is reasonable only if one accepts beforehand the existence of sources connecting between building activities that took place in the monarchic account and the Chronicler's account. This being the case, such an appeal represents a clear case of circular thinking, because it assumes what it is to prove.

Significantly, if a necessary connection between actual building activities in late monarchic Judah and the building accounts in Chronicles is not assumed, neither the report of Manasseh's building activities nor the lack of such a report in Josiah's account are relevant for the reconstruction of historical Judah.[46]

To sum up the results of this general overview of Manassic Judah and of the sources that may be used to reconstruct it, the most likely historical image of Judah during the Manassic period is one characterized by integration in the Assyrian region, by a relatively specific kind of economic development, by profound socio-economic changes, and by uninterrupted faithful vassaldom to Assyria and its kings, with all its implications.
Significantly, similar features characterize all the regional powers of the area. Therefore, it seems that the situation in Judah is not to be understood as a reflection of an idiosyncratic ideology or theology of its king and his elite, but as a reflection of a certain set of historical and

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46 Pace, for instance, L. Tatum, "From Text to Tell: King Manasseh in the Biblical and Archaeological Record" (Ph.D diss; Duke Univ., 1988); cf. Na'aman, "The Negev," 7. Josiah reigned thirty-one years (ca. 639-609 BCE), most of which were prosperous ones. Are we supposed to believe that Josiah build nothing during his reign because there is no mention of building activities in the Chronicler's account? Certainly not, but if the account of Josiah is not reliable in this respect, what does it tell us concerning Manasseh's account? See the methodological issues discussed in note 31.
In the past there was a tendency to assign the development of Judah in the seventh century to Josiah. It seems that this tendency was influenced by the positive description of Josiah in both Kings and Chronicles--along with the negative picture of the "idolator" Manasseh. This tendency reflected the Chronicler's general approach, namely that a good king is a builder of the nation, in any possible meaning of the word "builder." Recent references to Manasseh as the almost only builder in seventh century Judah which seem to rely, at least partially, on the lack of a building report in Josiah's account, represent another reading of Chronicles. In my opinion both readings are flawed, because they assume that a theological-literary work from Persian Yehud necessarily reflects the historical circumstances of late monarchic Judah. On these and related issues, see P. R. Davies, *In Search*, 1-74.

regional circumstances.[47] As to the biblical accounts of Manasseh's reign, an attempt to sharpen the historical image of the period on the basis of these accounts has led to no convincing conclusions. This "failure" may be an important conclusion not only for the reconstruction of the historical Manasseh, but also for that of the biblical Manassehs.[48]

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47 This being so, one of the most promising ways to advance our understanding of historical Judah in Manasseh's day is to focus on the (systemic) circumstances and possible roles of vassals states in the neo-Assyrian empire, and especially on that of the southwestern vassals (e.g., Judah, Ekron, Moab). Models of the empires, or more specifically of core-periphery socio-economic and political systems may be helpful in this endeavor. See, for instance, R. S. Stantley and R. T. Alexander, "The Political Economy of Core-Periphery Systems," E. M. Schortman and P. A. Urban (eds.), *Resources, Power and Interregional Interaction* (Interdisciplinay Contributions to Archaelogy, New York and London: Plenum Press, 1992), pp. 23-49. An analysis of such models and their potential uses for the understanding of Manassic Judah deserves a separate discussion. (Notice the recent publication of J.P.J. Olivier, "Money Matters; Some Remarks on the Economic Situation in the Kingdom of Judah during the seventh century B.C," *BN* 73 [1994], pp. 90-98, which may exemplify the potential and the limitations of works based on these models.) In addition, it is worth stressing that also the underlying reasons that led to the replacement of a regional "interstate" system--which existed in the area since the collapse of the great empires of the Late Bronze--by a new regional imperial system--which, of course, led to the unavoidable integration of Judah within the imperial system--are substantially unrelated to any possible policy of a Judahite king. As such they should be studied in regional terms, and likely with the heuristic help of systemic approaches. In this respect, see, for instance, R. Taagpera, "Size and Duration of Empires. Growth-Decline Curves, 3000 to 600 B.C.," *Social Science Research* 7 (1978) 180-96.

48 I am grateful to Dr. M. Patrick Graham, Emory University, for his careful reading of an earlier draft of this paper and his helpful suggestions.