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Reinterpretation of History in the Books of Chronicles: The Case of King Manasseh¹

Abstract: Manasseh of Judah: an idolatrous ruler and murderer to be condemned, as depicted in 2 Kgs 21:1–18, or a converted sinner and restorer of his kingdom, a pattern to follow, as presented in 2 Chr 33:1–20? These two biblical portrayals of the king cannot be reconciled without raising questions about the assumptions of the biblical historiographers who built up two alternative traditions about this biblical figure. The case of King Manasseh is therefore an intriguing example of the Chronicler's reinterpretation of historical material found in the Books of Kings. It is argued that particular narrative strategy and theological issues lie behind this vision of the king and its significance for the addressees of both writings. Consequently, the biblical figure of Manasseh is somehow biased, and its historical reconstruction has its limitations.

Keywords: Books of Chronicles, Books of Kings, King Manasseh, theology of history

1. Introduction

The relation between the history of the Kingdom of Judah described in the Books of Chronicles and the history of this kingdom as told in the Books of Kings is an interesting and much debated question. Many studies have been devoted to the work of the Chronicler, who, though he used material from the Books of Kings (the so-called *Vorlage*), often gave them a new form, omitting some threads or incorporating new ones. A comparison of these two

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historiographical projects provokes questions about the narrative strategy and editorial assumptions, as well as about the theological issues that governed the biblical author's choice of historical material and manner of constructing his accounts.

The story of King Manasseh is a particularly interesting case, since in the Books of Chronicles it has a different construction and significance than in the Books of Kings.² When we place these accounts side by side, it can clearly be seen that only the first part of the narrative (with a few small differences) is conducted in parallel, showing continuity of historiographical material between the Books of Chronicles and the Books of Kings (2 Chr 33:1–9 = 2 Kgs 21:1–9). For we find out from both accounts about Manasseh's impious and idolatrous deeds, whereas later the interpretation of what happened to the king develops in two opposite directions. In the narrative of the Books of Kings, his reign is unambiguously condemned, as he is held personally responsible for the Babylonian invasion and the fall of the Kingdom of Judah (2 Kgs 21:10–18; see also 2 Kgs 23:26–27; 24:3–4). The Chronicler's account, in turn, draws on new historiographical material, presenting Manasseh in a positive light as a repentant sinner who has rehabilitated himself in the eyes of God and restored the former splendour of the kingdom by his reforms and building enterprises (2 Chr 33:10–20). In this way, then, the Chronicler's account is not merely a simple reconstruction of the history of Manasseh on the basis of historiographical material from the Books of Kings, but a full reinterpretation of Manasseh's story.

The alternative accounts of Manasseh in Holy Scripture provoke questions about the narrative strategy and the theological message that flows from these two different stories. Why does the Chronicler

² For a detailed analysis of the biblical image of Manasseh in the Books of Kings and the Books of Chronicles see, for example, K.A.D. Smelik, *Converting the Past: Studies in Ancient Israelite and Moabite Historiography*, Oudtestamentische Studiën (OTS) 28, Leiden–New York–Köln 1992, 129–189; F. Stavropoulou, *King Manasseh and Child Sacrifice: Biblical Distortions of Historical Realities*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 338, Berlin 2004, 15–59; G.N. Knoppers, *Saint or Sinner?: Manasseh in Chronicles*, in: J. Corley, H.V.M. von Grol (eds), *Rewriting Biblical History: Essays on Chronicles and Ben Sira in Honor of Pancratius C. Beentjes*, Berlin–New York 2011, 211–229.

pass over those elements in the tradition of Manasseh that indicate his personal responsibility for the fall of Judah? Why does he present Manasseh in a different light than the historiographer of the Books of Kings? What historical value does the Chronicler's own material have? These are only some of the questions for which we shall seek answers in the present study. Our investigation is divided into several stages. First, we shall compare the shared material from the tradition of Manasseh, indicating points of contact between the account in the Books of Kings and that in the Books of Chronicles. Second, we shall analyse the material that is peculiar to each of the two accounts, emphasising those elements in which the traditions differ, and their theological consequences. Third, we shall consider the probable narrative strategy that lies behind the given vision of the fate of Manasseh, and its significance for the addressees of these writings. Finally, we shall ponder the question of historical reconstructions of the figure of Manasseh, their possibilities and their limits.

2. Material Common to the Tradition Concerning Manasseh

At the beginning of the story of Manasseh, the historical material that appears is common to both the Books of Kings and the Books of Chronicles (2 Kgs 21:1–9 = 2 Chr 33:1–9).³ Both historiographers present the figure of the king and provide basic information about his reign. Next, they conduct an unambiguously negative assessment of his deeds and three times refer to his sins of idolatry, which strike straight to the heart of the uniqueness of the cult of YHWH. Both historiographers twice refer to the prophecies concerning Jerusalem as a place chosen by God, where he will put His name. Both authors also point to the fact that the condition for the prosperity of Judah

³ Some other common elements in the story of Manasseh can also be found in its ending (2 Kgs 21:17–18 ≈ 2 Chr 33:18–20), but while the text of 2 Chr 33:1–9 quotes almost *verbatim* 2 Kgs 21:1–9, the narrative of 2 Chr 33:18–20 contains a clearly reworked version of the text of 2 Kgs 21:17–18. I discuss the ending of both accounts later in point 3., which is devoted to the writers' own material in the tradition of Manasseh.

and her inhabitants is observation of the Law of Moses. The material common to both narratives concludes with a summing up that condemns the impiety of the people, whom Manasseh led astray by his practices.

The table below presents the material common to 2 Kgs 21:1–9 and 2 Chr 33:1–9 (the expressions in the centre refer to both versions, while differences, additions and omissions are indicated as appropriate in the columns referring to 2 Kgs 21 or to 2 Chr 33).

	2 Kgs 21	2 Chr 33
v. 1	<i>Introduction:</i> Manasseh became king at the age of 12, reigned over Judah for 55 years	
	His mother was named Hephzibah	—
v. 2	<i>Negative assessment of his rule:</i> Manasseh did what was evil in the sight of God, like the nations that God had driven out before Israel	
vv. 3–4a	<i>First catalogue of his crimes:</i> He rebuilt the high places which his father Hezekiah had destroyed He raised altars to Baal to the Baals He made Canaanite wooden image, an Asherah as Ahab, king of Israel, had done He worshipped all the host of heaven and served them He built altars in the temple of YHWH	
v. 4b	<i>Prophecy recalled:</i> YHWH will put his name in Jerusalem	
vv. 5–6a	<i>Second catalogue of crimes:</i> He built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the temple of YHWH He burned as an offering his son his sons	

	<p>—</p> <p>He practised soothsaying and augury — and dealt with mediums and wizards</p>	<p>in the Valley of the Sons of Hinnom</p>		
v. 6b	<p><i>First summing-up:</i> He did much evil, provoking YHWH to anger</p>		v. 6b	
v. 7a	<p><i>Third catalogue of crimes:</i> He set in the temple of YHWH an image of Asherah that he had made</p>	<p>a carved image which he had made</p>	v. 7a	
vv. 7b–8	<p><i>Recalling of the prophecy given to David and Solomon:</i> The temple in Jerusalem is a chosen place, in which YHWH will put his name for ever, YHWH will not allow the sons of Israel to wander any more out of the land given to their fathers If only they keep what he has commanded them, and the whole Law, — which his servant Moses commanded them</p>		<p>The temple and Jerusalem on which he set the feet of your fathers statutes and ordinances given through Moses</p>	vv. 7b–8
v. 9	<p><i>Second summing-up:</i> The people did not listen to these words of YHWH Manasseh seduced them</p>		<p>— Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem</p>	v. 9
	<p>so that they did even more evil than the heathen whom YHWH had destroyed before Israel</p>			

The table above shows that the principal part of the two accounts is shared.⁴ The differences that we observe are mainly of stylistic or rhetorical significance. For example, one may point to a certain tendency in 2 Chr 33 to use the plural rather than the singular, as in 2 Kgs 21 (v. 3: Baals *versus* Baal, Asherahs *versus* Asherah; v. 6a: sons *versus* son). Besides this, the Chronicler's account omits certain elements typical of the historiography of the Books of Kings, such as the recording of the king's mother's name in the case of the monarchs of Judah (v. 1), or the reference to Ahab, the king of Israel (v. 3). The Chronicler, however, adds to and extends certain details of the account, for example, he defines precisely the place of the burnt offering (v. 6a, the Valley of the Sons of Hinnom); he uses a term signifying the practice of sorcery (vb *kāšaq̄* piel; v. 6a) alongside others denoting augury (vb *'ānan* poel) and soothsaying (vb *nāḥaš* piel); and he extends the call to observe the Law (Hebr. *tôrāh*; v. 8) by reference to statutes (Hebr. *ḥuqqîm*) and ordinances (Hebr. *mišpāṭîm*). The Chronicler also states more precisely that Manasseh seduced "Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem" (v. 9), whereas 2 Kgs uses only the pronoun "them". Elsewhere (v. 7a) the Books of Chronicles replace the expression "an image of Asherah" (Hebr. *pesel hā'āšērāh*) found in the Books of Kings with a more general expression, "a carved image" (lit. "image-carving", Hebr. *pesel hassemel*).

The differences between the texts of 2 Chr 33:1–9 and 2 Kgs 21:1–9 indicate a slight alteration of accents in the account. The text of the Books of Chronicles is more emphatic and expressive, pointing more strongly to Manasseh's guilt by multiplying his crimes (e.g., by the use of plural forms) and detailing them (e.g. by reference to the Valley of the Sons of Hinnom and by the addition of a term for the practice of sorcery), or by omitting one of the references to the collective guilt of the people. The Chronicler also uses language which is more explicit and persuasive (e.g., he adds statutes and ordinances to the Law; he is precise as to whom

⁴ In order to simplify the record, and for didactic purposes, I have omitted from the table some lexical and stylistic differences between the Hebrew texts of 2 Kgs 21:1–9 and 2 Chr 33:1–9. These differences in my view have no great importance for the overall content of the story.

Manasseh seduced). In addition, the expression “carved image” seems to have a greater impact on the addressees of the Books of Chronicles, that is the postexilic community of Israel, because it broadens the reach of the concept of idolatry to any kind of image of a heathen god.⁵

These observations do not alter the fact that the general message of 2 Chr 33:1–9 remains in harmony with that of 2 Kgs 21:1–9. The Chronicler presents King Manasseh as a wicked idolater who gave himself over to the practices of heathen nations, dealt a direct blow to the cult of the one God YHWH and desecrated His temple in Jerusalem by placing heathen altars in it and a carved image of a god. The drama of this situation is underlined by the twice-repeated recalling of the words of God about his choice of this place for His name and the impossibility of reconciling it with the idolatrous cult of Manasseh. Thus, the words of the historian, that the promise of God’s Providential care for His people is conditional on their observation of the Law of Moses, sound like a warning. A similar thing can be said of the statement that Manasseh seduced his people to such an extent that the ungodly deeds of Judah surpassed even the practices of the nations driven out before them. All this must incline the addressee to ask serious questions about the future of Jerusalem, Judah and the whole nation.

3. The Writer’s Own Material in the Tradition Concerning Manasseh

The turning point in the story of the impious king is 2 Chr 33:10. From this point on, the Chronicler’s narrative takes a different direction than the narrative of the Books of Kings. While 2 Kgs 21:10–18 continues the theme of indictments against the king and shows the consequences of his actions for the whole nation (further incrimination of Manasseh, intensifying his guilt), the Chronicler

⁵ See Ph. Abadie, *From the Impious Manasseh (2 Kings 21) to the Convert Manasseh (2 Chronicles 33): Theological Rewriting by the Chronicler*, in: M.P. Graham, S.L. McKenzie, G.N. Knoppers (eds), *The Chronicler as Theologian: Essays in Honor of Ralph V. Klein*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament. Supplement Series (JSOT.SS) 371, London–New York 2003, 97.

introduces the theme of divine punishment meted out directly to the king and informs the reader of his conversion and restoration to grace by God (rehabilitation of Manasseh). Let us examine both processes, in order then to draw out the elements that are characteristic for each of these accounts.

3.1. Indictment of Manasseh in 2 Kgs 21:10–18; 23:26–27; 24:3–4

The plot of the story in 2 Kgs 21:10–18 develops the theme of the charges against Manasseh. The historiographer here recalls the prophecy that God spoke through his servants the prophets (v. 10). The content of the prophecy refers first (v. 11) directly to the crimes of Manasseh, whose scale is unprecedented, and to the fact that he also led his country into sin (here intertextual connections are forged between the prophecy and what has already been said in vv. 2 and 9). The historiographer next presents God's unambiguous judgement: Jerusalem and Judah will be destroyed (v. 12), and their inhabitants will become a prey and spoil to all their enemies (v. 14). This sentence is presented with the aid of two images.

The first of these refers to the destruction of Samaria, the capital of the Northern Kingdom, and the fall of the house of Ahab (v. 13a), considered to be the most impious of all Israel's monarchs (see 1 Kgs 16:30, 21:25). This is no accidental comparison, for the list of Manasseh's sins in 2 Kgs 21:3–4a is similar to those of Ahab in 1 Kgs 16:31–33, whose house was condemned to destruction for precisely such impiety and idolatry (1 Kgs 21:21–24). The case is similar with the fall of Samaria (2 Kgs 17:5–6), which the historiographer interprets in theological terms as the result of idolatry and unfaithfulness to the true cult of YHWH (2 Kgs 17:7–23). Many of the crimes detailed in this pericope as the cause of God's anger and punishment recall the charge against Manasseh in 2 Kgs 21:1–9 (see especially 2 Kgs 17:16–17: making images of idols, worshipping the host of heaven, burning his children as offerings, divination and sorcery). The practical aim of this juxtaposition is clear: the same fate will meet Jerusalem, Judah and their inhabitants as met Samaria and the house of Ahab.

In the second image, the destruction of Jerusalem is compared to wiping a dish (by implication: of dirt), which is then turned upside down (2 Kgs 21:13b). This metaphor suggests that the destruction will also be the purification of Jerusalem and Judah from the idolatry of Manasseh. The motif of turning a dish upside down, however, does not signify utter extermination or annihilation; rather, it is destruction with the perspective of renewal.

The last words of the prophecy analysed here justify God's judgement against Jerusalem and Judah as resulting from the impiety of the people of Judah, who since the exodus from Egypt have never ceased to offend God by their deeds (v. 15). This declaration undoubtedly shifts the accent from Manasseh's personal guilt for the approaching disaster to the shared responsibility of the inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judah. It also creates suspense in the plot, because God's judgement is not executed until the events of 2 Kgs 24–25.

In the later part of the story of Manasseh, the historiographer recalls yet another of his crimes: he shed so much innocent blood in Jerusalem that he filled the whole city from one end to the other (2 Kgs 21:16). This crime adds to the charges against the king a sin of a different character from those mentioned so far.⁶ In the eyes of the historiographer of the Books of Kings, Manasseh was not only impious and idolatrous; he was also a murderer, who instead of caring for the welfare of his people, persecuted them in a bloody manner. This charge has its later consequences, since looking at the matter from an intertextual point of view, the unlawful shedding of blood calls either for retribution to be made by the death of the perpetrator of the crime (Gen 9:6, Num 35:33),⁷ or, if the murderer

⁶ Unlawful killing is a crime directed against the social order. The laws expressed in Deut 19: 10–13 forbid the shedding of innocent blood in the land that God gives his people as an inheritance. This text orders the unconditional removal from Israel of the person guilty of shedding innocent blood. See P.S.F. van Keulen, *Manasseh through the Eyes of the Deuteronomists: The Manasseh Account (2 Kings 21:1–18) and the Final Chapters of the Deuteronomistic History*, OTS 38, Leiden 1996, 140.

⁷ The only exception is unintended killing, in which case the perpetrator may take shelter in one of the so-called cities of refuge, while his guilt is redeemed along with the death by natural causes of the high priest in office at the time (Num 35: 28, 32).

is not discovered, for a rite of cleansing to be carried out with ash from a red heifer (Deut 21:1–9). If these actions are not undertaken, then the land remains irrevocably stained with blood, and then it cannot be inhabited either by the people or by God Himself (Num 35:33–34).⁸ Thus, in the eyes of the historiographer, the unredeemed guilt for the bloody crimes of Manasseh constituted no less a threat to the existence of the Kingdom of Judah than his impiety and idolatry.

The plot of the story of Manasseh in 2 Kgs 21, however, is devoid of a resolution. After learning of all Manasseh's sins and of the prophecies against Jerusalem and Judah, the reader might expect God's judgement to be carried out in the form of direct punishment of the perpetrator of the crimes, that is King Manasseh himself. Yet the conclusion to the story in 2 Kgs 21 says nothing about this. The historiographer first presents a stereotypical conclusion concerning the reign of the monarch, in accordance with the convention of the Books of Kings (v. 17), going on to inform the reader of his burial in the palace garden and the establishment of his son Amon as the new king of Judah (v. 18). The information that Manasseh slept with his fathers in his grave assumes a peaceful death without violence. The historiographer mentions nothing about the possible punishment that God might have meted out directly to Manasseh, in the shape of war or the shedding of his blood in revenge for the crimes committed. It may then be assumed that the guilt and punishment for the sins of Manasseh were not wiped out and continued to weigh on his people, in accordance with the biblical concept of collective responsibility for the king's guilt (compare the case of king David in 2 Sam 24:17).⁹ It is worth noting that on the constructional layer of the story, this means a suspense in the plot which calls for completion and resolution.

The tradition concerning Manasseh in the Books of the Kings is not confined only to 2 Kgs 21. This figure is recalled another three

⁸ Compare Lev 18: 24–30, where it is stated that the inhabitants of Canaan have been deprived of the right to their land because of their shameful crimes, which have made the land unclean.

⁹ See R.D. Nelson, *I e II Re*, Strumenti. Commentari 51, Torino 2010, 273; K.A.D. Smelik, *Converting the Past: Studies in Ancient Israelite and Moabite Historiography*, 160–163.

times. Two of these are in the context of the actions of his grandson, king Josiah, who restored the covenant with God after the impious reigns of his grandfather Manasseh and his father Amon (2 Kgs 23:1–3). The historiographer tells us that he tore down all the places of the cult of idolatry in Judah, including the pagan altars which Manasseh had set up in the temple of Jerusalem (23:12). However, Josiah's reforms did not reverse the fate of his kingdom. For God did not turn away from "the fierceness of his great wrath, by which his anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations with which Manasseh had provoked him" (23:26).¹⁰ This statement indicates the imminent rejection of Judah, Jerusalem and the temple as places where His name dwells (v. 27), and the ultimate execution of the judgement announced in 2 Kgs 21:11–15.

The resolution of the plot of 2 Kgs 21 follows in the course of the events recounted in 2 Kgs 24–25. While describing the invasion of the armies of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, to quell the rebellion of king Jehoiakim (24:1–2) the historiographer explains that this happened on the orders of YHWH as a result of the sins of Manasseh, and especially because of the innocent blood with which he had so filled Jerusalem that God no longer wanted to pardon it (vv. 3–4). By recalling the figure of Manasseh in this context, the historiographer makes him the wrongdoer who is directly responsible for the national disaster whose consequences are borne by all the inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judah.¹¹ These explanations by the historiographer are the only theological comment on the events of 2 Kgs 24–25, which leads us to conclude that the next events as well (i.e. the destruction of the temple and of Jerusalem and the exile of king Jehoiachin and the people of Judah to Babylon) should be interpreted in relation to the unredeemed guilt of Manasseh. In this way the divine prophecy and the foretelling of destruction in 21:11–15 at last find their fulfilment, while the plot of the story of Manasseh is resolved and concluded.

¹⁰ The prophetess Huldah tells also of the irrevocable fate of Judah in 2 Kgs 22:16–17, but without reference to the guilt of Manasseh.

¹¹ For a detailed study, see K. Kinowski, *Dlaczego Juda została zniszczona przez Nabuchodonozora? Teologiczna reinterpretacja przelania niewinnej krwi przez króla Manassesę (2 Krl 21, 16) w 2 Krl 24,3–4*, *Zeszyty Naukowe Stowarzyszenia Bibliistów Polskich* 14 (2017), 331–345.

3.2. The Rehabilitation of Manasseh in 2 Chr 33:10–20

The story of Manasseh develops in a different direction in the Books of Chronicles. In the Chronicler's account, the impious and idolatrous king and his people (2 Chr 33:1–9) received a rebuke from God to which they paid no heed (v. 10), so that the Lord brought the armies of Assyria up against them to bind their ruler in fetters and lead him away to Babylon (v. 11). These actions are clearly a divine punishment for Manasseh's sins, according to the principle of retribution. In this way the Chronicler expresses the strict cause and effect link between the king's sins and God's intervention with punishment that cannot be postponed or delayed, as in the case of the account in the Books of Kings. It should be noted that the Chronicler emphasises by this means the individual character of divine punishment (meted out directly to Manasseh), while the theme of collective punishment (towards the people) is as it were passed over in silence.¹²

God's intervention in 2 Chr 33:10–11 becomes, in a narrative sense, the so-called transforming action in the story as a whole and the turning point, since it was these events which prevailed on Manasseh to make expiation before God by penance, and which opened the way for his return to Jerusalem (vv. 12–13a). In the construction of the story, the culminating or climactic point in building dramatic tension is the Chronicler's comment that in this way Manasseh came to know that only YHWH is God (v. 13b).

The conversion and return of the king to Jerusalem meant not only his rehabilitation, but also a new beginning to his rule. This was expressed by religious reform and the work of renewing the kingdom, to which Manasseh devoted himself. The Chronicler enumerates his enterprises: architectural (the new, very higher outer wall of Jerusalem,¹³ v. 14a) and military (the reorganization of the

¹² See Ph. Abadie, *Converting the Past: Studies in Ancient Israelite and Moabite Historiography*, 98–99.

¹³ Scholars point to the similarity between the building of the new wall in Jerusalem by Manasseh (2 Chr 33:14a) and the rebuilding of the walls of the city by Nehemiah (Neh 2:17–4:23), which is supposed to indicate the historical context of this reference; see L.K. Handy, *Rehabilitating Manasseh: Remembering King*

army and its strengthened presence in all the fortified cities of Judah, v. 14b). The historiographer describes in detail the removal of the cult of idolatry from the temple and the whole of Jerusalem (v. 15), as well as the rebuilding of the altar of the Lord and the offerings made on it, and the commandment to the people to serve YHWH alone (v. 16).¹⁴ In this way the story underlines the contrast between the king's earlier impious acts (vv. 3–4) and his religious reform and restorative actions (vv. 14–16).¹⁵

The final passages of the story also mention the prayer that Manasseh made to God in his misery.¹⁶ The Chronicler mentions the Chronicles of the kings of Israel and the Chronicles of Hozai, which recorded this prayer, or the prophecies of the “seers” sent to rebuke the king, or the sins and misdeeds committed before his conversion and the later history of the monarch (vv. 18–19). The final information about Manasseh concerns his burial in the royal palace and the fact that Amon, his son, became king in his stead (v. 20). It is in this manner that the figure of Manasseh disappears from the historiography of the Books of Chronicles. It is symptomatic that his name does not appear in the context of the destruction of Jerusalem or the Babylonian captivity, as happens in the tradition of the Books of Kings. In the Books of Chronicles, the nation as a whole is blamed for the catastrophic end of the kingdom: first by the mouth of the

Manasseh in the Persian and Hellenistic Periods, in: D.V. Edelman, E. Ben Zvi (eds), *Remembering Biblical Figures in the late Persian and Early Hellenistic Periods: Social Memory and Imagination*, Oxford 2013, 225–226.

¹⁴ The Chronicler notes in v. 17 that the people continued to make offerings on the high places, but he adds that these offerings were made only to YHWH. This commentary emphasizes the individual character of Manasseh's repentance, and also suggests a distinction between the “high places” as places of the cult of unfaithfulness in the Books of the Kings (according to Deuteronomistic theology, which permits the cult only in the temple in Jerusalem) and the “high places” as local sites of the cult of YHWH in the Books of Chronicles. See Ph. Abadie, *Converting the Past: Studies in Ancient Israelite and Moabite Historiography*, 100.

¹⁵ G.N. Knoppers observes that Manasseh's reform did not reverse all the effects of his earlier actions and proved to be insufficient to prevent the fall of Judah; see his *Saint or Sinner?: Manasseh in Chronicles*, 224–226.

¹⁶ The biblical text does not supply the content of this prayer. The mention of it probably prompted the composition of a text known as the *Prayer of Manasseh*, found in Qumran (4Q381 33:8–11; 45:1–7). An independent Greek version of the *Prayer of Manasseh* is also present as an addition in the Septuagint.

prophetess Huldah (34:23–28) and then by the voice of the narrator (36: 14–16). God’s anger had risen so much against his people that there was no remedy for them (v. 16).

The image of Manasseh as a converted sinner who as a result of God’s intervention and inevitable punishment became the restorer and builder of Judah is an alternative image that breaks with the tradition of Manasseh known from 2 Kgs 21. In the Chronicler’s account, there is nothing of the tone of the Books of Kings, which hold Manasseh responsible for the destruction of Jerusalem and the fall of the Kingdom of Judah. The Chronicler is also silent on the issue of the crime of shedding innocent blood. As a result, he draws a positive image of Manasseh, seeing in him a call to sinners to repent, and making him an example worthy to be followed in his search for God’s forgiveness.

4. Construction of the Story of Manasseh

Reading the two stories of Manasseh leads us to the obvious conclusion that they differ in terms of construction. While both narratives are based at first on the same image of the king as a sinner and idolater, the Books of Kings develop the plot in the direction of further incrimination of Manasseh as a murderer and the cause of the nation’s downfall, whereas the Books of Chronicles move in the direction of his rehabilitation as a penitent and a restorer. Why, though, does the Chronicler not mention the shedding of innocent blood in Jerusalem by Manasseh? Why does he pass over his guilt in leading the Kingdom of Judah to its downfall, but lay such stress on his rehabilitation? Other questions could be asked: why does the historiographer of the Books of Kings say nothing about the Assyrian invasion and the taking captive of Manasseh, or of his reforms, or his building and military enterprises? Why does he lay on him the burden of guilt for the national disaster which took place more than 40 years after his death?

Each of these questions is connected with the overall assumption, which now needs to be accepted and declared, that the criterion governing the choice of historical material by each of the biblical

authors was a narrative strategy appropriate to the intended aim of each and resulting from theological premises.¹⁷

4.1. Narrative strategy in the account in the Books of Kings

The story of Manasseh in the Books of Kings can be interpreted on three planes: legal, cultic and in relation to the principle of retribution.¹⁸ The dynamic of events seen from the perspective of the law points to the covenant with God and the Law that results from it as the basic theological principle in judging the conduct of Manasseh.¹⁹ His impious deeds and rejection of the true cult of YHWH, and above all his desecration of the temple in Jerusalem by placing pagan altars in it and an image of an idol, not only broke the Law (see Deut 13:2–19) but also questioned the covenant with God. It is sufficient to recall that one of the first reforming actions of king Josiah, Manasseh's grandson, was the renewal of the covenant (2 Kgs 23:1–3), which means that it must earlier have been broken. In connection with this, God's sentence against Jerusalem and Judah (2 Kgs 21:11–15) needs to be interpreted on the legal plane as the consequence of departure from the covenant, that is from the exclusive service of YHWH. The fate of Samaria and the house of Ahab, recalled in this context (v. 13a), confirms the hypothesis that the fall of the Kingdom of Israel was a paradigm in the eyes of the historiographer for the fate of Judah. The theological justification of the downfall of Samaria in 2 Kgs 17:7–23 (especially vv. 15–17) points to many sins which later (from the point of view of the narrative time) find themselves on the list of Manasseh's wrongdoings in 2 Kgs 21:1–9. As a result, the historiographer

¹⁷ I.V. Provan notes that the Books of Kings are only one of the images of Israel's past which might be painted; see his *1 and 2 Kings*, Old Testament Guides, Sheffield 1997, 53. This remark also applies to the historiography of the Books of Chronicles.

¹⁸ I write of this also in: K. Kinowski, *Motyw „gniewu Bożego” w historiografii Księg Królewskich*, Verbum Vitae 34 (2018), 62–64.

¹⁹ The sequence of crime and punishment, as well as prophecy and fulfilment, typical for Deuteronomistic theology, also result from the legal paradigm. See G. von Rad, *Studies in Deuteronomy*, Studies in Biblical Theology 9, London 1956, 74–91; and his *Old Testament Theology*, vol. I, New York 1962, 334–347.

interprets the fall of Judah as a consequence of the same sins as led to the tragic end of the Kingdom of Israel. The comparison of Manasseh to king Ahab has a similar function, since Ahab is condemned as the greatest idolater and murderer of the innocent in the history of Israel. Thus the legal paradigm built on the foundation of faithfulness to the covenant and the Law is the basic theological criterion governing the historiography of the Books of Kings.

The second interpretational plane of this pericope refers to the cult. The singling out of only one, highly concrete crime of Manasseh, that is his shedding of innocent blood, as the direct cause of the Babylonian invasion and the destruction of Judah (2 Kgs 24:1–4), is not without significance here. As mentioned earlier in the intertextual context (see point 3.1.), the unlawful shedding of blood brings cultic uncleanness on the land (Num 35:33a, compare Ps 106:38; Ezek 36:18).²⁰ In the case of Manasseh, only the shedding of his own blood could redeem the guilt incurred, and this – as we know – did not happen, since the king died peacefully of old age (see the commentary above on 2 Kgs 21:18). This means that the land stained with guilt for the spilling of innocent blood did not attain purification. The divine prophecy in 2 Kgs 21:13b makes reference to this, when through the metaphor of wiping a bowl and turning it upside down, it speaks of the destruction of Jerusalem and Judah as being carried out in order to remove the uncleanness of the land. On the cultic plane, then, we are dealing with an interpretation of the events according to the scheme: *unlawful shedding of blood—staining of the land with blood—purification by destruction*.²¹ In this way the reference to the motif of Manasseh's shedding of innocent blood in the context of the destruction of Judah by the

²⁰ See T. Frymer-Kensky, *Pollution, Purification, and Purgation in Biblical Israel*, in: C.L. Meyers, M. O'Connor (eds), *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of His Sixtieth Birthday*, American School of Oriental Research. Special Volume Series 1, Winona Lake 1983, 399–414; Y. Feder, *Blood Expiation in Hittite and Biblical Ritual: Origins, Context, and Meaning*, Writings From the Ancient World. Supplement Series 2, Atlanta 2011, 176.

²¹ See T. Frymer-Kensky, *Pollution, Purification, and Purgation in Biblical Israel*, 399, 409–410. It is worth noting that some of the metaphors of the prophets have a similar logic (see Isa 4:4; Ezek 24:6.11–13).

armies of Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kgs 24:1–4) finds its theological justification. It seems that in the eyes of the historiographer of the Books of Kings, the destruction of Jerusalem and Judah were a necessary action, purifying the land and redeeming the guilt incurred by Manasseh.

The story of Manasseh in the Books of Kings could also be read according to a key known from ancient historiography, that is in relation to the principle of vengeance (retributive justice). According to this principle, the evil done should be repaid in the same measure (see Exod 21:23–25, Lev 24:19–20). Then the bloody crimes of Manasseh call for an equally cruel vengeance, and the figure of king Ahab in 2 Kgs 21:13a, recalled in this context, may have a double meaning: it not only refers to his idolatry, according to the legal paradigm mentioned above, but also brings into play the principle of retribution. For in the charge raised by the prophet Elijah against Ahab in 1 Kgs 21:19, we read that dogs will lick up the blood of the king in the same place as they previously licked up the blood of the innocent Naboth, murdered by his permission (21:6–7). The conclusion is obvious: for the historiographer, the death of Ahab was retribution for the death of Naboth (see 22:37–38). According to the same principle, the destruction of Judah during the Babylonian invasion may be interpreted as the appropriate punishment for the bloody crimes of Manasseh. We find a similar scheme also in the utterance of the prophet Hosea concerning the fate of the Northern Kingdom. In Hos 14:1, he foretells the bloody deeds of the Assyrians towards the people of Israel (ripping open the bellies of pregnant women), which are the same as the sufferings inflicted on the conquered peoples by Menahem, the king of Israel (2 Kgs 15:16).²²

The above three planes of interpretation of the story of Manasseh reveal the narrative strategy of the historiographer of the Books of Kings. Its aim was to expose Manasseh as an anti-king,²³ the greatest of idolaters and murderers of his subjects, exceeding in his

²² See P. Dubovský, *Menahem's Reign before the Assyrian Invasion (2 Kings 15:14–16)*, in: D.S. Vanderhooft, A. Winitzer (eds), *Literature as Politics, Politics as Literature: Essays on the Ancient Near East in Honor of Peter Machinist*, Winona Lake 2013, 29–45.

²³ The concept of an “anti-ruler” was proposed by R. Girard in *Violence and the Sacred*, Baltimore 1977, 77–78, 96–99, 107–109, 302–306.

impiety the worst even of monarchs, prepared to condemn the Kingdom of Judah to the same fate as met the Kingdom of Israel. Thus, there can be no place in 2 Kgs 21:1–18 for any kind of positive accent in judging the reign of Manasseh, still less for any mention of his conversion and rehabilitation, as in the Books of Chronicles. It is not difficult now to see that the image of King Manasseh in the historiography of the Books of Kings is tendentious; it has been given a clearly theological character in order to make of Manasseh the person principally responsible for the national tragedy, as a “scapegoat”²⁴ and—perhaps—in this way to lessen the guilt of the (post)exilic community for bringing the country to ruin.²⁵

4.2. Narrative strategy in the Books of Chronicles

The Chronicler’s account is inscribed in a different narrative strategy, although its basis is also the legal paradigm and the principle of direct retribution.²⁶ The point of departure is the same: Manasseh is impious and idolatrous also in the Books of Chronicles, and by his conduct he breaks the covenant with YHWH and consequently deserves the most severe punishment. However,

²⁴ Many studies present Manasseh as a “scapegoat” of a theological interpretation of history. See, for example, S. Lasine, *Manasseh as Villain and Scapegoat*, in: J.Ch. Exum, D.J.A. Clines (eds), *The New Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible*, JSOT.SS 143, Sheffield 1993, 163–183; K. Schmid, *Manasse und der Untergang Judas: ‘Golaorientierte’ Theologie in den Königsbüchern?*, *Biblica* 78 (1997), 87–99; B. Halpern, *Why Manasseh Is Blamed for the Babylonian Exile: The Evolution of a Biblical Tradition*, *Vetus Testamentum* 48 (1998), 473–514; F. Stavrakopoulou, *The Blackballing of Manasseh*, in: L.L. Grabbe (ed.), *Good Kings and Bad Kings*, Library of Hebrew Bible. Old Testament Studies (LHB.OTS) 393, London 2005, 248–263; J. Schipper, *Hezekiah, Manasseh, and Dynastic or Transgenerational Punishment*, in: M. Leuchter, K.–P. Adam (eds), *Soundings in Kings: Perspectives and Methods in Contemporary Scholarship*, Minneapolis 2010, 81–105, 187–194; E.A. Knauf, *The Glorious Days of Manasseh*, in his *Data and Debates: Essays in the History and Culture of Israel and Its Neighbors in Antiquity – Daten und Debatten: Aufsätze zur Kulturgeschichte des antiken Israel und seiner Nachbarn*, *Alter Orient und Altes Testament* 407, Münster 2013, 251–275.

²⁵ See S. Lasine, *Manasseh as Villain and Scapegoat*, 166–167, 174; K. Schmid, *Manasse und der Untergang Judas: ‘Golaorientierte’ Theologie in den Königsbüchern?*, 93, 96–99.

²⁶ See G.N., *Knoppers, Saint or Sinner?: Manasseh in Chronicles*, 215–217.

in contrast to the Books of Kings, the narrative in the Books of Chronicles is widened to take in the theme of divine intervention, meted out directly to the king. From this moment, the Chronicler's narrative takes a completely different direction than it does in the Books of Kings. The leading away of Manasseh in captivity to Babylon is a divine punishment which Manasseh personally bears. This experience becomes the turning point for him and allows him to understand that the only God is YHWH (2 Chr 33:13b). His humbling himself before the Lord, his plea for pardon and his repentance not only allow Manasseh to experience God's mercy, but also open the way for him to return to his country and give him the opportunity for personal rehabilitation. In this way the narrative of the Books of Chronicles supplements the legal paradigm (*covenant–broken covenant–punishment*) with new elements: *conversion* and *renewal (rehabilitation)*. This is one of the Chronicler's well-known narrative schemes (*sin–punishment–conversion–restoration*; see the paradigm in 2 Chr 7:14), and it fulfils an important persuasive function in his work with regard to the exilic community, the addressees of the Books of Chronicles.²⁷ Manasseh, the repentant sinner, who after his restoration to grace rehabilitated himself as the restorer and builder of Judah, could be a perfect model for the exiles to emulate, since he gave hope of a return to the lost homeland and renewal of its statehood.²⁸

But why does the Chronicler not mention Manasseh's shedding of blood? Why does he not burden him with the guilt of bringing disaster on the nation, as the historiographer of the Books of Kings does? It seems that the answers to these questions lie in the Chronicler's narrative strategy, outlined above. The image of Manasseh carrying out a bloody massacre in Jerusalem does not correspond with the positive message of the historiographer of the

²⁷ See V.M. Schniedewind, *The Source Citations of Manasseh: King Manasseh in History and Homily*, *Vetus Testamentum* 41 (1991), 451–455, 460–461. Compare S. Japhet, *I and II Chronicles: A Commentary*, *Old Testament Library*, Louisville 1993, 1001.

²⁸ Ph. Abadie shows that the figure of Manasseh in the Books of Chronicles is a typical convert figure and an outstanding example of the efficacy of conversion; see his *Converting the Past: Studies in Ancient Israelite and Moabite Historiography*, 98–99, 102–104.

Books of Chronicles. For while the king could rehabilitate himself before God for his acts of disobedience and idolatry by carrying out religious reform in the country and removing the elements of the idolatrous cult that he had introduced, it seems impossible, or very difficult, for him to rehabilitate himself for taking the lives of innocent people.²⁹ Besides this, the mention of Manasseh's shedding of innocent blood would mean that cultic uncleanness was incurred by him (see the remarks on 2 Kgs 21:16),³⁰ and this would render him incapable of renewing the temple cult.³¹ It is therefore probable that the Chronicler remained intentionally silent on the question of Manasseh's murders, for theological and persuasive reasons, since he needed to convey to his audience a positive image of the king as an example to follow.

We may explain in a similar way why the Chronicler did not make mention of Manasseh's personal responsibility for the fall of Judah and the Babylonian exile. The Chronicler speaks clearly of the guilt of the whole nation, which so mocked and despised the messengers God sent them that there was no longer any remedy (2 Chr 36:16). The placing of collective responsibility on the people of Judah for bringing misery on their country, instead of laying responsibility individually on Manasseh, is also a consequence of the narrative strategy adopted by the Chronicler. It was intended to have an effect on the attitude of the postexilic community, among whom no one should feel free of responsibility for the nation: either as the inheritor of its painful past, or as a builder of its future. From this point of view, the theological message of the Books of Chronicles is more universal than the account in the Books of Kings and remains relevant also for today's readers of Holy Scripture:

²⁹ The heretic who does penance has a chance to make amends for his sinful past, but the tyrannical murderer, even if he repents, cannot restore life to his victims; see L.K. Handy, *Rehabilitating Manasseh: Remembering King Manasseh in the Persian and Hellenistic Periods*, 224.

³⁰ D.F. Murray shows on the basis of analysis of 1 Chr 22:8; 28:3 that the syntagm "shed blood" (Hebr. *šāpāk dām*) in the Books of Chronicles implies the incurring of cultic uncleanness; see his *Under YHWH's Veto: David As Shedder of Blood in Chronicles*, *Biblica* 82 (2001), 457–476.

³¹ See L.K. Handy, *Rehabilitating Manasseh: Remembering King Manasseh in the Persian and Hellenistic Periods*, 224.

repentance and acknowledgment of YHWH as the one God opens the way to reconciliation and renewal to even the greatest of sinners.

5. The Manasseh of the Bible *versus* the Manasseh of History

The presence of two different biblical traditions concerning Manasseh prompts us to ask questions about the “historical” Manasseh. Which of the images of this figure – from the Books of Kings or from the Books of Chronicles – is closer to historical truth? What are the possibilities and the limits of historical reconstruction of the figure of Manasseh?³²

It needs first to be observed that both currents in the tradition concerning Manasseh find confirmation in extra-biblical literature. On the one hand, the Talmud³³ and the apocryphal *Martyrdom of Isaiah* reinforce the negative image of Manasseh as an idolater and a murderer of prophets (the king is supposed to have killed the prophet Isaiah by sawing him in two³⁴). On the other hand, the apocryphal *Prayer of Manasseh* supports his positive image as a converted sinner.³⁵ It is also necessary to mention that the Greek version of the Books of Kings and the Books of Chronicles does not ascribe the crime of shedding innocent blood to Manasseh, but to

³² Many biblical scholars deny the historical character of those details supplied in the story in the Books of Chronicles which are absent from the Books of Kings. B.E. Kelly presents an interesting discussion with this thesis and shows that the historicity of the Chronicler’s image of Manasseh should not be rejected uncritically; see his *Manasseh in the Books of Kings and Chronicles* (2 Kings 21:1–18; 2 Chron 33:1–20), in: V.Ph. Long, D.V. Baker, G.J. Wenham (eds), *Windows into Old Testament History: Evidence, Argument, and the Crisis of ‘Biblical Israel’*, Grand Rapids 2002, 131–146.

³³ The Tosefta treatise *Kippurim* (1:12g–h) blames Manasseh for the fact that God left the place of his “dwelling” in Jerusalem. See also the treatises of the Babylonian Talmud: *Shabbath* 33a and *Yoma* 9b, and the Mishnah treatise *’Abot* 5:9b.

³⁴ See *The Martyrdom of Isaiah* 11:41. The murder of Isaiah is also attributed to Manasseh in the f₆ manuscript of the Targum Jonathan to 2 Kgs 24:4, the Targum to Isa 66:1, the Babylonian Talmud (*Yevamos* 49b and *San* 103b), the Jerusalem Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 10:2:vii.G–i), and the Midrash *Pesikta Rabbati* 4: 3, as well as in Josephus Flavius’s *Antiquities of the Jews* (X 38).

³⁵ Mention of Manasseh’s prayer is also made in the apocryphal 2 Bar (64:8) and in the rabbinical dissertation *Mekilta Bahodesh* (10).

king Joiakim (see the Ancient Greek text of 4 Kings 24:4 in the version of the so-called Lucian manuscripts and 2 Chr^{LXX} 36:5). It is he that the Septuagint makes the main culprit, guilty of the Babylonian invasion, by the same token reducing the responsibility of Manasseh for the national tragedy.³⁶ These observations make it clear that both currents in the Manasseh tradition were independently present in the consciousness of the chosen people as two alternative (re)interpretations of the same historical figure.³⁷

Is it possible in this situation to reconstruct the historical figure of Manasseh? Our analysis has shown that both images of the king are theologically marked. In both the Books of Kings and the Books of Chronicles, the narrative is motivated above all by a theological and practical purpose which is more important than the historical events, which are sometimes reconstructed only after decades or even centuries have passed.³⁸ This is why it is difficult and perhaps even impossible to penetrate to the historical figure of Manasseh, since in both cases we see him through the prism of the theological assumptions and narrative strategies adopted by the given historiographer.³⁹ Every attempt at historical reconstruction of biblical figures and events must take account of these assumptions.

What criteria then should we apply in assessing the sources when we attempt to establish the historical and biographical facts of the life of King Manasseh? In answering this question, we should take

³⁶ See F. Stavrakopoulou, *King Manasseh and Child Sacrifice: Biblical Distortions of Historical Realities*, 39–40.

³⁷ See L.K. Handy, *Rehabilitating Manasseh: Remembering King Manasseh in the Persian and Hellenistic Periods*, 234–235.

³⁸ J.–L. Ska shows that the aim of the biblical texts was to shape the conscious faith of Israel rather than to provide information on the subject of its past; see his *Les énigmes du passé: Histoire d'Israël et récit biblique*, Le livre et le rouleau 14, Brussels 2001. See also the discussion by F. Stavrakopoulou on the subject of the difference between theologically marked biblical *stories* and *history* as such, in her *King Manasseh and Child Sacrifice: Biblical Distortions of Historical Realities*, 1–13.

³⁹ See V.M. Schniedewind, *The Source Citations of Manasseh: King Manasseh in History and Homily*, 451–455, 460–461. F. Stavrakopoulou believes that the historical figure of Manasseh was distorted in the biblical stories; see her *King Manasseh and Child Sacrifice: Biblical Distortions of Historical Realities*, 100; compare M. Cogan, H. Tadmor, *II Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible 11, New Haven–London 2008, 291.

three criteria into account above all. The first of these was formulated by the Greek philosopher Anaxagoras of Clazomenae (V century B.C.), who said that in traditions passed from generation to generation, nothing is ever lost, nothing is invented, but all is subject to transformation. With this in mind, we should not reject *a priori* any information about Manasseh that is supplied in Holy Scripture, but we should remember that in the course of time and for theological reasons, it might have undergone considerable transformation.

To the above should be added one other very important element in the consciousness of the ancient world, which was the strict connection between history as a collection of events from the past and the so-called collective or social memory, which was responsible for their selection, arrangement and passing on in oral or largely illiterate societies. Ancient historiographies are the fruit of collective memory, although at the same time they shape and transform that memory. Hence it is important to ask not only about the historicity of biblical events, but also about the theological assumptions for which they survived in social memory in a given form. For biblical historiographies are concerned above all with interpreting events, which they revise rather than verify or falsify.⁴⁰

The third criterion in assessing the character of a source of information is the principle of historical plausibility, which says that where evidence is lacking to prove or disprove a given event, one should consider to what degree it is merely possible from a historical point of view, and to what degree probable and plausible. In the case of King Manasseh this criterion has a particular application, since we do not have unambiguous evidence to confirm the details of the biblical accounts of his life. We should keep in mind, however, that such reconstructions are always hypothetical.

⁴⁰ See the concise presentation of the theory of social memory and its application to biblical studies in: R. Williams, *Social Memory*, *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 41 (2011) no. 4, 189–200. See also E. Ben Zvi, *On Social Memory and Identity Formation in Late Persian Yehud: A Historian's Viewpoint with a Focus on Prophetic Literature, Chronicles, and the Dtr. Historical Collection*, in: L. Jonker (ed.), *Texts, Contexts and Readings in Postexilic Literature Explorations into Historiography and Identity Negotiation in Hebrew Bible and Related Texts*, *Forschungen zum Alten Testament*. 2. Reihe 53, Tübingen 2011, 95–148.

In connection with the above, it is probable that the “historical” Manasseh was neither such a self-evidently bad king as the Books of Kings present him to be, nor so entirely worthy of emulation as he is shown to be in the Books of Chronicles.⁴¹ Undoubtedly the cult on the “high places” had spread in Judah, according to the practices current everywhere among the peoples of Canaan.⁴² Probably Manasseh shed someone’s blood in Jerusalem, but it was not necessarily innocent and was certainly not shed in such quantities as to fill the whole city.⁴³ The possibility cannot be excluded that Manasseh—as a faithful vassal of the king of Assyria—was present at his court (in Assyrian inscriptions his name appears several times among the western liegemen of Assyria⁴⁴), though it is difficult to judge in what character he may have been present (abduction?) because of the lack of extra-biblical sources that speak of the Assyrian invasion in the times of Manasseh (circa 697–642 BC).⁴⁵

⁴¹ See the discussion in B.E. Kelly, *Manasseh in the Books of Kings and Chronicles* (2 Kings 21:1–18; 2 Chron 33:1–20), 138–146.

⁴² As historians of religion observe, the cultic practices employed by Manasseh were neither “foreign” nor devoid of elements of Yahwism. Rather, they were part of the norm of home-grown polytheism in Judah, incorporating the cult of YHWH as an important element; see P. Merlo, *La religione dell’antico Israele*, Quality Paperbacks 291, Roma 2009, 45–47. The renewal of the so-called “high places” in the times of Manasseh could have been the result of a new settlement of rural areas in Judah after the invasion by the Assyrian king Sennacherib; see F. Stavrakopoulou, *King Manasseh and Child Sacrifice: Biblical Distortions of Historical Realities*, 110.

⁴³ In the light of the policy of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, Manasseh, like every Assyrian vassal, could enjoy far-reaching independence in internal politics and get rid of “inconvenient” subjects so long as the feudal *status quo* was not imperiled; see K. Kinowski, *Dłaczego Juda została zniszczona przez Nabuchodonozora? Teologiczna reinterpretacja przelania niewinnej krwi przez króla Manasseh* (2 Kgs 21,16) w 2 Kgs 24,3–4, 344.

⁴⁴ See text no. 1, v 55 and text no. 5, vi 7’ in: E. Leichty, *The Royal Inscriptions of Esarhaddon, King of Assyria (680–669 BC)*, The Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period 4, Winona Lake 2011, 9, 44; see also Prism C, ii 39 in: R. Borger, *Beiträge zum Inschriftenwerk Assurbanipals: Die Prismenklassen A, B, C = K, D, E, F, G, H, J und T sowie andere Inschriften*, Wiesbaden 1966, 18, 212.

⁴⁵ Archeological discoveries point to a lack of traces of military action in Judah between the end of the eighth century BC (the invasion of Sennacherib in 701 BC) and the beginning of the sixth century BC (the invasions of Nebuchadnezzar

On the other hand, it is highly probable that during the 55 years of his long reign, Manasseh raised the mentioned wall in Jerusalem and new buildings in Judah, thus strengthening the country's defences, especially as archaeological discoveries seem to confirm this.⁴⁶

6. Summing Up

The history of Manasseh in 2 Chr 33:1–20 presents an alternative version to the story told in the Books of Kings (2 Kgs 21:1–18) of the affairs of this ruler, removing the unequivocally negative image. In this sense, the Books of Chronicles entirely reinterpret this biblical figure, enriching the story of his life with previously unknown details, preserved in the collective memory of the exiles. The example of the impious king who repented and restored the religion and the buildings of Judah was intended to challenge the postexilic audience of the Books of Chronicles to embark on the road of penance and reconciliation with God. Accordingly, in the same way as Manasseh they could experience God's mercy and they could look with hope towards the possibility of national renewal.

between 597 and 586 BC), which means that Manasseh's reign took a peaceful course, without larger armed conflicts. See the general presentation of archeological data from this period in L.L. Grabbe, *The Kingdom of Judah from Sennacherib's Invasion to the Fall of Jerusalem: If We Had Only the Bible*, in the collection edited by him, *Good Kings and Bad Kings*, LHB.OTS 393, London 2005, 81–90, 101–104.

⁴⁶ K. Kenyon discovered the wall in Jerusalem not far from the Gihon spring on the eastern side of the city of David, dated to the seventh or eighth century BC, that is to the times of Hezekiah or Manasseh. Besides this, archaeologists date the raising of several Judean buildings (e.g. Ramat Rahel, Horvat Uza) to the seventh century BC. They testify to the development of organizational infrastructures and to the general well-being of the state. However, scholars are not entirely in agreement in their interpretation of these archaeological data. Some ascribe the new building projects to Manasseh (first half of the seventh century BC), others to his grandson Josiah (second half of the seventh century BC) or his father Hezekiah (as regards the wall in Jerusalem: second half of the eighth century BC). The lack of comparative material unfortunately makes it impossible to provide more precise dating. See L. Tatum, *King Manasseh and the Royal Fortress at Horvat 'Uza*, *Biblical Archaeologist* 54 (1991), 136–145; I. Finkelstein, *The Archaeology of the Days of Manasseh*, in: M.D. Coogan, J.Ch. Exum, L.E. Stager, J.A. Greene (eds), *Scripture and Other Artifacts: Essays on the Bible and Archaeology in Honor of Philip J. King*, Louisville 1994, 177.

This message remains relevant also for today's readers of the story of Manasseh.

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