The Debated Historicity of Hezekiah's Reform in Light of Historical and Archaeological Research[1]

Hezekiah's cultic reform is mentioned in the Book of Kings in two separated verses: once in the introduction to the description of his reign (2 Kgs. 18:4) and again in the words of the Rab-shakeh (18:22). Some scholars have accepted its historicity and have suggested various explanations for this early reform, which antedated the reform of Josiah by almost a century.[2] Other scholars have doubted its historicity, regarding it as an artificial projection of Josiah's reform and suggesting historiographic and theological explanations for the author's attribution of such reform to Hezekiah.[3] The silence of the prophets Isaiah and Micah, contemporaries of Hezekiah, concerning the reform has sometimes been regarded as added evidence for the non-historical character of the references in Kings.[4]

Many more details of Hezekiah's cultic activity are mentioned in the Book of Chronicles (2 Chr. 29–31). Some scholars have suggested that the Chronicler's narrative concerning Hezekiah corroborates and supplements the data found in Kings, and they reconstruct the reform by combining the two sources.[5] However, Chronicles is a problematic source for the reconstruction of history. It seems that the work is based mainly on the Books of Samuel

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1. Reprinted with permission. *ZAW* 107 (1995), 179–195.

2. See the extensive literature cited by Spieckermann 1982:174, n. 34. See also Haran 1978:132–142; Ahlström 1982:65–68; Miller and Hayes 1986:356–357; Gonçalves 1986:73–88, 100–101, with earlier literature; Cogan and Tadmor 1988:218–220; Halpern 1991:47–48, 65–70; Weinfeld 1992:156–162.

3. For the list of literature, see Spieckermann 1982:174, n. 34; Hoffmann 1980:146–155; Gonçalves 1986:74, nn. 83, 85–86; Würthwein 1984:411–412; Handy 1988:111–115.

4. For the suggestion that the prophecy in Mic. 5:9–14 was delivered to stimulate or promote the religious reform of Hezekiah, see Willis 1969:353–368. However, the prophecy should certainly be dated to the exilic period, as suggested by Willis himself (1969:357). His reconstruction of the prophecy's historical background and the tradition upon which it rested is highly speculative.

5. See for example: Todd 1956:288–293; Bright 1960:265–267; Albright 1963:76–77; Myers 1965:lxi; Nicholson 1963:383–386; Moriarty 1965:399–406; McKay 1973:15–17; Oded 1977:442–444; Reviv 1979:193–195; Rosenbaum 1979:23–43; Williamson 1982:361, 371–373; Herzog, Aharoni, Rainey and Moshkovitz 1984:21–22; Jones 1984:559–561.

and Kings and that the Chronicler had at his disposal a very limited number of pre-exilic sources (Willi 1972; Welten 1973). Furthermore, as described in Chronicles, Hezekiah's involvement in the affairs of the newly founded Assyrian province of Samaria is highly unlikely. Samaria was conquered by Sargon II in 720 BCE and turned into an Assyrian province. Sargon implemented a "two-way" population transfer, relocating thousands of inhabitants from Samaria in various parts of the Assyrian empire and bringing in their place various groups from Babylonia and from the Syro-Arabian desert (Na'aman and Zadok 1988:36–46). He rebuilt the city of Samaria, established his own administration in the new province and imposed a tribute (Dalley 1985:31–36). The inhabitants of Samaria became Assyrian citizens. Any involvement of Hezekiah in the affairs of the newly founded province would have been seen as interference in internal Assyrian affairs and would have been severely punished by the energetic and powerful king of Assyria. It seems to me that the Chronicler had no source other than Kings for his account of Hezekiah's reform, and that the description in 2 Chr 29–31 is not historically reliable. His description would best be omitted from the historical discussion.[6]

In this article I will first discuss the literary problem of 2 Kgs. 18:4, 22 and then examine the results of recent archaeological and historical research and their possible contribution to the long debate on the historicity of Hezekiah's reform.

1. The Literary Problem of 2 Kgs. 18:4, 22

A. 2 Kgs. 18:4 summarizes the act of reform thus:

> He removed the high-places (*bāmôt*), and broke the sacred pillars (*maṣṣebôt*), and cut down the *'ašerîm*[7] and smashed in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made, for until these days the Israelites were burning food offering (*m^{e}qaṭṭ^{e}rîm*) to it. It was called Nehushtan.

The Deuteronomic law of extirpating the Canaanite cult objects runs thus:

> But thus shall you deal with them: you shall break down their altars, and dash in pieces their sacred pillars, and hew down their Asherim and burn their graven images with fire (Dtr. 7:5).

6. For similar conclusions based on different arguments, see recently Gonçalves 1986: 88–99, with earlier literature.

7. See *BHS*.

> You shall tear down their altars, and dash in pieces their pillars, and burn their Asherim with fire and hew down the graven images of their gods . . . (Dtr. 12:3).

When comparing the law of Deuteronomy with the text describing Hezekiah's reform, it is clear that the latter fulfilled the law in every detail. *Bāmāh* is the Deuteronomistic (henceforth, Dtr.) appellation for a forbidden cult place, and *bêt bāmôt* is the designation for a forbidden temple. These negative appellations and their referents are counterposed in Dtr. literature to the temple of Jerusalem, the sole legitimate place of worship, which is referred to by "positive" appellations such as *miqᵉdāš*, *hêkāl*, *bêt* YHWH and *bêt ʾelohîm* (Haran 1978:13–25). The interchange of cult places (*bāmôt*) and altars (*mizbᵉḥôt*) in similar contexts in the Deuteronomic and Dtr. literature is because the altar was the major element in all cult places.

The bronze serpent occupies exactly the same place in 2 Kgs. 18:4 as the graven image (*pesel*) in the passage of Deuteronomy cited above. That the serpent was regarded by the author of Kings as an image is further indicated by the words *mᵉqaṭṭᵉrîm lo* ("offering sacrifices to it"). *Qiṭṭer* (*piʿel*) has a distinctly pejorative connotation in the Dtr. literature; it appears mainly in descriptions of the burning of food offerings to "foreign" deities.[8] Noteworthy also is the formulation "burning food offerings to it," i.e., to the image rather than to YHWH, to whom the image was dedicated.

Some scholars have suggested that only the record of the destruction of the Nehushtan is original and that v. 4a is an editorial expansion that was borrowed from the description of Josiah's reform (McKay 1973:84, n. 5). In light of the above discussion, it seems more plausible to assume that the entire verse was formulated by the historian according to the pattern of the Deuteronomic law. He apparently combined paratactically the Deuteronomic triad of the altars (= *bāmôt*) — sacred pillars — Asherim with the archival note of the removal of the Nehushtan. The integration of the two sources would explain the use of the *waw* with the perfect (*wᵉkittat*) (in place of the expected *waw*-consecutive) after v.4a.[9]

One may further note the similarity in the execution of the reforms of Asa and Hezekiah as described in the Book of Kings (1 Kgs. 15:12–13; 2 Kgs. 18,14): Both kings removed (hiphʿil of *swr*) the "forbidden" cults and then destroyed a specific cult object (*mipeleṣet* made for Asherah; Nehushtan). One may assume that, for both kings, the author had an isolated archival note,

8. See Haran 1978:23–24, 233–234; Edelman 1985:401–404, with earlier literature.

9. For this problem, see the discussion in McKay 1973:84–85, n. 5, with earlier literature. For similar suggestions, see Hoffmann 1980:151–155; Spieckermann 1982:174–175, 420.

around which he wove a description of reform formulated in similar pattern and with lexicon borrowed from the Dtr. literature.

Finally, we may note the deeds of Manasseh that partly reversed the reform of Hezekiah (2 Kgs. 21:3):

> He rebuilt the high-places (*bāmôt*) which Hezekiah his father had destroyed; and he erected altars for Baᶜal, and made an Asherah . . . and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served them.

Hezekiah's cultic centralization was reversed, according to 2 Kgs. 21:3, by the rebuilding of the destroyed cult places (*bāmôt*), a deed that is historically improbable, because, at that time, most of the Judean sites lay in ruins (see below). The rest of Manasseh's recidivism as described in 2 Kings refers to his cultic arrangements in the temple of Jerusalem.

In conclusion, there is a firm basis for the claim that the Dtr. historian composed his account of Hezekiah's reform in 2 Kgs. 18:4 by combining an archival note of the removal of the Nehushtan with the law of Dtr. 7:5 and 12:3.[10] The assumption that the text of 2 Kgs. 18:4 is a unitary excerpt from a pre-exilic archival source is quite unlikely, in light of the considerations reviewed above.

B. There is scholarly controversy about the originality of 2 Kgs. 18:22 (and Jes. 36:7) within the speech of the Rab-shakeh. Some regard it as an integral part of the speech, and others suggest that it is a gloss or a part of the Dtr. redaction (Gonçalves 1986:74, nn. 85–88, 390–392). It seems to me that the latter alternative is better founded, because in several ways the verse departs from the inner structure of the first speech of the Rab-shakeh (2 Kgs. 18:19–25):

(a) All passages open with the time adverb "now" (*ʿattāh*), except for v. 22.

(b) All other passages address Hezekiah in the second person singular, whereas v. 22 addresses the delegation in the second person plural.

(c) Whereas the other passages address Hezekiah in the second person, this passage refers to him in the third person.

It seems to me that v. 22 was inserted by the Dtr. historian when he integrated the narrative of the siege and the miraculous deliverance of Jerusalem into his work and that it did not form part of the Rab-shakeh's speech in the pre-Dtr. work.

C. We may note, in passing, Jer. 26:17–19, which some scholars have considered a reference to Hezekiah's reform under the impact of Micah's preach-

10. There is no textual evidence for Haran's suggestion (1978:132–148) that Hezekiah's reform was based on the ideology of the Priestly source.

ing (Williamson 1982:372; Jones 1984:561). In this passage, Hezekiah is mentioned in connection with the prophet Micah (instead of Isaiah), and Mic. 3:12 is quoted. From Mic. 3:11, it is clear that the prophet is refuting those who have put their trust in the divine inviolability of Jerusalem ("Is not YHWH in the midst of us? No evil shall come upon us"). Jeremiah has a similar message: Divine commitment to Jerusalem notwithstanding, without repentance the city will be destroyed (Jer. 26:2–6, 12–13). For the author of Jeremiah 26, Hezekiah serves as the model of true repentance: He heeds the prophet's word, beseeches YHWH, and his city is saved (v. 19).

The fact that it is Hezekiah's response to the prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem that is invoked here implies that the author of Jeremiah 26 is referring not to the short note on Hezekiah's cultic reform, but, rather, to the king's repentance in face of a threat to Jerusalem. Instead of trusting in the city's inviolability, he appealed to the prophet, repented, entered the temple and prayed to YHWH (2 Kgs. 19:1–4, 14–19). It is evident that, to teach his readers a lesson, the author of Jeremiah 26 combined Micah's warnings against relying on the divine inviolability of Jerusalem with the narrative of Hezekiah's reaction to the Assyrian threat as expressed in the words of the Rab-shakeh. (This is contrary to Smelik 1986:86, 92, n. 94.) We may conclude that the narrative in Jer. 26:17–19 refers to the story of the Assyrian campaign against Jerusalem and has nothing to do with the short note of Hezekiah's cultic reform.

In conclusion, 2 Kgs. 18:4 and 22 appear to have been formulated by the historian. No pre-Dtr. written source referring to a large scale cultic reform can be discovered in the history of Hezekiah. One may assume, of course, that Hezekiah did carry out a cultic reform in his kingdom and that its memory was still alive in the time of the historian. Whether this is the most reasonable assumption is another matter and will be discussed below.

2. Archaeological Research and Cultic Reforms

For many years, archaeologists have been trying to find evidence for the reforms mentioned in the Book of Kings. The assumption has been that destroying cult places (*bāmôt*), demolishing altars and smashing sacred pillars — as the reforms are described in the Bible — would leave traces that archaeologists would easily be able to identify in the excavated sites. So far, however, these efforts have had no success. Neither at the late eighth century BCE strata nor at those of the late seventh century BCE are there signs of a drastic change in the cult. Nor is there archaeological evidence for iconoclasm of the kind described in the histories of Hezekiah and Josiah. Controversial data were uncovered in the excavations of Tel Arad and Tel Beer-sheba and will be presented in the following two sections:

(a) A small shrine with a courtyard and altar was unearthed at Tel Arad and was published in preliminary reports.[11] The dates of its foundation and end are debated among scholars. Aharoni (1967:248–249; 1968a:26–27; 1975a:85–86) attributed its inception to the Solomonic period (Stratum XI) and dated the termination of the altar to the end of the eighth century (Stratum VIII) and of the shrine to the late seventh century BCE (Stratum VII). He (1968a:31, 26) concluded the discussion thus:

> Arad seems to elucidate the two stages in the centralization of worship carried out by Hezekiah and Josiah, respectively. Its first stage, in the days of Hezekiah, was the prohibition of sacrifice, while only its second stage, in the days of Josiah, brought about the complete abolition of worship outside Jerusalem.

In a later article published by the members of the Arad publication team (Herzog et al., 1977:19–22), the termination of both the shrine and the altar was dated to the late eighth century BCE (Stratum VIII). This date contradicts Aharoni's conclusions according to which the shrine was abolished only in the late seventh century BCE.

Many scholars have expressed doubts concerning the chronology and interpretation of the findings both as suggested by Aharoni and by his team.[12] Recently Ussishkin (1988:142–157 [cited from p. 156]) suggested dating the foundation of the temple either to the later part of the eighth century or to the seventh century, and its end to the late seventh or early sixth century BCE. He further suggested that the shrine was destroyed by fire at the same time as the final destruction of the Judean fort, at the end of Stratum VI. He concluded the discussion thus:

> The dating of the shrine . . . means that its construction and destruction can hardly be related in any way to the religious reforms conducted in Judah by Hezekiah and Josiah.

In light of the many controversies and ambiguities concerning the dating of both the foundation and the end of the sanctuary, the empirical data uncovered at the shrine of Arad do not establish the claim of a reform conducted at the site by the kings of Judah.

(b) Fragments of a large-ashlar built horned altar were found in the course of the excavations at Tel Beer-sheba. Four stones were found sealed under the Stratum II rampart, and many others were incorporated into the rebuilding of the Stratum II Pillared Storehouse (Aharoni 1974:2–6; 1975b:154–156;

11. Aharoni 1967:247–249; 1968a:18–32; 1975a:82–89; Herzog et al. 1977:1–22.

12. For a list of critical notes, see Holladay 1987:285, n. 39; Ussishkin 1988:151, nn. 21, 22, 25 and p. 156, n. 45.

Herzog 1977:53–58). Aharoni assumed that the big altar must have been associated with a sanctuary. This suited his hypothesis that the place is identical with biblical Beer-sheba and his long search for a temple at the site.

In spite of the large scale excavations conducted at the site, no sanctuary was discovered. Aharoni came to the conclusion that the "lost" temple must have been situated under Building 32. The latter was built in Stratum II; its builders dug a huge pit upon which the new building, with its deep foundations and basements, was erected. According to Aharoni's interpretation, the big pit was dug not for the sake of the new building, but to obliterate all signs of the sanctuary that formerly stood on the site. Aharoni dated the foundation of Stratum II at Tel Beer-sheba to the early years of Hezekiah and its destruction to the Assyrian campaign of 701 BCE. Thus, he concluded that the horned altar was dismantled and the sanctuary razed to its foundations when King Hezekiah conducted his cultic reform.[13]

This highly hypothetical reconstruction suffers from many flaws. First, it is questionable whether Tel Beer-sheba should be identified with biblical Beer-sheba; the latter should best be located at Bir es-Seba', as was suggested long ago by Alt.[14] Second, it is not necessary to look for a sanctuary at the site. As observed by Yadin (1976:7–8), the big altar might have been part of an open cult place, rather than a temple.

Third, the theory of a temple that was completely uprooted as part of a cultic reform is highly unlikely. It seems that Building 32 was erected as part of the defensive construction at the site in face of the Assyrian threat in the late eighth century BCE. It is located at the focal point of the town's urban plan and must have served as the seat of its military governor. The deep basements served for storing arms and supplies, and the deep foundations indicate that the building rose high above its surroundings. These remarkable features of the building are well explained by its military-administrative function; there is no need for farfetched theories to interpret the building's structure and function.

Fourth, the date of the destruction of the altar and its historical background remain unknown. All that legitimately can be inferred is that it preceded the building of Stratum II. The original location of the (possibly desecrated) altar remains unknown; thus, it is not even clear whether (or not) another altar was built to replace it. Ascribing the destruction of the altar to

13. Aharoni 1975b:154–156. The members of the Tel Beer-sheba publication team adopted Aharoni's views about the sanctuary and the altar. See Herzog et al. 1977:53–58.

14. Alt 1935:320–321; Abel 1938:263; Noth 1953:93; Na'aman 1980:149–151; Fowler 1982: 7–11.

Hezekiah's cultic reform is entirely hypothetical. In the present state of our knowledge, we should best leave the Tel Beer-sheba altar outside the discussion of Hezekiah's religious policy.

So far, I have discussed the archaeological evidence suggested by scholars for cultic reforms. However, there are other cult places that were destroyed or abandoned during Iron Age II, but never discussed in reference to the problem of reforms. The reason for ignoring them is clear: They do not fall into the time of biblical reformer kings. In other words, it is the biblical history and the assumption of its fundamental correctness that has dictated the interpretation of the archaeological evidence thus far.

To illustrate the problem, let me present a specific case. Ussishkin (1989:149–172) suggested recently that Building 338 at Megiddo was a temple and was deliberately buried at the end of the tenth century BCE.[15] He further suggested (1989:170–172) that Building 2081 at Megiddo was also a shrine and was partly buried at the same time. Another cultic structure was unearthed at nearby Tel Taanach, although its plan remains unclear.[16] P. Beck (1990:417–446 [esp. 445–446]) suggested that the two cult stands unearthed at the site were used as seats for the statues of the god and goddess of the shrine. It seems that, like the shrines of Megiddo, the cultic site at Taanach and its sacred objects were buried following its destruction in the late tenth century BCE.

A structure that may be a small shrine was unearthed at Tel ʿAmal, east of Beth-shean and was published in a preliminary report.[17] The identification of the structure as "cultic" is due to the density of artifacts with cultic associations (stone "trepoid" full of ashes, basins, chalics, bowls, etc.). It was destroyed in the late tenth century BCE, and its artifacts were buried under the ruins of the building.

A small shrine and a neighboring "high place" were discovered at Lachish (Aharoni 1975c:26–32). The shrine was found with its altar and cult vessels. A large block of limestone (*maṣṣebāh*) and, possibly, the remains of an Asherah were discovered in a nearby "high place." Aharoni (1975c:30–31, 41–42) suggested that the shrine was destroyed and covered over in the late tenth century BCE and that the "high place" remained in use in Strata IV-III. Alternatively, one may suggest that both the shrine and the "high-place"

15. For criticism of the suggestion, see Stern 1990:102–107.

16. Sellin 1904:75; Lapp 1964:26–32; 1967:19–23; 1969:42–44; Glock 1978:1138–1147. Fowler's claim (1984:30–34) that there is no proof for the cultic nature of the structure unearthed at Tel Taanach, in my opinion, is hardly convincing.

17. Lewy and Edelstein 1972:329, 338–340, 341–343, 362–363 and Pls. XIX, XXI.

were buried in the late tenth century BCE and that, at a later time, a pile of broken pillars (*maṣṣebôt*?) and a "*favissa*" were dug in and buried within the sacred place.

The above data indicate that several shrines in northern Israel (Megiddo, Taanach and possibly Tell 'Amal) and in the south (Lachish) were destroyed and buried, with their sacred objects, in the late tenth century BCE. The burial may have been intended to prevent a possible future desecration of the sacred sites (compare 2 Kgs. 10:27). The destruction of the northern shrines is linked by scholars to the campaign of Pharaoh Shishak against Jeroboam I. The background of the destruction of the Lachish shrine remains unknown.[18]

The evidence for the destruction of the four/five shrines and their burial in the late tenth century BCE is quite impressive, certainly more impressive than the "evidence" for reforms in the late monarchial period. Is it possible that the shrines were buried and not restored as a consequence of an official decision? As nothing is said in the Bible of cultic reforms at that time, this attractive possibility has never been examined. Biblical archaeologists are mainly concerned with corroborating and authenticating the scriptures by extra-biblical evidence. Such efforts are perfectly legitimate, as long as the limitations of the biblical data are taken into account, as long as the archaeological evidence is not "squeezed" to fit it into the scriptures, and as long as additional archaeological data, not directly related to the Bible, are also given appropriate consideration.

In conclusion, there is, as yet, no clear archaeological evidence for any of the cultic reforms mentioned in the Bible. Although lack of positive evidence does not indicate that reforms did not take place, we must remember that the Bible is our only source for both Hezekiah's and Josiah's reforms and that textual, literary and historical analysis are our main tools for establishing the authenticity of the scriptures.

3. The Break Between the Eighth and Seventh Centuries BCE

Sennacherib's campaign of 701 BCE marks a major break in the settlement history and economy of the kingdom of Judah. Dozens of its cities were destroyed and many thousands of its inhabitants deported. Vast districts were grievously damaged or even totally abandoned. This is particularly true of the Shephelah. According to a recent archaeological survey, all settlements in the area were destroyed and many sites abandoned for hundreds of years. By the end of the sev-

18. Aharoni's assumption that Lachish Stratum V was destroyed by Shishak in the course of his campaign (1975c:41) is unlikely. Shishak's campaign never reached the Shephelah of Judah. See recently: Na'aman 1992:79–86.

enth century BCE, a century after the 701 campaign, only about 25% of the former inhabited area in the Shephelah had been resettled (Dagan 1992:259–262). Parts of the lowlands were transferred to the Philistine kingdoms.[19] The kingdom of Ekron took the place of Judah in the northern Shephelah, expanding its territory and gaining considerable political and economic power (Gitin 1989: 23–58; Na'aman 1991:49). Details of the population decrease in the hill country of Judah and the district of Benjamin are still missing, but there seems to have been a decline of population in these areas in the seventh century BCE, although not on the same scale as in the Shephelah.

Sennacherib's campaign greatly increased the extent of Judah's subjugation of to Assyria. Manasseh, Amon, and Josiah, the latter in his early years, were Assyrian vassals who paid tribute and were obliged to obey the orders of the overlord and his officials. Only in the eighth decade of the seventh century, about 70–75 years after the 701 campaign, did the Assyrians retreat from Syro-Palestine (Na'aman 1991:33–41).

During the long period of subjection to Assyria, Judah slowly and gradually recovered from the heavy destruction of 701 BCE, restored some of its settlements and strengthened its economy. With the *pax Assyriaca*, borders were opened and manifold contacts with various regions within the Assyrian empire became possible. The penetration of "non-Yahwistic" cult practices to the temple of Jerusalem (2 Kgs. 21:3–7; 23:4–12) is an indication of the political and cultural climate of this period. However, it must be emphasized that in all matters relating to the extent of its borders, its strength of settlement, and its economic power, Josiah's kingdom was considerably weaker than the kingdom that had existed in the eighth century BCE (Na'aman 1991:57–58).

We may conclude that the Assyrian campaign of 701 BCE marks a turning point in the history of Judah and breaks a continuity of more than 200 years that began with the division of the monarchies of Israel and Judah ca. 931 BCE. There must have been considerable differences in many aspects of pub-

19. The suggestion of scholars that Sennacherib transferred districts in the hill country of Judah and in the Negeb to Judah's neighbors is arbitrary. Even the assumption that the Philistine kingdoms had effective control over the entire Shephelah region during the first half of the seventh century BCE is uncertain. The long settlement gap in the lowlands is mainly the result of lack of manpower following the massive Assyrian deportation of 701 BCE. Thus, the Philistines were able to use the deserted territories as grazing fields for their sheep. However, Philistine settlements were found only around the city of Ekron, and the rest of the Shephelah remained unsettled until the recovery of the kingdom of Judah in the second half of the seventh century BCE. For the problem, see Alt 1929:80–88; Elliger 1934: 140–148; Junge 1937:24–27; Ginsberg 1950:349–351, nn. 12–13; Halpern 1991:60.

lic and private life between the eighth century kingdom of Hezekiah and the seventh century kingdom of Josiah.[20]

These conclusions are significant for the debate over Hezekiah's cultic reform. Scholars who have accepted the historicity of this early reform emphasize the close connection between Hezekiah's and Josiah's reforms and assume a linear development linking the two kings. For example, Weinfeld has suggested a continuity in the political and cultural climate between the reigns of Hezekiah and Josiah that brought about the emergence of the Deuteronomic laws and movement. He refers to this time span as "the Hezekianic-Josianic period" and suggests a close connection between the cultic centralization of the two kings.[21] I believe that the opposite is true and that one must emphasize the break, rather (or, at least, no less) than the continuity between the reigns of the two kings.

The idea of a miraculous deliverance of Jerusalem during the campaign of 701 BCE and of the city's divine inviolability may well have played an important role in the centralization of the cult under Josiah (Maag 1956:10–18). But this idea must have developed long after the campaign, when memories of its disastrous results had faded considerably (Clements 1980:52–108). The destruction of many cult places in the course of the Assyrian campaign of 701 BCE would have facilitated the completion of the late reform. The fall of the northern kingdom, the destruction of vast areas of the kingdom of Judah, and the long subjection to foreign power may have been regarded as the fulfilment of the warnings of the eighth century prophets. Deep spiritual reckoning must have followed these events and would have played an important role in the growth of the Deuteronomic movement. It is clear that a better understanding of Sennachrib's campaign of 701 and its disastrous results may help us explain the emergence of the Deuteronomic school and the reform of Josiah. But Josiah's reform does not help in understanding the background of Hezekiah's debated reform. The latter must be analysed in its own right; the variegated factors that played an important role in the development and implementation of the late seventh century reform can hardly be applied to the conditions that prevailed a century before.[22]

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20. Junge 1937:28–99; Rofé 1976:207–209; Halpern 1991:59–77. Various suggestions raised by Halpern in his pioneering work require further study and elaboration.

21. Weinfeld 1985:89–95. The continuity between Hezekiah and Josiah was emphasized by Weinfeld in his early works; see 1964:211–212.

22. M. Weinfeld (1964:202–212) put forward the suggestion that Hezekiah's cult reform was a move to increase the king's authority by strengthening the link among the king, the Temple and the provincial towns at the time of his rebellion against Assyria. He found an analogy in the act of Nabonidus, who gathered the statues from provincial cit-

4. The Lachish Reliefs

Sennacherib's attack on the city of Lachish is portrayed in detail on a series of stone reliefs erected in his royal palace at Nineveh. The reliefs were discovered and published by Layard (1853 Pls. XX-XXIV), re-drawn by Dekel and studied afresh by Ussishkin (1982).

I would like to draw attention to the spoils of the city as depicted in the reliefs (Ussishkin 1982:84, 105, 107). To the right of the city two columns of people are seen moving to the right and approaching the king sitting on his throne. A line of captives and deportees and their escorting Assyrian soldiers appears in the upper column. The last soldier holds a short sword, its sharpened end threatening the captives who walk before him.[23] At the rear of the column eight Assyrian soldiers appear, carrying the booty.

The first and second soldiers bear large incense burners that, in general, resemble smaller Iron Age clay incense burners.[24] The cult vessels must have been made of bronze, as indicated by their placement at the head of the spoils procession. The third soldier holds a chair with armrest (Akkadian *nēmedu*), and the fourth and fifth soldiers pull a ceremonial chariot. The last three soldiers bear weapons: three spears, two shields and six swords. The relief depicts three kinds of objects that are mentioned many times in Assyrian royal inscription booty lists: cult vessels, the treasures of the palace and weapons.

Aharoni (1975c:42–43) has pointed out that the cult vessels on the Lachish reliefs must have come from a cult place. This was regarded by him as support for his assumption of a continuous tradition of worship at Lachish from the tenth century until the Hellenistic period. Whether or not one accepts his hypothesis, it is clear that there was a cult place in Lachish in the late eighth century BCE. It was destroyed by Sennacherib, and the Assyrian relief depicts the most extravagant booty taken from the site: a pair of bronze incense burners.

In the eighth century BCE, the city of Lachish was second in importance only to Jerusalem and served as the major Judean center in the Shephelah.

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ies into Babylon on the eve of the Persian attack in 539 BCE. For a refutation of the analogy and dissociation of Hezekiah's reform from his policy toward Assyria, see Cogan and Tadmor 1988:219. As they observe: "At a time when efforts were being directed toward the physical fortification and provisioning for war, wise counsel would not have recommended cult reforms."

23. Ussishkin (1982:105) suggested that this soldier carries a ceremonial spoil of a sceptre or a mace and heads the booty carriers. For other scenes of captives or deportees escorted by soldiers holding a short sword whose sharpened edge is pointed upwards, see Layard 1853. Pls. XIX, XXVI, XXXIII, XXXIV, XXXVII, XLII.

24. See Aharoni 1968b:164; 1975c:42; Holladay 1987:288, n. 86 and 290, n. 104.

A considerable part of the city was occupied by the governor's palace-fort, with its storehouses, stables and broad courtyard (Ussishkin 1983:103, 147–154; 1990:81–84). Lachish was under direct royal control, and one would assume that, had there been an extensive cult reform in the kingdom of Judah, Lachish would have been the first place to be purged. The fact is that its cult place apparently remained intact until the town's conquest by Sennacherib. This is an indication of the non-reliability of the text of 2 Kgs. 18:4, 22, according to which Hezekiah removed the cult places from all the towns of Judah.

Conclusions

The combination of textual, archaeological, historical and pictorial evidence sheds new light on the long debated problem of the cult reform assigned to Hezekiah in biblical tradition. An analysis of the text of 2 Kgs. 18:4, 22 indicates that the two verses were composed by the Dtr. historian and that he had before him no written source referring to reform, except for a note of the removal of the bronze serpent. No unequivocal evidence of cultic reform either in the days of Hezekiah or in the days of Josiah has been discovered in the many excavations conducted so far in the area of the kingdom of Judah. Rather, there are indications of the destruction and the closing of shrines during the late tenth century BCE, incidents that are not mentioned in the Bible. This is an example of the enormous gap that separates the biblical descriptions of the past from the archaeological evidence. Establishing the relationship between these two entirely different kinds of source is always complicated. In general, it would seem wise to study and evaluate the biblical text on its own, before applying it to archaeological research and historical reconstruction.

Sennacherib's campaign of 701 BCE marks a break in the history of Judah. The destructive Assyrian conquests and mass deportations of the last third of the eighth century BCE, the words of the late eighth century prophets, the long subjection of Judah to Assyria, and the "foreign" influences infiltrating the kingdom — the combination of these factors explains, at least partly, the emergence of the Dtr. school in the seventh century BCE. However, there is no evidence for the emergence of the Dtr. movement as early as the late eighth century. Hezekiah's reform has sometimes been regarded as the first concrete test of the program of this movement and, thus, as evidence for its emergence at that time. However, because the execution of a wide-ranging reform by Hezekiah is doubtful, there remains no evidence for activity of the Dtr. movement prior to the seventh century.

Finally, there is evidence for the persistence of a cult place at Lachish, Judah's major royal city in the Shephelah in the eighth century, until the

Assyrian conquest of 701. This fits well with all the other evidence presented above and leads me to conclude that a comprehensive cultic reform did not take place in the time of Hezekiah.

Why, then, was such a reform ascribed to Hezekiah in the Dtr. history? The answer may be found in the description of the king in the story of 2 Kgs. 18:17–19:37. Hezekiah's depiction as a righteous king, who trusted YHWH, turned to his prophet and prayed in his temple at a time of crisis, was interpreted by the historian as an indication of utmost devotion to YHWH. Accordingly, he integrated Hezekiah within his scheme of four kings (bad-good-bad-good) who spanned the period from Ahaz to Josiah (Amon does not fit this pattern and is treated as an appendage to Manasseh's period).[25] Hezekiah is presented in this scheme as the antithesis of Ahaz and as the prototype of Josiah. According to the historian's written source, Hezekiah had removed the bronze image of the serpent. Whether there were some other oral traditions of the king's deeds is not clear. The historian, thus, portrayed the righteous king as the first to carry out the Dtr. program and as forerunner of Josiah, the king who fulfilled the Deuteronomic law in every detail.

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25. For the schematic nature of the evaluative comments in the Book of Kings, see recently Ben Zvi 1991:359–361.

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