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Chronicling the Chronicler

The Book of Chronicles and
Early Second Temple Historiography

Edited by

PAUL S. EVANS AND TYLER F. WILLIAMS

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To Our Children

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and

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and Isaac Nelson Williams

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Reading Chronicles and Reshaping the Memory of Manasseh

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1. Introduction

Manasseh was certainly a memorable king of Judah for those who had read and reread the books of Kings and Chronicles. Both books draw much attention to him, but there can be no doubt that the figure of Manasseh as portrayed in Chronicles was significantly different from the king evoked by the book of Kings (see 2 Kgs 21:1–20; 23:12, 26; 24:3) and reflected in Jer 15:14 as well.¹ Reading Chronicles affected the way in which literati in the

1. On the contrasting portrayals, see, for instance, P. Abadie, “From the Impious Manasseh (2 Kings 21) to the Convert Manasseh (2 Chronicles 33),” in *The Chronicler as Theologian: Essays in Honor of Ralph W. Klein* (ed. M. P. Graham, S. L. McKenzie, and G. N. Knoppers; JSOTSup 371; London: T. & T. Clark, 2003) 89–104. For a detailed and helpful contrastive analysis of the two texts, see K. A. D. Smelik, “The Portrayal of King Manasseh,” in *Converting the Past: Studies in Ancient Israelite and Moabite Historiography* (ed. K. A. D. Smelik; OtSt 28; Leiden: Brill, 1992) 129–89. For a study that explains the difference between Kings’ and Chronicles’ portrayals of Manasseh in terms of cultural wars that were waged at the time of the exilic edition of Kings but that were all but won by the time of Chronicles, see B. Halpern, “Why Manasseh Is Blamed for the Babylonian Exile: The Evolution of a Biblical Tradition,” *VT* 48 (1998) 473–514. Cf. Hermann-Josef Stipp, “Remembering Josiah’s Reforms in Kings,” in *Remembering (and Forgetting) in Early Second Temple Judah* (ed. E. Ben Zvi and C. Levin; FAT; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012).

The tension between the two different portrayals of Manasseh construed by these texts continued to impact the construction of the memory of Manasseh centuries after these texts were composed and first read. See, for instance, “Said R. Yohanan, ‘Both authorities [who dispute the fate of Manasseh] interpret the same verse of Scripture, as it is said, ‘And I will cause to be removed to all the kingdoms of the earth, because of Manasseh, son of Hezekiah, king of Judah’ (Jer. 15:4). . . . ‘One authority takes the view that it is ‘on account of Manasseh,’ who repented, while they did not repent.’ . . . ‘The other authority takes the view [103A] that it is ‘because of Manasseh,’ who did not repent’” (b. *Sanh.* 102b–103a; J. Neusner’s translation).

Two important essays that emerged after this essay was written should be mentioned here as well: (1) Gary Knoppers, “Saint or Sinner? Manasseh in Chronicles,” in

late Persian (or early Hellenistic) period remembered Manasseh. Reading Chronicles and (mentally) visiting and (imaginatively) experiencing, as it were, the Manassic period that it evoked, balanced the social memory of the period that these literati (and those whose views were strongly influenced by them) would have had, if they had read and known only about the books of Kings and Jeremiah.

Although Manasseh was portrayed first in Chronicles in a way *roughly* similar to the portrayal in Kings (see 2 Chr 33:1–10),² the book asked its readers to imagine and remember, time and again, that Manasseh repented and carried out a “godly” cultic reform (2 Chr 33:11–17). Moreover, Chronicles reminded the readers that Manasseh’s prayer was worth remembering for generations and, since the book does not provide the text of the prayer, it opened the prayer’s contents to the imagination of the readers.³

Rewriting Biblical History: Essays on Chronicles and Ben Sira in Honor of Pancratius C. Beentjes (ed. J. Corley and H. van Grol; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011) 211–29. Knoppers addresses matters from a different, though complementary perspective from my perspective here. (2) L. Jonker, “Manasseh in Paradise, or Not? The Influence of Persian Palace Garden Imagery in LXX 2 Chronicles 33:20,” to appear in *Thinking of Water* (ed. E. Ben Zvi and C. Levin, forthcoming) draws particular attention to the burial notices in MT 2 Chr 33:20 and in LXX 2 Chr 33:20 (compare and contrast with MT and LXX 2 Kgs 21:18) and suggests that these notes may have been part of a process of “upgrading” the figure of Manasseh.

2. Note, for instance, that 2 Chr 33:5 refers to “sons,” plural, whereas 2 Kgs 21:6 (MT, but not LXX^B and LXX^L) has “son,” singular; and that it carries a slightly longer list of misdeeds although, significantly, like 2 Kgs 21:6 it does not fully or explicitly reproduce the entire list from Deut 18:10–11. Note also the removal of the explicit reference to the rejected prophets in 2 Chr 33:10, so as to make Manasseh reject YHWH directly (see 2 Chr 33:10 and cf. 2 Kgs 21:10). In general, despite the fact that Manasseh is construed in extremely negative terms in 2 Kgs 21:1–10, the changes in 2 Chr 33:1–10 seem further to enhance the negative portrayal of the king. One may note also that 2 Chr 33:7 replaces the explicit reference to the Asherah in 2 Kgs 21:7 with a reference to *the* סמל (and cf. Deut 4:16; Ezek 8:3, 5). This change requires separate study.

There are also minor additional changes; for example, compare 2 Chr 33:4 (וּבְנֵה וּבְנֵה מְזֻבְחוֹת בְּבַיִת יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר אָמַר יְהוָה בִּירוּשָׁלַם יְהִי־שְׁמִי לְעוֹלָם וּבְבַיִת יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר אָמַר יְהוָה בִּירוּשָׁלַם אֲשִׁים אֶת־שְׁמִי) with 2 Kgs 21:4 (בְּבַיִת יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר אָמַר יְהוָה בִּירוּשָׁלַם אֲשִׁים אֶת־שְׁמִי).

On the “reprobate” section of the account of Manasseh in Chronicles, see W. Johnstone, *1 and 2 Chronicles*, vol. 2: *2 Chronicles 10–36: Guilt and Atonement* (JSOTSup 254; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997) 222–26.

3. Not surprisingly, texts that purported to be the prayer of Manasseh eventually emerged, as clearly evidenced by 4Q381, frg. 33, 8–11. Compare and contrast the position advanced in W. M. Schniedewind, “The Source Citations of Manasseh: King Manasseh in History and Homily,” *VT* 41 (1991) 450–61. For the (most likely) later (and “canonical” in some groups) “Prayer of Manasseh,” see J. H. Charlesworth, in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (ed. J. H. Charlesworth; New York: Doubleday, 1985) 2:625–38. On these and related matters, see F. Stavropoulou, *King Manasseh and Child Sacrifice: Biblical Distortions of Historical Realities* (BZAW 338; Berlin: de

This essay is not about the historical King Manasseh who lived in the 7th century B.C.E.⁴ or about potential sources other than Kings that might or *might not* have been available to the flesh-and-blood author/s of Chronicles.⁵ It is about the Manasseh evoked by Chronicles and the ways this character influenced the construction of the community's narrative about what "their" late monarchic past was and what they learned from it. It is about why the memory of Manasseh as evoked by Chronicles was shaped as it was.

2. *The Usual Approach and Its Limitations*

The usual approach to addressing these questions has been to focus on the historical (flesh-and-blood) author/s of Chronicles that we, as contemporary historians of ancient Israel or as historical-critical commentators of Chronicles, construct.⁶ Once attention is turned to this author, on the surface, a response to the questions set at the conclusion of the previous section seems easy and quite straightforward: the portrayal of Manasseh's repentance and transformation from villain to reformist hero was simply the author's response to the tension that emerged from the length of the reign of Manasseh—55 years, the longest

Gruyter, 2004) 130–33 and bibliography cited there. For a recent study of the "Prayer of Manasseh" and its background, see J. Davila, "Is the Prayer of Manasseh a Jewish Work?" in *Heavenly Tablets: Interpretation, Identity and Tradition in Ancient Judaism* (ed. L. R. LiDonnici and A. Lieber; JSJSup 119; Leiden: Brill, 2007) 75–85.

4. See, among others, I. Finkelstein, "The Archaeology of the Days of Manasseh," in *Scriptures and Other Artifacts: Essays on Bible and Archaeology in Honor of Philip J. King* (ed. M. D. Coogan et al.; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994) 169–87; Y. Thareani-Sussely, "The Archaeology of the Days of Manasseh Reconsidered in the Light of Evidence from the Beersheba Valley," *PEQ* 139 (2007) 69–77; A. Faust, "Settlement and Demography in Seventh Century Judah and the Extent and Intensity of Sennacherib's Campaign," *PEQ* 140 (2008) 168–94; contrast with O. Lipschits, O. Sergi, and I. Koch, "Judahite Stamped and Incised Jar Handles: A Tool for Studying the History of Late Monarchic Judah," *TA* 38 (2011) 5–41. See also my "Prelude to a Reconstruction of the Historical Manassic Judah," *BN* 81 (1996) 31–44; E. A. Knauf, "The Glorious Days of Manasseh," in *Good Kings and Bad Kings* (ed. L. L. Grabbe; LHBOTS 393; London: T. & T. Clark, 2005) 164–88; F. Stavropoulou, "The Blackballing of Manasseh," in *ibid.*, 248–63; and *idem*, *King Manasseh*. Compare and contrast B. Kelly, "Manasseh in the Books of Kings and Chronicles (2 Kings 21:1–18; 2 Chron 33:1–20)," in *Windows into Old Testament History: Evidence, Argument, and the Crisis of "Biblical Israel"* (ed. V. Philips Long, D. W. Baker, and G. J. Wenham; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002) 131–46 and bibliography cited there.

5. Among those proposing the existence of sources other than Kings behind the Chronicles' account of Manasseh, see, for instance, Schniedewind, "Source Citations"; S. Japhet, *I and II Chronicles: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993) 1009.

6. This author was responsible for Chronicles but not for Ezra–Nehemiah or any section in that book. Given the distribution of social roles according to gender in Yehud, this author was most likely male and thus will be referred to as male in this essay.

reign in Judahite history, even longer than the reigns of David and Solomon—as stated in Kings and his characterization as extremely impious. Since length of days was considered a blessing within the social mindscape of the community (and as expressed in numerous texts in the discourse of the community; e.g., Exod 20:12; Deut 5:16, 6:2; Ps 91:14–16; Prov 3:1–2, 10:2, 12:28; cf. 2 Kgs 20:1–7; 2 Chr 24:15) and was construed as a blessing by the author, he felt it was necessary to resolve the inconsistency between Manasseh's long reign and life and the principles governing a divine economy of divine rewards and punishment; thus, he reshaped the portrayal of Manasseh.⁷

But matters are not as simple and straightforward as they seem to be. The observations mentioned above indeed shed light on some aspects of the emergence and role of the Manasseh of Chronicles in late Persian Yehud but obscure or oversimplify other aspects. To begin with, the generative tension between the 55 years' regnal period and the overwhelming impiety did *not necessitate* the construction of a narrative about a pious Manasseh and most certainly not the particular narrative advanced in Chronicles.

To be sure, a simple observation of literary and ideological tendencies (and constraints) at work in Chronicles shows that: (1) Chronicles could not have construed the span of Manasseh's reign any differently from the span stated in the (MT) book of Kings;⁸ (2) Manasseh's piety was implicitly presented as consistent with his lengthy life; and (3) Chronicles shaped other regnal accounts around a narrative plot in which the reign of the king was divided between a period of piety and divine rewards and another of impiety and punishment (see the accounts of Asa, Joash, Amaziah, and Uzziah). But questions emerge.

Despite the fact that, on the whole, Chronicles valued length of life as a blessing,⁹ the very same Chronicles assigns to its most sinful king a life of about 36 years (see 2 Chr 28:1), not much shorter than the life of one of its most pious kings, Josiah, to whom it assigns about 39 years (2 Chr 34:1). Moreover, if one were to claim that there is a difference in that Josiah enjoyed

7. This has been the most common approach since, at least, J. Wellhausen. See his *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* (trans. J. Sutherland Black and Allan Menzies; Edinburgh: Black, 1885; orig. German pub., 1878) 206–7. See S. L. McKenzie, *1–2 Chronicles* (AOTC; Nashville: Abingdon, 2004) 353–54.

8. See my *History, Literature and Theology in the Book of Chronicles* (London: Equinox, 2006) 78–99 (esp pp. 82–83). This chapter was first published as “Shifting the Gaze: Historiographic Constraints in Chronicles and Their Implications,” in *The Land That I Will Show You: Essays on the History and Archaeology of the Ancient Near East in Honor of J. Maxwell Miller* (ed. M. Patrick Graham and J. Andrew Dearman; JSOTSup 343; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 2001) 38–60.

9. Note that the great hero Jehoiadah the priest, to some extent as kingly a figure as a priest can ever be, lives 130 years, longer even than Moses; see 2 Chr 24:15. The portrayal of Jehoiadah in Chronicles requires a separate study that cannot be carried out here.

many more regnal years than Ahaz, one still must keep in mind that Abijah, a most pious king in Chronicles, reigned only 3 years (2 Chr 13:2), far less than Ahaz's 16 years (2 Chr 28:1).

In fact, Chronicles had no problems with construing a world in which sinners may, at times, outlive the pious (see 2 Chr 24:20–22); and even more importantly, it asks its readers to imagine a world in which the worst sinner (Ahaz) *is not necessarily* punished with premature death. The fact that he remains alive when sinners around him die because of their sins (see 2 Chr 28:5–7) makes the point emphatically. These are not minor issues or accidental examples bearing little meaning. They are integral to shaping and communicating that, while longevity and long regnal periods are a blessing, not all pious were blessed this way, and conversely, not all sinners had to die (prematurely).

The latter considerations reflect an important aspect of the ideological approach in Chronicles: a world in which sinners must be punished with (premature) death is a world that allows no room for repentance. However, repentance plays a central role in the ideological discourse of postmonarchic Israel (for obvious reasons) and in Chronicles. Ahaz is thus portrayed as being surrounded by examples of divine justice and consistently rejecting the lesson. His lack of repentance strengthens the negative characterization of the personage, which in turn, is a necessary feature for the shaping and communicating of an extreme example of the potential availability of repentance.

Manasseh, who is portrayed as the worst king in Kings, could have been construed in Chronicles as consistently doing wrong, never repenting for 55 years, and thus “besting” (as it were) Ahaz. Chronicles could have but, significantly, did not construct him that way.

Another consideration is that, although the division of a regnal period into two diametrically different eras is a common ideological and narrative-structuring device in Chronicles, the sequence is always a “good period” followed by a “bad period” (see the accounts of Asa, Joash, Amaziah, Uzziah, and to some extent Josiah). The account of Manasseh is a glaring, unique exception.¹⁰

10. On the surface, one might be tempted to consider the account of Rehoboam as another example, particularly given the report of his ascension to the throne. But that section of the account of Rehoboam is about the secession of the North and is substantially different from the accounts of the kings of Judah in the post-Davidic/Solomonic period. For my work on the secession of the North in Chronicles, see my *History, Literature and Theology in the Book of Chronicles*, 117–43; first published as “The Secession of the Northern Kingdom in Chronicles: Accepted ‘Facts’ and New Meanings,” in *The Chronicler as a Theologian*, 61–88. On the account of Rehoboam in Chronicles, see G. N. Knoppers, “Rehoboam in Chronicles,” *JBL* 109 (1990) 423–40. Of course, many scholars have noticed the contrast between the trajectories in the accounts of Asa, Joash, Amaziah, and Uzziah, as well as in Manasseh. For instance, P. Abadie maintains that the difference “gives the narrative of Manasseh a particular tonality” (Abadie “From the Impious Manasseh,” 95). See also Japhet, *I and II Chronicles*, 1001.

However, the strong preference for the good-turns-bad plot over its counterpart (i.e., bad-turns-good) is not random. It reflects a central ideological viewpoint and, one may say, a particular social mindscape. I discussed this issue at some length elsewhere,¹¹ but for the present purposes, it suffices to note that Chronicles could have construed a good period in which Manasseh followed the counsel of his father Hezekiah's advisors and then a bad period in which he rejected them (see Chronicles' account of Joash). Moreover, had Chronicles shaped its account of Manasseh's reign in such a way, not only would it have "explained" his lengthy reign, by assigning many of its years to the good period, but it also would have created a Manasseh whose image would have been much more easy to reconcile with that advanced in Kings than the image Chronicles actually developed. Given that the readership of Chronicles was well aware of Kings, social memory would have tended to prefer an image of Manasseh that could more easily be reconciled with the image in Kings than an image that can hardly be reconciled. But Chronicles did not follow this path; instead, it created an *exceptional* sequence that as such cannot but draw attention to itself, to the figure of Manasseh *as evoked by Chronicles*, and to the messages that this figure/site of memory communicated to the remembering community.

A third consideration: it is easy to recognize that the Manasseh of Chronicles is the paradigmatic Judahite king who repents and that he prefigures Israel, considering that he is exiled to Babylon because of his sins and returns to Judah.¹² But one may wonder, why Manasseh? Why does Chronicles join Manasseh to David in such a way that the two become the two paragons of repentance?¹³ To be sure, the communicative point may be that they represent two extremes of kingly behavior, the best and worst king—that is, a kind of polar construction. As one would anticipate, the most ideal human king is imagined as a great "repentant" as well.¹⁴ But, probably more important from a communicative and ideological perspective is the image of the most sinful

11. E. Ben Zvi, "A House of Treasures: The Account of Amaziah in 2 Chronicles 25: Observations and Implications," *SJOT* 22 (2008) 63–85, esp. pp. 69–75.

12. On discussions of Manasseh as a "type" or prefiguration of Israel in Chronicles, see, among many others, R. Mosis, *Untersuchungen zur Theologie des chronistischen Geschichtswerkes* (Freiburger theologische Studien 92; Freiburg: Herder, 1973) 192–94; Schniedewind, "Source Citations," 451–55; H. G. M. Williamson, *1–2 Chronicles* (NCB; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982) 389–90; S. J. De Vries, *1 and 2 Chronicles* (FOTL 11; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989) 399–400; Stavropoulou, *King Manasseh*, 55–56; Abadie, "From the Impious Manasseh"; etc.

13. On David, see G. N. Knoppers, "Images of David in Early Judaism: David as Repentant Sinner in Chronicles," *Bib* 76 (1995) 449–70. For a different position, see J. W. Wright, "The Innocence of David in I Chronicles 21," *JSOT* 60 (1993) 87–105.

14. Assuming, of course, that all humans, even highly lionized individuals such as David, will occasionally fail and sin. This position is attested in and communicated by

king as repentant, for it carries more persuasive appeal as a site of memory encouraging repentance within the community and as a potential site with which Israel can identify.¹⁵

This said, Ahaz, not Manasseh, is the worst king in Chronicles. If the point is (1) that the worst Davidic king is comparable with Israel and (2) to convey a sense that both can repent (and that monarchic Israel did not, and thus it fell), then, again, why not use Ahaz, the most sinful king in Chronicles, for that purpose?¹⁶ Moreover, given that the Ahaz evoked by Kings and particularly Isaiah is not such a bad king, it would have been “easier” to construe him as repenting and withstanding the enemies who were attacking him and Jerusalem than to “clean up” Manasseh.¹⁷

Just to be clear, the point of these observations is *not* to advance or reject any hypothesis regarding causality as it applies to the actual author of

Chronicles (remember David) and is common in the entire discourse of Yehudite Israel, which construed even Moses as occasionally sinning (see also 1 Kgs 8:46; Qoh 7:20).

15. Although at some level, Israel was identified with David, the “Israelites” probably did not imagine themselves as pious as Chronicles’ David but also not as sinful as the Manasseh of memory and, if he could have repented, then so could they. See the text from *b. Sanh.* 102b–103a cited in n. 1.

16. On the surface, one may claim that Ahaz ended up being the worst king only by default, because Chronicles made Manasseh repent. Even if this were the case, the message would have remained, but this is very unlikely to have been the case. The main argument against such a position is that Ahaz’s image was very actively shaped as that of the worst king in Chronicles (compare with his image in Kings and see, for instance, 2 Chr 28:24; note the action of closing the temple that is attributed to him in Chronicles; even the Manasseh of Kings was not imagined as planning or carrying out such an extreme deed). Moreover, the maximization of the negative characterization of Ahaz in Chronicles goes together with the lionization of Hezekiah, which is certainly not an accidental result of the “cleansing” of Manasseh but a very important point in Chronicles. It is not by accident that the most important contrastive pair of kings (the worst and the best) in Chronicles is Ahaz and Hezekiah, whereas in Kings, it is Manasseh and Josiah. This has much to do with the general mnemonic and ideological differences between Chronicles and Kings (see below). Finally, one might also add that Chronicles could have used an available common narrative pattern meant both to portray and to remember within a community a particular king in a saliently negative way and still allow for his repentance at a late stage (see, for instance, Naram Sin’s legend; Daniel 4 [esp. v. 34]; and 2 Macc 9:12, 17). There was no need to lionize Manasseh or characterize Ahaz extremely just to construe the former as repentant. The story, however, had to portray Manasseh and Ahaz in the way it actually did if Chronicles were to evoke certain important mnemonic narratives about the past (see below). There were no accidents here, nor did the community construe the implied author of Chronicles as communicating any accidents.

17. To be sure, there is the issue of the deportation to Babylon, but if this is, as most likely, a story contrived to make a particular point, it could have been used for other kings as well.

Chronicles. The discussion above is not meant to propose or reject any particular answer to the question why the actual author of Chronicles wrote the account of Manasseh the way he did instead of some other potential way that would have been as consistent or more consistent with the general message and historiographical tendencies of Chronicles. Instead, the point of the present discussion is that the shape and contents of the report about King Manasseh in Chronicles do not represent a *necessary, inevitable* outcome. The actual author had a significant amount of freedom to reshape the narrative from Kings in different ways. Although we may *explain* the “final outcome,” we certainly could not have predicted it. In other words, the best we can do is to develop good descriptive, post-event explanations rather than pre-event, causality-centered frameworks.¹⁸

18. The preceding discussion has focused on historiographical/ideological tendencies and constraints that characterize Chronicles. It must be admitted, however, that on the surface another type of consideration must be addressed: one might claim that the simplest position is that the author of Chronicles portrayed Manasseh the way he did, simply because such was the historical Manasseh. But first, the resulting reconstruction of the historical Manasseh is highly problematic (see references in n. 4). Second, even if for the sake of the argument one were to accept the idea that some aspects of the portrayal of Manasseh in Chronicles reflected the circumstances of the historical Manassic period, accepting this approach requires us to ignore the complex processes involved in history writing in general and the very evidence of Chronicles itself about the way in which it dealt with its sources. Moreover, ancient (as well as contemporary writers, one may argue) history writers, including the author of Chronicles, do not include stories in their historiographical narratives *simply* because they (believe that they) happened. They recount or fail to recount matters, and they shape their accounts the way they do for a large variety of historiographical reasons. Close to the case at hand—can we imagine that the author of Chronicles failed to include a single reference to Josiah’s building activities just because he believed that Josiah did not build anything in his 31-year reign? Or that Asa and Jehoshaphat, both of them, did and did not remove the *bamot*? Or that Asa indeed had two different mothers? Or that this author included prophetic speeches such as Abijah’s because they simply happened? Or that this author shaped an image of Elijah in the particular way that he did in Chronicles (which stands in sharp contrast to Kings) just because Elijah was actually like that? (For a discussion of these and related matters, see my *History, Literature and Theology in the Book of Chronicles*, 44–77).

Likewise, claims that Chronicles described Manasseh the way it did because this was the description of Manasseh that existed in the author’s sources not only face what we know all too well about the way Chronicles dealt with its sources but also simply shift the question to another “author” rather than “answering” the claim.

Finally, as I show in §3, the very focus on the historical author and on matters of direct correspondence between the narrative reported in Chronicles and contemporary potential narratives about the history of the Manassic period is not the most helpful way to approach the question of how a late-Persian-period community construed memories of Manasseh by reading Chronicles. This is the reason that this essay does not focus on the historical Manasseh but on the remembered Manasseh, and even more narrowly,

(Of course, these observations apply to authors of historiographical works other than Chronicles as well. See the book of Kings, for example; the book itself presents multiple approaches balancing each other and thus allowing multiple potential stories to be consistent with the book. At best, we would be able to “explain” how *any* text that the author/s eventually actually wrote/composed fit other aspects of the book rather than addressing the question of why he/they decided to write this but not any other potential texts.)

Moreover, the issue is not only that entering into the mind of the long-dead author to discern predictive, deterministic *causality* (as implied in some of the usual historical explanations about the construction of the figure of Manasseh in Chronicles) is in itself an impossible task but also—and far more important, even if this task were possible—that it would *not* shed much light on the memories evoked by the book.

It is the implied author as construed by the intended readership of the book, not the flesh-and-blood, “actual” author that has an impact on the construction of social memories shaped by reading texts, for it is with this author that the readership communicates. It is to *this* implied and socially construed author that they listen and whose characters they bring into existence through imagination and memory.¹⁹

As we turn to this implied author, an indirect but clear offshoot of the preceding discussion and its examples is that the literati reading and rereading the book in late-Persian Yehud had *no substantive reason to imagine the author of the book—the voice talking to them, as it were—as constrained either to invent or to report the story of Manasseh’s exile to Babylon and his repentance*, so as to make sense of his long life. In fact, had their “historian” (i.e., their implied author of Chronicles) been construed in such a manner, he would not have been

on the remembered Manasseh evoked by reading Chronicles within a late-Persian/early-Hellenistic, Jerusalem-centered community—that is, in late Yehud.

For general surveys or discussions on the historicity of the account of Manasseh in Chronicles, see, in addition to the works mentioned in n. 4, from different perspectives and among many other scholars: R. H. Lowery, *The Reforming Kings: Cults and Society in First Temple Judah* (JSOTSup 120; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991) 185–89; M. A. Sweeney, “King Manasseh of Judah and the Problem of Theodicy in the Deuteronomistic History,” in *Good Kings and Bad Kings* (ed. L. L. Grabbe; LHBOTS 393; London: T. & T. Clark, 2005) 264–78 (esp. pp. 268–72). Concerning the putative building activities of Manasseh, see also P. Welten, *Geschichte und Geschichtsdarstellung in den Chronikbüchern* (WMANT 42; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1973) esp. pp. 31–34, 72–78.

19. It should be stressed that ancient readerships did not read texts that they considered authoritative (or as carrying reliable, godly knowledge about YHWH and Israel) against the grain. In other words, readers of authoritative books imagined themselves as following the communicative wishes of the authors as they thought them to be. See Y. Amit, “The Glory of Israel Does Not Deceive or Change His Mind’: On the Reliability of Narrator and Speakers in Biblical Narrative,” *Proof 12* (1992) 201–12.

too credible in the community, and the book attributed to him would have been unlikely to survive. The implied author/historian *was not imagined as forced to tell anything*; rather, he simply narrated what is worth remembering of the things that “happened.”

Concerning these matters, the intended (re)readership of Chronicles construed itself in ways similar to those of their implied author. The intended readership was not required to imagine that Manasseh *had* to repent to avoid premature death, even if their mindscape would have been dominated *only* by the ideology and narratives of Chronicles. Taking into account that they were also influenced by the book of Kings, which was part of their repertoire of authoritative books as well, and which actually evoked a memory of Manasseh as evil and long-lived, the case is even more evident.²⁰

In other words, the literati who read and reread Chronicles were to evoke and remember Manasseh the way in which he is construed in Chronicles, because a Manasseh of this sort was worth remembering. But why did it make sense to remember this Manasseh, alongside the other Manasseh—the Manasseh in Kings and Jeremiah—in this community?

3. *The Memorable Manasseh Evoked by the Target Readership of Chronicles*

Before addressing this question, I must stress that, from the perspective of the reading community, the implied author wanted them to imagine and remember well the Manasseh of Chronicles. Time and again and in multiple ways, the text draws particular attention to Manasseh. The target readership is repeatedly reminded that their Manasseh is an exceptional character, to whom they should pay much attention. In other words, theirs is a very memorable Manasseh.

At first glance, one might be tempted to dismiss *some* of the salient and unique ways that Manasseh is evoked as simple accidents, but the cumulative weight of all these observations is undeniable. Moreover, each of them in its own way serves to portray or draw attention to some significant aspect of the memory of Manasseh evoked by Chronicles.

The exceptional, bad-turns-good plot that shapes the account of Manasseh has been mentioned above. Whereas most kings either remain as bad as they are or turn from good to bad due to hubris or other reasons, the exceptional nature of the shift toward good in Manasseh makes him a salient exemplar for repentance. Moreover, the fact that he is described as a terrible sinner before

20. Note again that the link between length of days and proper behaviour on earth is *not* an invention of Chronicles, but a basic feature of an existing social mindscape that came to be explicitly expressed in texts that predated Chronicles and remained within the authoritative repertoire of the community. See, for instance, Exod 20:12; Deut 5:16, 33; 17:20; 22:7; 25:16 and cf. Prov 10:2; 11:4.

his repentance communicates the message that YHWH does not necessarily “execute” those worthy of being executed and that even some of the worst sinners may repent and their repentance be accepted by YHWH. I will return to these points, but at this stage it is important to note the presence of many other markers of uniqueness and salience in Chronicles’ Manasseh.

2 Chr 33:10 reads *וַיִּדְבֹר יְהוָה אֶל־מְנַשֶּׁה וְאֶל־עַמּוֹ*. Given that the syntax here is very common and so are the key words, it is particularly worth noting that the exact phrase *X-לִיהוָה יְדִבֵּר* is rare in the HB used with any “X” other than Moses.²¹ Moreover, in most of the exceptions, the slot of X is assigned to someone directly associated with Moses.²² The other two exceptions are (1) in 1 Chr 21:9, where X is Gad, David’s seer but, interestingly, not David himself; and (2) in 2 Chr 33:10. Furthermore, the occurrence in 1 Chr 21:9 is in the context of the story about David’s census, the plague, David’s repentance, and the place of the temple. At the very least, therefore, the use of this precise phrase in 2 Chr 33:10 prepares the reader for the fact that the next account will narrate “something of importance.”²³

The readers of Chronicles were also asked to remember a past in which various kings received Godly advice through a special prophet or two at particular (potential) turning points. Chronicles evokes an image of a Manassic period in which *multiple* prophets continuously advised him (see the reference to *הַחֲזִים הַמְדַבְּרִים אֵלָיו בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל* in 2 Chr 33:18). Moreover, Chronicles informs its readers that the words of these prophets were worthy of being recorded for posterity and referred to (see ‘Now the rest of the acts of Manasseh, . . . and the words of the seers who spoke to him . . . these are in the Annals of the Kings of Israel’, *וַיִּתֶּר דְּבָרָי . . . מַלְכֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל . . . וְדְבָרָי הַחֲזִים הַנֶּם עַל־דְּבָרָי מַלְכֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל* [2 Chr 33:18]). The contrast with the absolute absence of Manassic-period prophets in the worlds construed by the collection of prophetic books and the Deuteronomistic Historical Collection, with which the readership of Chronicles was acquainted as well, only emphasizes and draws attention to references about these prophets in Chronicles and about Manasseh himself.

Personages from the past are most often remembered as characters within particularly memorable plots and in relation to other figures populating the memory-scape of the community.²⁴ The Manasseh whose image was evoked by reading Chronicles was constructed parallel with and in contrast to a

21. With “X” being Moses, it is very common in the Pentateuch.

22. See Aaron in Lev 10:8; Num 18:8 (and Moses and Aaron in Lev 13:1; 15:1; Num 16:20; 19:1) and Joshua in Josh 20:1, within a text where Joshua clearly stands in continuation with Moses.

23. Moreover, the text here may have hinted at a potential connection to David, the other main exemplar of repentance.

24. This is so because social memory tends to be organized in terms of narratives.

combination of images evoked about two kings of the late period—namely, Jehoiakim and Zedekiah. Like the first king, Manasseh is taken captive to Babylon (compare the precise language in 2 Chr 33:11b with that of 2 Chr 36:6, which stresses the point and weaves a network of meanings for the intended readers of the book), but in contrast to Zedekiah, he humbled himself (compare 2 Chr 33:12b with 2 Chr 36:12b).

Significantly, the general tendency was to construe major characters as encompassing, in a contrasting or noncontrasting way, several minor characters rather than vice versa. Manasseh is presented through these allusions to kings such as Jehoiakim and Zedekiah as a major character, more memorable and more important than either one of the latter. Note also that, whereas YHWH is portrayed as sending messengers calling for repentance during Zedekiah's reign (2 Chr 36:15), YHWH addresses Manasseh (and his people) "himself" and calls them to repent (2 Chr 33:10). This matter is not trivial or just a product of random chance and is consistent with the (contrastive) minor differences in the language of 2 Chr 33:12b and 2 Chr 36:12b and the other "peculiarities" of Manasseh's account in Chronicles.

Even as the memory of Jehoiakim and (especially) Zedekiah is strongly connected to the catastrophe of 586 B.C.E. in Chronicles (in contrast to Kings, where Manasseh's memory is connected as much or even more), it is Manasseh and his repentance that consume more textual space and mind-share in Chronicles.²⁵ The target readership is asked to remember that Manasseh's prayer was worthy of being recorded in both the chronicles of the kings of Israel and the prophetic records (2 Chr 33:18, 19).²⁶ I will return to the issue of Manasseh's prayer and repentance, but at this point it is worth stressing that his is the only prayer, and the only text for that matter, that was putatively composed by a post-David/Solomon king of Judah and that was meant to be recorded for posterity. Also in this regard, the Manasseh evoked by Chronicles is exceptional and uniquely draws attention to himself.²⁷

25. This is consistent with the tendency in Chronicles to balance the overwhelming centrality of exile and the catastrophe in other works in the repertoire of the community. I have discussed this matter elsewhere: see my "Toward a Sense of Balance: Remembering the Catastrophe of Monarchic Judah / (Ideological) Israel and Exile through Reading Chronicles in Late Yehud," in this volume. I discussed the importance of the concept of *social mind-share* for studies of social memory in ancient Israel in my "Remembering the Prophets through the Reading and Rereading of a Collection of Written Prophetic Books in Yehud: Methodological Considerations and Explorations," in *Remembering (and Forgetting) in Early Second Temple Judah* (ed. E. Ben Zvi and C. Levin; FAT; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012).

26. This understanding of the text holds true regardless of the precise reading one adopts concerning *וְדַבְּרֵי חֲזוֹנֵי* in 2 Chr 33:19; on this matter, see Japhet, *I and II Chronicles*, 1012.

27. Manasseh's repentance and prayer were considered memorable and continued to affect and influence Jewish and Christian readers from early periods to recent times.

Of course, given the basic facts about the past agreed upon in the community and the large mind-share of the figure of Josiah (as construed in Kings), Manasseh could not have been remembered as the last reformer king, but only as another reforming king. However, the Manasseh of Chronicles was to be remembered as the last Judahite building king in a book in which building activities was considered important and very much worth remembering.²⁸ In a manner reminiscent of the actions of his father, he built the walls of the city and strengthened the fortified cities (compare 2 Chr 33:14 with 32:5 and 32:1), yet clearly the actions of Manasseh are portrayed as being carried out in a period of peace and blessing and as a mark of blessing, rather than being hasty actions meant to stop an invading army by worldly means.

There are additional textual markers that suggest that remembering the Manasseh of Chronicles involved evoking the memory of Hezekiah. For instance, the language *וְזָכְרֵי שְׁלָמִים וְתוֹרָה* in 2 Chr 33:16 is unique but reminiscent of the also-unique *מְזַכְּרֵי זָכָרִים וְזָכְרֵי שְׁלָמִים וּמְתוּנָדִים* in 2 Chr 30:22. Conceptually, the

A few examples from different times suffice. As I mentioned in n. 2, texts in Qumran purported to contain the prayer of Manasseh. A Hebrew version of the traditional “Prayer of Manasseh” was found in the Cairo Geniza. Voices in Rabbinic Judaism that attributed the fall of Jerusalem to the fact that, even Manasseh could repent but Judah did not, were mentioned above. Jerome wrote:

O happy penitence which has drawn down upon itself the eyes of God, and which has by confessing its error changed the sentence of God’s anger! The same conduct is in the Chronicles attributed to Manasseh, and in the book of the prophet Jonah to Nineveh, and in the gospel to the publican. . . . The first of these not only was allowed to obtain forgiveness but also recovered his kingdom, the second broke the force of God’s impending wrath. (Jerome, *Epist.* 77)

David, the Ninevites, Hezekiah, and Manasseh are considered the eminent exemplars of repentance in *Apostolic Constitutions*, II, section 3, §22. For much later times, see, for instance, the inclusion of Manasseh among six great kings of Judah in the statues at the royal chapel in El Escorial (the other kings are David, Solomon, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, and Josiah; see J. C. Endres, “The Spiritual Vision of Chronicles: Wholehearted, Joy-Filled Worship of God,” *CBQ* 69 [2007] 1–21 [esp. pp. 6–12]). Turning to the twenty-first century: S. Tuell wrote,

Manasseh serves as a compelling illustration of the extraordinary grace of God, offered freely to penitents whatever their offenses—and a firm rebuttal to those who would see a firm divide between ‘Old Testament’ *law* and ‘New Testament’ *grace*. In fact, the grace of God is the living heart of the whole Scripture. The forgiveness of sins in Jesus’ ministry . . . builds on the foundation laid in the Hebrew Bible . . . the life of Paul, persecutor of the church turned apostle, forms an intriguing parallel to the Chronicler’s life of Manasseh.” (S. S. Tuell, *First and Second Chronicles* [Interpretation; Louisville: John Knox, 2001] 233).

28. In Chronicles, Manasseh, not Josiah is the last building king. I wrote elsewhere on building activities in Chronicles: *History, Literature and Theology*, 100–116; originally published as “The Chronicler as a Historian: Building Texts,” in *The Chronicler as Historian* (ed. M. P. Graham, K. G. Hoglund and S. L. McKenzie; JSOTSup 238; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1997) 132–49.

sentence *וַיֹּאמֶר לַיהוָה לְעִבּוֹד אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל* (2 Chr 33:16) may be seen as an expansion on 2 Chr 30:22 and similar texts.²⁹ In addition, the idiom, *לְעִבּוֹד אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל* (2 Chr 33:16) links the figure of Manasseh to that of Josiah, the other great reforming king; and see *לְעִבּוֹד אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיהֶם* (2 Chr 34:33).³⁰ In addition, Manasseh was imagined in some ways as being similar to the reforming kings within the memory-scape of the community that preceded Hezekiah and Josiah (cf. 2 Chr 33:17 with 1 Kgs 22:44; 2 Kgs 12:4; 14:4; 15:4).

The above considerations make the point that much attention was drawn in Chronicles to its Manasseh. But since he was made so memorable, the question is: why? What basic meanings and associations were embodied in the Manasseh of Chronicles as a site of memory for late-Persian/early-Hellenistic literati (the people who read and reread the book and for whom it was [directly] intended) that made him so central?

The Manasseh of Chronicles was construed as partially embodying Israel. To be sure, he was a sinner who, for his sins, was removed to Babylon and then restored to Judah and Jerusalem, just as Israel was (as construed by the literati in Yehud).³¹ Unlike postmonarchic Israel, however, he returned to Judah and Jerusalem to rule the land as well as to live in it (compare and contrast with 2 Chr 36:23). The story of Manasseh inspired not only repentance but also hope for a future.

As the construed metaphor of Israel in the Persian period, Manasseh was not punished as harshly as he could have been.³² Remembering Chronicles'

29. See also the opening language in 2 Chr 32:26 and 33:12.

30. It is worth noting that the precise expression *לְעִבּוֹד אֶת־יְהוָה* appears only in 2 Chr 33:16 and 34:33.

31. An association between sinful Israel/Judah and sinful Manasseh is conveyed, indirectly, in Kings as well. See Smelik, "The Portrayal of King Manasseh," 149–51.

32. Japhet correctly notes that, "in view of the extraordinary and unprecedented transgressions, this arresting of Manasseh presents a relatively mild reaction of the Lord, disproportionate to the immensity of sin" (*1 and 2 Chronicles*, 1009). But the same can be said of Manasseh's companions as paragons of repentance in Judah. David in the discourse of the literati was also influenced by Samuel, was construed as *בֶּן מוֹת*, and was severely punished, but he was kept alive and eventually bore Solomon and engendered the temple. Postmonarchic Israel identified with both. Chronicles maintains the characterization of David as a paragon of repentance who existed within the discourse of the community, but it shifts the main event from the sin associated with Bathsheba and Uriah to the sin of the census: the story of Bathsheba is not mentioned in Chronicles and thus is indirectly considered not worthy of retelling and remembering. More importantly, the books tries to diminish the weight of the story within the mind-share of the community, while at the same time keeping David as a central site for repentance. Japhet concludes that Chronicles reports a relatively mild response of YHWH, because it follows extrabiblical sources that report Manasseh's removal to Babylon at the hands of the Assyrians.

Manasseh was indirectly hammering the common but important point in the discourse of postmonarchic Israel that YHWH had been just *and merciful* with Israel, even when YHWH exiled it; after all, YHWH allowed a remnant to survive, who in turn could be “restored.” Remembering Manasseh and seeing him as Israel was also remembering that the turning point that caused Manasseh’s/Israel’s change of heart was divine punishment in the form of exile. Needless to say, this construction reflected, supported, and communicated the role given to the exile in the discourse of Persian Yehud and the idea that post-repentance Israel/Manasseh is post-Babylonian Israel.³³

Significantly, following his deliverance by YHWH’s mighty hand, Manasseh as construed and evoked by reading Chronicles, acknowledges that YHWH is God, just as Israel does following its deliverance from Egypt—even if the Sinai-nomad Israelites were not brought to Jerusalem. One may note even the use of the phrase *כִּי יְהוָה הוּא הָאֱלֹהִים* in 2 Chr 33:13, taken word for word from Deut 4:35 and binding these two memories together. Thus, on some symbolic level, Manasseh is Israel and thus, when YHWH talks to Manasseh, YHWH is talking to Israel as well—a point implied in the logic of the text but also made explicit (2 Chr 33:10). Moreover, as Moses in Deuteronomy 4, Manasseh commands the people to serve YHWH (2 Chr 33:16).

To remember the Manasseh of Chronicles is to remember that he was an example of the repentant Israel of 2 Chr 7:14 and of YHWH’s promise to forgive and heal. Significantly, some key wording and concepts in this text reverberate in 2 Chr 33:12–13. Notice the crucial role of Niphal verbal forms of *כָּנַע* in both texts to communicate the turning point³⁴—the importance of prayer and of turning from (what are considered to be) wicked ways—which is detailed and exemplified in the case of Manasseh (2 Chr 33:15–16).

Of course, the memory of Manasseh, like almost anything else in Chronicles, had to be set in proportion. Given his “history,” Manasseh at the very end could not be imagined as great as Hezekiah or as Josiah, even in Chronicles (compare 2 Chr 33:15–17 with 2 Chr 34:33; and above all the reports about the kings’ respective reforming activities and their level of success).³⁵ After all, Manasseh cannot overcome socially agreed-upon, core memories

33. See my “Total Exile, Empty Land and the General Intellectual Discourse in Yehud,” in *The Concept of Exile in Ancient Israel and Its Historical Contexts* (ed. E. Ben Zvi and Christoph Levin; BZAW 404; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010) 155–68.

34. See 2 Chr 12:22 (Rehoboam’s repentance that allowed for the continuation of the Kingdom of Judah and David) and 2 Chr 32:26 (Hezekiah’s repentance that postponed the fall of Monarchic Judah).

35. The “problem” that Manasseh’s reform would not have left much for Josiah to purge/reform was *not* a problem for the target readership of Chronicles. Similar “logical” inconsistencies appear elsewhere in Chronicles (e.g., Asa’s reform) and, in any case, emerge out of modes of reading Chronicles other than those the intended readers were asked to follow as they read the book, or at least many sections of it. I have

that exist in the community.³⁶ Moreover, not only his good deeds are worth remembering but also his evil ones (note the balance explicitly communicated in 2 Chr 33:19). But again, even this contrast makes the Manasseh of Chronicles a unique site of memory.

Studies on social memory show that, the more a character comes to embody, integrate, and communicate multiple matters that were at the core or close to the core of the discourse of the community, the more memorable the character turns out to be; and vice versa, memorable characters serve as magnets for issues and images that are central to the community. Moreover, although each character is construed and remembered as unique and his/her singularity is necessary to be a memorable figure, able to communicate all the matters integrated in and evoked as sites of memory (e.g., ideas, images, conceptualizations, basic narratives), many of these matters cannot be unique to him/her but must reflect the general mindscape of the period. Consequently, these memorable characters tend to be encoded elsewhere, in other sites of memory. In fact, had this *not* been the case, the character would not have been worthy of being remembered.³⁷

The Manasseh of Chronicles was a unique site of memory that embodied both grave sin and great repentance. Thus, he served not only as a site of memory, standing symbolically for Israel, but also as a site of memory for Yehudite Israel. From the latter's perspective, Manasseh, to a large extent, encapsulated a central aspect of its main narrative about itself as reflected in the historical and prophetic books, and more importantly, for its present purposes.

discussed these matters elsewhere; see my *History, Literature and Theology in the Book of Chronicles*, 44–77.

36. It is particularly noteworthy that the motif of the people's continuing to sacrifice and make offerings in the *bāmôt* that is so common in Kings appears only here in Chronicles, in a place that could not have had any direct parallel in Kings but had a rhetorical function quite similar to what is in Kings. In Chronicles, the note explicitly sets Manasseh's reform in proportion, especially in terms of the reforms of his father, Hezekiah, and his most memorable successor, Josiah.

37. I recently discussed these trends in relation to the figures of Abraham, Moses, Isaiah, and Hosea in the late-Persian/early-Hellenist period. See my chapters "The Memory of Abraham in Late Persian/Early Hellenistic Period Yehud" and "Exploring the Memory of Moses 'the Prophet' in Late Persian/Early Hellenistic Period Yehud/Judah" and "Why Was Isaiah So Memorable in the Persian/Early Hellenistic Period? Some Observations," in *Remembering Biblical Figures in the Late Persian and Early Hellenistic Periods: Social Memory and Imagination* (ed. D. V. Edelman and E. Ben Zvi; Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, forthcoming). The chapter "The Memory of Abraham in Late Persian/Early Hellenistic Period Yehud" also appears in *The Reception and Remembrance of Abraham* (ed. P. Carstens and N. P. Lemche; Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2011). On Hosea, see my "Remembering Hosea: The Prophet Hosea as a Site of Memory in Persian Period Yehud" (paper presented at the International Meeting of the SBL, London, July 2011).

To imagine the Manasseh of old was also to recall that both the good and bad deeds must be remembered by the community and that the good do not cancel the memory of the bad, even if explicitly imagined as “undoing” the bad. In this way, the Manasseh of Chronicles encapsulated again the general discourse of the period and the basic notions expressed in the authoritative repertoire of the community.

Remembering Manasseh was not only a way to remember the place of Jerusalem in Israel, especially the fact that its temple and the return from the second exile were to Jerusalem, not to the land in general (see Isa 52:11–12; 2 Chr 36:23; and contrast these with the original return—that is, the exodus). But also, in his own way, Manasseh served as a site of memory, embodying and broadcasting a core aspect of the community’s ideology that was expressed elsewhere.

To remember the Manasseh of Chronicles was, of course, to remember YHWH and the deity’s interaction with Israel. Significantly, the Manasseh of Chronicles brings attention to YHWH’s willingness to give enough time to Israel to repent but also calls attention to the fact that Israel should repent and acknowledge YHWH. Considering that, for the most part, the narratives about deliverance from Egypt and Babylon do not emphasize Israel’s need for repentance prior to deliverance, and elsewhere Chronicles suggests that exile is by divine decision (temporally restricted and, in any case, of limited—though not inconsequential—significance),³⁸ remembering Manasseh serves to balance matters. This more balanced, multivocal approach to the issue is far more consistent with and representative of the larger spectrum of voices encoded in the prophetic corpus on this very matter.

The preceding observations show that Manasseh was reshaped in Chronicles to reflect a set of positions expressed in the general authoritative repertoire of the community and reflective of its general social mindscape. Manasseh’s reshaping in Chronicles also played important roles in the reshaping of the structure of the remembered narrative about Israel’s late monarchic period. Kings encoded and communicated a narrative in which the two main characters were Hezekiah and Josiah, in that order. Each was preceded by a villain who served as the expected foil and, since Josiah was the most positive king in this plot, the one preceding him needed to be the most negative king. Thus the narrative in Kings was structured to a large extent around the pairs Ahaz-Hezekiah and Manasseh-Josiah. The heightened image of Josiah required and the lack of a slot for a “great villain” following him contributed much to the characterization of Manasseh as a king whose actions decided the fate of Judah—to the point that even Josiah’s deeds could not change it.

38. On exile in Chronicles, see my “Toward a Sense of Balance: Remembering the Catastrophe of Monarchic Judah/(Ideological) Israel and Exile through Reading Chronicles in Late Yehud,” in the present volume.

The narrative in Kings played an important role in the formation of memories about the period in the community, but Chronicles rebalanced this period in the social memory of the community by creating a different, and to a large extent, complementary main plot. Here the main hero was Hezekiah, and the main villain then had to be Ahaz. To characterize late Manasseh as Israel, not as villain but a hero, erases the possibility of strongly structuring the narrative around the pairs Ahaz-Hezekiah and Manasseh-Josiah.³⁹ To have Manasseh as a complex and, to a large extent, very positive figure is conducive to a reshaping of the narrative in order to have one heightened point: Hezekiah's time (note the space allocated to his reign in Chronicles, which is much more than that allocated to any king since the foundational Davidic/Solomonic period).

This narrative, in fact, is a case of resignifying another main narrative that existed in the discourse of the community—the one in which Hezekiah and the Assyrian crisis served as the prefiguration and counterpoint of the catastrophe of 586 B.C.E., which is reflected in, among others, the book of Isaiah and much of the prophetic literature. Chronicles resignifies the narrative so as to draw more attention to Hezekiah as a reformer and pious king rather than as the king who was delivered by YHWH from the hands of the Assyrians. Although this is not the place to analyze the Hezekiah of Chronicles (and its aftermath in the quasi-messianic Hezekiah of Rabbinic Judaism),⁴⁰ it is worth stressing

39. On the Hezekiah of Chronicles, see, for instance, M. A. Throntveit, "The Relationship of Hezekiah to David and Solomon in the Books of Chronicles," in *The Chronicler as Theologian: Essays in Honor of Ralph W. Klein* (ed. M. P. Graham, S. L. McKenzie, and G. N. Knoppers; JSOTSup 371; London: T. & T. Clark, 2003) 105–21 (and previous literature cited there); L. Jonker, "The Chronicler's Reinterpretation of Hezekiah's Reformation Efforts," in *From Ebla to Stellenbosch* (ed. I. Cornelius and L. C. Jonker; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2008) 116–40; A. K. Warhurst, "The Chronicler's Use of the Prophets," in *What Was Authoritative for Chronicles?* (ed. E. Ben Zvi and D. V. Edelman; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2012) 165–82. I elaborated elsewhere on Josiah in Chronicles; see my "Observations on Josiah's Account in Chronicles and Implications for Reconstructing the Worldview of the Chronicler," in *Essays on Ancient Israel in Its Near Eastern Context: A Tribute to Nadav Na'aman* (ed. Y. Amit et al.; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006) 89–106 and the references cited there.

40. Compare with the (partial) "Hezekianic" characterization of Jesus in Matthew (see T. L. Thompson, *The Messiah Myth: The Near Eastern Roots of Jesus and David* [New York: Basic Books, 2005] 84). As for rabbinic sources, see *b. Sanh.* 94a, 98b, 99a; also M. Hadas-Lebel, "Hezekiah as King Messiah: Traces of an Early Jewish-Christian Polemic in the Tannaitic Tradition," in *Jewish Studies at the Turn of the Twentieth Century*, vol. 1: *Biblical, Rabbinical, and Medieval Studies* (ed. J. Targarona Borrás and A. Sáenz-Badillos; Leiden: Brill, 1999) 275–81 and bibliography there. On the relationship between the accounts of Ahaz and Hezekiah in Chronicles and the lionization of the latter, see P. R. Ackroyd, "The Biblical Interpretation of the Reigns of Ahaz and Hezekiah," in *In the Shelter of Elyon: Essays on Ancient Palestinian Life and Literature in Honor of G. W. Ahlström* (ed. W. Boyd Barrick and J. R. Spencer; JSOTSup 31; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984) 247–59.

that the reshaping of the memory of Manasseh in Chronicles is part of a larger project of replotting and restructuring the late monarchic past and constructing a particular memory of Hezekiah. This project aims at creating a memory landscape that is different from the one evoked by reading Kings or most of the prophetic books—which also construct a late monarchic past, but not Isaiah, which moves straight from Hezekiah (see Isaiah 39) to Cyrus and the return (Isaiah 40–55).⁴¹ This project constructs a late monarchic past that rebalances and informs the other two, just as it is rebalanced and informed by them. The fact that, through this project, the main villain—who was at times construed and remembered as responsible for the destruction of Jerusalem⁴²—is now identified with Israel, is seen as quite a hero, becomes a shared embodiment of the extremely sinful and very pious; and a call to remember both turns out to be a cipher for a return to Jerusalem and the temple and is, above all, a cipher for (the potential of) repentance. This is clearly not to be underestimated.⁴³

Of course, through this very process, Manasseh becomes a paradigmatic case of a multivalent (and yet integrated and integrating)⁴⁴ site of memory within the social memory of an Israel who reads and rereads Kings, the prophetic literature, and Chronicles. In fact, one may say that Manasseh becomes a main site of memory embodying and communicating the potential multivalence of other sites of memory in the memory landscape of the community.⁴⁵ The presence of

41. For a discussion of the ways that social memory structures plot and its significance, see my “Isaiah, a Memorable Prophet.”

42. See the voice in Kings that comes to the forefront in 2 Kgs 23:26, 24:3; and see Jer 15:14.

43. And certainly not explained away in terms of “necessities” that befell a relatively single-minded author, or a matter that is peripheral to “historical” issues, such as: “Did Manasseh rebel or think to rebel against Assyria or not?” “Was Manasseh taken to Babylon or not?” To be sure, these questions are important for historical reconstructions of the Manassic period, but for the reasons mentioned above, far less relevant to historical reconstructions of the world of thought and the social memory-scape of literati in late-Persian/early-Hellenistic Jerusalem and Yehud/Judah. The primary readership and historical community that imagined its past as it read Chronicles included the latter but not the former (i.e., the historical Manassic Judah).

44. After all, all the mentioned attributes and associations were interwoven into one single character from the past. On this issue, see my “Exploring the Memory of Moses ‘The Prophet.’”

45. The presence of such sites of memory contributes to and is consistent with a certain preference for “fuzziness” in the social mindscape of the community. A study of these matters, however, stands well beyond the scope of this essay. I briefly dealt with these issues in my essay “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 *Texts, Contexts and Readings in Postexilic Literature: Explorations into Historiography and Identity Negotiation in Hebrew Bible and Related Texts* (ed. L. Jonker; FAT 2/53. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011) 95–148; and in my “Exploring the Memory of Moses ‘The Prophet.’”

multiple markers' drawing the attention of the target readership of Chronicles to its Manasseh and making him such a memorable figure can be understood as a reflection of the centrality of the messages that are both embodied and communicated by this site of memory and the need to increase the relative weight or better social mind-share of this Manasseh *vis-à-vis* other Manassehs that existed in the memory-scape of the community. They both competed with and complemented the memory evoked by Chronicles (and vice versa). Needless to say, the more important the messages that Manasseh evoked, the greater would be the tendency in Chronicles to increase its mind-share within the community. The present discussion brings to the forefront the proof of this process. At the same time, the status of Chronicles—which presented itself as secondary to the books of the Deuteronomistic Historical Collection and was meant to complement and balance the memories that this collection (and the Primary History) evoked rather than erase them—set some limits on its capability to shape the comprehensive social memory of Manasseh.⁴⁶

46. See J. Van Seters, "Creative Imitation in the Hebrew Bible," *SR* 29 (2000) 395–409; E. Ben Zvi, "One Size Does Not Fit All: Observations on the Different Ways That Chronicles Dealt with the Authoritative Literature of Its Time," in *What Was Authoritative for Chronicles?* (ed. E. Ben Zvi and D. V. Edelman; Winona Lake, IN.: Eisenbrauns, 2012) 13–36.

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