

Carchemish in Near Eastern Historiography and in the Old Testament¹

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ABSTRACT

The goal of this article is to show how the three Old Testament texts mentioning Carchemish (Isa 10:9; Jer 46:2; 2 Chr 35:20) treat and reflect the historical event of the battle of Carchemish in 605 B.C.E. which totally changed the political landscape in the Ancient Near East. The article begins with a short introduction to the history of Carchemish in the last three millennia B.C.E. followed by a discussion of the three references to Carchemish in the Old Testament. The article concludes with some methodical reflections on Carchemish's textual attestation and how the Old Testament authors used, preserved and transformed historical facts and dates.

A INTRODUCTION: CARCHEMISH IN THE HISTORY OF THE 3RD, 2ND AND 1ST MILLENNIUM B.C.E.

The North Syrian city of Carchemish³ is situated on the western bank of the middle Euphrates at an important trading and military crossing. The old city appears in records of the 3rd millennium until the year 600 B.C.E.

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³ The short historical overview is based on the exceptional article of J. D. Hawkins, "Karkamiš," *Reallexikon der Assyriologie* 5 (1976-1980): 426-446, which includes all important information about topography, history, archaeology and literature of Carchemish; see also J. D. Hawkins, *Corpus of Hieroglyphic Luwian Inscriptions. Vol. I: Inscriptions of the Iron Age* (Untersuchungen zur Indogermanischen Sprach- und Kulturwissenschaft 8.1. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2000), 73-79. M. Görg, "Karkemisch," *Neues Bibellexikon II* (1995b): 451 gives a summary of the history and archaeology of Carchemish. H. Klengel, "Karkamis in der hethitischen Großreichszeit," in *Ausstellungskatalog "Die Hethiter und ihr Reich."* (Stuttgart: Theiss, 2002), 164-167 informs about Carchemish in the period of the Late-Hittite empire; cf. also H. Klengel, *Syria 3000 to 300 B.C. A Handbook of Political History*. (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1992), 217-19 and 230-232.

Carchemish is mentioned for the first time in texts from Ebla of the 3rd millennium, e.g. in the treaty between Ebla and Asshur noting that the *kārum* (“quay-wall”) of Carchemish (*qar ga mi iš/šu*) was under the rule of the king of Ebla.⁴ In the early 2nd millennium Carchemish is frequently attested in the Mari texts from which only two examples will be given:

- (i) A letter to the king of Qatna⁵ reports that the rulers of *Ḫaššum*, *Uršum* and *Kār Kamiš* had united against the king of *Yamḥad*. This reference probably implies a political and geographical association of these four polities west of the Euphrates.
- (ii) Later, some passages in the correspondence of Zimri-Lim⁶ frequently refer to arrivals of messengers and convoys of Carchemish; even issues of food or payment to Carchemish are recorded.

During the period of Hittite control over Syria (1350–1200 B.C.E.) Carchemish served as the residence of a Hittite viceroy. Texts from Hattuša and from Ugarit⁷ testify to a series of at least four kings of Carchemish; the throne was passed on from father to son. Above all, some legal documents of Ugarit⁸ demonstrate the political relationship between the kings of Hattuša and Carchemish.

Two centuries after the collapse of the Hittite empire, Carchemish flourished in the so-called Neo-Hittite period (1000–717 B.C.E.)⁹ as an independent royal city. This glorious period of the city is attested by the hieroglyphic Luwian inscriptions¹⁰ from Carchemish and by Assyrian texts¹¹ as well as by the archaeological record¹². The most famous indicators are the sculptures and reliefs from the Long Wall of Sculpture, the Temple of the Storm-God and the gatehouse of Processional Entry in Carchemish.¹³

In 717 B.C.E. Sargon II accused Pisiri, the last king of Carchemish, of breaking oaths and conspiring with other kings against him. Sargon II attacked

⁴ Cf. G. Pettinato, “Carchemiš-Kar-Kamiš” *OrAnt.* 15 (1976): 11-15.

⁵ ARM I 24.

⁶ ARM II 107; XIV 31, 52, 86; VI 23; VII 159; XII 747; XIII 131 according to Hawkins, “Karkamiš,” 428.

⁷ Cf. the references given by Hawkins, “Karkamiš,” 429-434.

⁸ Attested by Hawkins, “Karkamiš,” 431b-433a.

⁹ See Hawkins, “Karkamiš,” 441b-445b.

¹⁰ Cf. Hawkins, “Karkamiš,” 442 and especially *Corpus of Hieroglyphic Luwian Inscriptions*, 72-172.

¹¹ Cf. Hawkins, “Karkamiš,” 441b-442a.

¹² Cf. Hawkins, “Karkamiš,” 435b-438b.

¹³ According to Hawkins, “Karkamiš,” 443a. For the reliefs and the questions of iconography see W. Orthmann, *Untersuchungen zur späthethitischen Kunst* (Saarbrückner Beiträge zur Altertumskunde 8. Bonn: Habelt, 1971), 29-44, 185-191, “Tafeln” 20-37.

and captured Carchemish. Pisiri and his family were carried in chains to Assyria along with his partisans and a large booty. Thereafter, Assyrian colonists were settled in the city and the territory was transformed into an Assyrian province under the aegis of a governor.¹⁴

At the very end of its existence Carchemish was the battleground for the battle between the Egyptian army and the Neo-Babylonians in the late 7th century. The Egyptian army based in Carchemish and commanded by Pharaoh Necho II supported the remainder of the Assyrian forces. In the famous battle of Carchemish in 605 B.C.E., Nebuchadnezzar brought the Egyptian presence in Syria and Palestine to an end and established the Neobabylonian Empire.¹⁵

These last events of the ancient history of Carchemish in the 8th and 7th century also found expression in the Old Testament. The following section of the article will deal with the three references of Carchemish in the Old Testament which may illustrate and reflect some events of the last century of the old city and their influence on the history of Israel and Judah.

Finally, a methodical reflection on how Old Testament texts use and preserve historical dates and facts on the one hand and how they transform these facts according to their specific theological intentions on the other hand will conclude this article.

B CARCHEMISH IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

1 Isaiah 10:5–14

1a Explanation of the text

This section belongs to the so-called Asshur-texts¹⁶ of Proto-Isaiah in the chapters 5; 10; 14; 29–31. The studies of Barth¹⁷ and Becker¹⁸ identify a primary layer of texts of the 8th century in which Asshur serves as a tool in the hand of

¹⁴ According to Hawkins, “Karkamiš,” 441b, 445b.

¹⁵ Cf. Hawkins, “Karkamiš,” 446 and R. Albertz, *Die Exilszeit. 6. Jahrhundert v. Chr.* (Biblische Enzyklopädie 7. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2001), 51. This event is testified by the “Chronicles of the Chaldaean Kings”, see the editions of D. J. Wiseman, *Chronicles of Chaldaean Kings* (London: The Trustees of the British Museum, 1956), 67f., l. 1-8 and A. K. Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles* (Text from Cuneiform Sources V. Locust Valley, N.Y.: Augustin Publisher, 1975), 99, l. 1-8 and the German translation in TUAT I, 4, 402f.

¹⁶ Cf. the discussion about the “Assur-Redaktion” in U. Becker, *Jesaja – von der Botschaft zum Buch* (Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments 178. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck, 1997), 212-219.

¹⁷ H. Barth, *Die Jesajaworte in der Josiazeit. Israel und Assur als Thema einer produktiven Neuinterpretation der Jesajaüberlieferung* (Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament 48. Neukirchen: Neukirchner-Verlag, 1977).

¹⁸ Becker, *Jesaja*, 212-219.

YHWH apart from the so-called “Asshur-Redaction”¹⁹ of the 7th century (in the time of Josiah²⁰) when Asshur itself becomes the object of divine wrath due to its arrogance and pride. This relationship also exists in the present text.²¹

In the woe-oracle of verses 5 and 6 Asshur is still the rod and the staff in the hand of YHWH against “the godless nation” of Judah with its capital Jerusalem. But soon, a change of mind in the heart of the King of Asshur (v. 7) occurs. The direct speech of the king in verses 8–11 and 13–14 informs about this change:

- V. 8: He boasts about his great authority over many kings.
- V. 9: He prides himself on having captured one city after the other: Six cities are named, among them Carchemish and Samaria. No one could prevent the devastation.
- Vv. 10–11: He mocks the gods of the defeated nations and cities; protection by them was useless in spite of their high number which excelled the gods and idols of Samaria and Jerusalem.
- Vv. 13–14: He arrogantly calls himself wise and clever and compares himself and his conquests with a plunderer who takes the eggs from a nest.²²
- V. 12 describes the change of mind in the heart of YHWH: He announces a divine punishment to the Assyrian King, formerly his tool, due to the king’s arrogance and vainglory. But this will not happen “until Adonai has finished all his work on Zion and on Jerusalem” (*kī y’bašṣi’ ʾāḏō*n ay=[y] ʾat kul[l] maʿś i=hu(w) bʿ=har[r] ṢYWN wʿ=bʿ=YRWṢLM*). This ambiguous wording²³ may refer to the time when Zion and Jerusalem are either punished or rehabilitated by YHWH.²⁴ Verse 12 is most probably a later redactional text²⁵ and may

¹⁹ See Becker, *Jesaja*, 212-219.

²⁰ According to Barth, *Die Jesajaworte in der Josiazeit*, 301.

²¹ For the diachronic discussion of Isa 10:5-15 cf. O. Kaiser, *Das Buch des Propheten Jesaja. Kapitel 1-12* (Altes Testament Deutsch 17. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck, ⁵1981), 219-223 and Becker, *Jesaja*, 200-205; both of them separate a primary layer from later redactional additions; W. A. M. Beuken, *Jesaja 1-12* (Herders Kommentar zum Alten Testament. Freiburg: Herder, 2003), 279 gives a summary of the diachronic discussion.

²² According to Beuken, *Jesaja*, 285 the comparison shows the cynism of the Assyrian King if the metaphor is read on the background of Deut 22:6-7.

²³ For the interpretations see H. Wildberger, *Jesaja. 1. Teilband. Jesaja 1-12* (Biblischer Kommentar 10/1. Neukirchen: Neukirchner Verlag, 1972), 402.

²⁴ See Beuken, *Jesaja*, 4: “Der assyrische König bedenkt... nicht, dass auch JHWH einen Plan verfolgt und dass JHWH überdies auf dem Zion wohnt.”

²⁵ In agreement with Wildberger, *Jesaja 1*, 402; Kaiser, *Das Buch des Propheten Jesaja*, 226; Becker, *Jesaja*, 202; and Beuken, *Jesaja*, 284.

be dated to the late 7th century²⁶ when the Assyrian empire was already destroyed.²⁷

1b Historical Evaluation

Though some of the modern commentators such as Kaiser²⁸ or Becker²⁹ contest the assertion that this text was written at the end of the 8th century, namely in the years of Assyrian expansion,³⁰ we can make the point that the text quite correctly conserved names and facts from this period.

First, verse 9 preserves a list of cities that were destroyed by the Assyrian conquest of the late 8th century; their names are also mentioned in the Assyrian texts of Sargon's or Sennacherib's campaigns.³¹

Secondly, Kalno, *Kullania* in cuneiform texts,³² situated east of Antiochia, was captured by Tiglat-Pileser III in 738, Carchemish – as said above – in 717 by Sargon II, Hamat³³ and Arpad³⁴ – together with Damascus and Samaria – belonged to an anti-Assyrian coalition;³⁵ both were destroyed in 720.³⁶ We

²⁶ Or even later, see Wildberger, *Jesaja* 1, 402: Persian era.

²⁷ Beuken, *Jesaja*, 279: "Das Ganze ... schaut ... in einer Art Besinnung oder Anfrage auf den Untergang Assurs: Warum ist diese Weltmacht, die von JHWH ausgesandt war, um an Israel das verdiente Urteil zu vollstrecken, schließlich selbst zu Fall gekommen?" For U. Berges, *Das Buch Jesaja. Komposition und Endgestalt* (Herders Biblische Studien 16. Freiburg: Herder, 1998), 125 the whole unity 10:5-15 is a reflection about the decline of Assur.

²⁸ Kaiser, *Das Buch des Propheten Jesaja*, 223: "Ein Stück literarischer Prophetie ... Mithin sollte man 10,5-15 aus der Liste der auf den Propheten Jesaja selbst zurückgehenden Sprüche streichen."

²⁹ Becker, *Jesaja*, 205, 212: "Eine jesajanische Urheberschaft (kommt) unter keinen Umständen in Frage" (212).

³⁰ A. Schoors, *Die Königreiche Israel und Juda im 8. und 7. Jahrhundert v. Chr. Die assyrische Krise* (Biblische Enzyklopädie 5. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1998), 64-107 presents a summary of the history of this period.

³¹ For the literary and epigraphical sources of this era see Schoors, *Die Königreiche Israel*, 64-70. One finds a German translation of the appropriate Assyrian texts of the campaigns of Tiglat-Pileser III, Sargon II and Sennacherib in TUAT I, 4, 370-392. S. Ernst, *Ahas, König von Juda. Ein Beitrag zur Literatur und Geschichte des Alten Israel* (Arbeiten zu Text und Sprache im Alten Testament 80. St. Ottilien: EOS Verlag, 2006), 175-209 gives a literary and historical evaluation of the Annals of Tiglat-Pileser III in comparison with the OT texts of the Ahab era.

³² According to W. Röllig, "Kalne," *Neues Bibellexikon II* (1995): 433.

³³ See Görg, "Hamat," 20.

³⁴ See Görg, "Arpad," 176.

³⁵ Cf. TUAT I, 4, 378-381.

³⁶ Cf. Schoors, *Die Königreiche Israel*, 67-95 and Kaiser, *Das Buch des Propheten Jesaja*, 224.

are familiar with the points in time, when Damascus (732) and Samaria (722) could not stand up to the Assyrian power.³⁷

Though some historical facts³⁸ and names may be preserved, the text of Isaiah displays an exclusively theological intention concerning Israel and Judah/Jerusalem respectively.

1c Theological Intention

The Woe-oracle against Asshur (Isa 10:5-14) and its pride serves as a consolation for Israel since it confirms YHWH's just reign of the world.³⁹ After punishing the corrupt Israel he again devoted himself to his elected people by accusing and sentencing the power thirsty nation that destroyed Israel:⁴⁰ "The (new) light of Israel shall become a fire which burns up and consumes the thorns and briars of Asshur," as Isaiah 10:17 says.

Beuken⁴¹ is right in saying that this text brings YHWH, Israel and Asshur in such a relationship that the hope of YHWH's just order of the world is maintained. In other words, YHWH, not the political powers of the world, will be successful in ruling the world. And within the divine reign over the world, Israel will survive and may prosper⁴² again in spite of its defeats and setbacks in its history.

2 Jeremiah 46:2–12

2a Explanation of the text

This sequence is part of the oracles against the nations⁴³ in the book of Jeremiah and presents an oracle against Egypt.⁴⁴ It serves as an introduction to this special section of the prophetic book.

³⁷ See Schoors, *Die Königreiche Israel*, 94 and Ernst (2006:175-209).

³⁸ E.g. the methods of the Assyrian conquest, to extinguish by deportation those states which resisted their expansion, cf. Beuken (2003:283).

³⁹ Wildberger (1972:403): "Der Abschnitt ist ... hoch bedeutsam für Jesajas Geschichtsverständnis."

⁴⁰ Beuken (2003:298): "(JHWH) präsentiert das Gericht über Assur als eine Befreiungstat für Israel."

⁴¹ See Beuken (2003:297).

⁴² Kaiser, *Das Buch des Propheten Jesaja*, 227 talks about the typological significance of the Assyrian defeat of 701 in Jerusalem which made the theme actual even in the postexilic era. So he justifies the late chronology he assumes for most of the Proto-Isaiah texts.

⁴³ For the interpretation see the detailed monograph of B. Huwyler, *Jeremia und die Völker. Untersuchungen zu den Völkersprüchen in Jeremia 46-49* (Forschung zum Alten Testament 20. Tübingen: Mohr, 1997), also the study of M. Häußl, *Bilder der Not. Weiblichkeit und Geschlechtsmetaphorik im Buch Jeremia* (Herders Biblische Studien 37. Freiburg: Herder, 2003), 113-166 and the commentary of G. Fischer, *Jeremia 26-52*

Though the redactional verse 2⁴⁵ informs about the historical and military preconditions⁴⁶ of the following text, relating it to the battle of Carchemish and mentioning Necho and Nebuchadnezzar, its leading characters, the corpus of the poem (vv. 3–12) does not immediately shed light on the identity of the severely defeated army. Step by step, Egypt is slowly introduced by name, starting with the comparison of the swelling of the Nile in verses 7–8; at the very end (v. 11) the identity is clear once the defeated nation is mourned as *bātūlat bi[t]t MŠR aym*.⁴⁷ This narrative strategy⁴⁸ creates high tension in the hearers of the text; it is one of the reasons for the high literary quality of the poem accepted by all commentators.⁴⁹

There might also be a subtle comment on the location of the battle since the following topographical detail is repeated in both verses 6 and 10: “In the north, by the river Euphrates.”⁵⁰

The section can be separated in two parts:⁵¹ Verses 3–6 and 7–12. The formal break is clearly indicated by the question of verse 7: *mī zā k’=[h]a=y(‘)ōr yi‘lā*.

The first section⁵² starts with a series of seven imperatives demanding the preparation for battle (vv. 3–4). But already in vv. 5 and 6, complaining and fear about the escape of the well-armed warriors take place.

(Herders Kommentar zum Alten Testament. Freiburg: Herder, 2005). Albertz, *Die Exilszeit*, 148–150 comments on the meaning and function of the oracles against the nations in Jeremiah and generally in the prophetic books.

⁴⁴ The oracles against Egypt were recently discussed by Huwyler, *Jeremia*, 74–126; Häusl, *Bilder der Not*, 121–139; Fischer, *Jeremia* 26–52, 464–490.

⁴⁵ The redactional character is confirmed by W. Rudolph, *Chronikbücher* (Handkommentar zum Alten Testament 21. Tübingen: Mohr, 1955), 268; W. McKane, *Jeremiah. Vol. II* (International Critical Commentary. Edinburgh: Clark, 1996), 1111; Huwyler, *Jeremia*, 74, 100; Häusl, *Bilder der Not*, 124.

⁴⁶ The historical background of the first oracle against Egypt is illustrated by W. Holladay, *Jeremiah 2* (Hermeneia. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 319; Huwyler, *Jeremia*, 100–106; and W. Werner, *Das Buch Jeremia. Kapitel 25, 15–52* (Neuer Stuttgarter Kommentar – Altes Testament 19/2. Stuttgart: Kath. Bibelwerk, 2003), 150.

⁴⁷ This word connection usually with the local name ŠYWN is broadly discussed and explained by Häusl, *Bilder der Not*, 35–85.

⁴⁸ Häusl, *Bilder der Not*, 124, 138: “Rätselcharakter.”

⁴⁹ E.g. R. P. Carroll’s opinion in *Jeremiah. A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), 763: “A brilliant poem ... It is one of the finest poems in the book of Jeremiah.” For the literary techniques and details see Huwyler, *Jeremia*, 78–100 and Häusl, *Bilder der Not*, 121–139.

⁵⁰ According to Huwyler, *Jeremia*, 86, 91.

⁵¹ In correspondence with Häusl, *Bilder der Not*, 134, who justifies the separation in two sections against Huwyler (1997:78). Fischer, *Jeremia* 26–52, 470, 474 also assumes two sections (3–6, 7–12) and calls them “Durchgänge.”

The question of verse 7 at the beginning of the second section reverts to the preparations of the battle. These are compared with the swelling of the Nile.⁵³ In verse 8 Egypt itself is speaking; it expresses its plans for attacking countries and cities and compares its aggressiveness again to the rising and surging of raging waters.

Verse 9 stands parallel to verse 3 demanding again the arming with different weapons. The respective addressees are the North African allies of the Egyptian army: Kush, Put, Lud.⁵⁴

Verse 10 represents a surprising turn: The actual enemy of the Egyptian army is introduced, namely YHWH who takes revenge on his enemies and sits in judgement upon them. The topos *yōm YHWH*⁵⁵ is used at this point and God's fighting is described by a strong cultic term: *zabḥ l'='adō*n ay=[y] YHWH šaba'ōt* – “a slaughter sacrifice for (or: held by) YHWH.”

The effects of the divine fighting against Egypt are expressed by verses 11-12 at the end of the poem: Verse 11 labels the defeated Egyptian country as *bātūlat bi[t]t MŠR aym*, usually the title of defeated and violated Zion or Judah.⁵⁶ The search for remedies, even in a foreign country (cf. “the balm of Gilead”), is in vain. There is no longer healing possible since the warriors are killed. All nations hear the outcry of Egypt.⁵⁷ These are the consequences of the divine intervention.

2b Historical evaluation

Before the publication of the Neo-Babylonian chronicles by Wiseman⁵⁸ there were some speculations about the identification of the battle described by the poem and about its actors.⁵⁹ However, it is obvious that only the battle of Carchemish could be the subject of the poem in Jeremiah 46. Moreover, any historical tradition about a similar resounding defeat suffered by an Egyptian army

⁵² A more detailed description of the text can be found in Huwyler, *Jeremia*, 79-86.

⁵³ Huwyler, *Jeremia*, 86 connects this metaphor with the royal ideology of Egypt: Pharaoh embodies Hapi-Osiris, the god of the Nile.

⁵⁴ Kush is identified with Nubia, Put with Lybia, Lud may be a term for mercenaries from Lydia, see Huwyler, *Jeremia*, 88.

⁵⁵ Huwyler, *Jeremia*, 90 and Häusl, *Bilder der Not*, 127 comment on this tradition.

⁵⁶ See Häusl, *Bilder der Not*, 35-82, 139.

⁵⁷ According to Huwyler, *Jeremia*, 93 an allusion to the world-wide importance of the battle and its consequences.

⁵⁸ Wiseman, *Chronicles*. Cf. Vogt's comment and evaluation of these chronicles in *Die Neubabylonische Chronik über die Schlacht bei Karkemisch und die Einnahme von Jerusalem* (Vetus Testamentum Supplementum 4. Leiden: Brill, 1957), 67-83.

⁵⁹ See Rudolph, *Chronikbücher*, 268 and Huwyler, *Jeremia*, 100-102.

in the 7th or in the following centuries is lacking.⁶⁰ Thus this poem confirms the report of Flavius Josephus⁶¹ and the comment of the redactional Jeremiah 46:2 about the battle of Carchemish. Huwyler⁶² calls the author or the redactor of 46:2 “still well informed” about the political affairs of their time.

Besides, it is plausible that such an important political and military event like the battle of Carchemish changing the political landscape in the Near East in favour of the Neo-Babylonians and their king Nebuchadnezzar found its echo in the book of Jeremiah, with its exuberant political statements in favour of the victor of Carchemish,⁶³ and his influence on the history of the last years of the Judaeen monarchy.

However, our second text also provides instructive information about the way Old Testament authors valued their historical and political information and sources.

2c Theological intention

Especially the statements of verses 10-11 clearly demonstrate the following: The author does not read the events of Carchemish as historical or political facts but as part of YHWH's history with the nations. Egypt had to lose the battle, not because of its hybris, but because it opposed the plan of YHWH to give the nations into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar;⁶⁴ several times in the book of Jeremiah this Neo-Babylonian monarch is called ‘*abd YHWH*’⁶⁵ who gained his power over the world as a tool in the hand of Israel's god. Therefore, YHWH himself intervenes in the battle and rejects the Egyptian army. In the view of the author of Jeremiah 46 the outcome of the battle of Carchemish gives clear evidence for YHWH's sovereignty in ruling the world and in electing the rulers according to his will.

There is yet another theological intention immediately concerning Judah and Jerusalem: The defeat of Egypt in Carchemish is an example emphasizing that YHWH will defeat and punish Judah/Jerusalem in the same way if Judah continues to reject YHWH's plans by not submitting to Nebuchadnezzar's rule.

⁶⁰ Cf. Huwyler, *Jeremia*, 102: “Da keine andere derart bedeutende Niederlage Ägyptens am Euphrat bekannt ist, weder aus dem 7. noch aus einem späteren Jahrhundert, ist die Annahme, daß das Gedicht sich auf die Schlacht von Karkemisch bezieht, nicht nur die natürlichste, sondern auch die einzig sinnvolle Interpretation.”

⁶¹ Flavius Josephus, *Ant.* X, 6, 84-86: “... ἐπὶ Καρχάμισσαν ἀναβαίνει πόλιν...”

⁶² Huwyler, *Jeremia*, 100 n. 123.

⁶³ Especially by the famous topos “the foe from the north” in Jeremiah 4-6, cf. Huwyler, *Jeremia*, 96, 102 and Häusl, *Bilder der Not*, 127 who interprets v. 6 (*šapōn-a-h ‘al yad nāhar PRT*) in this sense.

⁶⁴ Huwyler, *Jeremia*, 98: “Wer sich mit dem ‘Feind aus dem Norden’ anlegte, kämpfte gegen JHWHs Pläne und wurde so zum Feind JHWHs selbst.”

⁶⁵ Jer 25:9; 27:6; 43:10.

In that case conquest and destruction will also be inevitable for Jerusalem. One finds this tendency clearly expressed in the title *bātūlat bi[t]t*⁶⁶ in verse 11 that Egypt shares with Zion/Jerusalem.

By interpreting the current political facts the author articulates his theological conviction⁶⁷ that YHWH has the absolute sovereignty over the world.

3 2 Chronicles 35:20–25

3a Explanation of the text

This section is an account of the end of king Josiah's reign from the Chronicler's point of view.⁶⁸ He presents a much more detailed report of the events than the parallel section in 2 Kings 23:28–30 does; in 2 Kings there is only a short notice⁶⁹ of the violent death of Josiah at the time when Pharaoh Necho arrived to meet him at nearby Megiddo. The Chronicler expands this note (like he usually does) to an exhaustive story⁷⁰ including different actors, scenes and speeches. This story displays all peculiarities of the Chronistic historiography;⁷¹ therefore, most scholars⁷² agree that this could be considered a work of the Chronicler and of his special theological interests alone not supported by other historical sources.

⁶⁶ Clearly proved by Häusl, *Bilder der Not*, 78–85, 138.

⁶⁷ Albertz, *Die Exilszeit*, 327–329 summarises the different types of the theological interpretation of history in DtrH, Jer and Deutero-Isaiah.

⁶⁸ See the commentaries of E. L. Curtis, *The Book of Chronicles* (International Critical Commentary. Edinburgh: Clark, 1910), 516–519; Rudolph, *Chronikbücher*, 331–333, Becker, *2 Chronik*, 123, S. Japhet, *2 Chronik* (Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament. Freiburg: Herder, 2003), 475–481, 491–494, the monograph of L. J. Jonker, *Reflections of King Josiah in Chronicles. Late Stages of the Josiah Reception in 2 Chr 34f.* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlag, 2003) and the comparative study of Z. Talshir, “The Three Deaths of Josiah and the Strata of Biblical Historiography,” *Vetus Testamentum* 46 (1996): 213–236.

⁶⁹ Cf. E. Würthwein, *Die Bücher der Könige. 1. Kön. 17 – 2. Kön. 25* (Altes Testament Deutsch 11,2. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck, 1984), 464–466) and Talshir, “The Three Deaths,” 213–220.

⁷⁰ Japhet, *2 Chronik*, 478 emphasises the different function of the Chronistic story as an independent literary unit with an apologetic tendency.

⁷¹ Jonker, *Reflections of King Josiah in Chronicles*, 24, 41 introduces the term “Re-forming History” to characterise the historiography of the Chronicles as “an attempt to reformulate and sanitize the older traditions about the past, as well as an attempt to reformulate the identity of God's people in the changed socio-historical circumstances of the late Persian era.” Jonker marks the position of the Chronicles “as a bridge between past and present.”

⁷² E.g. Rudolph, *Chronikbücher*, 331; Becker, *2 Chronik*, 123; Japhet, *2 Chronik*, 479; Talshir, “The Three Deaths,” 236 summarises: 2 Chr 35:20–25 “is the Chronicler's own fictitious version of Josiah's death ... he had no genuine source superior to that included in the books of Kings....”

The beginning of the story (v. 20) outlines the new political constellation that is of interest:

- 20a 'aḥ[⊕]arē kul[l] zō(')t
 b 'āšr hikīn Y'ŠYHW 'at ha=bayt
 a 'alā NKW malk MŠR aym
 aI l'=hillaḥim b'=KRKMYŠ 'al PRT
 c wa=yiše(') l'=qrā(')t=ō Y'ŠYHW⁷³

The Egyptian King appears in Palestine on his way to Carchemish on the Euphrates and is confronted by Josiah. The Chronicler leaves out the purpose of Pharaoh's campaign to the Euphrates which is wrongly called in 2 Kings 23:29 "to fight against"⁷⁴ the king of Assyria". However, the exact reason is unknown.⁷⁵ Perhaps the author's knowledge of the real political constellations at that time was vague: Such an ignorance may be concluded from the reading of the similar vague description in the speech of Necho's messengers in 2 Chronicles 35:21:

- 21d lō(') 'al ē=ka 'attā ha=yōm
 e kī 'il bēt milḥamt=ī⁷⁶

The word-connection *bēt milḥamt=ī* is problematic.⁷⁷ It is an ambiguous formulation.⁷⁸

The address of Necho's messengers to Josiah (v. 22) also reveals the "handwriting" of the Chronicler: The address names a theological reason for

⁷³ Transcription and separation of the sentences according to W. Richter, *Biblia Hebraica transcripta* (BH^t), ATS 33.14, St. Ottilien 1993, 480, 482.

⁷⁴ Some authors change 'al in 2 Kgs 23:29 textcritically to 'il, see e.g. Rudolph, *Chronikbücher*, 331; Würthwein, *Die Bücher der Könige*, 464; Talshir, "The Three Deaths," 214.

⁷⁵ Japhet, *2 Chronik*, 481 presumes two reasons: Either the phrase 'al malk 'ŠWR in 2 Kgs 23:29 is a late glossary younger than Chronicles or the Chronicler used a non-biblical source.

⁷⁶ The translation of the New English Bible is more an interpretation: "I have no quarrel with you today, only with those with whom I am at war."

⁷⁷ For the different interpretations see Curtis, *The Book of Chronicles*, 518 and Rudolph, *Chronikbücher*, 330; his own conjecture of the Hebrew text (*malk BBL*) is arbitrary.

⁷⁸ Japhet, *2 Chronik*, 493: "Ein (...) etwas rätselhafte(r) Ausdruck"; she translates: "... gegen den Ort meines Krieges."

the Pharaoh's urgency to go to the east: God pushes him and God is on his side.⁷⁹

Afterwards the text is only interested in Josiah's part: In his refusal to obey the Pharaoh's warning and therefore God's will, in his attacking the Egyptian king (v. 22), in his injury during the battle of Megiddo (v. 23), in his death⁸⁰ after being transported to Jerusalem (v. 24) (according to 2 Kings 23:29 he dies in the battle) and finally in the memorial ceremonies for Josiah (v. 25).⁸¹

3b Historical Evaluation

The late text of the Chronicler may commemorate the Egyptian presence in Carchemish in order to protect the Assyrians' last stronghold since 609. This would correspond to the Babylonian chronicles. However, the Chronicler mixes up the events of the year 609 and 605⁸² as he misdates the battle of Carchemish to King Josiah's reign.⁸³ Nevertheless, even this late text keeps the important battle in memory by mentioning the name of Carchemish in the context of a military conflict at the very beginning of the story.

Another historical implication can be deduced from both biblical texts of 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles: Due to Josiah's attack⁸⁴ on the Pharaoh, the Judean king is an ally of the Neo-Babylonians.

In that respect, the text of 2 Chronicles presents two contradicting views: historical errors and inaccuracies, but also the memory of real historical facts.⁸⁵

⁷⁹ For the discussions whose God is meant in the speech of Necho and for the theological difficulty for Josiah see the controversial interpretations of Rudolph, *Chronikbücher*, 331 and Japhet, *2 Chronik*, 492; Jonker, *Reflections of King Josiah in Chronicles*, 32 n. 19 gives a critical comment on Japhet's interpretation.

⁸⁰ The parallels to the death of King Ahab (1 Kgs 22:30-37) and other parallels to royal biographies in 1.2 Kgs (Saul, Ahasja, Asa, Ahaz) are broadly discussed in the literature, see Curtis (1910:517), Talshir, "The Three Deaths," 217-227, Japhet, *2 Chronik*, 480; she speaks of the "anthological style" (493) of the chronistic author.

⁸¹ Cf. Talshir, "The Three Deaths," 234 and Japhet, *2 Chronik*, 494; she finds a parallel in Jdg 11:39.

⁸² According to Becker, *2 Chronik*, 123.

⁸³ See the discussions on whether there really was a war between Josiah and Necho in Talshir, "The Three Deaths," 215-219.

⁸⁴ The motif for this attack which Rudolph, *Chronikbücher*, 331 gives, that Josiah would have been afraid to lose the freedom he enjoyed after the decline of the Assyrian empire, is based on a text conjecture of v. 22 which is unnecessary.

⁸⁵ Talshir, "The Three Deaths," 236: "The Chronicler may be drawing on the living tradition of his milieu, to which he surely contributed his own share."

3c Theological Evaluation

But it is also clearly recognisable that the political events mentioned by the Chronicler are only the framework for his theological aims. He wants to explain why such a good and pious king, such as Josiah, died a sudden and early death⁸⁶ during a battle by confronting the Pharaoh. The Chronicler finds the theological reason in Josiah's refusal of God's will expressed in the Pharaoh's warning of Josiah: "God is on my side" (v. 21).

Thus, from the Chronicler's point of view, Josiah's sudden death is the divine punishment for his disobedience to God's word. This is a bold theological concept: It praises the God of Israel as the universal God who is able to declare his divine will even by means of a pagan king⁸⁷ who is only a tool in the hand of the universal God ruling the world in sovereignty. The political events transformed by the Chronicler according to his concepts only provide the scenario of his theological message.

I will conclude this article with three methodical statements concerning the relationship of Old Testament texts and historiography, on the one hand, and the use of the Old Testament as a historical reference source on the other hand.⁸⁸

C METHODOICAL CONSEQUENCES

1 Reality not Fiction

As we have seen, even highly marked theological texts such as Isaiah 10, Jeremiah 46 and 2 Chronicles 35 betray a certain connection to the Ancient Near Eastern politics and political affairs. The various proper names and dates in the texts are not fictitious, but are confirmed by non-biblical sources, at least in part. The Assyrian conquests of the West at the end of the 8th century which are echoed in the text of Isaiah 10; moreover, the historical fact of the heavy defeat of Egypt in the battle of Carchemish upon which Jeremiah 46 comments.

Even in the late text of 2 Chronicles the memory of the famous battle of the year 605 B.C.E. is handed down. The consequences of the Egyptian campaign to Syria for the kingdom of Judah are embedded in the overall theologi-

⁸⁶ In correspondence with the interpretations of Rudolph, *Chronikbücher*, 332, Becker, *2 Chronik*, 123, Japhet, *2 Chronik*, 479, Jonker, *Reflections of King Josiah in Chronicles*, 32; see also Talshir, "The Three Deaths," 230: "...the fate of this outstanding pious king is not congruous with the system of retribution. The chain of causality demands that Josiah must have done something wrong."

⁸⁷ The literary example for the Chronicler could be: Jer 27:6-8 and Isa 45:1-7.

⁸⁸ A fresh and very instructive compendium of the recent discussion of this important relationship is available now in the periodical *Verkündigung und Forschung* 53/1 (2008): "Geschichte Israels und biblische Geschichtskonzepte."

cal intentions of the story. Therefore, it is methodically incorrect to generally characterise biblical texts as fictitious.

2 History as Framework for Theology

However, the proper names, the chronology, the military and political facts are only a framework. The authors of these three texts used historical information as background to describe their theological implications and intentions; first to establish and confirm YHWH's universal reign over the world upon whom even the rulers of the world depend, and secondly, to disclose the guilt of Israel that is affected by the divine wrath in the same way as the foreign nations (cf. Jer 46). However, there are also implications for a new beginning of Israel and Jerusalem established by the same God.

In favour of these theological aims, the historical elements behind the texts are sometimes not correct and reliable; they partly appear to be changed or even manipulated to emphasise the theological message. The following are examples: 1) the names and dates of Isaiah 10 are more easily understood against the backdrop of the scenery of the late 7th century at the time when Assyria collapsed than against the situation of the 8th century; 2) the power of the Egyptian expansion to Syria in Jeremiah 46, which is compared to the flooding of the Nile, seems to be exaggerated; 3) in 2 Chronicles 35 the dates of the events at Megiddo in 609 and at Carchemish in 605 are obviously mixed up. Therefore, it is always necessary to examine every detail of the so-called historical framework behind the biblical texts.⁸⁹

3 No General Rule: The Single Text as Standard

In the conflict between the "maximalists" "who insist that the bible always contains reliable historical information unless proven otherwise" and the "minimalists" who maintain that "the bible never contains reliable information unless proven otherwise by extra-biblical evidence,"⁹⁰ the consequences of my examination of the three texts would be the following: There is no general rule how to use Old Testament texts as historical references. Every single text has to be examined again on that condition. The single text with its own special feature – its surrounding context included of course – will be the only standard in

⁸⁹ According to C. Hardmeier, "Zur Quellenevidenz biblischer Texte und archäologischer Befunde," in *Steine – Bilder – Texte. Historische Evidenz außerbiblicher und biblischer Quellen*. Arbeiten zur Bibel und ihrer Geschichte 5 (Edited by C. Hardmeier, Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2001), 20; cf. also Jonker, *Reflections of King Josiah in Chronicles*, 95-97.

⁹⁰ According to E. A. Knauf, "The 'Law Chronology' and How Not to Deal with it," *Biblische Notizen* 101 (2000): 59 quoted also by Hardmeier, "Zur Quellenevidenz," 15.

the difficult question concerning the historical reliability of Old Testament texts.⁹¹

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⁹¹ I give my special thanks to Dr. Erasmus Gass and to cand. phil. Charles Steitler who corrected the English style of this article.

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