The Deuteronomistic views on the biblical kings Manasseh and Josiah provides the title for this monograph. Some of the contributions go back to a session of the Society of Biblical Literature International Meeting at Berlin in June 2001. Others, like those of Nadav Na’aman and Christoph Uehlinger, are slightly revised classics on the Josianic period. This shows that the editor intended not only to document the conference session but to present a multiperspective approach to the Judean history of the seventh century B.C.E. There is no doubt that the most interesting question concerning this century is the problem of whether there was anything like a Josianic reform, if it existed, and what it really meant. The editor places the contributions of this monograph between a maximalist position (e.g., Ian Provan), which takes the biblical accounts of Josiah’s reform in 2 Kgs 22–23 and 2 Chr 34–35 as historically reliable “sources,” and a minimalist approach (e.g., Herbert Niehr), which reduces the Josianic reform, on the basis of a half-verse in 2 Kgs 23:8a as historically valuable, to an administrative action without any religious intentions. Since in Martin Wilhelm Leberecht de Wette’s 1805 “Dissertatio critico-exegetica” the Josianic reform functioned as a kind of chronological “nail in the wall” for Pentateuch research, the problem of the historicity of the biblical accounts of a Josianic reform has been of great interest not only for reconstructions of Judean history but also pivotal for our understanding of the development of Judean religion and literature, especially the literary history of Deuteronomy. The minimalist position provides an interpretation of the preexilic religions of Israel and Judah as a kind of “Hebrew paganism” analogous to Julius Wellhausen’s Reste arabischen Heidentums by dating all the special characteristics of a Yahweh religion, such as covenant and monolatry, to the Persian period. Since this kind of argument is based on a vicious circle that dates the Pentateuch, including
Deuteronomy, to the postexilic period, this volume is also of keen interest not only for commentators on the book of Deuteronomy but also for those working on a literary history of the Pentateuch or a history of the Yahweh religion.

Philip Davies renews his theory that there was no Josianic reform at all because there was no preexilic Deuteronomy. Rainer Albertz answers directly this extreme critique of the biblical account in 2 Kgs 22–23 as a mere projective fiction of the Persian period and delivers some arguments for a preexilic Deuteronomy. But it is obvious that any position that tries to fix the date of a biblical text by other biblical texts falls prey to circular reasoning, so that external evidence is needed. A complex literary-critical approach that results in many literary layers in 2 Kgs 22–23, as held by Christof Hardmeier, is not a way out of this vicious circle but part of it, because the methodological presuppositions of such literary-critical operations are at issue.

More helpful is Christoph Uehlinger’s distinction between extrabiblical sources (epigraphical, iconographical, and archaeological evidence) as primary sources and the biblical traditions as secondary sources, because distinct from the external sources the latter underwent a long literary history until they assumed their canonical shape. Lester L. Grabbe offers an exciting experiment taking up this distinction. He tries to test the extent to which one can use the biblical text as a historical source, if there is no primary evidence. He compares the different Assyrian, Babylonian, and Egyptian literary sources and Judean epigraphical and archaeological data, on the one side, with the biblical accounts, on the other. The result is a thesis of a graduated historical reliability of biblical narratives. The Judean iconography suggests a significant religious change in the seventh century B.C.E. reflected in the disappearance of Yahweh’s consort and astral symbols, so that the general biblical account of Josiah’s reform should be accepted as rather plausible, though not necessarily in all its single details. This essay is one of the methodologically most important of this volume because it lays firm foundations for further research on the history of Israel and Judah.

Nadav Na’aman in his 1991 essay shows by strictly archaeological means that Albrecht Alt’s dating of the town lists in Josh 15–19 to the Josianic period was historically correct. These lists offer evidence of the narrow Judean borders in the seventh century B.C.E., which does not fit the biblical glorifications of Josiah as a strong and independent ruler. However, there are also very sound archaeological data proving that Josiah expanded his territory to Bethel, although the Assyrian hegemony over Judah was directly transferred to the Egyptians. But as the latter were not interested in the hill country, Josiah had a limited scope for expansion, which aroused a nationalism that encouraged him to begin religious reforms.
For Christoph Uehlinger, Josiah merely “modernized” the Judean state cult by removing elements such as the kemarim, roof altars, and the horses and chariots of the sun-god, which had become obsolete after the decline of the Assyrian Empire. But cultic rituals all over the world are conservative, and one must doubt whether people in antiquity simply modernized their cultic inventories when the political climate changed. What were, one may ask, the religious impulses to determine which rituals should be kept and which given up? Martin Arneth (“Die antiassyrische Reform Josias von Juda. Überlegungen zur Komposition und Intention von 2 Reg 23,4–15,” ZABR 7 [2001]: 189–216) has shown the anti-Assyrian character of Josiah’s cultic measures. This is supported by the anti-Assyrian shape of the Josianic Deuteronomy that I undertook to sketch in Das Deuteronomium: Politische Theologie und Rechtsreform in Juda und Assyrien (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1999).

Ernst A. Knauf likewise deals with an Assyrian impact on Judean cult centralization, but this should have been seen already during Manasseh’s reign, who sought to adjust the Judean state cult to the Assyrian cult of Ashur. Consequently, Deut 12 has nothing to do with the cult centralization but with a legitimation of different cultic places and 2 Kgs 23 nothing to do with the Josianic period but with a rivalry between Jerusalem and Bethel in the sixth century B.C.E. One may doubt if there really is a solid archaeological foundation for such a provocative hypothesis, if the author dates the intentional demolition of the temple of Arad X in Arad IX to the year 700 B.C.E. and interprets this as an act of Manasseh. One also may doubt his literary-historical presupposition that there existed a broad stream of pro-Assyrian literature during the seventh century B.C.E., such as a pro-Assyrian book of Isaiah or pro-Assyrian psalms such as Ps 48. This essay demonstrates that any writing of history is endangered not only by an inner vicious circle interpreting and dating biblical texts by other biblical texts but also by an outer circle interpreting archaeological data by assumptions that were derived from the interpretation of biblical texts and vice versa. Preferable is a more critical dialectic between external evidence and biblical text. Archaeological data can critically correct the biblical accounts, but these accounts can also provide hints when an interpretation of archaeological data lacks some plausibility.

This is the case with David A. Warburton’s essay. He demonstrates convincingly that hypotheses denying any Babylonian exile are simple counterreactions to biblicistic interpretations of the exile. The archaeological agenda shows rather clearly that the biblical account of the exile had a historical fundamentum in re. The author also demonstrates that archaeological data show that Judah became a state after the Assyrian destruction of Israel, adopting the northern kingdom as an ancestor. But if the author concludes that the southern kingdom was a creature of the Assyrians with no independent history prior to the Assyrian conquests of the north, one may doubt whether a Judah of the tenth–eighth centuries B.C.E. without any history and the thesis that the biblical account
of a divided monarchy was just fiction to create a mythical common origin makes any sense. The archaeological record shows that there was a town of Jerusalem with some architecture prior to the eighth century B.C.E. In this essay again prevails an extremely hypothetical interpretation of archaeological data that forms a vicious circle with an extremely critical interpretation of the biblical account, simply because of a hypothetical coordination of archaeological data at issue.

There is more agreement among historians about Manasseh, whose reign was deeply misinterpreted by biblical authors. If he was a good king who brought peace, security, and prosperity to his people, Manasseh was one of the best Judean kings. Francesca Stavrakopoulou and Marvin Sweeney explain the biblical picture of a wicked king as a necessity of the Deuteronomists to explain Jerusalem’s fall. His northern name could be one of the reasons that he alone took the blame for the Judean people. However, as the Assyrian royal inscriptions demonstrate, Manasseh was a faithful vassal of the Assyrians. This is an important fact for understanding the Josianic period. Manasseh was among those who took Esarhaddon’s loyalty oath naming Assyrian deities in 672 B.C.E. The religious implications of the Assyrian loyalty oaths must have called into question the Judean religious identity. This, rather than just his northern name, is a more plausible answer to the question why only Manasseh is charged with apostasy. As Deuteronomy demonstrates, there were intellectual circles in Jerusalem in the seventh century B.C.E. who claimed to defend the Judean religious identity against the cultural impacts of the Assyrian hegemonic powers. In these circles also the polemics against Manasseh had their roots.

Lester L. Grabbe presents a very helpful volume that delivers a kind of candid shot of the debate on the history of the seventh century B.C.E. Two conclusions can be drawn: (1) the distinction between primary sources and biblical accounts as secondary sources and the priority of the external evidence is well accepted; (2) the extremely critical approach to the Hebrew Bible as only fictitious ideology is obsolete. The future belongs to a critical methodology that correlates primary and secondary sources. This volume contributes a good deal to this methodology, but is also demonstrates a new danger in biblical history writing. The specialization in our scholarship is progressing so quickly that we get only specialists of biblical history, literary history, and history of religion. This specialization is responsible for the shortcomings of this volume. Most essays discuss the problems of history writing without taking into account the complex problem of the literary history of the seventh century B.C.E. and vice versa. Especially a kind of “Deuteronomy-oblivion” characterizes the contributions, although Deuteronomy remains the pivot for the history and literary history of the seventh century B.C.E. Wilhelm Martin Leberecht de Wette’s insights are still relevant, although the literary history also needs external evidence in order to avoid the vicious circle of interpreting one biblical text by another (see Eckart