The Rendering of 2 Chronicles 35-36 in 1 Esdras

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It has been more than forty years since my dissertation on the text critical implications of 1 Esdras was accepted at Harvard.1 In the meantime, I have spent little time on 1 Esdras, except to write brief notes for several study Bibles. It was therefore a pleasure to accept the invitation of Liz Fried to the first meeting of this new Consultation and to return to the arena of my earliest scholarly work. In the course of writing this essay, I gave great attention to the two books by Zipora Talshir on this subject, 1 Esdras. From Origin to Translation (1999)2 and 1 Esdras. A Text Critical Commentary (2001),3 both of which I had reviewed for the Journal of Near Eastern Studies.

1 Esdras 1 is clearly based on the Hebrew text of 2 Chronicles 35-36 although in a form somewhat different than the Masoretic Text. It remains difficult today, as it was 40 years ago to be sure about retroversions from 1 Esdras back into Hebrew. The translator does not always stick to formal equivalences and sometimes demonstrates inconsistencies, the most notorious of which is his frequent use of κύριος both for the tetragrammaton and for various forms of Elohim.

1. Statistical comparison of MT, 1 Esdras, and the Paraleipomena

In preparing this lecture I worked up the translation of 2 Chronicles 35-36 for the second volume of my Hermeneia commentary on Chronicles and created more than 200 text critical notes for these chapters. The following approximate statistics do not tell the whole story, but they may help us to understand the amount of variation between 1 Esdras and MT.

* 1 Esdras differs from MT in 2 Chronicles 35-36: 111 times (70 times representing differences in the Vorlage and 41 times representing changes due to the translator)

2SBLSCS 47. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature.
1 Esdras and Paraleipomena agree together against MT 42 times (36 times representing differences in the Vorlage and 6 times representing changes due to the translator).

- The Paraleipomena differ from MT and 1 Esdras combined 28 times (18 times representing differences in the Vorlage and 10 times representing changes due to the translator).

In addition, there are two times where MT and 1 Esdras differ, and Paraleipomena conflates the variants; and once where MT and Paraleipomena differ, and 1 Esdras conflates the variants.

About twenty-five cases were deemed too unclear to be included in these statistics.

The bulk of this essay will examine a number of cases where the variations in 1 Esdras lead to significant changes in meaning.

2. The animals comprising the passover sacrifice

2 Chronicles and 1 Esdras differ on which animals were to be sacrificed as Passover sacrifices. According to Exod 12:5 the passover sacrifices were to come from the sheep or goats, but in Deut 16:2 we read: “You shall offer the Passover sacrifice to YHWH your God from the flock or from the herd” (זֶבַע וַבָּקר), thus allowing for a passover sacrifice from either small or large cattle. In Josiah’s passover account in 2 Chr 35:6 MT we read "slaughter the passover and sanctify yourselves." As numerous commentators have noticed, this sanctification of the people comes at an inappropriate time. My reconstructed text of 2 Chr 35:6 reads "slaughter the passover (presumably a lamb) and the holy things." 4

This reconstruction is based on the Paraleipomena and 1 Esdras, which agree with one another against MT. The original (reconstructed) text proposed a mediating position between Exod 12:5 and Deut 16:2 in which the small cattle are designated as the passover sacrifice itself and the large cattle are designated as otherwise unspecified “holy offerings.” Cf. also the following pairs of translations where both kinds of animals are mentioned explicitly:

2.1 Josiah’s contribution of passover offerings

4 1 Esd 1:6 τας θυσιας; Par τα αγια.
2 Chr 35:7 small cattle--lambs and kids--all for the passover offerings for all who were present to the number of thirty thousand--and three thousand bulls

1 Esd 1:7 lambs and kids thirty thousand, bulls three thousand

2.2 The contribution of the chief officers of the house of God

2 Chr 35:8 for passover offerings two thousand six hundred,\(^5\) and three hundred bulls

1 Esd 1:8 for passover offerings two thousand six hundred sheep and three hundred bulls

2.3 The contribution of the chiefs of the Levites

2 Chr 35:9 for passover offerings five thousand sheep,\(^6\) and five hundred bulls

1 Esd 1:9 for passover offerings five thousand sheep, seven hundred bulls.

3. The Death of Josiah

The variant readings in 1 Esdras dealing with the death of Josiah are worthy of special attention. The Chronicler added two verses to the Vorlage from Kings, and they read as follows (2 Chr 35:21-22):

21. He [Neco] sent messengers to him [Josiah], saying, “What have I to do with you, king of Judah? I am not (coming) against you today, but against the house with which I am at war, and god has commanded me to hurry. Cease opposing god who is with me lest he destroy you. 22. But Josiah would not turn his face away from him, but he disguised himself in order to fight him. He did not listen to the words of Neco from the mouth of God, but came to fight with him in the valley of Megiddo.

In my translation for the Hermeneia commentary I have fifteen text critical notes on these two verses. Only the most significant can be discussed here.

2 Chr 35:21

לָא עִבְרֵךְ אֲתַהּ יָהוָה

I am not against (אתה) today (MT), or I am not coming (אתה) against you today (Par)

1 Esd 1:25 οὐχὶ πρὸς σὲ εξαπεστλῆσαι ὑπὸ κυρίου τοῦ θεοῦ

Not against you have I been sent by the Lord God. Talshir translates this back into Hebrew as:

2 Chr 35:21

יַנְתֶר אֵלֶה אֲתַהּ יָהוָה

I am not against you (אתה) today (MT), or I am not coming (אתה) against you today (Par)

1 Esd 1:25 οὐχὶ πρὸς σὲ εξαπεστλῆσαι ὑπὸ κυρίου τοῦ θεοῦ

Not against you have I been sent by the Lord God. Talshir translates this back into Hebrew as:

\(^5\)Par adds: sheep and lambs and kids.

\(^6\)גֵּיא, with Par and 1 Esd 1:9; lacking in MT.
וַהֲוֶה יְהוָה לֶשֶׁךְ נַעֲלֵךְ עָלֶיךָ וְלֹא.

Whether the Greek rendering in 1 Esdras is the translator’s paraphrase of a difficult text or whether it is a passive translation of an alternate Hebrew Vorlage, as Talshir, 1 Esdras. A Text Critical Commentary, 47, suggests, the text of 1 Esdras provides additional theological rationale for two later clauses in 2 Chr 35:21, namely, “God has commanded me to hurry,” and “cease opposing God who is with me.” 7 1 Esdras therefore reinforces what is said about divine empowerment of Israel’s enemies, but 1 Esdras also interprets. The rendering in 1 Esdras makes clear that the God sending Neco was the God of Israel, and not Pharaoh’s god as Japhet proposes. 8

The Hebrew expression מלחמתי בית אל כי in 2 Chr 35:21 was as difficult for translators in antiquity as it is for us. My translation of the MT is paraphrastic “but against the house with which I am at war.” The Paraleipomena translate this clause πολέμον ποιησαι (to make war), which Leslie C. Allen proposed represented the simple omission of רבי בית אל כי as incomprehensible and a loose translation of מלחמתי. 9 1 Esdras renders this expression by επι γαρ του Ευφρατου η πολέμος μου εστιν (For on the Euphrates is my war). Does 1 Esdras represent a different Hebrew text or an interpretative paraphrase of MT?

A major theological difference comes in the rendering of the second sentence in v. 22. According to MT, “He [Josiah] did not listen to the words of Neco from the mouth of God,” presumably the God of Israel. In vv 23-24 the death of Josiah is apparently retribution for not listening to Israel’s God. A reader might well ask, “Did God make himself known through a Gentile king?” 1 Esdras solves that dilemma with its translation of v 22: “He not not heed the words of Jeremiah the prophet from the mouth of God” (1 Esd 1:26). Talshir, 1 Esdras. A Text Critical Commentary, 50, note 2, cites a parallel from Lamentations Rabba: “Nevertheless

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7 Divine empowerment of an Israelite enemy is also attested in 2 Kgs 18:25. Sennacherib said to Hezekiah: “Moreover, is it without YHWH that I have come up against this place to destroy it? YHWH said to me, Go up against this land, and destroy it.”


9 The Greek Chronicles. Part I The Translator’s Craft (VTSup 25, 1974), 118-119.
Josiah...hearkened not unto the words of Neco from the mouth of God--this alludes to Jeremiah who said to Josiah, I have this tradition from my teacher Isaiah, And I will spur Egypt against Egypt, but he would not listen to him.” 1 Esdras and Lamentations Rabba represent a common exegetical tradition. Whether this interpretation was brought in by the translator of 1 Esdras or whether it was already represented in his Hebrew Vorlage is difficult to determine.

One more difference in regard to the death of Josiah merits attention. According to 2 Kgs 23:29 Neco killed Josiah at Megiddo when he saw him. In 2 Chr 35:23-24 the account is both longer and different: When the archers shot at king Josiah, the king said to his servants, “Take me away for I am severely wounded.” His servants took him away from the chariot, and they made him ride in his second chariot. They brought him to Jerusalem where he died. Instead of archers shooting at the king (יהברים וiero 2 Chr 35:23) 1 Esd 1:27 states that the leaders came down toward him (και κατεβησαν οι αρχοντες), representing a divergent and secondary Hebrew text ירדו or ירדו וירדו, and in 1 Esd 1:28 the king cries out, I am very weak” ησθενησα γαιρ λιαν. After his servants remove him from the battline or chariot,10 Josiah climbs up11 into the second chariot and, arriving in Jerusalem, he dies. This alternate account results from a misreading or miswriting of several Hebrew words and a choice of “weak” instead of “wounded” as a translation for the Hebrew word חלה. The net result is that in 1 Esdras Josiah is not explicitly wounded by Neco, and in fact he is gathered to his grave in peace, as Huldah had prophesied (2 Kgs 22:20//2 Chr 34:28).

4. Two supplementary verses in 1 Esdras 1:21-22

1 Esd 1:21 και ὄρθωθη τα ἑργα Ιωσιου ενωπιον του κυριου αυτου εν καρδια πληρει ευσεβειας. 22 και τα κατ αυτον δε αναγεγραπται εν τοις εμπροσθον χρονοις περι των ημαρτηκτων και η ησεβηκτων εις τον κυριον παρα παν εθνος και βασιλειαν και α ελυπησαν αυτον εν αισθησει και οι λογοι του κυριου ανεστησαν επι Ισραηλ.

10 ἀπο της παραταξεως probably renders מֵן הַמְּרָכָבָה. MT: מֵן הַמְּרָכָבָה.
11 Is this a paraphrase of ריעם (they made him ride) or does it represent an alternate Vorlage ירעה? In either case Josiah does not seem to be near death.
Talshir’s translation:  
1:21 The work of Josiah was well-established (the deeds of Josiah were upright) before (in the eyes of) his Lord with a heart full of piety (with a whole heart and with piety). 1:22 And the things that came to pass in his days have been written in former times concerning those who sinned and acted impiously against the Lord beyond every nation and kingdom and how they grieved (vexed) him intentionally (with their evil), so that the words of the Lord against Israel were fulfilled.

Talshir’s retroversion of these verses into Hebrew:

The translation of Arie van der Kooij as translated by RWK:  
1:21 And Josiah’s deeds were well carried out before his Lord because his heart was filled with piety. 1:22 The events of his reign have been recorded in former times concerning those who sinned and acted impiously toward the Lord beyond any nation or kingdom, and how they grieved him [Josiah] in his (ethical) sensitivity. Therefore the (judgmental) words of the Lord were fulfilled against Israel.

The most significant difference between 1 Esdras and 2 Chronicles 35-36 is the addition in 1 Esdras 1 of vv. 21-22. These verses are inserted between the translation in 1 Esdras of 2 Chr 35:19 and 35:20, at nearly the same spot that the LXX of Chronicles, the Paraleipomena, inserts a translation for the equivalent of 2 Kgs 23:24-27. The crucial point is how 1 Esd 1:22 is to be

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12 1 Esdras. A Text Critical Commentary, 36. The words in parentheses reflect the alternate Hebrew retroversions that are indicated in the Hebrew text below by footnotes.
13 Or: ירשר.
14 Or: מעש.
15 Or: ב MMI.
16 Or: על יד הוהי مجال.
17 Or: על יד הוהי مجال.
18 Or: רבדך והחיים.
understood. Scholars debate about the identity of the people who sinned and acted wickedly, and whether they grieved the Lord deeply or whether by their sinning they grieved Josiah deeply.

4.1 Why were insertions made at this point in both the Paraleipomena and in 1 Esdras?

I believe the insertions were made at this point because readers of Chronicles were not satisfied at the transition between the highly laudatory account of Josiah’s passover in 2 Chr 35:1-19 and the immediately following account of his death at the hands of Neco, resulting from his sin, in 2 Chr 35:20-26.

4.2 Is the wording of the insertion in 1 Esdras related to the content of the insertion in the Paraleipomena?

In his book on the textual history of 1 Esdras, Robert Hanhart argued that 1 Esd 1:21-22 differs both in form and content from 2 Kgs 23:24-27, but he finds in the mention of the records about Josiah in 1 Esd 1:22 an echo of 2 Kgs 23:28: “Now the rest of the acts of Josiah, and all that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah?”

Jacob M. Myers, following C. C. Torrey, however, found a relationship between 1 Esd 1:21-22 and 2 Par 35:19^{a-d}, although most scholars disagree (e.g. Hanhart, Williamson, van der Kooij, Talshir).

After all, 2 Par 35:19^{a-d}/2 Kgs 23:24-27 describe how Josiah put away mediums, etc., and how there was no king comparable to Josiah previously or since. And yes, it goes on, because of the sins of Manasseh, God had decided to destroy Judah, Jerusalem, and the temple. There is nothing in the Par supplement and its Kings source comparable to the wording of 1 Esd 1:22. Torrey and Myers thought that 1 Esd 1:21-22 was corrupt in Greek, but that in its Hebrew form it was part of the original text of the Chronicler, and Myers held that this material was intentionally dropped in Chronicles MT because it appeared to put Josiah in the same category as the most evil kings, which he certainly was not. Meyers errs, in my judgment, in concluding that vv. 21-22 portray a negative image of Josiah.

4.3 What does v. 22 mean and what earlier writing does it refer to?

Robert Hanhart found in 1 Esdras 1:22 a reminiscence of 1 Kings 13, the prophecy of Josiah’s attack on the altar at Bethel, and its fulfilment in 2 Kgs 23:14-20. Zipora Talshir holds a similar position, but her argument can only be understood on the basis of her English translation and on the basis of her retroversion of these verses into their supposedly original Hebrew (see the citations of Talshir’s work above).

Talshir notes that verse 21, with its praise of the work of Josiah, travels the same road as 2 Kgs 23:25 but in details the two verses differ completely. When she turns to v. 22 she asks why Josiah’s history is included among the deeds of the impious and who are these impious folk. She believes, as Fritsche, Hanhart, and many others, that 1 Esd 1:22 refers to 2 Kgs 23:15-20, which mentions a prophecy about Josiah in the days of Jeroboam. This prophecy is contained in 1 Kgs 13:2 “O altar, altar, thus says YHWH: ‘A son shall be born to the house of David, Josiah by name, and he shall sacrifice on the altar at Bethel the priests of the high places, and human bones shall be burned on you.’” That prophecy is confirmed in 1 Kgs 13:32, namely, the saying which the old prophet cried by the word of YHWH against the altar in Bethel and against the high places in Samaria. 1 Esdras 1:22, according to Talshir, notes that the prophecy foretelling the role of Josiah has now come to pass, as written in the account of the impious King Jeroboam.

In *I Esdras. From Origin to Translation*, 17, Talshir states her position clearly: “The meaning of the passage [v. 22] would then be as follows: Josiah’s actions were foretold long ago, in the early days, in the book that told the history of the sinners against the Lord (the sins of Jeroboam).” In Talshir’s reading, therefore, v. 22 does not refer to those who sinned at Josiah’s time, but rather it says that Josiah’s time was predicted in the book known today as 1 Kings that told the history of the sinners against YHWH in the time of Jeroboam. Talshir translates the first clause of the Greek text of v. 22 into English as “the things that came to pass in his days,” but her Hebrew retroversion would have to be translated somewhat differently: His deeds, behold
they are written “in”\textsuperscript{22} former times concerning those who sinned and acted impiously. The phrase “concerning those who sinned and acted impiously” is a very awkward way of saying that the prophecies about Josiah (now fulfilled) were written earlier in the books of Kings and in their sharp critique of Jeroboam I.

One also wonders why the supplements in 1 Esdras and in the Paraleipomena would both have made additions at this particular spot. The presenting reason for this insertion, as stated above in my response to the first question, results from the fact that the account of Josiah’s God-pleasing Passover is followed immediately in Chronicles by the brief account of his rejecting the word of God that led to his death. The supplemental verses in the Paraleipomena do give an etiology for YHWH’s continuing anger by mentioning the sins of Manasseh, but the supplement in 1 Esdras, according to Talshir’s exegesis, makes the contrast between the Josiah of the Passover celebration and his death immediately following even more exasperating since Josiah is also being hailed as the fulfilment of prophecy made three centuries earlier.

Wilhelm Rudolph had also argued that 1 Esd 1:22 referred to 1 Kgs 13:2 and 32,\textsuperscript{23} but we must note that the words of the Lord in 1 Esd 1:22 refer to the people of Israel and not to Josiah as in 1 Kings 13, and the words that come to pass in v. 22 are also directed to Israel, not Josiah\textsuperscript{24}.

4.3 Verse 22 and the original beginning of 1 Esdras

The question about the meaning of v. 22 has been related to the discussion of whether the beginning of 1 Esdras once included more of the text we know as 1 and 2 Chronicles. Karl Friedrich Pohlmann argued, like many before him, that 1 Esdras is a fragment of a larger work and must begin with at least the beginning of the reign of Josiah in 2 Chronicles 34, but he surmised that it probably included all of the books of Chronicles, beginning with 1 Chr 1:1.\textsuperscript{25}

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\textsuperscript{22}She suggests מ as a translation for εν. Her citation of מ for εν in 1:31 40, however, is not completely persuasive.

\textsuperscript{23}Chronikbücher (HAT I, 21; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1955), 331.

\textsuperscript{24}van der Kooij, “Zur Frage des Anfangs,” 246.

Lurking behind Pohlmann’s position is the old question of whether Chronicles-Ezra-Nehemiah once formed a united work, a fragment of which is preserved in 1 Esdras, a position I now reject.

H. G. M. Williamson in his published dissertation *Israel in the books of Chronicles* concluded that vv. 21-22 were integral to 1 Esdras, but were never included in the Hebrew text of Chronicles. These verses were occasioned by the untimely death of pious Josiah (recounted in 2 Chr 35:20-26), who faced immediate retribution because he had disobeyed the words of Neco, which words came in turn from the mouth of God, and these verses were also occasioned by the wider problem of the exile itself. That is, verse 21 emphatically asserts the piety of Josiah while verse 22 states that the sins of others in Josiah’s day were nevertheless sufficient to condemn Israel. Williamson felt that the words of v. 22 “echo precisely” the judgment on Manasseh cited in 2 Chr 33:9 (cf. 2 Kgs 21:9), namely, “Manasseh misled Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that they did more evil than the nations whom YHWH had destroyed before the people of Israel.” The reference to Manasseh in 1 Esd 1:22 is not explicit, and Williamson argues that this can only result from the fact that the narrative of 1 Esdras began sometime after the reign of Manasseh. Otherwise the allusion to Manasseh by the author of 1 Esdras would not be veiled. 2 Chronicles 33, therefore, belongs to “writings in former times” and not to the hypothetical earlier chapter of 1 Esdras. Williamson proposes that the narrative of 1 Esdras once began only with the accession of Josiah (2 Chr 34:1) and not with the beginning of the books of Chronicles (contra Pohlmann).

In his article published in ZAW in 1991, van der Kooij argued that 1 Esdras 1:21-22 does not refer to Manasseh at all nor to the pre Israelite nations that are explicitly mentioned in 2 Chr 33:9 (2 Kgs 21:9) and therefore he rejects the allusion to 2 Kgs 21:9//2 Chr 33:9 that Williamson had proposed. The impiety of Israel in Josiah’s time, represented by a perfect participle from the root ασεβεω in v. 22 contrasts explicitly with the piety ευσεβεια of Josiah in

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v. 21.28 Josiah is not among the sinners of his day (contra Torrey and Myers). Van der Kooij also differs on who was grieved by the actions of these sinners. While NRSV and Talshir, for example, find the Lord as the antecedent of the word αυτον, van der Kooij believes this pronoun refers to Josiah. The sinful behavior of the people grieved Josiah.

The decision in this case is complicated by the Greek word αισθησις, which is usually translated as “insight” or “experience” or (Talshir) “perception.” Talshir retroverts this word into Hebrew with either בדעת “with knowledge,” that is, they provoked the Lord intentionally, or she suggests a reading בדעתם as a corruption of ברעתם “with their evil.” Van der Kooij, on the other hand, argues that αισθησις here refers to Josiah’s “sittliche Empfindung” or “sittliche Verstândnis”--ethical sensitivity or ethical understanding. He cites passages from Prov 1:7 and 1:22 where αισθησις is the translation for דעת.29 In both cases the LXX of Proverbs makes a relationship between ευσεβεια/ασεβεις and αισθησις. 1 Esdras 1:22 talks about Josiah’s αισθησις and 1:21 also about his ευσεβεια.

Van der Kooij himself thinks that v. 22 alludes to the words of Huldah in 2 Kgs 22:11-20//2 Chr 34:19-28. The mention of “those who sinned and acted wickedly toward the Lord beyond any other people or kingdom” is matched by 2 Kgs 22:17//2 Chr 34:25, where Huldah notes that they, that is, the people and not the king, have abandoned me and made offerings to other gods. The reference to their grieving Josiah in his ethical sensibility or understanding (ἐν αισθήσει) is matched by 2 Kgs 22:11b and 19b//2 Chr 34:19b, 27b, where Josiah tears his clothes and weeps before Yahweh. Similarly Ezra, in 1 Esd 8:68-69, acts dramatically when he learns about the mixed marriage crisis--he tears his garments, pulls out his hair, mourns, and sits quietly and grief stricken. The reference in 1 Esd 1:22 to the words of the Lord being fulfilled upon Israel is matched by 2 Kgs 22:16, 17b//2 Chr 34:24a, 28b where Huldah announces threats of disaster on Jerusalem and its inhabitants. These threats came true in the events of 2 Kings 25. Hence 1 Esdras, in mentioning what had been written down about Josiah in earlier times, refers

29“Zur Frage des Anfangs,” 244.
to the Huldah passage from 2 Kings 22/2 Chronicles 34. For Van der Kooij, the links to 1 Esd 1:47 and 8:68-69 incline him to think that the addition of vv. 21-22 is related to the composition of 1 Esdras itself.30

More importantly, if the words of Huldah in 2 Chronicles 34 were recorded in earlier times then it appears likely that the present beginning of 1 Esdras, with its translation of 2 Chr 35:1 is also the original beginning of the work. Van der Kooij also finds a significant conflict between his understanding of the meaning of 1 Esd 1:22 and 2 Chr 34:33: “Josiah took away all the abominations from all the territory that belonged to the people of Israel, and made all who were in Israel worship Yahweh their God. All his days they did not turn away from following YHWH the God of their ancestors.” That is, the Chronicler said that Josiah had transformed the sinners of his time into people with perfect obedience, but 1 Esd 1:22 states that the people of Josiah’s time persisted in sinning and acting impiously. This conflict prohibits, in his view, any edition of 1 Esdras that included 2 Chronicles 34.

In 2 Chr 35:20 the Chronicler refers to Josiah’s work on the temple, that is, he alludes to 2 Chronicles 34. But in the translation of this verse in 1 Esd 1:23 we read only “After all this activity of Josiah, it happened that Pharaoh, king of Egypt, came to make war.” Thus there is no explicit reference in 1 Esdras 1:23 to the temple. That might be dismissed as due to the somewhat paraphrastic nature of the translation in 1 Esdras except that the reference to the temple (חֵית) is also absent from the regular Greek translation of Chronicles, the Paraleipomena.31 In any case, the absence of the word temple in this verse in 1 Esdras supports van der Kooij’s hypothesis that

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30Van der Kooij has to admit that Huldah in 2 Kings 22/2 Chronicles 34 does not accuse Israel of sinning in a superlative way beyond every nation and kingdom, but he finds something similar within 1 Esdras, as with Ezra above, namely in 1 Esd 1:47 (its translation of 2 Chr 36:14): “Even the leaders of the people and of the priests committed many acts of sacrilege and lawlessness beyond all the unclean deeds of all the nations.”

31Par omits a translation for “After all this which Josiah had established--the house.” Note also the awkward location of the word house in Hebrew. 2 Kgs 23:29 does not have this clause.
1 Esdras did not once contain a translation of 2 Chronicles 34, that describes Josiah’s purification of the temple.

Van der Kooij next seeks a parallel to the notion that the sins of the people caused grief to Josiah or that he grieved over their sins. He turns to the Hebrew text of Sirach, which may be translated as follows: For he grieved over our betrayals and destroyed the abominable idols. He kept his heart fixed on God and in times of lawlessness he practiced virtue (Sir 49:2-3). 32 Both Sirach and 1 Esdras, therefore rate Josiah highly and the people of his time negatively.

Finally, Van der Kooij concludes, against Torrey and Meyers, that vv 21-22 would not have fit in the context of 2 Chronicles 35, and so there was never a corresponding Hebrew text there that later fell out.

4.4 The original language of the insertion in 1 Esd 1:21-22

Williamson holds that vv. 21-22 are integral to the book we call 1 Esdras, but they were never included in the Hebrew text of Chronicles. 33 Robert Hanhart, however, finds behind the supplemental texts in 2 Par 35:19a-d and 1 Esd 1:21-22 divergent Hebrew Vorlagen which result from alternate attempts to harmonize the books of Kings and Chronicles. 34 Zipora Talshir, as we have seen, translates the Greek of vv. 21-22 back into the “original” Hebrew. Talshir concludes (p. 38) that “The expansion could not have been written originally in Greek although she concedes that reconstructing the Vorlage is a difficult chore and much remains uncertain. It is not self evident to me that this expansion could not originally have been written in Greek. Does the pun in Greek suggest that this is a Greek composition and not a translation of a Hebrew Vorlage? I have in mind Josiah’s piety, ευσεβείας in v. 21, and the impiety of the people in v. 22, rendered by ησεβηκοτων (root = ασεβεω). Talshir’s retroversion of these words into Hebrew shows no punning at all. The first word is retroverted by her as יראות and the second by a participial form of פשע.

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33Israel in the Book of Chronicles, 20.
34Text und Textgeschichte, 13.
5. Conclusion

So what can we say about the rendering of 2 Chronicles 35-36 in 1 Esdras? The translator used a Hebrew text that was not identical with the MT since there are more than 100 cases where 1 Esdras alone or 1 Esdras with the Paraleipomena presuppose a different Vorlage. In the cases of animals that were sacrificed for the Passover sacrifice or the events leading up to the death of Josiah there are significant differences in content. Finally, in two supplementary verses dealing with Josiah, which were composed by the translator or possibly existed already in his Vorlage, the sins of Josiah’s contemporaries grieved the king, an interpretation of the role of Josiah that is also found in Sirach.

Bibliography


