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Totally Devoted: Dismantling Religious Practices and Training Devotion in 2 Kgs 22-23

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Abstract

The demise and disappearance of religions are processes rarely analysed or theorised in depth in the study of religions. This article engages the discussion of how religious traditions disappear by focusing on religious demise as an active process and suggests that this can also teach us about religious persistence. Using memory and emotion perspectives, I focus on processes of religious change in Judaism in the Persian-Hellenistic era by analysing a case study from the Hebrew Bible that involves an active dismantling of previous religious practices and their replacement with a new programme for religious devotion: the narrative of 2 Kgs 22-23. I argue that the new total devotion programme involves the active erasure of previous religious practices as a key part of the new identity. On the basis of the analyses, I discuss religious changes in Second Temple Judaism and suggest a novel reframing of some of the key changes in terms of memory, media, and emotions.

Keywords: Demise of religion, religious identity, identity formation, memory, emotion, 2 Kgs 22-23, Second Temple Judaism

1. Introduction: reflecting on religious demise - and survival¹

Continuous adaptations, bricolage, and change are inevitable and natural parts of any cultural production, including the production of religion in its various formats throughout history, as one might sum up an important perspective in the study of religions.² Despite the factual disappearance of many specific religions – ancient Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Roman, and Old Norse religions, to mention just a few, theorizing about and discussions of religious demise are few in the academic study of religions.³ Both Robbins and de Jong have suggested that cultural formations, including religions, are most often studied from the point of view of continuity and persistence and that more in-depth analyses, discussions, and theorizing of religion demise are necessary.⁴ In this article, I discuss religious demise and persistence in the Hebrew Bible, an anthology of religious texts often understood as bearing witness to several forms of religion. I suggest that looking at religious demise and persistence enables us to understand new aspects of decisive religious transformations in ancient forms of Judaism relating to a distinction - variously dubbed but nevertheless possibly under-emphasized in the broader study of religions (as suggested by de Jong⁵) -

¹ I am grateful to Professor Jan N. Bremmer for his helpful comments, as well as to the research group *The Demise of Religions*, the Centre for Advanced Study, Oslo, for discussions. I thank Professors Michael Stausberg and James Lewis and the Norwegian Academy of Sciences and Letters for funding my research stay, as well as the two anonymous reviewers and Prof. Tigchelaar for helpful comments.

² McGuire, *Lived Religion*; Gilhus and Sutcliffe, *New Age Spirituality*; Rüpke, "Lived Ancient Religion;" Rüpke, "Reflecting on Dealing."

³ Robbins, "How Do Religions End;" de Jong, "Disintegration and Death." Some work in evolutionary studies of religion deals with the question; however, I leave the integration of such theories to further studies.

⁴ Robbins, "How Do Religions End," 12; de Jong, "Disintegration and Death," 648.

⁵ de Jong, "Disintegration and Death."

between locative and utopian religions (J.Z. Smith), community religions vs. religious communities, folk religions vs. universal religions, primary vs. secondary religions, religions of blessing vs. religions of salvation, polytheism vs. monotheism, and archaic vs. axial religion types.⁶ To this discussion we should add an attention to how religions that formulate persistence programmes in the face of demise may be better equipped for survival than those that do not. Moreover, we must also distinguish between studies of the historical demise and disappearance of various religions over time, studies of the strategic and active ways of dismantling religion, and ideological presentations and uses of religious demise. But all these aspects of demise are relevant for each other. Focusing on the ways in which people actively dismantle religious practices and replace them with new ones enables a more nuanced study of how religions work actively to stay in the existential game, of how they develop programmes for persistence. Differently put, a study of religious demise that includes a study of religious strategies of demise enables us to study processes of change in religions in a detailed and nuanced way beyond merely pointing to continuous adaptation processes.⁷ Some religions demonstrate an awareness of their own potential replacement by another cultural tradition, which we may call an anxiety of demise, and they devise coping strategies.⁸ Such a perspective can also throw a new light on religious changes in Persian era Judaism.

As suggested by Robbins, disappearance as well as persistence can be approached as “something people actively do, rather than as something that simply happens.”⁹ Also problematizing religious continuity in interesting ways, Weitzman has studied the strategies of cultural persistence that helped Jews to foster religious continuity in the Second Temple era;¹⁰ he emphasizes that persistence is also an active, social project.¹¹ The destructions of the First and Second Temples both count as major examples of material erasure and displacement. Weitzman suggests that in these situations, Jews actively promoted stories that fostered religious persistence, and, importantly, cultivated a reflexive awareness of the issue of persistence¹² that might provide a defence against displacement and demise.¹³

Along these lines, I wish to analyse some of the means used, in the Hebrew Bible, for doing away with former religious practices and actively replacing them with a new programme for religious devotion. The new devotional programme is here, I suggest, explicitly focused on persistence. This means that it displays some “demise anxiety,” that is, recognition of the importance of protecting religious

⁶ For criticism of the term “monotheism” and the distinction between primary and secondary religion types, see Assmann, “Monotheism;” Jensen, “Religionshistorie og aksetid;” for the other pairs see de Jong, “Disintegration and Death” and Schjødt, “The Christianization of the North.” Robert N. Bellah has introduced a five-fold cultural evolutionary distinction (Bellah, *Religion in Human Evolution*), according to which we would here be dealing with the transition from archaic to axial and post-axial religion types.

⁷ As suggested by de Jong and Robbins, some forms of religion could be more susceptible to processes of change (de Jong, “Disintegration,” 647) or to persist (Robbins, “How Do,” 14) than others.

⁸ The analysis has been somewhat inspired by philosopher Peter Sloterdijk’s *Du mußt dein Leben ändern* and the idea that repetitive training is a universal human cultural phenomenon and that religions / cultures can be studied in terms of their training programmes. Training functions as protection and repair programmes that help individuals and groups stay alive and persist in the face of danger, risk, threat, and death (Sloterdijk *Du mußt*, 19-23, cf. his terms *homo immunologicus*, *homo repetitivus*, *homo artista*). That said, it is important to emphasise that Sloterdijk sees training evolve especially in the context of so-called axial age religions. For an application of Sloterdijk, see the special issue of *Numen* on asceticism in the Qur’an, guest edited by Petersen 2019.

⁹ Robbins, “How Do,” 13.

¹⁰ Weitzman, “Sensory Reform in Deuteronomy.”

¹¹ Weitzman, “Sensory Reform in Deuteronomy,” 11.

¹² Weitzman, “Sensory Reform in Deuteronomy.” On the Torah as a response to crisis, as a set of reflections on how to prevent exile and securing tenure of the land, see Neusner, *Transformations*, 13-16.

¹³ Robbins, “How Do.”

identity from erasure and displacement. As the selected material from the Hebrew Bible is framed as a memorial narrative, set in the era leading up to the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians and the exile, I use perspectives from memory theory, but I focus methodologically on what theories of memory have to say about active strategies of oblivion and forgetting. This is thus a study that puts theoretical perspectives on religious demise and persistence to work in an analysis of aspects of emerging Judaisms, looking at the strategies for handling situations of crisis, devastation and change.¹⁴

The particular narrative chosen for analysis here – 2 Kgs 22-23 – has played a large role in discussions of Hebrew Bible religion, emerging Judaisms and “monotheism;”¹⁵ its presentation of the correct worship of Yahweh as non-iconic monolatry has been seen as the very essence of “biblical religion.”¹⁶ Much research on these chapters revolve around questions of newness, the introduction of monotheism, cult centralization, idol-criticism, exclusivity, and law-based religion.¹⁷ My focus is on this narrative as a performative and literary religious text as reflecting and affecting religious understandings in Persian era Yehud and among Judeans living in the “Jewish”¹⁸ diaspora in the Persian era.¹⁹ What is important here is that in Persian era Yehud this story and the radical actions of the character Josiah were considered meaningful and important as religious communication for the recipients, who understood the Jerusalem temple as founded in the ancient times of Judah and its religious activities as having been thoroughly changed, in the past, by king Josiah, thus creating some of the significant foundations for their identity as Judeans/Jews. While the actuality of Josiah and his activities is contested,²⁰ this basic understanding is not in dispute.²¹ I see the text as an expression of a religious programme of change that involves an active strategy of replacement of former religious practices. Which strategies for dismantling

¹⁴ Cf. de Jong’s distinction between exogenous and endogenous factors of demise (de Jong, “Disintegration”), we are here in the endogenous realm.

¹⁵ Handy, “Religious Peg.” I have placed “monotheism” in quotation marks to signal that it is not an apt term here. Monolatry is the more fitting term for the type of religion idealized in the Hebrew Bible. See, e.g., Jensen, “Aniconic Propaganda;” Assmann, “Monotheism;” cf. Kratz and Spieckermann, *One God*, for current debates.

¹⁶ Stordalen, “Imagined,” 183. A conscious, polemically founded aniconism can be found in Jerusalem only after the Maccabean revolt in the 2nd century BCE (Kratz, *Historical*, 278; Jensen, “Aniconic,” 403).

¹⁷ Anderson, “Dialectical;” Pakkala, “Cult Reforms,” 202.

¹⁸ Using the terms Jew / Judaism do not suggest that we are here dealing with “religion” in a modern, disaffiliated sense, but that it involves self-reflective religious elements in addition to geography, ancestry, and genealogy – it is not enough to live in Judah, or be of Abraham’s seed, one must also observe the law of Moses in order to be a *Ioudaios* (Collins, *Invention*, 18). Kratz has shown that “Israelite” religion and “Judaism” cannot be separated (Kratz, “Temple and Torah;” Kratz, “Cultic Centralization,” 121-22). Some situate the development of “Judaism” in the Persian era; others place it in the 2nd century BCE with the Maccabean crisis, others later (see Collins, *Invention*, 1-19; Eckhardt, “Rom und die Juden,” 15; Cohen, *Maccabees*). Note that the endeavour to investigate ancient religions via modern concepts is not invalidated by a lack of fit (Petersen, Review).

¹⁹ The historicity of this narrative is an enormous discussion; cf. Barrick, *The King*; Albertz, “a Reform;” Uehlinger, “Cult Reform;” Pakkala, “Cult Reforms;” Handy, “Religious Peg” (and more). Pakkala (“Cult Reforms”), Davies (*Origins*), Handy (“Religious Peg”), and Collins (*Invention*) argue in favour of a post-exilic dating, seeing the narrative as religious fiction. Note that archaeological evidence cannot distinguish precisely enough between the reign of Josiah and the events of 587 (Pakkala, “Cult Reforms”).

²⁰ According to internal chronology, the events can be dated to 622, but no external sources verify the events, and the text is clearly ideological (Stordalen, “Imagined”). Pakkala (convincingly) finds most of the text unreliable historically (2010). The archaeological evidence (Uehlinger, “Cult Reform”) does not point to any conclusions; see also Pakkala, “Cult Reforms,” 218. See Uehlinger, “Image Ban” for lucid reflections on the image ban, archaeology and assessments of Hebrew Bible religion and emerging Judaisms.

²¹ Cf. Handy, “Religious Peg,” 73; Stordalen, “Imagined.” Reconstructing the text’s history has been very difficult for redaction criticism; it is a problematic historical source (Pakkala, “Cult Reforms,” 203). 2 Kgs 22-23 primarily reflect the interests of post-exilic theologians (Pakkala, “Cult Reforms,” 212), and I focus on their ideas and ideals.

previous religious practices are voiced and which new ideals for religious devotion for Persian era Yehud, Judeans, and Jews?

2. Active Amnesia and Iconoclasm at Work

Cultural memory studies have become an important factor in Biblical and Jewish studies, especially as changing scholarly perceptions reflect a widespread understanding that the biblical presentation of the past is heavily ideological and performative for religious identity formation²² and offers a picture divergent from the historical realities of ancient Israel and Judah.²³ Scholars have therefore turned to investigations of biblical views of the past, drawing on perspectives from theories of cultural memory. Here, I add to this debate by focusing on what theories of cultural memory have to say about active strategies of forgetting.²⁴ Briefly stated, the French sociologist Halbwachs developed the concept of collective memory in the 1920s,²⁵ focusing on the social frames without which no individual memory can constitute itself and understanding memory as formed in the socialization process.²⁶ The term “cultural memory”²⁷ highlights that shared memories of the past are “the products of mediation, textualization, and acts of communication.”²⁸ Mediated and re-narrated shared memories are not undesirable deviations from a spontaneously produced memory, but rather a precondition for the production of collective memories.²⁹ Memory is at once embodied and social, and contingent on materiality and mediation.³⁰ With Astrid Erll, Ann Rigney has stressed the importance of media and materiality in memory studies, understanding memory as an active and performative engagement with the past that is contingent on remediation in order not to die out and be over-written by new memorial stories deemed more relevant for identity formation.³¹

Theories of cultural memory posit that forgetting is a crucial part of memory; that memory involves both remembering and forgetting.³² However, the research literature rarely discusses strategies or techniques of forgetting explicitly, nor does it inquire into the relationship between “memory performance and the production of oblivion.”³³ Often the role of forgetting in memory performance is understood to be a component that acts of memory seek to counter; the focus is on how memory manages or curates the past, offering selective forgetting. Instead, what Plate dubs “amnesiology” addresses forgetting not as a failure that commemorations seek to counter, but as an active process; amnesia is, as it

²² E.g., Edelman and Ben Zvi, *Remembering*; Feldt, “Biblical Traditions;” Feldt, “Using the Past.”

²³ Uehlinger, “Image Ban;” Stavropoulou, “Historical Framework.”

²⁴ The following section overlaps with some of my previous presentations (as in e.g., Feldt, “Using the Past”).

²⁵ Halbwachs *Les cadres*.

²⁶ Halbwachs, *Les cadres*, 376–78, 392–95. Memory—also personal memory—comes into being only in communication and interaction in social groups. Halbwachs coined terms such as “collective memory” and “national memory,” seeing memory as playing a decisive role in the formation of collective identity. As Erll and Rigney show, Halbwachs was aware of the importance of media in shaping memory (Erll and Rigney, *Mediation*, 1–2).

²⁷ Assmann, *Kulturelle Gedächtnis*; Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume*.

²⁸ Rigney, “Plenitude,” 14. See Assmann on the two phases of collective memory: “communicative memory,” when multiple narratives circulate and compete with each other, and “cultural memory,” the longer phase when only relics and narratives are left as a reminder of past experience (Assmann, *Kulturelle Gedächtnis*, 48–66).

²⁹ Rigney, “Plenitude.”

³⁰ Cf. Feldt and Høgel, *Reframing Authority*; Geertz and Jensen, *Religious Narrative*.

³¹ Erll and Rigney, *Mediation*, 2.

³² Plate, “Amnesiology.” Ricoeur, *Memory*. An idea of *total memory* is an unlikely default position, as our historical condition first and foremost involves forgetting (Ricoeur, *Memory*, 412–413); our default position is “an oceanic amnesia” (Eaves, “Editorial Void”). The relation between memory and forgetting should thus not be understood as a struggle of memory *against* forgetting, because total recall is an impossibility. Rather, we should focus on how the balance is struck between memory and forgetting (Ricoeur, *Memory*, 413).

³³ Plate, “Amnesiology,” 143.

were, *made*; it is an actively produced condition.³⁴ Predating Plate's coinage of the term amnesiology, Paul Connerton offered a useful summary of types of forgetting. His (deliberately) incomplete list counts seven types of forgetting: "repressive erasure; prescriptive forgetting; forgetting that is constitutive in the formation of a new identity; structural amnesia; forgetting as annulment; forgetting as planned obsolescence; forgetting as humiliated silence."³⁵ Type 1 – repressive erasure – and type 3 – forgetting constitutive in the formation of a new identity – are immediately relevant, as they can be used for studying the demise and change of religion in terms of active processes of remembering and forgetting.

In type 1, material objects relating to specific persons or events are deliberately and programmatically destroyed on the part of those in power, with the purpose of casting those persons or events into oblivion. Yet, as Connerton briefly seems to suggest,³⁶ in acts of editing out and erasing, traces of the erased often linger. A similar thought is put more explicitly by Eaves, "throwing things away [...] is as much a part of our standard practice as keeping them."³⁷ In the story of king Josiah, as we shall see, it seems that the throwing away, the erasure and the active forgetting, is made part of the new identity. Thus, we have moved towards Connerton's third type of forgetting, namely the type *which is constitutive in the formation of a new identity*. In this type, the focus is on what is gained for those who know how to discard memories in the service of the management of one's *current* identity.³⁸

In his examples of this type of forgetting as a process of cultural discarding in the service of forming a new identity,³⁹ Connerton focuses on implicit, unacknowledged and gradual forms of forgetting. I call attention, instead, to forms of forgetting that are more explicit, acknowledged and modelled as sudden. In the Josiah narrative, repressive erasure becomes a part of the formation of a new identity. We can connect this to how David Morgan points out, in his recent book on the material culture of enchantment, that iconoclasm can be "defined as the practice of destroying focal objects."⁴⁰ This can be effective because it disrupts relations in the networks accessed by the focal object, it disables connections, but at the same time acts of iconoclasm animate objects of worship and presume their animation, their active agency.⁴¹ In a mirror reading, acts of iconoclasm speak to a situation of competition in which the iconoclasts are painfully aware of the power of images as a threat to their own religious projects, involving their own potential demise. Thus, repressive erasure – in this case in the form of iconoclasm – can be made an important part of the new identity, reminding us that cultural memory is mediated, materialised and embodied. This points towards studies of the performative nature of religious texts as material media that play key parts in the formation and training of religious memory and identity.

3. Contextualising 2 Kgs 22-23 and Emerging Judaisms

It has been a matter of debate at which point we can speak of "Judaism" as a "religion," in an era in which Judaism was an "embedded" practice-oriented religion or a set of religious traditions with clear connections to ethnicity and land. In this era (as in most others⁴²), it was not possible to make clean

³⁴ Plate, "Amnesiology," 144.

³⁵ Connerton, "Seven Types," 59.

³⁶ Connerton, "Seven Types," 60-61.

³⁷ Eaves, "Editorial Void," 527.

³⁸ Connerton, "Seven Types," 63.

³⁹ Connerton, "Seven Types," 64.

⁴⁰ Morgan, *Images*, 87.

⁴¹ Morgan, *Images*, 87-89.

⁴² See Neusner, "Defining Judaism."

distinctions between Judaism as an ethnos and as a religion, and Judaism was not an -ism.⁴³ The same goes for any ancient religion, from Mesopotamia to Greece and Rome; nevertheless, they can be studied as religions from a third-order perspective. This, of course, does not relieve us of a historical discussion of changes in second-order ideas of “Judaism” as an identity that encompassed a specific religious component. Shaye Cohen argues that a more religious understanding of what a Jew is appears in the 2nd century BCE with the Maccabean crisis. After this, we can speak of Judaism as an ethno-religion,⁴⁴ rather than of “Judeans” as an ethnic category encompassing religious traditions.⁴⁵ Several scholars suggest that “religion” became an essential part of understandings of Jewish identity in this era.⁴⁶ While significant changes regarding conversion emerged in the Maccabean period, Collins suggests that we can see aspects of Judaism as a kind of ethno-religion already in the Persian era.⁴⁷ Situating 2 Kgs 22-23 in the Persian era (as many do⁴⁸), what we see in our text is the formulation of a *religious* programme of identity formation,⁴⁹ as it involves ideals of what it takes to be a proper Yahweh-devotee that involves more than ethnic traditions and kinship and that makes a distinction within the people/the Judeans based on religious ideals of proper vs. improper worship.⁵⁰

In the following, I refer to the people addressed by these texts in the Persian era as either “Jews” (cf. Second Temple *Judaisms*)⁵¹ or as “the people” because that is the primary way that the Hebrew Bible refers to them. I refer to the pre-exilic traditions as “Yahwism” to indicate the key role that the deity Yahweh played in it; this is of course in many ways a misnomer in as much as we do not have any direct textual sources for pre-exilic traditions⁵² and whatever they were, they were not an “-ism,” but a set of temple- and sacrifice-oriented, religious traditions focused on obtaining blessing and fertility similar to surrounding milieu in the ancient Near East, the Levant, and the broader Mediterranean area in this

⁴³ Davies, *Origins*, 12-14; Collins, *Invention*, 18, and Mason, “Jews.” It does not follow, however, that “Judaism” and “Jewish” texts, expressions, practices, etc. cannot be analysed as a religion or as religious, because that would be confusing second order concepts with third order concepts (see Petersen, “Review”). The absence of second order concepts does not mean an absence of what our third order concepts help us identify and analyse; our concepts are not invalidated by a lack of a perfect fit (see here also Mason, *Jews*, 481-82), contra Barton and Boyarin, *Imagine*). See Collins on *ioudaios* in this era, *Invention*, chapter 1; Davies, *Origins*, 12-14. Please note that I here merely provide an overview of research; I do not make statements about the general feasibility or likely lack thereof, in definitions of religion, of distinguishing ethnicity clearly from religion, - a much larger discussion.

⁴⁴ Cohen, *Beginnings*, 70.78-79.104.137.

⁴⁵ Schwartz and Davies have pointed to how we can see a self-conscious cultural and religious identity in 2 Maccabees where *hellenismos* is contrasted with *ioudaismos* (Schwartz, *Studies*, 11; Davies, *Origins*, 13).

⁴⁶ Davies, *Origins*; Schwartz, *Studies*.

⁴⁷ Collins, *Invention*, 18-19; Cohen, *Beginnings*, 104.

⁴⁸ See Pakkala, “Cult Reforms.”

⁴⁹ While still stressing cultural, geographical, and ethnic aspects (Collins, *Invention*, 19).

⁵⁰ For *ioudaios* as Judean as an ethnos throughout antiquity, see Mason, *Jew*. However, I would argue that ancient ideas of what constitutes authentic Judaic ancestral traditions could form a viable basis of our study of “ancient Judaisms,” rather than taking whatever religious traditions or practices a Judean might have (like Ba’al-worship, for instance) as “the religion of the Judeans.” Studies of Babylonian or Roman religion proceed similarly. Mason’s discussion of why the Romans could not accept “conversion” to “Judaism” - that it was exclusive and involved the betrayal of native ancestral traditions (Mason, *Jew*, 510) - shows exactly that we need a category of “Judaism” or perhaps “Judean religious traditions” to discuss specific ethnic-and-religious traditions. “The religion of the Judeans” falls somewhat short, as it does not exclude Judeans who do not follow (what is considered to be) ancestral tradition.

⁵¹ Cf. Davies, *Origins*, 12-14 on *Judaisms*, rather than *Judaism*.

⁵² Cf. Uehlinger, “Image Ban.” I use our text in the historical context of Persian-era Yehud, as a source for (ideals about) emerging monolatric “Judaism.”

period.⁵³ Ideas of monolatric Yahwism might have emerged in some segments before the 587 exile, but we cannot know. It is more likely that the exile / exiles were catalysts for important, religious transformations.⁵⁴ In the Hebrew Bible's narratives, the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of Yahweh's temple are framed as Yahweh's just punishment for apostasy and illegitimate forms of worship on the part of the people and the kings. The catastrophe of the fall of Jerusalem and the Babylonian exile is an object of much reflection throughout the Hebrew Bible and its influence can hardly be over-estimated.⁵⁵

The Deuteronomistic History (DtrH)⁵⁶ makes many references to the exile throughout; indeed, the exile can be understood as a key interpretative framework for the national epic. In the DtrH, the actions of the kings and the people are evaluated in view of the exile/s and the fall of the two kingdoms; redactional comments and evaluations referring to exile (both the 722, the 597 and the 587 attacks) abound throughout (see, e.g., 1 Kgs 8:46; 9:1; 21:20-22; 2 Kgs 17:23, etc.⁵⁷) The understanding of the catastrophe of the exile as Yahweh's just punishment frames and pervades the editorial interests, and the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple (2 Kgs 24-25) are narrated as the dramatic culmination of the national epic in the chapters following immediately after the narrative of Josiah. Framed as catastrophic and as a destruction of their way of life,⁵⁸ the Babylonian attack, the exile, and the collapse of the main institutions of Hebrew Bible religion / Yahwism – the monarchy and the temple – represented a decisive turning point forcing radical transformations of temple-based state religion.⁵⁹ We are thus dealing with the events leading up to what is framed and understood as a cultural demise.

4. Programming Total Devotion on the Anxiety of Demise: 2 Kgs 22-23

The story of king Josiah starts with a brief summary of Josiah's merits: his young age upon his ascension of the throne and his long reign of 31 years (22:1),⁶⁰ that he was an exemplary king (22:2). The signals of idealization are clear; his story is meant for emulation and remembrance and a pedagogic tone is set. The narrative of 2 Kgs 22-23 holds Josiah up as an ideal and presents a programme for religious identity formation that involves an anxiety of religious demise. It is a story of religious change that reflects an awareness that religious demise is a potential, future danger, in which we see the formation of a new programme of religious devotion aimed at avoiding demise, supporting persistence; one that at its core contains strategies for actively dismantling previous religious practices. 2 Kgs 22 presents the fear of exile and of the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem as a fear of being turned into "a horror and a curse" by Yahweh (22:13.16-17.19, see also 23:25-27), and the new programme of religious devotion – using the medium of the book combined with emotional formation – is presented as a remedy (22:3-20). 2 Kgs 23 goes into detail with the dismantling of previous religious practices, spelling out to the text's recipients how an

⁵³ Uehlinger, "Image Ban;" Stavropoulou, "Historical Framework;" Stern, "Religious Revolution." We must assume stratification and diversity between the elites and the broader population, as well as different views from a lived religion perspective.

⁵⁴ Pakkala, "Cult Reforms;" Neusner, *Transformations*; Collins, *Invention*, 21-61; Davies, *Origins*; see also Kratz, *Historical*, 52; Kratz, "Centralization."

⁵⁵ Pakkala, "Cult Reforms," 208-9; Poulsen, Høgenhaven and Power, *Images of Exile*; Meyers, "The Babylonian."

⁵⁶ The DtrH has been edited more than once, but also in the Persian era (Stordalen, "Imagined," 187).

⁵⁷ Pakkala, "Cult Reforms."

⁵⁸ Blenkinsopp, "Remembering Josiah," 256-57; Ben Zvi, "Memories," 8-9; Meyers, "The Babylonian." Ben Zvi underlines that the most important thing about Josiah for the Persian era literati was that he carried out these cultic changes with the knowledge of the coming destruction (Ben Zvi, "Memories," 10).

⁵⁹ Pakkala, "Cult Reforms," 201.207-8.230-31.

⁶⁰ I have used the Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia (the Quinta version is not yet available for Kings). I have also consulted the Septuagint. I analyse this version, but the text of 2 Kgs 22-23 is heavily edited; for a recent analysis of the editing processes, see Pakkala, "Cult Reforms."

active rejection of the religious past is a crucial part of the new religious devotion. The religious identity modelled here for the text's recipients is thus split internally between what it was (or indeed is), and what it is supposed to be:⁶¹ it is modelled as an emotional formation that involves the totality of the person – all the heart, the entire being (23:3)⁶² – that also requires a condemnation of one's previous religious practices.⁶³ It has at its centre a set of new emotional practices,⁶⁴ placing a book (*sēper*) as the centre of authority in combination with the dismantling of iconic worship of multiple deities in the Jerusalem temple. It is presented in a memorial narrative about the past.

After setting the tone in 22:1-2, we get the presentation of the new medium, the book, in 22:8-10. The book was found by the high priest;⁶⁵ it is a book of the *tôrâ*, law or instruction. The king demonstrates strong emotional reactions to the book and its contents and its future repercussions. After having heard what it says (the chief scribe Shafan reads it to the king), the king performs actions to signal that he is greatly moved, very sorrowful (22:11),⁶⁶ and asks for an oracle from Huldah, the prophetess, because, as he realises, Yahweh's anger is great towards the people because their fathers have not obeyed the words of the book (22:13). We thus see not only a text-internal anxiety of demise, but also a signal of the relevance of the story in the post-exilic, Persian era. The overarching rationale for installing a new form of devotion is given in 22:16-17, 19, when the text references Yahweh's intentions to destroy "this place" (Jerusalem) and its inhabitants in the future, a clear post-hoc reference to the Babylonian attack in 587 (which is then "confirmed" by chapters 24-25). Thematising the need to avoid demise in 22:16-17 and 19, the text reflects the awareness of a need to take measures, via one's form of devotion, to avoid destruction and demise: the oracle of Yahweh in v. 16 spells out what is in store; Yahweh will bring evil (*rā'â*) on this place and its inhabitants, because (v. 17) they left Yahweh, sacrificed to other gods, and they continually provoke Yahweh with things they make with their hands.⁶⁷ Yahweh's anger has been kindled,

⁶¹ We see a similar structure of identity formation in the wilderness stories, see Feldt, "Wilderness."

⁶² The phrases from 2 Kgs 23:1-3 are my starting point for the idea of devotion as total, an idea also found in Deut 6. The phrases suggest that devotion should be total (the entire soul, strength, at all times and places), and that this idea of total devotion is new and different. Partial devotion would suit temple-focused localistic religion well, in as much as one would not be obliged to devotion when not engaged in ritual activities. I suggest we here see the formulation of an ideal that the devout ought to be devoted all the time. The Hebrew vocabulary entailed is related to keeping the law, following Yahweh, the covenant, etc. Worship would be different, i.e., the ritual activities of the cult.

⁶³ These are sometimes othered, i.e., split out as pertaining to cultural others (the Canaanites). Stordalen suggests that the elite exiles, as returning expats, encountered the kinds of religious practices, in Judah, that they were supposed to have left behind, and so framed them as foreign, cf. Ez 9 (Stordalen, "Imagined," 187).

⁶⁴ Many historically oriented emotion researchers agree that emotions have cognitive and bodily foundations cross-culturally (Bourke, *The Story*; Scheer, "Are Emotions;" Keen, "Emotions and Narrative;" Rosenwein, "Problems and Methods"), while still stressing historically and culturally variable contexts. I lean on this strand within emotion studies (distinguishing between "affects" as the bodily reactions, and "emotions" as the verbalised expressions), more so than the power-oriented ethnography from the 1980s-1990s (e.g., Abu-Lughod, *Veiled Sentiments*) and the cultural evolutionary approach that sees emotions as adaptive programs with functional specializations for survival and reproduction. The latter approach has made advances but rarely provides specific strategies of analysis for emotions in narratives (see Keen, "Emotions and Narrative;" Turner et al., *The Emergence*). For emotional practices, see Scheer, "Are Emotions."

⁶⁵ As Na'aman discusses, "pious frauds," the manipulation of texts to legitimise present claims, were well-known ancient Near Eastern power strategies (Na'aman, "Discovered," 49-53).

⁶⁶ Gesenius s.v. *qr'*: "zerreißen... die Kleider, als Zeichen der Trauer od. leidenschaftlicher Bewegung" (1195-6).

⁶⁷ While the *hiphil* infinitive constructus here follows after a Qatal or perfectum verb (*'azāvûnî*), in my assessment the infinitive points to ongoing activities that are the result of the people having left Yahweh (as in Is. 1:4 and cf. Joïon and Muraoka, *A Grammar*, paragraph 112e, "the action, put in the past, is assumed to continue in some way up to the present moment" (p. 362)). The verbs following the perfectum also point towards the present; they spell out what they *are* currently (or in an ongoing way) doing wrong as a result of having left Yahweh. Infinitive constructus can both indicate a series of connected actions after a perfectum, but also a consequence. The use of *lê-mā'an* is also an

and it will not be extinguished (v. 17). The text communicates that they used the “wrong” material culture and the “wrong” media in their interactions with Yahweh.⁶⁸ According to this narrative, they should use the book of instruction instead.

This also reflects – or is relevant for – the situation in Yehud in the Persian era to which the exiles returned, and we can understand the text as attempting to persuade its recipients to worship Yahweh alone in Jerusalem, by using the anxiety of past-future destruction. By presenting the Babylonian attack and the exile as devastation and danger lurking on the horizon, these verses demonstrate an awareness of potential future demise, an anxiety of demise, that is meant to push the recipients – in this case, Yehud-era Judeans and diaspora Jews – towards avoiding Yahweh’s anger via an idealized emotional formation. We have seen the first step in the summary of the king’s reaction in v. 19. This step involves demonstrating a proper emotional attitude that is given extra weight by being voiced by Yahweh in v.19: *ya’an rak-lebābkā*, “... your heart was timid” (or: tender) vis-à-vis the *tōrā*, the king humbling himself in front of Yahweh.⁶⁹ The anxiety of demise is manifest not only in being greatly moved and sorrowful (v. 16 and v. 19), in having a timid heart and humbling oneself (v.19), but also in demonstrative crying.⁷⁰ The second step involves adopting an attitude of disgust⁷¹ related to iconic, polytheistic worship of Yahweh. This is what chapter 23 is about. In a mirror-reading, these are clear, intra-biblical indications that iconic worship of Yahweh, and worship of Yahweh in a polytheistic setting, were not unthinkable – if not quite normal – practices in the post-exilic era.⁷² Here, we also see clearly how Paul Connerton’s first type of forgetting, repressive erasure, is combined with the third type in which forgetting is constitutive of the new identity. The repressive erasure is narrated—and the re-telling of it keeps the memory alive and makes it constitutive of the new religious devotion.

Chapter 23 starts by coupling *one god* worshipped alone in *one temple* with *one people*: in a fantasy of togetherness, the king, the Judeans, all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, along with the priests, prophets, *wəkol hā-‘ām*, and all the people, from the smallest or most insignificant one to the greatest one (*lě-miqqāton wə‘ad gādōl*), gather together (23:1-2). The king then proclaims (*wayyiqrā’ bē-oznēhem*, he literally proclaims or shouts it in their ears, in their hearing), all the contents of the book. In this tendency for hyperbolic description we sense the intensity that the text brings across. Not only is the book important in its material mediality, but the gathering of all the people, and their understanding of the content of the book, are clearly also important features.⁷³ It is not enough that the king reads it – the

indicator that the infinitive suggests present or future. Also, the series of verbs here are not connected in the standard consecutive manner, cf. also Pedersen, *Hebræisk Grammatik* §126.

⁶⁸ I here use a religion-and-media perspective (cf. Feldt and Bremmer, *Marginality*). I do not suggest that the biblical text develops a category of media, merely that it contains views on which kinds of religious “mediation” are better than others. Some are delegitimized (“wrong”); others – the book, the law – are held forward as “correct” or “right.”

⁶⁹ Lambert, “Refreshing Philology” cautions against reading *leb* as indicating interiority (p.342), suggesting instead that it indicates the borderline between an individual and the world, a kind of objectivation of the self (342-43), and further that Deut 6’s words indicate a Yahweh-loyalist in different ways (346); ideas that could be applicable here too. This is an interesting area for further in-depth studies. The emphasis on emotional reactions in our text could suggest some interiority, but that would again depend on a deeper study of biblical emotions (see here Lambert, *How Repentance* for important caveats).

⁷⁰ We find crying in the presence of the Torah also in Neh 8. Crying is usually a sign of sorrow or being moved (cf. Gen 37:35); crying is also related to death laments (Gen 23:2, Judg 11:37-40, 21, Amos 5, 2 Sam 12).

⁷¹ Inspired by Sloterdijk’s idea of *Verekelung* with regard to common culture, in asceticism (*Du mußt*, 338-40).

⁷² See Kratz, *Historical*; Kratz, “Temple and Torah.”

⁷³ Cf. Neh 8:1-3, with an important difference: in Kings the reading takes place in the temple, whereas in Nehemiah, Ezra reads it outside the temple. Josiah is more of a cultic figure (Handy, “Religious Peg,” 74), and the Torah-reading is connected to the temple cult, cf. Monroe, *Josiah’s Reform* on Priestly aspects in 2 Kgs 23.

entire people also needs to listen and understand; at least to the extent that they can make a new deal with Yahweh to keep his commandments, testimonies and prescribed things - according to the book - and to form their selves and their devotion totally according to the book:

wayya ʾāmōd hammelek ʾal-hāʾammūd wayyikrōt et-habbērīt lipnē YHWH lāleket ʾaḥar
YHWH wēlišmōr mišwōtāyw wēʾet-ʾēdwōtāyw wēʾet-ḥuqqōtāyw bēkol-lēb ūbēkol-nepes̄
lēhāqīm ʾet-dibrē habbērīt hazzōʾt hakkētūbīm ʾal-hassēper hazzeh wayya ʾāmōd kol-hāʾām
babbērīt

The king stood by the pillar and made the covenant in front of Yahweh, to follow Yahweh, to keep his commandments, his testimonies, and his statutes, with all the heart and with the entire being, to make stand the words of this covenant that is written in this book. And all the people entered the covenant.

(2 Kgs 23:3)⁷⁴

The words underlined here indicate the totality of the devotion required: to follow, keep or guard (*lišmōr*) the commandments, testimonies, and statutes with the entire *lēb* (lit. heart),⁷⁵ the seat of judgments, mind, conscience, character and emotion, and with the entire *nepes̄*. This latter term is often translated “soul,” but it can also mean “character,” “life” or “being” (Gesenius s.v.) It could thus be argued that the new religious programme requires total devotion with one’s entire being, self, or person, making the words of this covenant stand (*qūm* in hiphil) by means of one’s entire being. Importantly, these words are of course also partly a quote from, or resemble significantly, Deut. 6:5, and they have formed part of many theories regarding the content and dating of the book mentioned in this story.⁷⁶ Here, I wish to point to the importance of the total devotion entailed in this programme of religious self-change, involving one’s entire inner life, person, emotions, and mind.⁷⁷ Turning now to the rest of 2 Kgs 23 we see how the totality of devotion encompasses another aspect, namely the active dismantling and disavowal of previous religious practices, framed here as varieties of physical destruction and desacralization of cult objects and murdering ritual specialists. Again, this combines Connerton’s first and third types of forgetting into an erasure constitutive of the new identity.

4.1. Dismantling Religion: Destroying, Desacralizing, Murdering in 2 Kgs 23:4-20

A large portion of chapter 23 concerns the active dismantling of previous religious practices. After having read the book aloud and made a covenant between Yahweh and the people, in his attempt to protect the people, Jerusalem, and Judea from future harm and catastrophe, Josiah starts removing, destroying, and desacralizing cult objects in the Jerusalem temple.⁷⁸ The vocabularies of violence and actions for dismantling religion play an important role in what is framed as a pivotal moment of religious transformation. Moreover, if this text – as I argue – can be understood as narrativizing ideal religious

⁷⁴ All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

⁷⁵ Studying ancient emotions is complicated (Feldt, “Feeling;” Lambert, “Refreshing Philology”) and we need more philologically grounded study. I note the overall importance of emotionality here; this could signal interiority.

⁷⁶ See Kratz, “Centralization” and Pakkala’s convincing argument that any connections between 2 Kgs 22-23 and Deuteronomy does not mean that the texts are early; they are post-exilic or post-monarchic (Pakkala, “Cult Reforms”).

⁷⁷ MacDonald discusses discrepancies between modern understandings of monotheism and Hebrew Bible ideas of wholehearted love, devotion and radical obedience entailed in the Deuteronomic commandment of “love” (MacDonald, *Deuteronomy*, 97-123).

⁷⁸ An interesting prefiguration of the Babylonian attack.

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devotion involving an anxiety of demise, the text's foregrounding of violence in these ideals and its forward-working memorial narrative of the pre-exilic past are important processes to analyse in detail.

The principal, purging actions of 2 Kgs 23:4-20 involve various forms of removal and destruction – burning, crushing, pulverization, cutting – of unwanted objects, as well as forms of cultic defilement of ritual sites, objects and spaces, via contact with graves, human bones, or via disposal of matter in spaces considered unclean, low status, or liminal. Finally, the actions also include murdering unwanted ritual specialists. The actions are narrated as matching a spatial scheme, according to which the king first purges the temple in Jerusalem and sites in Judah (v. 4-14), after which he moves to the northern kingdom (v. 15-20). The actions are designed to remove all traces of iconic worship of Yahweh along with other deities in a polytheistic setting in the Jerusalem temple (thus effectively indicating that polytheistic and iconic Yahweh-cult was wide-spread, normal practice), as well as at any other cult site in Judah and Israel. This also involves removing and destroying cult objects and rendering the sites ritually impure, gathering Judean ritual specialists in Jerusalem and killing the ritual specialists from the northern kingdom. Let us have a more detailed look.

In 23:4, we are presented with the king's order to the high priest, the priests of the second order, and the doorkeepers to remove all objects made for the worship of other gods in the temple, for Ba'al, Ashera, the host of heaven, and to burn them in the valley of Kidron, taking the ashes to Bethel.⁷⁹ In 23:5, the pronoun shifts back to the 3rd person singular, referring back to the king, and it is related that the king also removed (*šābat*, hiphil)⁸⁰ the *kēmārīm* – ritual specialists⁸¹ – who had made sacrifices in the high places⁸² of Judah and near Jerusalem, the ritual specialists of Ba'al, the sun and moon, the constellations, and the host of heaven.⁸³ The king then removed *hā'asēra* (2 Kgs 23:6). Probably, and most obviously, this refers to an iconic representation of the goddess, likely in the form of a statue, that is here taken out of Yahweh's temple in Jerusalem. This passage shows that Yahweh's temple is here used - and/or was imagined to function - as an arena for polytheistic Yahweh-worship, in which Yahweh was worshipped along with several other gods. The Ashera is then brought to the Kidron valley, burned and crushed, and the ashes thrown on graves of the people, making it ritually impure.⁸⁴ Verse 7 confirms this, because why else would the king also tear down the room in which clothes⁸⁵ for her were woven (2 Kgs 23:7). The king burns the unwanted cult objects outside of Jerusalem in the Kidron valley (23:4). He does away with⁸⁶ the

⁷⁹ Bethel and Kidron are illegitimate and/or impure places in DtrH (cf. 1 Kgs 12); the Kidron valley is associated with illicit cult, cf. 1 Kgs 11:7; 1 Kgs 15:13. But Josiah's actions also challenge families and father-houses maintaining the burial sites (Stordalen, "Imagined," 193). In Chronicles, the hero is instead Hezekiah (2 Chr 29-30). As Handy suggests, this can indicate that the story is fictional, because it signals that "the historicity of the event was not evident to the Chronicler. It is much easier to move imagined events around in reconstructions of the past than historical ones" (Handy, "Religious Peg," 75-76).

⁸⁰ MacDonald suggests "killed;" ditto Pakkala, "Cult Reforms," 217 note 50 and 222. The text uses the atypical cop.perf. which can also be taken to indicate that the text is late.

⁸¹ The normal word is of course *kōhānīm*.

⁸² Cult sites that could involve various forms of materiality, open-air altars and solid structures and buildings.

⁸³ Note that the *kōhānē habbāmōt* in Judah join the Judeans for *maššōt* (v.9) and the grave of the *ʾiṣ hā-ʾelohīm* (man of god/divine man) is left alone (v. 16-18), while the king slaughters the ritual specialists of Samaria and Bethel, and he desacralizes their altars with human bones (v.20).

⁸⁴ The phrase is *benē hāʾām*, literally the sons of the people, or just "people." Cf. Gesenius, s.v. *ʾām*.

⁸⁵ Following the LXX here, so that the king here is presented as pulling down the houses or rooms of the *qēdēšīm* in Yahweh's temple, in which the women were weaving for Ashera.

⁸⁶ *Šbt* in hiphil can mean "remove" or "do away with," but likely means "kill" here (Gesenius, s.v. and see note 84).

ritual specialists⁸⁷ (23:5) who offered sacrifices on the high places of Judah and those who sacrificed to other gods (23:5). He pulls down various structures (23:7, 8, 12 – rooms, high places, altars), several times disposing of the dust in the liminal Kidron valley. The term for imposing ritual impurity or defiling an object or a site (piel, *ṭāmē*) is used in 23:8, 10, 13, 16 with regard to high places and other places of ritual activity deemed illegitimate. The king restricts access to Yahweh's altar in Jerusalem for the priests of the high places (23:9).⁸⁸ In several other instances, the king actively defiles objects, spaces and structures by bringing them into contact with human bones or impure matter (23:14, 16). The story of destruction culminates with the king's murder of all the priests of the high places, for which the term "slaughter" (*zābah*) is used (23:20).

The majority of chapter 23 (v. 4-20) is thus spent on acts of desacralization and destruction, primarily of cult objects, but also, in an extreme but uncontested act of violence, the slaughter of the northern ritual specialists (v.20), thus demonstrating the necessary elimination of such objects, practices, and specialists to the text's recipients by holding out an image of horror. This textual element in the memorial narrative functions, I would suggest, to *stimulate* reactions of horror and an attitude of disgust vis-à-vis religious objects made for other gods, for iconic cult, divine statues, for Ashera, Ba'al, etc. A clearly negative discourse about other gods is seen especially in v. 13, in which we have several repetitions of words for detested, disgusting things and abominations, and in v. 24, where a series of religious practices that are evidently regarded very negatively is featured. Such extended emphasis suggests that the erasure type of forgetting is made part of the new identity.

After the long passage of destroying, desacralizing and killing according to an ever-widening geographical scheme, the king inaugurates a new way of celebrating Pesach in v.21-24. Again, it is emphasised that this is done according to the book. This medium is thus ascribed authority as a point of clear orientation in devotional matters. The passage also testifies to how the new medium of the book is ascribed more authority than previous practices. Verse 23 specifies that this centralized Pesach was instituted according to the book, representing what Pesach should be like in the light of disaster and devastation.⁸⁹ Not only is this book-authorized Pesach to be celebrated in Jerusalem, and not locally, it is to be focused on Yahweh only. Intimately tied to this we see the destruction of and negative discourse about mediums, spiritists, the teraphim and idols and all the abominations mentioned in the same passage (2 Kgs 23:24). Verse 25 shows how Josiah is presented as the ideal Deuteronomistic king who presents the programme of religious identity formation: devotion to the *tôrâ*, what is written down, combined with cult reform and centralisation of key rituals, but also, importantly, demonstrating and modelling an attitude of total devotion and intense emotion. Josiah here features as a literate king who can read his Torah⁹⁰ and who transforms his entire person, his entire person, his heart, soul and strength (cf. Deut 6) according to this new programme. Not only does he perform disgust by destroying the illegitimate cult objects, but he

⁸⁷ The change of term could signal that they are illegitimate ritual specialists. Uehlinger argues that it refers to priests engaged in astral worship (Uehlinger, "Cult Reform," 304) and suggests a 7th century dating, but the evidence for this is not solid (see Pakkala, "Cult Reforms," 228).

⁸⁸ It is, however, not certain that this is what this verse means, but this is how it is often understood. If we take the preposition *'el* (and not *'al*) seriously, this verse could mean that the priests of the high places did not go up to Yahweh's altar in Jerusalem, but instead (or: unless) they ate *maššôt* with their brethren, that is, in the rural areas.

⁸⁹ According to Stordalen, a fully centralised Pesach was unlikely in the early post-devastation era and as he suggests, a controversy between a centralised Pesach and a localised one would pit returned expats and locals living off the land against each other. Much of what Josiah does in these chapters works against local, folk, household and family kinds of religion which would have entailed ancestor and funerary cult (Stordalen, "Imagined," 194).

⁹⁰ In chapter 22, the scribe reads it aloud to him; the discrepancy can be taken as a sign of redaction.

also displays the appropriate emotional practices in relation to the new medium, the book: timidity, humility, tears. He heads his group as a role model. The basic idea is that upon hearing what is contained in the book, and using Josiah as a model, the recipients will be transformed too.⁹¹

Rounding off the story, we see Josiah presented like the last man standing in verses 26-27. He realises what is at stake – the demise is coming, the unprecedented cultural catastrophe of chapters 24-25, and so Josiah acts, destroys, reforms and re-designs religious practices and devotion in order to take destruction seriously, acting on an anxiety of demise. The new programme – built and designed to avoid demises in the future – consists of strategies to enhance cultural persistence by monopolisation, exclusivity, and total devotion – understood as encompassing not only specific cultic practices, but one's entire person and the performance of intense emotions that signal the willingness to change.

It is interesting to observe that although this story aims to do away with previous religious practices in favour of a new devotional programme, the means used to do away with the old ways hinge on cultic practices and cultic ways of thinking that overlap to a great extent with those old ways, especially in terms of ritual purity, ritual pollution, and sacralization vs. desacralization.⁹² Moreover, not only is it clear in a mirror reading that polytheistic iconic Yahweh-worship is seen as a real danger, in competition with monolatric Yahweh-worship, but also that the cult objects, cult sites and ritual specialists are understood as powerful competitors, warranting these extreme forms of destruction. Analysing these actions in a performative perspective, the story also functions to make defection from the programme of total-devotion Yahwism/emerging Judaism very costly. The narrative does not operate within a belief vs. doubt, truth versus falsity or good versus evil regime, but instead works in one of authenticity, legitimacy, purity and appealing emotional, medial, and memorial practices and things, over against inauthentic, illegitimate, impure and disgusting objects and practices. The narrative is concerned with formulating in words what ideal devotion looks like, but also about teaching it, stimulating it, and training it in bodily and emotional practices. In this perspective, the narrative teaches, stimulates, trains the recipient people, *Ioudaioi*, Jews how to react and feel in the face of iconic worship of Yahweh in a setting that involves also several other deities, and the worship of Yahweh on the *bāmôt* of Yehud.

As shown in the analysis above, the primary emotions evoked by Josiah's actions are disgust and horror – evoked not only by the explicit discourse of disgust,⁹³ but also by the frequent mentions of graves, bones and dead bodies, the horror evoked by the many kinds of destruction and desacralization, and the fear evoked by the slaughtering of illegitimate priests.⁹⁴ As pointed out by Jensen, ancient *Ioudaioi*/Jews were exposed to iconic worship in polytheistic settings constantly, whether in Judea or in the diaspora, because it was quite simply the most common form of religion at the time.⁹⁵ This narrative makes those practices disgusting, horrifying – and terrifying via costly defection. The complete lack of counter-voices, opposition or contestation of the king's actions in the narrative also speaks to its quality as a performative programme, rather than a narrative of actual past events.⁹⁶ In Elsner's words, iconoclasm is

⁹¹ See Handy's suggestion that Josiah functions as a "peg" on which "the identity of a true Judean of good religious standing could hang "his beliefs" (Handy, "Religious Peg," 84 and note 41).

⁹² Monroe, *Josiah's Reform*.

⁹³ I owe this felicitous phrase to Prof. Jan N. Bremmer.

⁹⁴ This also functions as a threat to the audience, of course.

⁹⁵ Jensen, "Aniconic," 403-4.

⁹⁶ Josiah's actions in Samaria are unlikely in the 7th century, but also as historical events in the Persian era where Samaria competed with Judah for influence; a Judahite king would not have been able to affect cultic life in Samaria so violently (although Yehud seems to have ruled Bethel in the Persian era, Stordalen, "Imagined," 191). Relegating

more about affirming the destroyer than about the destroyed – “the activity of iconoclasts... is...usually... a discursive act of self-affirmation.”⁹⁷ Iconoclasm touches, he says, on the place and ownership of the past in the current era and claims about which kind of past should be dominant, ancestral, authentic, as embodied in material objects seen through a lens that frames them as religiously obscene.⁹⁸ The medial change we observe here that moves from an emphasis on the visual and tactile to a form focused on listening, words, and books, uses emotional practices to attain its goal. It does not, however, let fully go of the tactile and visual, but partly re-codes it in an emotional economy of disgust.

4.2. Economies of Disgust and Devotion

As we saw in the above analysis, the narrative features a negative discourse of disgust related to specific material things. It seems fair to suggest that the acts of destruction of religious objects and spaces (23:6-7, 11, 15) and the acts of defiling and making them unclean (23:8-10, 14, 16) stimulate reactions of fear, disgust, and fascination. But in addition, the text features an explicit discourse of disgust in v. 13, 20, and 24. Verse 13 uses the root *šht* in the hiphil participle as a derogatory nickname for the Mt of Olives, a root used to describe a marring, disfiguring, and damaging of people and things. Used as a noun we find it as a name for a supernatural creature similar to ancient Near Eastern plague deities.⁹⁹ The same sentence proceeds to designate the deities of Ashtarte, Kemosh and Milkom as *šiqquš*, i.e., abominable or disgusting, clearly intending to repel¹⁰⁰ the people from worshipping those deities. The king then defiles them in their material and spatial instantiations, thus connecting the disgusting and the unclean; the text uses a root (*tm*, piel, make unclean) closely connected with ritual contexts. Playing into this explicit discourse of disgust, we get the extreme violence of v. 20, in which the narrative relates that the king literally slaughters the priests of the high places and burns human bones on the altars, likely stimulating both disgust, dread, and fascination. The text then ends by emphasising the singularity of the Pesach that Josiah then celebrates according to the *sēper* – no Pesach like it had been celebrated since the time of the judges¹⁰¹ (v.22) – and by connecting the celebration of Pesach to the destruction of a whole list of illegitimate things that were seen in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem (v.24): spirits of the dead, soothsayer-spirits, house gods, all the despicable idols (*gillûlîm*) and the disgusting idols (*šiqqušîm*).

What we see here is a mobilisation of disgust that is intimately coupled with a narrative mobilisation of total devotion to Yahweh. Disgust of polytheistic, iconic worship of Yahweh is distributed to the material things of the other gods, between the members of the group addressed by the text, distributed spatially onto both Judah and Israel/Samaria, and built on the anxiety of the past-future crisis of “the exile.” The material things and cultic spaces of the other gods thus come to embody the threat of crisis: the devastation of temple, city, the destruction and disorganisation resulting from the Babylonian

these events to the pre-exilic period made them less contentious, and allowed the narrator to maximise the horror, violence and destruction – which features without protest or contestation – in order to stimulate the recipients in a specific way: to teach them to abhor iconic polytheistic worship of Yahweh. The people strangely concur, without being given a voice. Hebrew Bible narratives are not otherwise void of dissent (Feldt, “Wilderness”). Stordalen discusses the lack of protests more extensively, suggesting that “religion” became a more prominent factor in post-exilic minority life (“Imagined,” 199).

⁹⁷ Elsner, “Objects,” 134.

⁹⁸ Elsner, “Objects,” 136.

⁹⁹ Meier, “Destroyer.”

¹⁰⁰ Note also – regarding the intention to repel and the disgust – that animals that are abominable must not be eaten (Lev 11). Abominable and unclean are not the same categories in P, but here they are connected (Gruber, “Abomination;” Gesenius s.v.)

¹⁰¹ Interestingly, Pesach is not mentioned in the Book of Judges.

attack and the exile.¹⁰² In that sense, disgust is here *economic*.¹⁰³ Framing polytheistic, iconic Yahweh-worship as disgusting is built on the anxiety of future demise of one's way of life. This anxiety makes those icons and cult objects do more work; it makes them linger on in the memorial, emotional and identity-constitutive attic, as it were. How can the difference between proper worship of Yahweh and wrong worship - that will lead to destruction and demise - be told? The answer given here is that this can happen via emotional practices. Disgust is distributed materially, spatially, and socially, and a new medium focused on aural reception is presented, along with the demand for a cultivation of binding devotion to a single deity. The clearly articulated disgust of cult objects, spaces, and other deities is an emotion that does things here; it is distributed and circulated to align bodily spaces with social spaces, but it is also clearly tied to other emotions.

One of the strategies used here for destroying inappropriate religious practices, objects, and people involves stimulating disgust vis-à-vis these practices, objects, and people, as well as binding the group together in total devotion for Yahweh: you *shall* follow your god (as totally as the ideal Josiah). The emotionality at work stimulates and trains the formation of Yahweh-devotees; they come into being via an emotional alignment with the idealised model in the economies of anxiety, disgust, and total devotion. Turning away from the objects of disgust involves a turning towards the new total devotion-self, as we saw in 23:1-3 when the entire people together voiced their consent to the words of the book and their total devotion to Yahweh, with Josiah. The underlying narrative of a future-past crisis is crucial in justifying the purging of the cult, the destruction of objects and the murder of the ritual specialists, the imaginary return to the values of the book putatively under threat hinges on the production of the crisis in the first place.¹⁰⁴ The story then works to police boundaries of the group via the economies of disgust and devotion. The imperative to become totally devoted becomes a foundation of community, as well as a guarantor of a common future. On this basis, we can summarise how memorial, medial, and emotional practices feature in this narrative's dismantling of religious practices and its modelling of new religious identity:

Strategies for dismantling religion and for replacing it in 2 Kgs 22-23

<i>Dismantling religion, repressive erasure - Conerton #1, with constitutive forgetting #3 - ("ars oblivionis"¹⁰⁵)</i>	<i>Programming new identity (ars memoriae¹⁰⁶)</i>
Removing, discarding objects, visual culture	A new auditory sensory regime (listening) A new medium, the book; remediation ¹⁰⁷ of Deut. 6

¹⁰² Sara Ahmed emphasises how emotions play important roles in identity formation and group dynamics (2004). Negative attachments like hate and fear involve positive attachment to "the imagined subjects" who are brought together in an affective economy (Ahmed, "Affective," 118). Much work on emotion emphasises that emotions are not private but interactional and relational practices within broader social frames and historical contexts (Bourke, *Story*; Scheer, "Emotions"). I do not use the word anxiety in the same way as Ahmed.

¹⁰³ Ahmed, "Affective," 120.

¹⁰⁴ Declarations of crises usually work with real events, says Ahmed, but the narrative of crisis reads those events and transforms them (Ahmed, "Affective," 132); it can become the grounds for purging / destroying that which is construed as the source of the threat. Assumptions about what is necessary to defend the group against future crises rework the narrative logic so that instead of positing an internal weakness as responsible for the crisis (Ahmed, "Affective," 133) - we and our gods are not strong enough - the group is framed as strong and unified.

¹⁰⁵ The term goes back to Harald Weinreich (Ricoeur, *Memory*, 412).

¹⁰⁶ This is Frances Yates' term (Ricoeur, *Memory*, 412).

¹⁰⁷ Not thereby making assumptions about which text is earlier, but signalling their relationship.

Material erasure, destruction of objects and sites, visual culture	Purification of the one temple, sacralisation, forging altered rituals (Pesach) that align ethnic and family levels Monopolizing ritual agency: one temple, one city, one god
Murder of ritual specialists	Providing a narrativized model of behaviour: Josiah
Delegitimizing discourse: a discourse of disgust, horror effects (a wildly violent past)	Legitimizing discourse: Authenticity claims, finding an old book, oracle The unity of the people
Affective dis-engagement via a discourse of disgust, the stimulation of horror and fear, making defection costly	Affective engagement Evoking the entire person in total devotion

5. Conclusion: on leaving traces in an oceanic amnesia

Many traits of the story analysed above are unrealistic: the centralisation of legitimate worship could not have been enforced, and was not, a custom like Shabbat would still have been practiced in a family setting, and the same goes for Pesach, as we know that Judean military forces celebrated Pesach in Egypt.¹⁰⁸ Large Jewish communities existed outside of Yehud in the Persian era, and Jewish life in the Persian empire did not conform to these ideals (pilgrimage is another case in point),¹⁰⁹ considering also networks and technologies of communication at the time. As Handy elaborates and as has become the consensus view, everyday lived religion “on the ground” in ancient Yehud continued as it had done for millennia with worship of a local pantheon of several gods with sacrifices and ancestor worship; the monolatric position belonged to an elite.¹¹⁰ In that sense Josiah’s (narrated) activities were, in a short-term perspective, historically unsuccessful. Sometime during the Hellenistic era, Yahweh came to be understood as the only god for the Jews (*Ioudaioi*).¹¹¹ But in terms of discussions of how religions disappear and persist, in the long term, the focus in this narrative on formulating an explicit programme of persistence that involved hard-core immunisation and erasure strategies like the explicit dismantling, destruction and killing of previous practices and specialists is a highly interesting novelty in the ancient history of religions.

The demise of religions has been discussed or theorised very little, whereas cultural persistence has been paid more attention.¹¹² I have suggested that the two can be intimately connected, as the above analysis has brought out. According to Weitzman and Robbins,¹¹³ like demise, persistence can also be viewed as an active process. Persistence can take the form of a set of active techniques for keeping traditions alive, for protection against dissolution, erasure and demise. Weitzman and Robbins both suggest that a self-reflective awareness of potential disappearance, making persistence into an active project, provides a defence against demise. The analyses in this article suggest that 2 Kgs 22-23 devises a

¹⁰⁸ Kratz, “Second Temple,” 253; Pakkala, “Cult Reforms,” 229.

¹⁰⁹ Handy, “Religious Peg,” 82. Extra-biblical sources from the Persian period that deal with Jewish matters do not mention “reforms.” At Elephantine, the Jewish community planned to build a temple for Yahweh, and as late as the 5th century these *Ioudaioi* were unaware of any cultic restrictions and they had friendly relations with Jerusalem and Samaria, at odds with what the Hebrew Bible narrates (Pakkala, “Cult Reforms,” 205-6). There is no evidence that the cultic cleansing and monopolisation of ritual in Jerusalem was put into practice.

¹¹⁰ Handy, “Religious Peg,” 79; Zevit, *Religions*, 661.

¹¹¹ Handy, “Religious Peg,” 80; Collins, *Invention*.

¹¹² Cf. the important strand of work on cultural persistence by thinkers such as Durkheim, Geertz and Rappaport.

¹¹³ Weitzman, *Surviving* and “Sensory Reform;” Robbins, “How Do.”

programme for training religious identity in the face of demise; this programme involves total devotion and the destruction of one's own previous "wrong ways" in material media form and the cultivation of disgust. In memory terms, here we have repressive material erasure as a type of forgetting constitutive of the new identity. What we see is a specific, religious way of curating or managing the past, of combining forgetting with memory, in a way that makes the past useful for the present.

There is general agreement that a new type of religion, or aspects of it – monotheism, secondary religion, universal religion – derives from the Hebrew Bible and that precisely this narrative is decisive for understanding these religious changes. This has been the subject of extensive discussions in Hebrew Bible studies as well as in the comparative study of religion.¹¹⁴ By focusing not only on what comes into being, but also on what is destroyed and dismantled, as well as on the memory, media, and emotional practices involved in making religious changes, new aspects of such developments come into view that have implications for broader categories of types of religions in the comparative study of religion. The analysis presented here has shown that in addition to discussing the number of deities as in the monotheism vs. polytheism distinction, the goals involved as in religions of blessing or salvation, the types of space as in utopian or universal vs. locative or folk religions,¹¹⁵ we should also discuss aspects of memory, media, and emotional formation: I have argued that we here see the formulation of a type of religion that involves a self-reflective programme for total devotion that trains emotional formation in relation to one deity, in one place, by means of a medial form focused on books and listening. As part of the programme it involves an active dismantling of, and negative discourse about, previous religious practices, thus making defection extremely costly, while the goals involved remain blessing and the spatial dimension locative. The dismantling of religion involved is based on an anxiety of demise, an awareness of potential death or oblivion,¹¹⁶ that could be of consequence in broader discussions of religion demise and persistence, or, in other words, for further studies of religious change.

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¹¹⁴ See, e.g., Auffarth, "Justice." The debates related to Assmann's term the Mosaic distinction have been huge. On religion types, see Assmann, "Monotheism;" Schjødt, "Christianization;" Smith, *Drudgery*.

¹¹⁵ As for the archaic and axial religion types, the present analyses offer a specific emphasis by highlighting concrete means of memorial and emotional formation and the meta-awareness of religion as a cultural formation in danger of dissolution, at a more detailed level of analysis, vis-à-vis the emphasis on asceticism, self-marginalisation (anti-state/society relations) and salvation out of this world in cultural evolutionary theories. For cultural evolutionary theories and religion, see Turner, Maryanski, Geertz and Petersen, *The Emergence*.

¹¹⁶ In broader terms, the presence of dismantling strategies in a "religion" vis-à-vis previous religious practices or other religions could signal the emergence of a field of "religion," as opposed to a religious field not structured by "religion."

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