

Incest and Parricide on the Throne of Judah?

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The Biblical texts involving the Hebrew kings during the First Temple period present us with fascinating contradictions and inconsistencies. During that period a great struggle was being waged between the prophets of Yahweh and those of the Canaanite gods (Albright, 1968; Cross, 1973). The people themselves, whose need for a father-god in no way ruled out their need for a mother-goddess, a fire-god, a sun-god, a sea-god, and a host of other deities, were quite willing to practice Yahwism along with Baalism, to use a convenient shorthand for the various Canaanite cults. The projection of inner infanticidal, parricidal, incestuous, and other wishes on the gods made the latter psychologically indispensable.

The people worshipped the Canaanite father god El, the mother goddess Asherah or Elath, the chief god and storm god Baal or Haddad, the virgin goddess of love and of war Anath or Ashtoreth, the sun god Shamash or Ner, the sea and river god Yamm or Nahar and the fire god Moloch or Melech side by side with their official god, Yahweh, whom they often fused or syncretized with El or with Baal. In fact, Asherah may well have been Yahweh's consort, present beside him in the Holy of Holies in Solomon's Temple (Patai, 1967, 1977; Lemaire, 1984; Dever, 1984). Infanticide, parricide and incest were commonplace in this divine family (Gordon, 1961). The writers and editors of the Biblical texts, whether Elohist, Yahwist, Deuteronomist, Chronicler, or others, were writing at a time when Yahwism needed bolstering. The kingdom of Israel had been destroyed. Judah was in dire straits. Yahweh, the protector of Israel, had seemingly failed. The historiography of the

Yahwist writers and editors became tendentious. Those kings who had promoted Yahwism and fought Baalism were glorified, whereas those who had promoted "other gods" were severely criticized. Moreover, the Yahwist writers and editors attempted to prove that Yahweh had rewarded his supporters with long and fruitful reigns while punishing the worshippers of "other gods" through destruction and pillage by their enemies. In the process, these writers and editors twisted and suppressed vital information, which can only be reconstructed by examining the inconsistencies in their combined texts in detail and by applying psychoanalytic insight.

In this chapter I shall attempt to do this for the case of King Asa of Judah, who reigned from around 911 to 871 BCE and wrought a violent religious revolution there, removing Asherah from the Temple and forcing his people to embrace Yahweh. I shall put forward a psychohistorical hypothesis to explain some striking inconsistencies in the Biblical text concerning Asa and his father King Abijam. I intend to show that my hypothesis fits the evidence we have better than the theories that have heretofore been proposed by Biblical scholars.

The primary sources we have on the kings of Judah are extremely limited. The Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah, to which the Biblical editors often allude, has been lost or suppressed, and the Biblical text itself is often our only primary source. Nevertheless, that text itself is full of fascinating contradictions and inconsistencies that cannot be explained by the mere fact of it having undergone many revisions and redactions. On the contrary, the authors of these numerous changes and revisions could have spotted these contradictions and attempted to eliminate them, yet these inconsistencies have survived in the text (see Discussion).

The psychohistorical method is foreign to Biblical scholarship. The work of Zeligs (1974, 1986) and a few other scholars cited in this essay is an exception to the rule. I anticipate the angry reactions of some traditional Biblical scholars but would remind them of the ancient Roman saying, *sine ira est studio*. I shall deal with the various possible objections to my hypothesis in the Discussion.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE KINGDOM OF JUDAH

The first king of Judah after the division of the Israelite kingdom was Rehoboam, son of Solomon and of Naamah, an Ammonite princess (I Kings 11:43, 14:21-31; II Chronicles 9:31, 12:13). According to I Kings

11:1-5 it was Naamah who imported the cult of the Ammonite fire-god Milchom or Moloch, to whom firstborn sons were sacrificed. This cult was widespread during the First Temple period. Biblical scholars differ on the date of Rehoboam's accession to the throne and on the length of his reign. Most agree that he was born around 971 BCE, became King of Judah and Israel around 931 BCE, and reigned over Judah for some 17 years (I Kings 14:21; II Chronicles 12:13; Sukenik et al., 1950-1982, Vol. 7, p. 348). He died around 915 or 914 BCE. Rehoboam was 57 years old when he died. Albright (1949) believed that Rehoboam reigned for only seven years [from 922 to 915 BCE], a view echoed by his disciples Anderson (1966) and Bright (1981) but disputed by Israeli scholars (Sukenik et al., 1950-1982, Vol. 7, p. 348), who argued that it would upset the entire Biblical chronology.

In the fifth year of Rehoboam's reign, around 925 BCE, his tiny kingdom of Judah was invaded by the Pharaoh Sheshonk, or Shishak I, of Egypt, founder of the 22nd, or Libyan, dynasty. Sheshonk destroyed several of Judah's cities, besieged Jerusalem, and forced Rehoboam to pay him tribute (I Kings 14:25-26; II Chronicles 12:2-9). Sheshonk took away all of Judah's gold. This must have been a great blow to Rehoboam's narcissism. Such was the sad fate of Judah, sandwiched as it was between its powerful enemies: Philistia to the west, Egypt to the southwest, Aram or Syria to the northeast, Assyria and Babylonia to the east.

The kingdom of Israel to the north was a sometime ally and a sometime enemy. During Rehoboam's time there was constant warfare between Judah and Israel (I Kings 14:30; II Chronicles 10-11). There were two minor prophets in his time, Shemaiah and Iddo, who warned Rehoboam against defying both Yahweh and Egypt (II Chronicles 12:5-15).

Rehoboam had 18 wives, 60 concubines, 28 ~~eight~~ sons, and 60 daughters (II Chronicles 11:21). In such a family jealousy and rivalry are rife, and the potential for incest and fratricide is high. Wives can be madly jealous and enraged at each other, and so can brothers. Rehoboam's favorite wife was his beloved cousin Maachah, the favorite daughter of his uncle Absalom, Abishalom or Abisalem (II Chronicles 11:20-21: all three names refer to the same person). Maachah had been named after Absalom's own mother (II Samuel 3:3) and was thus a "linking object" between Absalom and his mother (Volkan, 1981).

Maachah named her first son Abijam or Aviyamm, which means "Yamm is my father" (I Kings 14:31). Yamm was the Canaanite god of the sea (Gordon, 1961). Maachah worshipped Yamm's mother Asherah

as well (I Kings 15:13; II Chronicles 15:16). She had introduced a statue of Asherah into the Temple of Yahweh, where Asherah was worshipped "with some interruptions" throughout the First Temple period (Patai, 1967; Patai, 1977; Lemaire, 1984; Dever, 1984). The first such interruption is the subject of this essay.

Rehoboam made his firstborn son, Abijam, "the chief, to be ruler among his brethren: for he thought to make him king" (II Chronicles 11:22).

THE CONTRADICTIONS IN THE BIBLICAL TEXT

There are several fascinating inconsistencies in the Biblical narrative involving King Abijam, his wife and his son:

1. His name is given as Abijam or Aviyamm, meaning "Yamm is my father" (I Kings 14:31, 15:1-8), but it is later given as Abijah or Aviyah, meaning "Yahweh is my father" (II Chronicles 11:20-22, 12:16, 13:1-23).

2. His mother is identified as Maachah, daughter of Absalom (I Kings 15:2; II Chronicles 11:20-22), but she is later identified as Michaiah, daughter of Uriel of Gibeah (II Chronicles 13:2).

3. Maachah, daughter of Absalom or Abishalom and Rehoboam's favorite wife, is identified as the mother of Abijam (I Kings 15:2; II Chronicles 11:20-22) but also as the mother of his son Asa (I Kings 15:10,13; II Chronicles 15:16). At the same time Asa is not listed among her sons by Rehoboam (II Chronicles 11:20).

4. Maachah is identified as Absalom's daughter (I Kings 15:2,10; II Chronicles 11:20) yet we are told that Absalom's only daughter was Tamar (II Samuel 14:27).

5. We are told that Abijam reigned only three years and died, being succeeded by Asa. The cause of his death is not stated (I Kings 15:2-8; II Chronicles 15:2-23).

6. We are told that Abijam died in the twentieth year of the reign of King Jeroboam of Israel (I Kings 15:8-9), but we are also told that Jeroboam died during Abijah's reign (II Chronicles 13:20).

7. Asa succeeded his father Abijam as king and could have removed his mother Maachah, the Regent, from power right away (I Kings 15:13), yet he waited fifteen years to do so (II Chronicles 15:10-19).

What could account for all these blatant inconsistencies? Is there more to our texts than meets the eye? Let us examine the various attempts that have been made to resolve these contradictions.

TRADITIONAL ATTEMPTS TO RESOLVE THE CONTRADICTIONS

Traditional Jewish commentators have noted these contradictions and attempted to resolve them by weaving myths about the royal family. The discrepancy in the dates of Abijam's and Jeroboam's death gave rise to the myth that Abijah had defeated Jeroboam but

shortly thereafter occurred his death, brought about by his own crimes . . . he had indulged in excessive cruelty; he ordered the corpses of the enemy to be mutilated, and permitted them to be buried only after putrefaction had set in. Such savagery was all the more execrable as it prevented many widows from entering into a second marriage. Mutilating had made identification impossible, and so it was left doubtful whether their husbands were among the dead . . . [Ginzberg, 1967-1969, Vol. 4, p. 183, italics added].

One of my hypotheses will explore the deeper significance of this legend.

The glaring contradiction involving the identity of Asa's mother gave rise to the legend that Maachah was devoted to the gross worship of Priapos, the Greek fertility god, "an obscene little deity, a daimon of fertility, represented as a more or less grotesquely misshapen man, with a huge and erect phallos" (Ginzberg, 1967-1969, Vol. 4, p. 184; Rose, 1959, p. 175). Ginzberg (1967-1969, Vol. 6, p. 308) added:

To reconcile the contradiction between 1 Kings 15.10 and 2 Chron. 13.2, it is asserted that after repenting of her idolatrous practices, the name of Asa's mother was changed; her father's name, too, was changed; the latter was none other than the wicked Absalom. . . . The commentators Kimhi and Gersonides on 1 Kings 15.2, as well as ps.-Rashi on 2 Chron. 13.2, call attention to the fact that it was *not the mother, but the grandmother*, of Asa who had been addicted to idolatry. This is another attempt to reconcile the contradiction between 1 Kings 15.2 and 15.10 [p. 308; italics added].

This all too easy change from mother to grandmother has been adopted by the editors of the *New English Bible*, who made Maachah Absalom's granddaughter rather than his daughter, as she is in the original Hebrew, and Asa's grandmother rather than his mother, as the Biblical text repeatedly tells us she was. These unwarranted changes underscore the discomfort of the editors with our difficult text. The

traditional Jewish legends, of course, did not resolve the contradictions any more than did the editors of the *New English Bible*. As I shall argue, these legends may have been attempts to ward off the unpleasant truths that lay concealed behind them.

Modern historians have also attempted to explain these riddles and contradictions. Albright (1942) thought that "the most reasonable explanation is that Asa's own mother had died and that Rehoboam's widow continued to exercise the prerogatives of queen-mother during the infancy of Asa, whose father had died in the third year of his reign" (p. 158). This "explanation" unnecessarily calls for the death of Asa's mother during his infancy and does not explain why Maachah herself is repeatedly identified in the Biblical text as Asa's mother, not as his adoptive mother or stepmother. Nor does it explain the rest of the contradictions I have cited.

Myers (1965) gave us a supermarket list of options of which only one, namely *that Abijah and Asa were brothers*, makes any sense. Bright (1981, p. 240) thought that Asa was "either a son or a brother of Abijah" who succeeded to the throne as a boy when Abijah died prematurely. During Asa's minority

Maacah acted as regent and continued to have her way, but when Asa reached manhood he sided with the more conservative party, deposed the queen-mother, and instituted a reform (vs. 11-15), which, during his reign and that of his son Jehoshaphat (873-849), freed Judah, at least officially, of pagan cults . . . [p. 240].

Was Asa Abijah's son, or was he his brother? Why did Abijah die prematurely? What of all the contradictions I have enumerated? Bright, too, may have recoiled from the truth. Let us pursue this matter further.

Some scholars have explained the name change from Abijah to Abijam as the wish of the chroniclers to erase the idolatrous origin of Abijah's name in the god Yamm (Sukenik et al., 1950-1982, Vol. 1, p. 24). As for Abijah's mother's name, one Israeli scholar explained that Michaiah was actually Abijah's wife rather than his mother, which would make her Asa's mother, while Maachah was Abijah's mother (Sukenik et al., 1950-1982, Vol. 5, p. 194). The chroniclers, however, repeatedly tell us that Asa's mother was Maachah, daughter of Absalom or Abishalom (I Kings 15:10-13; II Chronicles 15:16). The Israeli scholar's "explanation" is as forced as that of the *New English Bible*.

THE HYPOTHESES

There may be more to all these riddles and inconsistencies than meets the eye. The following hypotheses seem to explain all the contradictions in the Biblical text:

1. Maachah committed incest with her son Abijam during Rehoboam's reign. This probably occurred in a fit of jealous rage or madness. Asa was the issue of that incest. Maachah raised Asa as Rehoboam's son, but he was really Abijam's son and his brother at the same time.

2. After Rehoboam's death, his favorite son Abijam became King. The young Asa was jealous. He did not yet know that he was Abijam's son.

3. In the third year of Abijam's reign, Maachah told Asa that he was his brother Abijam's son. She may have added that her son Abijam had seduced or raped her. Asa was enraged and resolved to kill his father-brother Abijam.

4. Asa killed Abijam three years after Abijam became king, took his place on the throne of Judah, and made his mother Maachah regent.

5. In the 15th year of his reign, the aging Maachah told Asa the whole truth. The enraged Asa removed his mother, Maachah, from power and became the sole ruler of Judah.

6. The Biblical chroniclers, writing some three centuries later, attempted to conceal the incest and the parricide by altering various details involving the two kings.

SUPPORT FOR THE HYPOTHESES

I realize that my hypotheses may upset some of my readers, but as the ancient Romans used to say, we must be cautious lest our anger blind us to historical truth (Loewenberg, 1985). Not only do the above hypotheses explain the numerous contradictions in the Biblical narrative, but the following considerations seem to lend them further support:

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1. Most of the kings of Judah and of Israel ruled for many years, except those that were assassinated (Bright, 1981). Abijam reigned for three years only.

2. Asa was clearly the son of Maachah, daughter of Absalom (I Kings 15:10-13; II Chronicles 15:16), and so was Abijam (I Kings 15:2;

II Chronicles 11:20–22). They were therefore brothers. Yet Asa was also Abijam's son (I Kings 15:8 and II Chronicles 13:23).

3. Asa was not among Maachah's sons by Rehoboam (II Chronicles 11:20). He was clearly Abijam's son, not Rehoboam's. Had Asa been Rehoboam's son, the Biblical chroniclers could simply have told us that King Abijam was succeeded by his brother Asa. They repeatedly tell us that Asa was Abijam's son.

4. Rehoboam had 28 sons (II Chronicles 11:21). This meant that Abijam had to contend with 27 rivals for the throne. His son Asa must have grown up thinking that he was Abijam's brother and feeling jealousy and rivalry for him, not knowing the true identity of his father. When Asa learned his true identity, most probably from his mother, he became enraged with his father-brother.

5. Fraternal rivalry was especially strong in Biblical times. Fratricide was not uncommon among princes. Maachah's own uncle Amnon had committed incest with his sister Tamar and had been killed for this by Maachah's own father Absalom (II Samuel 13:28–29). It is possible that Absalom's rage had come from his unconscious wish to do just what his brother Amnon had done (see below).

6. The killing of Abijam by Asa was parricide and fratricide at the same time. Asa was a "good" king who "did that which was right in the eyes of Yahweh" and removed the idols and abominations from the land (I Kings 15:11–15; II Chronicles 14:1–6). In the fifteenth year of his reign he forced all his subjects to embrace Yahweh, removed Maachah from power, and burnt her idol of Asherah (II Chronicles 15:10–19). The Biblical chroniclers had strong reasons to conceal both his being the son of an incestuous union and his parricide. They wished to portray Asa as a virtuous, Yahweh-fearing king. Their attempt to cover up the incest and the parricide would explain the various riddles and inconsistencies in their narrative.

7. Incest was punishable by death in Judah (Leviticus 20:11). When Asa learned from his mother Maachah about her "rape" by his brother Abijam, of which he was the issue, his personal rage was reinforced by his religious indignation and he decided to kill Abijam. Asa may have viewed himself as his father's Yahweh-appointed executioner: he named his firstborn son Jehoshaphat, meaning "Yahweh has passed judgment."

8. Had Abijam died of natural causes, his age at the time of his death would have been stated, as was the case with all other kings of Judah. He died in the third year of his reign of unstated causes and at an unknown age.

THE ROLE OF ABSALOM

To understand the role of Maachah, the key figure in our story, it is essential to go back to her father, Absalom, the most handsome son of King David and his third wife, Maachah, daughter of King Talmai of Geshur (II Samuel 3:3). His name, variously given as Abishalom, Abisalem and Abishalem, means "Shalem is my father." Shalem was a Canaanite god whose name means "the Perfect one" (Graves and Patai, 1964). Jerusalem was named after this god (Falk, 1987).

Absalom was his mother's favorite son, and Maachah was Absalom's favorite and beautiful daughter, named after his mother (II Samuel 3:3). Yet in the only Biblical verse listing all of his children the name of Absalom's only daughter is given as Tamar (II Samuel 14:27). Now Tamar was the name of Absalom's beautiful sister, who had been raped by her half-brother, Amnon (II Samuel 13:1-22). Did Absalom name his only daughter after his mother or after his sister?

Absalom seems to have been a highly narcissistic young man, tempestuous and violent. The confusion in Absalom's life between mother, sister and daughter may have a deeper significance. Absalom himself had never resolved his own Oedipal conflict. His rebellion against his father, David, and his sexual relations with his father's concubines "in the sight of all Israel" (II Samuel 16:22) show this quite clearly. Absalom may not have committed incest with his mother or with his sister, but he killed his half-brother, Amnon, for doing just that (II Samuel 13:22-39). His murderous rage may have derived from the projection of his unconscious guilt feelings. *Amnon had done exactly what he, Absalom, had wanted to do.*

THE ROLE OF MAACHAH

Maachah grew up in a family in which incest, fratricide, and parricide kept occurring. Her family history reads like a clinical case study. Her aunt Tamar was raped by her half-brother, Amnon (II Samuel 13:1-22). Her father, Absalom, killed his half-brother, Amnon (II Samuel 13:23-26). Absalom escaped to his father-in-law's country fearing the vengeful wrath of his father, David (II Samuel 13:37-39). Absalom returned to Jerusalem, but his father, David, refused to see him (II Samuel 14:1-24). Absalom built himself a great monument, fearing he would have no son and heir (II Samuel 18:18).

Absalom married and had three sons and one daughter, who is first

identified as Tamar (II Samuel 14:27) but who is later identified as Maachah (I Kings 15:2, 10; II Chronicles 11:20–21). After Maachah was born her father Absalom was reconciled to his own father, David (II Samuel 14:31–33). When Maachah was a girl, however, Absalom rebelled against his father and committed incest publicly with his father's concubines (II Samuel 15:1–16:22). Soon thereafter Absalom was killed by David's army chief, Joab (II Samuel 18:15).

Maachah was no more able to mourn the death of her father Absalom than her father Absalom himself had been able to mourn the death of his own mother Maachah or the rape of his sister, Tamar (Mitscherlich, 1975; Volkan, 1981). This was why he named his daughters for them. Maachah's feelings seem to have remained "fixated" on her father Absalom.

Maachah was a very attractive woman, her cousin Rehoboam's favorite wife (II Chronicles 11:20–22). Her favorite goddess was Asherah, the Canaanite mother-goddess and fertility goddess (II Kings 15:13; II Chronicles 15:16), whom she introduced into the Temple of Yahweh (Patai, 1967). The Jewish legend that has her "grossly worshipping" the Greek fertility god Priapos with his enormous erect penis may have derived from the heavy sexual undertone that the readers sensed in the Biblical text. Maachah was grossly "stuck" in her own incestuous feelings and desires. Her worship of Yamm, the Canaanite sea god, and her naming her firstborn son after him, are significant. In Canaanite myth, Yamm was killed by his brother, Baal (Gordon, 1961), just as Maachah's father Absalom had killed his brother, Amnon.

Maachah may have seduced her firstborn son Abijam in a fit of madness, when she became enraged with her husband and jealous of his other wives. She may also have unconsciously transferred her incestuous feelings from her father, Absalom, to her son, Abijam. At some point after the death of her husband Rehoboam she may have been overwhelmed by guilt feelings, which led her to tell her son Asa that he was really his brother Abijam's son. She must have told him that she had been seduced or raped by Abijam, for Asa killed Abijam and took his place while Maachah remained Regent for 15 years (II Chronicles 15:10–19).

Then, when Maachah was growing old, she may have told Asa the truth. His rage at her was great, for he removed her from power, destroying and burning the idol of her Asherah. Asa's killing of the mother-goddess Asherah was unconscious matricide. It is most interesting that in both Canaanite and Hittite myth the mother-goddess attempted to seduce her own son (Albright, 1968), just as Maachah had

done. Maachah, who actively practiced the Canaanite religion, must have known this myth.

Rehoboam had made Abijam his successor, and upon Rehoboam's death around 914 BCE Abijam became King of Judah. The widow Maachah became Queen Mother, but after Abijam's murder by Asa she became Regent as well (I Kings 15:13; II Chronicles 15:16). She was the real power behind Asa's throne. After Abijam's coronation his brother, Asa, was jealous. When he learned he was Abijam's son as well as his brother, Asa's rage grew murderous. When he could no longer contain his rage he resolved to kill his father-brother. It took Maachah another 15 years as Regent to tell Asa the whole truth. It was then that Asa destroyed and burned down his mother's goddess and removed his mother from power.

Abijam had taken up his dead father's war against King Jeroboam of Israel. The chroniclers tell us that he dealt a major defeat to Jeroboam, who lost several important cities and some half a million men and died of grief or illness (II Chronicles 13:13-20). Among the cities captured by Abijam from Jeroboam were the holy city of Bethel and her "daughters" or neighboring towns. This story may be apocryphal and exaggerated, however, for I Kings makes no mention of Abijam's great victory, stating only that Abijam reigned for three years and died in the 20th year of Jeroboam's reign (around 911 BCE)—a glaring contradiction to II Chronicles.

That we are not told the cause of Abijam's death is important. What is left out of a story is often just as significant as what is in it. It is possible that the Biblical chroniclers were trying to cover up King Abijam's incest with his mother, Maachah, and his murder by his son-brother Asa by inventing a new mother for Abijam, by changing his name to Abijah and by having him kill King Jeroboam of Israel. King Asa was King Abijam's brother whether or not Abijam had committed incest with his mother, for they were both indisputably the sons of Maachah, and Abijam was killed in the 20th year of Jeroboam's reign.

INCEST AND PARRICIDE FROM DAVID TO ASA

It is fascinating to go back to King David himself and to trace the transmission of the themes of incest and parricide through the generations from David to Absalom to Maachah to Abijam to Asa. David himself was overly permissive and inadequate as a father, craving the

love of his children and striving to be the reverse of his stern, rigid, and rejecting father, Jesse (Zeligs, 1960).

When David's son Amnon seduced and raped his daughter, Tamar, David did nothing. When his other son Absalom killed Amnon, David was angry and sorrowful, yet he did nothing and later reconciled himself to Absalom. When Absalom rebelled against him and slept with David's concubines "in the sight of all Israel," David still sought Absalom's love. The tragic chain of events that led from Absalom's parricidal rebellion to his great-grandson Asa's political and religious revolution may have begun with Jesse and David.

DEICIDE AS MATRICIDE

When Asa learned the whole truth from Maachah, he became enraged at her, feeling that she had exploited, used and manipulated him. He zealously removed her from power and destroyed her goddess, Asherah, and her entire legacy. As Sachar (1958) put it, "Asa went so far in his zeal that he punished the aged queen-mother for having *teraphim* [idols] in her possession and had the infamous emblem solemnly burnt in the valley of Kidron" (p. 46). Sachar seems to have had no idea what personal rage lay behind Asa's zeal.

Maachah was very powerful after the death of Abijam and clearly was "the power behind the throne" of both Abijam and Asa. The man who had killed his father-brother and taken his place on the throne of Judah vented his rage upon his mother's goddess because he could not bring himself to kill his own mother. Asa's "killing" of his mother's Asherah, the mother-goddess, was unconscious matricide.

The Biblical chroniclers presented Asa as one of the virtuous monarchs of Judah. He destroyed the "abominations" and the idols of his mother Maachah. He knew how to forge political alliances that brought peace and prosperity to his realm. He eliminated the Canaanite practice of having sexual relations with the Kdeshim, the holy male prostitutes or "sodomites" of the goddess of sacrifice, Kadesh, upon the bamoth or high places (I Kings 15:11). He "took away the altars of the strange gods, and the high places, and brake down the images, and cut down the groves [Asherim] . . . he took away out of all the cities of Judah the high places and the images" (II Chronicles 14:2-4).

Asa's reformist zeal in destroying the "monster" or idol of Asherah that his mother had erected (I Kings 15:13) came not so much from his love of Yahweh but from his profound rage at his father-brother and at

his mother. Indeed, "the high places were not removed" (I Kings 15:14; II Chronicles 15:17). Asa made constant war against his "enemies" (I Kings 15:16-24; II Chronicles 14:7-14) and killed every subject who refused to embrace Yahweh (II Chronicles 15:13).

Anderson (1966) saw Asa's actions in terms of power: "Asa shook himself free from the control of his mother, deposing her from her regency and banning the worship of Asherah, the Canaanite mother-goddess . . ." (p. 205). But King Asa's political actions were extreme. He "went so far as to bribe Damascus [Aram] to attack his northern rival" (Sachar, 1958, p. 46). Sachar was alluding to the pact made by Asa with King Benhaddad of Aram [Syria] against King Baasha of Israel (I Kings 15:18-21; II Chronicles 16:1-5). It is noteworthy that one of the cities captured and destroyed by Benhaddad was Abel-Beth-Maachah, whose name may mean "the mourner of the house of Maachah" (I Kings 15:20). This city's name was dropped from the II Chronicles version.

THE END OF A REFORMER KING

Asa was very young when he became king and may well have been manipulated by his mother-grandmother Maachah. We have conflicting accounts in I Kings and in II Chronicles concerning his wars. We are told that he made war on King Baasha of Israel "all their days" (I Kings 15:16) and that Baasha died in the 26th year of Asa's reign (I Kings 16:6-8). Then we are told that there was peace for 35 years and that Baasha did not invade Judah until the 36th year of Asa's reign (II Chronicles 15:, 19 and 16:1). These obvious contradictions stem from the chroniclers' attempts to portray Asa as peace-loving. Actually Asa was quite warlike, not only fighting Baasha and his successors but also massacring the Cushites (II Chronicles 14:7-14). As noted earlier he killed all his subjects who would not embrace Yahweh (II Chronicles 15:13). He seems to have seethed with righteous, murderous rage. Wars and massacres may well issue from unconscious guilt feelings (Fornari, 1974).

DISCUSSION

Some readers may question my underlying assumption that the contradictions in the Biblical text arose at the hands of a group of editors who shared a common psychological motivation, however unconscious, that resulted in the identifiable contradictions. I may seem to have overlooked the fact that these texts evolved over the course of centuries, through a

forest of redactions; that the editing process took place over extended periods of time and at the hands of multiple groups of editors; and that they reflect different and ancient Biblical traditions.

I am, however, well aware of this fact. The only motivation I assume all the editors of the Biblical texts to have shared is that of promoting the Yahweh religion and denigrating the loathsome religion of the Canaanites. This can hardly be disputed. It is precisely the survival of these glaring inconsistencies in the Biblical texts, despite all the editing and re-editing, that cries for an explanation. This explanation I have attempted to provide.

Other readers may ask why such pains were taken by the Biblical editors to conceal the facts of incest and parricide in this case, when such occurrences are often recorded openly in the Biblical text. This objection, however, overlooks the fact that cases of incest and parricide were recorded in the Bible only when they could be condemned by the Biblical editors and when the perpetrators had been punished, as was the case with Amnon and with Absalom. In the case of Asa, a king who promoted the Yahweh religion very vigorously, it would have run quite contrary to the aims of the Biblical writers and editors to acknowledge him as the offspring of incest and as a parricide, both designations punishable by death by their time and anathema to the authors of Leviticus.

Some readers might be bothered by my seemingly anachronistic interpretations. I may appear to have overlooked the three centuries that elapsed between the incest/parricide and the writing of the texts. Maachah's cult of Asherah may have involved ritual orgies of the Bacchanalian type later condemned by Hosea and Amos. Not only cult prostitutes, but incest may have been socially acceptable among the cult's participants on such occasions. Abijam may also have committed incest as a political act, under his mother's guidance, immediately after Rehoboam's death, as a means to consolidate his throne. Absalom's incest with David's concubines may have had cultic significance as well. It was definitely a public political statement of Absalom claiming David's kingdom.

In other words, these readers' objection might run: even if Asa was the issue of incest, there is no need to assume that the incest was a private act that Maachah kept secret for years. The fact that an editor writing around 600 BCE suppressed references to incest does not mean that the participants in that incest three centuries earlier shared the same cultural outlook. Three centuries is a long time, and we have evidence that royal incest was publicly acceptable in the early era of Judah: Tamar told her

brother Amnon he should request her from their father King David "for he will not withhold me from thee" (II Samuel 13:13).

My hypothesis, however, is that Maachah had to keep the incest secret because her son-grandson Asa was born *while her husband, King Rehoboam, was still alive*. Royal incest may have been acceptable in the days of Kings David, Solomon, Rehoboam, and Abijam, but it was certainly condemned in the Biblical texts such as Leviticus, Kings, and Chronicles and was punishable by death. Indeed, mother-son incest was especially abhorrent to the authors of these texts. Asa, the king who removed Asherah from the Holy of Holies of the Temple of Yahweh and violently wrought the Yahweh revolution in Judah, could not have been presented as the issue of such incest and as a murderer of his own father.

Here I come to the strongest possible objection to my thesis. Some readers may accept my incest hypothesis while rejecting the parricide one. Where the argument about incest may be attractive because it resolves the obvious contradictions in the text, the argument about parricide may seem sheer speculation. At first sight there seems to be no problem in the Biblical text concerning Abijah's death. Biblical scholars are agreed that the phrase "slept with his fathers" always means died by natural causes. Since that phrase is used of Abijam in both I Kings 15:8; II Chronicles 14:1 my hypothesis of parricide seems untenable.

Is it? As I have amply shown, there are many problems in the Biblical text on the issue of Abijam's death, not the least of which is whether it occurred during Jeroboam's reign in Israel or after the latter's death, and why Abijam died prematurely. Let us for a moment put ourselves in the shoes (or sandals) of the Biblical editors. If we wished to praise King Asa, the king who eliminated the Canaanite gods and promoted the Yahweh religion, the king who wrought the first great religious revolution in Judah, would we not have "stooped" to concealing the violent death of his father at Asa's own hands, if in fact it did occur? For the editors both of Kings and of Chronicles, telling us that Abijam "slept with his fathers" may have been a neat way of concealing his violent death.

Some readers, Biblical scholars especially, may object that I have argued from theory to a historical fantasy, and not from historical facts, via theory, to a sober historical reconstruction. My approach may seem unbending and dogmatic to them. Yet I have put forward a carefully documented set of hypotheses to explain numerous and glaring inconsistencies in the Biblical texts. My approach may be unconventional among religious historians and Biblical scholars, but this makes it novel rather than dogmatic.

A FINAL WORD

I realize that the "fantastic" psychohistorical hypotheses I have put forward in this study are just that, hypotheses. The dearth of documentary evidence makes it impossible to know what happened with any degree of certainty. My only claim is that the hypotheses I have advanced explain the very contradictions in the Biblical text that conventional religious historians and Biblical scholars have been unable to reconcile. History and politics, as Loewenberg (1983) has written, begin in the family.

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