THE DEATH OF JOSIAH ACCORDING TO 1 ESDRAS

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I

Judaism of the late Second Temple period is characterized by intensive literary activity. The sacred "books of the ancestors" (cf. Prologue Wisdom Ben Sira 10) are copied and re-edited as well, and new literary compositions, parabiblical and non-biblical, were produced. An interesting example of this literary creativity is the book of 1 Esdras (1 Esd), constituting a new composition in its own right, dating to the second century BC.² Since it is based on biblical and nonbiblical texts,³ the book of 1 Esdras, in my view, represents an original work in Greek as far as its composition is concerned.⁴

It is the purpose of this article to analyze the passage about the death of king Josiah in 1 Esd 1:23-30. This passage constitutes one of the three versions of the death

¹A preliminary version of this article was read at the SBL Meeting of 1994, November 19-22, in Chicago.


³For the question whether the nonbiblical section (the story of the three youths) may go back to a Semitic Vorlage see Z. and D. Talshir, "The Story of the Three Youths (1 Esdras 3-4) — Towards the Question of the Language of its Vorlage," Textus 18 (1995) 135-155.

⁴The question whether 1 Esdras should be considered an original work in Greek, or a translation of this (new) literary composition in Hebrew (and/or Aramaic) is a matter of dispute. See Williamson, "The Problem with First Esdras" (above, n. 2) 212ff. We will address this issue below.

of the pious king, the other two being 2 Ki 23:29-30 and 2 Chron 35:20-25. The version of 1 Esdras, representing a translation of the corresponding story in 2 Chron 35, displays remarkable differences with the Hebrew text of 2 Chron as we know it. It will be argued that the version of 1 Esdras is a story in its own right, reflecting to some extent a creative approach towards its parent text since it contains elements of interpretative reworking.

Differences between LXX and MT are dealt with, quite often, in an *ad hoc* fashion by examining at the word level which Hebrew reading may underly the Greek. In this study, however, the method of analysis is different. In order to take passages like 1 Esd 1:23-30 as seriously as possible in their own right it seems more appropriate to deal with such a passage by way of a *contextual approach*. The basic idea of this approach is to examine differences between LXX and MT not on word level, but at the level of its own context in Greek, first of all the immediate one (pericope, or chapter), before dealing with the question of the underlying Hebrew text. The crucial matter is to see whether specific readings in the Greek text cohere with each other and whether they make sense as part of the Greek text as it stands.

II

A comparison between (MT) 2 Chron 35:20-25 and 1 Esd 1:23-31 reveals quite a number of differences. It is not the purpose of this article to give a full analysis of all differences. We will concentrate on the major differences by examining how they function in their actual context of 1 Esdras.

1. Our first case concerns parts of 2 Chron 35:22-23 // 1 Esd 1:26-28:

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כ יחלות וב התמיש
[...]
ויר יורם
מלך יושיה
מלך יושיה
ויאמר המלך עלבר
עברית
יתר
כ התיילית מואר
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According to Chron king Josiah “disguised himself” in order to fight against the king of Egypt. Scholars have pointed out that this motif has its parallel in the story about

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king Ahab in 2 Chron 18 (cf. 2 Kings 22): In his battle against Aram “the king of Israel disguised himself” (יהוה המשר יבש ארם). Interestingly, this is not the only parallel between both chapters. Other points of agreement are:
(a) in 18:33 we read that the king is shot by an archer (יוהש משב ליבש); cf. 35:23: ‘the archers shot him’;
(b) in 18:33 the king says, “I am wounded” (אני הצלחת); the same wording is used in 35:23.

Thus both passages display a corresponding pattern of the following motifs: a disguised king in battle, being shot by (an) archer(s), and the king saying, “I am wounded.”

The story as found in 1 Esdras is different: king Josiah does not disguise himself, but “he attempted to fight” the king of Egypt (v. 26), and no archers were going to shoot him, but “the captains went down against the king Josiah” (v. 27). Only the utterance of the king in v. 28a of 1 Esd 1 (“I am very weak”) seems to correspond with the text of Chronicles. What are these differences to be explained? In line with our contextual approach we need to determine, first of all, whether the specific readings of 1 Esdras are related to each other. This indeed seems to be the case. According to the version of Chronicles, the king, having disguised himself, is shot by anonymous archers. This makes sense, for who else could attack a disguised king (cf. 2 Chron 18)?
The text of 1 Esdras, however, also makes sense, since because the king has not disguised himself it is possible for “the captains” or “the officers” to go down in order to fight against him. The important thing is that this too has a parallel in the story of 2 Chron 18 where we read in v. 30 that the king of Aram, not yet aware of the fact that the king of Israel had disguised himself, ordered “the commandery of the chariotry” (שד ברובא יריב) to attack the king of Israel. In 1 Esdras Josiah did not disguise himself, so here “the captains” can enter the battle scene to confront him as they do in this text. In light of the parallel in 2 Chron 18 the idea of introducing “the captains” might well have been derived from that passage.

The text of 1 Esdras relates that the captains “went down”. The choice of this verb (καταβαίνει) is most appropriate contextually because the battle was to take place “in the plain of Megiddo” (v. 27). Thus the captains descend into the plain of Megiddo. Compare for this idiom 1 Macc 10:71: κατέβησθι προς ἡμᾶς εἰς το πεδίον. This text is

also important for the use of the preposition πρὸς: it is used here in the negative sense of ‘against’ and this also makes perfect sense in our text of 1 Esdras.

As to the rendering of ἡποθένησα, it is not clear whether this Greek word conveys the same meaning as of the Hebrew יִהְיֶה, i.e. of being wounded. The Greek word could refer to a weakness resulting from fighting (cf. ἀπὸ τῆς μάχης in the same verse, and compare the use of ἄσθενεω in passages such as LXX Jer 26:6, 12, 16), but it is also possible to think of a weakness resulting from an illness, or simply from exhaustion. It is interesting to note that the plus, ἀπὸ τῆς μάχης, also seems to point to 2 Chron 18 as its source, because v. 33 of that chapter reads מְלַמַּת יְהוָה (LXX Chron: ἑξάγαγε μὲ ἐκ τοῦ πολέμου).

The intriguing question is why Josiah is not portrayed in 1 Esdras as someone who disguised himself like the king of Israel, Ahab, did. One can imagine that the author of 1 Esdras did not like the agreement between king Josiah and king Ahab, the last one having a bad reputation as a most impious king, whereas king Josiah is presented in 1 Esdras, even more so than in Chronicles, as a most pious king (see 1 Esd 1:21ff.). It might also be that the idea of a king entering the battlefield in disguise conveyed the negative connotation of cowardice.


According to Chronicles king Josiah entered the battlefield on his chariot, for after having been shot by (an) arrow(s) of the archers despite his disguise, the king is taken “from his chariot” (v. 24), and “is led” (by his men) to his second chariot.

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7The fact that according to v. 29 the king “ascended” (ἀνέβη) his second chariot favors the second option. See also Z. Talshir (above, n. 5) 220.
8For the meaning ‘army in battle array’ for Hebrew מְלַמַּת see HALAT s.v.
9On these verses see my article in ZAW 103 (above, n. 2).
The story as presented in 1 Esdras is different. Verse 29 of the Greek text does not refer to his being taken from his chariot, but “out of the line” (cf. “out of the battle” in v. 28). And v. 26 has the remarkable passage, that “Josiah did not turn (himself) to his chariot.” According to 1 Esdras Josiah apparently did not enter the battle field on his chariot. The beginning of v. 29 (“and he ascended his second chariot”) fits in with this picture.

The text of v. 26 is the most puzzling one. It is often translated wrongly (e.g. the NEB: “Josiah did not turn his chariot”), or if translated properly is typified as “recht unverständlich”.\(^9\) W. Rudolph claims that the Greek resulted from a corruption; the correct and original reading should have been: ἀπὸ τῆς ῥήματος,\(^1\) but this does not help us any further.

It is to be noted that contextually speaking, the specific readings of v. 26 and v. 29 (“out of the line”) of 1 Esd 1 are clearly related to each other: king Josiah did not enter the battle ground on a chariot, and therefore he could not be taken “from his chariot.” One wonders what the background of the idea of 1 Esdras that Josiah was not going to fight on his chariot might be. The difference between Chronicles and 1 Esdras pertains to a difference in the practice of warfare regarding the role of the chief commander of an army. There is reason to believe that the author of 1 Esd has introduced here a Persian battle practice. In his well-known book *Anabasis*, Xenophon tells us that Cyrus the Younger, just before the beginning of the battle at Cunaxa in the year 401 BC, “descended from his chariot, put on his armour, and having mounted his horse, he took the spears in his hands” (Κῦρος τε κατασφηδόσας ἀπὸ τοῦ ἄρματος τὸν θώρακα ἔνεδυ καὶ ἄναβας ἐπὶ τὸν ὑπὸν τὰ πολλὰ εἰς τῆς χειρας ἔλαβε [I,8,3]). Thus Cyrus took up his place in the center of the battle array, as the chief commander of his army.\(^1\) This may provide the clue for the notion that king Josiah left his chariot (i.e. a chariot for travelling) before going to fight. Understood this way the text of v. 26a makes perfect sense:

Josiah did not turn himself to his chariot, but (ἀλλὰ) he attempted to fight with him.

It is not stated in 1 Esdras that the king mounted his horse, as Cyrus did, but this might well be meant by implication since it was the only alternative of the time.

\(^{10}\) K. F. Pohlmann, 3. Esra-Buch (JSBRZ I,5; Gütersloh 1980) 392. His translation reads, “Und Josia wandte sich nicht um zu seinem Wagen.”

\(^{11}\) W. Rudolph, Chronikbücher, 330.

3. Our third case concerns 2 Chron 35:22b // 1 Esd 1:26b.27a (for related passages see below):

The text of Chronicles has it that “he (i.e. Josiah) did not listen to the words of Necho,” but 1 Esdras reads quite differently here: “(Josiah was) disregarding the words of the prophet Jeremiah.” This is a well-known difference between both texts. As to the question of temporal priority it is not likely that the text of 1 Esdras reflects a text prior to the text of Chronicles, because it would be difficult to explain why Jeremiah should have been removed and replaced by the king of Egypt.

It is interesting to note that the prophet Jeremiah is mentioned in other places in the immediate context, and hence one could argue that this might have been one of the reasons to introduce him also in our text. The places are: 1:30.45.54, and 2:1:

1:30: καὶ ἐβρήσανεν Ἰερεμίας ἣ προφήτης ὑπὲρ Ἰωσίου, cf. 2 Chron 35:25 (without “the prophet”);

1:45: “Zedekiah showed no shame at the words spoken by the prophet Jeremiah from the mouth of the Lord” (ἐν τῶν ῥηθέντων λόγον ὑπὸ Ἰερεμίου τοῦ προφήτου ἐκ στόματος τοῦ κυρίου), cf. 2 Chron 36:12 (without ‘the words spoken by’);

1:54: ...εἰς ἀναπλήρωσιν τοῦ ρήματος τοῦ κυρίου ἐν στόματι Ἰερεμίου, cf. 2 Chron 36:21;

2:1: ...εἰς συντελείαν τοῦ ρήματος τοῦ κυρίου ἐν στόματι Ἰερεμίου, cf. 2 Chron 36:22.

These places agree with the parallel texts in 2 Chron, though it should be noted that 1 Esdras has a plus in 1:30 (“the prophet”) and in 1:45 (“the words spoken by”). The fact that Jeremiah is mentioned so often in the immediate context may well have stimulated the introduction of the prophet Jeremiah in our text, but it does not explain why the prophet Jeremiah figures in the story of the death of Josiah. It has been argued that the author of 1 Esdras changed “Necho” to “Jeremiah” because of the difficulty felt by him (as by modern scholars) of “the disturbing reference of God’s words to a foreign king.”

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13 For this view see S. L. McKenzie, The Chronicler’s Use of the Deuteronomistic History (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985) 188.


15 Z. Talshir (note 5 above) 232.
relationship between the words of Jeremiah and the words spoken by the king of Egypt in the preceding verses (1 Esd 1:24f.). In order to answer this question one must ask which passage of Jeremiah is here in mind.\(^{16}\)

In the case of the other places mentioned above concerning a word, or words, spoken by Jeremiah, one can easily trace the passages from the book of Jeremiah that are being referred to. But which passage from the book of Jeremiah is the one the author of 1 Esd 1:26 had in mind? It seems very likely that the author of 1 Esdras had in mind the oracle about Egypt in Jeremiah 46:2-12 (cf. LXX Jer 26:2-12), in which the defeat of the Egyptian army by Nebuchadnezzar is announced. The heading of this prophecy reads as follows:

Concerning the army of pharaoh Necho, king of Egypt, which was by the river Euphrates at Carchemish....

In light of the striking agreement between the data of the heading of this prophecy and 1 Esd 1:23 (cf. 2 Chron 35:21), it is conceivable that an author well-versed in "the books of the ancestors" related the story of the death of Josiah with the prophecy of Jeremiah 46.

As a result of the introduction of the prophet Jeremiah, the text of 1 Esd 1:26 does not refer directly to the words spoken by the king of Egypt in v. 24f., as is the case with the parallel text of Chronicles. This is why the Greek text of 1 Esdras does not read, "he did not listen to." Instead, the verb προσέχω (c. dative) is used here, meaning here, and elsewhere in LXX, 'turn one's attention to something.' (It is to be noted that this verb never occurs in the LXX as an equivalent of the Hebrew root יִמְנַשָּׁה.) Thus the Greek text testifies to a clear awareness of the fact that by introducing the words of the prophet Jeremiah in our text the verb had to be adjusted accordingly. The text of 1 Esd 1:26f., "disregarding (οὐ προσέχον) the words of the prophet Jeremiah from the mouth of the Lord; but he rather (ἀλλὰ) undertook the war with him in the plain of Megiddo," further implies that if Josiah should have given heed to the words of the prophet Jeremiah he would not have undertaken to fight with the king of Egypt.\(^{17}\)

The question remains, however, how to understand the relationship between the words of the king of Egypt in 1 Esd 1:24f. and the words of Jeremiah in v. 26. In Chronicles the situation is clear: Josiah did not listen to "the words of Necho" (v. 22)

by which the author refers to what has been said by the king of Egypt in v. 21. Things are different in 1 Esdras: there is no explicit relationship between vv. 24f. and v. 26. Yet, if we assume that v. 26 has the oracle of Jeremiah 46 in mind, an underlying relationship between these verses suggests itself: after having heard the words of the king of Egypt Josiah should have realized that the prophecy of Jeremiah 46 was going to be fulfilled. If he had done so, he would not have decided to fight against the king of Egypt.

This idea of an implicit relationship between v. 24f. on the one hand and v. 26 on the other raises the question whether the words of the king of Egypt as formulated in 1 Esd 1:24f. can be understood in this that way. The text of 1 Esd 1:24f. in fact differs in some instances from the corresponding passage in 2 Chron 35:21, and one wonders whether these differences may be due to the shift from Necho to Jeremiah in 1 Esd 1:26.

(a) The beginning of v. 25 reads, “It is not against you that the Lord God has sent me; for my war is by the Euphrates,” which differs from the text of Chronicles in two respects: the king of Egypt is being sent by the Lord God, and his war will be by the Euphrates. The Greek text is saying, basically, that God has sent the king of Egypt to wage war somewhere by the river Euphrates. (For the Greek ἐπὶ τοῦ Εὐφράτου see v. 23.) The wording of 1 Esdras makes good sense if read with the oracle of Jeremiah in the background. This does apply, first of all, to the specification “by the Euphrates.”

17 For a similar tradition see L. Ginzberg, The Legends of the Jews (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1968) 4:283.

18 According to Jer 46:2 the Egyptian army was defeated by Nebuchadnezzar “in the fourth year of Jehoiaikim”, that is to say, a few years after the death of Josiah. It may well be that this has given rise to the rendering ἐγκάθισεν πόλεμον in 1 Esd 1:23 (i.e. ‘to incite a war,’ MT בָּלָל). See also LXX Micha 3:5.
the introduction of this element in the direct speech of the king of Egypt by way of harmonization with v. 23 can very well be seen as an element that could have reminded Josiah of the oracle of Jer 46 (see Jer 46:2.10). The same can be said of the claim of the king of Egypt as being sent by God. In regard to this aspect the passage of 1 Esd 2:1-3 (cf. 2 Chron 36:22f.) is very helpful:

[...] the Lord, in order to fulfil his word spoken through Jeremiah, moved the spirit of Cyrus to make a proclamation throughout his empire, which he also put in writing: This is the decree of Cyrus king of Persia: The Lord of Israel, the most high Lord, has made me king of the world.

This passage provides a nice illustration of a conceptual relationship between the fulfilment of a prophecy and the claim of a foreign king about God as the ultimate subject of his doings. In line with 1 Esd 2:1-3 the idea behind our passage can be reconstructed as follows: in order to fulfil the prophecy of Jer 46 the Lord moved the spirit of the king of Egypt to wage war by the Euphrates, and this clarifies the fact that the king of Egypt said to Josiah that he was sent by the Lord. So again, the statement of the king of Egypt as being sent by the Lord God could have helped Josiah realize that the king of Egypt was doing something that was predicted in an oracle.

(b) The second difference of interest concerns the next part of v. 25: “and now the Lord is with me, the Lord is with me hastening me forward.” 2 Chron 35:21 offers a different text here: “God has said to make haste.” The idea of Chronicles that God “has said” something to Necho is also found in the next verse (22) of this chapter: “the words of Necho from the mouth of God.” This notion is not expressed in the text of 1 Esdras. The part of v. 25 under discussion is longer than the text of Chronicles; pluses are “now” and “with me” (twice). It seems likely that these pluses are derived from the immediate context: for “now” see the preceding part of 2 Chron 35:21 (וַיָּשֶׂה, פְּנֵי), and for “with me” see the following part of the same verse in 2 Chron 35 (עֲמֵנִי). But what about the passage of 1 Esdras as it stands? This passage too, in my view, makes perfect sense if read in the light of the oracle of Jeremiah 46: now the Lord is with the king of Egypt, that is, on his way to Carchemish (and for that reason Josiah should let him go), but the Lord will not be with him later during the battle on the Euphrates! The text of 1 Esdras is full of irony here: now the Lord is with the king of Egypt, and he is even hastening him (to the defeat at Carchemish).

(c) The last part of 1 Esd 1:25 reads, “Withdraw, and do not oppose the Lord.” The emphasis in the Greek text is on the idea of not withstanding the Lord as the one who dispatched the king of Egypt. The last clause of the text of Chron (“lest he [God] destroy you”) has no equivalent in 1 Esdras. It may have been considered not fitting
the picture of king Josiah as a most pious person (cf. 1 Esd 1:21f.), all the more so since in Deuteronomy the use of the verb “being destroyed” is typical of the punishment for disobedience to the Law. It might also be that the last clause was left untranslated because it is not in line with any prophecy about king Josiah (see esp. 2 Chron 34:28).

Thus one can say that the words of the king of Egypt as they are formulated in 1 Esd 1:24f. make perfect sense if understood to evoke the prophecy of Jer 46:2-12. The passage means that if Josiah had listened well to these words, he would have been reminded of the words of the prophecy, and if he had realized this and had paid heed to that oracle of Jeremiah he would not have waged war with the king of Egypt.

III

The story of the death of king Josiah in 1 Esdras turns out to be a version of this story in its own right. Several specific readings constituting remarkable differences with MT appear to correlate with each other; they make perfect sense as part of the Greek text as it stands.

Having said this it must now to be asked: how does this pertain to the question of the underlying Hebrew text of 1 Esd 1:23-31? Scholars have argued that in some places the parent text was different from MT Chronicles. As such, passages of 1 Esd 1:23-31 can easily be retroverted into Hebrew, like the following demonstrate:

verse 26b: לא שמר את dribא y-pw+ 33-ph 533 66
for ou prosochon remasian lereymi tou profhtou ek stoma tos kuryiou

verse 27b: ורד ומשריר אל מלך יושביה
for kai katibhsan oi arkhontes prós ton basilēa Iωsίαν

However, the fact that it is possible to retrovert these and other passages into Hebrew does not necessarily mean that the underlying Hebrew text read accordingly. It is very doubtful whether the variant readings just mentioned would make sense in the version of the story of the death of Josiah as given in Chronicles. As we have pointed out above, these and other specific readings in Greek are related to other ones in the passage of 1 Esdras, which also differ from (MT) Chronicles. To give an example: The Greek rendering ἀπό τῆς παρατάξεως in 1 Esd 1:28 is clearly related to v. 26 where, quite different from MT, the idea has been introduced that king Josiah was not going to fight on his chariot (as he is supposed to do according to the Hebrew text). The Greek phrase of v. 28 can thus be accounted for as a ‘free’ rendering
in order to give the Greek version coherence (see also the plus of v. 28a [ἀπὸ τὴς μάχης]). It is therefore unnecessary to assume that this phrase reflects Hebrew מַעֲרֹבָּה in its Vorlage (instead of מַעֲרֹבָּה) as has been suggested, apart from the fact that this is not the only Hebrew equivalent of Greek παραστάσεως (other equivalents are מַעֲרֹבָּה or מַעֲרֹבָּה). Moreover, as far as the Hebrew text is concerned, the variant reading מַעֲרֹבָּה does not fit very well contextually speaking, because the second part of the verse (2 Chron 35:24b) where it is said that the king was carried by his men in “his second chariot,” presupposes the other chariot to be mentioned before.

Since it is not plausible to reconstruct a Vorlage of 1 Esd 1:23-30 which does not constitute a meaningful and coherent story, the alternative would be to assume that the parent text of 1 Esd 1:23-30 was in line with all places where the Greek version differs significantly from MT Chronicles. This hypothesis, though theoretically possible, is unlikely and unnecessary too. It is more probable to assume that the author of 1 Esd made a translation of the Hebrew text of 2 Chronicles 35 at his disposal in a free and creative way, that is to say, in a way that allowed him to introduce elements of interpretative reworking. One of the elements that clearly suggests that our author-translator was able to produce a meaningful text in its own right is the fact that 1 Esd 1:23-30, and the rest of the book as well, is characterized by good Koine usage.

In regard to our passage the good Koine usage concerns specific words and expressions in particular. It should be noted that several words are used which are typical of 2 Maccabees: ἐπιστευέω, συμβαίνει (συμβηπτει!), διαπέμπω, μεταλλάχω τὸν βιον οὐσίων. The idiomatic expression συνίστημι τῶν πόλεμον is also known from LXX Daniel (7:21), 1 Macc, and Polybius, whereas the verb ἐναντιόμαι is used, apart from 1 Esd 8:51, in the rest of the LXX only in a few places (Prov, SapSal, 3 and 4 Macc). The

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19See e.g. T. Muraoka, A Greek-Hebrew/Aramaic Index to 1 Esdras (Chico: Scholars Press, 1984) s.v. It might be that the actual rendering in Greek was not only realized in analogy with ἀπὸ τῆς μάχης in v. 28a, but also by way of association between ‘war-chariot’ (μαχη) and ‘line of battle’ (μάχη).

20As is the case in the Greek text in v. 26.

21There are of course also places where a rendering different from MT can be accounted for by one of the well-known devices of translation technique in LXX. So it may well be that the rendering ἐπιστευεῖ in 1 Esd 1:26 (for MT שָׁמוּר) constitutes a rendering of the root שָׁמ (‘to dig, search’ [Jastrow]) by way of etymology (with thanks to G. Marquis for this suggestion).

verb προσέβημα, occurring several times in 1 Esdras (5:60; 9:4.45), is not attested elsewhere in the LXX but is known from other sources of that time (e.g. Polybius, xii 16.6). Further, in regard to the motif of warfare our passage shows an interesting variety of expressions: ἐπιχειρῶ πολεμεῖν, ἐγείρω τὸν πόλεμον, συνίστημι τὸν πόλεμον.

Good Koine usage and interpretative skill: both features seem to be typical of the author of 1 Esd 1:23-30. As to the second aspect we have argued above that this Greek version reflects an interpretation of the story of the death of Josiah in light of related biblical passages (2 Chron 18, and Jer 46), or with the help of some knowledge of Persian culture. The text of 1 Esd 1:23-30 thus attests to a strong interest in the study of biblical books. This feature fits in with the pattern of a growing interest in the study of the “books of the ancestors” in the second century BC, an interest which is clearly reflected by passages like Prologue Wisdom Ben Sira 8-10 and 4QMMT C:10.23

Two other elements, to be found in 1 Esd 1:31 are worthy of mention at this juncture.

The middle part of v. 31 // 2 Chron 35:26 (ending) reads as follows:

καὶ τῆς συνέσεως αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ νόμῳ κυρίου

Different from Chronicles, where it is stated that the good deeds of Josiah were according to what is written in the law of the Lord, 1 Esdras stresses the point that king Josiah was someone with great knowledge and understanding of the Law. This clearly points to an interest in the study of the Law.

The beginning of v. 31 (// 2 Chron 35:25 [ending]) is also very interesting:

τάυτα δὲ ἀναγέγραται ἐν τῇ βίβλῳ
τῶν ἱστορημένων περί τῶν βασιλέων τῆς Ἰουδαίας

The text of Chronicles reads “they are written in the Laments.” The plural “they” refers to the laments mentioned in the preceding part of the verse (v. 25), i.e. the laments sung by singing men and women at the death of Josiah. 1 Esdras, on the other hand, has the following text: “these things are recorded in the book of histories of the kings of Judah.” The Greek of v. 31 is characterized by technical terms, ἀναγράφω

23Prologue Wisdom Ben Sira 8-10 reads: “My grandfather Jesus, who devoted himself for a long time to the study of the Law, the Prophets, and the other books of our ancestors, and developed a thorough familiarity with them.” 4QMMT C:10 reads as follows: “We have [written] to you so that you may study (carefully) the Book of Moses and the books of the Prophets and (the writings of) David” (DJD X, 59). The passage of the Prologue clearly implies that all the books mentioned were considered “books of the ancestors.”
and ἱστορέω (note also the use of πρᾶξις and of the verb πράσσω in the rest of the verse), indicating that a historiographical source is meant in which “these things” (ταῦτα) are “recorded.” This source is called, “the book of the histories of the kings of Judah.” At the end of v. 31 a similar reference is found: “the book of the kings of Israel and Judah” (cf. 2 Chron 35:27), but it should be noticed that both designations differ: the book of v. 31 (beginning) is about the kings of Judah only, and not about the kings of both Israel and Judah. The difference between these designations can easily be explained by assuming that the one about the kings of Judah refers to the book of Chronicles, because Chronicles does not deal with the kingdom of Israel (after the time of David and Solomon) as does the other one, the book of Kings. “These things” of v. 31 then, are best understood as referring to the whole passage of vv. 23-30 (note also the use of δέ). One of the reasons for introducing the book of Chronicles in v. 31 may have been that in the milieu of our translator the book of Lamentations was not considered to contain the laments over king Josiah. Thus the beginning of v. 31 also reflects an interest in biblical books.

Knowledge of the biblical books, Law and Prophets, turns out to be an important matter. This is precisely what characterizes the version of the story about the death of king Josiah in 1 Esdras. The reason of his death was not, and could not be in the light of tradition, a lack of knowledge of the Law (compare also Ben Sira 49:3), but rather a lack of knowledge as far as the Prophets are concerned: if Josiah had given heed to the words of the prophet Jeremiah (1 Esd 1:26) he would not have found his untimely death.