Athaliah and the Theopolitics of Royal Assassination

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Abstract. While the kingdom of Israel experienced eight military coups in its shorter history, the kingdom of Judah saw only four assassinations of its monarchs, three of which were Athaliah, her usurper, and his successor. This sequence of untimely royal deaths in Judah stands in contrast to the stability of Israel’s royal line under the Jehuite dynasty, whose kings are said to have entreated Yahweh, sought advice from prophets, and defeated Judah at Beth-Shemesh. From a later perspective it seems that whereas Yahweh previously protected the Judahite kings, in the ninth-eighth centuries BCE the Jehuite kings enjoyed Yahweh’s favour more than the Davidides. This paper thus considers the theopolitical impact of untimely royal deaths in ninth-eighth century Judah and argues that the instability of the Judahite royal line after her marriage contributed to the negative biblical portrayal of Athaliah and the Omride-Judahite alliance.

Résumé. Cependant que le royaume d’Israël a connu huit coups d’État, le royaume de Juda n’a subi que quatre assassinats royaux, parmi lesquels Athalie, son usurpateur et son successeur. Cette séquence tranche avec la stabilité de la dynastie jéhuite, dont les rois implorent Yahvé, cherchent conseil auprès des prophètes, et défient Juda à Beth-Shémesh. De ce point de vue, il semble qu’aux IXᵉ–VIIIᵉ s. av. J.-Ch. les rois jéhuites bénéficient plus que les davidides de la faveur de Yahvé, alors même que ce dernier protégeait jusqu’alors les rois judaïtes. Cet essai s’intéresse donc à l’impact théopolitique de ces morts royales prématurées et suggère que l’instabilité de la dynastie judaïte après le mariage d’Athalie a contribué au portrait négatif que la Bible dépeint d’elle et de l’alliance omrido-judaïte.

Keywords: Athaliah; Royal Assassination; 1-2 Kings; Omrides and Judahites

1 I do not include Josiah in this paper for although he suffered an untimely death, there are not enough details given in the biblical account (2 Kgs 23:29-30) to determine whether Josiah was assassinated, executed, or killed in battle. Furthermore, the assassinations referred to in this paper are presented in the biblical texts as being carried out by figures internal to Israel or Judah, rather than by foreign agents.
The biblical authors make no secret of the fact that they viewed Queen Athaliah’s reign as an illegitimate interruption in the Davidic succession and rule of Judah. 2 2 Kings 11 presents her as a violent outsider, ruthlessly seizing the throne after the deaths of her husband and son and murdering the princes who could have stood in her way. The fact that she was a woman and an Omride, combined with the accusations of bloodshed, rendered her an obvious target for the biblical authors’ polemic, as perhaps, did possible parallels with Jezebel. 3 Yet, despite numerous works focusing on the portrayal of Athaliah in 2 Kgs 11, less attention has been paid to the potential theological implications arising from her assassination. 4 For regardless of their “sins,” the Judahite monarchs were

2 For the purposes of this paper I am referring to Athaliah as a monarch on the basis that, even if she was technically a queen-regent for a young child, she would have been the face of the Judahite monarchy for all intents and purposes during her six-year tenure. In my view, the point of a regent was to function as a monarch even if they were not necessarily the sole ruler.


believed to be Yahweh’s representatives on earth. The murder of a monarch, therefore, had serious theological implications for both the monarch and the murderer’s standing vis-à-vis Yahweh as it involved a transfer of royal status. Due to the large temporal gaps and the subsequent different historical circumstances between them, the assassinations of Athaliah, Joash and Amaziah are not usually discussed together. Whilst acknowledging the reality of the different historical circumstances, this paper proposes that, due to the rarity of royal assassinations in Judah, from a retrospective literary viewpoint the deaths of these monarchs would have been a subject of interest for the biblical authors. Viewed retrospectively, following Athaliah’s marriage into the house of David, a Judahite king was killed in battle for the first time (Ahaziah, 2 Kgs 9:27-28).


5 E.g., Carly L. Crouch, “Made in the Image of God: The Creation of אדם, the Commissioning of the King and the Chaoskampf of YHWH,” JANER 16 (2016): 1–21, here 1–6, and see more comments on the relationship between monarchs as divine representatives of the gods in the ancient Near East more widely in Carly L. Crouch, War and Ethics in the Ancient Near East: Military Violence in Light of Cosmology and History (BZAW 407; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), 21–32.

6 The northern kingdom of Israel experienced eight military coups in its shorter history, including the seven assassinations of Nadab (1 Kgs 15:27-28), Elah (1 Kgs 16:8-10), Joram (2 Kgs 9:21-26), Zechariah (2 Kgs 15:8-10), Shallum (2 Kgs 15:13-14), Pekahiah (2 Kgs 15:23-25) and Pekah (2 Kgs 15:29-30), while three royal houses were apparently wiped out, including the House of Jeroboam I (1 Kgs 15:25-30), the House of Baasha (1 Kgs 16:10-12), and the House of Omri (2 Kgs 9-10). Judah, meanwhile, saw only four assassinations of its monarchs: Athaliah (2 Kgs 11), Joash (2 Kgs 12), Amaziah (2 Kgs 14) and – over a century later – Amon (2 Kgs 21). That the deaths of Ahaziah, Athaliah, Joash and Amaziah were of interest to the biblical editors is also demonstrated by the deviations in their epilogue formulae as compared to the other kings. Jürg Hutzli, “Observations and Considerations on the Epilogue Formulae in Kings,” in M. Oeming and P. Sláma (eds.), A King Like All the Nations? Kingdoms of Israel and Judah in the Bible and in History (BVB 28; Zurich: LIT Verlag, 2015), 177–194 shows clearly that the absence of expected formulae with regard to Ahaziah and Athaliah mark disruption in the royal line (p. 177). Furthermore, he shows that Ahaziah, Athaliah and Joash are not said to ‘sleep with their fathers,’ while the mention of ‘the king’ sleeping with his fathers placed just after Amaziah’s epilogue may be a later addition (p. 179–181). For further comments on the epilogue formulae see Matthew J. Suriano, The Politics of Dead Kings: Dynastic Ancestors in the Book of Kings and Ancient Israel (FAT 2; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010).
and a Judahite monarch was assassinated for the first time (Athaliah, 2 Kgs 11:16) followed by two others in succession (Joash, 2 Kgs 12:20; Amaziah, 2 Kgs 14:19). Four Judahite monarchs in succession thus met untimely ends while the Jehuite line enjoyed the most stable period in Israel’s history, ruling for over a century and defeating Judah in battle. What follows explores this contrast in royal fortunes and proposes that, to later biblical editors, the switch from stability to violence in Judah’s royal line – and the opposite in Israel – may have indicated a theological change in the status of the Israelite and Judahite kings and their relationship with Yahweh. The problems for the Judahite royal line began with the marriage of Athaliah into the House of David, while the stability for Israel began with Jehu’s slaughter of the Omrides. I contend, therefore, that the starting point for the presentation of Athaliah as a threat to the House of David was the manner of the deaths of the kings surrounding her reign, which led to scrutiny of the Omride-Judahite alliance – the reason Athaliah married into Judah in the first place.

**I. A Dynasty De-Stabilized: Untimely Deaths in Judah’s Royal Court**

Following king Jehoshaphat of Judah’s ninth-century alliance with king Ahab of Israel, the northern princess Athaliah married Joram of Judah (2 Kgs 8:16-18), and their son Ahaziah ascended to the throne upon Joram’s death (2 Kgs 8:25-27). According to 2 Kgs 8-9, Ahaziah maintained the Omride-Judahite alliance and was killed while in Israel supporting Joram of Israel in his battle against the Arameans (2 Kgs 8:28-29; cf. 2 Kgs 9:14b-16). The biblical texts claim that Jehu killed Ahaziah and Joram during his uprising, though the Tel Dan stele complicates matters by claiming that Hazael of Aram killed both kings. Numerous scholars give priority to the stele’s version of events, though Robker’s observation that royal inscriptions can be just as biased as the biblical texts should be noted.7

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The identity of the killer of the kings remains unclear, though given that Jehu was supposedly fighting the Arameans at Ramoth-gilead when he decided to rebel, it may well be that an alliance existed between Jehu and Hazael and they both claimed credit for the deaths of Joram and Ahaziah. In any case, Ahaziah was the first king of Judah killed in battle and the untimely nature of his death is highlighted by the lack of an appropriate heir to succeed him. 8 Although the biblical texts claim that Athaliah murdered the Davidic claimants to the throne (2 Kgs 11:1-3), this was unlikely to be the case, not least because she would have needed a male heir to reign as regent. 9 In addition, 2 Kgs 10:13-14 states that Jehu killed forty-two relatives of Ahaziah at Beth-Eked, which may represent a pro-Omride delegation sent by Judah to either fight or negotiate with Jehu after Ahaziah’s death. 10 If the reference to Jehu’s slaughter of these princes is historical, then Athaliah may well have been the most senior royal available to act as regent when she ascended to the throne. 11 It thus appears that in the aftermath of Ahaziah’s death Judah found itself bereft of candidates for the kingship, which resulted in Athaliah taking the throne. 12 The biblical authors

8 Which explains the lack of reference to a successor in his epilogue (2 Kgs 9:27-28); Hutzli, “Observations,” 177, 188.
10 As I have argued elsewhere; Cat Quine, “Jehu’s Slaughter of Judah’s Royal Family at Beth-Eked (2 Kings 10:13-14): A Closer Look,” ZAW 131 (2019): 537–548. The reference in 2 Kgs 10:13 to the princes going down “for peace (לשלום) with the sons of the king and the sons of the queen mother” is important in this regard as it suggests a parallel between the brothers of Ahaziah and the Omrides Joram and Jezebel, both of whom mention peace immediately before Jehu kills them (2 Kgs 9:22, 31).
12 The serious nature of this crisis in Judahite royal circles should be acknowledged. Judah had never seemingly had a shortage of candidates for the throne nor had so many probable contenders been killed in a short space of time
evidently went to some efforts to present her reign as illegitimate, including attributing it to innocent bloodshed, omitting any formal regnal notices, and contrasting her presence in the palace with Joash’s presence in the temple. Yet, her six-year reign could not have been achieved without internal support and Jehoiada notably states during the coup that any who follow her should also be put to death (2 Kgs 11:15).

At first glance, Athaliah’s assassination solves the problem of her reign, for after her death, the new king Joash made a covenant with the people and destroyed the temple of Baal, at which the people of the land rejoiced, and the city was quiet (2 Kgs 11:17-20). The notice that the city was quiet is interesting and may be intended to clearly state – whether accurately or not – that no one offered any opposition to Joash’s enthronement. Thus, according to the authors, with Joash’s accession order was restored and the brief interruption to proper Davidic rule was dealt with. Subsequent chapters of 2 Kings, however, report continuing violence and bloodshed in Judah’s royal court.

With Athaliah’s assassination, the seven-year-old Joash was made king, under the supervision of the priest Jehoiada and he apparently ruled for forty years (2 Kgs 12:1-2). Joash’s regnal summary largely concerns repairs and economic matters of the temple (2 Kgs 12:4-16), though it seems ironic that these efforts narratively culminate in him stripping the temple to pay off Hazael of Aram, who was threatening Jerusalem (2 Kgs 12:17-19). Although the items Joash took seem unconnected from the money used to pay for the temple repairs, Long observes that the votive offerings of Jehoshaphat, Joram and Ahaziah (2 Kgs 12:18) that he took were markers of the piety of his predecessors, following Asa’s use of (whether at the hands of Jehu, Athaliah, or other parties). Athaliah was undoubtedly a woman of very high standing, thanks to her northern royal origins and her previous roles as wife of the king and queen mother, but the fact remains that if a woman had to take the throne – even temporarily – the Davidic line was under serious threat.

temple treasures to pay Ben-Hadad of Aram for an alliance (1 Kgs 15:18-20). Thus, the supposedly pious king raised in the temple handed the markers of his ancestors’ piety over to a foreign king. Joash’s reign concludes with the notice that his servants made a conspiracy and killed him. The exact location and circumstances of this assassination are unclear in the MT, but more interesting than the meaning of the אֶלְמָתָן is the preservation of the names of the conspirators who killed the king. In every other instance of royal assassination in Judah the perpetrators are not named; they are presented only as a vague plural group. For example, even with Athaliah, Jehoiada commands the coup but only a vague “they” – seemingly the captains of army – put her to death; no names are mentioned (2 Kgs 11:15-16). Similarly, “they” – apparently “all the people of Judah” – made a conspiracy against Amaziah and killed him at Lachish (2 Kgs 14:19-20), and unnamed “servants” killed Amon in his house (2 Kgs 21:23). Contrastingly, the conspirators behind royal assassinations in the northern kingdom of Israel are usually named in the biblical texts because they took the throne after their respective coups. The accounts of royal assassinations in Judah, however, usually distance everyone, especially other Davidides, from the bloodshed.

15. Long, 2 Kings, p. 159–160.
17. The biblical texts usually report that those assassinating monarchs – and, in Israel, taking the throne – “conspire” (קשׁר) against them. Thus, in the northern kingdom Baasha (1 Kgs 15:27), Zimri (1 Kgs 16:9), Jehu (2 Kgs 9:14), Shallum (2 Kgs 15:10), Pekah (2 Kgs 15:25) and Hoshea (2 kgs 15:30) all “conspire” their way to the throne. Only Omri (1 Kgs 16:16-17) and Menahem (2 Kgs 15:14) enacted a successful coup and were not said to have “conspired.” Similarly, in Judah, Jozacar and Jehozabad, “they”, and the servants of Amon, all “conspire” against Joash, Amaziah and Amon, respectively. Interestingly, despite the presentation of her reign as illegitimate, Athaliah is not said to have conspired her way to the throne in 2 Kgs 11 and nor is anyone specifically stated to have “conspired” against her; she cries “conspiracy, conspiracy” (קשׁר קִשְׁר) herself when she saw Joash in the temple (2 Kgs 11:14). As Jehoiada is not directly said to have “conspired,” despite clearly doing so, this may suggest a different author for the Athaliah narrative or may indicate an attempt to absolve Jehoiada of his actions – presenting him as doing what he had to do rather than “conspiring.” Alternatively, this could be
Quite why the names of Joash’s murderers, Jozacar and Jehozabad, are recorded in 2 Kgs 12 is unclear; it may simply reflect the source material at the editors’ disposal, or perhaps the two individuals were well known and may even have launched a bid for the throne themselves. To be sure, this is speculative, but it seems that Joash’s son Amaziah only succeeded him after a struggle – for “when the kingdom was firmly in his hand” (2 Kgs 14:5), the first act of Amaziah’s reign was to execute those who killed his father. The only close parallel to this phrase is found in 1 Kgs 2:12 which states that Solomon’s kingdom was “very firmly established” (מלכותו מאבד). Given that other chapters of Samuel and Kings report succession struggles surrounding Solomon’s ascension to the throne, it may be that Joash’s death prompted a succession struggle of some kind, won by Amaziah. While Joash’s reign began with a promising priestly start, Amaziah’s began with a promising military start, defeating ten thousand Edomites and capturing Sela (2 Kgs 14:7), which then (slightly ironically) turned into military failure at the hands of Israel. According to the text, the victory at Sela bolstered Amaziah’s confidence to the extent that he sent messengers to Jehoash of Israel challenging him to battle (2 Kgs 14:8). Jehoash, however, replied with a somewhat provocative fable emphasising Judah’s lowly status – a thorn compared to Israel’s another way of the authors indicating the illegitimacy of Athaliah’s rule by avoiding the term usually reserved for the deposition of the king.

18 MT names the individuals as Jozabad (son of Shimat) and Jehozabad (son of Shomer): יְוָשָׁבָד בֶּן־שִּׁמְאָה יְהוָעָבָד בֶּן־שְׁמוֹר, though BHS notes that multiple other manuscripts preserve the name Jozacar ben Shimat (יְוָשָׁר בֶּן־שִּׁמְאָה) for the name of the first assassin.


20 Jones notes that the figure ten thousand appears in the numeration of Jehoahaz’ army in 2 Kgs 13:7, while David was also said to have killed a large number of Edomites (18,000) in the same region as Amaziah (2 Sam 8:13); Jones, 1 and 2 Kings, 508.

21 Long observes that the words of Amaziah to Jehoash do not necessarily imply hostile force, though it is evidently interpreted that way; Long, 2 Kings, 167.
cedar – and warned Amaziah to stay at home so that he might not fall and take Judah with him, which Amaziah ignored.22

As a result of the ensuing battle at Beth-Shemesh, Amaziah was captured, Jerusalem was attacked, the palace and temple ransacked, and some Judeans were taken as hostages (2 Kgs 14:8-14). No details are given about how (or if) Amaziah was released, nor about the identity and fate of those taken as hostages. Debate remains about the chronology of Amaziah’s reign and that of his successor Azariah, which is complicated by the notice that Amaziah “lived” (not “reigned”) for fifteen years after Jehoash’s death (2 Kgs 14:17). These chronological problems raise questions about whether Jehoash appointed Amaziah’s son Azariah as a regent after his victory.23 Whatever the exact political situation, according to the biblical text, Amaziah was assassinated fifteen years after the defeat at Beth-Shemesh (2 Kgs 14:19) and “all the people of Judah” made his son Azariah king instead of him.

Given that longevity of rule, a peaceful death, and a secure succession was regarded as demonstrating a deity’s blessing of a king, one might assume that Joash and Amaziah must have been sinful if

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22 The use of a fable usually indicates the wisdom of the one speaking it, serving here to highlight Jehoash’s wisdom and Amaziah’s folly, and is somewhat unexpected from 1-2 Kings which affords the Judahite kings preference over the Israelite kings at almost every other turn. Although it seems at first glance that Jehoash wished to avoid a battle, both Tatu and Eaton connect the use of similar fables to contests and Jehoash’s words seem provocative. For Tatu, the similar fable of the thistle and cedar in Judg 9 could be considered a form of “contest literature,” found commonly in verbal contests in ancient Near Eastern literature; Silviu Tatu, “Jotham’s Fable and the Crux Interpretum in Judges IX,” VT 56 (2006): 105–124. For Eaton, meanwhile, 2 Kgs 14:9 is an example of “flyting,” which occurs in various forms but generally involves trading insults or provocations; M.R. Eaton, “Some Instances of Flyting in the Hebrew Bible,” JSOT 61 (1994): 3–14. Certainly, the comparison of Judah to a thistle, Israel to a cedar, and the statement that Amaziah had become arrogant after his victory over Edom (את־הכית הכה ונשׂאך אדום) seems derogatory, though these may well be the words of the editors following Judah’s defeat rather than those of the king of Israel prior to it.

Yahweh permitted them to be assassinated and removed the responsibility of the succession out of their hands. Yet, neither Joash nor Amaziah are described as sinful kings – both are said to have done “what was right in the eyes of Yahweh” (2 Kgs 11:2; 14:3), albeit neither removed the high places. The existence of the high places cannot have been enough to account for their assassinations, however, as Asa (1 Kgs 15:11-14) and Jehoshaphat (1 Kgs 22:43-44) had previously also been described positively but without removing the high places and they did not suffer the ignominy of assassination. In addition, whereas the coup against Athaliah was described in detail and justified through her portrayal as dangerous and illegitimate, neither Joash nor Amaziah’s assassinations are explained or justified in any way. How then do we explain the assassinations of two “good” kings?

As noted above, assassination of a monarch was a serious business, for monarchs were believed to be representatives of Yahweh on earth. Yet, the reports of assassinations and coups in the northern kingdom of Israel in 1-2 Kings are often unconcerned with the theological implications of such events, merely reporting who killed whom and who became king. With regard to Judah, the theological transfer of royal status in contentious situations is textually indicated by the actions of the people. Thus, when Solomon and Joash are crowned the people rejoiced (1 Kgs 1:38-39; 2 Kgs 11:20), and after the assassinations of Amaziah and Amon, “all of Judah” and “the people of the land” chose Azariah and Josiah (two pious kings) as the next rulers (2 Kgs 14:21; 21:24). This public acclaim seems designed to negate any suspicions the reader may

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24 See the discussion of royal longevity in the ancient Near East in David T. Lamb, Righteous Jehu and his Evil Heirs: The Deuteronomist’s Negative Perspective on Dynastic Succession (OTM; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 164–170.

25 The exceptions to this rule, however, are found when a royal house was wiped out (see below) and, in particular, with Jehu’s coup which – uniquely amongst all the reports of Israelite and Judahite assassination and usurpation in 1-2 Kgs – was said to have been prophetically and divinely ordained (2 Kgs 9:1-6).

26 In the cases of Solomon (1 Kgs 1:34-39) and Joash (2 Kgs 11:10-12), where the potential for internal dissent was especially high, the new king was also anointed and presented with indubitable symbols of royal status, designed to symbolically end any conflict; see, for example, discussion in Dutcher-Walls, Narrative Art, Political Rhetoric, 37–41, 80–82.
have. This seems especially true for the Amaziah-Azariah succession, where the unique statement that “all the people of Judah” made Azariah king may be designed to deflect attention from Je-hoash’s possible involvement in Azariah’s enthronement.\(^{27}\) It is clear, therefore, that the biblical authors wished to present the divinely ordained Davidic succession as stable and orderly, particularly in the face of conflict. This stability stands in clear comparison to the succession of the northern kingdom of Israel which rapidly changed hands. Yet, claims that Yahweh favoured Judah’s royal line over Israel’s would have proven problematic when three of its monarchs were assassinated in succession.

II. North of the Border: The Favoured Jehuite Dynasty

Jehu son of Nimshi’s violent coup against the Omrides began a new chapter in Israel’s history in 1-2 Kings.\(^{28}\) Preceded by a succession of “bad” Omride kings, Jehu’s coup was uniquely given prophetic and divine legitimation – no other usurper received such support in 1-2 Kgs.\(^{29}\) 2 Kings 9 recounts that an anonymous prophet visited

\(^{27}\) The only similar example of the people of Judah being collectively involved in king-making is 2 Sam 2:4, where the “men of Judah” (יהודה אנשׁי) anoint David king.


\(^{29}\) On the portrayal of Jehu and his coup see, for example, Tammi J. Schneider, “Rethinking Jehu,” *Biblica* 77 (1996): 100–107. Lissa M. Wray Beal contends that the Deuteronomistic approval of Jehu centres on his observation of correct Yahwistic worship and his obedience to Yahweh’s prophets in Lissa M. Wray Beal, *The Deuteronomist’s Prophet: Narrative Control of Approval and Disapproval in the Story of Jehu (2 Kings 9 and 10)* (LHBOTS 478; London: T&T Clark, 2007). Würthwein contends that
Jehu, anointed him king (2 Kgs 9:6) and gave him a divinely sanctioned mission to strike down the Omrides (2 Kgs 9:7-10). 2 Kings 10:30, meanwhile, states that Yahweh spoke to Jehu and promised him four generations of successors on the throne. While it is simple to propose that the prophetic anointing and message in 2 Kgs 9 was propaganda designed to legitimate Jehu’s actions, the retention of this propaganda in a Judahite text is perhaps surprising. 1-2 Kings often presents Israel and its kings as supposedly sinful and less favoured than Judah, yet here, Jehu is given a divine promise of succession while Judah’s royal line experienced repeated upheavals. The positivity does not stop there. Despite statements that Jehu’s successor Jehoahaz apparently did “what was evil in the eyes of Yahweh” and followed the sins of Jeroboam ben Nebat (2 Kgs 13:2), he also “entreated Yahweh” concerning the Aramean oppression.


Hutzli also observes that the four generations of Jehuite kings promised to Jehu (Jehu-Jeroboam II) all receive burial notices in their epilogues and are said to have acted with might (גבורה) – the latter adjective being reserved only for the Judahite kings Asa, Jehoshaphat and Hezekiah. The only other northern kings to receive such distinction are Baasha and Omri; see Huztli, “Observations,” 189–190. It is not entirely clear why Baasha and Omri receive distinction alongside the four Jehuite kings, but I would suggest the possibility that Baasha was deemed positive for ending the House of Jeroboam I (a fundamentally ‘bad’ king in the eyes of some editors) and Omri perhaps because he started a military uprising but is never stated directly to have killed his master (Zimri, 1 Kgs 16:18), nor his competitor for the throne (Tibni, 1 Kgs 16:21–23), which is unique amongst the coups of the northern kingdom reported in 1-2 Kings. The latter would explain why Omri, not Zimri (who ended the House of Baasha), receives the notice.
sion and “Yahweh listened to him” (2 Kgs 13:4) and “gave Israel a saviour” (2 Kgs 13:5). Jehoahaz’ successor Jehoash also receives the stereotypically negative statements about evil and Jeroboam (2 Kgs 13:11) but also “wept before Elisha” (2 Kgs 13:14), was promised that he would defeat the Arameans three times (2 Kgs 13:15-19, 24-25), and defeated the Davidide Amaziah and ransacked the temple of Yahweh in Jerusalem without consequences (2 Kgs 14:8-14). Meanwhile, Jehoash’s successor, Jeroboam II, is also said to have done evil, yet he restored the borders of Israel “according to the word of Yahweh” which came via the prophet Jonah son of Amittai (2 Kgs 14:25) and “Yahweh saw Israel’s distress and saved them” through the hand of Jeroboam (2 Kgs 14:26-27). Lamb explains this disparity between the negative and positive material as a result of the Deuteronomist’s negative bias against dynastic succession, found also in presentations of Gideon, Eli and David’s reigns. He further notes the tendency of the Deuteronomistic editor to emphasise Yahweh’s mercy rather than the individual worthiness of the Jehuite kings in these reports, especially with a view to Jehoash and Jeroboam II. For Lamb, the Deuteronomist was a single author writing in the exilic period, seeking to explain the downfall of both

32 Although some of these statements are evidently later Deuteronomistic additions, it seems that the source material the editors had was originally favourable toward the Jehuite kings. That said, the Jehuites’ paying tribute to the Assyrians is not recorded in these texts, so we only have a very limited presentation of events.

33 He proposes that the Deuteronomist preferred charismatic to dynastic succession; Lamb, Righteous Jehu, 213–256.

34 Lamb, Righteous Jehu, 195–196. Indeed, I would suggest that Jehoash’s victory at Beth-Shemesh appears to have been deliberately traced back to Yahweh’s favour for Jehu, via the double patronym given for him at the beginning of the battle account: “Jehoash son of Jehoahaz, son of Jehu, king of Israel” (2 Kgs 14:8). Nowhere else is Jehoash given such a long patronym. Even in the places where he is referred to formally, such as his regnal introduction (2 Kgs 13:10), Amaziah’s synchronised regnal introduction (2 Kgs 14:1), and his own death (2 Kgs 14:16-17), the patronym is only one generation long, referring to him as “Jehoash son of Jehoahaz.” In addition, none of the other kings of the Jehuite dynasty are given double patronyms at any point, which suggests that the patronym in 2 Kgs 14:8 is intended to specifically connect Jehoash to Jehu, which helps to explain his victory.
kingdoms which explains the focus on dynastic succession. Although I agree with the probability of an exilic Deuteronomistic redaction, it seems plausible that some of the polemic against the Omrides – who ruled some 2-3 centuries before the exile – was written at an earlier date and the Deuteronomist worked with these texts.

This is the context in which we must consider the dialectic between the Jehuites’ positive and negative portrayals. It is not simply interesting that Yahweh favoured them, but that Yahweh favoured them at a time when such favour is not reported for Judah. Indeed, in the battle of Beth-Shemesh, it seems that Yahweh sided with Israel over Judah. I contend, therefore, that the first concerns around dynastic succession and the Yahweh-Israel-Judah relationship likely arose for the first time in the eighth century when Israel’s dynastic succession was considerably more successful than Judah’s. Early concerns about which kingdom Yahweh preferred would explain the creation of the polemic against the Omrides, Athaliah, and the Omride-Judahite alliance, to which later editors could add further theological evaluations. The dynastic struggles for Judah seemingly began with Athaliah’s marriage into the Judahite royal household.

36 Notably, while the Jehuites receive the positive theological comments noted above, no such positive theological reports are present in the regnal accounts of Athaliah, Joash, and Amaziah. Perhaps Athaliah is unsurprising in this regard, but even Joash, who was apparently raised in the temple and instructed by the priest Jehoiada “all his days,” is not connected with any prophetic narrative, nor did Yahweh offer divine intervention when Hazael threatened Jerusalem. In 2 Kgs 14, Amaziah also did not explicitly seek prophetic or divine confirmation before proposing battle with Jehoash, and Yahweh showed no favour for Judah, nor for his own temple in the outcome of that battle.
37 In an attempt to explain this situation, the Chronicler claims that Amaziah worshipped the gods of Edom and ignored a prophetic warning from Yahweh not to do so, thus Yahweh allowed Israel to defeat him (2 Chron 25:14-24). Such an attempt to offer an explanation indicates that, even centuries later, the relationship between Yahweh, Israel and Judah in the late ninth-eighth centuries presented issues for a pro-Judahite writer.
38 Sergi also argues that the negative perspective of the Omrides was shaped sometime during the eighth century, though he does not fully elaborate on what may have caused it; Omer Sergi, “The Omride Dynasty and the Reshaping of the Judahite Historical Memory,” *Biblica* 97 (2016): 503–526.
III. Assassinations and Anti-Athaliah Polemic

The above discussion has considered the successive assassinations of Athaliah, Joash and Amaziah in contrast to the stability of the Jehuite dynasty. I suggest that, due to the relative rarity of royal assassinations in Judah’s history, the manner of these monarchs’ deaths (rather than events during their lives) may help to explain the formation of polemic against the Omrides and Athaliah in particular. Although Jehoshaphat started Judah’s alliance with the Omrides, it is during his grandson Ahaziah’s reign that problems in Judah’s dynastic succession began to appear. Following the untimely death of Ahaziah and his brothers, the two kingdoms took contrasting approaches to the Omrides: Jehu slaughtered them in Israel, while Judah enthroned Athaliah and seemingly replaced her with a part-Omride descendent, in the form of her grandson Joash (note 2 Kgs 11:2). Notably, 2 Kgs 12 is careful never to mention Joash’s father but emphasises the role of the priest Jehoiada. Although this could reflect priestly influence, it also seems likely to be a literary device, wherein the priestly character serves to deflect attention from Joash’s Omride heritage.

If, indeed, Joash was Athaliah’s grandson, then an anti-Omride agenda was not the primary concern in the assassination of Athaliah and the enthronement of her successor. Rather, it may

39 Long argues that priestly influence may underlie the narrative of 2 Kgs 11; Long, 2 Kings, p. 161-162. Although this is possible – and Monroe has differently argued for a Holiness source underlyng the reform account of 2 Kgs 23 (Lauren A.S. Monroe, Josiah’s Reform and the Dynamics of Defilement: Israelite Rites of Violence and the Making of a Biblical Text, [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011] – it seems to me that Jehoiada’s presence serves as a distraction. He takes on the gap filled by the lack of a father, appearing directly after Joash’s regnal summary (2 Kgs 12:1-2) and apparently instructing Joash “all his days.” In truth, it could be doing both: perhaps Jehoiada’s role originally served to deflect attention away from Joash’s heritage and, in so doing, created an opportunity for priestly influence to enter the texts.

40 Indeed, an anti-Omride, pro-Jehuite agenda seems unlikely given that Jehu was not exactly favourable to Judah. He reportedly killed the Judahite king and a number of princes and ended what had been a fruitful alliance between Judah and Israel. Despite the machinations of the text, therefore, it seems unlikely that Athaliah was killed as an anti-Omride move.
simply have been an internal power shift. The anti-Omride agenda may, therefore, have been the product of the biblical editors, rather than the fruits of a historical anti-Omride development in Judah’s ninth-century political circles. If so, then perhaps it was Athaliah’s proximity to upheaval and assassination in Judah’s royal circles that may have singled her out as a target for polemic. With her son (and perhaps others; 2 Kgs 10:13-14) dying on a foreign battlefield, her assassination, and that of two of her successors, it seems that her entry into Judah coincided with, and was followed by, significant problems in Davidic royal circles. In addition, while the four generations of Judah’s monarchs from Ahaziah–Amaziah all met untimely deaths, the four generations of Israel’s monarchs from Jehu–Jeroboam II enjoyed unprecedented dynastic stability and defeated Judah in battle. To later writers, particularly in the wake of Israel’s victory at Beth-Shemesh, it may have appeared that with Jehu’s coup against the Omrides, Yahweh’s blessing of the Davidides had been transferred to the Jehuites. The balance was textually restored when “all the people of Judah” intervened in the Judahite succession and made Azariah king, who proved to be pious, while Jeroboam II’s successor Zechariah was assassinated (2 Kgs 15:8-10).

IV. Conclusions

Although previous scholars have noted Athaliah’s proximity to upheaval in Judah’s royal line, this paper has argued that we should also consider the continuation of this upheaval even after Athaliah’s death. In this light, I contend that the biblical authors may have been inspired to create the anti-Athaliah polemic due to the manner of the deaths of Judah’s monarchs from Ahaziah–Amaziah, which stands in stark contrast to the stability of Israel from Jehu–Jeroboam II. This may also explain why Athaliah is presented as the major threat to Judah’s royal line, despite Jehoshaphat being the one who started the Omride-Judahite alliance. For while he
does not fully escape without blame, Jehoshaphat is not remembered as harshly as Athaliah.⁴¹ This may be because he handed over the throne to his son Joram successfully, and Joram himself successfully handed over the throne to Ahaziah.⁴² Athaliah, meanwhile, saw her son killed in battle, and started a unique sequence of three assassinations of Judah’s monarchs. I propose, therefore, that in this case we should take into account the politics surrounding the deaths of the monarchs just as much as events during their lives. Notably, communicating the manner and significance of a royal death takes only a few words, whereas entire annals would be needed to communicate all the actions of a monarch during their life. Depending on the sources available to them, later biblical editors may have had more information about the deaths of the kings than their actions during their lives and if so, then assassinations and conspiracies probably served as clearer indicators of problems than did peaceful burials.

⁴¹ Although Jehoshaphat seems to be portrayed positively at first, note especially Sergi’s comments on Jehoshaphat’s continuous military defeats in Sergi, “The Omride Dynasty”, 512–522.
⁴² Hutzli argues that dying peacefully and handing over the throne successfully to one’s son is what fulfilled the criteria for the epilogue notice “he slept with his fathers,” which Jehoshaphat (1 Kgs 22:50) and Joram (2 Kgs 8:24) receive but Ahaziah and Athaliah do not; Hutzli, “Observations,” 179–183.