

## **Evil-Merodach and the Deuteronomist: The Sociohistorical Setting of Dtr in the Light of 2 Kgs 25,27-30**

### I. Dtr: Person, School or Movement?

When in 1943 Martin Noth formulated the seminal concept of the Former Prophets as a relatively integral composition produced by a Deuteronomically oriented individual (henceforth Dtr), a question arose regarding the sociohistorical location of this individual. Noth confidently stated that the last event reported by Dtr, Jehoiachin's release and exaltation on the thirty-seventh year of his captivity (2 Kgs 25,27-30), in other words, in 562-560 BCE, provided "einen festen terminus a quo für die zeitliche Ansetzung von Dtr". Moreover, he maintained that the corpus could not emerge much later and had therefore to be placed in the mid-sixth century BCE<sup>(1)</sup>. This conclusion rested on two presuppositions. First, Dtr was but a single, if extremely gifted and erudite, person, whose activity could not span more than a few decades. Second, "er hat in dem göttlichen Gericht, das sich in dem von ihm dargestellten äusseren Zusammenbruch des Volkes Israel vollzog, offenbar etwas Endgültiges und Abschliessendes gesehen und eine Zukunftshoffnung nicht einmal in der bescheidensten und einfachsten Form einer Erwartung der künftigen Sammlung der zerstreuten Deportierten zum Ausdruck gebracht", thereby displaying lack of awareness of the second chance that the community received under Persian rule<sup>(2)</sup>.

Studies of the last three decades have left both presuppositions in shambles. At the first stage of this paradigm shift, which began in the early 1970s, Dtr was reconceptualized as a "school" or a "movement", that is, a group of similarly minded individuals. Since in principle such a group can endure over several generations, emergence of the Former Prophets came to be seen as a gradual process that began well before Jehoiachin's release and continued for at least some time after it; conceptual, and sometimes even factual, inconsistencies and tensions abounding in the corpus were interpreted as traces of its multi-stage

<sup>(1)</sup> M. NOTH, *Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien*. Die sammelnden und bearbeitenden Geschichtswerke im Alten Testament (Tübingen 1957) 12.

<sup>(2)</sup> NOTH, *Studien*, 108.

formation<sup>(3)</sup>. Most hypotheses of this kind followed two basic trajectories. The mainly Continental “Göttingen school”, owing its existence to Rudolph Smend and Walter Dietrich, posited three consecutive Deuteronomistic editions of the Former Prophets, at least two of which, “historical” (DtrG or DtrH) and “prophetic” (DtrP), came into being before Jehoiachin’s release<sup>(4)</sup>. The predominantly American “Harvard school”, launched by Frank Moore Cross, postulated a pre-canonical Deuteronomistic edition of the Former Prophets associated with the reign of Josiah (circa 640-609 BCE)<sup>(5)</sup>. The putative period of Deuteronomistic literary activity has been thus extended to include not only most of the exile, but also several pre-exilic decades. Some exegetes went even further by positing a (proto)-Deuteronomistic redactional layer dating from the reign of Hezekiah (late eighth — early seventh centuries BCE)<sup>(6)</sup>.

Since approximately 1980, several scholars have pointed out that it would be naïve to derive Dtr’s *terminus ante quem* from the chronological scope of the Former Prophets. In particular, they argued that he or she could know what happened after Jehoiachin’s release

<sup>(3)</sup> Noth was, of course, aware of these problems but mainly chalked them up to Dtr’s dependence on earlier sources that could contradict each other and/or the Deuteronomistic agenda (see especially *Studien*, 84). Today this explanation is considered inadequate, if only because even unmistakably Deuteronomistic passages in the Former Prophets sometimes appear to be mutually contradictory and/or ideologically heterogeneous.

<sup>(4)</sup> W. DIETRICH, *Prophetie und Geschichte. Eine redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zum deuteronomistischen Geschichtswerk* (FRLANT 108; Göttingen 1972), building upon R. SMEND, “Das Gesetz und die Völker. Ein Beitrag zur deuteronomistischen Redaktionsgeschichte“, *Probleme biblischer Theologie* (ed. H.W. WOLFF) (München 1971) 494-509 (who isolated only two different redactions). Later Smend placed DtrH soon after 560 BCE and dated the latest, “nomistic” Deuteronomistic edition (DtrN) to the post-exilic period (*Die Entstehung des Alten Testaments* [Theologische Wissenschaft 1; Stuttgart 1984] 124); Dietrich accepted the latter dating (*David, Saul und die Propheten. Das Verhältnis von Religion und Politik nach den prophetischen Überlieferungen vom frühesten Königtum in Israel* [BWANT 122; Stuttgart 1987] 152).

<sup>(5)</sup> F.M. CROSS, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic. Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge 1973) 274-289.

<sup>(6)</sup> E.g., H. WEIPPERT, “Die ‘deuteronomistischen’ Beurteilungen der Könige von Israel und Juda und das Problem der Redaktion der Königsbücher“, *Bib* 53 (1972) 301-339; A. LEMAIRE, “Vers l’histoire de la rédaction des Livres des Rois“, *ZAW* 98 (1986) 221-232; B. HALPERN — D. S. VANDERHOOF, “The Editions of Kings in the 7th-6th Centuries B.C.E.”, *HUCA* 62 (1991) 179-244; E. EYNIKEL, *The Reform of King Josiah and the Composition of the Deuteronomistic History* (OTS 33; Leiden 1996).

and still choose it as the composition's terminal point for rhetorical or canonical reasons. If so, Dtr's opus could be produced decades and even centuries later, well into the post-exilic period. This line of reasoning, allowing for post-exilic, even late post-exilic, Deuteronomistic literary activity, was initially limited to scattered, often poorly substantiated comments<sup>(7)</sup>. Only in 2002, Raymond Person organized it into a cogent hypothesis<sup>(8)</sup>.

The above developments have rendered the historical setting of Dtr vastly indeterminate. Noth placed him or her soon after Jehoiachin's release, and in any case between this event and the end of the involuntary exile in 538 BCE – a span of slightly more than 20 years. Today, by contrast, Dtr is in effect smudged all the way from the late 700s BCE (Hezekiah's reign) through 458 BCE (the most likely date of Ezra's mission that, according to Person, resulted in the demise of the "Deuteronomistic school"), in other words, over an enormous period of circa 250 years. As a result, the concept has lost much of its heuristic value: if a phenomenon is all over the place, in a sense it is nowhere. What follows is an attempt to restore some of this value by demonstrating that the four-verse conclusion of the Former Prophets (2 Kgs 25,27-30) points towards 560 BCE as a relatively secure *terminus ante quem* of Dtr as an ideological and literary phenomenon. I will argue that, given the Deuteronomistic stance on the monarchy in general and the Davidic kingship in particular, the fact that the corpus ends with an account of Jehoiachin's release and exaltation by Evil-Merodach suggests that the phenomenon in question did not survive the end of the latter's reign and could even be narrowly localized in this reign.

## II. The Historical Evil-Merodach and the Reception of 2 Kgs 25,27-30

One of the pivotal concepts underlying the Former Prophets is that of YHWH's irrevocable promise that David's dynasty will endure forever. The concept in question, first formulated in 2 Samuel 7,

<sup>(7)</sup> See R.F. PERSON, *The Deuteronomistic School. History, Social Setting, and Literature* (SBL Studies in Biblical Literature 2; Atlanta 2002) 33-34 and references there.

<sup>(8)</sup> PERSON, *School*. Person and his predecessors are diachronic-oriented scholars, but some synchronic studies have likewise assumed post-exilic setting of the Deuteronomistic project, e.g., D. JOBLING, *1 Samuel* (Berit Olam; Collegeville 1998) 75-76; B. GREEN, *How Are the Mighty Fallen? A Dialogical Study of King Saul in 1 Samuel* (JSOTSS 365; Sheffield 2003) 1-19.

appears to be implicitly operative in the corpus' presentation of the Israelite kingship. Most of Samuel hinges upon the notion that while the deity may disenfranchise other royal houses, such as that of Saul, for relatively minor errors, even very serious blunders and transgressions do not disqualify David and his successors, at least not entirely or not forever<sup>(9)</sup>. In perfect agreement with this notion, a mere eleven chapters into Kings the Davidic dynasty survives Solomon's ultimate transgression of idolatry, with YHWH explicitly pardoning him "for David's sake" (1 Kgs 11,13; similarly 1 Kgs 11,32.36). Abijam and Jehoram are spared despite their misbehavior for exactly the same reason (1 Kgs 15,4 and 2 Kgs 8,19 respectively). The punishment that the deity does mete out to Davidides, the secession of the northern tribes soon after Solomon's death, effectively expires when Assyrians deport these tribes, leaving David's descendants in charge of what remains of Israel; even what amounts to a national catastrophe ultimately benefits the dynasty. What is more, the narrator mentions the breakaway tribes' disloyalty to the house of David when discussing the reasons of their deportation (2 Kgs 17,21). Finally, the multiple offenses of the Davidide Manasseh cause YHWH to... destroy Jerusalem and Judah while leaving the house of David in charge to the bitter end (the denunciation of Manasseh in 2 Kgs 21,11-15 does not include any specific penalties for his dynasty) and letting one of its scions, Jehoiachin, conveniently to escape the disaster<sup>(10)</sup>.

On a broader scale, the Former Prophets is informed by the principle (which may or may not be secondary to the Davidic promise) that the merits or shortcomings of the dynasty's founder exclusively determine its fate. In addition to David, the narrator explicitly formulates this principle with regard to Saul (1 Sam 13,13-14), Jeroboam I (1 Kgs 14,7-11), Baasha (1 Kgs 16,2-4), Ahab (1 Kgs 21,19-24), and Jehu (2 Kgs 10,30)<sup>(11)</sup>. Only the ephemeral dynasties that ruled the Northern Kingdom in the last decades of its existence are

<sup>(9)</sup> On this notion as operative in 2 Samuel, see S. FROLOV, "Succession Narrative: A 'Document' or a Phantom?" *JBL* 121 (2002) 99-101.

<sup>(10)</sup> 1 Kgs 9,4-9 seems to anticipate this turn of events.

<sup>(11)</sup> Technically, Ahab did not found a dynasty: he succeeded his father Omri (1 Kgs 16,28). The narrator accuses Omri of "doing what YHWH saw as evil and surpassing in evil all those who were before him" (1 Kgs 16,25) but blames Ahab for bringing the dynasty down. However, in terms of literary prominence, it is Ahab, featured in seven chapters (1 Kings 16-22), not Omri, whose reign is recounted in a mere four verses (1 Kgs 16,23-26), who functions as a founding king.

spared comments of this kind, but what happens to these dynasties fits in with the general rule.

In sum, if there is any merit to Noth's Deuteronomistic hypothesis (and if this is not the case, perhaps all discussions of "Dtr" or "Deuteronomistic school" should be abandoned as meaningless), the concept of an eternal dynasty founded by David must have been among the central pillars of Dtr's agenda<sup>(12)</sup>. Admittedly, certain parts of the Former Prophets do not seem to share this agenda, in that they either attack the institution of monarchy as inherently ungodly (e.g., 1 Samuel 8) or portray David as a less-than-model ruler (e.g., 2 Samuel 10-12). However, all these widely scattered, isolated, and self-contained fragments have been increasingly identified in recent scholarship as post- and anti-Deuteronomistic (and to somewhat lesser extent anti-Deuteronomic) interpolations<sup>(13)</sup>.

Dealing exclusively with the fate of the last surviving (although not the last reigning) Davidic king, 2 Kgs 25,27-30 obviously bears on the issue of the Davidic promise. Moreover, since the piece concludes the Former Prophets, its evidence may be decisive as far as the lasting validity of this promise is concerned. In the last six decades, the intent of 2 Kgs 25,27-30 has been the subject of massive scholarly scrutiny that divided most exegetes into two camps. One of them sees the fragment as "the final nail into the coffin" of David's dynasty, while

<sup>(12)</sup> On this point, see especially G. VON RAD, *Deuteronomium-Studien* (FRLANT 58; Göttingen 1947) 59-64. Noth believed that Dtr's political philosophy, shaped by the catastrophe of 586 BCE, must have been predominantly anti-monarchic and therefore tried to downplay the discussed tendency, ascribing it to Dtr's sources (e.g., *Studien*, 55-57, 64-65, 91-92). In fact, there is no reason to assume that pro-monarchic attitude was impossible in an exilic or post-exilic setting. At the very least, it can be taken for granted that Jehoiachin, his descendants (who, if Zerubbabel's prominence in Ezra is any indication, retained a degree of influence decades after the exile), and his exiled courtiers (2 Kgs 24,14-16) did not have a negative opinion of the institution.

<sup>(13)</sup> These interpolations may include Judges 19-21 (thus C. EDENBURG, *The Story of the Outrage at Gibeah [Judg. 19-21]*. Composition, Sources and Historical Context [Unpublished Ph.D. thesis; Tel Aviv 2003]); 1 Samuel 1-8 (S. FROLOV, *The Turn of the Cycle*. 1 Samuel 1-8 in Synchronic and Diachronic Perspectives [BZAW 342; Berlin 2004]); most of 2 Samuel (J. VAN SETERS, *In Search of History*. Historiography in the Ancient World and the Origins of Biblical History [New Haven 1983] 277-291; FROLOV, "Succession Narrative", 102-103, limits the putative post-Deuteronomistic contribution in this book to chs. 10-12); and prophetic narratives in Kings (VAN SETERS, *Search*, 303-306; S.L. MCKENZIE, *The Trouble with Kings*. The Composition of the Book of Kings in the Deuteronomistic History [VTS 42; Leiden 1991] 81-100).

another interprets the same text as optimistically announcing, “that a scion of David, king of Israel is yet alive and well”<sup>(14)</sup>. Although it may seem that the arguments presented pro and contra the rival approaches have left no stone unturned, a significant aspect of the account of Jehoiachin’s release and exaltation, one that may be of crucial importance as far as the text’s thrust and sociohistorical background are concerned, has largely eluded the exegetes’ attention. This aspect is the identity of the captive king’s benefactor.

As universally recognized by scholars, Evil-Merodach is a (distorted) Hebrew version of the Babylonian name Amel-Marduk (‘Marduk’s Man’). A ruler by that name assumed Babylonian throne in early October 562 BCE, upon the death of his father Nebuchadnezzar (it is possible that by that time Evil-Merodach had been a co-regent for at least two months)<sup>(15)</sup>. There is no information whatsoever about Evil-Merodach’s activities prior to his enthronement. Even more strikingly, nothing is known for certain about the events of his reign or

<sup>(14)</sup> The first group includes NOTH, *Studien*, 12, 87, 108; H.W. WOLFF, “Das Kerygma des deuteronomistischen Geschichtswerks”, *ZAW* 73 (1961) 174; CROSS, *Myth*, 277; C.T. BEGG, “The Significance of Jehoiachin’s Release. A New Proposal”, *JSOT* 36 (1986) 49-56; B. BECKING, “Jehoiachin’s Amnesty, Salvation for Israel? Notes on 2 Kings 25,27-30”, *Pentateuchal and Deuteronomistic Studies*. Papers Read at the XIIIth IOSOT Congress (eds. C. BREKELMANS – J. LUST) (BETL 94; Leuven 1990) 283-293; and, most recently, D.F. MURRAY, “Of All the Years the Hopes — or Fears? Jehoiachin in Babylon (2 Kings 25:27-30)”, *JBL* 120 (2001) 245-265. The second view has been defended by VON RAD, *Studien*, 63-64; E. ZENGER, “Die deuteronomistische Interpretation der Rehabilitierung Jojachins”, *BZ* 12 (1968) 16-30; J.D. LEVENSON, “The Last Four Verses in Kings”, *JBL* 103 (1984) 353-361; A. LAATO, *A Star Is Rising*. The Historical Development of the Old Testament Royal Ideology and the Rise of the Jewish Messianic Expectations (International Studies in Formative Christianity and Judaism 5; Atlanta 1997) 36; I.W. PROVAN, *1 and 2 Kings* (New International Biblical Commentary. Old Testament Series; Peabody 1995) 279-281; I.W. PROVAN, *1 & 2 Kings* (Old Testament Guides; Sheffield 1997) 88-93. Several scholars, especially recently, have tried to tread a middle ground by stressing indeterminacy of 2 Kgs 25,27-30: thus, e.g., R.D. NELSON, *First and Second Kings* (Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching; Atlanta 1987) 265-269 (in an earlier publication, Nelson sided with Noth: *The Double Redaction of the Deuteronomistic History* [JSOTSS 18; Sheffield 1981] 120); M.A. SWEENEY, *King Josiah of Judah*. The Lost Messiah of Israel (Oxford 2001) 319. The two quotations are from NELSON, *Redaction*, 120 and LEVENSON, “Verses”, 361 respectively.

<sup>(15)</sup> See the discussion in R.H. SACK, *Amel-Marduk, 562-560 B.C. A Study Based on Cuneiform, Old Testament, Greek, Latin and Rabbinical Sources, with Plates* (AOAT 4; Kevelaer – Neukirchen-Vluy 1972) 2-3.

about his internal or foreign policies because almost all references to him in extant contemporary documents are in dates using his regnal years<sup>(16)</sup>. In fact, the change of Jehoiachin's status is the only act of Evil-Merodach reported by a source that may be chronologically proximate to his reign. The history of Babylon prepared by Berossus in the third century BCE only says that Evil-Merodach "governed public affairs in an illegal and improper manner"<sup>(17)</sup>; sometimes extensive and colorful comments on Evil-Merodach found in much later Jewish and Christian writings are midrashic amplifications of 2 Kgs 25,27-30 meant to fill (perceived) gaps in it<sup>(18)</sup>. What is more, it is quite possible that even the most well-informed and pedantic historian would have found it impossible to compose a substantial account of Evil-Merodach's reign, for the simple reason that it lasted less than two years. Between May and August 560 BCE, he was replaced (according to Berossus – overthrown and killed) by Neriglissar, a veteran military commander and, according to Berossus, his brother-in-law<sup>(19)</sup>.

In sum, Evil-Merodach was one of the most obscure, insignificant, and ephemeral rulers Babylon and the ancient Near East in general have ever known. With no military campaigns or important building projects to his credit and, apart from Jehoiachin's release and exaltation, no substantial policy shifts associated with his name, he left no legacy to speak of. The transitional, and transient, character of Evil-Merodach's reign was further augmented by the fact that his removal ushered in an era of exponentially increasing political discontinuity in Babylon. While his reign was most likely a direct extension of that of his father, Nebuchadnezzar (especially if it was preceded by a period of co-regency), Evil-Merodach's successor, Neriglissar, was not his son, but somebody who was married into the royal family and may have assumed power through a coup d'état. Four years later, in 556 BCE, another coup d'état led by Nabonidus, "a usurper with no hereditary claim to the throne", put a violent end to the dynasty founded by Evil-Merodach's grandfather Nabopolassar<sup>(20)</sup>. Moreover,

<sup>(16)</sup> Sack conveniently includes plates, transliterations, and translations of all known texts mentioning Evil-Merodach (Amel-Marduk, 43-119, plates).

<sup>(17)</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>(18)</sup> Ibid., 12-23.

<sup>(19)</sup> Ibid., 31-32; R.H. SACK, *Neriglissar – King of Babylon* (AOAT 236; Kevelaer – Neukirchen-Vluyn 1994) 25-27.

<sup>(20)</sup> B.T. ARNOLD, *Who Were the Babylonians?* (SBL Archaeology and Biblical Studies 10; Atlanta 2004) 100.



rather than emphasizing continuity with this dynasty Nabonidus and his son Belshazzar (who was apparently the real power behind the throne) strove to portray themselves as heirs to the line of Assyrian kings crushed by Nabopolassar and Nebuchadnezzar<sup>(21)</sup>. Finally, in 539 BCE Cyrus annihilated the Neo-Babylonian kingdom, once briefly ruled by Evil-Merodach, and sidelined the native Mesopotamian elite, of which Evil-Merodach had been a part, becoming the first non-assimilated foreigner ever to control the region and for the first time making it “a province in a large empire whose center was outside the borders of Mesopotamia”<sup>(22)</sup>.

Evil-Merodach’s status as a virtual Mr. Nobody looms large when it comes to the reception of 2 Kgs 25,27-30 by different groups of listeners/readers. Post-560 BCE audiences were increasingly unlikely to attach any significance to Jehoiachin’s release and exaltation, because the successors of the king under whom it happened were increasingly unlikely to take heed of his policies. Even if some or all of them chose to treat Davidides favorably, they would have done so for the reasons of their own, not because of the precedent set by Evil-Merodach<sup>(23)</sup>. Accordingly, at no point after his downfall could 2 Kgs 25,27-30 be expected to shore up the concept of an eternal Davidic dynasty by convincing the audience that YHWH’s promise to David articulated by Nathan in 2 Samuel 7 is being fulfilled or will eventually be fulfilled. From the standpoint of any post-560 BCE listener or reader, the developments recounted by the four concluding verses of the Former Prophets were either irrelevant or of negligible importance with regard to the prospects of Davidic restoration. Moreover, the fragment was likely to pour cold water on any expectations of such a restoration by reminding the audience that Jehoiachin’s release and exaltation had had no lasting consequences, especially for Israel as a

<sup>(21)</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>(22)</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>(23)</sup> His move would not be even seen as essential for the physical survival of the Davidic line. Not only is there no indication in Kings or elsewhere that the family had been in danger of extinction, but the fact that Jehoiachin, exiled at the age of eighteen (2 Kgs 24,8) or eight (2 Chr 36,9) and released by Evil-Merodach almost forty years later (2 Kgs 25,27), had eight sons (1 Chr 3,17-18), clearly indicates that this was not an issue. Babylonian records of substantial allocations of oil to Jehoiachin, his sons, and courtiers confirm as much: see E.F. WEIDNER, “Jojachin, König von Juda, in Babylonischen Keilschrifttexten”, *Mélanges Syriens offerts à Monsieur René Dussaud* (ed. F. CUMONT et al.) (Paris 1939) II, 923-935. I will argue further that 2 Kgs 25,30 plausibly reads as an acknowledgment of these allocations.



whole, and ultimately the Davidic monarchy remained in shambles even with Israel restored in its land. Predictably, biblical and post-biblical texts that try to keep Davidic hopes alive never cite 2 Kgs 25,27-30 as a source of encouragement.

By contrast, with Evil-Merodach still on the throne 2 Kgs 25,27-30 would read as a striking confirmation of the Davidic promise and its (ever)lasting validity. In 2 Sam 7,16, YHWH is quoted as telling David: “Your house and your kingship shall ever be secure before you; your seat (סֵדֶן) shall be established forever”. The pronouncement is addressed to a king of Israel ruling from Jerusalem. By the end of Kings, there is no Israel or Jerusalem to speak of, certainly not as far as the narrator of 2 Kgs 25,27-30 is concerned. And yet a descendant of David is back on his seat (סֵדֶן), secured by the world’s most powerful monarch; moreover, for the first time ever this descendant towers above all other local potentates (v. 28b). Of course, as Murray has rightfully pointed out, the underside of the Babylonian ruler’s support, both figurative (v. 28) and literal (v. 30), is dependence upon him<sup>(24)</sup>. But with Evil-Merodach in power and the passage proving his benevolence beyond reasonable doubt, why does it have to stop here? What if his next step will be to reinstate Jehoiachin in Jerusalem, or even appoint him a de-facto ruler of the entire Babylonian empire, making him thereby a trailblazer of Israel’s redemption or even ascendancy<sup>(25)</sup>? To put it in a different way, from the perspective of Evil-Merodach’s reign, and from none other, 2 Kgs 25,27-30 goes a long way to kindle or sustain hope, centered upon a Davidic king, and trust in the theology of kingship articulated by 2 Samuel 7 and similarly minded texts. The last

<sup>(24)</sup> MURRAY, “Jehoiachin”, 259-22.

<sup>(25)</sup> Farfetched as it may seem, the motif of an exiled Israelite holding the reins of a foreign empire is recurrent in the Hebrew Bible: Joseph, Mordechai, and Daniel (in Daniel 5) attain precisely that status, and in two former cases it massively benefits the entire community. Jehoiachin’s elevation above all kings except Evil-Merodach himself follows this pattern. T.C. RÖMER, “Transformations in Deuteronomistic and Biblical Historiography”, *ZAW* 109 (1997) 11, points out that such an outcome would represent an alternative to Israel’s restoration in the promised land. It is noteworthy, however, that the Former Prophets carefully avoids making the Davidic promise contingent upon the promise of land. For example, Nathan’s discourse in 2 Samuel 7 never mentions the land, not even in the context of YHWH’s vow to “establish a home for... Israel” and “plant them firm, so that they shall dwell secure and shall tremble no more” (v. 10). This strategy, designed to keep all options open, would fit in with the situation that obtained in Evil-Merodach’s reign when Davidic restoration seemed possible but its format remained uncertain.

four verses of the Former Prophets would thus buttress a major plank of the Deuteronomistic agenda before August 560 BCE and undermine this plank at any point thereafter, especially subsequent to the Persian takeover in 539 BCE. This conclusion has two important corollaries that I will discuss in the concluding part of the article.

### III. Who was the Deuteronomist?

With the preceding considerations in mind, it appears that if 2 Kgs 25,27-30 is a Deuteronomistic contribution it must have been composed in 562-560 BCE<sup>(26)</sup>. Within this narrow time frame, the most probable social setting for the fragment would be Jehoiachin's retinue. Since no king could possibly conduct the internal and external affairs of his realm without at least a few scribes, it is safe to assume that these professionals were among Jehoiachin's courtiers who according to 2 Kgs 24,15 were exiled together with him. At their master's behest, or even out of sheer elation over the recent improvement of his (and, by implication, their own) status, they were certainly capable of producing a text that celebrates the event — and implicitly demonstrates that Jehoiachin's surrender to Nebuchadnezzar back in 597 BCE was, after all, a smart move<sup>(27)</sup>.

The statements of 2 Kgs 25,29-30 about Jehoiachin dining in Evil-Merodach's presence and receiving his daily rations כל ימי חייו 'all his life' would seem to militate against the dating suggested above. If the

<sup>(26)</sup> In principle, it is possible that 2 Kgs 25,27-30 was composed by a post- and anti-Deuteronomistic hand with a view to reminding a post-560 BCE audience that the hopes for a Davidic restoration under Evil-Merodach had come to naught and thus exposing them as futile. In such a case, the fragment would have no bearing on the dating of Dtr; however, two related considerations make this possibility remote. First, Dtr was unlikely to conclude his or her composition with the catastrophe of 586 BCE that left David's dynasty in shambles, at least not without explaining how such an outcome fits in with the promises of 2 Samuel 7, which even the doomsday prophecy of 2 Kgs 21,11-15 does not seem to revoke. Second, this ending would be perfectly consistent with the anti-monarchic perspective generated by such putatively anti-Deuteronomistic texts as 1 Samuel 8 and 2 Samuel 10-12; if so, it would be redundant, if not counterproductive, for post-Dtr to engage in a highly sophisticated ruse, pretending to celebrate release and exaltation of a Davidide, in other words, assuming the opponent's identity. The rule of parsimony thus clearly favors the attribution of 2 Kgs 25,27-30 to Dtr working before Evil-Merodach's deposition.

<sup>(27)</sup> W. SCHNIEDEWIND, *How the Bible Became a Book*. The Textualization of Ancient Israel (New York – Oxford 2004) 152-153.

narrator is trying to say here that both routines continued as long as Jehoiachin was alive, the verses must postdate his demise and, unless he died very soon after his release and exaltation (which would be too much of a coincidence, although even today it is by no means unusual to pass away at fifty-five), Evil-Merodach's fall as well<sup>(28)</sup>. However, the pattern of verbal forms in the fragment suggests that the sense of both verses may be somewhat different. To begin with, v. 30 uses the plain perfect verb נתנה; such verbs commonly “represent actions, etc., which were already completed in the past, at the time when other actions or conditions took place (pluperfect)”<sup>(29)</sup>. The sentence is then best understood, in juxtaposition with *waw*-consecutive imperfects in v. 28 (ויתן, וידבר), as referring to an antecedent action: “And his ration, a permanent one, had been given to him on the king's behalf all his life”. In other words, v. 30 seems to assert, in agreement with extant Neo-Babylonian documents, that Jehoiachin had been granted a lifelong allowance even before his release and exaltation by Evil-Merodach<sup>(30)</sup>. Such a statement could, obviously, be made in Jehoiachin's lifetime.

In v. 29b, the perfect אכל is preceded by a *waw*. Samuel Driver has compellingly demonstrated that in many cases the temporal connotation of this particular form can only be determined contextually; the nature of the relationship between the two clauses that comprise the verse is then of crucial importance<sup>(31)</sup>. Contentwise, v. 29a would properly belong after the account of Jehoiachin's release in v. 27; by reporting the removal of his prison garments after the mention of his exalted throne in v. 28 the text suggests that the change had something to do with his dining in Evil-Merodach's presence. From the syntactic point of view, by switching to a perfect form אשם after two *waw*-consecutive imperfects in v. 28 the narrator detaches v. 29a from them, implicitly lumping it with what follows. If so, v. 29b does not have to be a self-contained note suggested by conventional translations of the verse: “So Jehoiachin put off his prison garments. And every day of his life he dined regularly at the king's table” (RSV). Rather, the clause

<sup>(28)</sup> Thus, e.g., BEGG, “Significance”, 53; MURRAY, “Jehoiachin”, 260.

<sup>(29)</sup> GKC § 106f. Cf. also A. NICCACCI, *The Syntax of the Verb in Classical Hebrew Prose* (JSOTSS 86; Sheffield 1990) 30, 35-41, 52-54, 120-121, 180-181, 188.

<sup>(30)</sup> See n. 23 above.

<sup>(31)</sup> S.R. DRIVER, *A Treatise on the Use of Tenses in Hebrew and Some Other Syntactical Questions* (The Biblical Resource Series; Grand Rapids – Cambridge – Livonia 1998) 139-142.

explains why Jehoiachin received new clothes: “And [Evil-Merodach or Jehoiachin] changed [Jehoiachin’s] prison garments so that all his life [Jehoiachin] might constantly eat bread before [Evil-Merodach]”<sup>(32)</sup>. Construed in such a way, v. 29 would state that Evil-Merodach wanted to have Jehoiachin at his banquets as long as the latter lived and thus forcefully demonstrate the Babylonian king’s preparedness to translate the one-time acts of grace reported in vv. 27-28 into a permanent arrangement. At the same time, it emphatically would not claim that this arrangement actually remained in force until Jehoiachin’s death and certainly not that it survived Evil-Merodach’s removal from power<sup>(33)</sup>. Since such a comment does not have to postdate Jehoiachin’s demise, there is nothing in 2 Kgs 25,27-30 to preclude placing it in Evil-Merodach’s reign.

Even more importantly, the fact that despite the major shift in the audience’s perspective on 2 Kgs 25,27-30 that must have taken place in 560 BCE the fragment retained its pride of a place as the epilogue of the entire Former Prophets suggests that after this date there was no Deuteronomistic activity in the corpus — and perhaps no Deuteronomistic activity whatsoever. A Deuteronomist living after Evil-Merodach’s downfall, and certainly after Cyrus’ takeover, could be reasonably expected to try to prevent 2 Kgs 25,27-30 from defeating its original purpose and to that end either compose a sequel (especially if Jehoiachin retained his lofty throne under Evil-Merodach’s successors) or delete the fragment altogether and provide the corpus with a different epilogue. A highly noteworthy implication of this having failed to happen is that after 560 BCE there was no one

<sup>(32)</sup> In other words, I read the predicate of v. 29b as an indicator of modality; on perfect forms with *waw* as such indicators, see G. HATAV, *The Semantics of Aspect and Modality*. Evidence from English and Biblical Hebrew (Studies in Language Companion Series 34; Amsterdam – Philadelphia 1997) 142-161. Another possibility is that the verb refers to Jehoiachin’s future presence at Evil-Merodach’s banquets as guaranteed by the removal of his prison garments. GKC § 112x(a) points out that *waw*-consecutive perfect may be used “to announce future events... when joined to a statement concerning present or past facts, especially when these contain the reason for the action etc., expressed in the perfect consecutive” and cites Gen 20,11; 26,22; Judg 13,3; Isa 6,7; Hos 8,14 as examples.

<sup>(33)</sup> Another advantage of this construal is that it prevents v. 30 from sounding like an almost meaningless variation on v. 29b. If my translation is correct, the narrator stresses that by inviting Jehoiachin to dine at his table and to that end issuing him new garments (v. 29) Evil-Merodach went far beyond his father’s practice of sustaining the captive king (v. 30).

around willing to bring the Former Prophets up to date, at least not along Deuteronomistic lines: the individuals to whom 2 Kgs 25,27-30 owes its existence either died or chose forever to keep their peace.

This, in turn, places a question mark over the now-conventional definition of Dtr as a “school” or a “movement” that lasted for decades, if not for centuries, and enjoyed considerable following in the Israelite/Jewish society, especially among its educated elite. Phenomena of this kind do not vanish overnight. Of course, if Evil-Merodach’s overthrow had something to do with his favorable treatment of Jehoiachin, the coup could expose the Deuteronomists, whose fervent belief in imminent Davidic restoration was easily interpretable as disloyalty to Babylon and even high treason, to persecution and even extermination. However, insofar as no sources so much as hint at major purges under Neriglissar the rule of parsimony disallows this explanation. A much more economical way to proceed is to surmise that, important as it is from the literary standpoint, socially and historically Deuteronomism was limited to a small group of associates or even a single individual working within a short period – namely, in Evil-Merodach’s reign.

Technically, this would be entirely possible. The Scripture looms so large in the Western culture that it is usually thought of as a text of monumental proportions. In fact, the entire Hebrew Bible contains slightly less than 305,000 words, with the New Testament being much shorter<sup>(34)</sup>. The length of the Former Prophets is 69,359 words, but Dtr’s composition may have been longer or shorter than that: on the one hand, it could include Deuteronomy (14,294 words), on the other hand, substantial segments of the Former Prophets may be later additions<sup>(35)</sup>. I will assume therefore that this composition was between 60,000 and 84,000 words long. Taking a break for Shabbat and major festivals, i.e. working on the average about 300 days a year, a single scribe could complete it in its entirety in twenty-two months by writing down on the average between 109 and slightly less than 152 words a day<sup>(36)</sup>. Even with the writing utensils and media of the sixth century BCE, the task would hardly be daunting; for two or three

<sup>(34)</sup> Here and below I quote the traditional Jewish word count as tabulated in A. EVEN-SHOSHAN, *A New Concordance of the Bible* (Jerusalem 1993) xxxviii (Hebrew).

<sup>(35)</sup> For a tentative list of these additions, see n. 13 above.

<sup>(36)</sup> To put these numbers in a perspective: the present paragraph, excluding footnotes, contains 218 words.

scribes, it would be nothing but easy. If so, in strictly technical terms it would not take a “school” to launch and complete the Deuteronomistic project in Evil-Merodach’s twenty-two-month reign: even a single individual, and certainly two or three, could do the job without overexerting themselves.

Of course, the sheer length is by no means the only concern that could make it difficult to date this project in its entirety to 562-560 BCE. Much more problematic for this dating is the fact that the Former Prophets appears to display multiple conceptual tensions, factual discrepancies, as well as compositional, stylistic, and lexical variations. Would it be plausible to ascribe a corpus that seems to be highly heterogeneous (or even its pre-canonical substrate) to a single individual or a very small group working over a period of less than two years?

Three considerations make it possible to answer this question in the affirmative. First, variations and even tensions do not necessarily presuppose multiple authorship. Even a modern text, doubtlessly produced by a single author, can be inconsistent and even self-contradictory in both factual and conceptual terms<sup>(37)</sup>. Furthermore, allegedly discrepant pieces may in fact be mutually complementary, with their juxtaposition adding nuance rather than creating tension. Thus, it has been frequently argued that 1 Kgs 2,4; 6,12; 8,25 cannot come from the same hand as 2 Samuel 7 because they allegedly qualify the Davidic promise by making it contingent on the behavior of individual monarchs<sup>(38)</sup>. However, the proposition that wayward kings

<sup>(37)</sup> In J.R.R. TOLKIEN’s *The Lord of the Rings*, Lotho Pimple, briefly appearing in the opening chapters only as a “sandy-haired” (not “pimpled”) son of Lobelia Sackville-Baggins and entirely eclipsed there by his domineering mother, inexplicably emerges towards the end as an arch-villain in his own right. Mikhail BULGAKOV’s *Heart of a Dog* cites the age of a character at death first as 28 and just a few pages later as 25. On numerous glaring contradictions in Edgar POE’s *Arthur Gordon Pym*, see E.A. POE, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket and Related Tales* (ed. J.G. KENNEDY) (Oxford World’s Classics; Oxford 1998) 286-288. Chronological discrepancies are especially common: they occur not only in fiction (for several egregious examples in Jules Verne’s novels, see FROLOV, *Turn*, 199), but also in para-scholarly publications. For instance, according to ASIMOV’s *Guide to the Bible. The Old and New Testaments* (New York 1981) 122, the reign of Amenhotep IV ended in 1353 BCE, after which Ikhnaton (sic) reigned for seventeen years and was succeeded by Tutankhamon in... 1352 BCE.

<sup>(38)</sup> CROSS, *Myth*, 287, ascribed 1 Kgs 2,4; 6,11-13; 8,25b to the second, exilic Dtr.

and their immediate successors will pay dearly for their transgressions (as promptly illustrated by the misfortunes of Solomon and especially Rehoboam) does not necessarily contradict the thesis that David's dynasty as a whole will endure forever (as it does throughout the Former Prophets)<sup>(39)</sup>. As to the heterogeneity of style and vocabulary, it may reflect the basic fluidity of the oral discourse: although the Former Prophets as we know it is a written text, the creator of its Deuteronomistic substrate was doubtlessly influenced by his or her predominantly oral milieu where the utterances that we see today as dissimilar were interchangeable<sup>(40)</sup>.

Second, multiple authorship does not necessarily presuppose substantial diachronic depth. Citing the apparent heterogeneity of the Former Prophets, several scholars have recently argued that the corpus as a whole is not an authorial or redactional creation: each book thereof (counting Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings as such) evolved on its own, after which they were brought together and arranged in a chronological order by a canonical or proto-canonical process<sup>(41)</sup>. While rightfully pointing out that there is a large degree of distinctiveness to each of the books in question, the hypothesis founders on the complete absence of textual elements (e.g. superscriptions) identifying them as literary entities in their own right. One way to overcome the difficulty is to interpret the Former Prophets as a group project of sorts whose authors worked on their assignments (which may or may not be coterminous with what we know today as books) individually but with an eye to the overall design. If the

<sup>(39)</sup> Already 2 Sam 7,14 anticipates the possibility of a dynastic scion misbehaving and suffering the consequences. Indeed, a statement that any Davidic descendant will thrive no matter what would border on the bizarre, especially for an author concerned with observance of the divine law and seeing Deut 17,18-20 as an authoritative text.

<sup>(40)</sup> PERSON, *School*, 85-95, citing S. NIDITCH, *Oral Word and Written Word*. Ancient Israelite Literature (Library of Ancient Israel; Louisville 1996) and studies of scribes and oral performers of traditional texts in different cultures. Ironically, this consideration deprives Person's reconstruction of a "Deuteronomistic school" active over several generations of a major *raison d'être*.

<sup>(41)</sup> See especially C. WESTERMANN, *Die Geschichtsbücher des Alten Testaments*. Gab es ein deuteronomistisches Geschichtswerk? (TBü 87; Gütersloh 1994); E.A. KNAUF, "L' 'Historiographie Deutéronomiste' (DtrG) existe-t-elle?", *Israël construit son histoire. L'historiographie deutéronomiste à la lumière des recherches récentes* (eds. A. DE PURY – T. RÖMER – J.-D. MACCHI) (Le monde de la Bible 34; Genève 1996) 409-418.



calculations above are correct, such a project could be easily accomplished within a year or two.

Third, even the interpretation of variations and inconsistencies in the Former Prophets as traces of its development over a relatively long period would not necessarily extend Dtr's existence over this period, because many of them are attributable to post- and anti-Deuteronomistic interpolations. Heterogeneity created by the presence of such interpolations obviously does not add a diachronic dimension to the Deuteronomistic literary activity.

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Of course, as long as there is no definitive evidence to the contrary chances remain that the Deuteronomistic composition underlying the received version of the Former Prophets evolved gradually, perhaps along the double-redaction trajectory of the Harvard school, and that only its conclusion (2 Kgs 25,27-30 or 23,26 – 25,30) plus a few additional fragments date from Evil-Merodach's reign<sup>(42)</sup>. At the same time, it appears worthwhile to explore the possibility that Jehoiachin's scribe(s) penned this composition, surveying Israel's history in its own land and stressing the divinely guaranteed centrality and staying power of the royal house to which he belonged, in 562-560 BCE<sup>(43)</sup>. Indeed, the very concept of an eternal Davidic dynasty may be a by-product of the unexpected, and therefore striking, brightening of Davidides' prospects under Evil-Merodach. Even if it is not, the fact remains that after 560 BCE no one attempted to update the Former Prophets in accordance with this concept, especially to account for the crash of hopes associated with Jehoiachin as a surviving Davidic king. Although basic components of the Deuteronomistic ideology (strict adherence to the Torah, cultic centralization, and even the Davidic promise, eventually reconceptualized along eschatological lines) have remained in circulation ever since, as a vibrant, (relatively) coherent,

<sup>(42)</sup> The Deuteronomist(s) could also use earlier sources and even include them verbatim in the composition. Skepticism about feasibility of these sources' retrieval has been on the rise in recent decades, but many exegetes still work in that direction. To avoid going too far afield, I will refrain from further discussion of the issue.

<sup>(43)</sup> The Deuteronomic/Deuteronomistic insistence upon centralization of the cult would likewise have served the interests of Jehoiachin and his bureaucracy: back in Judah, concentration of the Israelite worship in Jerusalem would have doubtlessly contributed to their prestige, power, and wealth.

and, most importantly, literarily productive whole this ideology was gone for good together with the hapless Babylonian king who may have inadvertently created it.

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#### SUMMARY

The article demonstrates that four concluding verses of the Former Prophets (2 Kgs 25,27-30) militate against the recent tendency to view Deuteronomism as a lasting phenomenon, especially against its extension into the late exilic and post-exilic periods. Because Evil-Merodach proved an ephemeral and insignificant ruler, the account of Jehoiachin's release and exaltation under his auspices could be reasonably expected to shore up the notion of an eternal Davidic dynasty only as long as the Babylonian king remained on the throne (562-560 BCE). Since the dynastic promise to David and associated concepts rank high on Dtr's agenda, it means that the Former Prophets was not updated along Deuteronomistic lines to reflect the shift in the audience's perspective on Evil-Merodach caused by his downfall. If so, there was no Deuteronomistic literary activity in the corpus after 560 BCE.