FROM EXODUS TO EXILE:
2 KGS 17,7–20 IN THE CONTEXT OF ITS CO-TEXT

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I. Introduction

Recently, Walter Dietrich has stressed the importance of Martin Noth’s insights for ancient Israelite historiographic research. Had Noth not written his stimulating and influential monograph on the Deuteronomistic history writing1 “One would read these biblical books primarily in two ways: either biblicistically as instructional and factual reports on the history of the people of God or in an enlightened way as devotional and inspirational stories of Jewish writers on the fictionally constructed ‘history of Israel’”.2 Noth’s concern with the final shape of the texts in Deuteronomy up to 2 Kings has opened a third way of “doing history”, between “minimalists” and “maximalists”; between “sceptics” and “realists”. In my view Noth is offering a narrative history by showing how the author of the final text re-enacted the strings of events from the Israelite and Judahite past known to him from written evidence and oral tradition so that his theological point of view becomes clear.3 This paper does not aim at a full description of the Deuteronomistic history writing or at a reformulation of Noth’s thesis. I want to confine myself to one textual unit that plays an important role in Noth’s view: 2 Kgs 17,7–20. 2 Kgs 17,7ff. is

one of the orations that function as structuring devices throughout DtrH. According to Noth, 2 Kgs 17,21–23 form a later addition. This view is argued theologically by Noth in saying that the tearing away of the northern kingdom from the Davidic dynasty as πρωτον ψεύδος of the northern kingdom is not attested elsewhere in DtrH. The hand of the Deuteronomist is clearly visible in 2 Kgs 17,7–20. This textual unit, written in the period of the exile, includes Judah when it describes the sins of the northern kingdom. In other words, Noth reads this text as an indication that the fates of Judah and Israel were seen as parallel. Elsewhere, I have argued that 2 Kgs 17,21–23 is not a later addition to an already existing homily, but should be construed as a Josianic text prior to the final redaction of the book of Kings. In this essay, dedicated to a well-known Israeli scholar, I would like to test Noth’s insights concerning 2 Kgs 17,7–20.

II. 2 Kgs 17,7–20 translation and structure

First I would like to offer a translation of the textual unit under consideration.

7a This happened
   b because⁴ the Israelites sinned against YHWH, their God,
   c who brought them up from the land of Egypt,
   d from under the control of Pharaoh, king of Egypt
   e (because) they revered other gods,
8a walked after the statutes of the nations,
   b whom YHWH had destroyed⁵ for the Israelites
   c and after those, whom the kings of Israel had installed.
9a The Israelites had done hidden things,⁶
   b that were not good for YHWH, their God.

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⁴ Noth, Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien, p. 85.
⁷ With N. Lohfink, “Die Bedeutungen von Hebr. jrṣ qal und hif”, BiZs NF 27 (1983), pp. 26–32. הִיפ should be rendered “to destroy”; pace the traditional translation “To drive away; to dispossess” as in M. Cogan and H. Tadmor, II Kings (AB; New York, 1988), p. 203. It should be noted that in the book of Joshua the “Canaanites” are not driven away, but either destroyed or incorporated in Israelite society.
⁸ D.J.A. Clines, The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew III (Sheffield, 1996), p. 286, ren-