IDEOLOGY, HISTORY AND THEOLOGY IN 2 KINGS XVII 7-23

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2 Kings xvii 7-23, 2 a theological justification of the exile of the northern kingdom, 3 is a central text in the Deuteronomistic history. Martin Noth 4 considered it to be one of the great speeches inserted at historically significant points by Dtr. More recently, Richard Nelson 5 claimed that it provides important evidence for understanding the redaction of the Deuteronomistic history. Most studies have emphasized the formulaic Deuteronomistic nature of this pericope; they have not perceived its full complexity nor uncovered its multiple ideologies. This study will attempt to fill this vacuum. 6

Critical scholarship has emphasized the fragmentary nature of this unit. 7 It contains obvious glosses, 8 awkward splices 9 and repetitions. However, no consensus has been reached concerning the

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1 I wish to thank Professors Michael Fishbane and Nahum Sarna for their insightful comments on an earlier draft of this article.
3 I use this term or “the north” rather than the ambiguous “Israel” to refer to the geopolitical area controlled by Jeroboam and his successors.
6 This study is part of a continuing project of case studies of biblical historiographic texts. General issues of ideology, propaganda and the stance of the biblical historians will be discussed elsewhere as the conclusion to these studies.
7 See already J. Wellhausen, Die Composition des Hexateuchs und der historischen Bücher der Alten Testaments (Berlin, 1963 [1899, 1889]), p. 298.
8 Vv. 8b wmlky yšršl šw and 13 wbyhwdl are considered glosses by most scholars; see below, p. 271.
9 See v. 21 ky-qr... and the discussion below, p. 276.
division of this chapter into sources. 10 This is partially because no purely objective criteria exist for differentiating between different layers of composition in any text. Certainly, as noted by Nelson in his study of the editing of Dtr, some arguments for distinguishing literary layers of a text are better than others. However, it is impossible to differentiate sources with certainty because we cannot know how unified, complex or self-contradictory a single author’s conceptions might be or how precise or loose a single author’s style might be. 11 This problem is especially acute in reference to Dtr, which may reflect the work of a “school”, and therefore need not be as consistent as a composition written by a single individual. Despite these problems, the division of historiographical texts into sources remains one of the most compelling ways of explaining certain lexical, structural or theological peculiarities of texts, and thus should not be abandoned.

If possible, this division of texts into sources should follow patterns evidenced in texts known to be composite. 12 Devices used elsewhere as the basis for source-critical distinctions, especially isolation of distinct vocabulary 13 and the use of the Wiederaufnahme, 14 will be used to suggest a new division of 2 Kings xvii into sources. This division will be further supported by showing how each of the sections defined by these stylistic criteria has a unique ideological slant. Thus, formal stylistic criteria and different ideologies will serve as mutual checks in isolating sources.

For the sake of clarity, I anticipate my conclusions, and present the following source-critical division of 2 Kings xvii 7-23 at this point:

A. 7-12 (except the anticipatory gloss in 8b): A (misplaced) condemnation of bny yšrʾl (= Judah) for cultic sins.


13 The ability to explain distinct patterns of vocabulary is one of the strongest factors favouring traditional Pentateuchal criticism.