The Invention of History in Ancient Judah and the Formation of the Hebrew Bible*

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Summary

This paper deals with the question of the origins of historiography in ancient Judah. It claims that the first historiographical work (although not in the modern sense of the term) is the so-called Deuteronomistic History (DtrH), which in its "exilic edition" seeks to explain the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple. In doing so, it also prepares the way for a monotheistic understanding of Yhwh, who was worshipped during the Israelite and Judean monarchies as a national deity.

The DtrH also marks an important step in the formation of the Hebrew Bible. In the Persian period, Deuteronomy was separated from the books of Josh-Kgs and became the conclusion of the Pentateuch, whereas Josh-Kgs were reworked to fit into the "Prophets".

1. Narrative and History

The first nine books of the Hebrew Bible – the Pentateuch and the Former Prophets – can be read as a continuous history which, albeit interrupted in the Pentateuch by large legal corpora and speeches, presents a chronologically coherent narrative that begins with the creation of the world and of humanity and ends with the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of the Judahite king Jehoiachin or, in somewhat more poetic terms, from the expulsion from Paradise to the expulsion from the Promised Land.

Following the story of human origins, which after the great flood ends with humanity's settlement of the entire (known) world (Gen 1–11), the narrative focuses in the saga of the ancestors of Israel, who also happen to be the forebears of Arabian, Edomite, and Aramaic tribes (Gen 12–36). The narrative of the sale of Jacob's son Joseph to Egypt and the latter's remarkable rise to prominence (Gen 37–50) leads into the narrative of the exodus from Egypt and its protagonist Moses, whose biography unites the books of Exodus through Deuteronomy. From a narrative point of view, the events described in these books take place within a span of 120 years, since it is at this age that Moses dies at the end of the book of Deuteronomy. Following the exodus from Egypt

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(Exod 1–15) is a period of wandering in the wilderness (including the revelation of the law at Sinai), which ends in the death of the disobedient exodus generation (Exod 16–Num 25). The second generation then crosses into and conquers parts of Transjordan, arriving in the plains of Moab, where Moses delivers his great farewell address and then dies (Num 26–Deut 34). Moses' death is marked as a decisive break in Deut 34:10–12:

"[10] Never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face. [11] He was unequaled for all the signs and wonders that the LORD sent him to perform in the land of Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his servants and his entire land, [12] and for all the mighty deeds and all the terrifying displays of power that Moses performed in the sight of all Israel."

After this caesura, the conquest of the land to which the book of Deuteronomy frequently refers is reported in the book of Joshua, the end of which reports that all the divine promises have been fulfilled (Josh 21:43–45 and Josh 23) and then recapitulates all of the important events from Abraham to the possession of the land (Josh 24), giving the impression that only here Israel's history of origins has come to an end. At the beginning of the book of Judges, however, the narrative thread continues with the notice that after the death of Joshua and of the generation that entered the land, a new generation arose that no longer knew Yhwh or his mighty acts on behalf of Israel (Judg 2:6–10). In this way, the period of the Judges is characterized as a history of continual rebellion against Yhwh. Even if the various stories of the judges (or "saviors") relate to different tribes and territorial areas, they are told in such a way that gives the impression of a chronological sequence that ends with Samuel, who is depicted as the last of the judges. Samuel, however, is also a transitional figure, since as a prophet he leads into the beginning of the monarchic period (Judg 1–1 Sam 12). The books of Samuel then tell of the first three kings of Israel: the selection and rejection of Saul, the rise and succession of David, and Solomon, the temple-builder, after whose death the monarchy disintegrates into northern and southern kingdoms (1 Sam 8–1 Kgs 11). The history of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah is then depicted in a synchronized fashion up to the time when Israel and its capital of Samaria were conquered by the Assyrians (1 Kgs 12–2 Kgs 17). Following this is a history of the last decades of the southern kingdom, which ends in the deportation of its elites and the destruction of Jerusalem (2 Kgs 17–25). The final scene tells of the rehabilitation of the exiled king Jehoiachin, who is taken out of prison and lives out the rest of his days with a privileged place at the table of the Babylonian king. With this report, which is not followed by any concluding comment, the great history draws to a close, since the following book, Isaiah, which forms the opening to the Latter Prophets in most Hebrew manuscripts of the Bible, opens with oracles that date to the time of Judahite kings from the 8th century B.C.E.

The great history in Genesis through Kings is often termed the Enneateuch, an expression that has recently experienced a revival within the scholarly discussion.[1] Upon closer investigation, however, this Enneateuch proves to be quite uneven and sometimes even incoherent. Thus, for example, the Joseph story stands out stylistically and theologically both from the ancestral narratives that precede it and from the exodus narrative that follows. The narrative of the period in the wilderness up to the conquest of the land is interrupted by three collections of laws. Furthermore, the cyclical presentation of history in the book of Judges differs from the linear presentation of history in Joshua, Samuel, and Kings. In the books of Kings, stories about prophets have been interpolated into the history of the kings of Judah and Israel. In this respect, the Enneateuch should be understood as a collection of quite diverse narratives and traditions that point to a long and complex process of composition.

The sequence of the books of Genesis through Kings can be understood, furthermore, as a reshaping of myth into history. The stories of origins in the first part of the book of Genesis show close parallels with ancient Near Eastern mythology, while the narratives about the ancestors, Moses, and the conquest of the land can be characterized as legends. The narratives of the first kings of Israel and Judah also fall within this category, although more historical memories have perhaps been incorporated here than in the other stories. It is only in the history of the royal houses of Israel and Judah in the books of Kings that historical material emerges that is also reported in extrabiblical sources such as the Mesha inscription, Assyrian annals, or Babylonian texts.[2] Yet even this history, which is to some extent historically verifiable, has been told from a theological perspective according to which all of the events described have been directed by Yhwh.

From a canonical perspective, the Enneateuch does not exist, since Genesis through Deuteronomy constitute the Torah and the books of Joshua through Kings form the first part of the *Nevi'im*. Nevertheless, the book of Deuteronomy – despite the aforementioned passage in Deut 34:10–12 – should be understood not only as the conclusion to the Pentateuch but also as the opening to the narrative that follows. Stylistically, many texts in the "Former Prophets" contain a style that is comparable to that of Deuteronomy and was thus designated relatively early on as "Deuteronomistic." Yet Deuteronomy also prepares its audience for the history that follows in terms of its content and theology. In Deuteronomy, Moses makes reference to the crossing of the Jordan and the future possession of the land (Deut 4:1, 14; 7:1; 9:1, etc.) – that is, to events narrated in the book of Joshua, whose protagonist is appointed as Moses' suc-

1 Cf. Thomas B. Dozeman, Thomas Römer, and Konrad Schmid (eds.), *Pentateuch, Hexateuch, or Enneateuch? Identifying Literary Works in Genesis through Kings* (SBLAIL 8; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011).

2 See Ernst A. Knauf, "History, Archaeology, and the Bible," *ThZ* 57 (2001): 262–68.

cessor in Deut 31. Deuteronomy not only prepares the reader for the conquest narratives in the book of Joshua, however, but also for the other books that follow. Thus, for example, Deut 6:12–15 contains a warning not to pray to any other deities:

"12 Take care that you do not forget the LORD, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. 13 The LORD your God you shall fear; him you shall serve, and by his name alone you shall swear. 14 Do not follow other gods, any of the gods of the peoples who are all around you, 15 because the LORD your God, who is present with you, is a jealous God. The anger of the LORD your God would be kindled against you and he would destroy you from the face of the earth."

The book of Judges opens with a statement that this warning was not heeded (Judg 2:12–14), clearly alluding to Deut 6:12–15:

"12 And they abandoned the LORD, the God of their ancestors, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt; they followed other gods, from among the gods of the peoples who were all around them, and bowed down to them; and they provoked the LORD to anger. 13 They abandoned the LORD, and worshiped Baal and Astartes. 14 So the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he gave them over to plunderers who plundered them, and he sold them into the power of their enemies all around, so that they could no longer withstand their enemies."

In this way, Moses' last address in Deuteronomy already foretells the anarchy of the period of the judges. Deuteronomy, however, also alludes to the concluding events in the Former Prophets: the destruction of Jerusalem and the expulsion from the land (cf. Deut 6:15). The curses in Deut 28 already have this catastrophe in view:

"And just as the LORD took delight in making you prosperous and numerous, so the LORD will take delight in bringing you to ruin and destruction; you shall be plucked off the land that you are entering to possess" (v. 63).

This is precisely what occurs at the end of the second book of Kings: "So Judah went into exile out of its land" (2 Kgs 25:21).

These manifold connections inspired Martin Noth in 1943 to postulate the existence of a "Deuteronomistic History."

2. The beginnings of Judahite historiography: Martin Noth and the Deuteronomistic History

Martin Noth wrote his *Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien* (published in English as *The Deuteronomistic History*), which was to become one of the most important works in the study of the Hebrew Bible during the 20th century,

in 1943, during the Second World War, in Königsberg (present-day Kaliningrad).[3] Following a variety of earlier studies by Wilhelm M. L. de Wette, Heinrich Ewald, and Julius Wellhausen, among others, Noth regarded the existence of Deuteronomistic redactions in the books of Joshua through Kings as an established fact.[4] What was new in Noth's approach was that he sought to attribute the bulk of Deuteronomistic literature to a single individual, the "Deuteronomist." Shortly after 560 B.C.E. and in the vicinity of Mizpah and Bethel, this Deuteronomist purportedly wrote – "at his own initiative" – a history of Israel and Judah up to their demise. The fall of Samaria and particularly the fall of Judah and the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple had raised the question of the reasons for these events[5].

Thus, he sought to "collect the extant traditions concerning the history of his people, to edit them into a single work and to make an interpretation of the whole."[6] According to Noth, the Deuteronomist was simultaneously a faithful *editor* of ancient documents and materials as well as an *author* who developed a nuanced perspective of the history of Israel in order to write an etiology of the fall of the two kingdoms. In Noth's view, before the Deuteronomist there was no historical narrative spanning from the period of the conquest up to the end of the kingdom of Judah. In creating such a work, the Deuteronomist explained the fall of Judah and the Babylonian exile as Yhwh's punishment against Israel and Judah and their kings, the majority of whom did not follow the divine law codified in the book of Deuteronomy. Since the first edition of Noth's *Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien* only had a limited printing, the actual reception of Noth's hypothesis in fact first began with the second edition in 1957, following which the term "Deuteronomistic History" became commonplace in Hebrew Bible scholarship. At first it experienced widespread acceptance but soon received two important modifications.

The first modification is connected to the name of Frank Moore Cross[7] and relates to the assumption (ultimately reaching back to Julius Wellhausen and Abraham Kuenen) of a first edition of the DtrH still during the monarchic pe-

3 Martin Noth, *Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien: Die sammelnden und bearbeitenden Geschichtswerke im Alten Testament* (3d ed; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1967) (hereafter *ÜSt*); English translation: *The Deuteronomistic History* (trans. J. A. Clines et al.; JSOTSup 15; Sheffield: University of Sheffield, 1981).

4 On the history of research cf. Thomas Römer and Albert de Pury, "L'Historiographie Deutéronomiste (HD): Histoire de la recherche et enjeux du débat," in *Israël construit son histoire: L'historiographie deutéronomiste à la lumière des recherches récentes* (ed. Albert de Pury, Thomas Römer, and Jean-Daniel Macchi; Le Monde de la Bible 34; Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1996), 9–120.

5 Noth, ÜSt, 91–95 (ET 79–83).

6 Noth, *ÜSt*, 110 (ET 122).

7 Frank Moore Cross, "The Themes of the Book of Kings and the Structure of the Deuteronomistic History," in idem, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), 274–89.

riod under Josiah, whose cultic and political reform responded to the concerns of the Deuteronomic law. Thus, much English-language scholarship up to the present has reckoned with a Josianic DtrH ending in the praise of Josiah in 2 Kgs 23:25* (taking up Deut 6:4–5), which was later complemented after 587 by the addition of 2 Kgs 24–25 and the insertion of texts foretelling the exile. Indeed, there are texts within the DtrH that can be better understood in the context of the 7th century than in the Neo-Babylonian or Persian periods. These include in particular the evaluations of the kings of Israel and Judah up to the time of Josiah[8] or the use of the expression "until this day," which in many texts still seems to presuppose the existence of the Judahite monarchy.[9]

In contrast to this model, German-language scholarship, inspired by the work of Rudolf Smend[10] and taking a more composition-critical approach than English-language scholarship, developed a layer model that attempted to account for the complexity of Deuteronomistic literature already observed by Noth through the differentiation of three major redactional layers: DtrH (the "historian" responsible for the first edition of the Deuteronomistic History), DtrP (the "prophetic Deuteronomist" who can only be identified in the books of Samuel and Kings), and DtrN (the "nomistic Deuteronomist" who emphasizes the importance of the law). According to this model, however, "DtrN" is usually understood as a collective term that includes various late Deuteronomistic reworkings. This model remains true to Noth's hypothesis insofar as it also locates the beginnings of the DtrH in the "exilic period."

The multiplication of Deuteronomistic layers can, of course, lead to the dissolution of the compositional coherence of the DtrH. Indeed, in certain quarters today the DtrH is regarded as a further "scholarly dead end" ("Irrweg der Forschung"). Against Noth and his successors some object that the Deuteronomistic texts in the various books of the DtrH differ from one another to such an extent that they cannot be assigned to a unified Deuteronomistic redaction. Thus, the topic of cult centralization only plays a role in the books of Deuteronomy and Kings,[11] and typically Deuteronomistic texts are only found to a limited extent in the books of Judges and Samuel. For this reason, some

8 Significantly, Noth can do little with 2 Kgs 22–23 and sees "an element of retardation" (*ÜSt*, 86 [ET 73) in the report on Josiah's reign.

9 Jeffrey C. Geoghegan, *The Time, Place, and Purpose of the Deuteronomistic History: The Evidence of "Until this Day"* (Brown Judaic Studies 347; Providence: Brown Judaic Studies, 2006).

10 Rudolf Smend, "Das Gesetz und die Völker: Ein Beitrag zur deuteronomistischen Redaktionsgeschichte," in *Probleme biblischer Theologie: Festschrift für Gerhard von Rad* (ed. Hans W. Wolff; Munich: C. Kaiser, 1971), 494–509.

11 Konrad Schmid, "Das Deuteronomium innerhalb der 'deuteronomistischen Geschichtswerke' in Gen – 2 Kön," in *Das Deuteronomium zwischen Pentateuch und Deuteronomistischem Geschichtswerk* (ed. Eckart Otto and Reinhard Achenbach; FRLANT 206; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004), 193–211.

scholars have proposed that the so-called DtrH should be limited to the books of Samuel and Kings or that the theory should be abandoned altogether.[12]

Nevertheless, the burden of proof lies with those who dispute the existence of a DtrH to explain why, as Noth observed, "at all the important points in the course of the history, Dtr. brings forward the leading personages with a speech, long or short, which looks forward and backward in an attempt to interpret the course of events […]. Elsewhere the summarizing reflections upon history which sum up the action are presented by Dtr. himself as part of the narrative…."[13] The notion of a creative theologian that Noth projected onto the Deuteronomistic Historian, however, should indeed be abandoned. It is also highly probable that a group of Deuteronomists already existed at the end of the 7th century B.C.E. and revised certain scrolls in support of the "Josianic reform."[14] Thus, it can be assumed that the DtrH is a multi-layered composition that has its roots in the 7th century. However, as will be shown presently, Noth's assumption of a historical work that can be explained as a reaction to the crisis of 587 B.C.E. still remains an illuminating explanation of the beginnings of Jewish historiography. I would like to illustrate this first on the basis of an analysis made from the perspective of the sociology of knowledge.

3. Historiography as a "Semantics of Crisis" ("Krisensemantik")

In his work *Krisensemantik: Wissenssoziologische Untersuchungen zu einem Topos moderner Zeiterfahrung*, the political scientist Armin Steil investigates how the lexeme "crisis" became a widely-used term within intellectual discourse in European languages on the eve of and following the French Revolution.[15] In doing so, he draws on Max Weber in differentiating three ideal types that characterize three different attitudes to the social crisis that was expressed by the French Revolution. He calls these Prophet, Priest, and Mandarin. The *Prophet* understands the crisis as the necessary condition for a newer, better order; he invokes personal inspiration and fosters utopian leanings. A representative of this type would be Jean-Jacques Rousseau. The *Priest* constructs a mythical past as a reaction to the crisis; he glorifies and legitimates the tra-

12 Ernst A. Knauf, "L'historiographie deutéronomiste' (DtrG) existe-t-elle?" in *Israël construit son histoire* (ed. Albert de Pury, Thomas Römer, and Jean-Daniel Macchi; Le Monde de la Bible 34; Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1996), 409–18; Reinhard G. Kratz, *Die Komposition der erzählenden Bücher des Alten Testaments: Grundwissen der Bibelkritik* (UTB 2157; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000); Kurt L. Noll, "Deuteronomistic History or Deuteronomistic Debate? (A Thought Experiment)," *JSOT* 31 (2007): 311–45.

13 Noth, *ÜSt*, 5 (ET 18–19).

14 For a more detailed discussion of this see Thomas Römer, *The So-Called Deuteronomistic History: A Sociological, Historical and Literary Introduction* (London: T&T Clark, 2005).

15 Armin Steil, *Krisensemantik: Wissenssoziologische Untersuchungen zu einem Topos moderner Zeiterfahrung* (Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 1993).

ditional order as divinely ordained. This attitude is found in Edmund Burke and political Romanticism. The *Mandarin* belongs to the intellectual elite and takes an analytical approach to the crisis insofar as he attempts to understand why it occurred, thereby inaugurating the modern philosophy of history and modern historiography, such as, for example, Jacob Burckhardt and his "Weltgeschichtliche Betrachtungen" ("Reflections on History")[16].

These positions can be presented schematically as follows:

	Prophet	*Priest*	*Mandarin*
Situation	Marginal	Representative of the old order	Intellectual elite
Legitimization	Personal revelation of knowledge	Tradition	Education
Semantic of crisis	Hope in a better society	Return to origins	Historiography
Reference	Utopia	Myth	History

Armin Steil conducted his study without any reference to the Hebrew Bible. It seems to me, however, that these three ideal types can be adopted in order to explain the canonical units of the Torah and *Nevi'im*.[17]

First, the Pentateuch and Former Prophets can be identified as crisis literature insofar as these would probably have never developed as they did without the events of 597 and 587 B.C.E. It has sometimes been disputed whether the destruction of Jerusalem was a catastrophe for the population of Judah, since life in the land continued as "business as usual," suggesting that the idea of a crisis generated by the events of 587 is a construction of modern exegetes or theologians.[18] This is contradicted, however, by archaeological evidence, as has been discussed, for example, by Oded Lipschits.[19] Indeed, after 587 Judah was largely destroyed and shows a significant reduction in population, which indicates that the number of those deported to Babylon was significantly higher than is generally assumed. In contrast to Judah, the territory of Benjamin remained largely intact. This also explains the transfer of the administrative cap-

16 Jacob Burckhardt, *Weltgeschichtliche Betrachtungen* (Berlin : W. Spermann, 1905) ; ET : *Force and Freedom : Reflections on History* (New York : Pantheon Books, 1943).

17 For a more detailed discussion see Thomas Römer, "The Hebrew Bible as Crisis Literature," in *Disaster and Relief Management / Katastrophen und ihre Bewältigung* (FAT I/88; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 157–77.

18 Philippe Guillaume, "Jerusalem 586 BC: Katastrophal?" *BN* 110 (2001): 31–32.

19 Oded Lipschits, "Demographic Changes in Judah between the Seventh and the Fifth Centuries B.C.E.," in *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period* (ed. Oded Lipschits and Joseph Blenkinsopp; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 323–76.

ital from Jerusalem to Mizpah. The events of 587, however, also signified a crisis of religious concepts, which were characterized by the worship of a national protector deity but by no means excluded the worship of other deities. This deity was present in a central sanctuary, and the king played the role of mediator between the deity and his people. After 587, the Jerusalem temple lay in ruins, the king and his family were in exile, and Judah's territorial integrity had fallen apart. All of this led to questions surrounding the behavior of the national deity Yhwh: had he become angry with his people and abandoned them, or had the Babylonians and their gods proven to be stronger than Yhwh? Different groups wrestled with and answered these questions in varying ways.

According to Armin Steil's terminology, the *habitus* of the *Prophet* corresponds to some of the prophecies of salvation from the Persian period, which are expressed particularly clearly in so-called "Deutero-Isaiah." There it is frequently asserted that the arm of Yhwh is not too short, which can be understood as a rejection of the questioning of Yhwh's power following the events of 587. Also characteristic, however, is the utopian orientation of Deutero-Isaiah's semantics of crisis, which is exemplified in Isa 43:16–21:

"16 Thus says the LORD, who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters, 17 who brings out chariot and horse, army and warrior; they lie down, they cannot rise, they are extinguished, quenched like a wick: 18 Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. 19 I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. 20 The wild animals will honor me, the jackals and the ostriches; for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people, 21 the people whom I formed for myself so that they might declare my praise."

In this oracle, the destruction of Jerusalem and the Babylonian exile is juxtaposed with the announcement of a new exodus and a new creation. Particularly interesting here is the instruction not to remember "former things" (ראשנית וקדמניות). According to Jean-Daniel Macchi, the "former things" indicate the Deuteronomistic discourse on the reasons for the destruction of Jerusalem.[20] Thus, this text should be understood as engaging in critical dialogue with the Deuteronomistic History.

The ideal-type of the *Priest* described by Armin Steil corresponds remarkably well to the so-called Priestly source in the Bible. Indeed, this document retrojects all of the important institutions of emerging Judaism onto a mythic history of origins: the Sabbath corresponds to the order of creation, the taboo against blood is already assumed following the great flood, circumcision occurs during the time of the patriarchs, and Passover takes place already before the exodus from Egypt, while all subsequent festivals and ritual prescrip-

20 Jean-Daniel Macchi, "'Ne ressassez plus les choses d'autrefois': Esaïe 43,16–21, un surprenant regard deutéro-ésaïen sur le passé," *ZAW* 121 (2009): 225–41.

tions are provided by Moses in the wilderness prior to the people's entry into the land. Assuming that the original Priestly document ended already with the ritual for the Day of Atonement in Lev 16, as has recently been proposed by Matthias Köckert and Christophe Nihan,[21] this would mean that for the Priestly document the relationship between Israel and its deity can be renewed every year through corresponding rituals of purification. Thus, in a certain way, the Priestly document can be understood as a "purgation" of the crisis of 587.

It has often been observed how the Priestly document's history of origins develops a three-stage theology of divine revelation. According to Priestly texts, the God of Israel reveals himself to humanity as a whole as *Elohim* in the primeval history, to Abraham and all of his descendants as *El Shaddai*, and to Israel via Moses by his true name, *Yhwh*. Thus, it is Israel's prerogative to know the real name of the one God, who can nevertheless be called upon by all people, even if in a different fashion. This "inclusive monotheism" allows the authors of the Priestly document to preserve the distinctiveness of Israel's faith while also integrating it within the new Persian commonwealth, in which Israel's identity no longer relied on its political autonomy but was established instead through rituals and practices that were already revealed during a mythic period of origins.[22]

This leaves the ideal type that Armin Steil designated as the *Mandarin*. This type corresponds quite well to the "Deuteronomistic History" postulated by Martin Noth. Unlike the "Deuteronomist" envisioned by Noth, the Deuteronomists were probably high officials who belonged to the intellectual elite of Judah and who found themselves in exile in Babylon, having been able to take various written scrolls with them. The Deuteronomists reacted to the crisis of 587 by inventing history.

4. Deuteronomistic historiography as a theological explanation for the fall of Judah

Is it possible to understand the Deuteronomist – or better: the Deuteronomists – as forerunners or contemporaries of the "fathers of history" in Greece? For Noth, the Deuteronomistic History remains a useful historical source for the present-day historian: "Dtr.'s work tells us virtually all we know of the his-

21 Matthias Köckert, "Leben in Gottes Gegenwart: Zum Verständnis des Gesetzes in der priesterschriftlichen Literatur," *JBTh* 4 (1989): 29–61; Christophe Nihan, *From Priestly Torah to Pentateuch: A Study in the Composition of the Book of Leviticus* (FAT II/25; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007).

22 Albert de Pury, "P^g as the Absolute Beginning," in *Les dernières rédactions du Pentateuque, de l'Hexateuque et de l'Ennéateuque* (ed. Thomas Römer and Konrad Schmid; BEThL 203; Leuven: Peeters, 2007), 99–128.

tory of the Israelite people in Palestine."[23] Today, this statement would surely need to be nuanced further. Noth concedes, however, that "we cannot simply reconstruct the history of Israel on the basis of Dtr.'s account."[24] "The closest parallels are those Hellenistic and Roman historians who use older accounts, mostly unacknowledged, to write a history not of their own time but of the more or less distant past."[25]

Here, against Noth, it should first be pointed out that most of the texts in the Hebrew Bible are anonymous literature and have passed through the hands of multiple copyists and redactors, who preserved their works in temple or sanctuary "libraries." There is no biblical equivalent to Herodotus or Thucydides; the DtrH as well as Chronicles are not *historia* in the sense of an investigation based on a critical evaluation and discussion of sources. Unlike Herodotus, who passes down and comments upon different reports, the authors of the DtrH report events without any discussion of their sources. Although the DtrH does make reference to various documents, it does not describe these in further detail (Josh 10:13; 2 Sam 1:18: "The Book of Jashar"; 1 Kgs 11:41: "The Book of the Acts of Solomon"; 1 Kgs 14:19 passim: "The Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel"; 1 Kgs 14:29 passim: "The Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah"). It is reasonable to assume that the authors of the DtrH had written sources at their disposal, particularly royal annals, whose existence in Israel and Judah is quite probable. The possible use of such sources, however, was not in the service of a faithful presentation of events as called for by Thucydides; nor was the aim to recount Israel's and Judah's history in an objective and distanced manner. From a narrative point of view, the Deuteronomists are omniscient narrators/historians who are precisely informed about Yhwh's decisions and plans and communicate these directly to their audience. The DtrH does, however, share with Herodotus the idea that historiography serves to explain the present or the most recent past. Herodotus wrote his *History* in order to present the reasons for the Greco-Persian Wars. Similarly, the authors of the DtrH sought to explain the fall of Israel and Judah (2 Kgs 17:7: "This occurred because the people of Israel had sinned against the LORD their God …"; 2 Kgs 24:3: "Surely this came upon Judah at the command of the LORD, to remove them out of his sight…").

The Deuteronomistic History is even less comparable to modern historiography than it is to Greek *historia*, despite the fact that it reports information that is of great interest to contemporary historians, particularly in the books of Kings. The Deuteronomists had a decidedly theological perspective and certainly did not have the aim of communicating to ensuing ages "how it essen-

23 Noth, *ÜSt*, 90 (ET 121).
24 Ibid., 99 (ET 132).
25 Ibid., 12 (ET 26).

tially was" ("wie es eigentlich gewesen," Leopold von Ranke).[26] However, if one follows John Van Seters in adopting Johan Huizinga's definition according to which historiography is "the intellectual form in which a civilization renders account to itself of its past,"[27] then the DtrH can certainly be understood as such a project. Indeed, within Deuteronomy through 2 Kings a chronological sequence of different historical periods is constructed which aims to present the meaning of Judah's and Israel's history from its Mosaic beginnings up to the fall of both kingdoms. As Noth already observed, the chronological sequence is created by the fact that "at all the important points in the course of the history, Dtr. brings forward the leading personages with a speech, long or short, which looks forward and backward in an attempt to interpret the course of events…. Elsewhere the summarizing reflections upon history which sum up the action are presented by Dtr. himself as part of the narrative…."[28] These speeches and interpretations of history (Josh 1; Josh 23; Judg 2; 1 Sam 12; 1 Kgs 8; 2 Kgs 17),[29] whose model can be found in Moses' great farewell speech (Deut 1–30), are clearly related to one another and subdivide the books of Deuteronomy through 2 Kings into different periods. Most of these meditations on history allude to the possible or imminent loss of the land (Josh 23:13, 16; 1 Sam 12:15, 25; 1 Kgs 8:46–49; 2 Kgs 17:7–20) and thus prepare the addressees for the impending end.

Deuteronomy presents the "Mosaic foundation" and also contains the criteria according to which the following history should be understood: the exclusive worship of Yhwh, the separation from other peoples and their gods, as well as the observance of Yhwh's commandments found in Deut 12–26. The positive or negative outcome of history depends on the adherence or non-adherence to the commandments, as is made clear in the concluding announcements of blessings and curses in Deuteronomy:

"[47] Because you did not serve the LORD your God joyfully and with gladness of heart for the abundance of everything, [48] therefore you shall serve your enemies whom the LORD will send against you … [49] The LORD will bring a nation from far away, from the end of the earth, to swoop down on you like an eagle, a nation whose language you do not understand … [52] It

26 Leopold von Ranke, *Geschichte der romanischen und germanischen Völker von 1494 bis 1514* (ed. Willy Andreas; Wiesbaden: E. Vollmer, 2000 [1814]). According to Richard J. Evans, von Ranke was not primarily concerned with the objective presentation of events, as is often claimed, but rather to understand "how it essentially was," since "Ranke meant not that he just wanted to collect facts, but that he sought to understand the inner being of the past" (Richard J. Evans, *In Defense of History* [New York: Norton, 1999], 17).

27 Johan Huizinga, "A Definition of the Concept of History," in *Philosophy and History: Essays Presented to Ernst Cassirer* (ed. Raymond Klibansky and H. J. Paton; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936), 1–10; cited in John Van Seters, *In Search of History: Historiography in the Ancient World and the Origins of Biblical History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 1.

28 Noth, *ÜSt*, 5 (ET 18–19).

29 Noth also included among these Josh 12:1–6, but this short list differs significantly from the other historical summaries and can thus be left out of consideration here.

shall besiege you in all your towns until your high and fortified walls, in which you trusted, come down throughout your land; it shall besiege you in all your towns throughout the land that the LORD your God has given you." (Deut 28:47–52)

These and other verses allude to the end that their addressees have already experienced.

The next period is that of the conquest, which is framed by a divine speech in Josh 1 and by Joshua's farewell speech in Josh 23. This period is presented as a "golden age" in which the land is conquered and the people, apart from individual exceptions (Achan in Josh 7), behaves in an exemplary fashion. Thus, in the multi-layered farewell speech in Josh 23, Joshua declares that Yhwh has driven out Israel's enemies. The later version of Josh 23 adds, however, that Yhwh will possibly not wipe out all of the nations in the land, which prepares the ground for the book of Judges that follows. The end of the book of Joshua also contains an alternative that is comparable to Deut 28:

"15 But just as all the good things that the LORD your God promised concerning you have been fulfilled for you, so the LORD will bring upon you all the bad things, until he has destroyed you from this good land that the LORD your God has given you. 16 If you transgress the covenant of the LORD your God, which he enjoined on you, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them, then the anger of the LORD will be kindled against you, and you shall perish quickly from the good land that he has given to you." (Josh 23:15–16)

The period of the judges, which is framed by the (also multi-layered) Deuteronomistic commentary in Judg 2:11–3:4 and by Samuel's farewell speech in 1 Sam 12:1–15*, stands in sharp contrast with the period of the conquest. The time of the so-called judges – who are in fact charismatic savior figures – is evaluated in a thoroughly negative fashion by the Deuteronomistic introduction, despite the fact that the Deuteronomists probably drew on a "Book of Saviors" that originated in the northern kingdom and celebrated the military victories of particular tribal heroes:

"11 Then the Israelites did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and worshiped the Baals; 12 and they abandoned the LORD, the God of their ancestors, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt; they followed other gods, from among the gods of the peoples who were all around them, and bowed down to them; and they provoked the LORD to anger." (Judg 2:11–12)

In the Deuteronomistic construction of history, the prophet Samuel is also the last "judge," who marks the transition into the monarchic period through his farewell speech in 1 Sam 12. This speech integrates the ambivalent attitude of the Deuteronomists to the monarchy that emerges in the use of a variety of positive and negative traditions on the origins of the Israelite monarchy in 1 Sam 8–12. Samuel, too, informs the reader in advance that Yhwh can turn against Israel's kings:

"[B]ut if you will not heed the voice of the LORD, but rebel against the commandment of the LORD, then the hand of the LORD will be against you and your king [NRSV; HEBREW: your fathers]." (1 Sam 12:15)

This speech is followed by the period of the first three kings of Israel who, despite the use of various older traditions, function as ideal types in the Deuteronomistic depiction of history. Saul, through his rejection by Yhwh, prefigures the fall of the northern kingdom. David represents the everlasting dynasty promised by Yhwh, although its existence is called into question in 2 Kgs 25. Finally, Solomon anticipates the ambivalence with which the Deuteronomists depict the kingdom of Judah: on the one hand he is a temple builder who fulfils Yhwh's selection of Jerusalem as the sole legitimate place of worship, but on the other hand he is also a king who indulges in the worship of other gods on account of his international harem. The end of this period is marked by the long and highly complex prayer of Solomon in 1 Kgs 8 on the occasion of the dedication of the temple. Here, too, there is an allusion to the outcome of the history, since Solomon foresees that one day the people will find itself in exile:

"[47] If they sin against you […] and you are angry with them and give them to an enemy, so that they are carried away captive to the land of the enemy, […] [48] if they repent with all their heart and soul in the land of their enemies, who took them captive, and pray to you toward their land, which you gave to their ancestors, the city that you have chosen, and the house that I have built for your name; [49] then hear in heaven your dwelling place their prayer and their plea, maintain their cause …" (1 Kgs 8:46–49)

The next period, the time of the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah, is introduced by negative reports about Solomon that explain why the Solomonic kingdom collapsed. The Deuteronomistic presentation of the kings of Israel and Judah, although drawing on information from royal annals, is not primarily interested in concrete facts but rather in a theological evaluation of each king from a decidedly Judahite perspective. Rulers with long reigns and a certain international reputation, such as Omri (1 Kgs 16:23–27) and Jeroboam II (2 Kgs 14:23–29), are treated in a highly cursory manner. Since, according to the Deuteronomists, only the Jerusalem temple has been chosen by Yhwh, all of the kings of the northern kingdom are evaluated negatively, even Jehu, a zealot of Yhwh. The picture is more ambivalent regarding the kings of Judah. Alongside Hezekiah and Josiah, who are portrayed positively but only appear in the last period of the history, is a series of Judahite kings who receive only qualified positive evaluations: "He did what was right in the sight of the Lord […]. Nevertheless the high places were not taken away" (1 Kgs 15:5; 22:43–44; 2 Kgs 12:3–4; 14:3–4; 15:3–4; 15:34–35). The period of the parallel existence of Israel and Judah comes to an end with the fall of Samaria, which is commented

upon in a long reflection in 2 Kgs 17 that has been reworked several times[30] and integrates a text from the 7th century (17:1–6*, 18, 21–23aα, 23b):

"15 They despised his statutes, and his covenant that he made with their ancestors, and the warnings that he gave them. They went after false idols and became false; they followed the nations that were around them, concerning whom the LORD had commanded them that they should not do as they did. […] 18 Therefore the LORD was very angry with Israel and removed them out of his sight; none was left but the tribe of Judah alone. 19 Judah also did not keep the commandments of the LORD their God but walked in the customs that Israel had introduced." (2 Kgs 17:15–19)

Here, the end of Judah that will be reported during the last historical period is simultaneously anticipated. Despite the highly positive portrayal of Hezekiah and Josiah, Yhwh's anger can no longer be averted, leading to the end of the history in 2 Kgs 24–25 with the fall of Judah. For the reader it is clear that these events are the result of the repeated deviation from the divine commandments and instructions written in the book of Deuteronomy. Thus, the first history of Judah can easily be understood as a response to a crisis. Yet were the Deuteronomists "neutral" theologians who sought only to provide an explanation for the catastrophe? This is, in any case, how Noth understood the work of the individual he called the "Deuteronomist." It is striking that at the end of the books of Kings there is no concluding commentary, which on the one hand gives the history an "open end" but on the other hand raises the question whether the DtrH, which developed during the Neo-Babylonian or early Persian period, originally ended here.

5. The end of the Deuteronomistic History

According to some scholars, the original end of the Deuteronomistic History is found in 2 Kgs 25:21: "So Judah went into exile out of its land" (ויגל יהודה מעל אדמתו).[31] This statement has a parallel in 2 Kgs 17:23 (ויגל ישראל מעל אדמתו), and 2 Kgs 25:21 indeed presents a plausible ending that creates the myth of the empty land, according to which all "Israel" was expelled from its land but which contradicts both the historical facts as well as other biblical reports.

30 On the diachronic differentiation of 17:7–11* and 17:12–17, 20* cf. Walter Dietrich, *Prophetie und Geschichte* (FRLANT 108; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1972), 44, who attributes vv. 7–11 to DtrH; cf. similarly Ernst Würthwein, *Die Bücher der Könige: 1. Kön 17–2. Kön 25* (ATD 11.2; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984), 395–97, who, however, assigns a later date to both layers.

31 Walter Dietrich, "Niedergang und Neuanfang: Die Haltung der Schlussredaktion des deuteronomistischen Geschichtswerkes zu den wichtigsten Fragen ihrer Zeit," in *The Crisis of Israelite Religion: Transformation of Religious Tradition in Exilic and Post-Exilic Times* (ed. Bob Becking and Marjo C. A. Korpel; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 45–70.

If 2 Kgs 25:21 was the original ending of the DtrH, it must be assumed that it was soon expanded by the addition of vv. 22–26, which take up the information about the anarchic situation in the land (narrated in detail in Jer 40–42) and in a certain way revise v. 21, now ending with the flight of the remaining population to Egypt: "Then all the people […] set out and went to Egypt" (v. 26). Through this report, the statement in Deut 28:68 ("The LORD will bring you back in ships to Egypt, by a route that I promised you would never see again…") is taken up, nullifying the entire history of the people of Yhwh that had begun with the exodus from Egypt.[32] It would hardly be possible to end a history in more negative terms than these.

Finally, how should the passage in 2 Kgs 25:27–30, with which the books of Kings in their received form end, be evaluated? According to Noth, the report about the rehabilitation of Jehoiachin, who received a seat of honor at the table of the Babylonian king, was an addition "drawn from [Dtr.'s] own knowledge. This event lacks any intrinsic historical significance but it too belongs in the account of the fate of the Judaean kings."[33] Yet in Noth's view, "Under these circumstances Dtr. cannot mean the improvement in the deported Jehoiachin's personal fortunes (2 Kgs 25:27–30) to herald a new age."[34] Noth's somewhat laconic treatment of these verses quickly led to contradictions; often one read in them a more or less unstated hope in the continuation of the Davidic dynasty or even a hope in the coming of a messianic king.[35]

In my view, the parallels that exist between the fate of Jehoiachin and the Diaspora novellas in Gen 37–50 (the Joseph story), Dan 2–6 (the court tales in Daniel), and the book of Esther are significant in evaluating the compositional place of these verses.[36] All of these texts describe how an individual in exile is taken out of prison and receives a high position in the court of the foreign king (cf. 2 Kgs 25:28; Gen 41:40; Dan 2:48; Esth 10:3), which is symbolized in each

32 Richard E. Friedman, "From Egypt to Egypt: Dtr^1 and Dtr^2," in *Traditions in Transformation: Turning Points in Biblical Faith* (ed. Baruch Halpern and Jon D. Levenson; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1981), 167–92.

33 Noth, *ÜSt*, 87 (ET 117).

34 Ibid., 108 (ET 143).

35 Gerhard von Rad, "Die deuteronomistische Geschichtstheologie in den Königsbüchern" (1947), in idem, *Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament* (TB 8; Munich: C. Kaiser, 1958), 189–204; Erich Zenger, "Die deuteronomistische Interpretation der Rehabilitierung Jojachins," *BZ [NF]* 12 (1968): 16–30.

36 Thomas Römer, "La fin du livre de la Genèse et la fin des livres des Rois: ouvertures vers la Diaspora. Quelques remarques sur le Pentateuque, l'Hexateuque et l'Ennéateuque," in *L'Ecrit et l'Esprit: Etudes d'histoire du texte et de théologie biblique en hommage à Adrain Schenker* (ed. Dieter Böhler, Innocent Himbaza, and Philippe Hugo; OBO 214; Fribourg: Academic Press / Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005), 285–94; cf. also Ronald E. Clements, "A Royal Privilege: Dining in the Presence of the Great King," in *Reflection and Refraction. Studies in Biblical Historiography in Honour of A. Graeme Auld* (ed. Robert Rezetko, Timothy H. Lim, and W. Brian Aucker; VTSup 113; Leiden: Brill, 2007), 49–66; Michael J. Chan, "Joseph and Jehoiachin: On the Edge of Exodus," *ZAW* 125 (2013): 566–77.

case by the changing of clothes (2 Kgs 25:29; Gen 41:42; Dan 5:29; Esth 6:10–11; 8:15). In the Diaspora narratives the aim is to show that the land of the exile can become a land in which it is possible to live long-term and even to have a good career. Second Kings 25:27–30 could be interpreted in a similar way: the fate of Jehoiachin symbolizes the transformation of exile into a situation of Diaspora life, which became the form of existence for a large part of the Jewish population after the exile. Thus, the present form of the DtrH contains an "open end," which is quite comparable to the conclusion of the book of Acts in the New Testament.[37]

6. Conclusion: Myth, history, and prophecy and the formation of the Torah and Nevi'im

The so-called Deuteronomistic History was the first comprehensive Judahite depiction of history, which was conceived after 587 in order to explain the events that had led to the destruction of Jerusalem and to the Babylonian exile. This catastrophe is explained by human failing and God's punitive intervention. During the course of canon formation within the Hebrew Bible, however, this Deuteronomistic historical narrative was partially broken up and recombined with other literary units. The formation of the Pentateuch, which can be situated around 400–350 B.C.E., can be explained as a compromise between Priestly and Deuteronomistic writings but which also takes up other older traditions. In this process, Deuteronomy was separated from the scrolls that followed and was reshaped as the conclusion to the Pentateuch. The Torah ends with the death of Moses outside the Promised Land, which among other things reflects the situation of Diaspora Judaism. In the terminology of Steil, the Pentateuch represents a compromise between Priest and Mandarin, even though it excludes the history of Israel's political institutions. Insofar as both Deuteronomic and Priestly laws are mediated through Moses and the mythic history of Israel (from a canonical point of view) ends prior to the entry into the land and the establishment of the monarchy, in a certain way the Pentateuch establishes the separation between religion and the state, since it allows the divine laws and the rituals associated with them to exist everywhere and without the need for political autonomy. In this sense, the Pentateuch is a "portable homeland," as Heinrich Heine's felicitous expression puts it.

During the second half of the Persian period and the Hellenistic period, the books of Joshua through Kings were joined with the prophetic writings within the canonical unit *Nevi'im*. In this process, the Mandarin was juxtaposed with the Prophet; in other words, history was combined with utopia. Within the *Nevi'im*, 2 Kgs 25 no longer constitutes an ending, since now the report of

37 Philip R. Davies, "The Ending of Acts," *Expository Times* 94 (1983): 334–35.

the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile is followed by the book of Isaiah, which in Isa 7 promises an ideal king and in its second part presents the Persian king Cyrus as Yhwh's messiah, through whom Yhwh will bring about a new creation.

Although the Enneateuch can of course still be read as a continuous, overarching history, it is not a canonical reality. Interestingly, the theology of history that emerges in the Enneateuch is also modified by the integration of the books of Chronicles – which cover the same span of times as the books of Genesis through Kings but in a very different way – within the *Ketuvim*. Up to the time of David, the history is presented primarily through genealogies in which the exodus and conquest play no role, giving the impression of an autochthonous Israel. Moreover, 2 Chr 36 does not end with the report about Judah's last king in exile but rather with the edict of Cyrus, which calls on all Judeans to return to Jerusalem:

> "Thus says King Cyrus of Persia: The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may the LORD his God be with him! Let him go up." (2 Chr 36:23)

Unlike in 2 Kgs 25, this passage asserts that Yhwh is not only a punishing God who uses the Babylonians as his instrument of wrath but rather the God of all peoples who has chosen the Persian king to build his new temple. Most manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible end with this alternative history to the DtrH/Enneateuch, which shows that there were multiple possibilities for interpreting Israel's and Judah's history of origins and national history theologically.