Prophets and Prophecy in the Compositional and Redactional Notes in I—II Kings

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I. Introduction

One of the main features of the recent research on prophets and prophetic literature is the emphasis on their historical, social and political aspects. The last decades have also witnessed a clear tendency to posit deuteronomistic influences in the shaping of most of the biblical books except for the Writings.

The Book of Kings is both one of the main sources for the historical study of the social and political setting of monarchic prophecy and a sure case of literature clearly influenced by deuteronomistic streams in its compositional and redactional levels. Thus, the combined effect of the two tendencies mentioned above seems clear: I—II Kings turns out to be one of the key texts for the study of prophecy and prophetic literature not only in the monarchic period, but also in the period following thereafter (i.e., in the »deuteronomistic era«). Since a comprehensive analysis of the Book of Kings is not a manageable issue for an article, the topic must be narrowed down. This paper focuses on compositional and redactional notes in the I—II Kings.1

On the one hand, the historical-critical study of the prophetic topoi in these notes provides criteria for the differentiation between sources (either underlying the first edition of the book, or introduced into the text as later additions) and redactional and compositional notes concerning prophecy. This differentiation and the genre differentiations that follow it are of great importance for a critical assessment of the testimony (or better, testimonies) of I—II Kings concerning the historical role of prophets and of prophecy during the monarchic period. Methodologically, this analysis is a preliminary and necessary step for the study of prophecy and prophets against their historical background.

1 Of course, a comprehensive analysis of all possible compositional and redactional notes in the Book of Kings stands beyond the scope of this article. This study focuses on notes that are both very likely compositional or redactional and illustrative of deuteronomistic claims and messages concerning prophets and prophecy.
It is the premise of this work that such an analysis has to take into account that the more one can discern the influence of genre requirements in prophetic sources found in I—II Kings, the less one can accept at face value their historical-political claims. Of course, the same holds true concerning clearly redactional units concerning prophecy in I—II Kings. This paper discusses the reliability of compositional and redactional notes concerning prophets and prophecy in I—II Kings, as well as some types of prophetic stories, as sources for the reconstruction of the actual role of the prophet (and of prophecy) in the political milieu of monarchical Israel.

On the other hand, since the compositional and redactional notes found in the Book of Kings were written within deuteronomistic circles, it is reasonable to assume that the analysis of the prophetic topoi in these notes would shed light on deuteronomistic approaches to prophecy, and on deuteronomistic positions concerning the legitimate role of prophets in society. In addition, since prophecy cannot exist without a claim to authority, the analysis of these topoi may elucidate deuteronomistic messages concerning central socio-political and theological issues, such as who are the legitimate bearers of authority in society, and what is (or are) the legitimate source (or sources) of social authority in Israel.

Moreover, since it is extremely unlikely that deuteronomistic writers dealt with these issues only for the joy of building a theoretical utopia completely disassociated from their socio-political environment, the analysis of the deuteronomistic messages included in compositional and redactional notes in I—II Kings has — at the very least — the potential to shed light upon the social conditions and social struggles that characterized the deuteronomistic era in Israel’s history, and to contribute in this way to a better understanding of the deuteronomistic messages that the Book of Kings conveyed to its historical audience.

It is the contention of this paper that a critical study of compositional and redactional notes concerning prophets and prophecy in I—II Kings as persuasive documents written as part of the specific social discourse of the deuteronomistic era demonstrates that: (1) these notes are an excellent source for the analysis of the historical situation at the time of their authors and their original audiences, (2) deuteronomistic circles coped for a long time, and in different ways, with the phenomenon of living prophets and their prophecies, and (3) questions concerning the social authority of the deuteronomistic teachers/interpreters, and of that of their teachings, stood at the center of the historical persuasive message of most of these notes.

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2 I have addressed this issue elsewhere. See E. Ben Zvi, »Who Wrote the Speech of Rabshakeh and When?« JBL 109 (1990), 79—92, esp. 80—82.
II. Preliminary Methodological Concerns

The methodological approach here takes for granted that the Book of Kings was neither composed nor redacted and never functioned in society as an end by itself, but as means of social communication. Social communication always involves persuasion, or at the very least, an attempt of persuasion. Thus, social communication leads (or attempts to lead) either to a reinforcement of some already accepted concepts and behaviors or calls — explicitly or implicitly — for their change.\(^3\)

"Authoritative" books that claim to provide knowledge about God's stances on a variety of issues (e.g., I Reg 16,1-4; II Reg 21,10-15) and that are accepted as "authoritative" by a certain community (such as the Book of Kings in deuteronomistic circles — at least) make strong claims to either a reinforcement of existent positions or to their change. The Book of Kings and more precisely compositional and redactional notes in I—II Kings are here analyzed as persuasive documents written and rewritten by deuteronomistic circles and read, interpreted, and learned by historical audiences (including among them the deuteronomistic circles responsible for the redactional and editorial level).

Clearly, the study of the persuasive cases made in these notes cannot be restricted to their explicit affirmative claims. It must include also the implicit claims, and especially the realm of what is negated by the affirmative claims, because every affirmation (or determination) of a specific religious, social or political content or value implies the negation (or closing) of alternative or contradictory contents or values.\(^4\)

It goes without saying that in real life no persuasive message consists only of bare propositional claims. Implicitly or explicitly, claims are supported by arguments. This being the case, the persuasive message of a text to its community includes both the explicit propositional claim and the line of argumentation supporting the claim, including the premises of the discourse. Thus, an historical-critical study of the persuasive cases made by compositional and redactional notes in I—II Kings cannot restrict its focus to explicit propositional claims; it must also deal with the line of argumentation and its premises.

Turning to an additional set of guidelines, since this paper deals with compositional and redactional notes and their messages to their...
historical audiences, methodological clarity demands an explicit and functional definition of compositional and redactional notes in I—II Kings. Following the methodological lines I presented elsewhere⁵, redactional tradition is characterized here as a set of units containing a distinctive language, pointing to a distinctive set of ideas, or messages, in dialogue with the original work, and providing a new interpretation for it. That is, the redactional notes are a set of interpretative notes that show clear similarities in their language and their message. A compositional tradition is characterized here by a distinctive language pointing to a distinctive set of ideas and in dialogue with other editorial traditions, just as in the redactional traditions. Unlike the redactional, the compositional tradition provides the basic frame without which the entire book would collapse, and therefore one has assume that no version of the biblical book as such could have preceded this tradition. Of course, there are also redactional (or editorial) notes that belong neither to any source that existed separate from the text of I—II Kings (or its forerunners) nor to a clearly (and narrowly) defined redactional or compositional tradition.

III. The Frame of the Book of Kings and its Deuteronomistic Message concerning Prophecy

According to the methodological premises mentioned above, the basic frame of the Book of Kings represents a compositional tradition. This frame consists of a basic and recurrent outline that shapes all the regnal accounts in a quite — even if not entirely — uniform way.⁶ The central idea in these notes is that the cultic behavior of the kings is the decisive issue insofar as it concerns the fate of the kingdom, and that the pure deuteronomistic cult is the only one acceptable in »eyes« of YHWH⁷. What does the compositional frame say about prophets and prophecy?

⁶ That is, (a) opening and connecting formula; (b) evaluation comment, based on the formula »he [the king] did what was right/evil in the eyes of YHWH«; (c) a report about the deeds of the king concerning cult, if there is such a report; (d) reports on special events that occurred during the kingship of the relevant king, if there are such reports; and (e) concluding and transitional formula (such as »the rest of the acts ... and X slept with this fathers, and was buried ... and Y, his son reigned ...«). See, E. Ben Zvi, ZAW 103, 355 ff.
⁷ See, E. Ben Zvi, ZAW 103, 355 ff. Insofar as it concerns this paper, there is no need to take sides in the ongoing controversy concerning the authorship of these notes (single, dual or multiple), for in any case these notes represent a stream of thought
The answer is: absolutely nothing. The framing notes contain no reference to prophecy or to prophets. On the surface, the reason for the absence of any reference seems clear. The Book of Kings is a royal book, i.e., a book that consists of a series of accounts of the deeds of the different kings — even if it contains some stories about prophets, so why should be framing notes refer to the prophets? Although correct, this argument points only to the tip of the iceberg. The frame shapes the book as a series of royal accounts because its message is that the fate of the kingdom depends on whether the king behaves according to deuteronomic/deuteronomistic cultic requirements. If this is the case, two logical conclusions concerning prophets and prophecy follow: (1) the role of the prophets in the main drama of history could only be a secondary one, if, indeed they are seen to have a role at all; and (2) if there was a role for the prophets, its most important aspect could have been to remind the king that he should behave according to the deuteronomistic principles.

Significantly, the frame does not mention prophets fulfilling this role. Moreover, Deut 17,18–20 contains no reference to prophets when it makes a similar claim, i.e., that the king is to be judged according to his observance of the deuteronomic laws. The fact that Deut 17,18–20 does not mention the prophets, neither as teachers of the king nor as preaching, warning, or even, condemning figures is very significant because of (a) the influence of the theological thought of Deuteronomy on the deuteronomistic history, and (b) the deuteronomistic logic of the frame of I–II Kings, according to which if the prophets do not teach the deuteronomistic cultic provisions to the king — so he may do what is acceptable in the eyes of YHWH, then they are almost irrelevant for »historiographical« purposes. Furthermore, prophets play no role in another two deuteronomistic historical books, the Book of Joshua and the Book of Judges.

that expresses itself in a specific language, and that frames the separate accounts into one literary and theological unity without which the entire Book of Kings would collapse. Moreover, as it will be shown below, the communicative message of all these notes is clearly the same, at least insofar as it concerns prophets and prophecy.

8 »When he [the king] is seated on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this teaching, from that which is in charge of the levitical priests, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear YHWH, his God, by keeping all the words of his teaching and these statutes, by doing them.« It is noteworthy that the text explicitly refers to a king who has been chosen by YHWH (see Deut 17,15).

9 Except for a short redactional note in the latter concerning an unnamed אָשֶׁר נָבָא (*prophetman*) in Jud 6,8–10, and for a single reference to Deborah as אָשֶׁר נָבָא הָשָׁבָתָה (*prophetwoman*) in Jud 4,4. Significantly, the expression אָשֶׁר נָבָא occurs nowhere else in the OT. It is worth noting that the very short fragment of the Book
Thus, since it is unlikely that this situation is the result of a multiple coincidence due only to pure blind chance, one has to conclude that the accumulative weight of the testimonies of (a) Deut 17,18—20, (b) the Book of Joshua, (c) the Book of Judges, and (d) the frame of I—II Kings strongly suggests the existence of a certain stream in the deuteronomistic historiographical tradition in which prophets — and by implication, prophecy — were of secondary political and, perhaps, theological importance.

IV. Redactional Notes Describing Prophets as Deuteronomistic Speakers and Their Rhetorical Function

The stream in the deuteronomistic historiographical tradition referred to in the preceding section is coherent with, and probably related to, the trend to social control that characterizes the deuteronomistic code. This trend there subordinates prophets, as well as any independent center of actual or potential authority and social power, to the ideology (or theology) of the movement; that is, to the full acceptance of the deuteronomistic provisions. If prophets are allowed to fulfill their social role but only insofar as they remain subordinate to the religious authority of the deuteronomistic code (see Deut 13,2—6), it is unlikely that their independent social role would be exalted. To the contrary, one may expect the recasting of the figure of the »authentic« prophet in a way that illustrates his or her acceptance of the deuteronomistic theology; that is, to a description of the prophet as a deuteronomistic speaker.

of Judges preserved in 4QJudga (Jud 6,2—6.11—13) demonstrates beyond doubt the existence of a text of Judges in which Jud 6,11—13 immediately followed Jud 6,6. That is, a text that does not contain והם הש—who, and, of course, all Jud 6,7—10. (V. 7 seems to be a resumptive repetition introducing vv. 8—10 into the MT [or MT type] text). See J. Trebolle Barrera, »Textual Variants in 4QJudga and the Textual and Editorial History of the Book of Judges,« RevQ 14 (1990), 229—45.

10 See, for instance, the regulations concerning the king in Deut 17,16—20, and the pericope about local autonomy in Deut 13,14—19. Needless to say, according to the Deuteronomic Code no priest can serve YHWH unless he follows the deuteronomistic cultic provisions (such as centralization of the cult). Cf. W. Herbrechtsmeir, The Biblical Legacy of Religious Violence: The Evolution of Deuteronomic Law and Religious Culture (Ph.D. Diss. Columbia University 1987), 169—211.

11 The very mention of prophets in the context of Deut 13,2—6 shows that prophets were considered a potential source of authority, one that the deuteronomistic (or deuteronomistic) movement was concerned about. Since prophets claim to proclaim a revealed word of God, the deuteronomistic limitations on prophecy are tantamount to a claim of a superior theological (an social) authority by the authors of the deuteronomistic code on their own behalf. That this text is meant to conflict with other positions concerning the ways for discerning the »authentic« character of a prophet is underlined by the
Significantly, one of the clearest instances of this deuteronomistic shaping, or reshaping, of the figure of the prophet occurs at a central point in the deuteronomistic account of the history of the monarchy: namely, the account of the establishment of the Northern Kingdom. According to a prophetic tradition, Ahijah, in a symbolic act, tore his new garment into twelve pieces and gave ten to Jeroboam. These pieces represent, of course, the ten tribes (I Reg 11,29—31). Significantly, deuteronomistic writers put a divine speech in Ahijah’s mouth for that occasion:

He (Ahijah) said to the Jeroboam: ... For thus says YHWH, the God of Israel: See I am about to tear (והת) the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon, and I will give to you (Jeroboam) the ten tribes — but the one tribe he (Solomon) will have it, for the sake of my servant David and for the sake of Jerusalem, the city that I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel — for (יוסף) he has forsaken me, and worshiped Ashtoreth the god of the Sidonians, Chemosh the god of Moab, and Milcom the god of the Children of Ammon, and has not walked in my ways, doing what is right in my eyes and (keeping) my statues and my ordinances (מאתות וmonary) as his father David (did). Nevertheless, I will not take the whole kingdom out of his hand but I will make him ruler all the days of his life, for the sake of my servant David whom I chose and who keep my commandments and my statues (vv. 31—34).12

This speech not only contains clearly deuteronomistic phrases like »the city that I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel« (v. 32, cf. v. 36) but is distinctly related to two deuteronomistic pieces:

Solomon followed Ashtoreth the god of the Sidonians, and Milcom the god (MT abomination)13 of the Ammonites. So Solomon did what is wrong in the eyes of YHWH, and did not completely follow (לא være אתו YHWH as David his father (did). Then Solomon built a shrine to Chemosh, the god (MT abomination) of Moab,
on the mountain (גֵּבָה) east of Jerusalem, and to Molech, the god (אֹפֵּרוֹן הָגֹיִם) of the Children of Ammon. (I Reg 11,5—7)

... Since this has been with you and you have not kept my covenant and my statues that I have commanded you, I will surely tear (יִתְנָה) the kingdom from you and give it to your servant. But I will not do it in your days for the sake of David your father; I will tear it out (יִתְנָה) from the hand of your son. I will not, however, tear (יִתְנָה) the entire kingdom; I will give your son one tribe for the sake of David my servant, and for the sake of Jerusalem, which I have chosen. (I Reg 11,11—13)

I Reg 11,5—7 is the main part of the report of the narrator concerning the »fall of Solomon«. I Reg 11,11—13 contains the word of YHWH to Solomon concerning the division of the kingdom. Significantly, although this divine message is told by the narrator, it claims to be a direct report of the divine speech (YHWH is referred to in the first person, and Solomon in the second). Since the message and language that characterize this speech are clearly deuteronomistic, this report implies that YHWH’s message and language were deuteronomistic, at the very least in that occasion.14 Against this background, it is not surprising that when a true prophet, Ahijah, is described as reporting the word of YHWH that came to him, also his words that resemble those of the narrator, and those of YHWH to Solomon. The result is self-evident: (a) the prophecy of Ahijah turns out to be deuteronomistic one, (b) the prophet Ahijah turns out to be a deuteronomistic speaker, and (c) YHWH is described as a supporter of deuteronomistic ideas, who even uses deuteronomistic language when speaking to prophets and kings.

Of course, this deuteronomistic trend is not unique to the Book of Kings. It is attested to, for instance, by the so-called prose sermons in the Book of Jeremiah (e.g., Jer 7,1—8,3; 11,1—13; 16,10—13; 19,3—9.11b—13). These sermons shape the image of Jeremiah, i.e., the true prophet, as a deuteronomistic speaker, and indirectly the image of God as a deuteronomistic supporter.

This being the case, one has to conclude that the redactional notes in I—II Kings that describe prophets as deuteronomistic speakers are not idiosyncratic. Rather they are illustrative of one important aspect (or approach) in deuteronomistic thought to the issue of prophecy and prophets.

14 It goes without saying that when deuteronomistic circles imagined God as a deuteronomistic supporter who even expresses himself/herself in deuteronomistic language, and when they proclaimed this image by means of texts such as the text under discussion, they consciously or unconsciously empowered (or attempt to empower) themselves. See below.
V. Redactional Reinterpretations of Prophetic Stories and Traditions

The Book of Kings contains several narratives that are dependent upon, or reflect, prophetic stories and traditions that existed and developed long before they were brought into the Book of Kings (e.g., the tradition about Ahijah mentioned above). Since the Book of Kings is a book about kings, these prophetic traditions have found their way into the book mainly because they refer to prophets interacting directly or indirectly with kings.

One of the basic genre requirements of a prophetic story is that the main hero of the story is a prophet. As a result, when a king appears in a prophetic story, he cannot fulfill the role of the main hero. The king can appear there only as a helper or an opponent of the prophet. This being the case, the combined result of (a) the thematic and structural constraints that tend to select for inclusion in I—II Kings prophetic stories and traditions about prophets interacting with kings, and (b) basic genre requirements of the prophetic traditions behind the Book of Kings, is unequivocal: Prophetic narratives in the Book of Kings describing the prophets as having a central role in the political and social life of Israel.

It goes without saying that one cannot simply equate the religious thought of a pre-existent source eventually included in the Book of Kings (such as these prophetic traditions) with the religious thought of the deuteronomistic movement. To illustrate, the deuteronomistic redactor responsible for the introduction of the Mount Carmel story (I Reg 18,20–40) probably did not accept the idea that a true prophet can offer legitimate sacrifices to YHWH on every hill, nevertheless he (or less likely, she) included the story.

This being the case, a certain set of questions comes to the forefront: How did deuteronomistic circles react to the »historical« picture suggested by the prophetic stories included (or even that they have included)?

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15 Cf. the generic constraints that characterize legends of interactions between Jewish sages and Roman emperors (e.g., b. Hul 59b; 60a; b. AZ 10a–b; QohR 9.4; Tan 9). Of course, these sources cannot be taken at face value, neither for reconstructing Roman history nor for the socio-political status of Jewish Sages in the first centuries CE.

16 Of course, although a traditionally accepted prophetic story may contain a non-deuteronomistic (or even anti-deuteronomistic) message, its retelling in the context of the deuteronomistic history may well serve deuteronomistic purposes. On this issue see section vii.

The lack of necessary identity between the thought expressed in a specific non-deuteronomistic source and deuteronomistic trends is precisely the reason that the study of deuteronomistic approaches to prophets and prophecy in the Book of Kings has to rely mainly on redactional and compositional notes. This study is methodologically consistent with this restriction.
in the ongoing Book of Kings? Did deuteronomistic circles agree with the idea that prophets had (or should have) a central role in the political and social life of Israel? If not, how did they express their reservations? From a »functional« point of view — and since we only have a theological-literary text, i.e., I—II Kings — this set of questions leads to the following questions: (a) are there distinctly redactional notes interpreting (or reinterpreting) prophetic stories? and if they are, (b) what message did they convey to their historical community?

As mentioned above, the story of Ahijah is preceded by a divine announcement to Solomon that the kingdom will be divided because of his sins (I Reg 11,9—13). In addition, the divine message that Ahijah is described as presenting closely resembles the words that Solomon heard earlier (I Reg 11,32—33). As a result, the message of the book becomes clear: The sins of Solomon, and God's reaction to them are the real historical cause for the division of the kingdom. The symbolic acts of Ahijah (vv. 29—30) are little more than a nice story. They do not have real historical importance, because — contrary to what may be suggested by the prophetic story by itself — they did not cause the events to happen.

In a similar way, the story of Elisha and Joash, the Israelite King (II Reg 13,14—19), seems to suggest that the symbolic actions of the prophet, (mediated in this case by the king) have actual power. According to v. 18, after the king struck three arrows to the ground and stopped, »the man of God« (Elisha in this context) said:

You should have struck five or six times; then you would have struck down Aram until you had made an end of it, but now you will strike down Aram only three times (v. 19)

Nevertheless, an editorial note in v. 23 makes clear that Israel's salvation was dependent neither on the acts of the prophet nor on the number of times the king struck, but on God's will:

YHWH was gracious to them [Israel], had compassion on them, turned toward them — because of YHWH's [his] covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and would not destroy them ...

A third clear illustration of this interpretative tendency occurs in the account of Jeroboam II, King of Israel. According to the note of evaluation, the king did evil in the eyes of YHWH (II Reg 14,24). However, the next verse (v. 25) reports Jeroboam's military and political success, a success which is described as the fulfillment of the prophecy of Jonah ben Amitai (v. 25b). But, what was the putative weight of this prophecy in the political and military events? According to the next two verses (vv. 26—27), almost none, »for YHWH saw that the affliction of Israel was very bitter ... so YHWH saved them by the hand of Jeroboam son of Joash."
Summing up, a clear trend can be discerned: (a) received prophetic stories and traditions exalt the role of the prophet, (b) redactional notes counteract this exaltation. In the literary and theological context of the Book of Kings the latter are the interpretative keys for the meaning of the prophetic story; and certainly not the other way around. Significantly, these redactional notes do not deny traditionally accepted accounts of the deeds of the mentioned prophet — such a stance could have been communally impossible, and would have been self-defeating from a rhetorical point of view (see vii) — rather they provide a sense of »proper« (i.e., deuteronomistic) proportion to the role of the prophet in the described events.

VI. Redactional Notes Concerning Fulfillment of Prophecies and their Rhetorical Function in I—II Kings

The last example in the preceding section points to a series of accounts in I—II Kings referring to main events in the monarchic period as the fulfillment of prophecies. These accounts are commonly, and correctly, related to the second reference to prophets in Deuteronomy, namely Deut 18,14—22. This unit singles out the prophet as the only legitimate mean for seeking knowledge concerning the future. While other ways are banned, prophecy seems to be exalted by the reference Moses (vv. 15,18) and by the statement that YHWH will raise up a
prophet (at least one) in each generation, and he (or she) will be recognized by the community by the fulfillment of his (or her) prophecies (v. 22).

If the concept of prophecy conveyed by Deut 18,22 was accepted by deuteronomistic historians, they could draw, and probably drew, two exegetical inferences: (1) since the prophecies of the faithful prophets always come true, a chronological list of these prophecies should be real »history«; and (2) since it is highly unlikely that prophets were always silent concerning the main politico-religious events of the Israelite history (like the violent downfall of a ruling dynasty, as well as the ascension of a new one), faithful prophets should have foretold at least some of these events.

These inferences go hand in hand with a list of notes in I – II Kings that explicitly refer to main events in Israelite history as the fulfillment of a previous prophecy, and that are characterized by recurrent language:

Therefore I will bring disaster on the House of Jeroboam and I will cut off from Jeroboam every male, bond and free, in Israel, and I will consume the House of Jeroboam as dung is consumed, until it is all gone. Anyone belonging to Jeroboam who dies in the city, the dogs will eat; and anyone who dies in the open field, the birds of the sky will eat. (I Reg 14,10 – 11a)

Therefore I will consume Baasha and his house, and I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam, son of Nebat. Anyone belonging to Baasha who dies in the city, the dogs will eat; and anyone who dies in the open field, the birds of the sky will eat. (I Reg 16,3 – 4)

I will bring disaster on you; I will consume you and I will cut off from Ahab every male, bond and free, characterization of the legitimate prophet as one »like Moses« is coherent with deuteronomistic trends discussed in this paper. Cf. R. Polzin, Moses and the Deuteronomist, 1980, esp. 57 – 62. Significantly, according to Deut 1,9 – 19, when Moses establishes the legitimate leadership of the people, he does not appoint independent prophets but known »wise and understanding« persons. The judges are instructed that in any »difficult« case they should ask Moses, and judge according to the Mosaic instruction, i.e., according to the deuteronomic/deuteronomistic instruction.

Or, at least, one from time to time, according to the need. Cf. R. P. Carroll, »The Elijah-Elisha Sagas: Some Remarks on Prophetic Succession in Ancient Israel«, VT 19 (1969), 400 – 15, esp. 401 – 02.

In Israel. I will make (הנהו) your house like the house of Jeroboam, son of Nebat, and the house of Baasha, son of Ahijah.... Anyone belonging to Ahab who dies in the city, the dogs will eat; and anyone who dies in the open field, the birds of the sky will eat. (I Reg 21:21 – 22a,24)

All the house of Ahab will perish, and I will cut off from Ahab every male (מַאתֵי נָרִי) bond and free (מֶזוֹרֵר וַגוֹיָה), in Israel. I will make (הנהו) your house like the house of Jeroboam, son of Nebat, and the house of Baasha, son of Ahijah. (II Reg 9:8 – 9)

Even a cursory reading of the putative words of Ahijah in I Reg 14,10 – 11, the words of Jehu son of Hanani against the House of Basha in I Reg 16,3 – 4, the words of Elijah in I Reg 21,21 – 22a,24, and those of Elisha in II Reg 9,8 – 9 shows that the four prophets spoke in the same way. More specifically, the claim of the redactor, or redactors, is that the divine word that came to them was almost identical. Moreover, there is an explicit series of cross references that unify these notes into one system. The redactional character of these prophecies is supported not only by their recurrent language and message, but also by the absence of historical data in addition to those presented in the basic historical narrative, which is presumed by these notes. In other words, these notes, at least in their present form, do not stand outside the historical narrative. These notes clearly show that what the prophet said came true.

The redactional character of the system of explicit comments »as God had spoken by X,« or »as God had spoken by his servant X« is self-evident (e.g., I Reg 12,15; 14,18; 15,29; 16,12; 17,16; II Reg 9,36; 10,10; 14,25; 17,23; 24,2). There even the text claims to be a comment made by the narrator.

The message of these two systems of notes is clear: True prophets had true knowledge concerning future events, true knowledge provided by God. These notes are an exegetical necessity derived from the concepts expressed in Deut 18,14 – 22. In addition, they are an eloquent historical proof that Deut 18,22 provides a reliable rule for the communal recognition of the true prophets of YHWH.

The claim that history, i.e., the actual course of the events, provides support for certain theological positions, that God’s position concerning certain issues can be abstracted from history, characterize both the

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23 Cf., for instance, I Reg 11,31 – 35* and cf. I Reg 12,15; I Reg 14,7 – 11* and cf. I Reg 15,29; concerning Jehu’s House, see II Reg 15,12 and cf. II Reg 10,30. See also Ben Zvi, ZAW 103, 355 ff.
deuteronomistic history of Israel and I—II Chronicles. In this specific case, the mentioned redactional notes provide an allegedly independent source of knowledge of the divine position on prophets and prophecy. And that position supports Deut 18,21—22. The emphatic and recurrent historical buttressing of the reliability and divine support for Deut 18,21—22 in redactional notes in I—II Kings suggests that there was an important issue at stake for the deuteronomistic writers.

Deut 18,22 reads »if the prophet speaks in the name of YHWH and the oracle does not come true, that oracle was not spoken by YHWH; the prophet has uttered it presumptuously: do not stand in dread of him.« To a great extent there is nothing new in the idea expressed there. Prophets in the ancient Near East — including, of course, Israel — were supposed to provide true knowledge concerning the future, and certainly not to mislead. Nevertheless, one cannot but notice that in Deut 18,21—22, a widely accepted concept turns out to be the only test of prophetic legitimacy and authority (see v. 21). Thus, this is another implementation of a very common rhetorical technique used to persuade a social group of the validity of a new position — or to reinforce adherence to an existent position, i.e., to convince the group that the new position is either tantamount to or follows a premise considered by the group to be self-evident. If this is the case, the goal of Deut 18,21—22 is to persuade a certain social group that there is one single reliable test for prophetic authority: the prophetic announcement comes from YHWH if it is fulfilled in actual life (in the terms of deuteronomistic historians, in »actual history«). The larger social and theological implications of the acceptance of the sole authority of this test are clear and significant: No one in Israel can fully accept the independent authority of a contemporaneous prophet, for no one can know what prophecy will come true in the future.

24 Deuteronomistic and chronistic historians attempted to show that the seemingly disparate historical events are in fact concrete implementations of a single set of »rules« according to which YHWH governs history. Accordingly, they thought that either an analysis of these events may help to elucidate the divine set of rules, or that a certain set of rules can be shown as implemented in the course of history, or both. In any case, the goal is to develop an historical discourse whose main function is to persuade its audience of the validity of a set of theological and political positions.

25 »The purpose of the discourse in general is to bring the audience to the conclusions offered by the orator, starting from the premises that they already accept — which is the case unless the orator has been guilty of a petitio principii. The argumentative process consists in establishing a link by which acceptance, or adherence, is passed from one element to another« (Ch. Perelman, The New Rhetoric and the Humanities, 1979, 18—19). It goes without saying that rhetorical discourse is not restricted to oral speech, but includes written discourse.
Thus, the redactional notes and traditions that underscore that the actual events in history prove that true prophets of the past (i.e., those considered by received traditions as true prophets) foresaw and announced the future do more than fulfil the logical requirements imposed by the concepts expressed by Deut 18,14–22. They also support them by showing that history, a reflection of YHWH’s will, buttresses the case of Deut 18,14–22. Moreover, these redactional notes and traditions, along with Deut 18,21–22, convey a clear message against the practical acceptance of the authority of living, contemporaneous prophets. Significantly, both exalt the status of the true prophet (of the past) in order to undermine the independent authority of a contemporaneous prophet.

VII. The Use and Contextual Message of »Prophetic Historiography« in the Book of Kings

In addition to the redactional notes mentioned above, the Book of Kings contains other texts conveying the message that the words of true prophets were fulfilled in history. Some of them are based on pre-existent prophetic »historiography« (e.g., II Reg 18,17–19,36*; II Reg 20,12–19). This genre suits the theological and historiographical goal of proving the constant fulfillment of true prophecy through history, because one of its requirements is that whatever the prophet said, comes true. For writers who accept the line of thought expressed in the redactional notes and traditions mentioned above, these stories are among the best available material for making their case. Not only that these stories »prove« that the position of the writers is correct but they also do that by referring to cherished prophets whose authority was accepted by received traditions. That is, the weight of traditions exalting prophets of the past is used against the authority of prophets in the present.

For deuteronomistic circles interested in the disappearance of independent prophets (i.e., those who claim to a direct divine authority) these traditions were probably one of the most efficient weapons in their struggle. The existence of an audience expecting the fulfillment of the prophetic role is a necessary condition for the existence of independent prophets. As Overholt expressed it, without a feedback from an audience there is no prophet, and prophecy comes to an end. Thus, if the mentioned deuteronomistic

26 See Rofé, The Prophetical Stories, esp. 75–79. Also compare with »political prophetic legends« (e.g., II Reg 6,8–23); see Rofé, The Prophetical Stories, 55–74, esp. 58–60.
approach is to prevail in society it has to succeed in convincing potential audiences not
to recognize the words of contemporaneous prophets as divinely authoritative. It seems
natural to assume that circles that especially cherished the stories and traditions exalting
prophets of the past were central among those that may have been expecting been the
contemporaneous fulfillment of the prophetic role. Accordingly, these circles were an
important, or perhaps, the most important, audience for deuteronomistic messages concern-
ing prophecy. The use of the audience's own traditions, ideas, and beliefs in order to
bring it to the acceptance of the speakers' positions is a common persuasive technique
(see above). Thus, it seems that deuteronomistic circles relied heavily in these traditions
in order to persuade their social bearers not to accept any authority as divinely compelling
but that of the deuteronomic code and its deuteronomistic interpretation/s.

If this is the case, the use of traditions exalting prophets would be
only one facet of a more general feature in the work of deuteronomistic
historians. Accounts and stories about »saviors« are abundant in the
deuteronomistic Book of Judges, but the book's message is that no
charismatic ruler can provide lasting salvation. Traditions exalting Davi-
dic kings were similarly used in the Book of Kings in order to convey
the message that the Davidic king, even the best possible king (Josiah),
cannot provide lasting salvation, that the only way to salvation is by
behaving according to the deuteronomistic provisions. The end of

books is also an act aimed to undermine the legitimacy of contemporaneous prophecy
in the post-monarchic period, see E. Ben Zvi, A Historical-Critical Study of the
Book of Zephaniah, BZAW, esp. chapter 5. (For partial historical analogies involving
canonization rather than composition, see F. E. Greenspahn »Why Prophecy Ceased«,
Bible, 1972, 228 — 36.) Also the remark of A. G. Auld »Prophets and Prophecy in
Jeremiah and Kings», ZAW 96 [1984], 66 — 82) that »a good »prophet« is always a dead
one!« (p. 67) is worth noting. Some elements in Auld's thesis may support some of the
ideas advanced in this paper, but I agree, in general terms, with Williamson's critique
of Auld's position, and no position, or argument, in this article relies on the previous
»Prophets through the Looking Glass«, JSOT 27 (1983), 3 — 23.41 — 44; and H. G. M.
Williamson, »A response to A. G. Auld«, JSOT 27 (1983), 33 — 39; cf. R. Carroll,

28 See J. G. McConville, »Narrative and Meaning in the Book of Kings«, Bib 70 (1989),
31 — 41. G. N. Knoppers pointed out that the Book of Kings highlights the exceptional
and unparalleled achievements of Solomon, Hezekiah and Josiah by means of the
incomparability formulae (I Reg 3,12; II Reg 18,5; 23,25). Accordingly, no king exceeded
Solomon in wealth and wisdom, Hezekiah in trust, and Josiah in his reforms (see
G. N. Knoppers, »There was none like Him: Incomparability in the Books of Kings«,
CBQ 54 (1992), 411 — 431). Significantly, the Book of Kings teaches its audience that:
(a) the wisdom and wealth of Solomon were not enough to avoid the »fall of Solomon«
and the division of the kingdom; (b) the king who showed unsurpassed trust, Hezekiah,
could act in such a way that the loss of the royal treasures and the exile of the Davidic
line were unavoidable (II Reg 20,12 — 19); and (c) the king whose reforms were
unparalleled could not save Judah from the divine punishment.
Book of Joshua (i.e., Joshua 24) may also be understood in this light, for it conveys the message that lasting salvation is not be achieved by the actions of a mighty warrior, even if his might is only a reflection of his pious religious attitude, but on the people’s acceptance of deuteronomistic provisions.

Against the socio-political circumstances of deuteronomistic writers, the theological and social-political meaning of these messages seems obvious: Neither a Davidic scion nor a charismatic (non-Davidic) leader is the real answer for the people’s needs. Neither is one single pious leader (as Joshua). The answer is to keep the deuteronomistic provisions, as interpreted by deuteronomistics circles. Thus in order to make this point, deuteronomistic historians refer again and again to stories exalting alternative sources of social, political, and theological authority, only in order to show that these potential sources are by their own nature (i.e., no matter how pious is the individual leader whose legitimacy is based on any of these sources) inadequate for Israel’s needs.

While the deuteronomistic code envisaged a society in which the only source of authority is the theology/ideology expressed in the code, it seems that circles of deuteronomistic historians wrote in order to implement such a society in the post-monarchic period. Although a society can be described in theological/ideological terms, no society can exist without flesh and blood leaders. Moreover, even the deuteronomistic/deuteronomistic provisions could not be implemented in real life without a set of regulating and interpreting rules and rulings. To sum up, a flesh and blood leadership is required. If this is the case, the polemic polarity between deuteronomistic/deuteronomistic divine teaching on the one hand, and Davidic scions, charismatic leaders, and independent prophets on the other reflects a social and political picture of a polarity

29 The same holds true for Samuel. See the contextual message of the deuteronomistic reference to Samuel’s sons in I Sam 8,3. This note points out that Samuel’s solution of the Elide crisis was by its own nature only a temporary one, for the scenario needed for restarting the vicious circle of failure was already set up. It is worth noting that according to the II Reg 24,3 the reason for the divine punishment of Judah in 586 BCE was the behavior of Manasseh the son of Hezekiah, namely the son of the king whose trust in YHWH was unsurpassed. That the legitimacy of a priestly dynasty (or any dynasty) depends on the behavior of the priests is clearly stated in I Sam 2,29–30 (cf. the message of I Reg 8,25). The accounts of Joshua and of Elisha in the deuteronomistic history point out that the best possible non-dynastic system of succession (i.e., one based on choosing the person who most deserve leadership in each generation) works for no more than one generation. Thus, also this system provides no lasting salvation. Cf. C. Schäfer-Lichtenberger, »Josua« und »Elischa« — eine biblische Argumentation zur Begründung der Autorität und Legitimität des Nachfolgers«, ZAW 101 (1989), 198–222.

30 Of course, these stories and traditions fulfill the same persuasive role that the stories and traditions concerning prophets and prophecy fulfill, see above.

between the latter and human bearers and interpreters of the deuteronomistic teaching, i.e., deuteronomistic writers\(^{32}\), who were interpreters of the ongoing deuteronomistic tradition and its teachers to the people – or to a certain group among the people. Clearly, the persuasive potential of a claim based on the supremacy of a divine deuteronomic/deuteronomistic teaching is much stronger than the potential of a claim based on the supremacy of a group of interpreters.\(^{33}\) Since these texts either reflect or are a part of an effort, made by deuteronomistic circles, to influence the thought and the behavior of other groups in society and to reinforce their own convictions and behavioral norms, the occurrence of persuasive (rhetorical) features in their writing is only expected.

**VIII. Prophets as Warning Voices Calling for Repentance**

As shown above, deuteronomistic historians stressed that the word of YHWH given to a prophet has been fulfilled in history, both as a logical requirement derived from the concept expressed in Deut 18,14–22 but also in order to undermine the authority of their living contemporaneous prophets. The stress on this empirical test of prophetic authority led to a clear image of prophecy. Prophecy is not a »warning voice calling for repentance« (e.g., Zach 1,3–6, Jonah; cf. Jer 18,7–11), in which case prophecy would be conditional; the prophet is neither a preacher (e.g., Zach 1,3–4) nor a »watchman« (Ez 3,17–21, 33,1–9) nor a »tester« of the ways of his or her people (Jer 6,27).\(^{34}\) The prophet

\(^{32}\) If the present analysis is correct, the plural in the word »writers« should be underscored.

The texts mentioned in footnote 21 show that these deuteronomistic writers do not believe in the long term viability of a system based on one single pious interpreter of the divine teaching. These preference for the »many« may be related to the existence of a less centralized Israel in the post-monarchic period.

\(^{33}\) The rhetorical value of the movement from references to a concrete person fulfilling a social or political role to references to abstract concepts is clear and examples are abundant. Cf. J. Bentham's words: »Amongst the instruments of delusion employed for reconciling the people to the dominion of the one and the few, is the device of employing for the designation of persons, and classes of persons, instead of the ordinary and appropriate denominations, the names of so many abstract fictitious entities, contrived for the purpose. Take the following examples:

Instead of Kings, or the King, — the *Crown* and the *Throne*.
Instead of Churchman, — the *Church*, and sometimes the *Altar*.
Instead of Lawyers, — the *Law*.
Instead of Judges, or a Judge, — the *Court*.
Instead of Rich men, or the Rich, — *Property.*«


\(^{34}\) See also Ez 33,17–20 and Jer 28,9.
is the one who says the word of YHWH and this word, (i.e., prophecy) will be fulfilled, always.\(^{35}\)

In addition, it has been shown that there is a clear tendency in deuteronomistic circles to take advantage of the socially accepted legitimacy of prophets, and prophecy, as religious cultural institutions by turning the prophet (and indirectly YHWH) into a deuteronomistic speaker. Since the purpose of a (fictional or historical) deuteronomistic speaker is not only to state deuteronomic/deuteronomistic codes of behavior but also to convince the addressees of the speech that they should follow these codes, then the inner logic of the image of a deuteronomic speaker leads to that of a deuteronomistic preacher. But a preacher, a »warning call« that asks people to turn away from their ways cannot simply proclaim that the people are doomed or saved as a sealed fact, as for instance Jehu ben Hanani said concerning the House of Baasha, or Ahijah concerning Jeroboam. The future described by a preacher must be conditional. Instead of the certainty of doom (or salvation), a warning prophet has to stress certainty concerning the nature of the ways leading to doom.

This image of the prophet, as preacher of repentance, is therefore, a logical development in deuteronomistic thought. It occurs in II Reg 17,13 – 16, and perhaps implicitly in II Reg 21,8 – 9. Both notes probably belong to a »nomistic« redactional tradition that stresses the role of the Mosaic Torah (i.e., the deuteronomic/deuteronomistic instruction).\(^{36}\) Of course, this image of the prophet, and of prophecy, is not unique to I-II Kings. It occurs also, for instance, in Zach 1,2 – 6, and is further developed in I-II Chronicles.\(^{37}\)

**IX. Conclusions concerning Deuteronomistic Circles**

The present discussion has shown that compositional and redactional notes in I-II Kings point to a continuous process of coping with the phenomenon of prophecy and prophets. Either by turning them

\(^{35}\) Cf. Num 19,23; Isa 40,8; Tob 14,4. For this contrast, see Rofé, The Prophetical Stories, 165–70, and Rofé, in: Essays in Honor of B. S. Childs, 1988, 246 ff.

\(^{36}\) It is noteworthy that also the role of (prophetic) intercession is related to the role of preaching, teaching the deuteronomistic Torah. This relation is established not only by the deuteronomic/deuteronomistic image of Moses as prophet who interceded on behalf of Israel before YHWH but also, and very explicitly, in I Sam 12,19 – 25, which probably belongs to the dtr-N (i.e., »nomistic«) redactional tradition. For the situation in the Book of Jeremiah, see, C. R. Seitz, »The Prophet Moses and the Canonical Shape of Jeremiah«, ZAW 101 (1989), 3–27.

\(^{37}\) Cf. I. L. Seligman, »Die Auffassung von der Prophetie in der deuteronomistischen und chronistischen Geschichtsschreibung (mit einem Exkurs über das Buch Jeremia)«, VT.S
into figures of secondary importance, or by undermining the practical authority of an independent, foeseer, prophet, or by turning the prophet into a deuteronomistic preacher (not unlike themselves), or both, the deuteronomistic writers, redactors and editors of the Book of Kings consider prophets and prophecy an important part of their agenda, an issue that has to be dealt with in their reactualizations of the accepted ongoing textual tradition of I — II Kings. The extent of the effort to cope with prophecy made by these deuteronomistic historians points to the existence of living prophets and to the importance of prophecy in their own time. Moreover, the tendency to take over the role of the prophet by turning it into a deuteronomistic preacher is understandable only if there were circles in which the concept of prophet invoked some authority, circles which cherished and transmitted prophetic traditions, including those that were used by the deuteronomistic redactors to prove the correctness of the deuteronomistic approach.

X. Conclusions concerning I — II Kings as source for Historical Reconstructions of the Role of Prophets and Prophecy in Monarchic Israel

The present analysis of compositional and redactional notes in I — II Kings contributes not only to the understanding of deuteronomistic approaches to prophets and prophecy against their historical background, but also to the study of the role of prophets in the monarchic period — and prophecy.

It seems clear that the more one can discern the influence of genre requirements in prophetic stories found in the Book of Kings (see sections v, and viii), the less one can accept at face value their historical-political claims concerning the centrality of the prophet. The same holds true for clearly redactional units concerning prophecy in I — II Kings (see sections vi and vii).

Of course, this conclusion does not mean that there were no prophets who provided, or attempted to provide divine legitimation to political usurpers, especially in the Northern Kingdom. Clearly, any usurper is in need of legitimation. He (or she) cannot simply say that he is a treacherous officer, greedy for power. Accordingly, following a

29 (1978), 254 — 84. The fact that Shemaiah’s speech in I Reg 12,22 — 24 and the commentator’s note are similar to those occurring in I — II Chronicles is worth noting. The tension between different approaches to the question of fulfillment of prophecy continues in later periods, see, for instance, Tob 14,4.

38 The same holds true for other circles in ancient Israel, at other times (cf. A. H. J. Gunneweg, »Das Gesetz und die Propheten«, ZAW 102 [1990], 169 — 80; cf. footnote 27). The issue, of course, stands beyond the scope of this article.
successful political revolt, one expects the development of propaganda claiming divine approval for the upheaval. Against this background, propagandistic prophetic sayings are only expected. In this regard, it is noteworthy that even when there were no »prophets« in Israel, in the late Second Temple period, one is told that Menahem the Essene prophesied to the child Herod that he would be a king (Ant. XV § 373–74), and that both Josephus and Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai (according to ARN »A« IV, ARN »B« VI, b. Git 56a, LamR I) prophesied that Vespasian would become emperor, the latter on the basis of a certain exegesis of Isa 10,34. Of course, neither was Menahem a central factor in the accession of Herod, nor Josephus or Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai in that of Vespasian. One may conclude that without denying the existence of monarchic prophets and prophecy, on the basis of prophetic stories or redactional notes whose purpose is to exalt the role of prophets and prophecy, one cannot prove the centrality of monarchic prophets (and of prophecy) in the social, political, and religious life of Israel in the monarchic period. A historical reconstruction of the extent to which prophets were actually influential in these areas has to take into account anthropological and sociological comparative data, historical data from ancient Near East societies, epigraphical data, and of course, a critical analysis of biblical texts and traditions concerning social, political and cultural institutions in monarchic Israel. This endeavor stands beyond the limits of this work.

An historical-critical study of compositional and redactional notes concerning prophets and prophecy in I–II Kings as persuasive documents written as part of the specific social discourse of the deuteronomistic era demonstrates that: (1) these notes are an excellent source for the analysis of the historical situation at the time of their authors and their original audiences, (2) deuteronomistic circles coped for a long time, and in different ways, with the phenomenon of living prophets and their prophecies, (3) questions concerning the social authority of the deuteronomistic teachers/interpreters, and of that of their teachings, stood at the center of the historical persuasive message of most of these notes, and (4) these notes do not provide solid evidence for an historical reconstruction of the role and power of the prophets in the political sphere during the monarchic period.

39 Of course, this is not to deny that some form of propaganda may (or, in many cases, must) precede the actual upheaval.

40 My thanks are due to Prof. Gene M. Tucker and Prof. Francis Landy for reading and commenting on a previous version of this article.