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Ruth Sauerwein, PhD student, University of Goettingen
(ruth.sauerwein@theologie.uni-goettingen.de)

2Kings 2: Scrutinizing a "Prophetic Succession"

I. Introduction

The biblical stories about the prophet Elisha appear as a cycle of diverse narrative material (1Kgs 19:19-21, 2Kgs 2:1-8:15 [minus 3:1-3], 9:1-3, 13:20-21]). These stories are integrated sometimes more sometimes less tightly into the deuteronomistic notes on the kings Joram (852-841 BCE), Jehu (841-814 BCE), Jehoahaz (814-798 BCE), and Jehoash (798-782 BCE). Most of the anecdotes about Elisha appear to be loosely woven together. Almost none follows as a clear consequence of the previous story. Contradictions therefore occur, as might be expected. Hence, one aim of my dissertation is to reconstruct the growth of the Elisha cycle and to explore how and when the stories became connected with the Elijah stories and at what point in history they made their way into the Books of Kings.

One crucial chapter for the quest for the connection between the two prophetical figures is 2Kgs 2. The story about Elijah's ascension marks the transition between the Elijah and Elisha cycle. Elisha has been mentioned only once before that chapter and interestingly there is not a single reference to Elijah in the Elisha cycle after 2Kgs 2.

This chapter can easily be defined from the surrounding chapters due to the headline in 2Kgs 2:1 and the beginning of the deuteronomistic introductory résumé for Jehoram of Israel in 2Kgs 3:1. The chapter 2Kgs 2 itself consists of three stories, which are separated by their different protagonists, different localization and independent story arcs. 2Kgs 2:1-18 tells the story of Elijah's ascension and Elisha's succession. The accounts in 2:19-22 and 2:23-25 are short miracle stories depicting how Elisha heals a spring and how he punishes a group of children that had mocked him before. In this paper these three accounts will be scrutinized separately before conclusions will be drawn for the entire chapter. At first the tensions and doublets within the chapter will be subject to literary critical and redaction historical examination in order to trace the literary growth of the chapter.

Following, 2Kgs 2 will be compared to the other succession story in 1Kgs 19. Finally, conclusions will be drawn concerning the question of prophetic succession and the literary function of 2Kgs 2.

II. Literary Critical and Redaction Historical Observations

2Kgs 2:1-18

In the ascension story the reader notices numerous literary tensions and breaks which have caused scholars to come up with many different redaction historical reconstructions. For me, the manifold reconstruction attempts alone are a sign of a complex text growth, which will be investigated in the following – beginning with the literary tensions.

Initially, the introduction in 2:1 is rather unusual for an Old Testament story. It already summarizes the climax of the following narrative and in some respect spoils the ending of the story. Additionally, a clear tension can already be found herein. According to v. 11 Elijah is taken away by fiery chariots and horses only and without explicit intervention of Yahweh, whereas v. 1 first names Yahweh as the subject of the action and the storm – without mentioning fiery chariots and horses.[1] Furthermore, the storm in v. 1 is determined and therefore assumed as a known feature, although it here appears for the first time in the story and throughout the entire Books of Kings.

Therefore, the headline in 2:1 gives the impression that it is secondary to the original narration in 2Kgs 2 and serves primarily as an editorial link connecting the story of Elijah's ascension with the surrounding chapters. It is likely that the idea of the ascension in the whirlwind from v. 11b was picked up by the redactor who formulated the introduction in v. 1a. Since the idea of the ascension of Elijah in the whirlwind in v. 11b does not include Yahweh, it seems as if v. 1a above all aims to theologize the process of ascension by introducing Yahweh's will.

A further striking tension can be found in the descriptions about how the ascension took place. In vv. 9-10 the root לקח (passive) describes how Elijah was taken away from Elisha (אלקח מעמך / לקח מאתך). The verb remains without subject here. In v. 3 and v. 5, however, Yahweh is the subject (לקח active)

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[1] Cf. 2Kgs 6:15-17, the fiery horses and chariot here are the insertion of a later redactor. Cf. SCHMITT, A., Entrückung – Aufnahme – Himmelfahrt. Untersuchungen zu einem Vorstellungsbereich im Alten Testament, FzB 10, Würzburg 1973, 93-97; LEHNART, B., Prophet und König im Nordreich Israel, VT.S 96, Leiden 2003, 375. Cf. Ps 68:18; Isa 66:15; Ezek 1:15-21; Hab 3:8; Zech 14:5; 2Kgs 23:11.

of Elijah's removal. In this account the procedure is visualized as Elijah being taken away "over your [Elisha's] head" (2x יהוה לקח את אדניך מעל ראשך).[2] In v. 1 and v. 11, however, the process is described with the root עלה (v. 1 in Hifil and Yahweh as subject; v. 11 in Qal with Elisha as subject).

After Elijah and Elisha are separated by the fiery chariots and horses in v. 12, it is noted that Elisha sees this event. Shortly after that in the same verse it is stated that Elisha could see Elijah no more. The insertion of the particle עוד in v.12 on the final text's stage causes the reader to perceive that Elisha initially had *still* seen Elijah (this *still* has no equivalent in the Hebrew text, only the reader inserts it unconsciously), whereas later on he could see him *no more*. The reader would not expect a note about the fact that Elisha saw the process of separation and ascension into heaven unless the importance of seeing it had been emphasized previously as it had happened in v. 10. The note that Elisha could no longer see Elijah in v. 10 then again seems quite natural and fits in organically with the act of separating the two prophets.

A further detail strengthens the assumption that there is an editorial seam also between vv. 11 and 12. While v. 11 speaks of סוסים (horses), the phrase in v. 12 interestingly contains the term פרשים (steed / horsemen), even though the final text gives the impression that the sight of the fiery *horses* from v. 11 has motivated Elisha to his exclamation. The fact that v. 12 does not speak of horses could be an indication that this appellation has been used for Elijah secondarily at this point and originally derived from the Elisha tradition. The title could serve as an editorial clip used in order to tie the Elijah and Elisha tradition firmly together. By placing the same statement that marked Elisha's death in 2Kgs 13:14 also at the end of the Elijah story the redactor aimed to connect the two traditions tightly. Since the rest of the semantics of this exclamation does not fit effortlessly into the context of 2Kgs 2:12 either, and since the mentioned characteristics correspond better to the figure of Elisha rather than Elijah, I assume that the exclamation was originally used in 2Kgs 13:14 and from there made its way subsequently into 2Kgs 2.[3]

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2 Cf. SCHMITT, H. C., Elisa. Traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zur vorklassischen nordisraelitischen Prophetie, Gütersloh 1972, 104.

3 It has been stated by many scholars that Elisha's connection to the royal court and his involvement in battles and wars on the side of Israel would let this appellation suit Elisha much better than Elijah. Cf. GUNKEL, H., Geschichten von Elisa. Meisterwerke hebräischer Erzählkunst I, Berlin 1925, 12; WÜRTHWEIN, E., Die Bücher der Könige. 1. Kön. 17 – 2. Kön. 25, ATD 11,2, Göttingen 1984, 275; SCHMITT, Elisa, 103f; HENTSCHEL, G., 1 Könige, NEB 10, Würzburg 1984, 10 et al.

Particularly difficult to understand are the events which took place before the ascension. The tour which leads Elijah and Elisha to the different "discipleships" in Bethel and Jericho seems peculiar to the reader. Remarkable is the formulaic language in vv. 2-6. At first sight the verses appear as a collection of doublets (2x הידעת כי היום יהוה לקח את אדניך מעל ראשך; 3x חי יהוה וחי נפשך אם אעזבך). This oath in vv. 2, 4, and 6 has above all another parallel outside of the ascension story in 2Kgs 4:30 (חי יהוה וחי נפשך אם אעזבך).[4] Moreover, a remarkable accumulation of Yahweh's name can be found in vv. 2-6 (8 occurrences in 5 verses). Because of the observed tensions and the extraordinary language in vv. 2-6, these verses differ significantly from the surrounding text and can be identified as secondary extensions. A reason for mentioning these particular discipleships of Bethel and Jericho is not given in the story. The various occurrences of Yahweh's name, however, indicate that these verses also have a theological aim and try to point out that Elijah's ascension was Yahweh's will.

Also later in the chapter there occur other tensions and doublets, such as in v. 14, where Elisha's bash on the water is mentioned twice. Between the two references we find the call to "Yahweh, the God of Elijah". Delicate in this context is the phrase (אף־הוא),[5] which in my opinion is an insertion aiming to give the impression that the success of the second bash is due to the intervention of Yahweh. This extension has a similar theologizing tendency as vv. 2-6. In addition, it also works with the literary device of a rhetorical question like v. 3 and v. 5 and therefore probably derives from the same redactor. Again, here we can find resemblances to the work of the theologizing redaction in 2Kgs 4:31-34. Here and there it is the second attempt after a prayer to Yahweh that leads to the success of the miracle.

Furthermore, vv. 14a and 13a are – apart from the introductory verb – doublets. Verse 14a picks up the root לקח from v. 8a. The parallelism of vv. 13b//14 and vv. 7b//8 is probably a deliberate compositional parallelization of Elisha and Elijah in order to express that the spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha and enables him to work the same miracles as Elijah had worked before.

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4 In 2Kgs 4:30 the oath derives from a later redactor's hand and has a clearly theologizing intention. This redactor inserts through the oath and some other extensions the name of Yahweh into the story of the healing of the Shunamite's son and hereby gives it the touch of a resurrection worked by Yahweh.

5 Cf. SCHMITT, Entrückung, 49-53. Schmitt tries to find text critical explanations for these difficulties. To me the Greek text tradition in this case, however, gives no indication on the original Hebrew text, but shows how the various Greek translators obviously had difficulties themselves in understanding and translating the doublet and the אף־הוא. This assessment is in line with Wever's statement concerning the translation in IKgs 22 – 2Kgs 25 LXX: "[...] this is a wooden translation – and almost slavish word-for-word rendering of the Hebrew." WEVERS, J. W., Principles of Interpretation guiding the fourth Translator of the Book of the Kingdoms (3 K. 22:1 – 4 K. 25:30), CBQ 14 (1952), 40-56, 55.

Moreover, between v. 15 and v. 16 there appears another editorial interface, as the following observations will show. While the בני־הנביאים in vv. 3 and 5 are well aware that Elijah will soon be removed, in vv. 16-18 they seem to have no idea what happened to Elijah and suspect that he is still in the surrounding area. Equally contradictory is their acknowledgment of Elisha's power in v. 15 and their request to search for Elijah in v. 16.

Although according to v. 7 there are a total of 50 prophets accompanying Elijah and Elisha on their way to the river Jordan, v. 16 speaks of 50 strong men *among* the disciples of the prophet which suggests a larger total number.

In addition, the use of the term רוח differs. While v. 15 speaks of the spirit of Elijah (רוח fem.) which rests on Elisha, v. 16 mentions the spirit of Yahweh (רוח mask.) which could have carried away Elijah.[6]

While v. 15 concludes the story arc which had been opened and developed in v. 1, 3, 5, 9 with the confirmation that the spirit of Elijah now rests on Elisha, v. 16 opens a new story arc raising the question about the whereabouts of Elijah.

These observations suggest that we find a subsequent extension of the initial ascension narrative in vv. 16-18.[7] This extension is likely to be independent from the extension in vv. 2-6 and in my opinion younger because the prophets in vv. 2-6 were well aware of Elijah's ascension.

From my point of view, there is a moral tendency in the expansion in vv. 16-18, the purpose of which is to accuse the prophets' lack of faith and their lack of comprehension of what happened. Herein we can find a certain thematic relation to the redactional extension concerning Gehasi's greed in 2Kgs 5.[8] At the same time, this scene aims to take all the doubts about Elijah's ascension from the readers, too. The addition emphasizes the fact that Elijah really has been removed, thus can be found no more on earth.[9]

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6 Cf. HENTSCHEL, 2Könige, 8. He understands רוח in this respect rather as a kind of storm. Cf. 1Kgs 18:12a.

7 Cf. GUNKEL, Geschichten, 13; WÜRTHWEIN, Könige II, 274, 276; SCHMITT, Elisa, 105f; FRITZ, V., Das erste Buch der Könige, ZBK 10,1, Zürich 1996, 12-14; SCHMITT, Entrückung, 66f, 70f; STIPP, H.-J., Elischa – Propheten – Gottesmänner, ATSAT 24, St. Ottilien 1987, 45. For a different conclusion cf. ROFÉ, The Prophetical Stories: The Narratives about the Prophets in the Hebrew Bible, Their Literary Types and History, Jerusalem 1988, 47.

8 Cf. SCHMITT, Elisa, 129f.

9 Interestingly, herein we find (apart from all other parallels between the Elijah/Elisha cycles and the New Testaments account on Jesus' miracles) another parallel to the narrations about Jesus' empty tomb in the New Testament gospels. This analogy may hint that the extension in 2Kgs 2:16-18 could also be determined and motivated by a certain stage of Elijah piety.

Due to the observations made above, the initial layer of the ascension story can be found in 2Kgs 2:1b(+ויהי from 1a), 7-11, 12b-14 (except ויאמר איה יהוה אלהי אליהו אף־הוא ויכה את־המים), 15 – in the following referred to as 2Kgs 2:1-15*. This original ascension story concludes with the acknowledgment of Elisha's power by the sons of the prophets. The sons of the prophets serve in this respect as the chorus in a Greek tragedy, explaining and interpreting to the reader in a final e*xodos* what has happened in the preceding story.[10] In this case, the parting of the River Jordan by Elisha is interpreted as evidence that the spirit of Elijah now rests on Elisha. The ascension story in its original design intends to depict Elisha as the rightful and powerful successor of Elijah and thus reaches its aim in v. 15. This target had already been prepared in v. 9 when Elisha formulated his wish for the share of Elijah's spirit.

The original ascension story has consecutively been revised in two stages. At first, a theologically motivated redactor inserted the conclusive head line in v. 1 as well as vv. 2-6 and the prayer to Yahweh in v. 14. We find several traces of this redactor all over the Elisha cycle mostly inserting Yahweh as the causer of the miracles performed by Elisha – e.g. by introducing prayers into the plot.[11] This redaction apparently aims to adjust the less theologically steeped Elisha stories to the highly theologically emphasized figure of Elijah.

It is likely that the same redactor inserted the oath formula from 2Kgs 13:14 in 2Kgs 2:12 in order to tie the Elijah and Elisha cycles closer together by granting a common feature to the two stories' endings.

Finally, a later redaction expands the story by adding vv. 16-18. This redaction seems to have a moral tendency and a certain interest in the sons of the prophet. The expansion points out the faithlessness of the disciples concerning Elijah's ascension into heaven and also aims to antagonize the readers' disbelief. In this moral motivation lies an analogy to the expansion about Gehasi's greed in 2 Kgs

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10 Interestingly, all over the Elijah and Elisha cycle several times the goal of the different story arcs is marked by story characters formulating the central theological message at the end of the narrative (on behalf of the readers). Cf. the widow's statement after Elijah healed her son in IKgs 17:24 ("Now I know that you are indeed a man of God"); Naaman's confession in 2Kgs 5:15 ("Now I know that there is no God except in Israel"), the exclamation of the people in 2Kgs 18:39 ("Yahweh is God, Yahweh is God"), and the acclamation of Jehu as king by his friends ("Jehu is king") in 2Kgs 9:13.

11 Cf. 2Kgs 4:1aβ, 27bβ, 30a, 33, 43bα, 44b; 2Kgs 5:4-8, 11-13, 15a; 2Kgs 6:15b-18 (selective insertions), etc. Another example for a simple redactional insertion of Yahweh is חץ תשועה ליהוה in 2Kgs 13:17b. Cf. K. OTT, Die prophetischen Analogiehandlungen im Alten Testament, BWANT 185, Stuttgart 2009, 41; The higher intensity of theological reflection in the Elijah miracles is according to Würthwein the work of the deuteronomistic redaction that converted Elijah's miracles in Yahweh's miracles carried out by Elijah. E. Cf. WÜRTHWEIN, Könige II, 367f.

5:15b, 16, 19b-27. It is very probable that both of these moral expansions originate from the same redactor.[12]

From the analysis of the main characters and their share in the action as well as from the analysis of the story's narrative aim, the ascension story in 2Kgs 2 has to be understood as part of the Elisha tradition rather than the Elijah tradition.[13] Another detail within the story supports this assumption. The partly cloudy phrase ויהי־נא פי־שנים ברוחך אלי in v. 9b has caused scholars numerous attempts explaining the exact meaning of these words in this context. Many scholars refer in their explanations to Dtn 21:17 according to which two thirds of the heritage are designated for the firstborn.[14] Perhaps the author of 2Kgs 2, however, plays deliberately with the ambiguity of the term פי שנים and has at the same time also the "double share" in mind. He takes into account that Elisha has of firstborn-like relationship towards Elijah but is also aware that Elisha's miraculous deeds in the following will exceed those of Elijah. To me this explanation makes a lot of sense because the author of the ascension story already knows most of Elisha's miracles[15] and therefore knows that they are superior in number and impact to those of Elijah. Apparently, the ancient reader also seems to have understood the phrase in 2Kgs 2,9b in this way as can be seen in Sir 48:12.[16]

From the literary historical point of view this interpretation is another small hint supporting the overall assumption in my dissertation and in many other scholars' works that the miracle stories about Elisha are among the oldest and the succession stories among the youngest parts of the Elijah and Elisha cycle.[17] With the request for a double share of Elijah's spirit the author might have wanted to explain the imbalance of abilities between master and student. This imbalance had in my opinion only occurred because Elijah and Elisha had been put into the relationship of master and student (or predecessor and successor) at a certain point during the redactional work on the Books of Kings.

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12 The concept of the spirit of Yahweh which can carry away people also occurs in 1Kgs 18:12; cf. further Ez 3:12, 14; 8:3; 11:1, 24; 43:5.

13 Cf. GUNKEL, Geschichten, 15; SCHMITT, Entrückung, 131f; furthermore, many of the literary references and similarities with other parts of the Elisha tradition support this observation.

14 Cf. NOTH, M., Die Ursprünge des Alten Israels im Lichte neuer Quellen, Opladen 1961, 20; WÜRTHWEIN, Könige II, 275 et. al.

15 It has been pointed out in my first paper contributed to the OTSEM meeting in Goettingen 2009 that the short miracle stories in 2Kgs 4 and 2Kgs 6 belong to the oldest nucleus of the Elisha cycle.

16 Sir 48:12 (NRSV.A): When Elijah was enveloped in the whirlwind, Elisha was filled with his spirit. He performed twice as many signs, and marvels with every utterance of his mouth. Never in his lifetime did he tremble before any ruler, nor could anyone intimidate him at all.

17 Cf. SCHMITT, Elischa, 107; WÜRTHWEIN, Könige II, 273f; OTTO, Jehu, 261f.

Another interesting feature is the geographic information (Gilgal, Bethel, Jericho, Jordan) presented in vv. 1-6. In 2Kgs 2 there is no explanation given for the particular assembly of locations nor is it obvious to the reader why Elisha visits these places at all. The only fact that is interesting and striking about these particular places is that they will all occur in Elisha's miracles in the following chapters (Gilgal in 2Kgs 4:38; Bet-El in 2Kgs 2:23; Jordan in 2Kgs 6:2, 4; Jericho reconstructed in 2:19-22).[18] Based on my considerations on the genesis of the entire Elisha cycle it seems likely that the locations and the unusual itinerary which they form in 2Kgs 2 could draw a kind of map of the miracles of Elisha in advance.

Furthermore, it is obvious that the composition of 2Kgs likes to evoke resemblances to the succession of two other great figures in the Hebrew Bible – Moses and Joshua. Clearly, the parting of the Jordan first by Elijah and later by his successor Elisha reminds the reader of the parting of the Red Sea by Moses in Ex 14 and the parting of the Jordan by Joshua in Josh 3. Moreover, Elijah disappears from the face of the earth east of the River Jordan analogically to Moses' death east of the Jordan.

Clearly the ancient authors and redactors deliberately placed these and further references and allusions within the composition of 2Kgs 2. Three further remarkable examples of intertextuality I would like to mention in this context. The parting of the river and the passage of the Ark of the Covenant carried by the twelve priests in Josh 3:7-17 leads to the construction of the twelve stones (cf. Josh 4:1-5:1) – which then become the stone circle of Gilgal (cf. Josh 4:20). Moreover, the land which makes barren refers to Joshua's curse on Jericho (cf. Josh 6:26) which takes effect in 1Kgs 16:34. Finally, in Num 27:20 Moses is also asked to give a share of his gift (in this case his authority – הוד) to his successor Joshua.

Two other texts associated with the "prophetic succession" between Elijah and Elisha should also be taken into consideration – 1Kgs 19:19-21 and 1Kgs 19:16f.

The three verses 1Kgs 19:19-21 report very densely about the calling of Elisha by Elijah. This calling, however, is very different from the calling of most of the other prophets in the OT. Instead of a verbal assignment Elijah passes by on Elisha's field and employs Elisha by throwing his mantle over the farmer. Apart from the unique imagery of the mantle many more aspects in this short narrative remain cloudy and tensions can be found.

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[18] Cf. SCHMITT, Entrückung, 75, 139. See below for some further suggestions concerning the itinerary in 2Kgs 2:25.

Firstly, in V. 19a we find only a very loose connection to the preceding story (וילך משם „and he went from there“).[19] While in 1Kgs 19:16f Elijah was given the task of anointing Elisha (there is no sign of a mantle in 1Kgs 19:16f), in 1Kgs 19:19-21 he only throws his mantle. The mantle as a garment of a prophet can also be found by Ahijah the Shilonite (1Kgs 11:29) but with a different Hebrew term (שַׂלְמָה). The term אדרת, however, for the mantle of a prophet can only be found in the ascension story in 2Kgs 2 and in Zech 13:4. Although Elijah did not introduce himself and did not explain the meaning of the mantle to Elisha, the farmer seems to know immediately what has happened to him although this act is unique for the entire OT.

Interestingly, Elijah won't carry out a single one of the three tasks given to him in 1Kgs 19:15-18. This observation, the loose connection to the theophany at Mount Horeb, and the semantics of 1Kgs 19:15-18 indicate that these verses are a late addition to chapter 19.[20] The three tasks seem to be editorially prefixed to the story of Elijah and Elisha serving as a late editorial twine to tie the different parts of the Elijah and Elisha cycle together with the story of Jehu's putsch in order to form the entire complex of 1Kgs 17 – 2Kgs 13.[21] Certainly, this reconstruction bears some weaknesses such as the problem why a later redactor would not take into account that no anointing of a prophet had taken place in the following chapters. On the other hand a reconstruction that operated vice versa had to deal with the same problem of inconsistency. In the suggested reconstruction, however, the idea of anointment may have occurred theologically important to the redactor so that he wanted to apply it also to the instructions for the prophet's succession.

Taking a closer look at the topic of the prophetic succession, the episode in 1Kgs 19:19-21 forms, strictly speaking, a doublet to 2Kgs 2:1-15*. Both episodes explain how Elisha was made the successor of Elijah. Both are connected only through the keyword אדרת but apart from that do not refer to each other. In this case it is also difficult to base the decision on the very few literary critical facts. Hence, probabilities with regard to the stories' contents have to be taken into consideration.[22] Since 2Kgs 2 does not refer to Elisha's calling in 1Kgs 19:19-21 and the keyword אדרת is the only connection between both texts, it is likely that 2Kgs 2 existed before 1Kgs 19:19-21 was created.[23] While the ascension gives an explanation why Elijah is seen no more after 2Kgs 2 the succession

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19 Cf. 2Kgs 2:23, 25.

20 Cf. WÜRTHWEIN, Könige II, 231; OTTO, Jehu, 193.

21 Hence, 1Kgs 19:15-18 appears as the youngest layer of redactional work in the Elijah and Elisha cycle.

22 Therefore, many commentaries avoid the question of literary relations between the two succession texts in 1Kgs 19 and 2 Kgs 2 entirely.

23 Cf. GRAY, Kings, 472: „The independence of the two traditions is indicated by the fact that the present passage [II Kön 2] ignores the passage in I K. 19 (…)."

story in 1Kgs 19 lacks an explanation for that. Moreover, the ascension story gives an explanation why the farmer Elisha is suddenly capable of performing miracles. Nevertheless, the actual intention of the story in 1Kgs 19 remains cloudy.
Finally, based on few literary critical facts alone it remains difficult to decide on the relationship of 1Kgs 19 and 2Kgs 2. The suggested reconstructions shall therefore serve as a base for further discussion.

2Kgs 2:19-22

In this short story we find the motive of personal distress that is brought to Elisha for the first time within the Elisha cycle. The men of the town turn to Elisha because they believe he could find a remedy for the disease causing spring by using his special talents and thus allow a future life in the city.
Apart from that, the story is similar in structure and length to the short miracle episodes in chapter 4 (e.g. 4:38-41) and chapter 6 (e.g. 6:1-7*). The episode consists of four verses only and gets by with very few protagonists who (except for Elisha) remain unnamed and uncharacterized. They are depicted only in their function for the story. The story arc is opened by a problem that will be resolved by the end of the story through Elisha's supernatural intervention.
The story is lacking, however, a genuine introduction. It begins with the speech of the men of the unspecified city. Yet, the position of the story implies that this must involve the city of Jericho since Elijah's ascension took part in the vicinity (v.1-18).
Würthwein concludes that the introduction of this small miracle episode has been incorporated during the insertion of the ascension story and that v. 18aβ once stood before 2Kgs 2:19 and had to have formed the original introduction.[24]
In the present beginning of the story in v. 19 the opening speech of the men is formulated in the plural (ויאמרו אנשי העיר). The possessive suffix in the addition (כאשר אדני ראה), however, is formulated in the singular. This suffix of the 1st person singular could be implicitly interpreted to a particular speaker, who yet had not been highlighted through the introduction of speech.
Loosely inserted is the messenger's formula in v. 21. The introduction of speech (ויאמר) and the subsequent verb in the 1st person singular (רפאתי) suggest that it originally may have been Elisha's

[24] Cf. WÜRTHWEIN, Könige II, 277.

speech. The form ויאמר occurs as an introduction to a messenger's formula only in very few cases in the Old Testament. Except from the verbatim phrase of the Chronicler, all other occurrences can be found in the Books of Kings.[25]

Furthermore, v. 22 reviews the accomplished miracle and Elisha's – and not Yahweh's – words. This tension and the loose connection of the messenger formula imply that the messenger formula is most likely a theologizing expansion. Without the messenger formula, the healing order appears quite organically as Elisha's speech.[26]

The issue of how to read the verb form רפאתי in v. 21 has been discussed by scholars several times.[27] In my judgment, the consonants only suggest a form of the verb רפא (to heal). If the grammatically incorrect punctuation in v. 21 and the retrospect in v. 22 potentially also allude to the verb רפה (to soften) in a midrashic manner,[28] remains unclear and has no effect on the primary meaning of the verse.[29]

At first sight the phrase "until this day" in v. 22 appears like an etiology. Since, however, there is no reference to the specific spring or its exact location and no renaming of it is taking place, it is in my opinion no etiology in a narrower sense.[30]

Interestingly, the term צלחית in v. 20 is a *hapax legomenon* in the Old Testament. According to Rendsburg the more common term for "bowl" in the Old Testament is צלחת,[31] whereas צלחית is commonly found in Tannaitic texts.[32]

Less obvious than the resemblances to Moses in the ascension story in 2Kgs 2:1b-15* but also striking is the fact that even the assembly of stories in 2Kgs 2 seems to copy the sequence of the exodus story deliberately. The first short miracle episode that is told about Elijah after the parting of the Jordan is the healing of the disease causing spring by throwing salt into the water. Interestingly, the first miracle that Moses had to perform for the grumbling Israelites after he had led them

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25 Cf. 1Kgs 20:13f, 28; 22:11; 2Kgs 2:21; 3:16, and 2Chr 18:10//1Kgs 22:11.

26 Cf. LEHNART, Prophet, 379. WÜRTHWEIN, Könige II, 277 votes differently and concludes in spite of the tension that v. 22b is also secondary. Unfortunately, this decision remains unsubstantiated. Cf. 2Kgs 4:17; 5:14; 6:18; 8:2.

27 Cf. WÜRTHWEIN, Könige II, 277f; FRITZ, 2. Könige, 15; LEHNART, Prophet, 379, et. al.

28 Cf. SPERBER, D., Weak Waters, ZAW 82 (1970), 114-116.

29 Although at this point the perfect form is used in my opinion a present tense translation is appropriate. The perfect here was chosen to express that the mere use of the word also meant the immediate completion of the action. Cf. EHRLICH, Randglossen, 282.

30 Cf. FRITZ, 2. Könige, 15.

31 Cf. 2Kgs 21:13; 2Chr 35:13; Prov 19:24; 26:15.

32 Cf. RENDSBURG, Israelian Hebrew, 82f.

through the parted Red Sea was the healing of the spring in Marah. The author of 2Kgs 2 seems to arrange these episodes willfully according to the sequence in the exodus story and therefore places 2Kgs 2:1-15* before the first short miracles.[33] He likely took the two short miracle episodes (2Kgs 2:19-22, 23-25) from the older collection of short miracle episodes about Elisha and placed them into their present location and sequence. Additionally, this sequence was supposed to give proof that Elijah's spirit now rested on Elisha and gave him the power to perform miracles.[34]
From these observations it seems apparent that the author of 2Kgs 2 intended to pattern Elijah very much like Moses – the ideal of all prophets – and as a result designed Elisha as the type of successor represented by Joshua.[35] The author of 2Kgs 2 was presumably inspired by the message of Dtn 18:18.[36]

2Kgs 2:23-25

This miracle is again told in a short, episodic narrative, but this time it is a punishment miracle containing a moral tendency. The introduction in 2Kgs 2:23 connects this episode loosely to the previous story. The phrase ויעל משם does not give exact information on where Elisha started his way. The event, however, is clearly located in Bet-El.
The proclamation of the curse *in the name of Yahweh* in v. 24aβ is after what we have seen in the previous episode probably the insertion of a later (theologizing) redactor.
The number 42 appears in v. 24 for the first time in the brief episode and has no obvious connection to the previously told story, so one can assume that this number was chosen because of analogies with other Old Testament passages in which "42" appears as a death figure.[37]

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33 Additionally to the analogies in content, we find the same semantics for the process of throwing וישלך (in 2Kgs 2:21 and Ex 15:25) and the same use of the root רפא (in 2Kgs 2:21 and Ex 15:26).

34 Cf. LONG, B. O., 2 Kings, The Forms of the Old Testament Literature 10, Grand Rapids 1991, 21.

35 Cf. SCHMITT, Entrückung 134-137; CARROL, The Elijah-Elisha Sagas: Some Remarks on Prophetic Succession in Ancient Israel, in: D. E. Orton (Ed.), Prophecy in the Hebrew Bible, Leiden 2000, 56-71, 56f.

36 Cf. KRATZ, R. G., Die Propheten Israels, München 2003, 30; CARROLL, Prophetic Succession, 57.

37 Cf. Jdg 12:6; 2Kgs 10:12-14; Ezr 2:24//Neh 7:28. According to Herrmann, the figure 42 in the Old Testament refers to the number of judge deities from the Egyptian Book of the Dead in front of which the deceased had to account for their deeds; cf. HERRMANN, J., Die Zahl zweiundvierzig im AT, OLZ 13 (1910), 150-152; LEVIN, C., Der Sturz der Königin Atalja. Ein Kapitel zur Geschichte Judas im 9. Jh. v. Chr., SBS 105, Stuttgart 1982, 87.

A very elaborate discussion arose concerning the itinerary in 2Kgs 2.[38] Most of the interpretations see the inverted landmarks of Elijah's way (1Kgs 17-19) collected in the mentioned locations in 2Kgs 2. Unfortunately, this explanation only works under the condition of some redactional changes which can not be proven.[39] Elisha's return to Samaria (he had not been to Samaria in the preceding chapters) in v. 25b for instance does not fit into the picture of the inverted ways. To me, v. 25b rather creates a connection to 2Kgs 3:1 whereas V. 25a seems to prepare 2Kgs 4:8ff. Similarly the different locations mentioned in 2Kgs 2:2-6 seem to allude to the different locations within the Elisha cycle. To me, it therefore seems very probable that the author and the redactors of 2Kgs 2 gave a kind of a future prospect or an itinerary about the different locations on Elisha's future journey in the first place.

The episode in 2Kgs 2:23-25 seems apart from the redactional additions in V. 25 and the insertion of Yahweh in v. 24aβ consistent. Nevertheless, one semantic tension remains. Although small boys (נערים קטנים) mock Elisha in v. 23, in v. 24 the bear kills 42 children (ילדים). The different terms could indicate that Elisha was mocked only by boys but children of both sexes were killed by the bears. Since there is no other sign of literary tensions between these verses and the content does not suggest obvious reasons for a redactional intervention, I do not attach importance to this semantic tension.

III. Conclusion:

From the results of the analysis the conclusion can be drawn that 2Kgs 2 is among the youngest parts of the Elijah and Elisha tradition. Many of the motives from 2Kgs 2 show that big parts of the Elisha cycle already existed when the ascension story was created. As has been pointed out above, the oath in 2Kgs 2:12 (**אבי אבי רכב ישׂראל ופרשׁיו**) had its origin in the story about Elisha's death in 2Kgs 13 and was editorially inserted at the end of the Elijah story in order to adjust both figures to each other. The itinerary in 2Kgs 2:2-5 and 2:25 alludes to the various stories in the following chapters of the Elisha cycle and seem to sketch in advance where Elisha's ways will take him and the reader.

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38 Cf. WÜRTHWEIN, Könige II, 278; SCHMITT, Elisa, 77; STIPP, Elischa, 351; LEHNART, Prophet, 380.

39 Cf. LUNDBORN, J. R., Elijah's Chariot Ride, JJS 24 (1973), 39-50, 41f.; STIPP, Elischa, 56f.

The chapter 2Kgs 2 mainly serves as a redactional joint between the Elijah and the Elisha cycle. It forms the main connection between two formally independent characters. The very few passages where Elijah and Elisha interact or appear together are an indicator for that, just as much as the fact that Elisha was not mentioned before 1Kgs 19 and Elijah does not appear after 2Kgs 2.

Hence, the prophetic succession that 2Kgs 2 depicts can be assessed as a literary construction rather than a historical account. The chapter clearly aims to connect two formerly independent traditions at a comparatively late stage in the genesis of the Books of Kings.
Moreover, in 2Kgs 2 there are various references to the succession between Moses and Joshua. Above all references, there is also an interesting similarity in the sequence of stories. The author of 2Kgs 2 deliberately adjusted the sequence of these stories to the sequence of the exodus stories in Ex 14f. The fact that the tradition of Moses (including his death), Joshua and the Exodus had already been woven together at the time when 2Kgs 2 came into being, also indicates that the ascension of Elijah is among the younger texts in the Books of Kings.
Also for redaction historical reasons 2Kgs 2 can be assessed a key chapter in the Elijah and Elisha cycle. It shows, for instance, traces of the similar moral redaction that we can also find at a very late stage of 2Kgs 5. Furthermore, there are traces of the same theologizing redaction which has worked over many Elisha stories in order to bring Yahweh into the context of the Elisha cycle.
Finally, the unique ending that was given to Elijah's character in 2Kgs 2 provided the basis for the significantly higher impact on the Jewish and Christian religion history that Elijah had compared to Elisha.