

# About Synchronizing the Translation of the Introductory and Concluding Formulas for the Kings' Reigns in 1-2 Kings and 1-2 Chronicles

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The introductory and concluding formulas in 1-2 Kings mark text divisions and contribute to the cohesion of the work. While there are patterns, these formulas are not uniform, but show many differences between them. This article compiles such differences, in order to help translators take them into account. It further discusses whether the author had a certain intention when he used different wordings.

## 1. Introduction

Introductory and concluding formulas about the rules of the kings of Israel and Judah occur approximately one hundred times in the Biblical text. These formulas are used by the compilers of 1-2 Kings and 1-2 Chronicles as a kind of framework. As introductory and concluding formulas of individual passages they show the *segmentation* of the text. At the same time, the continued use of these formulas contributes to the *cohesion* within these books.

On one hand these formulaic passages have a lot in common; on the other hand many differences exist between them. This is what makes their translation challenging.<sup>1</sup>

For those who aim at a **literal translation**, in general the expectation regarding parallel passages is that in their translation “what is the same should be the same and what is different should be different”. Thus SIL’s Africa Area Translation Aid No. 8, which is devoted to the topic “Final Checking of a New Testament”, in its section “4. (b) Checking the consistency of parallel passages” says, regarding the synoptic gospels:

The aim should be that, where the text is the same in the different accounts, the translation should be consistent, but care should be taken to maintain any differences in the text, including differences of emphasis and focus.<sup>2</sup>

The same would apply to obvious parallels between 1-2 Chronicles and earlier books. Should one then not apply the same principle to parallel passages *within* a Biblical book? We hope to provide some help in keeping track of them by firstly listing all relevant passages and secondly identifying many of the differences, some of which are minute.

For those who want to produce a **literary translation**, the following questions need to be asked: Does the author use the different wordings purposefully? If so, what is his intention? And how can one render the differences appropriately in translation?

**Bible quotes** are taken from NASB, unless stated otherwise.

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<sup>1</sup> To my knowledge, there is no resource that provides a systematic presentation of all such formulas that would allow a translator to compare them. Bendavid, in the second part of his work “Parallels in the Bible”, does include tables with some comparisons of similar passages within the same book (so for instance on p. 131 for 2Ki 13:12f. par. 14:15f.), but this is not done throughout 1-2Ki or 1-2Ch. (Bendavid, Abba (Arr.): *Parallels in the Bible*. Carta, 1972.) Likewise, the software Paratext does not include the formulas in its tool “Parallel Passages”, unless they co-occur in corresponding texts of Kings and Chronicles, i.e. between different books. (Paratext 7.5. Source Language Search Tool. UBS / SIL.) The Handbooks on 1-2 Kings and 1-2 Chronicles comment on some aspects of the formulas, but do not discuss them as a separate topic. (UBS Handbook Series. Roger L. Omanson and John E. Ellington: *A Handbook on 1-2 Kings*. United Bible Societies, 2008. / *A Handbook on 1-2 Chronicles*. 2014.)

<sup>2</sup> SIL Africa Area Translation Aid (AFATA) No. 8. Accessed on: Translator’s Workplace 5. Summer Institute of Linguistics / United Bible Societies, 2008.

**Bible references** follow the Masoretic text, from which the English translations deviate in a few places.

**Abbreviations for translations:**

GECL German common language version (“Gute Nachricht Bibel”)

GNT Good News Translation

NASB New American Standard Bible

NET New English Translation

NIV New International Version

NLT New Living Translation

NRSV New Revised Standard Version

## 2. Where the introductory formula occurs

The introductory formula consists of the perfect of the verb <mālak> “he became king / he reigned as king” and the temporal phrase <bišnat ...> “in the ...<sup>th</sup> year of ...”. Here is the list of occurrences of this combination:<sup>3</sup>

1 Kings 15:1; 15:9; 15:25; 15:33; 16:8; 16:15; 16:23; 16:29; 22:41; 22:52; 2 Kings 3:1; 8:16; 8:25; (9:29); 12:(1-)2; 13:1; 13:10; 14:1; 14:23; 15:1; 15:8; 15:13; 15:17; 15:23; 15:27; 15:32; 16:1; 17:1; 18:1. (No occurrences in 1-2 Ch.)<sup>4</sup>

To get the full picture, certain further occurrences need to be included:

In 1Ki 14:21-22 we find the introduction of King Rehoboam of Judah. There, the phrase “in the ...<sup>th</sup> year of ...” does not occur, because the northern kingdom of Israel had not yet come into being, and so there is no point of reference for comparison.

From 2Ki 21 onward, the phrases “in the ...<sup>th</sup> year of King ..., the king of Israel, ... began to reign as king” do not occur any more, because the kingdom of Israel has ceased to exist. This results in the combining of the concluding formula about one king and the introductory formula for his successor: The sentence “his son ... became king in his place”, which ends the account about the former king, also opens the account about the next king. In other words, the extra opening statement “... began to reign as king” is dropped. Such is the case in 2Ki 20:21-21:1; 21:18-19; 21:26-22:1; 24:6-8. This reduced wording is also used in Chronicles – even in places where the parallel passage in Kings has the complete wording. That is because the Chronicler concentrates on the history of Judah.<sup>5</sup> The “combined formula” is found in 2Ch 13:23-14:1 [14:1f. in English translations] (par. 1Ki 15:7-12); 17:1; 21:1-5; 24:27-25:1; 26:23-27:1; 27:9-28:1; 32:33-33:1; 33:20f.; 36:8-9. These places are only found if one includes the imperfect consecutive <wayyimlōk> in the search. Finally, 2Ch 29:1 does use the regular form <mālak>, but without indicating a year.

At times the hiphil form of <mlk> is used, because certain people *make* someone king. This, too, changes the usual pattern. See 2Ki 23:30f.; 23:34-36; 24:17f.; 2Ch 22:1f.; 26:1-3; 33:25-34:1; 36:1f; 36:4f.; 36:10f.<sup>6</sup>

2Ch 13:1 (*Literally*: In the 18<sup>th</sup> year of the King Jeroboam *and he became king* Abijah over Judah.) is another exception. Here, the consecutive form <wayyimlōk> comes after the temporal phrase.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The whole formula often extends over more than one verse. I indicate only the first verse.

<sup>4</sup> 2Ki 9:29 is part of a concluding formula and a flashback, to be translated using the pluperfect.

<sup>5</sup> 2Ch 13:1 is the only occasion where the Chronicler does refer to the year of reign of the Israelite king. (Word Biblical Commentary series. Dillard, Raymond B.: 2 Chronicles. Word Books, 1987. P. 106).

<sup>6</sup> We have not listed occurrences of <mlk> that come in narrative sections, but only those that are somewhat formulaic.

<sup>7</sup> The parallel in 1Ki 15:1 has the regular formula.

Exceptionally, in 2Ch 20:31, <wayimlōk> is used, because the account that was started in 17:1 is resumed. Thus GNT translates with a pluperfect: “Jehoshaphat had become king of Judah ...”. Other translations imply the same by saying: “Now / So / Thus Jehoshaphat reigned over Judah.” (The parallel in 1Ki 22:41 uses the regular form in Hebrew, but should also be translated indicating some earlier point in history, as REB does, because Jehoshaphat was already talked about in vv. 1ff.)

### 3. The typical wording of the introductory formula

The model text below includes all elements that occur typically in the introductory formulas. If one translates this “framework”, one can adapt it by adding and omitting as each occasion requires. This avoids having to rewrite the whole formula’s translation each time one encounters a new variant.

And in the ...<sup>th</sup> year of King ..., the son of ..., the king of Israel / Judah,  
..., the son of ..., became king over Judah / Israel.  
... was ... years old when he became king.  
He reigned ... years in ...  
His mother's name was ..., the daughter of ... from ...  
He did what was right in the sight of the LORD, like David his father. /  
He did evil in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the way of Jeroboam.

### 4. Some differences between the introductory formulas

In describing the differences between the formulas we begin with pieces of data that are not included in each formula:

- The age of the king when he started his rule, e.g. in 1Ki 22:42. This piece of information is only given for the kings of Judah, if at all.
- The name of the mother, too, is given for the kings of Judah only. It is sometimes accompanied by the name of a parent or her place of origin, or both, e.g. 2Ki 21:19.
- We face an inconsistency in that the “son-of-so-and-so” phrase is sometimes used to identify the king, whose reign serves as dating reference, and sometimes it is used to identify the *new* king.

1Ki 15:1 Now in the eighteenth year of King Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, Abijam became king over Judah.

1Ki 15:25 Now Nadab the son of Jeroboam became king over Israel in the second year of Asa king of Judah, ...

Sometimes the “son-of” phrase is not used with *either* of the kings; at other times it is used for *both*, see 1Ki 15:9 and 2Ki 8:25.

- As can be seen from 1Ki 15:1 above, the name of the king of the other kingdom can also be given without the kingdom being named; it was self-evident to the original audience.
- The appraisals of the kings differ significantly – not only in whether they are positive or negative, but also in their length and wording. Compare, for instance, 1Ki 15:3/11/34 and 1Ki 22:43.  
In the appraisals reference is made to “David his (fore)father”, or to the real father of the king concerned, or to “the fathers” collectively. The wordings differ quite widely (cf. e.g. 1Ki 15:3/11; 2Ki 14:3; 16:2; 18:3; 23:32; 24:9/19).

We now turn to syntactical differences.

- The syntax differs in regard to how the verb is used and how the king is introduced. 1Ki 15:1 shows the regular use.

1Ki 15:1 <... mālak ʾAbiyām ʿal Yʾhūdāh>  
*Literally:* ... (he) became king Abijam over Judah

On one occasion the writer deviates from this:

1Ki 15:9 <... mālak ʾĀsāʾ melek Yʾhūdāh>  
*Literally:* ... (he) became king Asa, king of Judah,

We also find the following pattern:

2Ki 14:1 <... mālak ʾAmasyāhū ben-Yōʾāš melek Yʾhūdāh>  
*Literally:* ... (he) became king Amaziah, the son of Joash, king of Judah

If one takes the apposition “king of Judah” as referring to the father, then the country over which Amaziah became king is not stated explicitly. Or one reads the verse like this:

... (he) became king Amaziah, the son of Joash, (to be specific) king of Judah

On one occasion, the introduction starts with the imperfect consecutive <wayhî>:

2Ki 18:1 *Literally:* And it was in year ...

This might be due to the fact that here the account of the kings is taken up after it has been interrupted by the excursus on the fall of Samaria.

- Regarding the order of constituents, the time phrase “in the ...<sup>th</sup> year of ...” is sometimes placed at the very beginning, and sometimes later in the sentence:

1Ki 15:1 *Literally:* And in the 18<sup>th</sup> year of the King Jeroboam, son of Nebat (he) became king Abijam over Judah.

1Ki 22:41 *Literally:* And Jehoshaphat, son of Asa, became king over Judah in the fourth year of Ahab ...

- With the southern kingdom Judah, (a) the numbers of years are *always* put in front, i.e. in focus, and (b) the capital Jerusalem is *always* mentioned, e.g.:

1Ki 15:2 *Literally:* Three years he reigned in Jerusalem.<sup>8</sup>

With the northern kingdom Israel, (a) the numbers of years are *never* put in front, (b) they are sometimes added on at the end of the sentence, i.e. they are not always made the focus of a separate sentence, and (c) the order of the temporal phrase (for the years) and the locative phrase (for the naming of the capital) is flexible. Compare (*literally*):

1Ki 15:25 ..., and he [Nadab] reigned over Israel two years.

1Ki 15:33: “... (he) became king Baasha ... over all Israel in Tirzah, 24 years.”

1Ki 16:29: “... and (he) reigned Ahab ... over Israel in Samaria, 22 years.”

2Ki 15:17 ... (he) became king Menahem ... over Israel ten years in Samaria.

## 5. The purpose of the variants in the introductory formulas

We take up some of the differences listed in the preceding section # 4. We do not discuss data that is provided for some kings, but absent for others (e.g. the age of the

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<sup>8</sup> There is one place that uses a different wording: Because the story about how Jeroboam became king is told in much detail and not as a summary statement, the length of his rule is given afterwards in the concluding formula in 1Ki 14:20.

ruler), because this kind of difference, although significant, is not problematic in translation.

- The reason for the unusual construction in 1Ki 15:9 “... (he) became king Asa, the king of Judah,” is not clear. Possibly, the source of the writer had “... (he) became king Asa, the son of Abijah, the king of Judah,” (as elsewhere), and the writer deleted “the son of Abijah” without adjusting the rest of the sentence.
- We observed that the time phrase “in the ...<sup>th</sup> year of ...” is placed at different positions in the sentence. Is there a logic behind this? From 1Ki 15:1 to 16:28, the writer follows a pattern: when he continues to write about the kings of either Israel or Judah, he *first* gives the date (referring to the ruler of the other kingdom) and *then* introduces the name of the new king; when he switches from one kingdom to the other, he *first* gives the name of the new king and *then* the time phrase (15:25). This pattern can also be seen in parts of 2 Kings (e.g. ch. 9-13). However, beginning at 1Ki 16:29 (and later for instance in 15:32-18:1), the writer deviates from this logic so often (in about one third of all cases) that it can hardly be called a standard pattern anymore, even if there might be an explanation for certain cases.<sup>9</sup>
- As stated above, for Judah the standard wording is “... years he reigned in Jerusalem”, whereas for Israel the wording is not fixed. The motivation for these variations is not clear. They do not depend on strikingly short or long lengths of reign. Both of these are reported with different constructions (see 1Ki 15:25; 16:8/15; 2Ki 15:13; and 1Ki 15:17/33; 16:29).  
Now it so happens that the fronting of the number of years often goes together with the mention of the king’s *age* immediately before it, as e.g. in 1Ki 22:42. But this coinciding of two numbers by itself cannot be the reason for the fronting of one of them either, because the fronting happens also where the age is not given, see 1Ki 15:10.

What emerges from the data is this: The author is consistent in how he records the duration of the reigns of the Judean kings. Apparently, this was his fixed point. Keeping track of them allows him to add them up, just as today one would make a list. While the data for Judah comes across like the “backbone” of the chronology, the data for Israel appears less tidy. One can think of two reasons. The compiler’s main source might have been written in a less consistent manner, and was copied that way. Or the compiler of Kings had to compile his data from various sources, and did so somewhat cursorily. Either way, the manner in which Israel is described comes across as somewhat more chaotic than the account of Judah, which is described in a more organized manner. This is appropriate, given that Israel had 20 kings in a time where Judah had 13.

## 6. Where the concluding formula occurs

The concluding formulas start out with <w<sup>2</sup>yeter dibrê ...> “And the rest of the matters of ...”. All these occurrences are included in the list below:<sup>10</sup>

1 Kings 11:41; 14:19; 14:29; 15:7; 15:31; 16:5; 16:14; 16:20; 16:27; 22:39; 22:46; 2 Kings 1:18; 8:23; 10:34; 12:20; 13:8; 13:12; 14:15; 14:18; 14:28; 15:6; 15:11; 15:15; 15:21; 15:26; 15:31; 15:36; 16:19; 20:20; 21:17; 21:25; 23:28; 24:5; 2 Chronicles 13:22; 20:34(-21:1); 25:26; 26:22; 27:7; 28:26; 32:32; 33:18; 35:26; 36:8.

As with the introductory formulas, minor differences in wording make a complete search challenging. To the above listing, one needs to add the following instances:

<sup>9</sup> Only the introductory formulas in 1-2 Kings were checked in this regard. Continuity regarding the kingdom is given 17 times, a switch to the other kingdom happens 12 times.

<sup>10</sup> As with the introductory formulas, the whole formula often extends over more than one verse. Only the first verse of each occasion is indicated here.

2Ch 12:15, which starts out <w<sup>3</sup>dibrê R<sup>3</sup>ḥab‘ām> “Now the acts of Rehoboam”. (A word for “rest” is not present).

1Ki 15:23, where “all” is added in between the usual words: <w<sup>3</sup>yeter kol-dibrê ...>.

2Ch 9:29, which uses the synonym <š<sup>3</sup>ār> instead of <yeter>: <ūš<sup>3</sup>ār dibrê ...>.

2Ch 16:11, which adds <hinnēh> after <w<sup>3</sup>>: <w<sup>3</sup>hinnēh dibrê ...>, *literally* “And, behold, the matters of ...”.

In 2Ch 24:27 we recognize the phrase “..., behold, they are written in ...” (<hinnām k<sup>3</sup>tûbîm>), but the usual word <dibrê ...> (“matters of ...”) does not occur.

The passages that speak about David are less standardized than other ones: 1Ki 2:10-12; 1Ch 3:4; 29:26-30.

## 7. The typical wording of the concluding formula

Below follows a sample text that compiles the elements that occur often. If the translator translates this as a model, it will be easy to adapt it for each case.

And the rest of the acts of ...  
and all that he did, and his might,  
are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel / Judah?  
And ... slept with his fathers and was buried with his fathers in the city of David.  
And ..., his son, became king in his place.

## 8. Some differences between the concluding formulas

Some differences between the formulas are listed below. We start with the more obvious differences in content and move on to minor linguistic variations.

- As to the sources that the writer refers to, at first he mentions “the book of the acts of Solomon” (1Ki 11:41). In all following formulas, he refers to either “the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of *Israel*” (as in 1Ki 14:19), or, respectively, to “the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of *Judah*” (as in 1Ki 14:29). These must not be confused in translation.
- Additional information, which is given in a good number of cases, are these:
  - The continued waging of war, e.g. in 1Ki 14:30.
  - The inclusion of the word <g<sup>3</sup>bûrah> “might” etc., as in 1Ki 16:5.
- Sometimes additional information that is particular to that given king is included, e.g.:

1Ki 22:39 ... and all that he did and the ivory house which he built ...
- The phrase “And ... slept with his fathers” is dropped when someone is assassinated, see e.g. 2Ki 12:22 [21 in English translations].
- Sometimes the phrase “And ..., his son, became king in his place” gets replaced by other accounts. This is due to special circumstances. The difference should not pose problems in translation.
- The phrase “the rest of the matters of ...” is sometimes extended, and in ever-changing ways. Compare:

1Ki 14:29 Now the rest of the acts of Rehoboam and all that he did, ...

1Ki 16:5 Now the rest of the acts of Baasha and what he did

1Ki 16:27 Now the rest of the acts of Omri which he did ...

Yet another variant is found, where the relative pronoun <ʾāšer> is used in a somewhat unusual way:

1Ki 14:19 <wʾyeter dibrê Yārobʿām ʾāšer nilham waʾāšer mālāk ...>

And the rest of the matters of Jeroboam, <ʾāšer> he fought and <ʾāšer> he reigned ...

- As was mentioned in section # 6, 2Ch 9:29 – which is a parallel passage to 1Ki 11:41 – uses the synonym <šʾār> instead of <yeter>.
- The rhetorical question “..., are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings ...?” is sometimes replaced by an emphatic statement. It then always comes with the particle <hinnām> “behold”, e.g.:

1Ki 14:19 ..., behold, they are written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings ...

- The order of the two phrases about the burial and about the succession is reversed in one place, namely 2Ki 13:13.
- The people who make someone king are referred to in different ways: In 2Ch 22:1 it is “the inhabitants of Jerusalem” who act. In 2Ki 14:21 (par. 2Ch 26:1) they are called <kol-ʿam Yʾhūdāh> “all the people of Judah”. In 2Ki 21:24 (par. 2Ch 33:25) and 23:30 (par. 2Ch 36:1) they are called <ʿam-hāʾāreš> “the people of the land”.
- Sometimes the elements of a concluding formula can be interrupted. For example, the formula in 2Ch 20:34/21:1 is interrupted by vv. 35-37.

## 9. The purpose of the variants in the concluding formulas

The overall impression one gets in comparing the wordings is such that the writer did not try to cast everything in one mold. One would be hard-pressed to explain all the minor differences. Consider the details:

- The minute variants of the phrase “the rest of the matters of ...” seem arbitrary:

1Ki 14:29 Now the rest of the acts of Rehoboam and all that he did, ...

1Ki 16:5 Now the rest of the acts of Baasha and what he did

1Ki 16:27 Now the rest of the acts of Omri which he did ...

- 1Ki 15:23 is the *only* place where the introductory sentence “And the rest of the acts of ...” shows an extra word, i.e. “all”: “And the rest of all the acts of ...”
- 2Ch 16:11 is the *only* place that uses <hinnēh>, “behold”, at the *beginning* of the concluding formula.
- 2Ch 9:29, where the formula does not begin with <wʾyeter dibrê ...>, but with <ūšʾār dibrê ...>, is a curious case, because this happens only *once*. Is there any difference in meaning between <yeter> and <šʾār>? Going by the dictionaries, the answer is negative, as far as our formulas are concerned.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> <yeter> is glossed as follows:

Gesenius/Donner: “Rest, Überschub ... c) das übrige, außer dem schon erwähnten ...”

Here it refers to the formulas and suggests: “u. die übrige Geschichte des NN”.

HALAT: “2. Rest, was übrig bleibt” [HALOT: “2. rest, remainder“.] For the formulas it translates: “was sonst noch zu sagen ist” [HALOT: “the rest of what can be said”].

NIDOTTE: “rest, remainder, excellence, excess”.

<šʾār> is glossed as follows:

Gesenius/Donner: “1. was übrig bleibt, das Übrige, Übriggebliebene ...” Here, 2Ch 9:29 is included.

There is certainly a large overlap in the meanings of <yeter> and <š'ār>. We notice, though, that according to some, <yeter> can carry the meaning of excess, which in the formulas could be worded “what goes beyond that which has been said [but what is not relevant here]”, and <š'ār> can include the idea of residue, which in the formulas could be worded like “what else our sources say [apart from what I have included in my report]”). Does such a subtle difference make sense here? 2Ch 9:29 talks about Solomon. Granted, the reports about this king in Chronicles are more extensive than about other kings, so one could argue there is less left over to be said. However, the report about Solomon in 2Ch is not longer than the one in 1Ki. So this alone is hardly a reason to change the wording.<sup>12</sup>

Latoundji judges on this case: “It appears to be a stylistic variant, since the Chronicler uses the synonymous phrase <yeter dibrê> some 10x.” (NIDOTTE. Vol. 2, p. 572.) – The Chronicler then changed the original from Kings in the first instance (2Ch 9:29). In all following ones (13:22ff.) he did not follow through on this.

- The rhetorical question “..., are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings ...?” is replaced by an emphatic statement in five out of 34 times in Kings (1Ki 14:19; 2Ki 15:11/15/26/31, but not in v.21). The contexts do not give us any clue as to why this is done in these places and not in others.
- 2Ki 13:13 is the only place where the two phrases about the burial and about the succession are reversed. Later, the usual formula is applied to Joash’s reign:

2Ki 13:13 So Joash [=Jehoash] slept with his fathers, and Jeroboam sat on his throne; and Joash was buried in Samaria with the kings of Israel.

2Ki 14:16 So Jehoash [=Joash] slept with his fathers and was buried in Samaria with the kings of Israel; and Jeroboam his son became king in his place.

Wiseman comments on this:

Some wish to delete it because of variants. But these may be deliberate, since Jeroboam ‘sat on his throne’ ... could indicate that he deliberately took over the throne (cf. the Assyrian annals ‘x sat on the throne’, implying a take-over, legitimate or not, compared with ‘they caused x to sit on the throne’ following the usual election procedure).<sup>13</sup>

2Ki 13:13 is indeed the only place where the phrase “to sit on the throne” is used in the formulas (although it does occur elsewhere). However, if the “deliberate take-over” was significant, one would expect to encounter this expression a few more times.

One could argue that for whatever reasons the accession to the throne was indeed held before the deceased king had been buried. However, the text does not indicate any further details and does not suggest that this was a significant exception. Also, the fact that in the second formula in 14:15-16 the events are presented in their usual order cautions against giving the exception in 13:13 too much weight.

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HALAT: “Rest, Übrige, Übriges”. [HALOT: “remainder, excess.”] For 2Ch 9:29 it says: “was sonst noch von Salomo zu sagen ist”. [HALOT: “what else can still be said about Solomon (ZüB), cf. NRSV: the rest of the acts of Solomon”] Note that the original German edition uses the same wording as for <yeter>.

NIDOTTE: “rest, residue, remnant”.

<sup>12</sup> There is another difference between the two verses: The Chronicler speaks about the rest of the matters of Solomon “from first to last”, and refers to several more source texts, whereas the writer of 1 Kings only mentions one. Going by the subtle difference in meaning just explained, we would expect the Chronicler to use <yeter>, because he has much more material at hand than he needs for his purposes.

<sup>13</sup> Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. Wiseman, Donald J.: 1 and 2 Kings. Intervarsity, 1993. P. 241.

Strictly speaking, the formula in 13:12-13 is not needed, because the following verses still report events from Joash's time – first the final episode of the accounts about Elisha, then the war with Amaziah from Judah. Perhaps the first formula is a leftover piece that the editor of Kings, in composing his work from different sources, did not eliminate, or used to mark the interim end of his report about the kings, before turning to the prophet Elisha again.

Looking at these pieces of evidence, we feel that the use of the “formulas”, i.e. of standard wordings, is **for the sake of recognizability, not for the sake of reproduction** of one and the same set of phrases each time.<sup>14</sup> The patterns are modified with a great deal of flexibility.

In discourse studies, one likes to go by the principle that “choice implies meaning”, i.e. if an author has two ways of saying something, he has a reason for the choice he makes.<sup>15</sup> This is a healthy assumption in general. It cautions us against too superficial answers. However, perhaps a less idealistic view is in place and a practical factor deserves some consideration. The authors of Kings and Chronicles did not have our modern electronic means for writing, printing, copying and storing their documents at their disposal. While they were very much capable of consulting numerous sources, handling a vast amount of data, and composing their works with a clear flow and goal, consistency in the sense of sameness of wordings was perhaps neither easy to achieve nor considered of value in itself. Put in a more pointed way, it seems that the compiler of Kings took a somewhat laid-back attitude when it came to the reproduction of standard wordings. A more positive evaluation would be that the writer adapted his wordings intentionally, to avoid dull style. This seems less likely to me.<sup>16</sup>

## 10. Translating the introductory and concluding formulas

A **literal** translation will follow the Hebrew closely. The NASB is a good model. The data we have provided above alerts us to some of the differences to watch out for.

A **literary** translation faces other challenges. Obviously, **additional information** that is given in some formulas, but not in others, has to be translated. Such is the case with the age of certain kings. Including this piece of information does not pose any problems.

Likewise, **factual differences** are to be kept. Examples are those cases where the default phrase “his son became king in his place” has to give way to a statement like that in 1Ki 15:28: “So Baasha killed him in the third year of Asa king of Judah and reigned in his place.”

A bit trickier are the **references** to entities and characters. Sometimes it is not altogether clear which kingdom is in view. 1Ki 15:1, for instance, reads:

Now in the eighteenth year of King Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, Abijam became king over Judah.

This verse, read in isolation, could be misunderstood as meaning that both Jeroboam and Abijam were kings of Judah – with Abijam taking over the office from Jeroboam after he had reigned for eighteen years. For the sake of clarity, it is recommended to name both kingdoms, as for example NLT has done:

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<sup>14</sup> In certain texts, repetition serves memorability. That is not the purpose with these historical records.

<sup>15</sup> See Runge, Steven E.: *Discourse Grammar of the Greek New Testament: A Practical Introduction for Teaching and Exegesis*. Hendrickson Publishers, 2010. Pp. 5f.

<sup>16</sup> This is not to say that tiny differences are never meaningful. To cite just one example, in 2Ki 1:9 the first captain of fifty says: “O man of God, the king says, ‘Come down.’ In v. 11, the second captain of fifty says: “O man of God, thus says the king, ‘Come down quickly.’” This second command is more urging, and all English translations retain the difference in some way.

Abijam began to rule over Judah in the eighteenth year of Jeroboam's reign in Israel.

One could even consider filling in the father's name in those places where it is not given. 1Ki 15:9 would then read like this:

So in the twentieth year of Jeroboam [the son of Nebat] the king of Israel, Asa [the son of Abijam] began to reign as king of Judah.

This is not importing new information. The names can be obtained from other places in the book. It simply means following a standard way of reporting. The reader will become familiar with the pattern, and it might help him to keep track of "Who is who" as well.

We now consider the various **differences in syntax, constituent order, word choice, sentence type and proper names phrases**. As we have seen, most of them are not introduced with the intention to communicate something *special*. Thus the translator, too, does not need to feel obliged to follow the text too rigidly. In fact, regarding a literal rendering one could ask the question: Will attentive readers spot the minor differences and try to analyze them and find out what they have to say? In that case, the Hebrew style – whether it is considered beautiful or sloppy – gets in the way of the message; it sidetracks the reader. It might be better to translate the formulas in a standard way, but only, if that is what readers in the given language expect for this kind of document.

We go through the presented cases and begin with the introductory formulas.

- We said 1Ki 15:9 ("... (he) became king Asa, the king of Judah") is unusual. To keep it like this will sound illogical to many readers, and there is no value in keeping an ungrammatical construction in the text. Even NASB renders: "Asa began to reign as king of Judah."
- The time phrase "in the ...<sup>th</sup> year of ..." is placed at different positions in the sentence. Since a standard pattern, or a reason for deviations from it, could not be established, the translator does not need to feel obliged to cling to the differences either, but can feel free to come up with the most natural wording, and use it everywhere.<sup>17</sup>
- We observed that the numbers of years of the rule are sometimes put in focus, grammatically speaking. However, it is not entirely clear how this affects the meaning. Nor could we explain why this temporal phrase is sometimes added within the same sentence, and sometimes in a separate sentence. Therefore, a translator does not need to copy the Hebrew constructions, even if that is possible.

We now turn to issues in the concluding formulas.

- Here is how different English translation handle the phrase "the rest of the matters of ..." and its extensions:

NASB

1Ki 14:29 Now the rest of the acts of Rehoboam and all that he did, ...

1Ki 16:5 Now the rest of the acts of Baasha and what he did

1Ki 16:27 Now the rest of the acts of Omri which he did ...

It is known from other contexts that the Hebrew <kol> "all" (14:29) is sometimes felt redundant. The difference between 16:5 and 27 is only a <w<sup>3</sup>> "and". These details are not significant enough to be mirrored in the host language, if the

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<sup>17</sup> Not ideal is what NRSV did – following the Hebrew "deviation" from the model in 1Ki 15:25, but not in 16:29.

translators feel that a standard (identical) wording is more appropriate in their language. While NASB reflects the Hebrew as closely as possible, NLT has sometimes dropped the verb as redundant and NIV goes a middle way:

NLT

1Ki 14:29 The rest of the events in Rehoboam's reign and everything he did ...  
1Ki 16:5 The rest of the events in Baasha's reign [Ø] ...  
1Ki 16:27 The rest of the events in Omri's reign [Ø] ...

NIV

1Ki 14:29 As for the other events of Rehoboam's reign, and all he did, ...  
1Ki 16:5 As for the other events of Baasha's reign, what he did ...  
1Ki 16:27 As for the other events of Omri's reign, what he did ...

1Ki 14:19, where the relative pronoun <ʾāšer> cannot be translated literally, is rendered like this:

NASB Now the rest of the acts of Jeroboam, how he made war and how he reigned, ...  
NET The rest of the events of Jeroboam's reign, including the details of his battles and rule, ...  
GNT Everything else that King Jeroboam did, the wars he fought and how he ruled, ...

- Analogously, dropping “all” in 1Ki 15:23, the only place where this word occurs in the introductory sentence “And the rest of all the acts of ...”, is justified.
- Likewise, it is permissible to omit <hinnēh>, “behold”, in translating 2Ch 16:11.
- In 2Ch 9:29, where the formula begins with <ûšʾār dibrê ...> instead of <wʾyeter dibrê ...>. Two out of nine of the consulted English translations keep the difference: REB by saying “The rest of the acts of ...” instead of their usual wording “The other acts and events of ...”, and GNT by saying “Everything else that ... did” instead of “The rest of the history of ...” in all other places.<sup>18</sup> However, since a special meaning is not intended, a translation that is identical with the other places is quite acceptable.
- There are some differences that will disappear anyway, due to the grammar of the host language. For example, 2Ki 8:24 “and he was buried” parallels 2Ch 21:20 “and they buried him”. It could be that the first expression, a passive construction, is very rarely used in the language; or it could be that the second expression – without a named subject – is unnatural and therefore avoided. In either case, the difference in style of passive and active voice between Kings and Chronicles is removed. Although that is regrettable, naturalness is more important than clinging to details of style if they cannot be appreciated by the reader.
- The rhetorical question “..., are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings ...?” is sometimes replaced by an emphatic statement using <hinnām> “behold!”: “..., behold, they are written ...”.

Rhetorical questions are often turned into declarative sentences anyway, <hinnēh> is often felt to be superfluous, and so the stylistic difference of the original will disappear for reasons of naturalness. Thus, one may end up with a sentence like: “[They] are recorded in ...” (so NLT, NET, REB in 1Ki 11:41).

However, a little more can be said about the particular rhetorical questions that occur in these formulas. Schmid points out other references, where Biblical writers,

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<sup>18</sup> However, both translations happen to apply the special wording to one other place too where the Hebrew has the regular wording.

in citing literature, interestingly use the same constructions as here – once the question form, once <hinnēh>.<sup>19</sup> Compare these sentences:

Jos 10:13 Is it not written in the book of Jashar?

2Sa 1:18 Behold, it is written in the book of Jashar.

Est 10:2 ... are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Media and Persia?

Apparently, these two constructions were typical ways of making “bibliographical notes”. The writers of Kings and Chronicles have no reason to defend themselves – which would be one way of explaining the use of a rhetorical question, as if saying “If you don’t believe me, look it up.” Rhetorical questions often serve to express some sort of imperative too. Here, then, they can be taken as an invitation to read up more on the kings. The UBS Handbook quotes Peregrino with the following translation: “For more information about Solomon, his undertakings and his wisdom, see the Annals of Solomon.”<sup>20</sup> This is more idiomatic than the simple statement “[they] are recorded in ...”<sup>21</sup>

What has been suggested above does not mean that small differences should be ignored. The question is: Where do we cross the line between style and content, between form and meaning? Or: **Which linguistic differences carry a message, and which do not?** Below are some cases where more caution is in place.

- Any translation *should* reflect the difference in how the death of a king is reported: The phrase “and ... slept with his fathers” should not be applied where a king is assassinated. Models which keep the contrast are:

2Ki 8:24

NET Joram passed away

REB Joram rested with his forefathers

2Ki 12:22 [21]

NET His servants ... murdered him. ...

REB it was his servants ... who struck the fatal blow. ...

- A borderline case is 2Ki 13:13 (par. 2Ki 14:16), where the two phrases about the burial and about the succession are reversed. We cannot be sure that this is significant. The text is not difficult to understand and the author might have had reasons to say things the way he said them, and so it might be better to reflect the difference, as e.g. NIV does. NLT, in contrast, takes the freedom to revert to the usual order, and even does so with an explicit signal of sequence:

2Ki 13:13 NLT When Jehoash died, he was buried in Samaria with the kings of Israel. Then his son Jeroboam II became the next king.

As to the exceptional use of the phrase “to sit on the throne”, it is probably not worth sticking to it. This also depends on how natural it is in the host language.

- The people who enthrone the new king are referred to in different ways (see section # 8 above): Here, some caution against assimilating is in place. The “inhabitants of Jerusalem” might well have been a smaller group than “all the people of Judah”. And when the writer refers to “the people of the land”, this might reflect the fact that by that time the northern kingdom had ceased to exist,

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<sup>19</sup> Wuppertaler Studienbibel. Schmid, Hartmut: Das erste Buch der Könige. Brockhaus, 2000. P. 346.

<sup>20</sup> UBS Handbook Series. Roger L. Omanson and John E. Ellington: A Handbook on 1-2 Kings. United Bible Societies, 2008. On 1Ki 11:41.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. T4T1 for 2Ki 23:28, for example: „*If you want to know more about* [RHQ] all the other things that Josiah did, they are written ...“

and the Judean king was supported by the northern population, or parts of it, as well.

In the end, we come back to the question: How much can a translation achieve? One will always lose something of the original, not least a feel for the attitude and workmanship of the writer. But if the *skopos* of a translation is to provide easy access to the Biblical literature, then what is gained through some license in style will outweigh the loss in closeness to the original.

Some further remarks may be made.

**Section headings:** Section headings suggest themselves as a means to orient the reader as to which kingdom is being talked about. Most English translations make use of them in this way (e.g. NIV at 1Ki 15:1: “Abijah King of Judah”).

NRSV provides an interesting model by indicating the dynasties. This starts at 1Ki 12:20, where the section heading reads: “First Dynasty: Jeroboam Reigns over Israel”, and ends at 16:20 (“Fourth Dynasty: Omri Reigns over Israel”). For some reason, this approach is not continued in 2Ki.

A note may be added: If we follow the Hebrew formulas, then Omri’s reign starts at 1Ki 16:23, such as the section heading in GECL indicates. The vv. 21f., although they are introduced with the time adverb <āz> “then”, still belong to the preceding section on Zimri. What they describe takes the place of the standard phrase “His son became king in his place”, which does not apply here. For some reason, the English translations all have the section heading at v. 21 instead of v. 23.

Similarly, 2Ki 1:17f. should not yet be marked as the beginning of the reign of Jehoram (as NASB has done); the introductory formula for him only appears at 3:1, even if the events of ch. 2 took place during his time.

**Queen-mother:** One other point that deserves special attention is how to translate the sentences about the kings’ mothers. This point is unrelated to the issue of synchronizing the formulas. We know that the queen-mother occupied a special position at court. When we read “...and his mother’s name was ...” (1Ki 15:2 and *passim*), then the primary interest of the author is probably not to provide details about the genealogy of the new king, but to name the person who acted as “first lady”, as it were. I suppose that the vast majority of readers miss this point. Therefore, it is worth considering a translation like “The queen-mother was ...”, or “The position of queen-mother was filled by ...”.

<g<sup>3</sup>bûrah> “**might**”: English renderings of this word include the following: “achievements / accomplishments / victories / brave deeds / heroic acts / things he achieved / strength demonstrated / extent of power”. – Since the same expression is used for many kings, it seems safer to choose one of the more general terms, because we cannot be sure what kind of things the author refers to when speaking about a certain individual.

## 11. Conclusion

Originally, my intention was to provide a list of variants of the formulas, in order to make it easier for translators to be fully consistent in translating them. The more minor variations I discovered, the more I asked myself whether maintaining consistency was a worthwhile goal. In the end, I had the impression that, by and large, the variants can be attributed to the Biblical writers’ style. Thus, they do not carry a “deeper meaning”. Therefore, translators do not need to be overly concerned about keeping minor differences, but may – within reason – feel free to use the style that they find fitting in their own language. To put it differently, translators might find it more important to keep consistent within their own translation than to keep consistent with the original wording.

The goal is that the reader will recognize the introductory or concluding statements as such, that he can identify all people who are named in them easily, and that he perceives the style as fitting for these accounts about the kings' reigns. A remark in the book introduction about the formulas might also be appropriate.