

J. ALBERTO SOGGIN, *Das Königtum in Israel: Ursprünge, Spannungen, Entwicklung* (= Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft, N. 104). Berlin, 1967. pp. x-167. Alfred Töpelmann.

After several shorter studies on various aspects of monarchic history in ancient Israel, Soggin gives us now a comprehensive monograph in which his previous results are restated and elaborated in a wider framework. The book is a history of monarchy in Israel, both in itself and with respect to the other countries of the ancient Near East. After an introduction with a statement of the problem and an analysis of institutional forerunners of monarchy in Israel (the Judges, Gideon, Abimelek and Jephthah), there follow two parts, of which the first (pp. 27-111) deals with a presentation of monarchic institutions in a chronological sequence (from Saul to the Exile), while the second part (pp. 113-162) deals with Syria, the Hittites, Egypt, Mesopotamia and nomadic societies. The book is indeed a valuable recapitulation, where the material is presented clearly and the theory set forth lucidly. A most useful contribution is to be found in the bibliography appended in the footnotes, selected both judiciously and generously. As a historical account of the monarchy, Soggin's book is quite a solid piece of work, based as it is on a sound use of the sources and on a good sense for literary criticism and historical reality.

A few observations may be in place concerning questions of method and of general historiographical approach. The book is professedly a research into institutions. This is implied in the title, which may be translated as «Monarchy in Israel», with its emphasis on the abstract term—«monarchy» (as exemplified in Israel)—, rather than «The *Israelite* kingdom(s)», which would emphasize the concrete and contingent. That this is an institutional research can also be gathered from various points of the book, for instance in the introduction (p. 6): «Thus an investigation of the specific traits of Israelite monarchy should yield a considerable contribution to the history of political (staatlichen) institutions in the ancient Near East. . . ».

At the same time, however, the emphasis is also on development, a slant which comes to the fore in the subtitle—«Origins, Tensions, Development»—and again at various other points of the book, for instance on p. 7 where the author speaks of «institutional development». In the actual treatment of his theme the author has chosen to emphasize the latter aspect, i.e., development vs. institution. Thus the method appears to be primarily exegetical, with the guidelines for analysis and research provided by the sources in their chronological sequence more than by an inquiry into social and political structures. As a result, the study unfolds as an institutional commentary on the sources. In Soggin's treatment this is especially evident in his chapter on Saul's reign (I/1), in which the subdivisions of the chapter are not by institutional traits (such as government, administration, military apparatus), but rather by literary traditions (I Sam. 8; 10, 17-27; 12; I Sam. 9, 1-10, 16; 13, 5-15; I Sam. 11; 13, 1-4, 16 ff.; 14). Obviously questions about government, administration, etc. *are* found in I Sam. 8; 10, 17-27; etc., but the emphasis remains precisely on I Sam. 8; 10, 17-27; etc. Both approaches are valid, and the choice between them depends on the results one wishes to achieve. The first approach, which one might call structural, is more apt to land us on the risky, though challenging, terrain of hypothetical reconstruction. The second, or exegetical, approach is perhaps less prone to interpretive ventures and certainly more likely to stand firm on solid ground.

As for the content of the book, I would like to take issue with the author on two fundamental points of his exposition. The first, and most important, concerns the distinction he makes between charismatic and institutional principles. Even though it is stated that there is some exaggeration in Alt's conception of charismatic and institutional monarchies as sharply differentiated types (p. 79, n. 5), in practice Soggin's position is not much more mitigated. Thus on p. 7 he says that «it is possible to observe an evolution of the Israelite monarchy which led to more and more institutionalized forms, which of course was to be *detrimental* to the two elements» of *charism* and democracy. On p. 47 he says that «the *charismatic* leader shows fundamental and insurmountable *inadequacies* to cope with any *organic* planning». To my mind, this book, as well as writings by other authors who hold the same position, fail to prove their point, perhaps simply because they take it for granted. But is this possible? What is there in the sources to show that charism is solely to be understood in terms of extraordinary actions performed by single individuals? Undoubtedly this is *one* of the aspects of charismatic manifestations, but not the only one. One may say perhaps that charisms come to human groups primarily through the interaction of a single individual, but certainly human groups as such are not excluded from charism. Yahweh made a treaty with the house of David, which had indeed been entered into through the person of David, but which was conceived from the beginning as extending to a human group as a whole (David's dynasty). Similar considerations apply to the Sinai treaty, where Moses is conceived as intermediary for the people as a whole. In other words, I do not find in the sources any indication that a «communal charism» is repugnant to Israelite conception and mentality—or, to put it with Soggin, that it is «anticonstitutional (verfassungswidrig)» (p. 79). On the contrary, a research such as that by De Fraine, *Adam et son lignage*, Bruges 1959, has persuasively stressed the value and importance of the notion of «corporate personality» in Old Testament theology. In political terms, this means that we have no reason to expect an ideological resistance, in Israel, to the establishment of a dynasty which was conceived as divinely sanctioned. Thus there ought to have been no difficulty, from this point of view, to a smooth transition from the period of the Judges to the monarchic period. The ideology of the dynastic charism was no less a theological rationalization for changed political conditions than the ideology of the individual charism (for the Judges) had been in previous periods and different political conditions.

Because Soggin does not think it possible that a smooth ideological transition might in fact have taken place between the Judges and dynastic monarchy, he believes that another

stage has to be introduced to explain the transition which, in any case, did take place. Following, among others, Alt and Noth, the author suggests that another type of monarchy, namely elective monarchy, has to be inserted between the Judges and dynastic monarchy. The main representative of elective monarchy is Saul. But here too I find myself at variance. To my mind, Saul's monarchy was no different, in substance, from David's, the differences between the two being only a matter of degree. For one thing, neither Soggin nor other scholars who maintain a similar theory have explained what should the difference be between the Judges and Saul—besides, that is, the mere difference of title. Are the Judges simply occasional leaders of specific and isolated campaigns? (This seems to be Soggin's point when he compares the Judges to Rome's dictators, p. 13). But then, why the insistence in the sources in recording data concerning the death of the Judges, thus equating their *lifetime* with their period of tenure? Why don't we have two « Judges » in the same generation? The real difference between the Judges and Saul is not one of leadership in a single campaign vs. lifetime leadership. The real issue then is that Saul introduced dynastic monarchy. Otherwise, why the various anti-monarchic traditions? Is it conceivable that the Israelites (or at least some of them) should have been scandalized by the alleged introduction, with Saul, of a lifetime monarchy while, on the other hand, they would have presented little opposition when the real change, i.e., dynastic monarchy, would have come in with David? It is certainly more likely to assume that the antimonarchic traditions in I Sam. are directed against the real change, not against a relatively minor one. It may be noted that archaeological evidence is not against this interpretation, since we have remnants of a good size fortress in Saul's capital of Gibeah for precisely the time of Saul, see L. A. Sinclair, *An Archaeological Study of Gibeah (Tell el-Fûl)*, New Haven 1960, pp. 11–15 and Pls. 30, 35. In connection with the antimonarchic traditions of I Sam., I would like to refer to a text which has generally been neglected, namely the Akkadian « Advice to a Prince » recently republished by W. G. Lambert in his *Babylonian Wisdom Literature*, Oxford 1960, pp. 110–15. This text, which is especially interesting for a comparison of Israelite and other ancient Near Eastern monarchies, contains a list of veiled warnings addressed to a king against abuses vis-à-vis his subjects. Many of the points made are those we find in I Sam.: mobilization, forced labour, confiscation of goods, taxation (I plan to discuss these parallels more in detail in a future article). The Akkadian text, datable to the late Assyrian period, is not so much antimonarchic as anti-despotic, and it is perhaps in this line that one might also have to interpret the « anti-monarchic » traditions of the Old Testament. And such a conclusion is perhaps not too different from Soggin's; see for instance on p. 35: « It is not always easy to distinguish between a tendency which is fundamentally anti-monarchic and a tendency which rejects or delimits the monarchy only because of worries with respect to certain specific dangers... ».

In conclusion, I would like to repeat my appreciation for Soggin's work. The problems at hand are engaging and no easy solution can be claimed. As is often the case, differences in historiographical reconstruction may yield through their very contrast and complementarity a truer insight into the complexity of historical reality.

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