

ISAAC KALIMI

Writing and Rewriting the Story of Solomon in Ancient Israel

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Until a couple of decades ago the stories about early kingship in Israel and its three first representatives Saul, David and Solomon were considered to be a quite trustworthy source for the history of the period. Not that the approach was uncritical, but on the whole the basic outline of the story was seen as a fairly good reflection of what actually happened. With the rise of a much more critical view on the biblical sources held not only by the so-called minimalist but also by others, the bright picture has become blurred. Archaeologists have pointed out the problems in finding unequivocal traces of the Davidic empire and the large building projects launched by Solomon as depicted in 2 Samuel and 1 Kings. Renewed scrutiny of the texts in Samuel-Kings has led to a lowering of their dating with a corresponding skepticism of their value as historical sources. Traditionally the historical value of the version given in Chronicles has been ignored by scholars since it has been seen as a copy of the older account in Samuel-Kings plus some added details representing the Chronicler's own time.

On the whole, it can be said that Solomon, apart from the reduction of his empire, has received less attention in the new debate. The present volume is dedicated to a thorough analysis of the sources of the reign of Solomon. The author, Isaac Kalimi, research professor of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament and history of ancient Israel at the Johannes-Gutenberg-Universität, Mainz, is well-known not least for several penetrating studies on the Books of Chronicles.

The present book is divided into 14 chapters: 1–4 constitute Part I of the book, 6–14 Part II. Part I presents Kalimi's view of the sources, including critical views of the so-called minimalists who reject the whole tradition of David and Solomon. He also shows his skepticism towards those who break up the biblical narratives into a mosaic of separate sources. He advocates a moderate source-critical attitude. He also argues in favor of the trustworthiness of the biblical texts as historical

documents without, of course, any fundamentalistic inclinations. He is quite convinced of the historicity of Solomon, a view that is not uncontroversial nowadays. Part II contains analyses of all the relevant passages on Solomon not only in Samuel-Kings but also in Chronicles (not unexpected from one of the leading experts on that text!) which are quite illuminating in many instances. Every chapter has a short introduction where the result is presented, followed by a thorough analysis of the texts which is rounded off by a condensed conclusion. Even if this gives a touch of verbosity to the book as a whole, it facilitates the reader's navigation through the text and makes it easy to isolate separate themes for closer study.

Kalimi's main aim is a literary analysis of the relevant texts but he also comments upon their value as historical sources. As is well known, the existence of Solomon is nowadays doubted by some prominent scholars, not only "minimalists." It cannot be denied that the texts about Solomon in the Hebrew Bible are more fragmentary than those about his father and his historicity is much more vague than David's. There seems to be two fundamental themes that are attached to the traditional image of Solomon: His divinely inspired wisdom and his role as temple builder. Both seem to be ancient elements, perhaps confirmed by the passage in Josephus (*Ag. Ap.* 1.112–115; 24, n. 14). Kalimi shows that there is another element in the Solomon legend which is also likely to be ancient, namely the fact that he is an illegitimate heir to the throne. This is treated in the so-called succession story (2 Samuel 9–20 + 1 Kings 1–2) which looms large in Kalimi's study and his analysis of it is perhaps the most important part of the book. Kalimi sees the story as a unified literary composition by one author and not the result of many hands, a position supported by good argumentation (102ff., 218ff.). Only 1 Kings 2:2–4 is a Deuteronomistic addition (250). His main thesis is that the story is composed as an apology for Solomon and his kingship as it is evident from the succession story itself that Solomon is a usurper and that this is basic for the understanding of its meaning (113). The core episode of the whole composition is the birth of

Solomon through the immoral activity of David (2 Sam 10–12). Further, Solomon's accession to the throne takes place through a *coup d'état* effectuated by the prophet Nathan and Bat Sheva, Solomon's mother. Kalimi argues very convincingly that many features in the story become comprehensible from this perspective. One example is the name Yedidyah, "Yah's beloved," given to the new-born Solomon by Nathan. Kalimi shows with reference to extra-biblical Mideastern evidence that a name of this kind indicates divine favor of an otherwise illegitimate ruler (140) and is, consequently, one of the devices for Solomon's legitimacy.

Kalimi's reading raises questions about the whole background of the Solomonic tradition and indeed the rise of the Davidic dynasty. He argues that the succession story was written quite early, even during Solomon's reign for the sake of legitimization of his kingship. The fact seems to be that there was widespread knowledge that both David and Solomon were usurpers. The succession story is written in order to handle this problem. Were there circles who questioned the legitimacy of the whole Davidic dynasty? This is quite likely and it could be that the narrator actually employs their arguments in his account: The immoral act of David and the killing of Solomon's rival brother Adoniah as well as the murder of people who had been involved in David's activities. The narrator solves the moral problem by employing a folk-tale motif: The four sons of whom the youngest wins the princess and half the kingdom (or in this case the entire kingdom) even through dubious means (217–218). The motif is not unique to the story of Solomon. It is used also about David and in the story of Jacob and Esau where the motif of cunning is prominent and not condemned by the narrator: It is after all the will of YHWH, the hidden director behind the events. Specific for the succession story is, however, the subtle psychology and extreme ambiguity of the narrator. Is he for or against? Kalimi's analysis makes the ambiguity of the story very visible but it raises the question if it is likely that such a story could be written while the culprit or his successors were still in power. Dating the succession story to Solomon's

time is highly unlikely. We would rather expect an account like the one given by the Chronicler where all scandals and bloodshed are censored (183). But where were the circles who did not acknowledge the Davidic dynasty and when were they active? Kalimi is right in pointing out the non-Deuteronomistic moral visible in the death of the first child (109, 167), so the succession story could have been composed before 586, although hardly as early as Solomon's time, i.e., the tenth century BCE. The details of its context remain though.

We should thank the author for a well-researched and well-balanced study of a fascinating subject that will stimulate scholarly thinking about the whole complex of Israelite kingship, a theme that will never cease to fascinate.

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MATTHEW D.C. LARSEN

Gospels Before the Book

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Matthew D. C. Larsen takes on the difficult task of posing a basically unanswerable question and getting his readers to question their basic assumptions. The idea Larsen wants us to question is that the Gospel of Mark is a book, that is, a finished writing released into the world with the intention that it shall be read in the form in which it was written. Instead, Larsen argues that the Gospel of Mark is an unfinished collection of notes, from which an early Christian preacher would construct his or her own narrative about Jesus Christ.

Larsen begins his argument by noting that both Cicero and Caesar use *commentarii* or *hypomnēmata* to refer to rough, unfinished drafts of their own memoirs, intended not to be read as is, but to be used as base material for someone else to author a biography. In both of these cases, no one took up the offer, and Cicero is quite certain that this is because both memoirs were too finished, too well-written to be improved upon further. Larsen then points to many other ancient examples: Pliny the