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Kings and Poets

Samuel and Saul

As a group of often disunited tribes, oppressed by Philistines and others, often low in morale and without ongoing spiritual impetus, the Israelites looked for some tangible, permanent institution to deliver them out of their troubles. The kingship of their divine Sovereign had been expressed through deliverers or ‘judges’ raised up on occasion to meet the need, the greatest being Samuel. Samuel’s sons however, were not of their father’s calibre, but corrupt. So, at length, Israel’s elders determined to have a king ‘like all the (other) nations’ (1 Samuel 8:1-5). This, they were granted—but not without a plain warning that desertion of their divine Sovereign for a fallible, bureaucratic, exploitative human ruler (conformed to this imperfect world) would mean a price to pay.

Thus, in his address, Samuel spelled out that price to Israel (1 Samuel 8:10-18). A worldly king would conscript free men’s sons to serve as his attendants and in his armies, to till crown lands, to work in state workshops, and their daughters to give service also. State requisitioning of, and tax on, land and property, forced labour, etc., would in time cool the Israelites’ enthusiasm for the new order. This passage has often been dismissed as a late and jaundiced view of the monarchy, written up centuries after Samuel’s time, in the light of later experience. However, such a view is needless. From the archives of Alalakh and Ugarit comes

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abundant evidence on levantine kingship from long before Samuel’s time, illustrating the whole gamut of such burdens on people and property. These were the normal ‘cost’ of such a monarchy, not simply abuses (except when pushed beyond reason),¹ long before and after Samuel.

Saul was Israel’s first king, his reign marked by both triumphs and tragedy (1 Samuel 9-31). From his troubled times, archaeology has little to show directly. Saul’s citadel at Gibeah (Tell el-Ful) has been excavated, with results that illustrate well the value and limitations of much archaeology for biblical study. The earliest main level (I) was an Early Iron Age settlement of the twelfth century BC. Some time after its destruction (c. 1100 BC), during the eleventh century, there was built a rectangular fortress with corner towers and ‘casemate’ walls² (level IIA). Later, this fortress was revamped, with masonry of better workmanship (level IIB). This fort was certainly Saul’s abode in ‘Gibeah of Saul’—but during which phase, IIA or IIB? The excavators and their colleagues considered that the first fort was Saul’s work, later

¹ Well shown long since by I. Mendelsohn, *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, No. 143 (1956), pp. 17-22.

² That is, walls built in two parallel lengths, linked by cross-walls, forming interior compartments. These could either be filled in to give greater solidity, or kept free (and entered from the inside face) to provide storage space, according to need.

reconstructed under David. Others (e.g., Alt, Mazar) have queried whether it was the Philistines who built the first fort (as strongpoint against the Hebrews), which later Saul took over and rebuilt to be his centre of rule (second fort). The first view is perhaps, still preferable, but uncertainty still haunts the matter.³ Initially, Saul was able to maintain a successful defence of his kingdom against foes from the north (Zobah), east (Ammon, Moab, Edom) and south (Amalek), as well as against the Philistines—but ultimately, the Philistines proved too much, bringing about the deaths of Saul and his principal sons, together with the seeming collapse of Israel as a state (1 Samuel 31; 2 Samuel 1).

David: Restorer of the Kingdom, Builder of an Empire

From modest origins, David ultimately became the greatest and archetypal Hebrew king. Within a decade of Saul's death, the tribes of Israel saw in him their sole effective leader. Capturing Jerusalem, he ruled from there over a reunited people. The new monarch found himself beset by foes, but not wholly without friends. First and foremost, the Philistines sought to crush the new ruler, but were thoroughly repulsed (2 Samuel 5:17 ff.; 8:1). Eastward, swayed by suspicion, the new king of Ammon insulted David's envoys, therefore hired allies from the north, but was vanquished (2 Samuel 10-12), as were Moab (2 Samuel 8:2) and

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Edom (2 Samuel 11:14 ff., cf. 8:14). Then, in the north, David conquered the Aramean kingdom of Zobah and Damascus whence Ammon had obtained aid (2 Samuel 8:3 ff., cf. 10:6, 8, 16-19). This northern victory brought David two friends: the rulers of Hamath inland and of Tyre on the coast. Toi king of Hamath had already struggled with Hadadezer of Zobah for mastery of the routes north-east to the Euphrates (cf. 2 Sa. 8:3, 10b). So, when David eliminated the power of Zobah, that problem was solved, and Toi sent his son south with rich gifts to seek alliance with the new power, gifts accepted but not reciprocated (2 Sa. 8:9-11). Thus, Toi probably became David's subject-ally. As pointed out long since,⁴ David's empire thus contained three political elements: the home nucleus of Judah and Israel, the conquered territories to east (Ammon, Moab, Edom) and centre-north, and Toi as subjectally further north and east to the Euphrates. On the evidence of later Hittite hieroglyphic inscriptions, it is possible to determine that the kingdom of Hamath did extend to the Euphrates, opposite Laqe and Naharaim whence it could draw labour for work on buildings in Hamath. The northern centre of Luash was also a regular part of the kingdom.

David's other friend was Hiram I, king of Tyre, who was quick to perceive the new star in the ascendant in the Levant, and to ally himself with it—putting Phoenician craftsmanship and materials at David's disposition (2 Sa. 5:11-12). This alliance continued under Solomon, being renewed from time to time by the northern successor-kingdom of Israel in later centuries. David wished to build a temple for the God of Israel, but through Nathan the

³ See the useful outline by L. A. Sinclair, in Avi-Yonah (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Archaeol. Excavations in the Holy Land*, II, 1976, pp. 444-446 and references; cf. N. Lapp, *Bulletin, American Schools, Oriental Research* 223 (1976), pp. 25-42.

⁴ Cf. A. Malamat, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 22 (1963), pp. 6-8; Mazar, *Biblical Archaeologist* 25 (1962), pp. 102 f.; in graphic form, Y. Aharoni, *The Land of the Bible*, 1966, Map 21 with pp. 263-4.

prophet came the message that not he, but his son, should build it. This 'hope deferred' did not deter him from welcoming the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem, or from taking interest in the associated worship, in music as well as with offerings. A persistent and undoubtedly ancient tradition makes of David 'the sweet psalmist of Israel' (2 Sa. 23:1). Long before his attention to music in Jerusalem, he had been the youthful lyre-player who calmed Saul (1 Sa. 16:18, 23; 18:10). The narratives of his life include his lament over Saul and Jonathan (2 Sa. 1:17-27), his hymn of praise at the time of his greatness (2 Sa. 22), and his parting psalm (2 Sa. 23:1-7), quite apart from the persistent headings in the Psalter itself.

David and the Antiquity of Poetry

The tradition of poetry and hymnody in ancient Israel went far back beyond David's day. The blessings pronounced by the

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patriarchs were set in poetic form (Isaac, Gen. 27:27-29, 39-40; Jacob, Gen. 49:1-27). After the exodus, the 'Song of the Sea' uttered by Moses and Israel (Ex. 15) was a veritable triumph-hymn, as was the later Song of Deborah and Barak (Judges 5). The use of such poetic song in Saul's time is reflected in the refrain of the maidens that aroused Saul's jealousy of David (1 Sa. 18:7):

'Saul has slain his thousands,
And David, his ten-thousands.'

From 1000 BC onwards, therefore, even within the Old Testament, poetry and psalmody were by no means a novelty. In fact, by that date, David and others were heirs to two thousand years of ancient Near Eastern poetic tradition. Hymns and psalms, even of considerable length, were commonplace for the thousand years before David, including in West Semitic to which Hebrew belongs.

Thus, the whole development of poetry in the ancient biblical world can be followed through in outline for its entire history. That majestic chronicle of ancient literary wealth cannot be presented here, so vast is it. Here, we must take but a brief glimpse.

In the third millennium BC, both Egypt and Mesopotamia pioneered poetic style, with converging results. In Egypt, a stone memorial palette from the very dawn of her history (c. 3200 BC) appears to honour a victory by either the first pharaoh or his local predecessor. It would be the earliest-known triumph-hymn.⁵ The poetic unit is the single line. Every line has the same form, each one varying from the others only in the divine epithet used for the king and in the term used for the conquered city, at start and finish of each line:

'Horus has destroyed the City of the Owl,
[Seth] has destroyed the City of the Heron (?),
Vulture has destroyed the City of the Wrestlers, ...'

⁵ After Siegfried Schott, *Hieroglyphen*, 1950, pp. 19-21, p1.3 (German).

and so on for seven lines all told, giving the effect of a solemn, monotonous litany.

During the third millennium BC, a long series of religious texts was composed to protect the pharaoh and his pyramid for the afterlife. From the late 5th Dynasty onwards (c. 2350 BC), they were actually inscribed within the royal pyramids—hence their modern name, the ‘Pyramid Texts’. Besides rituals, spells, etc., they include also hymns, and show already a great variety of poetic usages.

First, the two-line ‘couplet’ that was to dominate ancient Near Eastern poetry for most of the rest of the pre-Christian era. Oldest is perhaps the ‘non-parallel’ couplet, where an idea is expressed not in one line or unit, but in two lines together. By varying one or

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more elements in one line or both, a series of matching couplets gives a poetic form to the whole. About 2300 BC, the official Uni conducted campaigns in Palestine for Pepi I. His victory-hymn has seven two-line verses all constructed thus:⁶

‘This army has returned in peace,
It has hacked up the land of the Sand-dwellers.
This army has returned in peace,
It has crushed the land of the Sand-dwellers.
This army has returned in peace,
It has demolished its forts...’

and so on. The other form of couplet which became favourite is the ‘parallel’ couplet. Here, the two lines can express the same basic thought in different words (‘synthetic parallelism’), or a concept and its opposite (‘antithetic parallelism’), or a thought in one line is further developed in the second line (‘expanded parallelism’). Already, these three forms can all be found as early as the Pyramid Texts—for example, in the famous ‘Cannibal Hymn’:⁷

Synthetic: ‘The lifetime of the King is eternity,
His duration is everlasting.’
‘Their souls are in the King’s stomach,
Their spirits are in the King’s possession.’
Antithetic: ‘Lo, their souls are with the King,
Their shades are gone from their owners.’
Expanded. ‘The King feeds on the lungs of the Wise ones,
He enjoys living on hearts and also on their magic.’

Besides the single line (still in use) and the ubiquitous couplet, more elaborate forms came into use. Such included three-line units (triplets or tricola), four-line units (of either four distinct lines, or two linked couplets), and five, six, and longer line units, up to eight, ten or eleven lines eventually. Some contain parallelism, some do not, just as with couplets. For a triple parallelism unit from the Pyramid texts, one may instance:⁸

‘The Nurse-Canal is opened,

⁶ Various translations, e.g. Wilson in Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, p. 228.

⁷ Pyr. Texts, §§ 393-414; translation, R. O. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*, I, 1969, pp. 80-83.

⁸ Pyr. Texts, § 343, cf. §§ 352, 359; Faulkner, *op. cit.*, pp. 73, 74, 75.

The Winding Waterway is flooded,
The Fields of Rushes are filled with water.’

In Mesopotamia, Sumerian poets quickly attained an equal mastery of these forms of poetic diction, also from the third millennium BC onwards. At random, one may turn to the long and hymnic building-inscription of Gudea, prince of Lagash c. 2100 BC. The poetic art of his scribe runs from the simplest parallel couplet,

‘Gudea arose, (it was from) sleep,
He trembled, (it was) a vision’,⁹

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to elaborate and involved poetic devices such as chiasmus:

‘*By night*, the moonlight will shine for you,
By day, the bright(?) sunlight will shine for you,
The house will be built for you *by day*,
It will be raised high for you *by night*.’¹⁰

Here, the poet has combined two parallel couplets into a four-line unit, and has ‘enclosed’ the whole within the sequence NIGHT/DAY and the symmetrically reversed pair DAY/NIGHT, the pattern AB-BA often termed chiasmus.

What bearing do these poetic achievements in third-millennium Egypt and Mesopotamia have on the Levant? The answer lies in the close contacts between Syria-Palestine and both of these great civilizations from the third millennium onwards. From the height of the Pyramid Age (c. 2600 BC) until its end (c. 2200), Egypt had continuous contact with such seaports as Byblos. In North Syria, at Ebla, Mesopotamian literary influence is even more directly visible (see chapter 3, above). There, Sumerian literature was both copied and adapted, and local Palaeo-Canaanite texts written in cuneiform. Hymns were included in such activities. Hence, within the third millennium, Sumerian influence on the norms and forms of early Levantine and specifically West-Semitic literature is virtually certain. Therefore, in the Levant from that time on, we should expect the rise of a vigorous literary tradition with a good range of poetic forms.

During the early second millennium BC, such development is certain, and ancient Near Eastern literatures grew apace. In Middle-Kingdom Egypt there flowered a brilliant classical literature, including poetry. The Old-Babylonian schools canonized the older Sumerian literature, and adapted and continued composing NeoSumerian hymns and other works. Semitic Akkadian (Assyro-Babylonian) literature at this time probably enjoyed its greatest period of creative writing in all fields of endeavour.¹¹ In distant Anatolia, Hittite narrative art began with Anittas. In Syria-Palestine, both Egyptian and Mesopotamian stimulus continued. The latter is illustrated by the finding of Sumerian word-lists at Alalakh. The former, by the

⁹ Cf. (e.g.) S. N. Kramer, *The Sacred Marriage Rite*, 1969, p. 33 end.

¹⁰ Cf. Kramer, *op. cit.*, p. 32 end.

¹¹ For the chronology of Sumerian and Akkadian literatures, cf. in outline respectively, W. W. Hallo in *Sumerological Studies in Honour of Thorkild Jacobsen*, 1976, pp. 181-203 with table, p. 200, and W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature*, 1960, pp. 1-20 and table before p. 1. On Sumerian stylistics, cf. C. Wilcke (in German), *Studies ... Jacobsen*, pp. 205-316.

princes of Byblos actually putting up inscriptions in Egyptian language and hieroglyphs, well composed but barbarously carved, adapted to their own needs. By about 1700 BC or soon after, the Semitic linear alphabet was probably first born. The great West-Semitic epics known from Ugarit (copies of fourteenth/thirteenth centuries BC) were probably orally composed in the nineteenth to sixteenth centuries BC.¹²

In the later second millennium BC, cosmopolitan trends in the an-

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cient Near East reached a climax, as is readily illustrated by the archives from Ugarit—texts in Akkadian, local Ugaritic and in Hurrian cheek by jowl, including literary works, besides Hittite and Egyptian contacts. From the wealth of poetry that flourished in the early biblical world during c. 1400-1200 BC, the single greatest body of West-Semitic poetry so far known to us is the epic poetry of Ugarit. Ugaritic itself is a language having numerous and quite close affinities with biblical Hebrew, especially in vocabulary and in poetic style and diction. It is our principal evidence for a rich heritage of West-Semitic poetry, on which Ugaritic, Canaanite-Phoenician and Hebrew all drew, having roots still further back in time, as we have seen. Thus, not surprisingly, there are numerous verbal parallels between Ugaritic poetic style and phraseology in the Psalms, both Davidic and others. All the wealth of poetic idioms—parallelism, etc.—known internationally since the third millennium (and exemplified above) is present here, whether in Ugaritic in the second millennium BC or in the Psalter in the tenth century BC and onwards. Poems such as Exodus 15 or Judges 5 help to span the interval between c. 1200 and 1000 BC in the unfolding of Hebrew poetry. There is, of course, no need to suppose that the visible relationship between Hebrew ('South Canaanite') and Ugaritic ('North Canaanite')¹³ is anything other than a common West-Semitic linguistic and literary inheritance, just as classical allusions in (e.g.) French, English, German, or Italian writers (who may owe nothing to each other) are owed one and all to the common classical inheritance from Greece and Rome in European civilization. Certainly, the linguistic and literary affinities are much closer altogether in the case of Hebrew, Canaanite-Phoenician and Ugaritic. It is needless to exemplify here similarities in incidental turns of speech in Hebrew and Ugaritic at any length.¹⁴ One well-known example from the Baal epic and a non-Davidic psalm must here suffice as examples of closely analogous phrasing and literary style.

Baal Epic:¹⁵

ht, 'lb-k B'I-m,
ht, 'ib-k tmkhts,
ht, ttsmt tsrt-k

'Now your foe, O Baal,
Now, your foe you shall slay,
Now, you shall destroy your enemy!'

¹² Cf. briefly W. F. Albright in H. H. Rowley (ed.), *The Old Testament and Modern Study*, 1951, pp. 31-32, and *Bulletin, American Schools of Oriental Research*, No. 150 (1958), pp. 36, 38; and esp. M. Held, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 79 (1959), pp. 171 f., n. 49, and 174-5.

¹³ Using these terms in a broad linguistic/cultural sense, not in the more limited political sense; as pointed out by Rainey, *Israel Exploration Journal* 13 (1963), pp. 43-45, Canaan proper in the 2nd millennium BC is essentially Western Palestine, the Egyptian province of 'Canaan', well south of Ugarit.

¹⁴ Many are collected in L. R. Fisher (ed.), *Ras Shamra Parallels*, I, 1972, II, 1975, III (forthcoming), with which should be compared the cautionary review by J. C. de Moor and P. van der Hugt, *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 31 (1974), pp. 3-26.

¹⁵ Translated (e.g.) by Ginsberg, in Pritchard, *Anc. Near Eastern Texts*, p. 131 top; Ugaritic text is Herdner, *Corpus des tablettes en cunéiformes alphabetiques ... 1929 d 1939*, 1963, p. 11, Text 2, 'IV', lines 8-9.

Psalm 92:9 (Heb., 10):¹⁶

ky hn, 'ybyk YHWH
ky hn, 'by-k y'bdw,
ytprdw kl p'ly-'wn

'For see, your foes, O LORD,
For see, your foes shall perish,
Shall be scattered all evildoers!'

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As can be seen, the use of the three-line unit (or tricolon) with 'expanded' parallelism is common to both. So too is the 'chiasmus' in the second and third lines of both—'foe + verb (1)'; 'verb (2) + enemy/evildoer'. One may (if so inclined) contrast the literary similarity with the theological divergence. In the epic, we find Baal out for vengeance, be he right or wrong, so to speak; in the psalm, there abides a clear moral note, 'all evildoers shall be scattered' by a righteous God.

This simple example is but the tiniest sample from the rich literary backcloth to the psalms (and other biblical poetry) that Ugaritic can provide.¹⁷ Even from David's time, Hebrew psalmody was heir to a tradition already centuries old; on these general grounds, there can be no objection to the existence of either Davidic or earlier psalms.¹⁸

Finally, the titles of the psalms. Working in a vacuum, past generations of Old Testament scholars have imperiously dismissed the titles of the psalms as of no value, particularly as regards authorship. However, various factors (both inside and outside the Old Testament) point in the opposite direction. First, many of the headings were already obscure to, and not understood by, the Septuagint translators in the third/second centuries BC. Therefore, such headings must be dated to a previous period long enough before the Hellenistic age to have become traditional and so long traditional that their meaning could be lost even in part. The Septuagint both adds and omits headings, also. Second, the natural meaning of the narrative *context* of Psalm 18 in 2 Samuel 22:2-51 shows clearly that authorship *is* intended in this case—as it is of Hezekiah in Isaiah 38:9, and of Habbakuk in Hab. 3:1. If this is true of Psalm 18 within the Psalter, there is no intrinsic reason to dispute such attributions to David, or to his reign or initiative in other cases; contrary *proof* needs to be found first. This applies equally to the personal and musical elements in the headings.

Outside the Old Testament, the comparative evidence of the biblical world runs in parallel with the Old Testament evidence itself. For millennia, we have headings, sub-headings, colophons and even authors for ancient hymns. As for authors, the Hymn to the Nile in Middle-Kingdom Egypt was most likely written by that same (Dua)Khety who composed the 'Satire of the Trades' and was associated with the Instruction of Amenemhat I, in the twentieth century BC. To king Akhenaten may be credited the Hymn to the Aten (fourteenth

¹⁶ The Hebrew is here transliterated with consonants only, to put it in a form directly comparable with the Ugaritic, for clarity.

¹⁷ A very far-reaching application of Ugaritic to the psalter is that by M. J. Dahood, *Psalms I*, 1966, *II*, 1968, *III*, 1970, in the Anchor Bible series; however, the numerous suggested correlations and 'solutions' require careful sifting to separate real gains from chaff.

¹⁸ In passing, one may note Amos's allusion (6:5) to David's musical repute, only two centuries after the united monarchy.

century BC).¹⁹ Much earlier than these was the famous priestess in Ur, Enheduanna, daughter of Sargon of Akkad, who lived on into the reign of her nephew Naram-Sin (c. 2300 BC). She is the world's earliest-known authoress.²⁰ To her

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credit belong two hymns to the goddess Inanna (Inanna and Ebih; Exaltation of Inanna), and the second, probably enlarged, edition of the Sumerian Temple Hymns.²¹

As for technical headings, sub-headings, colophons and classifications (including musical), these are abundantly represented in Mesopotamia. These are especially evident, for example, in the considerable amount of Sumerian hymnody published in recent years,²² dating largely from the twenty-first/eighteenth centuries BC, as well as earlier and later. Music, too, was frequently used to accompany such hymns and psalms from over one thousand years before David and Solomon until the end of pre-classical antiquity.²³ Far from being strange or improbable, the picture of psalmody, both personal and institutional, seen in Samuel, Kings, Chronicles and the Psalter is essentially what one would be led to expect from the evidence of the outside world as well as from the biblical text itself.

Solomon, Ruler, Builder, Sage

1. *Politics*²⁴

Solomon's reign saw both the peak and the decline of Israelite political power. At first, Solomon not only inherited but even enhanced David's empire. Remarkable was Solomon's receiving in marriage (early in his reign) a daughter of the pharaoh of Egypt (1 Kings 3:1). As dowry, he received Gezer, conquered by that king (1 Kings 9:16). Thus, it appears that the Egyptian king had raided south-west Palestine, probably defeating the Philistines right up to their neighbour, the old Canaanite city of Gezer. His defeat of so longstanding a foe as the Philistines was doubtless welcome to Solomon, but not an Egyptian presence just across his own border with Gezer. The two powers, therefore, came to some understanding and became allies, Solomon gaining Gezer as wedding-present. As a result, the Philistines ceased be a threat to Israel for a long time to come, even losing territory to Solomon.²⁵ The pharaoh concerned was most probably Siamun (c. 978-959 BC), the most dynamic ruler of Egypt's Twenty-first Dynasty. Historical records of any importance are almost totally lacking from the whole span of the Twenty-first Dynasty, particularly for foreign relations. Beyond private

¹⁹ Translation of Aten-Hymn, Wilson in Pritchard, *Anc. N. E. Texts*, pp. 369-371. On (Dua)Khety's virtuosity, cf. (in French) G. Posener, *Littérature et Politique dans L'Égypte de la XII^e Dynastie*, 1956, p. 19, and n. 7 with references. The Aten-Hymn, incidentally, is a source neither of monotheism nor of Ps. 104.

²⁰ For an appreciation of her work, cf. W. W. Hallo and J. J. A. van Dijk, *The Exaltation of Inanna*, 1968, pp. 1 ff.

²¹ Cf. A. W. Sjöberg and E. Bergmann, *The Collection of the Sumerian Temple Hymns, (Texts from Cuneiform Sources, III)*, 1969, p. 5.

²² Cf. such notations as *sagidda*, *irshemma*, *balbale*, and labelled 'antiphons' in texts such as those translated by Kramer in Pritchard, *Anc. N. E. Texts*, 3rd ed., pp. 576-8, 582-4, or *Supplement*, pp. 140-2, 146-8.

²³ For Mesopotamia, cf. (e.g.) the numerous allusions cited in I. J. Gelb et al. (eds.), *The Chicago Assyrian Dictionary*, Vol. 21/Z, 1961, pp. 36-38, with summary p. 38.

²⁴ For this section (esp. Egypt), cf. Kitchen, *Third Intermediate Period in Egypt*, 1972, pp. 279-283.

²⁵ On this point, cf. Malamat, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 22 (1963), pp. 15 ff.; on the Philistines' later history, cf. Kitchen in D. J. Wiseman (ed.), *Peoples of Old Testament Times*, 1973, pp. 64-67.

genealogies, local-affairs inscriptions in distant Thebes, and a handful of scattered minor stelae, we have next to nothing; and certainly no mention of any foreign ruler beyond Egypt, never mind David or Solomon. From Siamun's northern capital Tanis (biblical Zoan), we are fortunate to have one broken fragment of a triumph-scene showing the king slaying a fallen foe

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who grasps an axe of peculiar design, possibly of Aegean or West-Anatolian type. Such a derivation would well fit possible identification of this fallen foe as Philistine. Thus, Siamun may have conducted a 'police-action' to subdue the Philistines, to eliminate any, threat to his own north-east border and any rivalry to his own trade-port of Tanis; agreement with Solomon could have been economically advantageous to both parties.

In his own far north-east, Solomon used his commanding position over Aram and Hamath to secure the routes to the Euphrates. He 'took' Hamath-Zobah, and built Tadmor (later Palmyra) in the wilderness and other store-cities in Hamathite territory (2 Chronicles 8:3-4). This suggests that some part of Zobah (assigned to Hamath by David?) had revolted and was promptly crushed by the new king (Solomon), who then proceeded to secure the Palmyra route to the Euphrates.²⁶

To the south, aided by his father's old ally Hiram of Tyre, Solomon promoted trading and exploratory voyages down the Red Sea and beyond, to the mysterious Ophir. Ophir's location stubbornly remains unknown, but its reality as a source of gold is beyond any doubt, as is proven by a later ostrakon (inscribed potsherd) from Tell Qasile that reads: 'Gold of Ophir, for Beth-Horon—30 shekels'.²⁷ From South Arabia came the queen of Sheba (1 Kings 10:1-13) to visit Solomon, bringing a handsome present including 120 talents of gold.²⁸ A large sum, but not out-of-the-way—the still greater sum of 150 talents of gold was extracted from Metten II of Tyre by Tiglath-pileser III of Assyria c. 730 BC.²⁹ As others have suggested, probably much more was at stake in the queen's visit than just idle curiosity³⁰—Solomon's seaborne enterprises stood to rival Sheba's prospects for overland trade, hence the need of some understanding between the two states.³¹

2. More Economics and Ergonomics!

Even more considerable were Solomon's revenues in gold from the triennial (1 Kings 10:22) expeditions to Ophir (1 Kings 9:28) at 420 talents, not to mention the total 'in one year'³² of 666 talents of gold, about twenty tons (1 Kings 10:14). While some may be inclined to

²⁶ Cf. Malamat, *op. cit.*, pp. 7-8, preferable to Bright, *History of Israel*, 2nd ed., 1972, p. 209, needlessly emending Tadmor to Tamar.

²⁷ Illustrated, A. R. Millard, *The Bible BC*, 1977, p. 27.

²⁸ The same amount was paid to Solomon by Hiram of Tyre (1 Kings 9:14), in respect of territory in Galilee.

²⁹ Translation, Oppenheim in Pritchard, *Anc. N. E. Texts*, p. 282 (66).

³⁰ Not to mention the silly, frivolous legends of amorous relations built upon an arbitrary interpretation of 1 Kings 10:13; these are sufficiently reviewed in J. B. Pritchard (ed.), *Solomon and Sheba*, 1974, and are of no value whatever to the serious historian. The essay in that volume on Solomon's reign is needlessly negative, erring in method and heedless of background data.

³¹ Cf. (e.g.) J. Bright, *History of Israel*, 1972, p. 211.

³² It is uncertain whether this really means 'every year', 'annually', as is sometimes thought (for which *kol-shanah* would be a more precise expression). Our passage may mean that this figure was the maximum in a twelvemonth, not necessarily every twelvemonth.

consider that the figure has suffered in textual recopying,³³ yet—when all is said and done—such an amount is neither impossible nor unparalleled. It may have derived from various external sources (such as the Ophir expeditions) as well as from heavy taxation within Israel.³⁴ Over a thousand years before Solomon's day, a defeated king of Mari paid tribute to Ebla of ten tons of silver and over a third of a ton of gold, a mere incidental in

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the economy of Ebla (cf. chapter 3, above). Five centuries after Solomon, the one province of 'India' (just the Indus basin) yielded an annual 360 talents of gold to the Persian emperors (Herodotus iii, 94). But these figures—and Solomon's 666 talents—are as nothing compared with the breathtaking munificence of Osorkon I of Egypt to the gods of Egypt barely ten years after Solomon's death. During Years 1 to 4 of his reign, this king presented a total of two million deben weight of silver (about 220 tons) and another 2,300,000 *deben* weight of silver and gold (some 250 tons) to the gods, largely in the form of precious objects (vessels, statuary, etc.). In other parts of the damaged inscription, many such objects are itemised, many by weight.³⁵ The grand total, 470 tons of precious metal, outstrips twenty times over Solomon's reputed income of a mere twenty tons (the 666 talents)—yet, this record is detailed and first-hand. Not a little of that wealth may actually have been looted from Jerusalem by Osorkon's father Shishak (Shoshenq I), on his famous campaign (1 Kings 14:25-26). Needless to say, practically no scrap of that wealth has ever been recovered, apart from the silver coffin of Osorkon's son Shoshenq II; the gifts to the gods have all gone without trace, their very temples often but shapeless ruins.

To run his palace and seat of government (the 'Whitehall' of its day), Solomon required considerable revenues in kind—foodstuffs on a monthly rota from district governors (1 Kings 4:7, 22-23, 27-28). Large though these quantities seem, they are in fact directly comparable with the range of supplies for other royal courts in the ancient Near East as far apart as Mari and Egypt; and one month's supply of grain could be grown on about 424 acres of ground, an area some four-fifths of a mile square.³⁶ Hardly an excessive area out of any one province! There is no fantasy here.

As for the 'war-machine', Solomon's 1,400 chariots (1 Kings 10:26; 2 Chronicles 1:14) are notably fewer than the 2,000 chariots attributed to Ahab of Israel a century later by the Assyrian annals.³⁷ The figure of 4,000 stalls for chariot-horses in 2 Chronicles 9:25 should probably be preferred to that of 40,000 in 1 Kings 4:26. The Kings figure is probably nothing more than a tiny scribal copying-slip of one letter: *t* for *m*. The smaller figure would equip the 1,400 chariots with one span or pair of horses each, plus 600 'reserve' spans for nearly half the force, to cover against losses in war, replace older animals by younger, etc. Again, such figures are consistent with other ancient statistics. Three or four centuries before Solomon, the king of the small but wealthy state of Ugarit was negotiating for 2,000 horses on just one

³³ In 2 Chronicles 8:18, we find 450 talents for 420; this illustrates the problem of variants in figures in ancient sources.

³⁴ Cf. the calculations made by H. W. F. Saggs, *The Greatness that was Babylon*, 1962, pp. 255-257.

³⁵ Translated, Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt*, IV, 1906, pp. 362-6, §§ 729-737.

³⁶ More details, cf. Kitchen in J. D. Douglas et al. (eds.), *New Bible Dictionary*, 1962, pp. 431-2.

³⁷ Oppenheim in Pritchard, *Anc. N. E. Texts*, p. 279 top.

occasion³⁸—doubtless in addition to what he already possessed. In the tenth century BC, one would expect the 12,000 ‘horsemen’ (1 Kings 4:26; 2 Chron.

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9:25) to have been charioteers, not cavalry.³⁹ This figure, at 3 men to a car, would cover 1 crew on duty and 2 crews in reserve for 1,200 chariots, and 1 crew each on duty and in reserve for the other 200 chariots. Men not on active service simply lived their normal lives (e.g. on the land) and in their home towns, doing their stint of direct service in peacetime by rota. Precisely this procedure is well-known elsewhere in the biblical Near East, as at Ugarit, from where we have lists of towns with names of charioteers living in them.⁴⁰ To finish with economics, the changing price of decent horses is worth passing notice: 150 shekels in Solomon’s time (1 Kings 10:29). While in and near horse-raising districts hacks came cheap, the prices internationally for good horses show a declining arc over the centuries as their use became more widespread and their numbers greater. Thus they fetched up to 300 shekels in the eighteenth century BC (Mari), went down to 200 shekels by the thirteenth century BC (Ugarit), and hence might well cost just about 150 shekels by the tenth century BC (Solomon).

3. Solomon the Builder

Solomon’s most famous building was the Temple at Jerusalem. Of this, no stone remains—it was utterly devastated by the Babylonians in 586 BC, being replaced more modestly under the Persian rule (c. 538-521 BC), and more grandiosely by Herod whose efforts were demolished by Rome in the war of 68-70 AD. Hence, the descriptions in Kings and Chronicles are now our sole record. But, despite the problems posed by technical terms, these descriptions do reflect recognisable architectural features of the Levant in the second/first millennia BC, and beyond. The scheme of a pillared portico, vestibule and inner sanctuary (holy of holies) was current in Syria from at least the twenty-fourth/nineteenth centuries BC at Ebla (see chapter 3), is attested at thirteenth century Hazor in Canaan itself, and soon after Solomon’s day again in Syria (at Tell Tayinat). The temple proper was of relatively modest size by Near-Eastern standards, hardly more than 120 feet long by 60 feet wide overall, of solid ashlar masonry.⁴¹ The wealth of gold, etc., used in its decoration (1 Kings 6:21 f) is typical of the lavish ways of the ancient Near East. In Egypt, temples had silver and gold covered floors and stairways,⁴² Queen Hatshepsut capped and plated her giant obelisks (97 feet high) with gold and electrum,⁴³ Ramesses II’s skilled artisans cared for gold-covered temple-doors and sacred barques,⁴⁴ and Osorkon I’s incredible largesse to Egyptian temples

³⁸ Text translated by Albright, *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, No. 150 (1958), pp. 37-38, from Virolleaud, *Palais Royal d’Ugarit*, II, 1957, pp. 27-28.

³⁹ Already in the 14th century BC, Amenophis III of Egypt is described as ‘upon horse’ in the text relating to a scene of him riding in a chariot (Petrie, *Six Temples at Thebes*, 1897, pl. 10); terminology must be understood with reference to actual practice.

⁴⁰ Edited (in French), Nougayrol, *Palais Royal d’Ugarit*, III, 1955, p. 192f.

⁴¹ For size, contrast (e.g.) the personal temples of Ramesses II and III at Thebes in Egypt, each some 500 feet long, 200 feet wide, within still vaster precincts; nor are these the largest of ancient temples.

⁴² Examples, cf. C. F. Nims, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 14 (1955), p. 116; R. A. Parker, *A Saite Oracle Papyrus*, 1962, pp. 7, 8; Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt*, 11, 1906, p. 156, § 375:23, 25.

⁴³ Cf. translations, Breasted, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 133 (§ 319), 156 (§ 376:28), 157-8 (§§ 377:37-8).

⁴⁴ Texts of Nakht-Thuty, Kitchen, *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 60 (1974), pp. 168-172.

we have already seen. The temple itself, moreover, was not 'on its own'; it will have stood in a paved precinct, enclosed within surrounding walls, as most such temples did.⁴⁵

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To carry through the building of the temple in just seven years, Solomon levied two groups of people for lumbering, quarrying and transport of materials (stone and timber), in alliance with Hiram of Tyre. Again, the figures are large, therefore are frequently criticised as corrupt or just fanciful, and hence are little studied. Certainly, it is tempting to emend wholesale figures such as 70,000 to 7,000 or 700; but such procedures remain arbitrary unless textual or other evidence can be cited in support, as in the simple case of 4,000 or 40,000 stalls dealt with above. That example shows that careful textual criticism can help to a better understanding. However, no simple solution of that kind can be applied here. And first, one should ask whether the figures in fact may actually make sense, in themselves and in Near-Eastern context, before rushing headlong to jettison or emend them. Let us look at the figures, at their possible structure, and at the range of background evidence.

From 'all Israel', Solomon took, we are told, 30,000 men, in three divisions of 10,000 each, each division doing one month's service in Lebanon by rota (1 Kings 5:13-14). For the labouring work, the fetching, carrying and quarrying, Solomon further conscripted another 153,300 men (variant, 153,600), from the subsisting alien population, Canaanites and the like (1 Kings 5:15, 16; cf. 2 Chron. 2:2, 17-18). Unlike the Israelites, these people were to be put on perpetual levy for both the temple and other building-works (cf. 1 Kings 9:21). The 153,300 conscripts were divided into 70,000 labourers and 80,000 quarrymen, with 3,300 (or 3,600)⁴⁶ overseers. This would give a figure of 300 chief overseers over 3,000 foremen (1 chief to each 10 foremen), and 1 foreman per group of 50 labourers or quarrymen. These proportions make good enough sense, regardless of overall scale. Problems of textual transmission may have affected the variation between 550 Israelite officers in 1 Kings 9:22-23 and 250 such officers in 2 Chronicles 8:9-10. However, it is noteworthy that the 30,000 temporary levy of Israelites in 1 Kings 5:13-14 does not reappear in 2 Chronicles. Thus, it is conceivable that the 550 officers of 1 Kings 9:22 f. may include 300 officers to oversee the 30,000 (at 1 per 100?)⁴⁷ besides the 250 included in common with 2 Chron. 8:9-10, engaged on other duties and projects. In themselves, therefore, the Solomonic figures yield a sensible enough structure.

Have we any external scale by which to appraise such figures? The answer is yes; external data are limited but quite instructive, so far as they go. First of all, in terms of 'middle management', Solomon's 550 Israelite officers and 330 foremen and chiefs over conscripts, perhaps about a thousand administrators if one adds in an unknown number of palace officials, etc., are quite modest in

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number when compared with the great staff of 4,700 bureaucrats in the acropolis of Ebla city some thirteen centuries before Solomon (cf. chapter 3). Likewise 12 men to assure palace supplies (1 Kings 4:7 ff.) are trifling compared with the 103 leaders and their 210 aides that

⁴⁵ Cf. the outer courts, etc., in the later vision of Ezekiel, 40-44.

⁴⁶ Simple omission of an *l* in *sh-l-sh* (leaving sh-sh) would turn 300 into 600.

⁴⁷ The Israelites being less intensively supervised than the squads of alien conscripts?

exercised similar functions at Ebla! Two separate authorities⁴⁸ have calculated the Israelite population of Solomon's kingdom (as distinct from the foreign 'empire' territories) at 700,000 or 800,000 people. With the alien population of Canaanites and others as well, Western Palestine may have supported then over a million altogether. These figures may, still, be a little on the modest side when one recalls that the 140-acre city of Ebla in the 24th century BC held over a quarter-million people, equal to more than a quarter of all of Solomon's Palestinian subjects as just reckoned above!

Second, the question of quarrying, etc., expeditions. A thousand years before Solomon, the short-lived pharaoh Mentubotep IV dispatched 10,000 men into the dreary wilderness of Wadi Hammamat to fetch just one stone coffin and lid with a set of stone monuments. For the safe transport of the coffin-lid alone, 3,000 sailors were assigned.⁴⁹ Some fifty years later, Sesostri I of the 12th Dynasty sent an expedition of well over 18,000 men to the same narrow desert valley to fetch stone not for an entire temple (as Solomon did in Lebanon's easier setting) but just 60 sphinxes and 150 other statues. We are expressly told that 2,000 or 1,500 or 1,000 or 500 men were assigned to individual blocks of stone, perhaps depending on size.⁵⁰ About 200 years before Solomon, Ramesses IV sent over 9,000 men to Hammamat (of whom 900 died...), just to quarry blocks for a set of statues.⁵¹ In the light of these statistics, it is perhaps not unreasonable to wonder if Solomon's larger numbers (employed in relays, and for seven years' minimum) who went to hew and to quarry, not just for groups of statues but for an entire temple, are less unrealistic than many have supposed hitherto, and may contain more than a modicum of truth.

Of Solomon's other buildings, nothing remains of the other ambitious structures at Jerusalem (1 Kings 7:1 ff.); like the palaces of many another potentate, they have been swept away long since. However, the unified building-works of Solomon and his levies in more modest projects are well illustrated by the finding of standard-size gateways⁵² and casemate walls of the tenth century BC at Hazor, Megiddo and Gezer, all strategic centres within the kingdom (1 Kings 9:15).⁵³ Work at Gezer also confirmed a destruction there, just prior to Solomonic work on the fortifications—most probably visited upon Gezer by 'the pharaoh that smote

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Gezer' (1 Kings 9:16), most likely Siamun as we have seen. Similarly, Ezion-Gezer in the role of depot for Red Sea expeditions may be represented by the ruins at Tell el-Kheleifeh on the north end of the Gulf of Aqaba, as its main occupation began in the tenth century BC.^{53a} In

⁴⁸ Cf. W. F. Albright, *The Biblical Period from Abraham to Ezra*, 1963, pp. 55-56 with n. 118 (pp. 105/6), and H. W. F. Saggs, *The Greatness that was Babylon*, 1962, p. 256.

⁴⁹ Translation, cf. M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, I, 1973, pp. 113-115 (Montet No. 192).

⁵⁰ Edited as No. 61 (in French) in G. Goyon, *Nouvelles Inscriptions Rupestres du Wadi Hammamat*, 1957, pp. 81-85, with useful remarks by W. K. Simpson, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 18 (1959), pp. 28-32, who mentions the closely-related text Montet No. 87.

⁵¹ Translation, cf. Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt*, IV, 1906, pp. 223-7, §§ 461-8.

⁵² At each site, almost precisely 4.2 metres wide.

⁵³ See (e.g.) Y. Yadin, *Hazor, Rediscovery of a Great Citadel...*, 1975, pp. 200-231, and 193 ff. (Hazor itself); on Gezer, W. G. Dever, in M. Avi-Yonah (ed.), *Encyclopedia of ... Excavations...*, II, 1976, p. 441.

^{53a} See B. Rothenberg, *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 94 (1962), pp. 44-56, and N. Glueck, *The Other Side of the Jordan*, 1970 ed., pp. 111-118.

the Negeb or southland, Arad was rebuilt with a strong, towered citadel, and Beer-Sheba likewise became a royal stronghold,⁵⁴ among various other works.

4. Solomon the Sage

In literature, the name of Solomon is traditionally linked with the book of Proverbs, rather as that of David is with the psalms. Here too, the ancient Near East offers a wealth of rich background material that helps to place Solomon's possible relationship to the book of Proverbs and 'wisdom' in a fuller and more factual perspective than is usually envisaged, not least in Old Testament studies.

The present book of Proverbs contains (as any reader may verify) at least four works, as follows:

Proverbs of Solomon (1-24)

Proverbs of Solomon, recopied under Hezekiah (25-29)

Words of Agur (30)

Words for Lemuel (31)

Of these, the first two are of some length; the last two, quite short. That for Lemuel by his mother includes also the poem on the good wife. The first work, 'Proverbs of Solomon' (1-24), incorporates 'words of the wise'—i.e., culled from earlier sages—explicitly in two closing sections (22:17 ff.; 24:23 ff.). Unlike the three other works with just title and main text, this first work has a fuller literary structure: title, prologue (1-9), sub-title (10:1), and then main text.

However, the immense wealth of ancient Near-Eastern wisdom literature enables us to go further. All four of the individual works in Proverbs belong to one particular branch of ancient wisdom literature: 'instructions', in which a named author sets forth what he deems to be wise and unwise conduct, in a long series of observations, admonitions and word-pictures of various kinds. Ancient Egypt, the Levant and Mesopotamia between them offer some forty such works (in varying states of preservation) from c. 2700 BC down to Roman times: nearly thirty from Egypt, a dozen from Syria, the Hittites, and above all Mesopotamia. From this rich array of literary works all belonging to one class, it is possible to write in outline the history of development of this entire group of writings, and to put the four works in Proverbs in their proper setting in that panorama.⁵⁵ Here, the most essential points must suffice.

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During the whole twenty-seven centuries that such instructional works were composed, their authors habitually cast them in one or other of two basic formats. Both formats were used side by side by various authors, with no 'evolution' from one to the other. *Type A* was the simpler. The author would begin with a formal title to the work, identifying himself by name in the third person, and then proceeded directly with his work. In Egypt, such sages as Hardjedef, Merykare's father (third millennium BC), *Ancient Writings and Hori* (late second millennium

⁵⁴ See the summaries in Avi-Yonah, *op. cit.*, I, 1975, pp. 82-84, 86 (Arad) and pp. 162, 168 (Beer-Sheba, level V).

⁵⁵ Done in condensed form in Kitchen, 'Proverbs and Wisdom Books of the Ancient Near East—the Factual History of a Literary Form', to appear in *Tyndale Bulletin* 28 (1977/78); fuller presentation has been prevented so far.

BC), and Amenothos (first millennium BC) all belong to Type A. In Mesopotamia and the Levant, so do Shube-awilim (second millennium) and *Advice to a Prince* (first millennium). Here too belong three of the works in Proverbs: Solomon edited under Hezekiah (25-29), Agur (30), and Lemuel (31).

More interesting was *Type B*. After a formal title (as in Type A), the author would begin with a prologue, very often devoted to exhortations. Then, sometimes after a sub-title, comes the main body of the work. To this scheme belongs the basic work of the book of Proverbs, 1-24, the Proverbs of Solomon *par excellence*. This Type B format is abundantly attested at all periods in the biblical world. Examples are: Egyptian Ptahhotep and Old-Sumerian Shuruppak (third millennium BC); Egyptian (Dua)Khety, 'Sehetepibre', Man to his Son, and Amenemhat I, plus classical Sumerian and Akkadian versions of Shuruppak (all early second millennium); Egyptian Aniy, High Priest Amenemhat, Amenemope, Amennakht, and the Akkadian Counsels of Wisdom (late second millennium); Egyptian Ankh-sheshongy and Levantine/Mesopotamian (Aramaic) Ahiqar (first millennium BC). Thus, the assertion so commonly found in Old Testament studies that Proverbs 1-9 was composed and prefixed to 10 ff. after the Babylonian exile (fifth century onwards) is totally contradicted by the entire literary evidence of the whole of the rest of the ancient Near East. As that evidence shows, a prologue such as 1-9 is integral to the complete work, 1-24. Other supposed reasons for a very late date, such as vocabulary, concepts (e.g., personification) are also totally false, as the concepts concerned reach back into the second and third millennia BC, as does the history of much of the vocabulary.

Thus, no-one can prove that Solomon personally collected, wrote or inspired the first two sections (1-24, 25-29) of Proverbs. But his possible authorship of one complete work (1-24), drawing on older wisdom,⁵⁶ and role of collector of material copied-up later (Hezekiah, 25-29) are entirely feasible suppositions in the context of the literary, linguistic and conceptual world of the forty or so other works of the kind known to us today.

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⁵⁶ Among which, the Egyptian work of Amenemope might well have been included, although the common assertion that Proverbs 22:17 f. is directly derived from Amenemope is mistaken in precisely that simple form.