

THE CONQUEST OF POWER:

Analysis of David and Solomon's Accession Histories

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More than 70 years ago, Leonhard Rost² wrote a short book that was made well known through M. Noth's famous book on the Deuteronomist.³ David's Accession and Succession Histories were the very foundations of Noth's Deuteronomist. Indeed they are the central core of it (1-2 Samuel + 1 Kings 1 – 2). Still, Rost himself could not say exactly where the Accession Story of David begins. For this reason, he spoke more freely of David's Succession History (*Thronfolgegeschichte*) than of David's Accession Story.⁴ Also for the former, the beginning of the story was not easy to determine,⁵ even if the final conclusion was clearly settled in 1 Kgs 2:46.⁶

After the masterful book of Rost, which Noth integrated into his own book at its face value, six scores of articles and books poured an Euphratean river of ink on the subject.⁷ Today many authors attribute the whole story to the Deuteronomist author / redactor(s). The "Deuteronomist" of M. Noth became the melting-pot of modern exegesis: the Pentateuch, the Yahwist, the Elohist, Jeremiah, Isaiah, all the prophets, etc., are all the work of the omnipresent Deuteronomist. This is a facile manner of throwing the entire Bible out to the exilic or postexilic period. Once the Deuteronomistic redaction of Deuteronomy through 2 Kings is recognized (M. Noth), modern authors infer that all the material was written by the Dtr during the exilic/post-exilic time and that it does not contain any recognizable earlier matter. This is totally opposite to Noth's analysis, but

since the modern authors do not accept any more Noth's history of the tradition (*Überlieferungsgeschichte*), they attribute simply the whole Deuteronomy – 2 Kings to the composition (and invention!) of the Dtr.

In my *Théologie narrative de la Bible*,⁸ I offer a fresh analysis of the Histories of the Accession of David and Solomon. Contrary to Rost and Noth, I found that the borders of both narratives are exceptionally clear and indubitable. I discern further that the History of Solomon's Accession is constructed on top of David's and that both histories are strictly parallel and even complementary to one another. Further, the Story of the Ark is not an extra tradition, but is the very frame of both Histories. The Accession of David starts with the disastrous situation of the Ark of Israel taken by the Philistines. The Ark of the God of War, "the Lord of hosts", proves thus incapable of saving Israel from its enemies. This awful fact demonstrates from the very beginning that the old tribal system was now unable to save the people of Israel from foreign aggressions. Just as other nations were compelled to abandon their tribal charismatic system and create a centralized royal state in order to be able to repel a professional foreign army and to provide the basic security and necessities of a numerous people, so was now Israel (1 Sam 8:5).

1 Samuel 8 and 12 show that the traditional tribal organization was not willing to lose its autonomy; for it was clear to them that the establishment of a royal state implied the dissolution of the tribal blood relationships. David experienced the same unwillingness when he planned to construct a Temple, contrary to the people's nomadic traditions (2 Sam 7:6). These facts show the apologetic character of the History; it will demonstrate that, as time went on, the necessity became irreversible. Thus the story was

written when the necessity of a centralized state was not yet evident for all – that is in the eleventh century BC and not in the sixth century. No doubt, the Dtr ascribed the guilt of the Exile to the kings. Thus Dtr enclosed the entire fate of Israel between (a) the disaster of the Ark taken by the Philistines for the lack of a king, and (b) the final catastrophe of the City and the Temple burnt by the Chaldeans through the guilt of the kings. Even so, the Dtr never thought of returning 500 years back to a presently impossible tribal system. As a matter of fact, the story is an apology for the kingship, before being an apology for the Davidic kingship. Nevertheless, the Dtr mixed the bitter experience of the historic kingship of his own time into these chapters 8 and 12 of 1 Samuel.

Saul's reign was a failed attempt, which ended also with a disaster for Israel (1 Samuel 31). But the guarantor of the History, Samuel, had foreseen that Saul was not the right man in the right place and had already anointed David, in the name of God, to be the chosen king who should deliver Israel from all its enemies. This eventually occurred through David's enthronement, conquering of Jerusalem and, finally, bringing the Ark to David's city, Zion. This was the apology of David's conquest of power: he was divinely chosen to realize the divine project of salvation for Israel. Of course there is a shift in the salvation's history, for the Ark was once the safeguard of Israel; in the History, David became the safeguard of the Ark. But this is no more than a detail.

So the whole History is perfectly enclosed between the desperate situation of the Ark taken by the Philistines and the triumphal enthronement of the Ark in Jerusalem. This justified the necessity of David's Accession to power. We may say: the purpose justifies the means. The History of the conquest of power by David is realistic and often permits glimpses that some of the means were not fair. Subsequently, after the death of

David, another author plagiarized and duplicated the whole history of David's Accession in satiric and sarcastic terms. In my book, I position both narratives (the apologetic and the satiric) in two parallel columns in order to show the satiric bias.⁹

With the triumphal enthronement of the Ark in Zion, the Accession History of David came to complete justification of David's enthronement, which makes possible the enthronement of the Ark. Thus the whole history could be entitled: From Humiliation to Exaltation of the Ark. The History of the Accession of David is therefore clearly included between 1 Sam 4:1b (humiliation of the Ark) and 2 Samuel 6 (exaltation of the Ark in Zion). David was the divinely chosen king for that purpose.

But, exactly there, where the History of David's Accession ends, the History of Solomon's Accession takes over. For David left the Ark in a Tent in Jerusalem. That was not a suitable location for the Ark of God! Thus the History of the Accession of Solomon resumes where David's History ended. The "prophecy" of Nathan is the redactional program of the entire Accession of Solomon. Just as the History of the Accession of David is enclosed between the humiliation of the Ark (1 Sam 4:1b – 7,1) and its exaltation (2 Samuel 6), so is the History of the Accession of Solomon enclosed between the "prophecy" of Nathan-- who foresees and "prophesies" all that will occur--and the complete triumph of the Ark in the Temple of Solomon (1 Kings 8). Just as David had been chosen to realize the first act of the liberation of Israel's Ark, so Solomon was divinely chosen to complete David's work. The repeated affirmation that David "had the intention" (!) to build the Temple, but could not, and was therefore constrained to let the completion of that project to his divinely chosen son, indicated explicitly the continuation and connection of both Histories. Solomon is carrying on the unfinished work of David.

So both histories of the Accession of David and that of Solomon are integrated as two parts of the "Accession" (!) of the Ark from the humiliation of Philistine captivity until the final exaltation in Solomon's Temple. The Conquest of the Throne by David was "justified" by this purpose, so too was Solomon's (illegitimate) succession of David for the same purpose. David had been divinely chosen through the prophet Samuel; so too was Solomon through the prophet Nathan. Both histories balance each other and integrate a larger History of the Ark. To be sure, the Ark is the great "justification" of both Accessions.

The Accession of David is disturbed by the reign of Saul and his constant persecutions of David; also is the Succession of Solomon disturbed by the revolt of Absalom, which forced David to flee, just as he had fled from Saul. Both cases end in a battle (1 Samuel 31; 2 Samuel 18) in which Saul / Absalom happens to die, opening the way for the Accession of David / Solomon.

The History of the Accession of Solomon is even more clearly structured than the history of David's rise to power, for Nathan's "prophecy" programs the whole History until its planned completion. 1 Kgs 8:15-20 notes explicitly that all is now completed as "prophesied". The "prophecy" (2 Samuel 7), David's prayer (2 Samuel 8) and Solomon's prayer (1 Kings 8) contain a play of words with "House". In 2 Samuel 7, "House" initially means Temple (which David had the "intention" of building). But Nathan says that David will not build this "House", but that the Lord would build a "house" (descendant, dynasty) for him. This descendant (=Solomon!) will build the House (Temple) for God. David had the "intention" of building but could not. David's prayer (2 Samuel 8) uses the very same word "House" seven times, now with the meaning of descendance (=

implicitly Solomon!), and 1 Kings 8 also uses the same word with the meaning of the Temple, which David had the "intention" of building but could not, and which Solomon carried on to its completion. So the word "House" is used: eight times in 2 Samuel 7; seven times in 2 Samuel 8; and eight times in 1 Kings 8, where it has the two meanings: the Temple which should be built, and the descendant who would build the Temple. This literary fact also establishes undoubtedly the frame of the History of Solomon's Accession: beginning with Nathan's "prophecy" (program) until the full completion of this program ("prophecy"!) in 1 Kings 8.

Both Histories are complementary: they start with the abandonment of the Ark taken by the Philistines and end with the final triumph of the Ark enthroned in Jerusalem's Temple. David and Solomon were the two divinely elected ones chosen for this divine project. Or, inversely, the fate of the Ark "justifies" the conquest of power by David and Solomon (the end justifies the means). Both histories were composed with an overt apologetic aim. Thus they were written when such apologetics were necessary, namely during the reigns of David and Solomon. The apology of David (David's Accession Story) was written during David's reign and utilized for Solomon's Accession Story, which integrated it and duplicated it with satiric plagiarizing. So David's Accession History (without the satiric plagiarizing) was written during David's reign (eleventh century BC), and Solomon's Accession History resumed David's, duplicated it (satiric plagiarizing) and brought it to its final triumph with the transport of the Ark to the Temple of Solomon. This was done during Solomon's reign, which seems to have been even more controversial than that of David. The final form of the Story must have been completed in the tenth century BC

This conclusion calls into question much of modern exegesis which would date all the "Historic Books" of the Bible (Genesis through 2 Kings) from the time of Exile. These two stories, from 1 Sam 4:1b through 1 Kings 8, at least, date from the eleventh and tenth centuries BC. This dating seems to be certain in view of the apologetic aim of both stories, which would have been nonsensical in the time of the Exile. This dating furthermore demonstrates that the entity "Israel" already existed at the time of Saul and probably before him. It proves too that an authentic monotheism already existed at that time (1 Sam 4:3.17-18; 5:4; etc.). The Accession Histories represent therefore a contemporary document and hence the most ancient history of mankind, well before Herodotus' historiography.¹⁰

¹ I am grateful to Michael J. Spreitzer for improving my English.

² L. Rost, *Die Überlieferung von der Thronnachfolge Davids* (BWANT 3/6, Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1926).

³ M. Noth, *Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien* (2nd. ed., Tübingen: M. Niemeyer, 1957), pp. 54-55, 61-72.

⁴ Rost, *Überlieferung*, pp. 132-36.

⁵ Rost, *Überlieferung*, pp. 102-3, 120.

⁶ Rost, *Überlieferung*, pp. 137; "die Thronfolgegeschichte (ist) in I. Kön. 2:46 deutlich zum Abschluss gebracht."

⁷ See bibliography in C. Minette de Tillesse, "*Tu me verras de dos*" *Théologie Narrative de la Bible* (RBB Ano 12/1-2-3 [Edition en français] Fortaleza, Brazil: Nova Jerusalém), pp. 235-38

⁸ See preceding note.

⁹ C. Minette de Tillesse, "*Tu me verras de dos*," pp. 264-78.

¹⁰ A detailed analysis of both Histories is available in C. Minette de Tillesse, "*Tu me verras de dos*."