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Hezekiah and the Compositional History of the Book of Kings. By Benjamin D. Thomas. Pp. xix + 508. (Forschungen zum Alten Testament, second series, 63.) Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014. isbn 978 3 16 152935 1 and 1611 4914.

The book is a contribution to the critical question about the formation of the book of Kings. The author's thesis, not new in itself, is that a form of the book, which he calls the Hezekian History (HH), was complete in the time of King Hezekiah. In presenting this thesis, he diverges expressly from accounts of Kings that see it as a Deuteronomistic work, whether that is understood to comprise a Josianic edition followed by further redactional layers, or as essentially exilic and post-exilic.

His major contention is that scholarship on Kings has paid too little attention to genre parallels in the Ancient Near East (ANE). In support of this, he questions in particular the premise that Kings' accounts of the centralisation of worship could only have arisen after Deuteronomy. In favour of a HH as a component of Kings, he writes: 'The HH-historian's concept of centralization was not necessarily guided with knowledge of the Book of Deuteronomy. Cultic centralization is not an absolute criterion for classifying a literary text as Deuteronomistic, since the phenomenon developed out of royal motivations grounded in the historical context of 722 and 701 B.C.E.' (p. 45).

The argument turns chiefly on the identification of parallels in style and content between Kings and a range of ANE texts which he broadly classifies as 'chronographic' in genre, that is, documents that follow an essentially chronological pattern, including king-lists and chronicles (p. 46). Among features that Thomas finds in common between material in Kings and the ANE is formulaic repetition, where the formulae in Kings include synchronisms, lengths of reign, source citations, notices of death and burial, and succession (p. 54). He reviews such patterns in documents from both Mesopotamia, such as the Assyrian and Sumerian king lists, and the Levant, documents which show signs of redactional updating in keeping with political purposes. The meaning of texts of this sort is inseparable from their culminating structure, and formulae function in relation to the climaxes of such structures. It follows that 'inconsistencies in phraseology, literary arrangement, or ideological perspective are grounds for positing the existence of an earlier source ending at the climax of the culminating structure' (p. 57). The consequence for Kings, in Thomas's view, is to support his argument that the account of Hezekiah's reform in 2 Kings 18 once formed the climax of the document, even though in its present form Kings contains at least one further climax, namely in the centralizing reform of King Josiah.

The argument proceeds by considering various elements in the composition of Kings, showing how in every case the feature is consistent with a Hezekian edition of the book. It is possible only to give examples. Synchronisms are known already in the eighth century BCE (p. 74); their use in Kings implies access to separate records, presumably though temple sources, and is most plausibly dated to the time of Hezekiah, whose reign is the last to be synchronised with that of a northern king (p. 76). Thomas stresses the likely Levantine origin of this, citing a 'pre-existing Levantine chronographic tradition' (p. 77). Regarding the evaluative formulae, he affirms an 'indigenous [Levantine] development of the formulae', demonstrable for the term ישר 'from the tenth to the eighth centuries B.C.E.', and thus possibly present in HH (p. 147). Some features of the Hezekiah account are evaluated on criteria internal to Kings, rather than comparatively (the cultic reports, the beginning of HH, the division of the kingdom).

The final chapters concern the likely historicity of the Hezekiah accounts and of that king's reforms. The speeches of the Rabshakeh in the siege of Jerusalem (notably in the so-called B1 Narrative) find echoes in Assyrian accounts of sieges, and therefore have a plausibility in basic substance (citing Peter Machinist, 'Assyria and Its Image in first Isaiah', in *JAOS* 103 [1983], 719-37 [719]; Thomas, p. 371). Even 'theological' elements may be authentic, since examples of 'trust' and 'salvation' may be found in Assyrian texts (pp. 372-73).

Thomas's overall conclusion is that HH contained 2 Kings 18:1-5*, 7-11, and that vv. 1-4 are 'the original climax of the framework of the HH' (p. 352). He thinks that v. 4 in particular was remarkably under-emphasized in Noth's original thesis on DtrH, not least because it is quite distinctive compared to Josiah's reform account (pp. 393-94).

Thomas's work is a major contribution to the literature on Kings and the Deuteronomistic History. His contention that evaluations of the account of the monarchical history has been unduly dominated by the Deuteronomistic theory has much merit. The extent to which a putative HH was entwined with ANE chronographic texts, and especially with a distinct Levantine tradition, is not finally demonstrated here, and will remain debatable. However, Thomas has shown a large number of substantive connections, and in doing so has made a strong case for directing attention back to the ANE matrix of the biblical literature.

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