

Izabela Eph' al-Jaruzelska, *Prophets, Royal Legitimacy and War in Ancient Israel*, Warsaw: Warsaw University Press 2009, pp. 204

The latest book by Izabela Eph' al-Jaruzelska is devoted to political aspects of prophetic activity in the Northern Kingdom, in particular, the prophets' involvement in the legitimacy of the kings and their influence on royal military operations. Such an involvement was not the main task of the Bible's prophets, certainly not in Israel's territory. Nevertheless, this aspect of their activity seems especially up-to-date and fascinating in times of political-authority crisis, yet involves numerous research difficulties. There are at least three basic problems that the author had to deal with when trying to illustrate faithfully these types of prophetic activity. The first one is almost total dependence on a single source of information, namely, the Bible (other sources frequently used by the author may only serve as a comparative material, and raise a number of fundamental objections). The other problem is the lack of opportunity to review the general data regarding historical threads relating to the book, the credibility of prophetic teachings, or their different editorial versions. The third relates to the non-verifiable method of canonical prophets' selection. It is impossible to establish their actual influence on the events concerning them, or examine the decisive role of the God Factor in the election of subsequent rulers (which granted them the right to exercise authority and issue orders regulating such an exercise or control). All these problems impose a delicate and difficult task upon the researcher. If one wishes to sound reliable and professional, one cannot assume that all of the Bible's theological superstructure is unreliable because it is impossible to verify, and every reference to the God Element is a sociological trick. It seems that from the author's point of view such a procedure of reducing analytical components to the measurable ones would be nonsensical (the final part of the reservation made in the introduction astonishes

a bit with the statement that biblical sources ‘are tendentious, a fact revealed by concealment of failures, inflation of achievements, and religious interpretation of events’; p. 18).¹

In the introduction, the author points out that her work was in great part inspired by ‘the profound cultural crisis affecting modern society’, and in accordance with this inspiration, she declines to carry out a rigorous analysis of data, but instead aims to discover the universal truths of the past events revealed by the Bible. The biblical text did not originate as a commercial document, where it is enough to check its conformity with reality, but as a carrier of values and life wisdom. In my opinion, people notice a process of degradation regarding the order in which societies are organized. One of the numerous elements of this crisis is the disastrous condition of the authority (whether in local or supranational structures). It is then justified in our cultural circle to pose a question about how the problem of authority crisis was dealt with at the beginning of our civilisation, in this case based on selected fragments of the biblical record. Unfortunately, Eph’al-Jaruzelska rather avoids approaching the meaning of the text and most often limits her task to the literary, contextual and critical-historical review.

The book is composed of two essential parts. The first one is devoted to legitimisation of royal power and the second one to royal military activity. Each of them, in turn, consists of a series of almost independent miniatures concerning selected aspects of an individual prophet’s activity and mini-syntheses relating to theological streams in the Bible. Both parts are summarised with a description of selected aspects of Hosea’s teaching. Naturally, all the necessary supportive tools typical for this kind of monograph were employed, that is, an appropriate introduction explaining the scope of the elaboration, terms, assumptions, research methods, conclusions, bibliography and auxiliary indices. The formal and editorial preparation of the book does not raise any doubts. The author’s workmanship gains reader’s trust, which is rather uncommon in the era of mass production of scientific works.

The series of analysed texts is introduced by two presentations of the tale about Jeroboam’s designation by Ahijah: 1 Kgs. 11 and 14. The author calls the pericopes (for unclear reasons): ‘The First and Second Original Prophetic Stories’ (pp. 34–46). The story is told in a clear manner and placed in a context of similar prophetic actions. However, the subsequent stages of the exegesis raise objections. The author is right to state that for proper evaluation of the story about Jeroboam’s vocation to become a king it is essential to review the facts. However,

¹ Adopted from the lecture of Israel Eph’al, ‘Assyrian Imperial Policy According to Non-literary Documents Relating to The Levant’.

at the present stage of research, for example, in the case of the relevant fragment of Israel's history, it is entirely unworkable. Although the passage devoted to the above-mentioned verification provides us with apt comparisons allowing us to see similarity between the accounts on royal vocations (pp. 39–40) and creates a literary model of such accounts, it cannot determine their authenticity, suggesting all the more, as the author herself rightly points out, that we are dealing with editorial makeovers of previous traditions.

The second doubt is connected with the prestige accompanying the act of Jeroboam's designation. The encounter of Ahijah with Jeroboam, and later with his wife, takes place in secret and cannot influence the appreciation of Jeroboam's royal dignity by the people (p. 40). One may only talk about the influence of the Deuteronomistic report itself on the readers of the Book of Kings, and then the rite ('formal ceremony', p. 39) acquires a secondary meaning (it is difficult to call it a ceremony). It seems appropriate that the author searches in biblical reports for the traces of the people's role in the accession of a king in Israel and Judah, and she finds them. The role of prophets in such endeavours was crucial, which negates the confrontation of the account on Jeroboam's enthronement by the people with his prophetic designation as two parallel traditions (p. 45), even if they represent different literary genres. This is a good opportunity to mention that in the introduction to the third chapter Eph'äl-Jaruzelska underlines an almost complete lack of militaristic texts in the Deuteronomistic version (I understand her to mean the events concerning the Northern Kingdom). This implies that they cannot be discussed. Unfortunately, the author does not make an attempt to give the answer to the question why Deuteronomists do not comment on such a sensitive issue. The explanation of their silence would be very enriching for the subject in question.

The second of the discussed texts tells about Jehu's anointing (2 Kings. 9:1–6.10b). The author starts with the outline of the broad historical context, then she analyses the pericope in terms of history and literature. In case of the Jehu story, the author seems a bit more reserved in drawing general conclusions, and, as a result, her case is more convincing to me. It is obvious that Jehu's anointing by an anonymous prophet in conspiracy cannot serve as an example of a ceremony of that type, nor can it confirm the prophet's legitimising role in the king-making process. Instead, the author often asks about the intentions of the editor of the story's final version, but this time she draws no conclusions at all (unfortunately). When recalling the story of Jehu, the author indicates the lack of prophetic involvement in Omri's enthronement. She makes no attempt to explain that lack, which is all the more astonishing as Omri founded one of the most durable dynasties of the Northern Kingdom.

The third story is focused on the Elisha's prophecy foretelling royal authority for Hazael. In this case, however, there is no prophetic involvement in the legitimacy of the monarch, and no act makes this authority credible for the future subjects (Aramaean). According to the author, the story serves to spread the power of the prophets Elijah and Elisha (acting here as representatives of YHWH's authority beyond Israel's borders). In fact, the situation is a bit more complicated. Admittedly, the prophet Elijah (1 Kings. 19:15) orders Elisha to anoint Hazael as king, but the prophet only foretells his reign (in conspiracy), and this announcement results in a series of unfortunate events. It is doubtful that a hagiographer, or a possible editor of the text, would like to act under YHWH's name (in such an unimpressive manner), in case of Hazael's treacherous assassination of Aram's king and the decades of destructive war between Damascus and Israel. It seems that all the titles granted to Elisha by Hazael recalled in the book by the author only save the situation and are not the main motive of the message.

The series of the first three pericopes are followed by an interesting passage showing the meaning of the legitimisation of royal authority by prophets in the ancient Near East. It is however difficult to agree, especially at this stage of the book (after analysis of the pericopes regarding the role of prophets in acquiring power by Jeroboam, Jehu and Hazael), with the thesis about the centrality of prophets who legitimised rulers in the biblical accounts. All three pericopes confirm something quite contrary – the prophets anointed or foretold assumption of power in conspiracy, and the possible public effect of these events was marginal. Moreover, Eph'al-Jaruzelska indicates a little further on (p. 72) that in the biblical texts analysed in this book the speakers are the prophetic circles, and not the king himself, or the outsiders, to whom all three events were probably unnoticeable (pp. 72–74). The other aspect is the meaning of these acts in the eyes of hagiographers and the way they presented them in their papers. It is possible that an event objectively considered insignificant may be presented as crucial, however, the exegesis of the existing texts has not confirmed this.

To give the reader the full spectrum of the problem, the author also uses texts that seem to be marginal to the subject matter. The story of the rejection of king Baasha by the prophet Jehu, the son of Hanani, may serve as an example. The account of the king's vocation failed to survive, but the prophet mentions him in the condemnatory oracle: 'exalted you out of the dust, and made you prince over my people Israel' (1 Kings. 16:2). In my opinion this is not a proof for the habit of kings' legitimisation by prophets, but only a reflection of a common belief in Israel that everything that is happening has its source in YHWH's decisions. Despite the above, the analysis of the situation allows presenting the prophetic attitude towards royal authority in a favourable light, and this is the main goal of Mrs. Jaruzelska's book.

A separate chapter is devoted to the political involvement of the prophet Hosea, who actually did not claim support for any of the monarchs, but often made critical comments on the lawfulness of reigns and ruling class in general. Based on Hosea's numerous political speeches, the author outlines one of the concepts that was in those days fundamental to prophecy, namely, the prophet's relationship to the ruler. Individual passages analyse Hosea's political oracles and illustrate them with biblical and non-biblical parallels. The complexity of the material and comparatively rich textual resources contained in the chapter are quite sufficient for the reader, and the conclusions are for the most part well-documented and convincing.

The second part of this elaboration focuses on warlike issues, and more precisely, on the Israelites' comprehension (supported by examples from non-biblical literature) of YHWH's involvement in war as well as the role of prophets. The pericope introducing that part of the book is especially interesting from the interpretative point of view – the story about the Siege of Samaria and the Battle at Aphek (1 Kings. 20:1–43). Nonetheless, the author avoids setting the theological issues, and concentrates on the comparative analysis by which she indicates that the text is typical for these kinds of biblical and non-biblical prophetic accounts. Although this deduction is a constructive element of the entire analysis, it leaves the reader with a lot of questions. Of course, depending on expectations, this may be considered either a drawback or a positive feature of such an exegesis.

The subsequent passages are devoted to the analysis of the fascinating pericopes featuring prophet Elisha (1 Kings. 22:1–38; 2 Kings. 3:4–27; 6:8–23; 6:24–7:20 and 13:14–25). The first pericope is the famous story of the king of Israel (Ahab?), Jehoshaphat and prophet Micaiah, the son of Imlah. It describes preparations for the war and fight with Aram for Ramoth-Gilead. Micaiah stands against 400 other prophets and foretells the defeat of Israel and Judah coalition, which soon becomes true. An especially interesting element of the story is the *lying spirit* sent by YHWH to mislead the king and incline him to make an erroneous decision. This is how the prophet Micaiah explains the unanimity of the 400 prophets foretelling something contrary to his words. The presence of non-biblical parallels recording oracles on military issues implies the need not only to search for similar situations where a deity misleads the asker (in a polytheistic religion it is not unthinkable), but also to try to explain such situations in Yahwism. Besides prophet Micaiah we have here 400 other prophets who lawfully – which emerges from the narrative (then, aren't they 'the true prophets' just like Micaiah?) – took a stand against YHWH. Unfortunately, instead of the attempt to interpret the ambiguous text, we receive a number of parallels, without explanations, despite they are interesting and outline the literary and religious context of the biblical pericopes. Nonetheless, the collected comparative material is abundant and appears

to be a well-prepared starting point for further research and, as such, deserves appreciation.

2 Kings 3:4–27 is the text that received the focused attention of researchers after the famous discovery by Rev. F. Klein, owing to which the events described in the Bible could be confronted with the account of opponents, that is, Moab historiographers. Although the elaboration by Eph'äl-Jaruzelska provides us with references to Mesha Stele, she focuses attention mainly on the role of Elisha. The difference between the two accounts may be substantial for the discussion on the prophet's involvement, which actually predicted the victory of Israel. According to the Mesha Stele, the victors were the Edomites, but the Bible carefully conceals the final score of the battle, probably affecting the great prophet's reputation.

The third text is centred on the prophet Elisha and tells the story of a mysterious incident during Aram's campaign against Israel. The detachment of soldiers that has been sent to capture Elisha is miraculously directed by YHWH's intervention to Samaria and surrendered to the Israel's king. The latter, on Elisha's request, gives the feast for the Aramaic army, and next releases the soldiers. Regrettably, the author does not try to answer the question about the meaning of the story or the prophet's actions. She merely analyses the literary aspect of the story, citing indeed interesting non-biblical parallels. Moreover, in the passage devoted to the phrase 'fear not' in the context of non-biblical prophecy, Eph'äl-Jaruzelska, apart from a few general statements, cites only a fragment of the Stele of Zakkur (SAA IX 1–2).

2 Kings 6:24–7:20 describes another equally mysterious story. One night, the Aramaic army laying siege to Samaria hears strange noises and runs away in panic convinced that the kings of the Hittites and the Kings of Egypt are coming to rescue the city. The tragic situation of the Samarians changes in one night, confirming the prophecy of Elisha made on the previous day. The Israelite king, who denies the might of YHWH, is trodden to death in the gate by his own subjects in pursuit of the loot (as was predicted by the prophet).

A motif of miraculous liberation from enemy's oppression appears in many non-biblical texts. The author gives us a few examples in the passage called 'Non-biblical Parallels'. Because the texts listed there are scattered in time and space, and the events they relate to are so varied, they may only be considered an interesting illustration of the phenomenon.

The last of the discussed pericopes is one from 2 Kings 13:14–25. It tells the story of the events connected with the death of Elisha, the miracle concerning his grave and the victories of king Jehoash over Aram foretold by the prophet. The text is a compilation from various sources, which the author obviously points out. Unfortunately, she fails to make relevant conclusions when editorial makeovers like these could be useful in learning about the perception of the prophets' role.

This part of the book ends with two short summarising chapters. The first one confronts the roles of biblical and non-biblical prophets in military campaigns. The author solely concludes that all the motifs appearing in biblical pericopes have their equivalents in non-biblical texts. She also underlines the profound differences in the status of the mediators – the role of prophets as diviners before military campaigns is marginal in the non-biblical sources in comparison to the biblical examples. However, that is all. The second chapter concerns the prophetic schools or circles. Eph'äl-Jaruzelska believes they are the authors of the original prophetic accounts, where always the prophet, and not the king, plays the key role. This is not a thesis that resists discussion. For instance, A. Rofé or A. Lemaire hold the contrary belief. They claim that the prophetic stories originated in the royal court. Here, the author herself admits that both standpoints are based on assumptions (p. 167).

The last chapter of the elaboration is devoted to the prophet Hosea. In his book we do not find the texts addressed to a particular king, or regarding a particular battle. Hosea's oracles present YHWH as a Saviour against all oppressions, including the military ones. The subsequent passages of this chapter aim to outline the concepts of the God's Wrath contained in the Book of Hosea (and not only there) and the role of YHWH as the only saviour. First, however, the author quotes the fragments aiming to illustrate Hosea's way of understanding war in general. The 'pacifist' conclusion drawn here is rather unjustified. Although the prophet criticises the unbounded confidence of the Israelites in military defences, he rather criticises their arrogance towards YHWH than the beliefs that wars should not take place at all. The prophet's understanding of YHWH's actions is not far from the human standards in this subject, and the proof may be the oracles predicting YHWH's military interferences (e.g., 7:16; 11:6; 14:1). In fact, in the Book of Hosea, YHWH shows His military involvement and supports Israel's enemies in administering punishment on God's people. The belief that the rescue will come *neither by bow nor by sword, nor by war, nor by horses, nor by horsemen* (1:7b) apparently results from the military weakness of Israel, and not, according to Hosea, from YHWH's 'pacifism'.

In the summary one must admit that the author's situation is unenviable. The pericopes discussed in the book are rather few and varied. The attempt to draw more general conclusions is exposed to critics. Even worse is the fact that the events presented in the Bible cannot be verified. They happened beyond the scope of interest of civilisation centres of those times, and therefore left almost no evidence – the ones that survived are too fragmented. Nevertheless, the book provides the reader with a well-documented (and depicted in non-biblical sources) perspective on the problems regarding political and paramilitary areas of prophetic involvement.

I would like to end with a small remark on the non-biblical illustrations. In general, they are very enriching for Eph'al-Jaruzelska's train of thoughts, but the abundance of possible references does not allow one to make a selection that would satisfy everybody. For example, when the author writes about the ancient Near Eastern practice of carting away the gods of conquered territories, she mentions only inscriptions on the Mesha Stele (p. 97). Similarly, when describing different practices of asking deities about the future, the author mentions only the visits of Assyrian kings to the temple of Ishtar before military campaigns as an example of prophets' direct request for opinion (p. 104, see also one example of non-biblical usage of the phrase 'fear not' on pp. 145–146; and the title 'my father' on p. 146). Another ten examples would not exhaust the subject, but at times random examples given in the book leave us unsatisfied.

The author's conclusions are an excellent starting point for further discussion. In the summary of the research, she states that the originally minor role of the prophets in the Northern Kingdom becomes crucial owing to the stories originated from the so-called 'prophetic circles' that were later woven into the biblical narrative. However interesting, the thesis is risky, as it is based solely on ambiguous prerequisites and worse, is historically non-verifiable. Despite these reservations, the material collected for the purpose of the book and its analysis provide a sound basis for further research. The shortcomings of this compilation, which have been pointed out (quite random non-biblical illustrations and too-general deductions) appear to have been unavoidable. The comparative material in the literature and iconography of the ancient Near East is immense, and the biblical texts regarding the subject in question are still few and in addition placed in different sources. In the last chapter of the book the author announces a much more extensive elaboration to come. It will be based on the whole corpus of the biblical material concerning royal legitimacy and military activity and supplemented by external literary sources. This announcement gives hope for an exceptionally interesting elaboration, which I am now impatiently awaiting.

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