

Ian D. Wilson, (2017) *Kingship and Memory in Ancient Judah*. By. New York: Oxford University Press. Pp. xi + 308.

At the heart of the author's study is the question, "[H]ow did postmonarchic society in Judah remember and imagine its monarchy, and kingship in general, as part of its past, present, and future?" (p. 4). While invoking the Orwellian concept of "doublethink" in his analysis of the work of the Judean literati of the early Second Temple Period, Wilson sees a society that was making an "honest attempt to remember the past, to wrestle with and represent a monarchic past in a postmonarchic present" (p. 130). His approach utilizes a hybrid of literary and social scientific methods to examine the "multivocal" narratives in Samuel-Kings and Chronicles. Terming this approach "synchronic, socio-mnemonic shaping of identity," he focuses on how these Judean literati on the late Persian-period remembered their past, associated it with their present, and viewed it terms of their future (pp. 32-33).

Wilson begins by examining the portrait of the king found in the "Law of the King" (Deut. 17:14-20), which he terms "decidedly unkingly" (p. 44) in comparison with monarchs in neighboring countries. The limitations found here are primarily associated with the command that the king adhere to Yahweh's instruction (Torah) and in that sense tie the institution of kingship to a defining moment or "site of memory" in Israel's past (p. 47), thus creating a tension in which kings are both enabled and restricted in their actions (p. 75).

Torah functions as the first of several "sites of memory" that will have an impact on the monarchy and how it is remembered. Each of these "sites" contributes to "double thinking" and serves as "evidence of a society that was exploring various understandings of its past" (p. 77). Thus, the figure of Samuel and especially his positive and negative interactions with Saul becomes the next site of memory. Seen as a bridge between the Judges period and the early monarchy, Samuel's personal struggles over the establishment of kingship (see especially the discussion of 1 Samuel 12 on pp. 119-22), coupled with the "dischronology and problematic geography found in the narrative of 1 Samuel 8-12, point to the intentional maintenance of a "conspicuously multivocal text" (p. 118). Furthermore, Saul's moments of triumph are more than balanced by his failures (1 Samuel 13-15) and become "the epicenter for kingship doublethink in the Judean literature" (p. 128).

In like manner, there is no single story of David. Despite the fact that David and his dynasty serve as yet another "site of memory," there is a mixed message of close association with Yahweh and abysmal personal and leadership failures. It is only in the Chronicler's account that a more nearly perfect David and Solomon exist. But, as Wilson notes, Chronicles merely serves as a form of

social “ballast” to provide a companion discourse to Samul-Kings and its deuteronomic frank judgements of the kings, and to “relieve some of the tension with regard to remembering kingship’s relationship with the cult ... and its connection with Mosaic leadership” (p. 171). The Judean literati had both of these accounts and both contributed to the “social remembering” of their past while providing hope for their future (p. 181).

In Chapter Five, Wilson undertakes to outline “the remembered future and its interrelationship with the remembered past in Judah’s prophetic corpus” (p. 184). As he notes, the prophetic books contain affirmations of Yahweh’s firm control over history, describe Yahweh as the “absolute king of the cosmos” regardless of the current presence of powerful human rulers. He points to Mic. 4:1-5, which envision a future when Jerusalem will become the center of the world with Yahweh reigning there as king. Continuing the deuteronomic theme of the removal of unfaithful rulers, Wilson discusses Hos. 9:4a and 13:10-11 (pp. 191-95), which indicate disillusionment with human kings and reaffirm Yahweh’s true kingship (pp. 196-97). Here and in other prophetic texts that deal once again with the figure of David or the manner of God’s kingly rule, Wilson asserts that they are aware of and “interact with the problems of Israel’s and Judah’s remembered past, and they often do so by remembering the future” (p. 221).

Drawing his study together, Wilson reiterates “the potential for multivocal Judean thinking” as it relates to the hereditary monarchy, the “piety of the king” and what role he plays in the cult (p. 228). That multivocality expresses itself in the prophetic books by means of the genre of “speculative fiction” that is strongly rooted in the past or what is remembered of the past. This literary expression is therefore an extension of the need for those living in the Second Temple period to deal with constant change within an imperial context, necessitating a process and product of “cultural negotiation and synthesis” (p. 231). Prophetic literature thus based itself to an extent on the past, but also guided its audience through the multivocality of its historiography, counterbalancing cultural memories and tensions that could have left the Judeans without a clear sense of identity. Thus, the community could take their past and its various versions seriously as a representation of communications with and from their God.

Taken together, Wilson has presented a plausible explanation for the existence of a multivocal narrative in the Deuteronomic literature, the Chronicler, and the prophetic corpus. He has made effective use of memory studies, weaving their methods into a literary examination of a very complex set of texts. By focusing on the role of the Second Temple Judean literati rather than using the more typical source-critical approach, he has opened the door to providing a

solution to why the disparate memories of ancient Israel's flawed institution of kingship can contain both high and low points. Instead of creating and protecting the memory of a perfect human ruler, that role is reserved for the deity. Instead of allowing a government or a scribal class to systematically and officially "forget" what is not convenient or consistent with their political or theological thinking, the Judean literati embraced their multivocality and preserved a fuller sense of their past. If Wilson is in fact correct in his interpretation of the work of these guardians of Israel's fundamental "sites of memory," then he is to be thanked for releasing biblical scholarship from its literary-critical shackles. At the least, his insights and use of memory studies deserve fuller discussion within the academy.

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