

Concealed criticism of King Solomon in Exodus

Pekka Särkiö, Lahti - Finland

1. Introduction

Solomon, the famous king of Israel's double monarchy in the 10th century B.C., has the reputation to have possessed fabulous riches and intelligence. This picture of Solomon is based on the story of the Book of Kings, where the deuteronomistic writer sums up: "King Solomon was greater in riches and wisdom than all the other kings of the earth" (1 Kgs 10,23). During the centuries after Exile Jewish and Islamic traditions have developed these magnificent features of Solomon, in the way of orientalist storytelling, far beyond the historical startingpoint.¹

It has been often assumed, that the depiction of Solomon in the first Kings, chapters 3-10, is intended to glorify the King. In this purpose his wealth has been exaggerated. According to the general opinion the critique of Solomon doesn't appear until the end of the history of Solomon, namely in 1 Kings 11. There Solomon is criticized because of his many foreign wives, who led him to build altars for other gods and worship before them.²

In my opinion the critique of Solomon exists already in the former part of the Solomonic history. But the critique is indirect, partly hidden and occurs between the lines.³ According to the first writer of the Deuteronomistic school (DtrH), Solomon's sin was the luxurious lifestyle which he achieved at the expense of his people. The Deuteronomistic Historian describes, how the provinces had to deliver daily large amounts of food to Solomon (1 Kgs 5:2-3,6-8)⁴ and how Solomon forced the Israelites to perform compulsory labour (5,27-32).⁵

In addition, the Deuteronomistic Historian exaggerates the number of Solomon's horses, chariots, wives and the amount of his gold and silver (9,26-

¹ Watt 1974, 85-103; Ullendorf 1974, 104-114; Silberman 1974, 65-84. Also the Old Testament Pseudepigraphy, Testament of Solomon (1.-3. century A.C.), has given Solomon legendary features. In the collection of Judaic stories, retold by Rahel and Emanuel bin Gorion (Vom Garten Eden. Insel Taschenbuch 1189. Frankfurt am Main 1989), there are also numerous legends about Solomon (s. 76-86).

² Würthwein 1985, 1; O'Brien 1989, 143; Jobling 1991, 57-76; Frisch 1991, 14; Niemann 1993, 21; Knoppers 1993, 59f.

³ This opinion have also Dietrich 1986, 7-16; Eslinger 1989, 123-176; Newing 1994, 252; Sweeney 1995, 615-691; Walsh 1995, 482-493. See also Särkiö 1996,83-88.

⁴ Särkiö 1994, 51; Walsh 1995, 489f.

⁵ Dietrich 1986, 7ff.; Särkiö 1994, 163; 1996, 90.

11,3). In most cases the Deuteronomist has an earlier tradition as his material – *Vorlage* – for his editing work. This exaggeration should be interpreted as the editor's criticism of Solomon, especially viewed in light of the King's law in Deuteronomy (Dtn 17,14-20). In the King's law it is exhorted, that the king should not gather too many horses, wives or too much gold and silver for himself, so that he would not consider himself better than his people and would not forget his God.⁶

This Deuteronomistic critique of Solomon in the First Kings, indirect and direct, is followed by the account of the fall of Solomonic monarchy as God's punishment for his sins. In order to defeat Solomon God raised up adversaries against him. Most important of them was the Ephraimite Jeroboam, whom Solomon put in charge of the whole labour force of the house of Joseph. He rebelled against Solomon and fled to Egypt until Solomon's death (1 Kgs 11,*26ff.).⁷

After his father, king Rehoboam made the compulsory labour even harder than it used to be in Solomon's time. Jeroboam returned from his exile and went with the assembly of Israel in front of the King. They asked Rehoboam to lighten the harsh labour, the heavy yoke of Solomon. But Rehoboam rejected their appeal and made the compulsory labour still harder. This was more than the Northern tribes could stand. Jeroboam started a revolt against the Davidic monarchy and led the Northern tribes away from the "Slavehouse of Judah". The liberated former slaves of Solomon and Rehoboam founded their own monarchy, namely Northern Kingdom (1 Kgs 12).

2. Similarities between Solomon-history and Exodus-story

The account of the luxurious life of Solomon and the compulsory labour, which Solomon demanded from his people, bears remarkable similarities with the story of Exodus. I noted these similarities for the first time, when I was writing my doctoral thesis about Solomon in the early 1990's. Also several other Biblical scholars have noticed literal similarities between the Exodus-story and the Solomon-historiography, namely striking parallels in vocabulary and motives, especially in Ex 1 and 5.⁸ Most of them see concealed criticism of Solomon behind the Exodus-story,⁹ but they have various opinions about the circumstances, where the

⁶ Nearly the same opinion have Dietrich 1986, 14; Dreher 1991, 59; Carr 1991, 20.75; Brettler 1991, 91-93; Parker 1992, 96; Särkiö 1994, 235.239; Sweeney 1995, 615-617; Lemaire 1995, 114.

⁷ Särkiö 1994, 220.

⁸ Smend 1963,90f.; Weimar - Zenger 175, 93ff.; Crüsemann 1978, 167f.; Görg 1981, 42; Kegler 1983,58f.66-70; Dietrich 1986, 14; W.H. Schmidt 1988, 39; Dreher 1991, 59; Albertz 1992, 217f.; Coote - Coote 1990, 41; Coote 1991, 74; Särkiö 1994, 152f.

⁹ Schmidt (1988), Crüsemann (1978), Kegler (1983), Coote (1991), Dreher (1991), Albertz (1992) and Särkiö (1994) think, that the Solomon-critical editing of the Exodus-story is dependent on the dt Solomon-history in 1 Kgs (or the traditions behind it). According to Dietrich (1986), the exilic DtrH has written the critical text about Solomon's compulsory labour in 1 Kgs according to the Exodus-story. van Seters (1994) agrees with the others about the parallelity between Exodus-story and

Solomon-critical editing of the Exodus-story was written.¹⁰

In my opinion these intertextual connections can be explained so, that the editor of an earlier Exodus-story is using material, which derives from the pre-deuteronomistic Solomon-traditions. The editor, who uses Solomonic material when editing the Exodus-story is the so called Yahwist. The aim of this article is to consider the reason for the intertextual connection between the Exodus-story and the Solomon-narrative in the historiography of the Yahwist. For the next I will present some of these parallelities between the Exodus-story and the Solomon-narrative.

2.1. The allusions in Ex 1-2 to the Solomon-history

The first two chapters of Exodus describe the hard labour of the Israelians in Egypt and Pharaoh's efforts to execute a genocide of the Israelians by killing their male infants. Moses, the future leader of the Hebrews, however, avoided the death. It seems to me, that the hard conditions of the Israelians in Egypt are coloured with material, which derives from the descriptions of Solomonic compulsory labour. Specifically some *termini technici* in Ex 1,11 are supposedly taken from the pre-deuteronomistic Solomon-traditions. These terms are "slave masters" (שָׂרֵי מִסִּים), "forced labour" (כִּבְל) and "store cities" (עָרֵי מִסְכְּנוֹת).¹¹

It is very likely, that the depiction of the youth of Moses (Ex 2) is based on the stories about the both adversaries of King Solomon in 1 Kings 11, Jeroboam and the Edomite Prince Hadad. Moses escaped the massacre of the Hebrew boys and was adopted by the daughter of the Pharaoh, in the same way (Ex 1,22) as Ben Hadad avoided to be killed with the men of Edom and was taken to the family of the Pharaoh as a foster-son. When Ben Hadad had grown up, he asked the Pharaoh for a permission to go to his own country, but the king of Egypt was unwilling to let him go (1 Kgs 11,21-22).¹² This feature appears also in the Yahwistic editing of the Exodus-story, when Moses asks the Pharaoh several times "to let his people go" (Ex 5,11, etc.).¹³

Also the tradition of Jeroboam, described in 1 Kgs chapter 11, has affected the account of Moses in Exodus. Moses watched his own people at their hard labour and saw an Egyptian slave master beat them. Moses killed the Egyptian and was

Solomon-history, but he does not say anything about the supposed Solomon-critical tendency of the Exodus-story.

¹⁰ According to Crüsemann (1978), Schmidt (1988) and Coote (1991) the Solomon-critical Exodus-story was written in the 10th century B.C., that means in the time of Solomon or Rehoboam. Albertz (1992) thinks, that Exodus (1-14) was written in the time of Exile or after it.

¹¹ שָׂרֵי מִסִּים hi. in 1 Kgs 5,27; 9,15. עָרֵי מִסְכְּנוֹת in 1 Kgs 5,30; 9,23. כִּבְל in 1 Kgs 11,28 and עָרֵי מִסְכְּנוֹת in 1 Kgs 9,19.

¹² van Seters 1994, 32-34; Särkiö 1998, 58-59.

¹³ Särkiö 1998, 59.

forced to flee from Pharaoh. This anecdote is in my opinion written according to the tradition of Jeroboam, who somehow rebelled against Solomon and run away from the king. The more exact description of Jeroboams offence in 1 Kgs 11 is unfortunately covered by a later prophetic story (v. 29-39) and is thus missing. We can only try to deduce, what happened. Jeroboam himself was in charge of the whole labour force of the house of Joseph. Perhaps he defended his own Ephraimite people against the violence, which they suffered in their compulsory work. At least after coming back from his exile, Jeroboam supported the corvee workers in their revolt against the king.¹⁴

2.2. The allusions in Ex 5 to the Solomon-history

In the same way, the hard labour of the Israelians in Egypt, is described in Ex 5 with motives and vocabels taken from the Solomonic traditions (1 Kgs 12). Moses asked the Pharaoh to let them go into the desert, in order to worship God there. Pharaoh answered their appeal by making their labour even harder. He ordered the Israelians to gather their own straw for the bricks. However the daily quota of bricks wasn't reduced. The general theme of the passage is adopted from the discussion between king Rehoboam and the Israelians, who asked the king to reduce the amount of work. Rehoboam answered the people harshly and made their yoke of labour even harder (1 Kgs 12,14).¹⁵

One of the key-words in this passage in Exodus is the rare word for "straw" (תבן). This feature of the story is supposedly adopted from the Solomonic tradition, where the Israelians were everyday forced to gather straw (תבן) for the thousands of horses, which Solomon possessed (1 Kgs 5,8).¹⁶ In Ex 5, 9.11 Yahwist is using the word עבדה for "hard labour", which is for him untypical.¹⁷ An explanation for this untypical term עבדה could be a literary model in 1 Kings 12,4, where this word occurs.

2.3. The allusions in Ex 32 to the Solomon-history

The most famous example about the parallels, found between Exodus and Solomon-Jeroboam -historiography, is the story about the golden calves in Ex 32 and 1 Kgs 12. There is the parallel sentence In both passages, "These are your Gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt" (1 Kgs 12,28b // Ex 32,4b). It testifies about literal dependence between these two stories.¹⁸ In my opinion

¹⁴ Albertz 1992, 217-18; Särkiö 1998, 58.

¹⁵ Särkiö 1998, 76. Also van Seters (1994, 71f.) believes, that Yahwist has written Ex 5 on the basis of 1 Kgs 12, but not in a Solomon-critical sense. According to Crüsemann (1978, 175f.) and Albertz (1992, 217f.) the parallelity between Ex 5 and 1 Kgs 12 is to be explained so that Ex 5 was written as a propaganda-text for the revolution of Jeroboam.

¹⁶ Särkiö 1998, 74.

¹⁷ Normally he uses the term סבל (Ex 1,11; 2,11; 5,4f.) for "hard labour".

Jahwist is again using pre-dtr material, when he is writing about Israel in Sinai.

The story in Ex 32 about the golden calf doesn't actually refer to Israel in Sinai but it's hidden message concerns Northern kingdom and it's state cult, which Jeroboam founded in Bethel and Dan.¹⁹ The calves were not any idols of foreign gods, but they were representatives of Yahwe or his postaments. As the writer of the passage, Yahwist, is supposedly aware of the yahwistic context of the calves. But he opposes their erection because of the prohibition in Decalogue, to make any kinds of images (Dtn 5,8).²⁰

Yahwist has ment the story about the golden calves to be a concealed apology of Jeroboam. The erection of the calf wasn't his fault, because his *alter ego*, Moses, was at that time on the mountain of God. Instead the fault is Aaron's, who represents the priests of Northern Kingdom. According to Yahwist the priests erected both images in Bethel and Dan on behalf of the people and Jeroboam hadn't any part in that sin.²¹

Later the Deuteronomistic redactors considered the history of Jeroboam from Judean perspective. They attacked heavily against Jeroboam, who is for them the most warning example of an idolatrous king. Yahwist, instead, held Jeroboam as a liberator like Moses, who redeemed his people from the oppression of Solomon, grounded Northern Kingdom for them as a promised land and restored the traditional Yahwe-religion.

3. Concealed criticism in the use of Yahwist

We have now viewed in the light of some examples, how Yahwist is using his method of concealed criticism. He has adopted material from the Solomonic traditions, when he is editing the story about Exodus. It looks like in chapters Ex 1-2; 5 and 32 Yahwist is giving features of Solomon to the Pharaoh of Exodus. Thus he is in a subtle way criticizing Solomon, who oppressed his people with forced labour. At the same time Yahwist is giving Moses some features of the adversaries of Solomon, namely Ben Hadad and particularly Jeroboam. Thus he is in a concealed way supporting Jeroboam and describing him a liberator like Moses, who freed the oppressed Israelians from the heavy yoke of Solomon.

The concealed criticism of Solomon by Yahwist resembles the subtle criticism of Solomon by DtrH, who criticizes Solomon because of his gathering of wealth, pride and because of oppressing his people with hard taxes and compulsory labour. The similarities between the accents and their use of traditional material, speak about the historical nearness of Yahwist and Deuteronomist.

18 van Seters 1994, 295.

19 Aurelius 1988, 75-77.

20 Keel-Uehlinger 1992, 216; Särkiö 1998, 154.159.

21 Särkiö 1998, 159f.

4. The historical context of the concealed criticism of Solomon

We have now seen the literal dependence of the two complexes, Solomon History in First Kings and the Exodus story, and also the subtle criticism of Solomon as their common feature. It is a very difficult task to find out with some certainty the historical context of the concealed criticism and its reason.

The main question is, whether Yahwist has used the Deuteronomistic History of Solomon or earlier traditions behind it? The first alternative would mean, that we should date Yahwist after the Deuteronomist. The second alternative means, that we take in account the long tradition history behind the Deuteronomistic story of Solomon.

According to my opinion, Yahwist has first utilized the concealed criticism and has given an example to the Deuteronomistic Historian, who wrote the history about Solomon according to earlier traditions. Yahwist had used these same pre-deuteronomistic traditions, when he edited the earlier Exodus-story.

The birth time of the yahwistic editing is hard to solve with certainty. According to Ex 32,34 it looks like, that he knows the destruction of the Northern Kingdom. But in his editing there is no reference to the Babylonian invasion in Juda and Jerusalem.²² So Yahwist has written his work between the fall of Samaria and the destruction of the Temple, that means the years between 722 and 587 B.C. But I am inclined to think, that the actual point of time is in the end of the 7th century. In my opinion Yahwist directed the concealed criticism of Solomon and the admiration of Jeroboam to the former inhabitants of the Northern Kingdom, who were after the fall of Samaria forced to flee to Juda. Their grandfathers were Solomon's corvee workers, whom Jeroboam freed and brought to their own land.²³

Among the refugees there rose interest in their background: why had their forefathers originally left the Davidic dynasty and grounded their own monarchy? Besides the official Judean historiography Yahwist concentrated on this special issue of the Northern tribes. He examined the relation of the former Northern people to the Davidic dynasty by projecting the events of Solomon's and Rehoboam's era in the distant history of Exodus and using the method of concealed criticism.

If this is true, a new method of the Israelitic historiography, namely "concealed criticism of Kings", has been found.²⁴ One King – in this case Solomon – has been criticised through another biblical person – in this case the Pharaoh – by adding

²² Aurelius 1988, 76f.

²³ Särkiö 1998, 160-162.

²⁴ von Soden (1974) and Görg (1981, 42ff.) have interpreted also the story in Gen 3 as Solomon-critical. According to their opinion Eve represents Solomon's Egyptian wife and Pharaoh's daughter. In Görg's opinion Yahwist has written a concealed and timecritical message in this story: the fall of Adam and Eve into sin refers to the replacement of Jahwe as the only source of Life by the Egyptian snake-goddes Renenutet, which was brought in Jerusalem by Solomon's Egyptian wife. The phenomenon of concealed criticism of kings is also known in Assyrian texts. von Soden 1974, 237.

features of the king to be criticised to the other person. The remarkable and unmistakable features of the king, given to the other person, are intended to be a hermeneutical key: The reader interpretes the passage as a concealed criticism of the king.

For the Israelites, who escaped from North Israel to Judah in the year 722, the concealed criticism was a way to evaluate their earlier history under the regime of Solomon. The official Deuteronomistic historiography, instead, was controlled by the Davidic kings and gave no possibilities for the North-Israelites to honour their liberator Jeroboam.

Later in the post-exilic era one redactor of the Priestly school is utilizing the same method of concealed criticism of Solomon in the Sea Miracle story (Ex 14) by characterizing the Egyptian army as a chariot force. The chariot termini (שָׁלֵשׁ, רֶכֶב וּפָרָשִׁים) he has adopted from the Dtr Solomon historiography (1 Kgs 9,22) as well the name of the sea, "Reed sea" (Ex 13,18), which was the southern border of the Solomonic Israel (1 Kgs 9,26). It looks like this Priestly redactor has localized the Sea Miracle on the shore of the Gulf of Akaba (יָם סוּף)²⁵ in order to explain, how Solomon as the "Pharaoh of Exodus" with his chariot forces could be thrown into the sea by Yahwe, when chasing his fleeing slaves on their way to the mountain of Sinai.²⁶

There arises the question, why was king Solomon so important topic in the late-pre exilic, exilic and post exilic period, over three hundred years after his regime, that the critique against him had to be presented in a subtle and hidden way? One answer may be, that the late kings of the Davidic dynasty didn't let their idealized forefathers to be criticized. This argument doesn't function any more after the fall of the Judean monarchy in 587 B.C.

One more explanation for the hidden criticism of Solomon from the side of the Northern tribes could be the messianic expectations on the post-exilic era. In late-deuteronomistic and prophetic circles there arouse a hope of the coming of Davidic Messiah, who has features of Solomon (Jer 23,5; Ps 72; PsSol 17; see also Jer 33;17; 1 Kgs 11,36; 15,4). The descendants of the former corvee workers of Solomon couldn't easily share these kind of messianic expectations and the coming of the Son of David. For them a more suitable prototype for the Messiah were the liberators of (North) Israel, namely Moses and Jeroboam.

These "northern" or Galilean expectations were seen to be fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth. His nativity and youth is described by Matthew (Matt 2) according to the youth of Moses (Ex 2). From the same reason it was important for the author of Matt 1, that Jesus wasn't direct descendant of David and Solomon, but was born from the Virgin Mary.²⁷

²⁵ See about the identification of "Reed sea" (Ex 13,18) as Gulf of Akaba, Lamberty-Zielinski 1993, 195-226.

²⁶ Särkiö 1998, 124.

²⁷ Särkiö 1998, 162 n. 61.

Summary

It seems to me, that Yahwist, the pre-exilic redactor of the older Exodus-story, is utilizing some traditions, which are behind the Deuteronomistic depiction of the Solomonic history. Yahwist created parallels between the Exodus-story and the Solomon-history by adding features from Solomonic traditions to Exodus. In this way he wanted to give features of Solomon to the Pharaoh of Exodus and at the same time features of Jeroboam to Moses. Thus he redacted the older Exodus-story to an allegory of the fate of the North-Israel under the regime of Solomon and Rehoboam: The corvee-leader Jeroboam acted like Moses and led the people of Israel from the slavehouse of Solomon to freedom. One reason for the late and hidden criticism of Solomon in Old Testament were perhaps the messianic expectations, where a Solomon-like Son of David was waited for to bring with him the realm of peace and prosper. The northern people in Israel, the descendants of the former slaves of Solomon, couldn't easily share these expectations. For them Jesus of Nazareth was much more suitable as Messiah.

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