CANAANITE KINGSHIP IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

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We have long been familiar with the endeavours of GUNKEL, 1) GRESSMANN, 2) MOWINCKEL, 3) and SCHMIDT 4) to explain the role of the Davidic king in the Jerusalem cult in categories of general anthropology and specifically of the cult-patterns of Egypt and Mesopotamia, where the figure of the king was central. MOWINCKEL, in fact, conceives of the Davidic king as 'the incarnation of the national God.' This theory of divine kingship as a vital element in a general cult-pattern has been accepted and applied to Israel by an influential body of scholars and finds its most concrete expression in English in two publications edited by S. H. HOOKE, namely Myth and Ritual 5) and The Labyrinth 6). Since the discovery of the Canaanite literature of Ras Shamra evidence has been claimed from the soil of Canaan itself for this royal-divine ideology, notably by HOOKE, 7) MOWINCKEL, 8) and ENGNELL 9). This position, we feel, is subject to

1) GUNKEL and BEGRICH, Einleitung in die Psalmen, 1933, p. 140ff.
2) GRESSMANN, Der Ursprung der israelitisch-jüdischen Eschatologie, 1905; Der Messias, 1929.
3) MOWINCKEL, Psalmenstudien, II, 1922, pp. 298ff.
4) SCHMIDT, Die Thronfahrt Jahves am Fest der Jahreswende im alten Israel, 1927.
6) The Labyrinth. Further Studies in the Relation between Myth and Ritual in the Ancient World, ed. HOOKE, 1935. In this collection, the position of the king in the Jerusalem cult is studied by A. R. JOHNSON, who accepts the theory of the centrality of the king in the cult and even of his adoption as the divine son (pp.71-111), but does not accept HOOKE'S theory of the conformity of the Israelite cult to a general cult-pattern. JOHNSON has clarified his position in a recent study, Divine Kingship and the Old Testament, ET, LXII, 1950, pp. 36-42.
7) HOOKE, Origins of Early Semitic Ritual, 1938.

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qualification. Here the opinion of MOWINCKEL is valuable both as indicating his own position and as a criticism of the more extreme position of ENGNELL. He agrees, in the main, with ENGNELL’s view of the position of the king in ancient Syria but questions his exegesis of the texts. 1) Our own opinion is that in the uncertainty which surrounded so much of the text used by ENGNELL such a categorical position as he occupies is premature. In investigating the Hebrew kingship in its political aspects ALT 2) had already sounded a salutary note of caution in minimizing the influence of Canaan on the institution of the kingship in Israel. He maintains, in fact, that the kingship in Canaan was already a spent force at the time of the Hebrew occupation and the foundation of the Hebrew state, having been replaced by an oligarchy, the elders, as at Shechem (Jdg. ix 1ff.), Succoth and Penuel (Jdg. viii 5), Gibeon (Josh. ix 3ff.), and probably also Jerusalem (2 Sam. v 6) and Gezer (1 Kings ix 16). 3) With ALT we entirely agree and consider this aspect of his thesis worth elaborating in the light of fuller evidence. If we are to understand the kingship in Israel by the method of eisegesis, 4) we must first of all clarify the question of kingship in Canaan.

Documentary evidence from Canaan, which used to consist of Phoenician royal inscriptions, the Egyptian papyrus of Wen-Amon, and scattered references in the Old Testament, has been greatly increased by the cuneiform texts of Ras Shamra. These are the more valuable since they comprise several categories of documents, myth, saga, administrative texts, diplomatic correspondence, private letters, and ritual texts. We have, thus, texts which refer to historical conditions and can be dated, in fact, to the Amarna period, the beginning of the 14th century, as the correspondence of the king Nqmd with the Hittite Šubbiluliuma indicates. 5) The mythological texts, however, even though they may be late recensions dating from this

1) MOWINCKEL, NTT, XLV, 1944, pp. 72ff. MOWINCKEL objects that ENGNELL commits the error of verbal literalism, making too little allowance for poetic usage and imagery. T. H. GASTER raises the same objection in his review of Studies in Divine Kingship, Review of Religions, 1945, pp. 279ff.
2) ALT, Die Staatenbildung der Israeliten in Palästina, 1930, pp. 31-32.
3) In the case of Jerusalem and Gezer in the passages cited there is no explicit mention of elders, but the people are mentioned and nothing is said about a king.
4) NORTH objects that to use this method, as MOWINCKEL does, is to miss the real significance of much that is vital in the religion of Israel. The Religious Aspects of Hebrew Kingship, ZAW, L, 1932, p. 35ff.
5) GORDON, Ugaritic Handbook, 1947, 118.