

# Saul – not always – at War

## A New Perspective on the Rise of Kingship in Israel

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### 1. The rise of kingship in Israel

#### *1.1 The traditional view*

The rise of kingship in Israel is an important topic in the texts of the Hebrew Bible as well as in scholarly research on the history of ancient Israel. The transition from a tribal structure to the structure of a state is one of the watersheds in Israelite history. The importance of this transition is echoed by the different voices pro and con monarchy in the Old Testament itself, and it is evident as scholars differentiate between the pre-monarchic and the monarchic eras of the history of Israel.

Leaving aside all differences in detail, most scholars agree that the introduction of kingship in Israel came about quite reluctantly and late, and that the resistance against it was finally overcome because of the military threat posed by the Philistines. This common view has recently been reiterated by Lawrence E. Stager: “When kingship finally was established and acknowledged by tribal polity, it was the external military threat that served as the catalyst for kingship.”<sup>1</sup> This position claims that in the Iron

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<sup>1</sup> STAGER, *Identity*, p. 171. In BRIGHT’s classic *History of Israel* (1981<sup>3</sup> = 2000<sup>4</sup>), the first paragraph of chapter 5.A “First Steps toward Monarchy: Saul” bears the heading “The Philistine Crisis and the Failure of the Tribal Organization” and in the same chapter we read that “Saul’s whole reign was spent at war” (BRIGHT, *History*, pp. 185, 189). Cf. DONNER, *Geschichte*, p. 197: “... wenn ... aber ... die Bildung eines israelitischen Nationalstaates nicht mit Notwendigkeit aus den Lebensformen der vorstaatlichen Stämme erwuchs, dann müssen äußere Zwänge wirksam geworden sein. ... Das ist der Fall, und in diesem Sinne ist das erste israelitische Staatswesen in der Tat ein Notprodukt gewesen ... Die Bedrohung kam von den Philistern.” MILLER / HAYES, *History*, express the same point of view: “Saul ... made a name for himself by attacking a Philistine garrison ... and then successfully expelling the Philistines from southern Ephraim / Benjamin” (p. 136), and looking back from the end: “Saul’s career was ended as he had begun it, fighting against the Philistines” (p. 144). Although he tries to see things the other way around, for AHLSTRÖM too Saul’s relationship with the Philistines was one of conflict and war: “The rise of Saul’s kingdom has most often been seen as the result of the pressure of two other political powers of this time, the Philistines in the west and the Ammonites in the east.

Age I (between 1200/1150 and 1000 BCE) the tribal society of ancient pre-monarchic Israel both consolidated and expanded at the same time as there was also a consolidation and expansion of the Philistine city-states. Living in the coastal plain, the Philistines had an advantage in their development owing to their more favorable environment, the traditions and technologies they had brought with them, and their close contacts with Egypt. Because of this advantage, they were able to extend their authority into the hill country and mountain area where the Israelite tribes lived. The situation developed into a violent confrontation culminating in battles between the Israelites and the Philistines. This lasting conflict necessitated and facilitated the development from a tribal society to a monarchic structure, in other words the introduction of the monarchy in Israel and the establishment of Saul as the first king of Israel.

### *1.2 Problems with the Traditional View*

Most scholars who write about that period of Israelite history reconstruct the events of that time in more or less the same manner in which they are presented in the Hebrew Bible, i.e., in 1 Samuel: Saul was in some way elected and installed as king of the Israelites (1 Samuel 9–10); as such he rescued the eastern city of Jabesh-Gilead from the Ammonite threat (1 Samuel 11). Together with his son and crown prince Jonathan he was able to drive the Philistines out of the highlands (1 Samuel 13–14) and protected Israelite territory against attacks and raids of groups like the Amalekites (1 Samuel 15). He established and expanded both the Israelite court and a mercenary troop as a permanent army (1 Sam 13:2; 14:52). Finally he had an encounter with the united Philistine armies at Mount Gilboa, where he and most of his sons died (1 Samuel 31).

This traditional view combined with the idea of an ongoing confrontation with the Philistines leads to problems. An important problem is related to the rescue of Jabesh-Gilead: Saul's home and residence was in Gibeah, just a few kilometers north of Jerusalem.<sup>2</sup> At the same time there were Philistine garrisons at different important points, among others at Michmas (1 Sam 13:23) near Gibeah and – according to 1 Sam 10:5; 13:3 – even in Gibeah itself. If there was war between the Philistines and Saul and if the Philistines were so close to his home base, how could Saul have left Gibeah to cross the Jordan River in order to do battle at Jabesh? Would the Philistines not have taken over his residence in his absence? This problem was recognized and discussed by several authors, in particular by Hans

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One could perhaps 'flip the coin' and maintain that Saul's growing power must have led to a conflict with the Philistines" (History, p. 423).

<sup>2</sup> The identification with Tell el-Ful is widely accepted. El Jib, the alternative candidate, is just a few kilometers away; cf. below n. 20.

Joachim Stoebe in his commentary on 1 Samuel<sup>3</sup> and by Diana Vikander Edelman in her books and articles on King Saul. Edelman follows Stoebe's suggestion to situate the events of 1 Samuel 11, including the battle of Jabesh, following 1 Samuel 14, the victory over the Philistines. Only after his victory over the Philistines and after he had driven the Philistines out of Israelite territory could Saul have left his residence at Gibeah to wage war in Gilead.<sup>4</sup>

Another problem is the so-called metal monopoly<sup>5</sup> in 1 Sam 13:20–21: In the description of the Israelite army ranged against the Philistines, we are told that only Saul and his son Jonathan had swords. This quite detrimental situation is explained by a note about the so-called Philistine metal monopoly. The Israelites could not or more correctly were not allowed to do their own metal work. For sharpening their plough-tips and other metal objects they had to go to the Philistines. This interaction with the Philistines is described as a regular procedure that lasted for a long time. This brief note is given as an explanation for the lack of weapons among the Israelites, but at the same time it shows us something very important about the normal situation between the Israelites and the Philistines. The situation must have been a peaceful one, at least for a long time, because if there had been constant war with the Philistines, the Philistines certainly would not have performed this important service for Israelite agriculture. At the same time the Israelites would have tried to get their metal objects and tools and certainly also some more weapons from other sources, e.g., by trade with the Phoenicians. But evidently neither was the case. Therefore, we can and must conclude that in the years before the situation of 1 Samuel 13–14 there must have existed basically peaceful relations between the Philistines and the Israelites, peaceful but not equal. Evidently the Philistines controlled the highlands and the Israelites living there. But most probably it was a peaceful situation with economic exchange in both directions.

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<sup>3</sup> STOEBE, *Samuelis*, pp. 207, 241.

<sup>4</sup> EDELMAN, *Saul's Rescue*. See also ARNOLD, Gibeah, p. 96: "It is improbable ... that Saul would have abandoned the Gibeah region while it still lay under Philistine control in order to mount an attack in the distant Transjordan ... The Jabesh-Gilead campaign surely occurred well after Saul's victories over the Philistines in the Benjaminite heartland." The same view is shared by MILLER / HAYES, *History*, as they state without discussion: "The Saul stories read in proper sequence (1 Sam 9:1–10:16 ... 13:2–14:46 ... 1:26–11:15) are our primary source about Saul's rise to power ..." (p. 135; cf. p. 136).

<sup>5</sup> The biblical text does not speak about iron or a monopoly on iron, as many modern scholars do, but on metal work in general. Iron tools and weapons certainly existed and were in use for special purposes, but iron only gradually became superior and preferred to bronze.

## 2. Methodological Considerations

### 2.1 *Texts, Traditions, and Historical Value*

The Books of Samuel are part of the so-called Deuteronomistic History, which was written in the seventh or sixth century BCE. At several points in the presentation of the Saul story there are reflections that are evidently deuteronomistic.<sup>6</sup> Texts like 1 Samuel 7 and 12, etc., clearly reveal a deuteronomistic perspective. At the same time the differences between these deuteronomistic texts and other texts show that the deuteronomistic historians incorporated and used older traditions and texts. These older texts and traditions also have to be differentiated. Some may be quite old and close in origin to the original situation, while many other texts and traditions have been shaped by a long process of transmission.<sup>7</sup> It is important to analyze these texts and their intention and to consider the historical value of the information contained therein. An important argument in favor of the reliability of information is its intention. If the information is in line with the overall intention of a given text, it may be shaped by this intention. But, if a specific element differs from the overall intention or even contradicts it, then this element very probably contains older information.

### 2.2 *Unintentional Information*

Another important criterion is the “unintentionality” of information. This means that a piece of information given seemingly unintentionally is of higher importance and reliability, because it is neither shaped by nor employed because of the intention of the text. An example of this kind of unintentional information is the note discussed above about the metal monopoly of the Philistines. This note is given to explain to the reader why only Saul and Jonathan had swords, but at the same time we learn by implication about previous peaceful relations, since we are told that the Isra-

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<sup>6</sup> This holds true even in light of all the divergences between the different models for a deuteronomistic history or even if the theory of such a deuteronomistic history spanning the books from Joshua to Kings is not accepted.

<sup>7</sup> Examples of such cases are the texts about Saul's rejection in 1 Sam 13:7b–15, especially 1 Samuel 15\* or the texts about Jonathan and David. These texts are not simply deuteronomistic, but they clearly represent additions to and expansions of older texts. For 1 Samuel 15, see now DIETRICH, Ban, who shows that “the idea of a devotion to the ban is not an invention of the exilic period” (p. 204), but that “these notions and this praxis of the ‘devotion to the ban’ existed apparently in the middle and even in the early period of the Israelite monarchy” (p. 208). Close analysis shows that there are different redactional levels and that there is an older tradition behind the text: “The core of the tradition in 1Samuel 15 seems to be a short account about an expedition of Saul against the Amalekites in the Negev – in my opinion not historically implausible – which was victorious ...” (p. 206).

elites regularly went to the Philistines, and we are even informed about the price of their services.

### *2.3 Events and situation*

Most writers of Old Testament texts and most of their readers are interested in events. Indeed most writers of books on Israelite history are also interested in the history of events. But for historical research it is not only the events that are important, but also the overall situation. Only by analyzing the situation behind the events is plausibility given to the events and their importance demonstrated. Therefore, in the following discussion much attention will be given to the contemporaneous situation. Important contributions to the analysis and description of the situation are given by archaeological observation and sociological analysis and – last, but not least – by the proper analysis of the texts.

## 3. Palestine from Iron Age I to Iron Age II

### *3.1 Archaeological Research and Sociological Methodology*

While in earlier decades archaeological interest focused on cities and their larger remains,<sup>8</sup> archaeological research in recent decades has attempted to present a more nuanced overall picture of ancient civilization, relying in particular on archaeological surveys and using sociological models for the interpretation of finds.<sup>9</sup>

The sociological models of state development describe the phases from chiefdom through an early state to a fully developed state.<sup>10</sup> There are different factors that play a role in this development, e.g., economic development, internal and external conflicts, and the role of internal and exter-

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<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately the only large structure of interest for our theme is the larger building at Tell-el-Ful, identified by the excavator as a fortress. The older phase of this fortress seems to belong to the period of Saul, i.e. late eleventh century and has, therefore, been identified with Saul's residence; cf. LAPP, Fül, p. 445 (s.v. Identification). But it has to be admitted that the identification of the users of this structure is not possible on archaeological grounds. This larger structure may have also been a Philistine fortress. This alternative interpretation was suggested by Albrecht Alt and by Benjamin Mazar and is followed by other writers; see LAPP, Fül, p. 446. Regarding archaeological evidence relating to Saul we have to admit, as MAZAR (Archaeology, p. 371) puts it: "The time of Saul hardly finds any expression in the archaeological record." For a contrary analysis, see Faust's article in this volume.

<sup>9</sup> See especially the contributions in *Semeia* 37 (1986) and SCHÄFER-LICHTENBERGER, *Early State*.

<sup>10</sup> See especially SERVICE, *Origins*. For these methodological applications to the history of early Israel, see FRICK, *Methods*.

nal trade. In their application to the development of early Israel these factors are weighed in different ways: Marvin L. Chaney<sup>11</sup> emphasizes the economic factors, combining the external pressure of the Philistines on the Israelite economy with the internal development of their economy based on technical developments such as the building of terraces and waterproof cisterns, and the use of iron tools. Concurrent with these processes was the formation of an Israelite elite that coordinated the developments.

Robert B. Coote and Keith W. Whitelam<sup>12</sup> also combine various factors in explaining the rise of the Israelite monarchy, emphasizing in part Philistine pressure as well as the growth of the Israelite population and the necessity to organize its limited resources. Frank S. Frick<sup>13</sup> similarly combines external and internal factors. He gives special weight to the internal developments, namely agricultural development and population growth. Philistine pressure is the necessary factor that triggers the development towards monarchy, but it in itself would not have been enough.

Israel Finkelstein combines these sociological reflections with the results of his surveys of the central West-Jordanian hill country.<sup>14</sup> His surveys show an impressive increase in the number of settlements and in the overall population in Iron Age I, i.e., between 1200/1150 and 1000 BCE. Surveys in more northerly and southerly areas (i.e., the tribal territories of Manasseh and Judah) also evidence similar developments.<sup>15</sup> There was an expansion towards the west and the south, i.e., towards the western edge of the Samarian and Judean hill country and towards the Negev. These areas are topographically different and also differ on account of their economic and agricultural possibilities. Finkelstein discerns six areas with different environmental situations and agricultural possibilities, and goes on to consider the importance of these developments for the introduction of the monarchy:

What is the significance of this demographic process for the emergence of the monarchy? The westward expansion meant a struggle with harsh topography, difficult rock formations and a dense vegetation cover. Furthermore, certain areas were devoid of stable water sources. Economically speaking, dwelling in the western units means practicing an unbalanced economy, since this part of the region is suitable mainly for horticulture, while it is almost hostile to cereal growing and animal husbandry. The westward expansion required the clearing of rocky terrain and of forest, hewing water cisterns, and the terracing of slopes. It also necessitated contact with neighboring areas – surplus orchard

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<sup>11</sup> CHANEY, *Movements*.

<sup>12</sup> COOTE / WHITELAM, *State Formation*; COOTE / WHITELAM, *Perspective*.

<sup>13</sup> FRICK, *Formation*, pp. 191–204.

<sup>14</sup> After some preliminary reports now published in FINKELSTEIN / LEDERMAN / BUNIMOVITZ, *Highlands*.

<sup>15</sup> ZERTAL, *Manasseh*; KOCHAVI, *Judea*.

products were exchanged for the grain and animal products not easily raised in the western zone.<sup>16</sup>

Finkelstein goes on to conclude:

The patterns of settlement described above explain, in my opinion, both the internal and the external conditions for the emergence of the Israelite monarchy ... The situation, which developed mainly in the eleventh century, helped the population to overcome the geographical barriers between the various sub regions of the hill country and to establish a strong inter-regional flow of goods. An economic system of this type necessitated a certain level of organization, which served as the springboard for public administration.<sup>17</sup>

Although we can basically agree with this depiction and its interpretation, it needs to be expanded: Finkelstein is thinking about inner Israelite developments only. But, if we think in sociological and economic terms, we have to think about an exchange between different regions in all possible directions. This means that we also have to assume an exchange between the Israelites living along the western edge of the hill country and the Philistines living on the eastern edge of the coastal plane. We must not uncritically accept the biblical texts depicting hostilities between Philistines and Israelites to exclude such peaceful trade relations a priori, even if these relations probably were on unequal terms.

### *3.2 The Development of Regional and Supra-Regional Authorities*

The growth of population and the expansion of settlements and agricultural activities in the different areas led to more exchange and trade, and this development in turn necessitated a higher degree of organization and administration and last, but not least, a higher degree of security. The agricultural and economic development allowed the transition from a subsistence economy to a surplus economy. This development at the same time went hand in hand with the formation of an elite that was not only producing, but also organizing and consuming. In turn this elite developed the ability to organize and protect this economic exchange and its improvements.

The Hebrew Bible gives some hints at such a development of regional and supra-regional authorities: In the song of Deborah we hear about rulers who rode on white donkeys and sat on carpets (Judg 5:9–10). In the list of the so-called minor judges in Judg 10:1–6 and 12:8–15, we are informed about people with an at-least regional function that lasted for years and perhaps even decades, and we get some hints of the wealth accumulated by their families (Judg 10:4; 12:9, 14). And, not insignificantly, we are told about Deborah: Her title as a mother in Israel signals a far-reaching, supra-regional importance and a function that aided in enabling growth and sta-

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<sup>16</sup> FINKELSTEIN, *Monarchy*, p. 58.

<sup>17</sup> FINKELSTEIN, *Monarchy*, pp. 59–60.

bility. From her central place in the hill country she adjudicated between Israelites, i.e., she cared for reliability and stability in the relations between the Israelite tribes and regions and even initiated military actions when the trade routes in Israel were blocked (Judg 4:5–6; 5:6–7).

### *3.3 Development in the Region of Philistia*

In the area of Philistine settlement there was also considerable development during the early Iron Age, especially during the eleventh century. Archaeological remains reveal that that time was a period of considerable expansion and consolidation. The Philistine cities were growing, as was the Philistine population in the coastal plain. Philistine influence expanded towards the north and the east, i.e., towards the hill country. Evidently the Philistines also expanded their control of the hill country, especially of its highways and trade routes.<sup>18</sup>

This development is confirmed by information contained in various biblical texts. We are told about the battle at Aphek (1 Samuel 4) that opened up the way towards Shiloh,<sup>19</sup> and we get information about Philistine control over the main highways and the highlands by means of their bases and fortresses along the main roads (1 Sam 10:5; 13:3, 23) and about Philistine raids on Israel (1 Sam 13:17; 14:15; 23:1).

## 4. Observations for a New Model for the Development of the Monarchy in Israel

### *4.1 The Peripheral Location of Saul's Residence*

The area of the kingdom of Saul stretched from the region of Benjamin eastwards to Gilead in Transjordan and comprised at least the central West-Jordanian highlands, i.e., the area of Manasseh and Ephraim. On the other hand, there is a far-reaching consensus that the area of the tribe of Judah did not belong to the kingdom of Saul, even if he occasionally campaigned in the south. In summary, therefore, Saul's kingdom stretched from the environs of Jerusalem northwards and from the western edge of the central Palestinian hill country towards the east. Considering this situation, the place of Saul's residence at Gibeah in the south-western corner of

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<sup>18</sup> EHRlich, Philistines, says in regard to Ashdod: "The story of Ashdod in Iron Age I is one of continual expansion" (p. 19), and concerning the overall development he summarizes: "However, the regional culture of Philistia was never again to have as wide a distribution as it had until the end of the eleventh century B.C.E." (p. 21). Cf. also DOTHAN / DOTHAN, Philistines; and WEIPPERT, Palästina.

<sup>19</sup> Concerning the problem of a subsequent destruction of Shiloh cf. KREUZER, Shiloh, p. 475.



his territory seems to be very strange (cf. the map of “Saul’s kingdom”).<sup>20</sup> Normally, we would expect the main city of a kingdom somewhere in its geographic center.



AHLSTRÖM, *History*, Map 13: Saul's Kingdom (detail)

<sup>20</sup> The widely accepted identification of this “Gibeah (of Saul)” with Tell el-Ful (see e.g. LAPP, *Fül*, pp. 445–448) has recently been challenged again by ARNOLD, *Gibeah*, who favors the identification with el-Gib. NA’AMAN, *Saul*, pp. 649–652 takes up the discussion and shows the high probability of the identification with Tel el-Ful. The question does not matter for what we want to show, as both places are situated in the south-western corner of Saul’s territory and near the important east-west and north-south highways. (The same holds true for nearby Gibeon, which – because of its later importance – is considered by AHLSTRÖM, *History*, as Saul’s residence, cf. map).

This means that for Palestine there would have been one natural candidate for the capital city: Shechem is situated in the center of the central Palestinian hill country and at the intersection of the major routes leading north to south and east to west. Quite naturally, it was the capital of the combined Canaanite/Israelite kingdom that Abimelech tried to establish (Judges 9), and later on – after the dissolution of the united Israelite monarchy – it was there that the northern kingdom was born (1 Kings 12).<sup>21</sup> Compared to Shechem or even to Shiloh, Gibeah is far away from the center and quite peripheral to the territory of Saul's kingdom. Such a peripheral position is not very suitable for a capital.

Beyond this, the situation of Gibeah is quite dangerous, at least in respect to the possibility of Philistine oppression. If there was an ongoing conflict between Saul and the Philistines, how could Saul have his residence so close to them, especially if there was a Philistine outpost near Gibeah in Michmas (1 Sam 13:23) and according to 1 Sam 10:5 and 13:3 even at Gibeah itself? As we have seen above, there are some authors who therefore conclude that the battle for Jabesh-Gilead must have taken place after the events of 1 Samuel 13–14, because Saul could not have left his residence unprotected. But even if Saul had stayed at his residence, it was quite a dangerous place, being under the watchful eyes and control of the Philistines.

There is an explanation for this somewhat eccentric and at the same time dangerous situation of the residence of Saul: We have to assume that the initial relations with the Philistines were not so dangerous and that the seeming eccentricity of Saul's residence had some advantages. The location of Saul's capital can be explained by a double perspective: on the one hand that Saul ruled as king over his Israelite territory from Gibeah to the east and to the north as far as Gilead in Transjordan, and on the other hand that Saul's kingship was accepted and overseen by the Philistines. In this regard, Saul's residence was not peripheral, but at an important position, namely at the intersection of Israelite and Philistine territory and interests.

Since Saul had not chosen Gibeah as his capital, but Gibeah was his hometown, we may put things slightly differently: Saul was a member of the local elite of Gibeah and of the tribe of Benjamin. As such, he had to accommodate himself to Philistine influence and control of the important area north of Jerusalem, while at the same time he was able to expand his rule and protection over the northern Israelite tribes. The battle at Jabesh-Gilead was one of or probably the most important military action(s) of his

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<sup>21</sup> The centrality and importance of Shechem is highlighted by ALT, *Aufstieg*, p. 146, who called it “the uncrowned queen of Palestine.”

early years.<sup>22</sup> It was at about the same time that the other northern tribes may have associated themselves with Saul or – to put it in biblical terms – have chosen him as king.<sup>23</sup>

This situation seems to have been accepted also by the Philistines. As long as the Philistines had their military outposts in or near Michmas and at different points along the highways, Saul's actions were useful for the Philistines as well. Saul could control and protect the central Palestinian and Transjordanian region. Saul was, so to say, an Israelite ruler under the eyes of the Philistines. Seen in this way, the place of Saul's residence makes good sense. Although in the south-western corner of his kingdom, it was at the intersection of the different interests and influences he had to consider.

On the one hand, Saul could build and consolidate his kingdom over the Israelite tribes and even across the Jordan, which concurrently led to a greater importance of the region of Benjamin. On the other hand, he must have had largely peaceful relations with the Philistines, a situation that

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<sup>22</sup> According to Judges 21 there were established relations and even intermarriage between the Benjaminites and the Jabeshites.

<sup>23</sup> The question, if Saul was a king or a chief, is mainly a matter of definition and is not decisive for what we want to show here. Certainly Saul's state was an "early state" at its very beginning. But this does not necessarily justify its definition as a chiefdom. There are two perspectives on the question: In the biblical tradition Saul is seen as the first king; and the texts make a clear distinction between the time of the judges and the introduction of the monarchy. The historical development was without a doubt gradual (the Hebrew Bible itself mentions earlier efforts to establish kingship, e.g., Judges 9), but considering the inner perspective is not only so-to-say a biblical approach, it is also the approach of cognitive sociology. The other perspective is the definition of modern comparative sociology. In sociological terms, an important hallmark in the development towards kingship is the means of succession: A chief is followed by another "strong man," a king is followed by his son. Also in this regard, Saul is beyond the watershed: At least for Saul, Jonathan clearly was the crown prince and successor; and Saul's hostility toward David may be the result of his defense of the "dynastic" idea. Still more important is the fact that after Saul's death, his general Abner did not usurp the kingship, but respected the dynastic idea and installed Saul's son Ishbaal as king (2 Sam 2:8–10). Cf. also SCHÄFER-LICHTENBERGER, *Early State*: "The political association would have dissolved immediately after Saul's defeat at Gilboa and his death, if his sovereignty was constituted as a chiefdom. The succession to the rule of the only surviving son of the king, Eshbaal, indicates that the rulership association was not being held together solely by loyalty toward the supreme commander ... The association was advanced beyond the era of chiefdom" (p. 98). Beyond this, we have to consider that Israel was not a primary state with an isolated development toward kingdom, but a secondary state with other, older kingdoms round about it. There were both the old Canaanite and Phoenician kingdoms and there was the king of Egypt.

brought about cultural exchange and probably also political and military “learning.”<sup>24</sup>

#### *4.2 The Metal Monopoly of the Philistines as an Indication of a Peaceful Coexistence*

At this point we can take up the above-mentioned metal monopoly of the Philistines. As we have seen, this is a piece of unintentional information. The text explains why only Saul and Jonathan had swords. At the same time we are given the information that the Israelites went down to the Philistines to have their plough-tips and other tools sharpened. There are no reasons to doubt this description. In addition, the chronological place of this information seems to be correct. A situation like this is not probable before the eleventh century and, on the other hand, the political and social situation in the tenth century evidently also was different.

The information about the Israelites going down to the Philistines to have their tools sharpened requires a peaceful situation. If there were an ongoing conflict and military clashes, the Philistines would not have rendered this service, and on the other side the Israelites certainly would have tried to get metals for their agriculture and probably also for weapons through other sources, for instance by trade with the Phoenicians or from regions in the north-eastern. As this did not happen, there must have been a peaceful situation between the Philistines and the Israelites, although on unequal terms; and the fact that there were no better weapons for Saul and his people indicates that the conflict of 1 Samuel 13–14 must have been more or less short-termed.

#### *4.3 David and the Philistines*

There is another indication of peaceful relations between Saul and the Philistines, although it is less certain because it depends on the literary and historical evaluation of the story of (Saul and) David. In 1 Samuel 16ff. we are told that David lived at the court of Saul and that he even was Saul’s son-in-law. We are told that this close relation turned into a dangerous conflict and that David left Saul’s court and finally even allied himself with the Philistines.

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<sup>24</sup> One of the things Saul most probably took over from the Philistines was a mercenary army. Cf. ALT, *Staatenbildung*, pp. 26f: “Aber auf einem anderen Gebiet ..., nämlich im Heerwesen, scheint mir eine unmittelbare Einwirkung der philistäischen Einrichtungen auf das Reich Israel so ziemlich vom Augenblick seiner Entstehung an deutlich erkennbar .... So ist es wohl begreiflich, daß Saul bald dazu überging, den Heerbann durch eine schlagfertigere und besonders für den Kleinkrieg besser geeignete Truppe zu ergänzen; die Überlieferung weiß davon, wie er sich eine ständig verfügbare Gefolgschaft heranbildete und zu Unternehmungen verwendete, an denen das Aufgebot der Stämme nicht beteiligt war.”

If this picture is historically reliable, it contains a quite surprising aspect: If there was constant war between Saul and the Philistines, and David belonged to the inner circle around and even to the family of Saul, how could he be accepted by the Philistines and entrusted with a military base controlling some of the Philistine holdings in the south?

Certainly there are several examples of dissenting persons having been given refuge in another country, especially by its overlord.<sup>25</sup> So, it is not surprising that David could find refuge with the Philistines, but it is surprising that he was appointed to the role of a military leader. If there had been an ongoing war between Saul and the Philistines and if David had belonged to the inner circle at the court of Saul, this would have been quite improbable. But, if there was peace between Saul and the Philistines, this action would make good sense: As David played a successful role at the court of Saul, he became a rival of the king and especially to the crown prince. Even if Jonathan was not aware of this problem, Saul evidently saw it and acted. David had to leave the court or, as the biblical text says, had to flee.

We have to assume that this situation developed at an advanced stage of Saul's rule. Over the years, Saul's kingdom and with it the people of Israel must have become stronger. This development certainly could not go unnoticed by the Philistines, and most probably they reacted, e.g., by intensifying their control. In this situation the conflict between David and Saul may have been quite welcome to the Philistines. By entrusting Ziklag<sup>26</sup> to David, the Philistines had a quite successful vassal in the south of Palestine, who was able to control the Beersheba Valley and the region beyond it. At the same time, the Philistines gained a counterweight and a limitation for Saul's expansion towards the south. By establishing David at Ziklag, David played a similar role in the south to that of Saul in the north. Under the eyes of the Philistines he controlled the inland territory. In the Philistine perspective, this action was a form of *divide et impera*. Evidently this new situation came about after several years of Saul's kingship and after considerable developments in the situation of the Israelite tribes.

#### 4.4 The duration of Saul's kingship

The developments we have considered above, lead to the question of the duration of Saul's reign. As is well known, we have one biblical text giv-

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<sup>25</sup> The well known examples are Jeroboam, the later king of northern Israel (1 Kgs 11:26–40), and Hadad from Edom (1 Kgs 11:14–22, 25b), who both sought refuge in Egypt.

<sup>26</sup> The identification of Ziklag is still debated, cf. KOTTER, Ziklag, p. 1090, and FRITZ, Ziklag, p. 1213. The identification with Tell esh-Sheba as proposed by FRITZ, Beitrag, seems most plausible.

ing Saul's age at his accession and the duration of his monarchy. But 1 Sam 13:1 poses several problems. Taking the verse literally, Saul would have been one year old when he became king, which is impossible,<sup>27</sup> and his reign would have lasted for two years. There is a widespread consensus that two years are not enough for Saul's kingdom. His achievements as well as his wars must have taken longer. Besides this, by the end of his life he had grownup sons at his side, and last, but not least, his rule evidently had achieved such a degree of stability that in spite of the defeat and the death of Saul and most of his sons there was a continuation of his kingdom in the person of his son Ishbaal (cf. 2 Sam 2:8–10).

Because of these observations, the early Jewish historians and the Septuagint already assumed a longer duration of Saul's rule. Most of them speak about twenty years, some about thirty or thirty-two. In recent research the duration of Saul's kingdom is estimated between nine and twenty years.<sup>28</sup> In spite of the historical probability of this assumption, we still have to acknowledge that on text-critical grounds the number two in 1 Sam 13:1 has priority.

Among modern historians of ancient Israel there is one important scholar who not only accepted the text-critical priority of the number two, but also defended its historical accuracy. Martin Noth reminds us of the fact that the second part of the story of Saul (1 Samuel 16ff.) has been widely expanded by the story of David and by some other additions. In Noth's view, the basic events came to pass much faster: Saul's victory at Jabesh (1 Samuel 11) was immediately followed by the war against the Philistines. In the battle of 1 Samuel 13–14 Saul overpowered the Philistines and from there he would have gone on to drive the Philistines out of the Israelite hill country. The dynamics of this success put Saul's kingdom on firm grounds. At first, the Philistines had to live with this new situation, but in the following year they started a massive counterattack, not by small battles in the western hill country, but by mounting a large military expedition through the Jezreel Valley and attacking Saul from the north. As is well known, this was the last year of Saul's reign.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> For different interpretations and the obvious corrections in early Jewish literature and translations, see, e.g., McCARTER, *1 Samuel*, p. 222. STOLZ, *Samuel*, p. 81, suggests that שנה בן in itself would mean something like "Saul was quite old ...." This could be taken further, since the infinitive construct במלכו not necessarily mean "at his becoming king" (as it certainly does in 2 Sam 2:10), but may mean "in his being king/ruling as king."

<sup>28</sup> Nine years was suggested by JEPSEN / HANHART, *Chronologie*, who assumed a metathesis from תשע (nine) to שתי (two). Suggestions for 20, 22, or even 32 years are evidently based in different ways on the number two.

<sup>29</sup> NOTH, *Geschichte*, pp. 153f.

In my opinion Noth's view is basically correct. If Saul and the Israelites were able to overcome and drive the Philistines out in the manner related in 1 Samuel 13 and 14, the Philistines would not have tried to regain control by waging many small battles in the hills, but by launching a large-scale attack against the heartland of the Israelite tribes. But – against Noth – these two years were not the *only* but rather the *last* two years of Saul's reign.<sup>30</sup> Before the great conflict with the Philistines, there were years of peaceful development and of peaceful – although unequal! – relations with them. Very probably Saul's kingship did indeed last for about fifteen to twenty years. Saul's rule was accepted and overseen by the Philistines. At the same time, his reign was a period of important developments among the Israelites, both in terms of economic and agricultural life and in regard to military (e.g., mercenary troop) and political structures as well.

These developments gradually changed the balance between the Philistines and the Israelites. According to the First Book of Samuel, the battle at Aphek (1 Samuel 4) with its defeat of the Israelites had led to the establishment of Philistine control over the highlands. As we have seen, Saul began his career and his kingship under the eyes and the control of the Philistines. But, over the course of time, the situation changed and Saul and the Israelites became stronger. The old dependencies did not seem adequate any longer.

This picture may even explain an interesting detail in 1 Sam 13:3: According to this verse it was not Saul but Jonathan who started the conflict with the Philistines through his attack against the Philistine outpost at Gibeah. It would be quite understandable if Saul had become used to Philistine predominance, although it did not any longer reflect the new developments and the strength of Israel. Probably it was Jonathan, the crown prince, who realized the discrepancy and who no longer wanted to accept Philistine domination. Thus, Jonathan started the conflict with the Philistines, and Saul had to take it up (cf. 1 Sam 13:4).

## 5. A New Picture of the Developments in the Eleventh Century BCE and the Rise of Kingship in Israel

### 5.1 *The Coexistence of Israelites and Philistines in the Eleventh Century*

As is well known, the Philistines came into the southern coastal plain at the beginning of the twelfth century BCE. After some time of consolidation, they started an expansion around 1100. Recent archaeological research shows an expansion of the Philistine settlements during the eleventh

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<sup>30</sup> For further discussion, see KREUZER, *Jahre*.

century and also a strong increase in population size. Evidently during this period the Philistines also expanded towards the hill country and began to take control over the central and southern Palestinian highlands.

According to 1 Samuel 4, probably between the middle and the last third of the eleventh century, the Israelites suffered a serious defeat near Aphek. They even lost the Ark of the Covenant, their most important cultic object, and the Philistines gained access to the Israelite highlands. Most probably they gradually expanded their control over the other mountain regions and the important highways. According to some notes in 1 Sam 10:5; 13:3, 23, they established their outposts in Gibeah or Geba, at the mountain pass at Michmas, and also in the south. From these outposts and through military patrols they established their military and economic control of the highlands.

At the same time there was a considerable development among the Israelites. The Israelites expanded their settlements and their agricultural exploitation of the different regions, which in time led to more economic exchange and to the establishment of an organizing elite.

### *5.2 Saul as King of the Israelites*

By the end of the eleventh century, at the time of Saul son of Kish from one of the important families of the tribe of Benjamin, there was a further development and stabilization. Gibeah, the hometown of Saul, was situated near one of the important crossroads: There was the important route from the north to the south, especially as an inner-Israelite connection, and there was the east-west road and trade route from the coastal plain, traversing the highlands just north of Jerusalem, leading down to Jericho and across the Jordan up to the Transjordanian plateau and connecting with what was later called the King's Highway. The circumstances of Philistine control over the highlands challenged the Benjaminite elite to accommodate themselves to the Philistines, and evidently they were successful in this. Saul's role and authority as a leader developed under the eyes of the Philistines. The liberation of Jabesh-Gilead led to a new development. Because of their old relationship, the people of Jabesh sought help from the Benjaminites. Saul's victory demonstrated the importance of such forceful leadership. His success on the city's behalf and consequently similar expectations from other tribes (or the tribal league) led to the coronation of Saul as king and to the introduction of the monarchy in Israel.

At the same time, this new development was accepted and probably even welcomed by the Philistines, because in this manner – at least in an indirect way – they extended their political control beyond the Jordan River into Gilead. Saul's kingdom expanded from his home town in Benjamin towards the north and the east. Although Saul's home and residence



was at the southwestern edge of his kingdom, it lay at an important position, namely at the intersection between the area of his kingdom and the region of Philistine dominance.

The years of Saul's reign saw the intensification of economic and political developments in Israel. Agricultural production, economic exchange and trade were established on a stable and peaceful basis. Exchange and trade were not limited to the Israelite area, but took place also between Philistines and Israelites, especially those living in the western hill country. Although the Philistines had control over their production and use, the Israelites could use metal tools to improve their agricultural production. With the agricultural surplus they could afford other items in exchange and last, but not least, the acquisition and maintenance of their metal tools.

Probably there was also some exchange in other areas as well. As far as we know, and as we can see by archaeological research, cultural development in the coastal plain was ahead of that of the highlands. In some way the situation of the Late Bronze Age with its Egyptian control and domination of the highlands from the coastal plain, especially from Gaza, continued during the time of the Philistines.<sup>31</sup> The leading role of the Philistines is evident in metal production and use. Probably there were also other things the Israelites took over from the Philistines, an example of which was the establishment of a mercenary corps. The establishment of Saul's kingdom went hand in hand with the establishment of a mercenary army. Saul could watch the Philistine mercenaries and their efficiency. A standing army is one of the major distinctions between the structures of the monarchy and the time of the judges. The importance of the military corps was already evident during the reign of Saul and would be decisive for the next Israelite king, David.

### 5.3 *The Establishment of David in Ziklag – “divide et impera”*

The developments during the reign of King Saul changed the balance of power between the Israelites and the Philistines. The former state of dependency no longer corresponded to the new political reality. It was increasingly felt to be unjustified and unacceptable.

Without a doubt, the Philistines would have recognized the Israelite tendency towards autonomy and would have reacted to it. One way to react would be to expand military control through military raids. Another reaction would be to attempt to calm the situation by establishing other political facts on the ground. Evidently the Philistines used the conflict between Saul and David – or was it only the ambitions of David? – to establish a political limitation on Saul's power by installing David as a military leader

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<sup>31</sup> For this situation of late Canaanite / Philistine coastal city-culture and Israelite inland village-culture, see WEIPPERT, *Palästina*, pp. 383ff. and 393ff.

in Ziklag and by giving him control over a large chunk of southern Palestinian territory. In its essential configuration, the situation of David was similar to that of Saul. Both were local rulers overseen by the Philistines. The difference was that Saul had a closer relationship to the Israelite tribes and the people of his territory, while David evidently started his career as a mercenary leader.

#### 5.4 Saul's War with the Philistines

In spite of efforts to retain the *status quo ante*, a conflict was ignited between the Philistines and the Israelites. As we have seen, it was probably not Saul, but rather his son and crown prince Jonathan who started the conflict. The situation of dependence had become inadequate. Israel had grown stronger and was able to overcome the Philistines and drive them out of the hill country. These events encompassed Saul's last two years as king. Although the Philistines did not accept the initial success of the Israelites, they did not attempt to advance into the mountains through the western valleys again. Rather, they launched a large military action so-to-say through the backdoor of Israelite territory. They went up the Jezreel Valley and fought against Saul and the Israelites at Mount Gilboa. The Israelites lost the battle, and Saul and most of his sons lost their lives. But the Israelite defeat was not the end; political and social developments in Israel suffered a setback, but they could not be stymied. The amount of consolidation and acceptance that kingship in Israel had reached can be seen by the installation of Ishbaal, the surviving son of Saul, as king, albeit only in the eastern part of his father's kingdom. The most important element is that David could take over Saul's kingdom and build upon what Saul had left. On this basis and by means of his own achievements he was finally able to change the balance of power between the Israelites and the Philistines (2 Samuel 5).

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