

Portrayals of Economic Exchange in the Book of Kings is Roger S. Nam's doctoral dissertation condensed into book form. Its aim is to explore ancient Israel's economies using an anthropological approach to the biblical text and, through literary descriptions, to investigate the economic life and structure of ancient Israel as well as to reconstruct the social-historical reality of that period. In the opening chapters, Nam surveys the various mechanisms of exchange presented in the book of Kings, using Weippert's Blockmodel regarding the book's redactions and historicity, and Polanyi's paradigm of exchange as a methodological control. In these chapters he injects new, intriguing insight and his methodology is interesting and innovative. He is to be commended for breathing fresh life into a subject that has turned scholarly stale and musty over the years. However, the remainder of the book suffers from a serious lack of up-to-date research, as well as from significant issues with regard to scholarly literature.

In "Symmetrical Reciprocity in the Book of Kings" (ch. 3), the author describes Solomon's character as a great and powerful monarch, based on the reciprocity embedded in the stories of his diplomatic relations with Hiram of Tyre (1 Kgs 5:15–32; 9:11–15) and the Queen of Sheba (1 Kgs 10:1–10). He emphasizes the Solomon stories first and foremost as stories with reciprocity as a diplomatic theme. This view is based on parallels from the Late Bronze period (such as the el-Amarna texts, the letter from Aphek, and archaeological and textual finds from Ugarit), and assumes that despite the different social settings and the chronological gap between the two periods—a gap all the more significant when one considers the time when the biblical description was actually written—they reflect nonetheless a palatial economy that shares certain characteristics. Nam also sees reciprocity as a diplomatic theme in the story of Hezekiah and Merodach-Baladan (2 Kgs 20:12–15; Isa 39:1–4). But in this story, reciprocity also appears to symbolize the king's low status, expressed in prophetic stories with the prophet's refusal to accept gifts from kings (1 Kgs 13:1–10, 11–32; 2 Kgs 5:8–27; 8:7–11), while accepting gifts from the common people (1 Kgs 17:8–15).

Chapter 4 ("Asymmetrical Redistribution in the Book of Kings") focuses on the mechanism of redistribution of countable material goods in the form of tributes, taxes, or labor sent from the periphery to the center. After reviewing the archaeological evidence of redistribution during the formative periods of Israel from the purported United Monarchy to the time of the Babylonian destruction (the main part of this chapter, pp. 104–31, and see below), the literary use of descriptions of asymmetrical redistribution is the background for the list of Solomon's twelve governors (1 Kgs 4:7–20), the described conscription of labor (1 Kgs 5:27–32), the king's enormous livestock sacrifices brought to the temple (1 Kgs 8:62–63), as well as Solomon's building projects (1 Kgs 9:15–32). The first three, along with other descriptions, are used to glorify Solomon (pp. 135–6). In contrast, the description of Solomon's building projects, together with other descriptions in 1 Kgs 9–12, are considered as negative characterizations of the king, resulting in the schism (pp. 138–9). Other descriptions of asymmetrical redistribution are connected to later stages in the book of Kings, usually in order to pay tribute to threatening powers (e.g., 1 Kgs 14:6; 2 Kgs 12:17–19), all described as outcomes of YHWH's judgment (pp. 147–50). In connection with the previous chapter, dealing with reciprocity, Nam points to the use of redistribution not only to pay tributes, but also to gain surpluses, later used for reciprocity exchange (pp. 150–3).

Chapter 5 ("Market Exchange in the Book of Kings") deals with the third category in Polanyi's theory—market exchange. The author (p. 163) interestingly shows that the text emphasizes the description of Solomon's kingdom as an economic empire that needs no market exchange (compared to the descriptions of the kings of Assyria as receiving gifts, but never exchanging commodities). As for the divided monarchy, market exchange is mentioned in the story of the imposing of markets in Damascus (1 Kgs 20:34), the sale of oil by the widow (2 Kgs 4:1–7), the description of prices in the story of the siege on Samaria (2 Kgs 6:24), and the possible use of silver to buy products.

The major problems of the book begin in Chapter 6 ("A Social Analysis of Exchange in the Book of Kings"), where the author describes the complexity of the exchange in Kings, pointing to the mixed character of the economy of ancient Israel. The author deals with the existence of an informal economy, a local economy, and an international economy, all based on the preceding chapters. Most of this chapter and the remainder of the book are based on archaeological and historical background; unfortunately, these sections involve a simplified reading and dating of the biblical text.

In matters of archaeology, the problems originate mainly from the lack of references to recent scholarship. For example, the author has, legitimately, followed A. Mazar's "Modified Chronology" (p. 106), while rejecting the "Low Chronology" (although referring to the wrong paper; cf. p. 116, n. 54). Yet, the discussion completely ignores the advances of the chronology debate and the dozens of papers published over the past eighteen years. For example, while delineating Iron IIA as 980–840/830 B.C.E., the entire presentation is misleading; the excavations at Tell el-Safai/Gath have shown that the Iron IIA was at its peak in the second half of the ninth century, while the entire period should be divided into two sub-periods: "early Iron IIA" and "late Iron IIA."[3]

Moreover, the archaeological overview (pp. 106–31) presents in detail the results of various excavations in Israel, but it is based mainly on Mazar's 1990 monograph[4] and on articles in the 1993 New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land this encyclopedia has been updated since 1993 and it is difficult to understand why the author chose to use the oldest edition, which involves data of no current value to the scientific community. It goes without saying that, even in just two short decades, the archaeological landscape has advanced greatly; and final publications of many sites have sometimes completely overturned several historical conclusions. It is unforgivable for a book published in 2012 to date Arad (pp. 108–9, 125) based on Aharoni's study, which dates Stratum XII to the Iron I and Stratum X to the Iron IIA, overlooking the reports by Herzog and Singer-Avitz in which Strata XII–XI are
dating in the Persian period. Indeed, it is a period when the kingdoms of Israel and Judah had developed economies (p. 118), but the picture Nam presents is distorted: for example, the list of fortresses he presents as “forming a chain of defense centered around the Arad fortress” (p. 120) is actually a mixture of several periods combined. It includes the early eighth century unfortified Israelite trading station at Kuntillet Ajrud,[8] the late eighth century fortresses of Kadesh-Barnea and Tell el-Kheleifeh,[9] and also the late seventh century fortress of Horvat Uza.[10] Needless to say, these four were never part of a unified system, and furthermore, only the seventh century Horvat Uza is well accepted as representing the Judahite administration.

The lmlk stamped handles, which Nam deals with solely in their role in preparations for the Assyrian assault[11] is another poorly treated issue. Nam’s discussion overlooks the major scholarly debate regarding these stamps, according to which the lmlk system was mainly an administrative and economic enterprise of the Judahite regime.[12] By sidestepping this debate, Nam misses important evidence on the economic development of late eighth century Judah. Other important evidence that he misses is the development in Judah during the Iron IIB of the standardization of pottery types[13] the new system of marked weights,[14] and the production of storage jars that were larger than those previously used.[15]

Nam’s treatment of the Iron IIC and his description of the settlement pattern in the seventh century (p. 127–31) is a kind of conninging of errors relying on secondary sources that presents a misleading historical picture of the period. He writes that fortified centers of Judah were “completely rebuilt in the wake of Sennacherib’s destructions,” and designed to concentrate the population “into fewer cities” (p. 128). Among the sites he lists are En-Gedi, Tell Jemmeh, Tell el-Hesi, and Tel Beersheba. But En Gedi (Tel Goren V) was dated by the excavators to the second half of the seventh century[16] Tell Beersheba was not reestablished after the 701 destruction;[17] and the Assyrian centers at Tell Jemmeh and Tell el-Hesi, which may have been founded already in the late eighth century, were not part of Judah.[18] Furthermore, the following description of the Philistine coast suffers from the same problem, for Ekron is curiously described as “the second largest city in Judah” (p. 129), which runs against all of the excavators’ publications.[19] On the other hand, Ashkelon rose to power only during the late seventh century.[20] Moreover, other crucial evidence from the late seventh century administration is missing: the vast amount of epigraphic finds from Lachish II, Arad VII–VI, Tel Ira VI, Horvat Uza, and other sites, are all incorrectly dated by the author to the eighth century (see above); and the rosette stamped handle system is absent from the discussion regarding the late seventh century (though referred to in the previous discussion regarding the lmlk system).

As for the historical implications of the biblical description, a major lacuna is the absence of any discussion, not even a brief overview, of the enormous studies dealing with the concept of the United Monarchy.[21] Among the handful of notes regarding this issue, the author deals with it briefly (p. 133), without any reference except to A. Mazar’s paper regarding the chronology debate.[22]

Nam’s specific historical reconstructions are based on a combination of biblical narratives and archaeological records. His discussion suffers from what turns into an over-generalized view of Iron Age II. Although the term “United Monarchy” is constantly used, the author’s uncritical reading of the biblical texts combined with this broad-spectrum discussion of the archaeological record produces a schematic picture of the economy of Israel and Judah; the picture includes elements from countless periods, although the author notes that Solomon’s days were colored by late-monarchic writers (e.g., p. 153). Prominent among these is the historicity attributed to the contact between Solomon and Hiram, itself based on “various textual sources” that describe the commercial activity of the Phoenicians “surrounding the time of Solomon” (p. 81). Yet these sources span across a period of 500 years or more (from Ugarit to Esarhaddon of Assyria), a period too broad to be used in order to reconstruct a historical background for the short time-frame of the days of Solomon. Furthermore, the assumed “economic expansion of Tyre in the wake of Egyptian and Philistine decline as well as the instability of the Aramaean states” is based solely on the Solomon-Hiram narrative, as well as on studies that are based on this narrative (p. 81, n. 47); archaeological studies (such as radiocarbon dating of the foundation of Kition and Carthage), however, point to the late ninth century as the date of the Phoenician expansion, presumably under Aramaean auspices.[23] Elsewhere (p. 157), Nam argues for Solomon’s control over the international trade routes, based on the interpretation of Edom’s hostility regarding this control (1 Kgs 11:14–15), which in turn is supported by the description of the possession of Arabian gold by Solomon (1 Kgs 11:14–22). Needless to say, this is a fine example of circular argument. In light of the above, there is hardly any evidence mentioned in the book to support the historical connection of the Solomonic kingdom within the international trade system; on the contrary—everything points to the mid- to late-ninth century B.C.E. as the earliest date for such activity, while the literature in which it is reflected is itself from a much later period.

In contrast, the discussion on the visit of the Queen of Sheba concludes with the notion of its legendary character and argues for a post-exilic date (pp. 86–7). Yet, the Arabian trade was stimulated during the late eighth century B.C.E., while Judah was able to participate in it only during the monarchical period (see above). The legendary character of the episode does not date the story, but rather the historical background of the late monarchical period that brought about the birth of the tale.[24]

On the other hand, other narratives were considered in the book as evidence of the monarchical period, although they were written in the post-exilic era. (1) The simplified treatment of the Elijah-Elisha narratives is evident, for it is based solely on studies from the 1970s and early 1980s (pp. 99–100). The entire literature of the last three decades is missing, especially the German scholarship (expect for a general reference to Otto and Achenbach[25]), although it becomes more and more common among biblical scholars that only a small part of these narratives reflect a monarchical-period reality.[26] (2) The discussion of the story of Hezekiah and Merodach-Baladan (pp. 87–88) suffers likewise from insufficient reference to scholarly literature. It omits the various studies that have challenged the historicity of this account.[27] viewing it instead as an exilic or post-exilic composition[28] as a matter of fact, language and ideology point to a dating in the Persian period.[29]
In light of the above and in contrast to the presented reconstruction in the book, the archaeological records show the economic advantage of the Northern Kingdom as early as the ninth century, while the south enters this position only in the eighth century B.C.E. This was somehow noted also by Nam (p. 179), while in other places he concurs with the problematic thesis of the historicity of Solomon’s kingdom and economy (e.g., p. 84). Instead, the detailed economy described and its literary reflections should be dated to the late eighth century, and project a later reality into the period of Solomon’s reign.

To conclude, the book is the first study of its kind addressing through literary descriptions the complexity and diversity of the economic and social structure of monarchical Israel and Judah. Its importance lies in the way in which it illuminates the literary uses of various economic ideas and motifs in order to portray the different narratives; regardless of the historicity of the descriptions and their portrayal of economic ideas and motifs, these stories reflect the daily life of the writers in the late monarchical period. Despite the shortcomings discussed here, this alone makes the book an invaluable resource in reconstructing the economic exchange of late monarchical Israel.

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See recently N. Naʾaman ("The Israelite-Judahite Struggle for the Patrimony of Ancient Israel," *Biblica* 91 [2010], 1–23), with further literature.

A. Mazar, "The Debate over the Chronology of the Iron Age in the Southern Levant."


A. Rofé, *Introduction to the Literature of the Hebrew Bible* (JBS, 8; Jerusalem: Carmel, 2006).