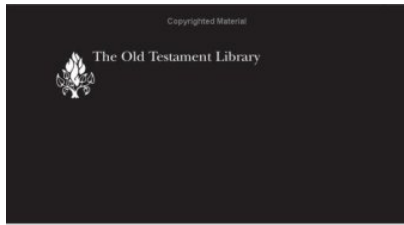
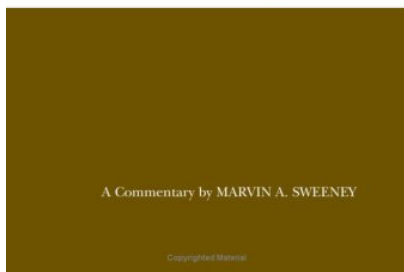


RBL 10/2008



## I & II Kings



**Sweeney, Marvin A.**

### *I and II Kings: A Commentary*

Old Testament Library

Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007. Pp. xxxi + 476.  
Hardcover. \$49.95. ISBN 0664220843.

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Assume you have to teach an undergraduate course on Kings, and you are supposed to cover both the literary and the historical aspects; which three commentaries would you advise your students to consult? There are still Würthwein and Cogan-Tadmor, but for the third? The two Berit Olam volumes are excellent but do not serve your present purpose; V. Fritz is too short, Mulder too thick, incomplete, and historically aberrant. Could the new commentary by Marvin Sweeney fill the gap?

With a little less than five hundred pages for all of Kings, the format is just about right, as is the length and depth of the introduction (ca. 10 percent of the text). But then the objections start to amass. Both in its positions and in its selection of references, the commentary is very much a thing past biblical scholarship, hardly addresses the present debates, and cannot expect too much of a future. Kings tells the history of the Israelite and Judean monarchies more or less correctly (including Josiah's impossible cultic centralization), if from a specific ideological point of view, and the text was finalized during the exile. Concerning Naboth's vineyard (1 Kgs 21), the reader is referred to the recent excavations (247 n. 66) but without being told that the Omride military camp found by Ussishkin and Woodhead cannot possibly serve as the venue for the plot of 1 Kgs 21 (no room for vineyards there). In his interpretation of the story, Sweeney follows

Hentschel, S. Otto, O. H. Steck, M. C. White, and Campbell; it is regrettable that the reader is not referred to the alternative position as expressed by A. Rofé and E. Blum, who both point out the Late Biblical Hebrew elements in 1 Kgs 21 which, in this reviewer's view, exclude a preexilic origin of that particular story and argue, in general, that Kings was not finalized before the end of the Persian period, together with the rest of the "Prophets." For Sweeney, there is an exilic, a Josianic, and a Hezekian edition of the Deuteronomistic History; again, the reader is left unaware that a growing number of biblical scholars reads Kings without recourse to any Deuteronomistic Histories.

So is this another failed candidate for the position of "third recommendable commentary" on Kings? I do not think so. The strength of the commentary lies not in the global, literary, and historical theories that it endorses but in its detailed observations and explanations of the text. Sweeney is absolutely right to identify the laws of Num 27:1–11; 36:1–12 as the point of departure for the Naboth story plot (249). We are dealing with postexilic exegesis of the Torah, not the confrontation of "Canaanite" versus "Israelite" law/custom in the ninth century.

As far as the overall structure of Kings is concerned, Sweeney sees a linear sequence of thirty-eight "regnal accounts" and rejects (8 n. 9) the tripartite composition that most commentators (including this reviewer) favor: the "united kingdom(s)" (1 Kgs 1–11), the "divided kingdoms" (1 Kgs 12–2 Kgs 17), and the "remaining kingdom" (2 Kgs 18–25). Again, Sweeney seasons a one-sided position (there is no reason not to apply both proposed structures to Kings; the polyphony of the biblical text also applies to its various levels of structurings) with a very good observation: for him, Jeroboam's story is still part and parcel of the "regnal account of Solomon ben David." If one does not want to extend Solomon's "regnal account" beyond the king's death, a five-part segmentation of the text becomes feasible:

- A: Jerusalem: head of the "united kingdoms"—1 Kgs 1–11
- B: Transition: from Jerusalem to Samaria—1 Kgs 12–15
- C: tale of two kingdoms, and two cities—1 Kgs 16–2 Kgs 16
- B': Transition: from two kingdoms back to one—1 Kgs 17
- A': Jerusalem: head of the remaining kingdom—1 Kgs 18–25

It is on the surface only that Kings is a story of kings and prophets, monarchies and people. The real focus of Kings is the more or less hidden agenda of the whole prophetic corpus: Jerusalem with the Second Temple and the Torah. But this cannot possibly be elaborated in detail within the limits of a review; the argument will have to wait for the completion of another commentary on Kings (scheduled for Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament).

For the time being, I will recommend Sweeney's commentary together with Würthwein and Cogan-Tadmor.