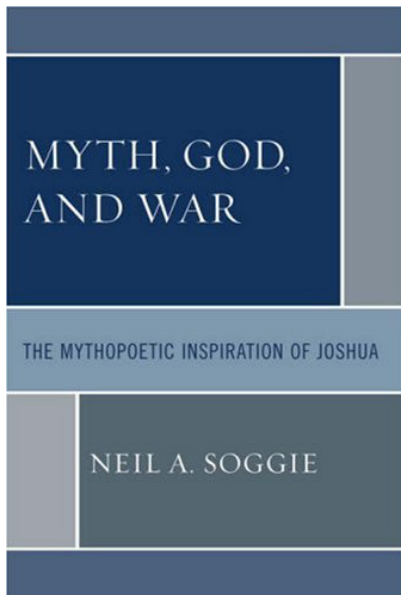


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**Soggie, Neil A.**

***Myth, God, and War: The Mythopoetic Inspiration of Joshua***

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In this new study, the author of *The Mythic Mind: The History and Philosophy of Psychology* (Word Alive Press, 2004) brings his expertise knowledge in cognitive sciences to bear on the literary formation of the narrative of the conquest in the book of Joshua (chs. 1–12). Combining neuropsychology with literary criticism, Soggie seeks to “unscramble” the complicated process of transmission and transformation of oral tribal legends of the conquest into the written texts that were eventually collected and assembled by the Deuteronomistic authors/redactors. The interdisciplinary approach of this study promises to “blur the lines of knowledge” and “stretch the assumptions of biblical formation,” which reflects the positive trend of an increasing number of studies on Josh 1–12 to draw strength from various humanistic and social-scientific disciplines. Indeed, before us is probably the first attempt to write a “phenomenology” of Joshua’s conquest narrative, and now that a path has been paved, I hope others will follow it.

The book opens with two short “prefaces” and an equally short “introduction” that sketch the goal of the study and the methodology employed. Soggie borrows the methodological tools necessary for “delving into the psyche of the biographers of a nation” (32) from the neuropsychology of orality. In so doing, he hopes to identify the “relics of remembrance” and the “historical truth” in the Deuteronomistic historiography of the conquest. The

search for the “inspiration event”—something that may have occurred and served as the source of the conquest mythology—within the written narrative is the primary concern of the book (7, 13).

Soggie starts by indicating that the biblical tradition itself provides a chronology for the conquest (1 Kgs 6:1; Acts 13:19–20) somewhere around 1400 B.C.E. Since the “mythic tradition” itself points to this period, Soggie agrees to look for “some inspirational episode” during this time framework (9). Thus he enters a hotly disputed scholarly territory, but Soggie is no novice in this field, as his earlier publication, “Origins Revisited: Refining the Theory of the Conquest Before It Is Too Late” (*Journal of Biblical Studies* 3/1 [2003]: 12–21), indicates. To place himself vis-à-vis the most prominent theories regarding Israel’s emergence in the land (e.g., “Conquest by Imagination,” “Peaceful Migration,” “Indigenous Revolt”), Soggie expresses his frustration with the way each theory relates the existence of Israel to the archeological data (9–10). In this, as in other cases, Soggie chooses the middle ground between a minimalist and maximalist view of the conquest. He knows that the text of Josh 1–12 is “biased,” yet believes, somewhat positivistically, that one can reach an objective sense of past historical events only if one is sufficiently aware of ancient literature’s modus operandi and the circumstances and assumptions of its authors/editors (13). An antique literary document such as the book of Joshua, not unlike any other artifact from the past, must be interpreted in light of archeological evidence, narrative information, theories of cultural assimilation, and economic (pastoralist) lifestyle (17).

Chapter 4 (“The Psychology of Orality”) is the most theoretical (neuroscientific). It deals with the question of how the human brain retains oral information, what changes occur in the transition to writing, and how transmission can take place without distortion. Soggie indicates that the more brain areas are involved, the better the retention of the past. In other words, the more physical areas are involved in constructing the past, the less likely it will fall victim to confabulations (39). Soggie seeks to challenge the minimalist camp (Lemche, Thompson) who believe that, since oral legend changes from one generation to the next, the Joshua myth must be completely “fiction” (38). While rejecting the claims that the conquest stories are completely fictive, Soggie does not believe that they are “true” in the historical sense either, but that they relate to some *inspiration event* that, once absorbed as “myth” offering a worldview (*Weltanschauung*), provides a schema for the organization of individual and collective memories. Since change is likely to occur in the transmission, some of which is necessary if myth is to “work,” there are, however, societal strategies, such as celebration of feast, festivals, and rituals, for limiting change in mythic transmission (29–41). Liturgy and ritual recall act as controllers of oral confabulation, making oral transmission more predictable and self-sufficient. Outside of this framework, as in the informal, group-discussion type of communication, conflicting accounts about the past are more likely to occur (43–49).

The search for the inspirational event continues in chapter 5, where an engagement with the text's structure is finally provided. Following the general outline of a double Deuteronomistic redaction for Josh 1–12, Soggie divides the conquest narrative along two layers: D-1, the main and authoritarian composition layer—1:1ab(a), 2–5ab; 2:1–9a, 12ab(a), 13–16; 3:5, 10b, 16b; 6:2, 16b, 20a(a)b(b), 22, 23a(a), 25a(a)b; 8:1–2a(a)b, 3ab(a), 4–5a, 6a(a)b, 7, 9a(a), 11, 16, 18–19a; 9:3–5, 8–9a(a), 12–13, 15a(a); 10:1a(a)b(a), 2–4a, 5, 8–9a, 10a; 11:1, 5, 6a, 8a(a), 18, 23a(a)b); and D-2, a later redactional layer reflecting the community-discussion period—1:1b(b), 5b(a), 6–18; 2:9b–11, 12b(b), 17–21, 24b; 3:1–4, 6–10a, 11–16a, 17; 4:1–24; 5:1–5; 6:1, 3–16a, 17–19, 20a(b)b(a), 21, 23a(b), 24, 25a(b), 26–27; 7:1–26; 8:2a(b), 3b(b), 5b, 6a(b)b, 8, 9a(b)b, 10, 11b–15, 17–18, 19b–35; 9:1–2; 6–7, 9a(b)–11, 14, 15a(b)b–c; 10:1a, 4b, 6–7, 9b, 10b–43; 11:2–4, 6b, 8, 9–17, 19–22, 23a(b); 12:1–24; 13:1–33.). He then indicates the mnemonic quality of the rhythmic structure of the D-1 layer that contains nine refined cycles (cycle 1 [Josh 1]; cycles 2 and 3 [Josh 2]; cycles 4 and 5 [Josh 6]; cycle 6 [Josh 8]; cycle 7 [Josh 9]; cycle 8 [Josh 10]; revised cycle 9 [Josh 11]) and a fourfold structure within each cycle (“contextual statement,” “transitional statement,” “narrative,” and “action”). This mnemonically structured legend of the conquest may have constituted the original “source legend” (SL-1) behind the D-1 layer. The *mouvance* of SL-1 from oral to written predates Josiah, since the mnemonic structure still remains even after Josiah’s revisionism. It must have been put into writing, then, no later than 750 B.C.E. (79). In contrast, D-2 contains a less discernable pattern. It is, not unlike D-1, made up of a number of pre-Deuteronomistic sub-sources, but independent of the D-1 account.

Returning in chapter 6 to the question of “historical fact” within Joshua’s conquest, Soggie develops an outline of events in six stages to which the SL-1 bears witness obliquely. In this historical schema, 1550 B.C.E. (the destruction of Jericho) marks the first stage, while 1250 B.C.E. (sedentarization shown by the absence of pig remains at sacral sites such as Shechem) the last stage. Soggie reconstructs this period of three hundred years by interpreting a wealth of archaeological evidence from the vantage point of Israel’s emergence from within Canaan (following Finkelstein), not from outside, as the “conquest” theory suggests. Finally, Soggie settles for the sixteenth-century B.C.E.-destruction of Jericho and the gaining control of the hinterland regions as the inspiration event of the D-1 layer, which had gone a long process of oral crafting before attaining its mnemonic fourfold structure. On the other hand, the inspiration event of D-2 is the thirteenth/twelfth-century B.C.E. conquest of both southern and northern cities and the burning of major cities such as Hazor. This revisionist layer, “utterly obsessed with Mosaic abolitionist tones” (117), was formalized much faster by the liturgical life of “Israel.” Over another period of three hundred years both legends were written down

and, eventually, (during the Josianic Age and later in exile) were joined by the Deuteronomists, who thus “built the past” by making a synthesis of the two sources.

Anyone reading Soggie’s book will soon realize the depth of this study. With much of its potential resulting from combining neurosciences with literary criticism comes, however, the risk of insufficiently expanding in each direction. This is often obvious throughout the study. Particularly weak is the sociology of Soggie’s transmission schema for the inspiration event, which could have been nicely enhanced by entering into dialogue with Maurice Halbwachs and others working on the *cadres sociaux de la mémoire*. The danger of walking the middle ground in the conquest scholarship is that both camps (“minimalists” and “maximalists”) will probably be unsatisfied with Soggie’s conclusions. On their part, the editors could have done more to increase the quality of the book. A line from footnote 115 (p. 89) is not visible. There is a incorrectly spaced comma on the same page, a few incorrectly spaced sentences on page 103 and 105, a miswritten name in footnote 25 (p. 22), and two footnote numbers (5 and 6) in the body of the text that are out of size (pp. 2–3). A careful proofreading should have eliminated these errors. Also, a more accurate index of authors (e.g., all references to R. Hess are wrong) and an attached list of definitions of cognitive terminology would aid the reading process, especially for those less familiar with neurosciences. These aside, the major contribution of Soggie’s book consists in opening up an unexplored theoretical battleground for explaining how Joshua’s conquest narrative reflects, as much as creates, the past it tells.