Searching for the Lost Donkeys (1 Sam 9)

Naratyvinės analizės taikymas kalbant apie Samuelio knygas leidžia naujai suvokti Sauliaus atėjimą į Izraelio sostą, t. y. geriau suprasti monarchijos ištakas, kadangi jos pateikiamos „visažinio“ pasakotojo. Istorija apie prarastus asilus vaidina ypatingą vietą pasakojime, nes ji „įveda“ Saulių į pranašų pasaulį, kuriam vadovauja Samuelis. Iš kitos pusės, naratyvinė analizė aiškiai parodė, kaip dieviškasis pro-monarchinis apreiškimas Samueliui (1 Sam 9, 15–16) suformuoja centrinę nagrinėjamo pasakojimo fragmento dalį (1 Sam 9).

The application of narrative analysis to the Books of Samuel makes it possible to see in a new light the ascent of Saul to the throne of Israel, i.e., to understand better the beginnings of monarchy as they are exposed by the omniscient narrator. The story about the lost donkeys plays a special role in the narrative, as it provides the background for introducing Saul to the prophetic world governed by Samuel. The divine pro-monarchic revelation to Samuel (1 Sam 9, 15–16) structurally represents the central part of the passage.

Preface

In the biblical exegesis, the application of the synchronic methodology of the narrative analysis\(^1\) to the Books of Samuel has resulted in a number of excellent highly academic publications, for example, the voluminous research accomplished by J. P. Fokkelman\(^2\). However, it is always possible to discover something new through the attentive re-reading of a number of passages while focusing on some details put into the foreground by the narrator. The object of the present research is the narrative of Saul before his enthronement, more precisely, during his search for the lost donkeys. This passage plays a special role in the story, as it provides the background for introducing Saul to the prophetic world governed by Samuel.

After establishing the role of the donkeys in the background, two questions arise: what is the central part of the passage? And how the message of this central part connects to the other narrative structures? The examination of the time sequence will represent one of our main tasks. If we can detect a significant departure from linear time structure, we can examine how important the passage is in the eyes of the narrator, and therefore how important the temporal digression is for the understanding of the whole story. Especially
significant it becomes when the conclusions from the narrative analysis are confronted with the results of the diachronic analysis.

As the J. L. Ska rightly emphasises, there is no incompatibility between synchronic and diachronic methodology, for example, between narrative analysis and historical criticism. Therefore, we can reasonably assume that the narrative analysis complements synchronically to the understanding of the tension between pro- and antimonarchic ideologies represented by different diachronic layers of the Books of Samuels. Based on this assumption, we will follow our aim by going through the footsteps of Saul in his search for donkeys on narrative level. At the same time, we will confront our findings with the pro- or anti-monarchic layers of the passage. Since the logical and chronological sequence of the narrative is of outmost importance to the reader, an ideologically pregnant flashback or flash-forward as the structural element becomes a moving force for the development of the plot and even more so for emphasising the crucial ideological points of the story, as they are revealed by the narrator. Because of that, the narrative analysis is especially appropriate, since it allows following the plot, and at the same time helps to explore the time structure of the narrative, especially the chronological sequence of the passage.

The narrative analysis, fully legitimate as a method, however hardly represents a typical empirical research. The findings cannot be fully tested through the A. D. de Groot’s empirical cycle, or considered a definite proof on behalf of the argument. Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to advance the hypothesis that the narrative analysis complements the diachronic exegesis through bringing to the foreground important logical and temporal narrative structures. Often, they are digressions from the linear time sequence of the story, as we will see in case of Samuel’s pro-monarchic revelation, which took place before his encounter with Saul.

The background: who lost the donkeys?

The narrator starts the history of Saul by introducing first his father and the ancestors (1 Sam 9, 1) and, only later, in the following verse, the future king of Israel (9, 2). We can wonder how many generations are listed there. Everything depends on how Aphiah is considered: as a Benjaminite or as a son of a Benjaminite. If we prefer to follow the Masoretic text, we have seven generations instead of six: as the first among the ancestors comes a Benjaminite followed by his son Aphiah, then Becorath, Zeror, Abiel, Kish, and finally the seventh, Saul. The implicit use of the perfect number probably indicates the intention of the narrator to inform his readers of the importance of the person about whom the story is going to be narrated and to make him stand out. The hope and the desire of Israel to have a king “as do all the nations” (1 Sam 8, 20) will have their fulfilment in him. Everything seems a lot more probable after the mention of the very respectable social position attributed to the father of Saul as “a strong and powerful man” (1 Sam 9, 1) is made. And Saul himself, the son of a brave man, would soon show the character peculiar to ancient heroes in his struggles as a warrior. Here Saul is described still as “a distinguished young
man” (ḇāḥūr wāṯōb) [1 Sam 9, 2]). Within a short time we will see him to be “taller than all the others, from his shoulders upward” (1 Sam 10, 23), and powerful men whose hearts were touched by God were to go with him (1 Sam 10, 26). After becoming king Saul would gather around himself other brave and powerful men (ḵoḷ-ʾīš gīḇūr wəḵoḷ-šen-ḥayil [1 Sam 14, 52]). One such man was David (1 Sam 16, 18) who, leaving the flock of his father (1 Sam 16, 11; 17, 15), would enter into the permanent service of Saul (1 Sam 18, 2).

Saul also occupies himself with the domestic animals (1 Sam 9, 3; 11, 15). In fact, as we have seen already, he had been sent to search for the lost donkeys. Together with a servant of his father, he goes through the regions of Shalishah, Shaalim and Benjamin for about three days travel, which is quite a long journey, with no result and so many uncertainties for us as well, that we too could ask the question why his journey was so long.

There are some who suggest that all the donkeys of Kish were lost and that would imply an economic catastrophe: Saul would have continued his search in such a desperate manner for this reason. Not only he, but also the servant who accompanies him was even ready to offer their money to a clairvoyant (1 Sam 9, 8) in order to have news about the lost donkeys. Whereas, the true reason for this search – a desperate one, yes, but only to some extent (for at the end, it is Saul himself who wants to return) – may be found in the words of Samuel: “As for donkeys, the ones lost by you (ləkā) …” (1 Sam 9, 20). Behold the one who had lost his donkeys! It was Saul himself. And thus, we have an answer to the question why his father sent him to search for the lost donkeys. It seems obvious that the intense search for the donkeys that Saul makes simply reflects his wish to show himself to be a good boy, who being guilty of their loss does not want to return home empty-handed.

Where was Saul during these days after the donkeys had disappeared? He has gone through the mountain region (literally “the mountain”) of Ephraim (1 Sam 9, 4). Even less clear are the indications that follow: the land of Shalishah (eṭeš šālîšāh), the land of Benjamin (eṭeš yəmînî). Of these first two places, we cannot even be sure of what region the author speaks; and the third location is too general. The experts have very varied opinions on this text but they agree that it is impossible to establish with precision the route of Saul. The different place–names (toponyms) found in the Septuagint (LXX) help us only to create more confusion in our attempt to combine the narrative with archaeology. In order to understand the meaning of the text, it is more important to understand the meaning of the refrain, “but they did not find them”– “but they were not there”– “but they did not find them” (wəlʾō māṣāʾû – wāʾayin – wəlʾō māṣāʾû) which actually accompanies the name of each locality crossed by Šaʿul together with his servant (1 Sam 9, 4). One might think that the donkeys of Kish might never have been to the territory of Shaalim; instead, in the other two places mentioned, i.e. in the territory of Shalishah and that of Benjamin, they were not found. Exactly “near the tomb of Rachel, at the boundaries of Benjamin” (1 Sam 10, 2; cf. 10, 9) Saul hears news about his donkeys, as he was returning homeward (maybe toward Gibeah, cf. 1 Sam 11, 4; 15, 34). Analysing the local news, it seems reasonable to think that the donkeys were found much closer to the house of Saul, in comparison to the places reached by him in search for the donkeys. Probably for the reader of that time it was possible to perceive the irony. Saul undertakes a long trip without finding even a single donkey; whereas the donkeys were really found in the proximity of his house.
The structure of the providential encounter

During his journey in search of the donkeys, Saul unexpectedly comes near the city in which his unexpected meeting with Samuel is to take place. Thus, the donkeys do have a very important role to play in the text. Their loss serves as the principal cause for Saul’s journey and his visit to the prophet of Israel. They help Samuel to tell Saul of their recovery already during the first encounter itself and to reassure him and to show him the need to think of more important things than the donkeys (1 Sam 9, 20): “As for your donkeys that were lost three days ago, give no further thought to them, for they have been found. And on whom is all Israel’s desire fixed, if not on you and on your entire ancestral house?” The donkeys also serve to confirm the royal anointing of Saul. They become a part of the sign (τὸ σῆμειον) of which the Greek text speaks explicitly (10, 1) and the Masoretic text implicitly says, in the prophecy of Samuel: “Today, when you have departed from me, you will find two men near the tomb of Rachel at the borders of the land of Benjamin, at Zelzah, who will say to you: ‘The donkeys that you were looking for are found’” (1 Sam 10, 2; cf. 10, 9). Finally, as they did in the beginning of the text, the donkeys will have another important role to play at the end. They will be used by Saul to pronounce only a “half-truth” about his stay with Samuel (1 Sam 10, 6), thus avoiding mentioning his consecration. Let us see how the text maintains, also in the details, a coherent structure from the narrative point of view.

Let us come back to the search for donkeys. Having reached the land of Zuph, Saul is encouraged by the servant to go see “a man of God (יִשְׁתָּלְוהִים) in this city” (1 Sam 9, 5–6). From his words one cannot be sure that it was the city where Samuel lived. The exact location is not mentioned, but generally one is tempted to think that the house of Samuel was in that city, i.e. Ramah (cf. 1 Sam 7, 17). From another point of view, the girls whom Saul meets before entering the city inform him that the prophet has already come on a special occasion: “He has come just now to the town, because the people have a sacrifice today at the shrine”. As we know already that every year Samuel “used to go around passing through Bethel, Gilgal and Mizpah” (1 Sam 7, 15), the words of the girls may puzzle us regarding the place of encounter between Samuel and Saul. The prophet seems to have just arrived, and the elderly men are waiting for him already. The only one who speaks of the “house of the clairvoyant” is Saul himself, but surprisingly there was no indication given to him by the prophet where he could find the house (1 Sam 9, 18). Recognizing that we cannot find clear signs to identify the city, we have to attribute this fact to the skill of the narrator who seems to have purposely hidden this from his readers to increase their surprise when they discover the identity of the anonymous clairvoyant in an unknown city.

In the first part of our text, Saul and the servant use the expression “man of God” (1 Sam 9, 6.7.8.10) and only in the second part do they speak of “the clairvoyant” (1 Sam 9, 11.18). The appellative “prophet” (נָבִי) is never used, except in v. 9 which is generally considered to be an added note. It is thought that this note was introduced to help us
harmonise the old hypothetical narrative regarding the encounter of Saul with the anonymous clairvoyant and the more recent version where Saul encounters Samuel the prophet and is consecrated by him. Since it is not a question of harmonising “the man of God” with “clairvoyant” within the text itself, but the term “clairvoyant” in the passage with “the prophet” in the previous chapter, some people suggest shifting v. 9 a little further ahead in the text, putting it before the first reference to “clairvoyant” in v. 11. Reading in this way it does not explain in any way the meaning of the verse in the context, but only in the context of the hypothesis of the exegete.

The verse however, at least from the synchronic point of view, is in the right place, for it is connected with the preceding dialogue between Saul and the servant. Saul asks him, “What can we bring (nābî’) to that man?” (1 Sam 9, 7). After the answer of the servant who was ready to give a quarter of a silver piece to receive directions about which way they should go (1 Sam 9, 8), the narrator, in v. 9, introduces the “modern” appellative of a clairvoyant – a prophet (nābî’), that is, one who has been called by God. Even if one might think of having here a fanciful etymology of the term “prophet” connecting it to the phrase “we will bring” by reason of similarity of the forms, we would not be able to exclude the acute irony present there. Saul is worried about the gift (mah-nābî’) to be brought to the man of God (1 Sam 9, 7), but it was he who received a much greater gift, for the man of God to whom he was going was a prophet (nābî’). Nevertheless, the servant proposes to offer a quarter of the silver piece not as gift, brought on the occasion of a simple visit, but as payment for the service that was to be provided: “I will give it to the man of God, and he will show us the way.” It is possible that this was a common practice (cf. 1 Kings 14, 3; 2 Kings 4, 42; Am 7, 12; Mic 3, 5), as was that of going to a clairvoyant to ask for something (1 Sam 9, 9).

The encounter with girls who were coming out of the town to draw water (1 Sam 9, 11–13) is very typical of the Palestinian environment and is used often for providential encounters. We recall the encounters between the servant of Abraham and Rebecca (Gen 24, 11–20), Jacob and Rachel (Gen 29, 2–12), Moses and the seven daughters of the priest of Madian (Ex 2, 16–21), and later the encounter of Jesus with the Samaritan woman (Jn 4, 6–26). The encounter is providential also for Saul, and it helps the author as a means with which he provides all the necessary information on this particular situation. Everything is prepared for a providential encounter. In the same place the two heroes of the history appear: Saul, accompanied by the servant, and almost at the same moment or, at least on the same day, depending on how the text is read (1 Sam 9, 12) Samuel as well. Even if we suppose that the city which Samuel had just come to is the city where he lives, the information given by the girls about the recent arrival of the two protagonists of the encounter underlines the exceptional character and the importance of the encounter itself. The girls also show an almost prophetic capacity, indicating exactly the moment of the encounter between Saul and Samuel: “when you enter into the city, you will find him” and “you will find him immediately” (1 Sam 9, 13).
And it so happens that Saul encounters Samuel at the gate of the city (1 Sam 9, 14.18). As we know, the gates are the place where justice is administered and it is the place of business, etc. It is difficult to find a place more significant than this for an encounter. For this reason we can consider this unexpected encounter between Saul and Samuel as the first highlighting point of the text. For the first time the name of Samuel is mentioned. The meaning attributed to this depends on the method used in the exegetical analysis. The representatives of the diachronic analysis base their interpretation of the meaning on the hypothesis of the two-origins or sources of the passage. According to them, the verse functions as a bridge connecting the older part – the narration of the encounter of Saul with an anonymous clairvoyant – and the prophetic contribution, i.e. the identification of this clairvoyant with Samuel. The representatives of the synchronic method stress literary formulations: up to this point, in the first part of the narrative, the point of view of Saul is presented and he does not know the prophet. Now the author reveals the identity of the clairvoyant to the reader, keeping him still hidden for Saul. And at the city gate Samuel would present himself as a clairvoyant to Saul (1 Sam 9, 19), and only later would he begin to introduce the future king to the world of the prophets and of prophetism.

Verses 15–16 represent retrospection, a dive into the past, a kind of flashback, regarding the events before the almost simultaneous arrival of the two protagonists of the encounter. The day before, Samuel had received instructions from the Lord about how he should behave with a man who would be sent to him the day after, from the land of Benjamin. The Lord has “opened the ears” of Samuel to tell him of the necessity of consecrating Saul (1 Sam 9, 15). Such an intervention on the part of the Lord was necessary to legitimate the institution of monarchy in Israel and to highlight the role of the prophet in its birth. With the intervention of the Lord, the narrator introduces new elements of a prophetic character into the text. As they increase in number, they become more and more evident, connecting the future king and the world of the prophets. We can also list the narrative elements that are almost in exponential growth, reaching their peak in the following chapter. They are: the gradual decision to consult a clairvoyant (1 Sam 5–10); the encounter with the girls who indicate the place and the time of the encounter with the clairvoyant (11–13); the message of the Lord, received by Samuel the previous day (15–16); the prophetic revelation to Saul by Samuel on his search for the donkeys and on his future (19–20); the consecration of Saul with the indication of signs of confirmation (10, 1–7); the last of which consists in the transformation of Saul into another person, one who could also prophesy (10, 6.10–13).

In its original form the flashback represents an inclusion preceded and followed by a description of the encounter itself (1 Sam 9, 14.17). In the first part of the concentric structure the omniscient narrator describes what Saul and the servant see, but for his reader he adds information which will be still kept hidden to the two characters, that is, the identity of the clairvoyant (1 Sam 9, 14). In the final part the narrator describes what Samuel, who is informed by the Lord about Saul, sees at the same time, or almost (1 Sam 9, 17). The only persons not to know these things, at this moment in the narrative in the
text, are Saul and the servant. It seems that the two verses (1 Sam 9, 14.17) speak of the same moment, or almost of the same moment. Also the place where the encounter is to take place should also be the same, within the city gate. Since he is already within the gate (1 Sam 9, 18), walking towards the centre of the city (1 Sam 9, 14), Saul approaches Samuel and addresses the prophet. His question seems to be innocent: ”Where is the house of the clairvoyant?”, and a certain irony on the part of the narrator is not to be excluded. Saul has a lot of difficulty understanding the logic of the prophetic world. While he was still talking with the girls, they informed him: “Just as you enter (kəbō’âkēm) into the city you will find him <…> you will find him immediately (kəhayyōm)” (1 Sam 9, 13). Thereupon they entered into the city (1 Sam 9, 14), but Saul did not even think that the girls might have been right and the person found in that place (when you enter…) could be Samuel himself. Saul in fact did not search for the person but rather asks about the house. Ironically, or perhaps we should say, providentially, he puts the question to the prophet himself.

We can see how Samuel, with fine pedagogy, gradually introduces him to the prophetic world. To the future king the prophet shows that he knows how to respond even to questions not asked (e.g. what could have happened to the donkeys); nevertheless, he does not respond to Saul’s question, maybe because it was useless, as was the search for the donkeys that had already been found. In his answer Samuel speaks of the house, not his own, but Saul’s, i.e. father’s (v. 20). Saul would be brought to a house (we do not know whether it was that of Samuel at Ramah or some other house) and will have a bed, but only later, after the encounter with thirty elders (1 Sam 9, 25). Even though Samuel says that the donkeys have been found, the truth here was that Saul has been found by Samuel. In him, the person indicated by the Lord (1 Sam 9, 17), the prophet has found the future king for the people. The encounter already announced by the Lord to Samuel and by the girls to Saul has truly taken place.

The flashback, the revelation of the Lord to Samuel (1 Sam 9, 15–16), is the central part of the text that reveals a concentric structure:

A. Saul and his servant without bread in their sacks (9, 7);
B. The detailed report of the girls on the actual situation and on the particulars of the imminent encounter between Saul and Samuel (9, 11–13);
C. The encounter with Samuel (9, 14);
D. The revelation of the Lord to Samuel the previous day (9, 15–16);
C’. The encounter with Samuel (9, 17–18);
B’. The detailed report of Samuel on the actual situations and the prophetical references to the future of Saul (9, 18–20);
A’. Saul and his servant are guests of honour in a ritual meal or banquet (9, 22–24).

Obviously, the elements that appear in the text are connected also to the other narrative structures. Thus, for example, the revelation of the Lord (D), that has begun to be fulfilled in the encounter between Saul and Samuel (C’), will continue in its effect the
following day, when Saul would be consecrated as nāgīd by Samuel (10, 1) and will be taken up again in the following chapters with the military actions of Saul, whose duty is “to save the people from the hands of the Philistines” (1 Sam 9, 16). A structure cannot be isolated from the general context of the book.

**Revelation through gestures**

Such an element contextually connected both with the other texts and with the elements of the text itself is identifiable in the revelations promised by Samuel to Saul. The prophet seeks to reveal all that Saul has in his heart. This task comes in the sequence in which the whole list of Samuel’s promises is given: “today you will eat with me” – “tomorrow morning I will let you go” – “I will tell you what you have in your heart” (1 Sam 9, 19). If the sequence of the events were listed in order of time, it might seem that Samuel wants Saul to leave first and only after, when Saul had already left, to tell him what is in his heart. But such a sequence is simply impossible and therefore we have to consider the sequence in which Samuel had listed his intentions as a thematic sequence. The prophet wants only to say: today remain to eat with me, you could go away tomorrow, in the meantime I will tell you what you have in your heart.

We can wonder: when exactly does Samuel do what he had promised? Samuel is a truthful prophet, as the servant of Saul has also recognized, “whatever he says becomes true certainly” (1 Sam 9, 6), and his words have to have a meaning for the development of the story. We do not have to nourish the suspicion that the omniscient narrator would have wished to deceive us or to create an empty space to exercise our imagination. Recognizing the thematic sequence of the actions listed by Samuel, it seems logical to connect the last action listed by Samuel, that is the promise to reveal all that he had in his heart (9, 19), with the prophetic discourse that follows immediately after (1 Sam 9, 20). Less probable, it would seem, is the connection between the Samuel’s promise and his gestures during the ritual meal (1 Sam 19, 22–24). Another possibility would be to place the revelation much later, after the ritual meal, when the prophet “entertains himself with Saul on the terrace” (1 Sam 9, 25). In the early morning, at dawn, Samuel would call Saul saying, “Get up, I want to say goodbye to you!” (1 Sam 9, 26). There is no more time for a conversation. Then the most important part of the whole Saul’s journey follows. Samuel no more reveals what Saul has in his heart, but what God has in His heart.

What Saul actually had in his heart? The donkeys? It is possible and therefore the fate of the donkeys is revealed to Saul immediately, after those words with which Samuel reveals his intention to speak as a prophet, revealing what is hidden in his heart (1 Sam 19, 20). Does Samuel want to reveal something more? The difficulty lies in the ambiguity of the Samuel’s words. His rhetorical question: ūlōmî kol-hemdat yišrā‘ēl
(1 Sam 9, 20) can, in fact, be understood in two different ways: (1) “for whom [i.e. for whom if not for you] is it all that is desirable in Israel?” and (2) “who [if not you] is the one most desired by Israel?”. In the latter case it would deal with the affirmation of a popular desire to have the king who would govern the people, who would go out leading the people as their head and would fight their battles (cf. 8, 19–20). Saul is the answer to this desire of Israel. While in the former case it would deal with the application to Saul of the foreseen prerogatives of the king. In the long discourse that he made to the people Samuel lists all the advantages that a king would enjoy legitimately in the case of the institution of the monarchy in Israel:

These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them over his chariots and to be his horsemen, and to run before his chariot; and he will appoint them commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and some to plough his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will also take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his courtiers. He will take one-tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and his courtiers. He will take your male and female slaves, and the best of your cattle [MT: young people] and donkeys, and put them to his work. He will take one-tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves (1 Sam 8, 11–17).

If with his rhetorical question to Saul, the prophet was thinking of the good things of Israel to which the king will have the right, we find here a subtle irony: are you thinking of the donkeys? You will have all the good things of Israel. But we are not obliged to decide which of these two was in the mind of Samuel. Maybe both are present in his oracle. We cannot resolve the ambiguity, not even by analysing the response given by Saul. He says that he belongs to one of the lowliest of the families of Israel (1 Sam 9, 2). What kind of doubts does he have: of not corresponding to the expectations of Israel or is he surprised, perhaps, because all the good things of Israel will be given to one of the humblest of the families?

In any case, Saul was right in giving that answer. We are at the dawn of the monarchy, and Saul is a Benjaminite. The book of Judges explains this humble attitude of Saul. The text begins with a reference to monarchy: “in those days there was no king in Israel” (Judg 19, 1) and finishes: “in those days there was no king in Israel and everyone did what seemed to him to be good” (Judg 21, 25). Here we have the narration of a civil war that had been started in Israel due to the Benjaminites and a Levite husband whose concubine had escaped from him. He takes her back, while returning home… due to some incidents at Gibeah the wife ends up in twelve pieces and the tribe of Benjamin was almost eliminated by the other tribes of Israel. As a descendant of this tribe and as an inhabitant of that place where the massacre caused by his ancestors took place, Saul could never even imagine that one day he would become a king longed by all the tribes of Israel or
would have the good things of Israel at his disposal and that of his house. Later his native city, the place of humiliation of the Benjaminites will bear his name, Gibeah of Saul (cf. 1 Sam 11, 4; 15, 34; Isa 10, 29).

Saul did not get an answer to the question with which he had begun the conversation: “Where is the house of the clairvoyant?” He would get no response even for his second and last question: “My family is the lowliest of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin. Why therefore do you speak in this manner?” But certainly there will be an answer, though given in gestures. To understand it better, we could cite the song of Hannah:

The Lord makes poor and makes rich;
he brings low, he also exalts.
He raises up the poor from the dust;
he lifts the needy from the ash heap,
to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honour.
1 Sam 2, 7–8; cf. Ps 113, 7–8

With this same gesture the prophet answers the humble boy so wretched in his search for the lost donkeys, without even a piece of bread in his sack (1 Sam 9, 7). He brings him to the ritual banquet and makes him sit at the head of the table of all his guests (1 Sam 9, 22). This is the gesture glorified in the song of Hannah.

To the Saul’s question, an unexpected answer is given. But on the other hand Saul’s question had also another meaning. It was a confirmation for Samuel. The Lord had told him: “Tomorrow at this time I will send to you a man from the land of Benjamin and you will anoint him as the head (lōnāgīd) of my people” (9, 16). When Samuel sees Saul, the Lord warns him: “Here is the man of whom I spoke to you” (1 Sam 9, 17). And now, Saul himself, without being asked, declares: “Am I not a Benjamite?” (1 Sam 9, 21). The question of Saul contains confirmation both of his identity and of the duty given to Samuel, i.e. to anoint the future king.

Instead of getting an answer to his questions, Saul finds himself in a banquet as a guest of honour. From a boy who was sent in search for his lost donkeys, little by little, he becomes a man who will be recognized by the people and by their representatives. Up to this moment, it might have seemed that he was travelling in the dark and desperation without even finding his donkeys and almost giving up the search, but instead he had been guided by Providence. Just let us think of the quarter of the silver piece that was found in the hands of the servant in the time of need (1 Sam 9, 8), or his timely arrival in the city, in which he was able to meet the prophet (cf. 1 Sam 9, 12). The most attractive thing to the reader is the journey that starts in the initial state of uncertainty, leads to the anointment of the king and ends in the admission to the world of the prophets (1 Sam 10, 1), until the association with the prophetic world (1 Sam 10, 6–12). And it was Samuel who guides Saul, gradually making him aware of his future role in Israel. Could we say that for this reason Saul was kept in the dark by Samuel at least partly? The future king should not resemble too much any person who understands everything so easily. Until
now his greatest virtue was his obedience. He obeyed his father (1 Sam 9, 3), the servant (v. 6), the girls (v. 12) and now the prophet of Israel. This obedience would bring him the honour of becoming the king and will give him all the wealth of Israel. The result of his future tragic disobedience will be reflected in the last chapter, where Samuel himself, in a single phrase, will explain the moral of the story of Saul: “Because you did not obey the voice of the Lord, and did not carry out his fierce wrath against Amalek, therefore the Lord has done this thing to you today” (1 Sam 28, 18).

Conclusion

The application of narrative analysis to the Books of Samuel allows to rediscover how the narrator uses a minor detail — the legend about the donkeys lost by Saul — to create (1) a storyline leading to the establishing of the monarchy in Israel; (2) prophetic background and, at least in the Septuagint, the sign (to sēmeion) confirming the royal anointing of Saul. The Hebrew author makes use of word play (‘prophet’ — [gift to be] ‘brought’), thematic structures (donkeys, bread, banquet, obedience), sequential flashbacks (regarding the events before the crucial encounter between the prophet and would-be king), motives (encounter with girls coming to draw water) that lead to the recognising of narrative and ideological qualities of the story. In addition, the analysis shows clearly how the divine pro-monarchic revelation to Samuel (1 Sam 9, 15–16) forms the central part of the passage (1 Sam 9).

The cross-textual allusions explain the obedience and the humble attitude of Saul, “the Benjaminite”. This attitude contrasts efficiently with his role as a guest of honour in a ritual banquet organised by Samuel and alluded to by the narrator in the song of Hannah at the beginning of the story of Saul. At the same time, it introduces the next leitmotiv in the story of the monarchy in Israel, and it is the obedience versus disobedience as well as the ascent to throne versus descent from it.

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1 The narrative approach with its methodology was successfully applied to the biblical exegesis by R. Alter, M. Steinberg and E. Auerbach, who in his Mimesis compared Gen 22 with the 19th book of Homer’s Odyssey.


Leaving aside the tradition found in the Masoretic version and in the principal Greek codices, many commentators prefer to emend the text and consider Aphiah as the first in the genealogical line, "the Benjaminite" but see Sasson J. M. A Genealogical 'Convention' in Biblical Chronology // Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft. 1978. Vol. 90. P. 171–185.

Kish is called gibbor hayil, an expression applied to the valorous warriors (e.g. Josh 1, 14; 8, 3; Judg 6, 12; 11, 1) and maybe, probably later on, to the mediocre nobility that paid taxes and served the armies when necessary, cf. 2 Kings 15, 20; 24, 14; 1 Chr 28, 1.

Cf. Eising H. Chayil / eds. G. J. Botterweck, H. Ringgren. Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament. Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. Vol. IV. P. 350–353. Among the other mythical heroes of Samuel, especially with regard to the military action, Jonathan his son would be distinguished (1 Sam 13, 3; 14, 1–46; 2 Sam 1, 22), one of the valorous warriors of David, whose works are collected in the appendix of the Books of Samuel (2 Sam 23, 8–39), and certainly David, the boy with "beautiful eyes and good looking" (1 Sam 16, 12).

If we assume that the definite article implies that all "the donkeys" (hā'ātōnôt) of Kish are lost (as do think H. W. Herzberg and H. J. Stoebbe), it will not be clear to us. For the construction ləqîš is also used as if to indicate that only a few or a particular number of donkeys are lost, i. e. the known ones, from the herd of Kish. At least P. K. McCarter thinks this way (cf. McCarter P. K., Jr. I Samuel. A New Translation with Introduction, Notes and Commentary. AncB 8. New York: Garden City. 1980. P. 173–174, P. 184–185) and he does not accept the theory (proposed by K. Budde and followed by E. P. Dhorme and G. R. Driver) of a dittography at the origins of the article, and wants to see the irony that, according to him, would be required by the narrative. Only some of the donkeys are lost but Saul searches for them with incredible insistence.

For the up-dated synthesis on the situation in the field of encounter between the biblical literature and archaeology, see Z. Zevit. Three Debates about Bible and Archaeology // Biblica. 2002. Vol. 83. P. 1–27.

There have been various attempts, certainly no less extensive than the journey of Saul, to divide up the narrative of his search for the donkeys. From the diachronic point of view the whole text, 1 Sam 9, 1–10,16 is considered to be an amalgamation, a cocktail, composed of an ancient pre-deuteronomistic folktale with the prophetic characteristics added to it. The narrative of the search by Saul who, instead of finding the donkeys, finds the kingdom, has been used by the prophetic editor who has substituted the figure of an anonymous soothsayer (who just had to announce to Saul that he would become the king) with the central and prophetic figure, Samuel (who consecrates Saul as the future king). While the traces of the narrative on the encounter between the anonymous soothsayer and Saul are found in 1 Sam 9, 6–11 and in a few other verses, the prophetic aspect is introduced in v. 14 and the following verses with the identification of the soothsayer as Samuel. V. 9 is considered to be a marginal gloss which explains the origin of the term "soothsayer", used also in 1 Sam 11, 18–19. Though such researches are useful to show the different tendencies that had a role in the development of the different strata in the book of Samuel, it is much more difficult to indicate what are the exact verses written or inserted by one or the other editor. The result of these researches in some ways seems to be very similar to the one reached by Saul in his travel. He does not find the donkeys, though he finds out something else perhaps more important than what he was searching for. For a criticism of the literary-critical approach to simplify the problem, see Polzin R. Samuel and the Deuteronomist. San Francisco: Harper & Row. 1989. P. 89–90.

the request made by the elders of Israel to Samuel asking for a king (1 Sam 8, 4–22). The almost ritual meal, which Saul shares as a guest of honour (1 Sam 9, 22–24), would have been organized precisely for that meeting between the elders and Samuel. However, as the hypothesis may be fine in its interpretation, one should recognize that it is neither possible to prove it nor set it aside.

12 McCarter. Ibid. P. 164–165, P. 169, P. 177. According to this author, a note by the scribe would create at this point a less obvious break.

13 The term "gift" (tēšûrāh) appears only here in the Bible (1 Sam 9, 7) and it might signify a gift that is given on the occasion of a visit, as the root šūr "to look", "to see" etc. would indicate.

14 Polzin (Ibid. P. 91) asserts that "the manner in which Samuel declares what Saul's journey is all about is paradigmatic of how later prophets will instruct Israel in its journey along the king's road" and that "chapters 9 and 10 constitute the Deuteronomist's opening declaration of the mišpaṭ hannābî’, the "ways of prophet"'.

15 On the one hand we could think of the encounter with the girls as an addition by the prophetic editor who explains that a prophet must bless also the sacrifice (a practice unknown to Old-testament tradition), and on the other hand, it seems that the passage was a pre-deuteronomic one, for the sacrifice is made in a "high place" outside the city (cf. v.14) as was normal in the syncretic and the pre-Yahwistic traditions which are certainly pre-deuteronomistic in nature. This reminds us of an old ritual which also included the ritual meal of the participants (1 Sam 9, 13; cf. Deut 12, 18).


17 A circular structure that, in some ways contains the so-called flash-back (a step backward into the past) or a flash-forward (a step forward in the future narrative) represents more or less frequent element in the narrative technique applied in biblical accounts. In the books of Samuel we will find the same double structure, corresponding to the development of the narrative events in time on other occasions as well, for example, in chapters 22, 20–23, 6 where the circular structure of the account of the escape of Abiathar, son of Ahimelech, on account of the destruction caused by Saul (the first part: 22, 20–23; the second part: 23, 6) contains the flash-back (the central part: 23, 1–5) in which the events in the camp of David before the coming of Abiathar are narrated.

18 The place of encounter is described differently in the verses that precede (1 Sam 9, 14) and follow (1 Sam 9, 18) the flash-back. Verse 14 characterises the moment of the encounter with the words: bā’îm bətôk hā’îr (TM) – eisporeumenōn eis meson tēs poleōs (LXX). Verse 18 explains how Saul came up to Samuel bətôk haššā’ar – enters the gate (of the city). The Septuagint (LXX) tries to harmonize the verses and translates them: eis meson tēs poleōs. The same is done by several later commentators, only in the opposite direction and they want to see an error of the copyist, and they in both cases read: bətôk haššā’ar. It is a legitimate choice, but useless. We can stick to the Masoretic text without changing it. The normal way to enter the city is through the gate. And that is why the sense of “going in toward the centre of the city” (9, 14) could include also the encounter “within the city gate” (9, 18).

19 While some of the commentators follow for the most part the Greek text according to which Saul immediately goes to bed that is prepared for him on the terrace (kai diestrōsan tō, Saoul epi tō, dōmati kai ekoinēthē), according to the Masoretic version he had a personal talk on the terrace with Samuel (waydabbēr ‘im-Sā’ûl al-haggāg), which represents the "Lectio difficilior" and adds to the story of Saul an element of perhaps prophetic interest: the preparation of the future king for consecration. There is no real need to select the LXX in place of the Masoretic text.

20 Citing the song of Hannah (1 Sam 2, 1–10) we cannot but remember the hypothetical reconstructions of the pre-deuteronomic story of Saul. As we know, the motive of miraculous birth, characteristic of the great heroes of the Bible (one could think of the figure of Samson in the Old Testament or John the Baptist or Jesus in the New Testament) is used in the prophetic narration regarding the birth of Samuel (1 Sam 1, 2–20). It is possible that initially the same motive might have been used to narrate the miraculous birth of Saul, the great warrior, and only later in the prophetic redaction it could have been
attributed to Samuel and only to Samuel. In the version we have we do not have any word regarding the miraculous birth of Saul. What lead us to think so is the song of Hannah which even ends with an acclamation that smacks of the monarchy: “the Lord <…> will give power to his king; will exalt the power of His anointed” (1 Sam 2, 10) and thus would correspond more to Saul than to Samuel. The same thing is valid also for the popular etymology of the name of Samuel: “<…> and gave birth to a son and called him Samuel (šəmû'ēl), saying: “I asked for him (šə’īltīw) from the Lord” (1 Sam 1, 20).

The play of words would sound better if only the name is replaced with that of Saul instead of Samuel, i. e.: “<…> she gave birth to a son whom she called Saul (šā’ûl) saying: I asked for him (šə’īltīw) from the Lord”. Probably this was the original text. The last words of the narrative about the miraculous birth indicate the possibility of the existence of a version with Saul as the protagonist. Anna says: “and so I too give (hiš’īltīhû) him as a gift to the Lord; until the end of his life, he will be given (šā’ûl) to the Lord (1 Sam 1, 28; cf. also 1, 27). On the substitution theory, first proposed by Hylander I. Der literarische Samuel-Saul-Komplex (I Sam 1–15) traditionsgeschichtlich untersucht. Uppsala: Almquist & Wiksell. 1932. S. 9–67, see, among others, White M. C. Saul and Jonathan in 1 Sam 1 and 14 / eds. Ehrlich C. S., White M. C. Saul in Story and Tradition. FAT 47; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck. 2006. P. 120–129.

LITERATURE AND SOURCES


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SEARCHING FOR THE LOST DONKEYS (1 SAM 9)

Summary

The application of narrative analysis to the Books of Samuel makes it possible to see in a new light the ascent of Saul to the throne of Israel, i.e. to understand better the beginnings of monarchy as they are exposed by the omniscient narrator. The story about the lost donkeys plays a special role in the narrative, as it provides the background for introducing Saul to the prophetic world governed by Samuel. On the other hand, the narrative analysis shows clearly how the divine pro-monarchic revelation to Samuel (1 Sam 9, 15–16) forms the central part of the passage (1 Sam 9).

The Hebrew author makes use of word play (‘prophet’ – [gift to be] ‘brought’), thematic structures (donkeys, bread, banquet, obedience), sequential flashbacks (regarding the events before the crucial encounter between the prophet and would be king), motives (encounter with the girls coming to draw water) that lead to the recognition of narrative and ideological qualities of the story. The cross-textual allusions explain the obedience and the humble attitude of Saul, “the Benjaminite”. This attitude contrasts efficiently with his role as a guest of honour in a ritual banquet organized by Samuel and alluded to by the narrator in the song of Hannah at the beginning of the story of Saul. At the same time, it introduces the next leitmotiv in the story of the monarchy in Israel, and it is the obedience versus disobedience as well as the ascent to the throne versus the descent from it.

Especially important are temporal digressions within the chronological framework of the narrative. If a significant departure from linear time structure is detected, we can examine how important the passage is in the eyes of the narrator, and therefore how important the temporal digression is for the understanding of the whole story. It becomes especially significant when the conclusions from the narrative analysis are confronted with the results of the diachronic analysis. It seems reasonable to argue that the narrative analysis can complement the diachronic exegesis through bringing to the foreground important logical and temporal narrative structures, as we will see in the case of Samuel’s pro-monarchic revelation, which took place before his encounter with Saul.

Jānis PRIEDE

IEŠKANT PRARASTŲ ASILŲ (1 SAM 9)

Santrauka

Naratyvinės analizės taikymas analizuojant Samuelio knygas leidžia naujai suvokti Sauliaus atėjimą į Izraelio sostą, t. y. geriau suprasti monarchijos ištakas, kadangi jos pateikiamas „visažinio” pasakotojo. Istorija apie prarastus asilus užima ypatingą vietą pasakojime, nes „įveda” Saulių į pranašų pasaulį, kuriam vadovauja Samuelis. Iš kitos pusės, naratyvinė analizė aiškiai parodo, kaip dieviškasis pro-monarchinis apreiškinas Samuelui (1 Sam 9, 15–16) suformuoja centriningą pasakojimo fragmento dalį (1 Sam 9).

Hebrajų autoriaus naudoja žodžių žaismą („pranašas” – [dovana] „atnešta”), tematines struktūras (asilai, duona, vašis, nuolankumas), nuoseklus žvilgsnis į praetį (įvykus prieš lempingą susitikimą tarp pranašo ir būsimio karaliaus), motyvus (susitikimas su mergaitėmis, einančiomis vandens), kurie vedė prie naratyvinių ir ideologinių istorijos savybių pažinimo. Aliuzijos į kitus tekstus paaškina nuolankumą ir Sauliaus, „Benjamin”, paklumų požiūrį. Šis požiūris efektyviai suprėšinamas su jo kaip garbės svečio vaidmenių apėginėse vašėse, kurias surengė Samuelis ir kurios buvo numatytos Anos dainoje istorijos apie Saulių pradžioje. Tuo pačiu metu jis „įveda” sekantį – monarchijos Izraelyje – leitmotyvą istorijoje, o tai yra paklusojo prieš nepaklusnumą bei atėjimo į sostą prieš sosto netekimą atėjimo žymuo.

Laikini nukrypimai nuo chronologinės pasakojimo sekos yra ypač svarbūs. Jie aptinkamas ženklaus nukrypimas nuo linijinės laiko struktūros, galima tirti, kokia svarbi, žvelgiant iš autoriaus pozicijos, ši tekst atkarpa yra bei kokia yra laikino nuokrypio svarba suvokiant visą istoriją. Tai tampa ypač svarbu, kuomet
Naratyvinės analizės švados yra supriešinamos su diachroninės analizės rezultatais. Yra pagrįsta teigti, jog naratyvinė analizė papildo diachroninę egzegezę iškeliant į priekį svarbias logines ir laikinas naratyvo struktūras, kaip matoma Samuelio pro-monarchinio apreiškimo atveju, kuris nutiko prieš jo susitikimą su Sauliumi.

PAGRINDINIAI ŽODŽIAI: Saulius, Samuelis, sosto užėmimas, monarchija Izraelyje, egzegezė, naratyvinė analizė.

KEY WORDS: Saul, Samuel, ascent to throne, monarchy in Israel, exegesis, narrative analysis.


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