

The King and Officials According to Hosea

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Hosea's opinions about the king and officials can be considered in a wider context of his attitude to the institution of monarchy, founded in Israel in about 1030 B.C. and maintained in the Northern Kingdom – a part of the divided monarchy in which the prophet lived – till 722 B.C. Worth emphasising is Hosea's interest in public life expressed, among others, by allusions to history more numerous, in relation to the volume of the books, than in the works of other prophets from the 8th century.¹ Moreover, the role of politics in Hosea's mission is evidenced by his dramatic personal life becoming the substance of prophecies on the fate of the state.² The monarchy is mentioned in the book mainly as a subject of criticism.³ An exception is the vision of its restoration under one king – a descendant of David, suggesting acceptance of the monarchy as the proper form of state (3,1-5), however, this text comes probably from a later editor.⁴ The aim of the present considerations is to discuss this negative attitude towards monarchy and attempt its sociological interpretation.

¹ Cf. J. Vollmer, *Geschichtliche Rückblicke und Motive in der Prophetie des Amos, Hosea und Jesaja*, BZAW 119, Berlin, p. 5; I. Jaruzelska, *The Officials in the Kingdom of Israel in the Eighth Century B.C. in the Books of Amos, Hosea and Micah*, 'The Polish Journal of Biblical Research' 1, 2000, pp. 13-14.

² It is sufficient to cite: 1) the symbolic names of children born by Gomer a harlot (אשה זוננית) whose sound announces the fall of the Kingdom of Israel (Os 1,2-8). The obligation to accept an adulterous women by the Prophet רע ומנאפת (אשה אהבת רע ומנאפת) a gesture not met in ancient Israel and testifying to magnanimity, showed God's love towards Israel, which was to be manifested as a restoration of the state in the form of a united monarchy (3,1-5).

³ According to A. Caquot the criticism of monarchy, besides the condemnation of the Canaanite religion practices is the main motive of the Hosea's message. A. Caquot, *Osée et la royauté*, RHPH 41, 1961, p. 123.

⁴ G.A. Yee, *Composition and Tradition in the Book of Hosea. A Redaction*, Atlanta 1987, pp. 57-64.

1. *Coup d'état* is the first phenomenon from the political sphere censured by the prophet, already at the beginning of his book (1,3-5), which in a way confirms the above remark about the position of politics in his mission. In this fragment Hosea gets an order from God to give Gomer's first born son the name Jezreel (יִזְרְעֵאל) as an announcement of the forthcoming punishment which will befall the house of Jehu for the bloodshed in Jezreel: 'And on that day I will break the Israel's bow in the valley of Jezreel' (1,4). The text refers to the tragic events, which took place at least a hundred years before Hosea started his mission, in Jezreel – the second capital city of the state, although Samaria remained the main centre.⁵ In this city Jehu murdered Joram, Jezebel and King Ahab's officials. It was also the city to which heads of his seventy sons killed in this 'purge' were sent from Samaria (2 Kgs 9-10). The condemnation expressed by Hosea, who calls the Jehu actions 'the bloody acts of Jezreel' (דְּמֵי יִזְרְעֵאל), is striking against the almost enthusiastic approach of the authors of the Book of Kings, who interpret this action as a just response to the idolatry of Achab's house following from the religious zeal (קִנְיַאת יְהוָה) (2 Kgs 10,16). The interpretators point out that this standpoint of Hosea, deviating from the traditional opinion, testifies to his own, independent evaluation of the events in Jezreel. The prophet does not accept the principle 'the end justifies the means'⁶ and condemns violence in politics, even when used from religious motives. Religion cannot justify the bloodshed. Therefore, Hosea announces the fall of the line of Jehu. Indeed its last representative, Zechariah, the son of Jeroboam, was murdered after a 6-month rule in a subsequent *coup d'état* (2 Kgs 15,10). The announcement of 'the end of the kingdom of the house of Israel' refers not only to the end of Jehu dynasty, but also to the fall of the monarchy, since the expression 'I break the bow in the valley of Jezreel' (1,5) suggests the destruction of the military power of the state.⁷ This region was annexed by Assyria in 733 during the reign of Tiglath-pileser III.⁸ Hence, the fall of the monarchy is seen as a result of the crime committed by the founder of the dynasty, charged with the responsibility for these deeds. The next symbolic name 'Not-loved' (לֹא רַחֲמָה), which Hosea gives to his daughter (1,6) also announces the fall of the state, interpreted as a sign of cessation of God's love of the people. The inference that the words refer to the fall of the northern part of the divided monarchy is justified by the words of the editor⁹ who in the

⁵ F.I. Andersen, D.N. Freedman, *Hosea, A New Translation with Commentary*, AB, New York 1980, p. 173.

⁶ A. Caquot, *op.cit.*, p.128 with earlier bibliography.

⁷ N.H. Waldman quoted by G.A. Yee, *op.cit.*, p. 65.

⁸ A.A. Macintosh, *Hosea*, ICC, Edinburgh 1997, p. 733.

⁹ G.A. Yee, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

next verse makes an allusion to Judah, on which God will have mercy, contrary to Israel, and which means God will prolong the political existence of the former. As we know, the kingdom of Judah fell almost one hundred and fifty years later. The end of the monarchy is then shown as a break of the covenant, reflected in the name of the third child (לֹא עַמִּי) 'Not-my-people', which sounds like a sentence, all the more so as the explanation of the name is put in the mouth of God himself: 'you are not my people (לֹא עַמִּי) and I am not (לֹא אֱדִיָּה) for you' (1,9). This interpretation refers to the name of YHWH ('I am who I am' אֱדִיָּה אֲשֶׁר אֱדִיָּה) revealed to Moses on Mount Sinai (Exod 3,14). The use of paronomasia in the name of the third child announces God's rejection of the sons of Israel, so the break of the covenant. A *coup d'état* is subjected to religious evaluation, which is manifested as calling this political crime as a deed of fornication (זִנוּנִים), which in the book of Hosea stands for Israel unfaithfulness to YHWH.¹⁰ The relationship between the prophet and the prostitute, from which three children whose names have been discussed above are born, illustrates an attitude of unfaithfulness of Israel's sons turning to foreign gods and violating the commandments of the covenant. Respect of these commandments, in particular by those who govern, determines the existence of the state. According to the prophet, the founder of the dynasty is mainly responsible for the defeat, when he mentions the crime in Jezreel at the beginning of the book as the first manifestation of fornication (זִנוּנִים) (1,2), whose other forms he condemns in subsequent chapters.

The subject of *coup d'état* reappears in Chapter 7 with apparent reference to the savage way of taking power by the king Hosea (in about 732), who according to 2 Kgs 15,30 removed Pekah, his predecessor.¹¹ The prophet in the following words accuses the new leaders: 'With their wickedness they supported the elevation of the king¹² and officials through their lies and falsehood. They are all adulterers, like an oven heated by the baker¹³ who stops keeping the fire burning to thin down the dough until it is leavened. On the day of our king, when the officials are inflamed with wine, he joins his hand with the mockers. For in their

¹⁰ TOB, p.1097.

¹¹ See *infra* p. 16.

¹² The Hebrew word יִשְׂמְחוּ I translate after A. A. Macintosh on the basis of a similar Arab word *šmh*, which means 'to be high', 'lofty', A.A. Macintosh, *op.cit.*, p.255; H.W. Wolff reads יִשְׂמְחוּ: 'make glad' contrary to BHS's and other commentators's reading יִמְשְׁחוּ: 'anoint' indicating that the author refers to the day of enthronement, described in the Bible as the day of joy, e.g. in the context of acclaiming Saul the king of Israel (1Sam 11,15). H.W. Wolff. *op. cit.*, p. 124.

¹³ I follow Macintosh who interprets the preposition (בְּ) as 'through the means of'. A.A. Macintosh, *op. cit.*, p 257, whereas Wolff understands this preposition as expressing the lack: 'an oven that burns without a baker' H.W. Wolff, *op.cit.* p. 107.

conspiracy they have made ready their resolve like an oven.¹⁴ Their baker sleeps all the night. In the morning it blazes like a burning fire. They are all heated like an oven and devour their leaders, all their kings fall, not one of them calls upon me' (7,3-7). This fragment shows Hosea as an excellent observer of the world of power, since he splendidly depicts the reality of the *coup d'état*, which was dethronement of the king and removal of civil and army officials. The exchange of the most important administration officials is illustrated by the description of Solomon's ascension to the throne. He removed the officials who would not support him. At first he sent away the priest Abiathar (1 Kgs 2,26-27) and replaced him with the priest Zadok (1 Kgs 2,35) and then he ordered the murder of Joab – the chief commander of David's army (1 Kgs 2,28–34), appointing Benajahu in his place (1 Kgs 2,35).

A very vivid description of a glowing oven perfectly depicts the competition and fights among different parties in the Northern Kingdom in the second half of the 8th century. The anti-Assyrian Syro-Ephraim league organised by Rezin, the king of Damascus, to which Pekah, the king of Israel belonged, testifies to the influence of the pro-Aramean party. However, the defeat of the kingdom of Damascus, ended with its annexation by Assyria in 732, proved the alliance with Aram pointless. His opponents took the power from Pekah, and looked for warranty of their safety in cooperation with Assyria. This change of orientation, ensuing an increase of the Assyrian influence is reflected in Tiglath-pileser's inscriptions. The latter mentions that after the king Pekah was killed by the Israelites, he put Hosea on the throne and made him pay tribute (Summary inscriptions: 9:9-11; 4:17-19).¹⁵ It is worth emphasising that according to the Bible, the same king of Israel started his rule as a result of a *coup d'état* he organised (2 Kgs 15,30). However, it is difficult to establish the actual course of events.

The greed for power is compared by the prophet Hosea to the destructive force of fire, devouring the rulers. The words 'all their kings fall' suggest that he refers not only to a single *coup d'état* but to a series of *coups d'état* in the period. In the Bible we read about the murder of the above-mentioned Zechariah by Shallum (2 Kgs 15,10) in ca. 750. The latter, after a one month rule was murdered by Menahem (2 Kgs 15,25). His successor Pekahiah was removed by Pekah (2 Kgs 15,25) in ca. 736, and he, as was mentioned above, was killed by Hosea in ca. 732-731.¹⁶ The prophet criticises frequent overturns in the Northern Kingdom, because the lack of stable power in this part of the divided monarchy was a significant reason for its fall. The stability of David's dynasty in Judah pro-

¹⁴ A.A. Macintosh, *op. cit.*, p. 262.

¹⁵ H. Tadmor, *The Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III, King of Assyria*, Jerusalem 1994, pp. 141.189.

¹⁶ H.W. Wolff, *op.cit.*, p. 111.

longed the political integrity of the Southern Kingdom by about 150 years. Internal political upheavals are also assessed from the religious perspective as a manifestation of deviation, when God accuses those involved saying: 'not one of them calls upon me' (7,7). According to A. Caquot, Hosea emphasises in this way the lack of God's legitimisation of those who rule in the Northern Kingdom.¹⁷

Still stronger criticism of *coup d'état* can be found in Chapter 8, when God speaking in the first person formulates the accusation: 'They make kings but not my will, they appoint officers, but without my knowledge; they have made for themselves idols of their silver and gold to bring their own ruin. He rejects¹⁸ your calf, O Samaria! My anger flares up against them. How long will they be incapable of innocence. A craftsman made it and it is not God. The calf of Samaria will be broken into pieces' (8,4-6).¹⁹ The above accusations show that Hosea condemns the *coups d'état* seeing them as a form of idolatry, because in parallel to them he condemns making gods of silver and gold. In this parallel, according to Macintosh, gods made by people correspond to kings acclaimed by people.²⁰

2. C O N C L U S I O N O F A L L I A N C E S with the powers of that time was earlier mentioned in the context of the criticism of *coups d'état*. Hosea condemns this aspect of political life calling these alliances 'mixture with nations' (7,8). They led to territorial loss as metaphorically described in the following words of the same verse: 'Ephraim²¹ has become a flat-cake, which is not revolved'²² Foreigners fed on its strength, but he was unaware'. This verse may refer to the situation stemming from the earlier mentioned alliance with Aram, according to the terms of which the Aramean troops marched through the territory of the Northern Kingdom on the way to Jerusalem, to force the latter into the antiAssyrian alliance (Isa 7,2). This fragment may be interpreted on a background of the already mentioned process of annexation of the Israelite territory by Assyria.²³ According to Hosea, the turn to this power is pointless: 'Ephraim went to Assyria and sent gifts to the great king, but he has no power to cure you or to heal your sores' (5,13). Apart from the alliances with Aram and Assyria, the prophet is also

¹⁷ A. Caquot, *op.cit.*, p. 137.

¹⁸ Cf. BHS's proposition: 'I rejected'.

¹⁹ A.A. Macintosh, *op. cit.*, p. 298.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 298.

²¹ The name Ephraim for the Northern Kingdom, which appears in the book nearly 40 times, refers to its range limited as a result of territorial loss to 'the city of Samaria and the surrounding Ephraim hill country'. J.M. Miller, J.H. Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*, London 1986, p. 334. However, it cannot be excluded that the name Ephraim reflects a separate tradition, in parallel to the names 'Israel' and 'Jacob' appearing in the book. H.F. van Rooy, *The Names Israel, Ephraim and Jacob in the Book of Hosea*, OTE 6, 1993, pp. 135-149.

²² I.e. burnt by fire.

²³ H.W. Wolff, *op cit.*, p. 126

against looking for help in Egypt (7,11.16;12,2). He emphasises the weakness of the rulers, expressed as indecision, which he compares to the behaviour of a 'naive pigeon'.²⁴ They do not know which power to trust: 'Ephraim is a silly senseless pigeon; They called upon Egypt and turned to Assyria' (7,11). Similar hesitation is reflected by the words; 'Ephraim concerns himself with wind²⁵ he pursues an east wind all day, he multiplies lies and robbery, they make a treaty with Assyria and oil is transported to Egypt' (12,2). The search for support in Egypt, and the diplomatic gifts of oil²⁶, was probably evoked by the chaos after the death of Tiglath-pileser in 727. The king Hosea taking advantage of this situation, tried to break the vassal dependence and did not pay the yearly tribute, but sent envoys to Egypt (2 Kgs 17,4). This move provoked the attack of Shalmaneser V, a new Assyrian ruler, on Samaria, which resulted in destruction of the city and annexation of the Kingdom of Israel to Assyria.²⁷ The collapse of the state revealed the fiasco of the foreign policy of the kingdom, based on alliances, which were to ensure the security of the state, but did not prevent the. The illusory character of the Assyrian help is also reflected by the metaphor of a bird falling into a net (7,12), which stands for Israel – victim of aggression of external enemies. The officials responsible for the disastrous policy will die by the sword (7,16), like the kings about whom the prophet says that they were all killed (7,7).²⁸

The policy of alliances is criticised, as in the case of a *coup d'état*, also for religious reasons. In the section concerning this aspect of Israel's policy (7,8-16), frequently quoted above, Hosea attacks the king and officials for looking for help in foreign powers instead of in God: Although Israel's pride testified against him, they did not return to YHWH, their God, nor for all this, not did they look for him (7,10). Similar accusations can be found a bit further on in the text: 'Woe to them, because they left me, destruction to them for they rebelled against me, and I wanted to redeem them, but they lied about me. They did not call upon me from their hearts, but they howled in their beds; because of grain and new wine they gash themselves and are rebellious against me' (7,13-14).²⁹ Hosea condemns alliances as being expressions of apostasy, especially in the following fragment: 'they have run to Assyria, Ephraim like a lonely wild donkey gives away gifts of love.

²⁴ A. A. Macintosh, *op. cit.*, p. 274.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 477.

²⁶ The oil could have been produced on the king's farms. The hypothesis of oil production on a large scale on such farms was put forward by the Israeli archaeologist D. Eitam, *Royal Industry in Ancient Israel During the Iron Age Period*, in: *The Town and Regional Economic Centre in the Ancient Near East*, E. Aerts, H. Klengel (eds.) Leuven 1990, pp. 56-73.

²⁷ For the summary of the discussion on the conquest of the city see: I. Jaruzelska, *Amos and the Officialdom in the Kingdom of Israel*, Poznań 1998, pp. 54-59.

²⁸ The correspondence between these two texts was noticed by A. Caquot, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

²⁹ H.W. Wolff, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

Although they have bargained among the nations I will gather them together, they will soon weaken³⁰ under the oppression of the king and his officials' (8,9-10).³¹ The metaphor in which Ephraim is compared to a wild donkey (note the similarity of sound of *pr*' ('wild') and *'prym* (Ephraim), an animal looking for company in the desert, emphasises the uselessness of the Israel's initiative to get help from Assyria. Probably the prophet refers to the tribute which king Hosea paid to get the support of Assyria and hold power.³² The conformability of this power as has been mentioned above, depended on the change of orientation from proAramean to proAssyrian. The payment of a tribute is compared in this fragment to paying for prostitution. In this way Hosea transfers his metaphor of a prostitute from the sphere of cult to that of Israel's foreign policy.³³ The search for support of a foreign power is condemned as form of idolatry. Macintosh and Wolff draw attention to the use of this metaphor in relation to the breaking of treaties in the Assyrian inscriptions, e.g. it was used in description of the agreement between Ashurnirari V (755-746) and Matiel, the king of Arpad, in which the party failing to keep the agreement is compared to a prostitute.³⁴

3. The theory of the state would be a proper term referring to Hosea's message concerning the Israelite monarchy. It could be outlined as follows: The tragic course of events exposed the inefficiency of the leaders and officials. Their complete helplessness in the face of Assyrian power, and likewise religious apostasy led Hosea to a more general reflection on the institution of monarchy in which he perceived the root of all evil. God speaking in the first person said: 'All their wickedness in Gilgal, there where I hated them. I will drive them out of my house because of their wicked deeds. I will show them no more mercy. Their officials are rebellious' (9,15). This text is an allusion to the beginning of the monarchy, since in Gilgal, which must have played an important role in the Northern Kingdom³⁵, Saul was made king (1 Sam 11,15). The fragment quoted seems to refer not only to the choice of Saul, but also to his rejection at the same place (15,21.23). The prophet describes Gilgal as a place of 'their evil' (רעתם) so with the same noun and pronominal suffix which he used to describe Hosea's *coup d'état* provoked 'by their evil' (ברעתם) (Hos 7,3). This literary medium was intended to show the connection between these incidents accentuating a negative

³⁰ The consonants ויחלו I interpret after Macintosh's suggestion, who understands them as a form of the verb חלה, meaning 'to be ill and weak' and translates after A. van Hoonacker 'they will soon show their weakness', *Ibid.*, p. 321.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 317-318.

³³ H.W. Wolff, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

³⁴ A.A. Macintosh, *op. cit.*, p. 318, H.W. Wolff, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

³⁵ A. Caquot, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

evaluation of the monarchy. Moreover, the mention of Gibeon (9,9) – a place associated with Saul, indicates, in the opinion of Wellhausen, Nowack and Robinson quoted by Caquot, the veiled criticism of the monarch in the person of the first king.³⁶ The evaluation of the monarchy by Hosea places him in the tradition of opposition to this institution, which is the most pronounced in the texts: 1 Sam 8,11-17; Judg 8,22-23; 9,7-20. In this aspect he appears a theoretician of the state.

CONCLUSION

The negative opinion on the monarchy expressed by the prophet Hosea resulted from its ineffective activities in a difficult political situation of the Northern Kingdom shortly before its collapse. The prophet emphasis on the ineffectuality of the king and officials, who led the country to ruin, shows that he perceived the specificity of the state as the sphere of social life which is bound with defence of the country against enemies as well as assiduous care of internal order. The above can be an expression of Hosea's affinity with the universal approach to the functions of the state.³⁷ The specificity of his estimation is expressed in presentation of the king and officials as apostates, i.e. as unfaithful members of a religious group. The deviation consisted, in the support of the golden calf cult. The prophet also considers the manifestation of the monarchy's functioning as apostasy, which obviously aggravates his negative opinion on this institution. At the same time we get a clear view of Hosea's conception of the union between two autonomous spheres of social life: the state and religion.³⁸

ABBREVIATIONS:

- AB = The Anchor Bible.
- BHS = *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*.
- BZAW = Beiheft zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft.
- ICC = The International Critical Commentary.
- OTE = 'Old Testament Essays'.
- RHPPhR = 'Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuse'.
- TOB = *Traduction œcuménique de la Bible*.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

³⁷ S. Kozyr-Kowalski, *Urzednicy panstwa jako stan spoleczny (State Officialdom as a Modern Social Estate)*, in: *Hegel a wspolczesnosć (Hegel and a Contemporary World)*, (ed.) R. Kozłowski, Poznań 1997, pp. 100-129, esp. pp. 118-123.

³⁸ Zob. także: J. Jaruzelska, *Ozeasz o królu i urzednikach. Prorok a polityka*, w: *Żydzi i judaizm we wspolczesnych badaniach polskich. Materiały z konferencji*, Kraków, 24-26 listopada 1998, red. K. Pilarczyk, S. Gąsiorowski, Polska Akademia Umiejętności, Komisja Historii i Kultury Żydów Polskich, Kraków 2000, ss. 421-441.