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SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES AND SCIENCES



The Shirley and Leslie Porter
School of Cultural Studies
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Faculty of Humanities
Tel Aviv University

“The Novelties of The Books of Samuel”

A Workshop on the Biblical Books of Samuel

Abstracts

Batnitzky, Leora (Prof. of Jewish Studies Department of Religion, Princeton University)
“Human Agency in the Book of Samuel”

While recent scholarship has addressed the dynamics of power portrayed in the books of Samuel (Halbertal and Holmes, 2017), less attention has been paid to what the text might say about human agency. In the books of Samuel, God empowers the people of Israel by allowing them a human king and in this way the text deviates from much of the rest of the Hebrew Bible which declares that only God is king. But is there a similar shift in the books of Samuel’s conception of human agency? Do individuals, such as Samuel, Saul, David, and Jonathan, affect their respective futures through their individual choices or are their actions ultimately part of a divine plan that is beyond human choice? This paper will address these questions by focusing on the dynamics between these characters.

Cohen, Ada Taggar (Prof. Faculty of Theology, Doshisha University)
“Why did Samuel have to make a Testament Speech (1Sam 12)?
A Comparison with the Testaments of Hittite kings”

The title of our workshop emphasizes “novelties.” One of the novelties in the Book of Samuel, from my perspective, is the way creating a new system of government is told. What are the points emphasized and what is not told and which language is used to elaborate some events and suppress others. At the end, no doubt, the dispute on dynastic legitimization seems to me to stand at the core of the story: who is more legitimate – the dynasty of the house of Saul, a Benjaminite dynasty, or the dynasty of the house of David, a Judahite dynasty. Clearly the Hebrew Bible is written from the perspective of Judah. In this paper the way Hittite texts relating to two important Hittite kings will be looked at in relation to the rise and struggle of ancient Israelite kingship.

Reading the Hittite texts of Ḫattušili I (CTH 6) and Ḫattušili III (CTH 81) has already alerted biblical scholars, during the last century, to seek similarities with the story of Saul and mainly that of David. Especially relevant is the text composed by Ḫattušili III – or as we would say today, by his “ghost writer” – who took the throne in a coup-d’état, and needs to legitimize his kingship. These two Hittite great kings lived several centuries apart, Ḫattušili I reigned around 1650 and Ḫattušili III from c.1270 BCE. The latter predates historical David by about 300 years. The paper looks at the fact that time difference does not cause ancient literary genres to disappear, the opposite, it preserves them.

Cohen, Uri S. (Prof. Department of Literature, Tel Aviv University)
“Tamar my Brother’s Sister: Intimate and Public Implications of King and Court”

It is plausible to consider Samuel as a result of various sources molded by various hands through time until we arrive at the canonized form. I propose that the text as it reached us has origins in earlier sources of Hebrew “heroics” and editing that is cognizant of the Hellenic world, its political order and histories of heroes and kings. The sequence under examination begins with David and Batsheva (Samuel 2 11-13) and



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ends with the murder of Am(i)non and the destruction of Tamar, his brother's sister. A reading that is both close and far reveals a story deeply engaged in questions of moral emotions, sight and insight in what Bernard Williams called shame and honor societies. When power is vested in the family, inevitably these emotions become political and their story invites tragedy. Such a reading produces an editorial point of view keenly aware of the perils of court and courtiers, persistently critical of kings, honor and the intimate disorder of David's family that invites violence of succession. It is almost a Shakespearean voice; or rather Shakespeare is its ripeness in time.

Damrosch, David (Prof. Department of Comparative Literature, Harvard University) (online)
"The David Story in the Babylonian Cosmopolis"

Written (or at the least, rewritten) during and soon after the period of the Exile, the books of Samuel and Kings are profoundly marked by the writers' exilic experiences, not only political but also literary. Having long been on the periphery of "the Babylonian cosmopolis" (to take the term recently proposed by Marc Van De Mieroop), the Deuteronomists found themselves uncomfortably ensconced at the heart of an empire they hated but whose literary culture was far more developed than their own. In this talk I will consider the stories of Samuel, David, and their troubled families in the context of Babylonian works such as the poem *Erra and Ishum* that probe the mystery of a god's willingness to countenance the destruction of his chosen city and even of his own temple.

Edelsburg, Chen (Dr. Department of Literature, Tel Aviv University)
"He Made Himself Ill": Illness and Consent from Amnon and Tamar to the #metoo Era

Since Freud's conceptualization of hysteria, the analysis of the relationship between rape and illness has primarily focused on the perspective of the raped individual. Freud understood the illnesses of many women (and even men) whom he treated as resulting from incest or sexual abuse, which created mental trauma embodied and expressed physically. While this direction led to significant developments in understanding the importance of sexuality, desire, and consent in mental life, the study of the relationship between illness and the perpetrators of sexual crimes was somewhat neglected.

Returning to the story of Amnon and Tamar in the book of Samuel 2 brings back to the center the question of this connection, as the story of Amnon's rape of Tamar begins with two opposing statements about illness. On the one hand, "Amnon became so obsessed with his sister Tamar that he made himself ill." On the other hand, immediately after that, on the advice of a friend, "Amnon lay down and pretended to be ill," in order to bring Tamar to his house and to his room. These two statements seem contradictory: is Amnon truly sick, or is he merely scheming to achieve his goal? Is he a clever manipulator or someone who has lost his mind?

These questions relate to the reliability of Amnon's character. However, through a cultural reversal, today these kind of questions are usually directed at rape victims (and not perpetrators). This reversal is the basis for the #MeToo movement, which called for a return to believing women who have been sexually assaulted and harassed.

The relationships between rape, reliability, and illness are intertwined with questions of status, power, and politics, as demonstrated by the story of Amnon and Tamar. My paper will focus on Amnon's illness as a key to understanding the political meaning of illness and its implications for contemporary sexual and gender politics.



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Gluzman, Michael (Prof. Department of Literature, Tel Aviv University)

“More Wonderful than the Love of Women? David and Jonathan in Modern Hebrew Poetry”

The relationship between David and Jonathan has long been celebrated as a profound example of male friendship. However, in contemporary Hebrew culture, the lament of David for Jonathan has undergone a significant reinterpretation, emerging as a powerful symbol of gay love. My talk examines this transformation, highlighting the ways in which this ancient narrative has been recontextualized to reflect modern understandings of queer identity. Through close readings of literary texts, particularly those by women poets, I will explore how the bond between David and Jonathan has been used to carve out a queer space, allowing women poets to imagine alternative modes of existence. These poetic interpretations not only challenge traditional heteronormative narratives but also offer a nuanced exploration of love, desire, and solidarity among women. By focusing on these modern literary reiterations by Rachel, Leah Goldberg, Sivan Baskin and others, my talk focuses on the dynamic interplay between the biblical text and modern cultural production.

Horowitz, Ariel (PhD Candidate Student, Comparative Literature, Stanford University)

“Saul in Ein-Dor”

Reading together to refresh the memory

Ruttenburg, Nancy (Prof. American Literature and Professor, by courtesy, of Comparative Literature, Stanford University)

“Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom*: The Antitypical Antitype”

American Puritans understood the relationship of the Old Testament to the New as *typological*. That is, Old Testament figures and events were conceived as *types* that anticipated and would be fulfilled, and even incarnated, in New Testament figures and events, their *antitypes*. For example, David was seen as type to Jesus’s antitype, an identification which the preeminent American Calvinist minister and theologian Jonathan Edwards examined at length in his treatise “Types of the Messiah.” I would like to discuss Edwards’s claims for the typological relationship of David and Jesus in order to propose that Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom* offers a third term in the form of a historical novel: type, antitype, antitypical antitype.

My aim is to propose a way of understanding Faulkner’s restaging of the story of the two Absaloms, the sons of David and Thomas Sutpen, that would offer an alternative to an allegorical reading of the novel (Sutpen as a modern David; Absalom as a modern Absalom) while keeping the Biblical types in play. One way he accomplished that, as many scholars have noted, was to weave a formally complex net of thematic parallels between the Biblical and fictional texts. However, I’d like to approach Faulkner in the context of the American literary tradition, and the novel in particular, which placed the Old Testament front and center. Just as Melville gave his major characters names like Ahab and Ishmael, as well as a “cracked” Isaiah warning Ishmael not to ship on the Pequod, Faulkner’s choice of Absalom as the name of a central character is, as Melville would put it, “not without meaning.” How does Faulkner amplify or extend this meaning into the twentieth century? Why is the novel, a secular form, uniquely capable of making Biblical language new—for Faulkner, as an unheard-of antitype to the Davidian type?



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Stay, Shira (Prof. Department of Hebrew Literature, Ben Gurion University of the Negev)
“Women in the Book of Samuel: Is There a Different Politics?”

In contrast to all previous wars in Israel, the war that erupted on October 7th involved women in profound, extensive, and unprecedented ways —some participating willingly, others not —women as observers, tank operators, captives, fighters, mothers, daughters, activists, protesters, and of course, the numerous massacre victims. Remarkably, this war can be comprehensively described without any need for a male-centric perspective. However, women are notably absent from the decision-making table and the political cabinet. This represents the sole aspect of the war where women's voices are not heard.

The Book of Samuel opens with the narrative of Hannah, an active woman whose lips move but whose voice goes unheard. This image is a poignant illustration of women's position therein. The book in its two parts recounts numerous war stories. Due to its novelistic quality, it is relatively filled with female characters, many of them play various roles concerning war. Yet, these roles seem marginal or peripheral, and the war unfolds predominantly 'Between Men' (Sedgwick, 1985). On one hand, women serve as disruptive agents who influence and pivot the war machine. For instance, Saul begins pursuing David after women extol David in their songs, emphasizing his superiority over Saul. On the other hand, women also act to mitigate violence (such as Abigail, or the wise woman of Tekoa), save lives (like Michal, or the wise woman of Abel Beth-Maacah), and uphold civic values.

Moreover, the history of feminist movements is also rich in fluctuations between militant national loyalty and dedication to values of solidarity and peace (Gelblum 2013, Levy-Hazan 2019). In my lecture, I aim to explore the diverse roles that women play in relation to the wars depicted in the Book of Samuel, delineating their range of actions and influence, and to ask whether that range offers alternative political pathways.

Sweeney, Marvin (Prof. Claremont School of Theology) (online)
The Book of Samuel: Pre-Hellenistic Examples of Israelite/Judean Novels

The biblical book of Samuel is well-known for its constituent narratives concerning the origins of kingship in ancient Israel and Judah. Two narratives are particularly important in that they portray the rise of King David ben Jesse of Judah and Israel in 1 Samuel 16—2 Samuel 9 and the failure of David to act as an effective father and king in the so-called Succession Narrative or Court History in 2 Samuel 10-20; 1 Kings 1-2. In both cases, they present a potential caricature of King David in his rise to power in 1 Samuel 16—2 Samuel 9 and his exercise of power in 2 Samuel 10-20; 1 Kings 1-2. In the account of David's rise to power, written in Judah to support the claims of the House of David over the House of Saul, David enjoys the favor of YHWH throughout and can do no wrong, even when he turns against his own king and father-in-law, Saul ben Kish, to ally with Israel's enemies, the Philistines, and refuses to have marital relations with his primary wife, Michal bat Saul, in order to deny her family heirs to the throne of Israel. In the account of David's exercise of power, written in northern Israel to justify revolt against the House of David, David can do no right as he commits adultery with Bath Sheba, the wife of one of his loyal soldiers, makes arrangements to murder Bath Sheba's husband, Uriah the Hittite, to cover up the adultery, and fails to control his own sons, who engage in rape, murder, and revolt against their own father. The paper examines the plot development and characterization in each of these narratives to demonstrate that they constitute two examples of novels written for political purpose in ancient Judah and Israel.



Sweeney, Soo Kim (Dr. Claremont School of Theology) (online)

“On the Verge of ‘Another’ Exile: David, the Ark, and a Metaleptic Reader of 2 Samuel 15:23-29”

This paper delves into the intricate relationship between the Ark of the Covenant and humanity, as portrayed in 2 Samuel 15:23-29. Against the backdrop of David's escape from Absalom, this passage marks a crucial juncture in the Ark's narrative journey in the books of Samuel. The paper employs a metaleptic reading approach, a method that traverses different narrative levels, thereby crossing ontological boundaries. This approach acknowledges the interpretive realm and stimulates intellectual engagement, as it recognizes that we cannot access David's mental space or comprehend his logic before his illocutionary act occurs.

The first metaleptic reading is a reader-oriented intertextual reading based on spatial and narrative sequence parallels. It delves into the tension between the triumphant crossing of the Jordan River and the miraculous victory at Jericho, both led by the Ark, and the catastrophic outcome of bringing the Ark into battle against the Philistines. The plot crisis emerges when readers are left in suspense about which option David will choose. This narrative is designed to involve the audience, making them part of the analysis. David's command to return the Ark to Jerusalem transitions the narrative from crisis to climax, a moment that piques the reader's curiosity. This decision leads the reader to assume he chose the latter, recalling the catastrophic memory of the Philistine battle disaster.

The second metaleptic reading delves into further questions: Why did David weigh more on this catastrophic memory than on the Joshua tradition, and with whom did he identify more, Joshua or Eli's two sons? The paper concludes the latter and unpacks the logic through a metaleptic reading. In the narrative space between Crisis and Climax, the metaleptic reader inserts the intertextual reading of the cases of Eli's two sons' sexual misconduct and David's sexual misconduct. These transgressions occurred near where the Ark was situated, underscoring their severity and the resulting severe divine retribution. David's decision to willingly distance himself from the Ark demonstrates his awareness of prior warnings and his

understanding of the paradoxical nature of divine presence during his past exiles and sojourns. This choice, made in the wilderness, emphasizes the Ark's double function as a symbol of divine protection and a possible catalyst for severe divine retribution.

Through a metaleptic reading and meticulous literary analysis with other intertextual connections, this paper posits that the Ark's journey is fraught with tension between wandering and settlement, surrender and manipulation, and presence and absence. This study ultimately provides profound insights that will help contemporary readers understand biblical passages, discern what to consider when choosing to weigh more on specific information, bring other interconnections in various contexts, and apply the discoveries to their own life situations. It invites readers to reflect on how they might weigh the significance of different biblical events if they encounter similar patterns in their lives.

Takeuchi, Yu (Prof. Faculty of Letters, Kumamoto University)

“εκ της του Ουριου (From “that” of Uriah) :

Reflections on the ingeniously condensed portrayal of protagonists in 2Sam 11 in the genealogy of Matt 1”



The paper examines a unique and important case of reception of the Bathsheba (or rather Uriah) and David Story (2Sam 11), namely, verse 6 in the genealogy of Matthew's gospel (Matt 1). Along with Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Maria, Bathsheba is the only one, among the five women listed in the gospel's genealogy, who is

mentioned without her proper name: “ek tes tou Ouriou”, literally, “from the (woman/wife) of Uriah”. Then, Uriah seemingly is the only male foreigner in the genealogy and the only male figure who is not a father. This miniature ‘Midrashic’ verse in the NT appears to accentuate the anomaly of Solomon's birth story and encapsulate the essence of the characteristic traits of the tragic couple. In light of this tiny trace of the early interpreters’ reading, I will try to illustrate the contrastive rhetoric technique used to highlight the difference between David, Uriah, and Bathsheba in 2Sam.

Watanabe, Kazuko (Prof. Emerita, Department of Religion, Toyo Eiwa University)

“How the Relationship between Gilgamesh and Enkidu differs from the Relationship between David and Jonathan?”

Although the relationship between Gilgamesh and Enkidu appears to be similar to that of David and Jonathan, in both cases warm friendships, I believe that the two relationships have several big differences. First, Enkidu has been created by the gods in order to deal with the problematic Gilgamesh, or at least to change him through a long process. Second, Gilgamesh forces Enkidu to help him kill Humbaba, the ‘fearsome guardian of the Cedar Forest’. But Enkidu knows that Humbaba was appointed guardian by the supreme god Enlil, and that, if anyone kills Humbaba, they will be punished by Enlil.

As a result of the slaughter of Humbaba and also of the Bull of Heaven, Enkidu alone will be sentenced to death by Enlil. Gilgamesh is so shocked by Enkidu’s death that he suffers from a long and deep grief. Wishing to meet Ūta-napishti, a survivor of the Ancient Deluge who received eternal life and was deified along with his wife, Gilgamesh travels through the wasteland alone for the first time. There are also several similarities between the two relationships. One might be that David also has to work through his grief from the death of Jonathan.

Weitzman, Steven (Prof. of Hebrew and Semitic Languages; Ella Darivoff Director, Herbert D Katz Center for Advanced Judaic Studies, University of Pennsylvania)

“David's Messianic Secret”

For more than a century, scholars of the Gospel of Mark have sought to account for why the Jesus of this gospel tries to keep his identity as the messiah a secret. This presentation seeks to shed new light on this question by exploring the relationship between the Jesus of Mark and King David as depicted in 1 Samuel. Mark's "messianic secret," it will propose, is the secret that Jesus is the long-awaited son of David, a claim that the gospel does not assert directly but insinuates intertextually through a series of allusions to David's time as a self-concealing messianic figure in 1 Samuel.