

The Outlaw David ben Jesse: Reading David as Geronimo in Exile?

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ABSTRACT

Descriptions of the years before David becomes King, particularly the narratives of 1 Samuel 19-30, have often emphasized David as a kind of "rebel" leader in relation to Saul's attempts to capture him. However, when read in conjunction of Eric Hobsbawm's famous concept of "Social Banditry", these "rebel" or "outlaw" themes take on a more serious tone. Reading the Biblical narratives next to the events surrounding the famous Native-American leader Geronimo only serves to further highlight the potential significance of "outlaw" themes in the Samuel narratives. However, when the widely noted "superscriptions" on some of the "Davidic" Psalms are brought into the discussion, more serious evidence emerges for an actual historical-textual interest, perhaps during the Neo-Babylonian and Persian periods, in David's "outlaw" life as a period of particular interest to exiles.

KEYWORDS: David, narrative criticism, Geronimo

One can indeed come out of prison to reign,
even though born poor in the kingdom.
Ecclesiastes 4:14

A PROLOGUE

I discovered the work of my colleague (and now, I am pleased to also say, my friend) Wilhelm ("Willie") Wessels while I was working on my commentary on the book associated with a Biblical trouble-maker, the prophet Micah. Wessels' many published studies on Micah¹ were constantly a source of inspiration,

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¹ Wilhelm Wessels, "Wisdom in the Gate: Micah Takes the Rostrum," *OTE* 10 (1997): 125-35; W. Wessels, "Conflicting Powers: Reflections from the Book of Micah," *OTE* 10 (1997): 528-44; W. Wessels, "Micah 1, an Apt Introduction to Power Talks." *Skrif en kerk*, 19 (1998): 438-448; W. Wessels, "Micah 4 and 5: A Battle of Words and Perceptions," *OTE* 12 (1999): 623-641; W. Wessels, "Cheating at the Market Place – Impressions from Micah 6:9 – 16," *Skrif en kerk* 21 (2000): 406-415; W. Wessels, "Micah 7:8-20: An Apt Conclusion to the Book of Micah," *Verbum et*

challenge, and encouragement, and it is my great honour to submit this study – a study of a somewhat more surprising Biblical outcast and rebel, especially when compared to Micah – in his honour. Willi, in any case, would approve of a study of Biblical rebels – an interest one might not suspect given his quiet demeanour. His friends, his students, and certainly the readers of his studies on Micah, know that behind the quiet is a passion for scripture, and especially scripture read with an interest in justice.

B UNSAVOURY HEROES

It is interesting how many early Biblical heroes lie through their teeth, usually to those in authority (Abraham, Gen 12, 20; Isaac, Gen. 26; Jacob, Gen 27, 30, 31:20; Moses, Ex 3:18; 5:3; David, twice in 1 Sam 21 alone, etc.). It is also interesting how many Biblical characters “flee” from authorities or “escape” from imprisonment, or “defy” punishment in various ways: Jacob (27:43; 31:20, 22); Moses (Ex 2:15; Acts 7:29); David² (1 Sam 19:10; 19:12; 19:18; 22:1; 23:13; again and again), Daniel 3 and 6; Jesus, Luke 4: 29-30 (perhaps also all the Passion narratives - by virtue of not remaining dead at the hands of the Roman Empire?), certainly Peter (Acts 12) and Paul and Silas (Acts 16), we could certainly go on. These same wily characters also often live away from authorities and population centres – such as in caves (David, 1 Sam 22:1, 2 Sam 23:13; esp. Prophets, 1 Kings 18:4; 1 Kings 19:9; 2 Chron 16:10; or are imprisoned, Joseph 39, 40). Our very familiarity with these stories may quite falsely distract us from the otherwise rather unsavoury, “low-class” or “hoi polloi” characterizations of our heroes in the Bible. Never mind that they are “unjustly accused” (“...of course”, say the prison guards: “...everyone is innocent in here!”). Still, these are not the kind of people (males, mostly) that you want your daughter or your son to associate with. They are in trouble. Suspicious. Outcasts. Or, to put it simply, they are exiles and/or despised minorities. Associating David with these unsavoury characters would seem, at first blush, to be simply rude in the presence of royalty. However, this is not at all clear.

In this study, I consider a reading of the stories of David that concentrates on understanding “David the Outlaw”, a way of thinking about the significance of the early years of David before he assumes the monarchy, a part of the story

Ecclesia 24 (2003): 249-259; W. Wessels, “Empowered by the Spirit of Yahweh: A Study of Micah 3:8,” *Journal of Biblical and Pneumatological Research* 1 (2009): 33-47.

² I am delighted to have discovered that my study on David in relation to Hobsbawm’s “Bandit” studies was anticipated, although developed in different ways, by Robert Sessengood and Jennifer Koosed’s book, *Jesse’s Lineage: The legendary Lives of David, Jesus, and Jesse James* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013). I discovered this wonderful study toward the end of my work on David and Geronimo, and I hope Robert Sessengood and Jennifer Koosed approve of my similar analysis.

of David that commences a body of writing usually referred to as "The Succession Narrative" (2 Sam 7 – 1 Kings 1-2). However, I am particularly interested in proposing possible reasons why there is such detailed information about David's social condition in these "pre-King" stories. In sum, there may be a basis for arguing that the Bible reflects an exile's interest in the *outlaw David*. Modern studies of David, however, have a significant context, which needs to be addressed at least in preliminary terms.

C WHY DAVID? A TROUBLING QUESTION...

In his 2009 work on David, John Van Seters begins with a statement that he has been 'fascinated' with David since his seminary years³. McKenzie's monograph on David begins with a paean to Michelangelo's statue, and an assessment of the attention the Bible gives to David, noting with many others that the Bible "devotes more space to David than any other character"⁴. Halpern, apparently recognizing that much interest in David has been traditionally driven by Christian theology, begins by acknowledging that a great deal of the Jesus tradition works to establish Jesus' genealogical connections to David in order to buttress the claims of Messiahship assigned to Jesus, and therefore David plays a central role in the Christian tradition with regard to the identity of Jesus⁵. I confess that, at least until the current project, if I were to begin a book on David (a book I shall never undertake), I would have to begin with an honest expression of loathing. I would not be alone, of course. In Van Seter's masterful monograph on David, he also points out the less than admirable picture of David painted by the "historical" writings as opposed to the Deuteronomic ideals of Kingship:

As we have seen in our study of the David Saga, this view of David and his household is so completely subverted by repeated acts of violence: murders, rape, adultery, civil war, and bloodshed. It is not just in the case of the Bathsheba affair, in which David's actions are comparable to those of Ahab, the worst king of Israel according to Dtr, and in which the judgment is passed on him that the sword will never depart from his household/dynasty. The negative view of David begins with his violent rise to power and it includes the unremitting acts of injustice and bloodshed that persist in his family throughout his reign. A portrayal of this sort could never serve as a model of what the monarchy should be...⁶

³ John Van Seters, *The Biblical Saga of King David* (Warsaw, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009): xi.

⁴ Steven McKenzie, *King David: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 2.

⁵ Baruch Halpern, *David's Secret Demons: Messiah, Murderer, Traitor, King*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 3.

⁶ Van Seters, *Biblical Saga*, 358.

But my difficulties with David have just as much to do with an equally violent "history of interpretation." In other words, it has been virtually impossible for me to separate the historical materials *about* David in the Bible (which, it must be remembered, starts early in noting David's excessive bloodshed, 1 Chron. 22:8) with the uses to which his story has been put over the centuries, particularly defending some of the most reprehensible behaviour on the part of Christians when they are in political power, all in the name of Davidic "law and order", Davidic "dominance", and/or Davidic "Empire"⁷. Furthermore, although I acknowledge that a considerable amount of the Old Testament is given over to what Walter Brueggemann has called "establishment Theology"⁸, I have a particular distaste for precisely this theology in its' various forms, including the already disturbing ideologies identified as "Zion Theology" by a previous generation of Old Testament scholars⁹. Why, then, do I offer a study of David *voluntarily* (and not under the pressure of 'covering the Monarchy' in "Introduction to Old Testament" lectures...)?

This essay had its' roots in a serendipitous reading about Geronimo, the famous Apache warrior of the 19th Century American Southwest (and Northern Mexico). The circumstances for that reading are not important here...it is the reading itself that transformed my thinking about elements of the David story, especially noting the frequent "escapes" of Geronimo, which surely would remind any Biblical student of David's frequent forays into the hills. What would have seemed a tangent into Arizona and New Mexico will eventually be brought clearly back to Jerusalem.

D READING GERONIMO AND THEN READING DAVID.

The Apache warrior, Geronimo, has undergone a striking cultural transformation from a man who was frequently reviled with threats of hanging, execution, or

⁷ For Constantine and Charlemagne as "David", see Judson Emerick, "Charlemagne: a new Constantine?" in *The Life and Legacy of Constantine Traditions through the Ages* (ed. M. Shane Bjornlie; London: Routledge, 2017), 138-139.

⁸ That is, the ideological foundations of the central Davidic line, see esp. Walter Brueggemann, "Interpretation in a Pluralist Society" in *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Walter Brueggemann; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 707-742.

⁹ Beginning, usually, with Edzard Rohland, 'Die Bedeutung der erwählungstraditionen Israels für die Eschatologie der alttestamentlichen Propheten' (Unpublished D.Theol. thesis. University of Heidelberg, 1956), but developed especially in J.J.M. Roberts, J.J.M., 1973. "The Davidic Origin of the Zion Tradition," *JBL* 92 (1973): 329-344; J.J.M. Roberts, "Isaiah 2 and the Prophet's Message to the North," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 75 (1985): 290-308; J.J.M. Roberts, 2001. "God's Imperial Reign According to the Psalter," *Horizons in Biblical Theology*, 23 (2001): 211-221; and Mark S. Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2002) esp. 96-97.

lynching during his life, to become a cultural icon in the later 20th Century, and now into the 21st Century. The story of this transformation is quite interesting.

His name in Apache is Goyahkla, or Gokliya¹⁰. In his own famous narrative of his life dictated to an Oklahoma educator by the name of S.M. Barrett in 1905-6, he suggested that his birth was in 1829, though some historians suggest it could likely have been some years earlier. Geronimo was never a chief, but was considered an important "war leader" who was recognized for his success in strategies of raiding. Furthermore, part of the terms of the US/Mexican border determined by Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 was that Americans promised to assist Mexico in reducing Apache invasions into Mexican territories. These militant activities of the Apache appear to have had their origins in Mexico initially, where otherwise peaceful relations were shattered in 1858 when a Mexican village launched an attack on Geronimo's camp and killed all of his family, among others in his band. Geronimo famously never abandoned his "hatred for Mexicans" and for seeking frequent revenge.

On the northern side of the new border, initial contact with European-American surveyors in the Southwest was peaceful, but subsequent aggressive mining and land speculation in Apache territory led to inevitable troubles, especially after gold was discovered in Apache territories after 1860. Land speculation and business interests among settlers also stoked the flames of war. Faulke, in his study¹¹, emphasizes the importance of the famous "Tucson Ring", a group of wealthy and influential Euro-American business and media men who profited considerably from the presence of American troops in the Southwest, and stirred animosities with Apaches, and encouraged harrowing stories about Apache atrocities, whenever possible – typically finding reasons to insist on the presence of troops.

19th Century articles in the *New York Times*, for example, reveals a startling array of angry denunciations of Apaches in general, but Geronimo specifically, during the time when his name was the very definition of fearful conflict with Native peoples, especially in the West. For example, in an article entitled: "The Inhuman Apaches" (May 30, 1885), the *New York Times* angrily shrieked: "Kindness and good treatment are thrown away upon such inhuman and bloodthirsty wretches. The blood of the murdered settler will cry from the

¹⁰ William Clements, *Imagining Geronimo: An Apache Icon in Popular Culture* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2013), 6.

¹¹ Odie Faulk, *The Geronimo Campaigns* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), but compare Louis Kraft, *Gatewood & Geronimo* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2000).

ground, and the cry will be heard." While still at large, the *New York Times* (Jun 2, 1885) referred to "Geronimo's Band of Thugs", stating:

The troops may not be able to catch these wretches, who are worse than wild beasts. If they do overtake them, and if any of the Indians shall escape the soldier's rifles, we do not see why those who may survive should not be hanged. They should be punished for their horrible crimes, and their punishment should be either execution or imprisonment for life. Not one of them should ever be allowed to go again upon a reservation.

These attitudes reached a fever pitch in the year that Geronimo famously surrendered for the last time. In "Geronimo's Death Demanded" (Feb 5, 1886), sourced from El Paso, Texas, the Times writes: "The feeling in Arizona and New-Mexico (sic) in favour of the summary execution of Geronimo, the Apache chief, and the surviving members of his bloodthirsty band, is rapidly growing into a demand," and when news of his surrender began to be verified, an article in the Sept. 10, 1886 edition was entitled, bluntly, "Geronimo Must Die": and went on to state: "...There is no doubt that the public sentiment of the country demands the death of Geronimo...".

It wasn't long, however, when news of Geronimo's capture and imprisonment in Florida was following by surprising news of Geronimo's *conversion* to Christianity. This was, in fact, the subject of further brief notices in the Times. In an article (Jan 28, 1890) entitled (one must say, offensively): "Geronimo Heap Good Injun", the writer refers to Geronimo teaching Sunday School, and becoming a man who has: "...lost all hatred of the white people." Still, it had not been a long time after his last surrender, and memories ran deep. In an angry obituary of Feb 18, 1909, the Times writes (perpetuating the historical mistake of calling Geronimo a "chief"):

The career of Geronimo, Chief of the Apaches, gave point to the proverb that a good Indian is a dead Indian...Crafty, bloodthirsty, incredibly cruel and ferocious, he was all his life the worst type of aboriginal American savage. Even his so-called religious conversion was not without cunning...

In the light of these early discussions, then, the transformation of Geronimo is nothing less than striking in American history.

After the Civil War, more attention was given to settling the Southwest, and this involved attempts to pacify the Apache and move them onto reservation lands so that the remaining lands could become open for settlement and ranching. As part of these campaigns, Geronimo was captured, or surrendered, on *four* occasions.

Gen. Crook was given command of military activities in the Southwest in 1871, the same year that Vincent Colyer was also sent by Grant on a Peace Mission to gather Native peoples peacefully onto reservation land. Colyer's efforts, predictably, were savagely mocked by the "Tucson Ring"¹². Geronimo was first captured in 1877, by Agent John Clum, and taken to San Carlos Reservation.

Distracted by a Spiritual movement on the reservation led by a prophet named Nakaidoklini¹³, Geronimo and a band escaped into Mexico in 1881. In 1884 Geronimo surrendered again and was taken to San Carlos, but troubles broke out again, and in 1885 Geronimo fled with a band, heading into Mexico. He surrendered a third time to Gen. Crook in 1886, but turned back from the Northern march early in 1886 when he sensed that the terms of the surrender were not to be honoured. In fact, Geronimo himself recounted his memories of Gen. Crook with disdain and suggested that the General's death was because "the Almighty" punished him¹⁴. Gen. Crook was replaced by Gen. Nelson Miles, who launched an intensive manhunt to find Geronimo in Mexico. Geronimo finally surrendered to Lt. Charles Gatewood, a Crook appointee who had left the Southwest, but was an officer whom Geronimo trusted. Miles called Gatewood back into duty, and in August-September 1886, Gatewood finally convinced Geronimo and his small band to surrender for the last time.

Geronimo was never allowed to return to the Southwest as he believed he was promised, but did enjoy some notoriety as a prisoner of war, living in Florida and Oklahoma. He attended World Fairs in Omaha, 1893; in Buffalo in 1901, and in St. Louis, in 1904. He was invited to attend Teddy Roosevelt's inauguration in 1905, and was courted by Gordon Lillie (Pawnee Bill) for his Wild West outdoor show, much as Sitting Bull had worked with "Buffalo" Bill Cody's Wild West show. Geronimo would sell autographed photos of himself, buttons from his coats (which he would routinely sew on for each public appearance), and bows and arrows that he made. There is continued controversy about his alleged conversion to Christianity, but sources are sparse on this aspect of his famous life. Geronimo died in 1909, and was buried NE of Fort Sill, Oklahoma. But that was hardly the end of the story.

At the beginning of his important 2013 study of how Geronimo has become a "subtext in the mainstream American imagination" in the United States, William Clements sites a number of important ways that the name and image of this Native-American warrior has become ubiquitous in modern American culture:

¹² Faulke, *Geronimo Campaigns*, 13-14

¹³ Faulke, *Geronimo Campaigns*, 24

¹⁴ Geronimo, (as told to S.M. Barrett), *Geronimo's Story of His Life* (New York: Duffield, 1906), 132.

Geronimo as the king of spades in a deck of 'Native American' playing cards; a liquor store in Pensacola, Florida, called Geronimo's Spirits; the steel cable on an oil derrick that provides a rapid escape [is] ...known as the 'Geronimo line'; an Australian company marketing Geronimo Jerky in six flavors, including Spicey Shaman; a Geronimo Heritage Blanket designed by Pendleton; a board game titled Geronimo published in 1995...postage stamps featuring Geronimo issued by the Marshall Islands, Angola, and the Gambia...¹⁵.

One can purchase an image of Geronimo on a T-Shirt in virtually any major city of the Western United States. Popular attitudes, therefore, have dramatically changed from the New York Times articles in the early 20th Century that regularly demonized him. As Clements further observes, "Geronimo's canonization became official on 23 February 2009"¹⁶. On that date, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a resolution on the 100th anniversary of Geronimo's death, and Clements further notes that the resolution included striking wording about his "extraordinary bravery, and his commitment to the defence of his homeland, his people, and Apache ways of life..." and spoke of Geronimo as "...a spiritual and intellectual leader, [who] became recognized as a great military leader by his people because of his courage, determination, and skill' as he directed his people in 'a war of self-defence'"¹⁷

Outside of popular opinions, however, the scholarly debates among historians with regard to Geronimo, his exploits and his character, continues to vary widely. Some scholars have tended to excuse, even valorise, him as a Native-American whose violence was only directed at those who would threaten his homeland and his people¹⁸. Other historians, however, include disgusted recitations of his violent, often murderous, raids on both sides of the Mexican-American border around Arizona and New Mexico¹⁹ and thus suggest that both negative and positive elements of the man must be taken into account. Utley, for example, states that many of the atrocities attributed to Geronimo:

...were mere rumors or fabrications, but the stories were bad enough to brand this man a bloody butcher who shot, lanced, or knifed dozens of victims throughout his adult life. His name induced fear and horror in settlers in Arizona and New Mexico as well as the Mexican states

¹⁵ Clements, *Imagining Geronimo*, 1

¹⁶ Clements, *Imagining Geronimo*, 50-52

¹⁷ Clements, *Imagining Geronimo*, 52.

¹⁸ Angie Debo, *Geronimo* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1976).

¹⁹ e.g. "a thoroughly vicious, intractable, and treacherous man", quoted in Clements, *Imagining Geronimo*, 20, but see also Robert Utley, *Geronimo* (New Haven: University of Yale Press, 2012); Faulke, *Geronimo Campaigns*, 1993, for a spirited defence.

of Chihuahua and Sonora. And the public at large knew the name to stand for terrible atrocities.²⁰

The historical debates will continue, but the cultural debate is essentially over. Geronimo is a permanent fixture in the folklore of American history. As is David...and with that, we begin to think about how Geronimo leads to another bandit many centuries before, when one could well imagine – compared to the infamous "Tucson Ring", a similar Philistine "Pentapolis Ring" also crying for Judean blood!

E DAVID THE "SOCIAL BANDIT"?

At the outset, the reader may find it helpful to be reminded of a rough outline of David's pre-monarchical stories, and also specifically the "outlaw years" in 1 Samuel:

1 Samuel 16 – Introduces David the Musician, plays for Saul

1 Samuel 17 – David vs. Goliath (but David reintroduced in vss. 12-16); 17:7; 2 Sam 21:19; 1 Chron 20:5

1 Sam 18 – David successful, "killed his ten thousand", Saul begins to be jealous

Begin the "Outlaw Years"

1 Sam 19 – David escapes Saul's rage with wife (Saul's daughter!) Michal's help.

1 Sam 20 – David escapes with Jonathan's help.

1 Sam 21 – David gets Goliath's sword by lying about his mission; feigns madness with Achish

1 Sam 22 – David and the Gang (vss 1-2 crucial!); Doeg betrays David; Priests killed for helping David

1 Sam 23 – David fights Philistines and rescues Judean town of Keilah, they are grateful; wanders but God protects him; Jonathan reaffirms friendship; "Rock of Escape" as David eludes Saul again.

1 Sam 24 – David has chance to kill Saul, but doesn't.

1 Sam 25 – David extorts from Nabal, but wife Abigail prevents David from killing him. Key: "You kept me from Bloodguilt" vs. 33.

²⁰ Utley, *Geronimo*, 5

1 Sam 26 – Saul after David again in Wilderness of Ziph. Dialogue against Abner (whom Joab kills later)

1 Sam 27 – Fighting with Philistines when he escapes to Gath (Samson's town!). David given Ziklag.

1 Sam 28 – Saul calls up Samuel's ghost

1 Sam 29 – Philistines release David before campaigning against Saul – Saul eventually killed

Possible end to "Outlaw Years"?

1 Sam 30 – David defeats Amalekites who harass Ziklag. David distributes booty evenly to all, and this is called an "ordinance" that he follows later – fair giving to all the poor.

The significance of these summarized episodes compared to our reading of aspects of the story of Geronimo becomes clearer, however, when we consider Eric Hobsbawm's (now nearly iconic) discussions of the phenomenon of the "social bandit" which he began to discuss already in the 1950s. Hobsbawm's famous work²¹ first proposed that such "Robin Hood" bandits are the heroes of many groups of people who feel unfairly treated in life. As such, they are the subject of song and memory:

Most of the bandit figures who have become genuinely famous figures in song and story, are persons of purely local range and horizons. Their names and the details of their exploits hardly matter. Indeed, for the bandit myth, the reality of their existence may be secondary.²²

Therefore, social bandits are: "...a form of individual or minority rebellion within peasant societies"²³, and they arise when the conditions seem ideal:

The point about social bandits is that they are peasant outlaws whom the lord and state regard as criminals, but who remain within peasant society, and are considered by their people as heroes, as champions, avengers, fighters for justice, perhaps even leaders of liberation, and in any case as men to be admired, helped, or supported...²⁴

Hobsbawm was also interested in the economic setting for social banditry as well:

²¹ Eric Hobsbawm, *Bandits* (New York: New York Press, 2000 [1969]).

²² Hobsbawm, *Bandits*, 10.

²³ Hobsbawm, *Bandits*, 19.

²⁴ Hobsbawm, *Bandits*, 20.

social banditry is universally found wherever societies are based on agriculture (including pastoral economies), and consist largely of peasants and landless labourers ruled, oppressed and exploited by someone else – lords, towns, governments, lawyers, or even banks. It is found in one or other of its three main forms...: the noble robber or Robin Hood, the primitive resistance fighter or guerrilla unit...and possibly the terror-bringing avenger²⁵

The central point of considering Geronimo, and then Hobsbawm's famous concept of the "Social Bandit" however, begins to become clearer when we consider Hobsbawm's "criteria" for identifying a case of social banditry:

1. The social bandit begins his/her career as victim of injustice
2. He/She "rights wrongs"
3. In some sense, he/she takes from the rich to give to the poor
4. They never kill but in self-defence, or just revenge
5. If h/she survives, they return to their people as an honourable citizen
6. He/She is admired, helped, and supported by his people
7. If he/she dies, it is invariably and only through treason, since no decent member of the community would help authorities against him.
8. At least in theory the social bandit is invisible and invulnerable
9. The social bandit is not the enemy of the king or emperor, who is the fount of justice, but only of the local gentry, clergy, or other oppressors (For David, the Philistines?)²⁶

The point need hardly be laboured much further – virtually each of the 9 proposed criteria from Hobsbawm arguably (and sometimes *obviously*) have corresponding motifs in the stories of pre-monarchic David briefly summarized in the outline of 1 Samuel – David is portrayed in terms that suggest a parade example of Hobsbawm's "social bandit". If one reads through the descriptions between 1 Sam 19 and the death of Saul in the first verse of 1 Sam 29, but continuing to Ch. 30, the narrative of David describes the adventures of David the Outlaw – the time between his realization that Saul wants him dead, and Saul's own death, which allows David to regain his place as the new King. These are the "outlaw years".

F DAVID'S MERRY MEN

Scholarly discussions of how David is portrayed in the historical accounts rarely emphasize an interest in the "outlaw years". For example, in her recent work on "remembering" Biblical David, Diana Edelman begins her essay as follows:

²⁵ Hobsbawm, *Bandits*, 22.

²⁶ Based on Hobsbawm, *Bandits*, 47-48.

David is remembered in the Hebrew Bible primarily in two ways: on the one hand, he is the heroic 'king of Israel' and founder of a dynasty that ruled in Jerusalem, the city of David, in an unbroken succession for 467+ years; on the other hand, he is the paragon of piety; the son of Jesse, loyal servant of Yahweh, who is the great king in Zion, composer of Psalms, and a prophetic 'man of God'.²⁷

Edelman is particularly interested in how David is "remembered" in the time period when these Biblical materials were gathered and edited in their present form – primarily in the late Persian and perhaps including Hellenistic periods, but wouldn't David the outlaw be of interest in those times? After all, both Edelman and Ben Zvi, for example, have considered the possibilities that different ideas about David may reflect different hopes of the people and that time:

...in a Persian and Hellenistic setting, where Jews were living in provinces of an empire headed by a non-native king, having lost their independence, the emphasis on YHWH's kingship may well have taken on a new theocratic dimension for those who were unhappy with imperial rule but who were not interested in seeing the Davidic monarchy restored either.²⁸

Edelman proposes that the two main ways David is remembered (and thus described in our texts that come from this later Persian period) is heroic king and pious leader. However, it is clear that David is also remembered, and not insignificantly as we shall soon see, as a brigand, a rebel, and an outlaw. Commentary literature does, in fact, discuss David's "outlaw years", but this discussion is normally triggered by commentary on 1 Sam 22:1-2:

David left there and escaped to the cave of Adullam; when his brothers and all his father's house heard of it, they went down there to him. (2) Everyone who was in distress, and everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was discontented gathered to him; and he became captain over them. Those who were with him numbered about four hundred.

"400 men" (cf. Gen. 32:6; 33:1; and notably, Acts 5:36!) come to David hiding out in the caves of Adullam, people who are described as:

²⁷ Diana V. Edelman, "David in Israelite Social Memory" in *Remembering Biblical Figures in the late Persian & Early Hellenistic Periods*, ed. E. Ben Zvi and D. Edelman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 141.

²⁸ Edelman, "David", 148; cf. also Ehud Ben Zvi, "Memory and Political Thought in the Late Persian/Early Hellenistic Yehud/Judah: Some Observations" in *Leadership, Social Memory and Judean Discourse in the Fifth-Second Centuries BCE* (ed. D. Edelman & E. Ben Zvi; Sheffield: Equinox, 2016), 16.

1. People in hardship (*אִישׁ מְצוּק* cf. "distressed" during siege, Deut. 28: 53,55, and 57, and Jer 19:9; but see also God as agent of relief for the oppressed in 1 Sam 2:8)
2. People in debt (*אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר-לּוֹ נֶשֶׂא*); and
3. People with a "embittered spirit" (*מֵר-זַנְּפֵשׁ* cf. bitter spirit in Ezek. 3:14, and a "bitter day" in Amos 8:10)

Surveying the commentary literature reveals that it is typically in the context of these verses that a discussion of David the "outlaw", if it occurs at all, is normally debated. Gnana Robinson's commentary, for example, here refers to David's "rebel group", David as "guerrilla leader" and "champion of the oppressed"²⁹, while Jones refers to David as "outlaw and leader of malcontents,"³⁰. Hertzberg similarly comments on: "discontented and reckless elements who had some reason for escaping from the situation in their homeland and who, under a leader like David, could form a dangerous band."³¹ Campbell and Flanagan, in their contribution to the *Jerome Commentary*, refer to David as a "guerrilla leader" and comment on how remarkable the story is with regard to the "country's malcontents"³². Campbell, with M. O'Brien, in *The International Bible Commentary* (1998), clarifies that describing David's early supporters "guerrilla band" as: "distressed, indebted, and discontented... [is]...a remarkable description of the supporters of Israel's future king."³³ But commentary opinion is interestingly mixed. McCarter, for example, sees the reference in 1 Sam 22:1-2 as negative, and therefore suggests that the Biblical writer attempts an apology on David's behalf:

To the objection that he became the leader of a band of outlaws, the narrator replies that David never sought thereby to harm or in any way threaten Saul but simply to ensure the safety of himself and others in like circumstances (22:2)³⁴

Some commentaries clearly do not consider the "outlaw David" to be a significant theme at all, and throughout his work, Polzin isn't interested in David

²⁹ Gnana Robinson, *1 & 2 Samuel* (International Theological Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 18-19.

³⁰ Jones, Gwilym H, "1 and 2 Samuel" in *The Oxford Bible Commentary* (ed. John Barton and John Muddiman; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 210.

³¹ Hans Wilhelm Hertzberg (tr. J. Bowden), *1 & II Samuel* (Old Testament Library, Philadelphia: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1964), 184.

³² Anthony Campbell and James Flanagan, 1 and 2 Samuel, in *The New Jerome Bible Commentary*, ed. R. Brown, J. Fitzmyer, and R. Murphy (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1990) 151-152.

³³ Anthony Campbell and Mark O'Brien, "1-2 Samuel", in *The International Bible Commentary*, ed. W. Farmer (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1998), 591.

³⁴ P. Kyle McCarter, P. Kyle, *1 Samuel* (The Anchor Bible, New York: Doubleday, 1980), 29.

as "outlaw" at all, nor is Jobling³⁵. Auld, perhaps, misses an opportunity when he argues that the famous passage shows how *minimal* David's support was at this stage. Comparing this to 2 Samuel 23, he suggests that this description in 22:1-2 is: "...typical of such a desperate situation, he is joined there *only by his family and by similarly desperate men*"³⁶, and believes that the reference to 400 men was only added later. That, however, would be interesting to follow up – why add so many "malcontents" to the story?

Not all commentators are sure that this is a negative portrayal. Birch, for example, is more alive to the possibilities that the "outlaw David" was presented in positive terms:

David becomes the leader of everyone who had suffered some kind of loss or deprivation and was discontented, disenchanted, and mistreated in the society. Therefore, they were passionate for change and were willing to share David's fate and do anything for David, see 2 Sam 23:17³⁷

Similarly, Van Seters suggests that 1 Sam. 22:1-2 presents David as more "sympathetic", noting that "a bitter spirit typified people who were homeless or bereft, or who had suffered great loss [cf. 1 Sam 1:10...30:6...2 Sam 17:8...Judg 18:25; Job 3:20]"³⁸. Kirsch, in a chapter entitled, "Desperado", further develops these themes when he refers to David's "shakedown" of Nabal, and David's "rousting" of Ahimelech, David certainly appearing to Ahimelech as "...one of the vagrants, so wretched and yet so threatening in their desperate poverty, who could be seen along the byways of ancient Israel"³⁹. In reference to 1 Sam 22:1-2, Kirsch approves of John Bright's mention of "flotsam, ruffians, and desperadoes", and to David as "bandit chief" in his famous *History of Israel*, and goes on to develop the thought:

About the best case that can be made for David during his fugitive years is that he was a soldier of fortune who relied on guerrilla tactics to survive and prevail against the reigning king of Israel...One member of David's outlaw band was a man who is identified in the Bible as a prophet but seems to have been a master of guerrilla

³⁵ Robert Polzin, "1 Samuel" (vol. 1), *Samuel and the Deuteronomist* (Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993); Jobling calls David a "refugee", in *1 Samuel* (ed. David Jobling; Berit Olam; Colledgeville: Michael Glazier/Liturgical Press, Colledgeville, 1998), 232.

³⁶ Graeme A. Auld, *1 Samuel* (Old Testament Library, Philadelphia: Westminster/John Knox, 2011) 265.

³⁷ Bruce Birch, "1 and 2 Samuel" in *The New Interpreter's Bible* (Vol. 2, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 539.

³⁸ Van Seters, *Biblical Saga*, 223.

³⁹ Jonathan Kirsch, *King David: The Real Life of the Man who Ruled Israel* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2000), 78.

warfare. Like Mao Tse-tung and Che Guevara and Ho Chi Minh, the prophet Gad understood that even the strongest urban fortress is always at risk of being surrounded and cut off by a superior force, and thus a guerrilla army is always safest when it is on the move through the countryside⁴⁰

He concludes that at this point David appears as a kind of "Robin Hood, or a Che Guevara".⁴¹

G WHEN WAS DAVID THE FAMOUS OUTLAW?

Clearly, then, David as outlaw is not a new idea. However, this theme may well have interesting implications for dating the tradition of David as outlaw. While there remain commentators who want to date this material quite early⁴², it is interesting to note that interest in David the Outlaw continues in later Biblical textual tradition, and most notably in the Psalms. As Declaisse-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner⁴³ indicate in their recent commentary on Psalms, there are only 13 "superscriptions" that purport to refer to events in the life of David in the entire collection of Psalms. What we are interested in, however, is whether these Psalm superscriptions which address moments in the life of David, indicate a *particular interest* in a special "era" of David's life. In fact they do.

The first superscription reference is in Ps. 3, which refers to Absalom's revolt. Interestingly, another time of social unrest, although clearly after kingship. The second, Ps. 7, regards David's concern with "Cush the Benjaminite" in Ps. 7:1, is an event "not attested" in the Bible⁴⁴, so we have no way of knowing if it was before or after David's crowning as King, even though some have proposed that "Cush" is a reference to "Saul" (*Note also 7:9 "judge" and 1 Sam 24:16, En-Gedi*):

Psalm 7:1 A Shiggaion of David, which he sang to the LORD concerning Cush, a Benjaminite.

Johnson, for example, in her fine study, notes that: "Scholars have surmised that the Benjaminite mentioned in the title of Ps 7 refers, not to Saul, but to another from this tribe; namely, Shimei ben Gera. This argument is based

⁴⁰ Kirsch, *King David*, 84.

⁴¹ Kirsch, *King David*, 91.

⁴² David Toshio Tsumura, *the First Book of Samuel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 11.

⁴³ E.g. Nancy DeClaisse-Walford, Rolf A. Jacobson, Beth Laneel Tanner, *The Book of Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014).

⁴⁴ Declaisse-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *Psalms*, 110.

upon a general match between the psalm's depiction of a person being unjustly accused and Shimei's cursing of David in 2 Sam 16⁴⁵.

Ps. 60 is also somewhat difficult to be precise about, but it is often thought to come from 2 Sam 8, which does indicate that Joab was over the army at the time of the series of victories that are listed (in a rather perfunctory manner, it must be said) in 2 Sam 8:

Psalm 60:1 To the leader: according to the Lily of the Covenant. A Miktam of David; for instruction; when he struggled with Aram-naharaim and with Aram-zobah, and when Joab on his return killed twelve thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salt.

So, to be safe, I will eliminate these 2 examples from the point I wish to make here, and also Ps. 3 and Ps. 51 (the latter referring to the Bath-sheba affair). Of the remaining 11 (or 10 if we eliminate the "Cush" episode), *fully 9 of these 10/11 historical references to David's narrative are references to "the outlaw years"*, e.g. the very traditions we are considering here.

Psalm 18:1 To the leader. A Psalm of David the servant of the LORD, who addressed the words of this song to the LORD on the day when the LORD delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul.

Psalm 34:1 Of David, when he feigned madness before Abimelech, so that he drove him out, and he went away. [*The Psalm adds "expulsion" not in 1 S 21, but in 29*].

Psalm 52:1 To the leader. A Maskil of David, when Doeg the Edomite came to Saul and said to him, "David has come to the house of Ahimelech." [*Johnson writes: "Unbeknown to the priest, David is an outlaw. David cons the priest by acting as if he worked as an agent for Saul. Doeg, Saul's top man, witnesses their encounter in Nob." (Johnson, 59)*]

Psalm 54:1 To the leader: with stringed instruments. A Maskil of David, when the Ziphites went and told Saul, "David is in hiding among us." [*Ziphites as "foreigners"?*]

Psalm 56:1 To the leader: according to The Dove on Far-off Terebinths. Of David. A Miktam, when the Philistines seized him in Gath. [*David isn't seized in Gath*]

⁴⁵ Vivian Johnson, *David in Distress* (The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies # 505, London: T&T Clark, 2009), 137.

Psalm 57:1 To the leader: Do Not Destroy. Of David. A Miktam, when he fled from Saul, in the cave. [*1 S 24, note "cave" and "wing", but Ps. 57 makes David more desperate than in the 1 Sam story*]

Psalm 59:1 To the leader: Do Not Destroy. Of David. A Miktam, when Saul ordered his house to be watched in order to kill him. [*Psalm emphasizes threat from those all around. Claims innocence here, but not in 1 Sam.*]

Psalm 63:1 A Psalm of David, when he was in the Wilderness of Judah. [*Note the number of times David flees from Saul and dwells in the desert; 1 Sam 23: 14,15,24, 25; 24:2; 25:1,4,15; 26: 2,3, and later Absalom.*]

Psalm 142:1 A Maskil of David. When he was in the cave. A Prayer. [*Word for "prison" in Ps. has same root as "he has shut himself in" in 1 Sam 23:7*]

Furthermore, the only reference to the life of David in the Synoptic Gospels is an episode from these same "outlaw" period, and arguably quite a notable episode as well:

Mark 2:25-28 ²⁵ And he said to them, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need of food? ²⁶ He entered the house of God, when Abiathar was high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and he gave some to his companions." ²⁷ Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the Sabbath; ²⁸ so the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath." (Cf. Luke 6:3-5; and **Matthew 12:3-6**).

In their entry on "David" in the *Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature*, Huttar and Frontain note, in one sentence, that at one point in David's life, he "assumes the life of an outlaw", but when they take note of the 14 Psalms that refer to David's story, they do not identify any tendency among them⁴⁶. In the prologue to her careful examination of these superscriptions in Psalms, however, Johnson argues that these superscriptions intend to magnify *David's piety*:

...nearly all of these historical Psalms focus on one dimension of his history, namely David in distress. That is, the authors of the historical superscriptions appear interested in the aspects of David's history that are, as one commentator notes: 'woven out of incidents of trouble'....This intensification of trouble serves an important

⁴⁶ Charles Huttar, Charles, and Raymond-Jean Frontain, "David", in *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature* (ed. D.L. Jeffrey; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 181-182.

theological purpose: it illustrates David's level of faithfulness before God⁴⁷

Johnson furthermore argues that this "representation of David as prayerful pious and penitent constitutes a change in David's image from what one finds in the books of Samuel, and that David is thus "recast...into a devout man..."⁴⁸. But is this really why the Psalms, at a much later time, shows such an interest in this particular period of David's life?

Van Seters has already proposed that the "lawlessness" of the outlaw years of David point to an era much later than the time of the alleged historical David:

Once one admits that there are details in the story of David that could reflect a time of composition much later than the 8th century...then the conditions of Judah reflected in the story may relate to the Exile and Postexilic Period, when the population of the region was again very sparse for an extended period of time⁴⁹

In their recent work on later "memories" of Biblical traditional figures, Edelman and Ben Zvi point out that "memories" of David (that is, the texts as we have them) are gathered and edited among Hebrews *who live under Persian domination*. In Ben Zvi's terms:

"the Yehudite literari lived in a poor, lightly populated and marginal province, within one of the many satrapies of the Persian Empire. They were governed by a Persian-appointed governor..."⁵⁰

Therefore, memories of David were part of the work on a "...glorious but tragic past and of an eventual utopian future" which was "at the heart of their literary and ideological work". In point of fact, the Yehudian "literati" were not discussing the details of Persian administration (largely, says Ben Zvi, ignored) but rather:

They explored political thought as it related to their core interest: their ideological Israel; that is, the one that populated their memories of the past and the future and with whom they identified as a text-centred/memory-centred community⁵¹.

All the more significant, then, to point out how much attention was given – and traditions assigned – to David *the outlaw*. If Edelman, Ben Zvi, and Van

⁴⁷ Johnson, *David in Distress*, 1-2.

⁴⁸ Johnson, *David in Distress*, 2.

⁴⁹ Van Seters, *A Biblical Saga*, 81.

⁵⁰ Ben Zvi, "Memory and Political Thought", 11.

⁵¹ Ben Zvi, "Memory and Political Thought", 12.

Seters (among many others, it must be said) are right about the setting of Persian period Yehud (e.g. poor, relatively insignificant) then memories of David the "social bandit" may have been especially significant to Yehud residents who not only faced precisely such "badlands" circumstances in a remote region of the Persian Empire, but for whom a bandit hero would be truly meaningful. In short, David is Geronimo to fellow "Apache"/Judeans, but not to Saul/Philistines/Persians. Perhaps it was not David the King that inspired the rebuilding of life in the province of Yehud, but David the swash-buckling pirate, slipping through the dangers of dominant "Benjaminite", "Philistine", and perhaps also Persian, authorities. Furthermore, is this why Genesis, increasingly dated to Exilic/Persian period authors and editors, portray Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as similarly mobile bandits willing to lie to authorities to escape the official "Eyes of the King"?

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