

THE SANCTIFICATION OF THE QUEER BODY: GENDERFLUIDITY AS AN  
EXPRESSION OF HOLINESS IN 2 SAMUEL 6

by

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis argues that David's second procession before Hashem's ark in 2 Samuel 6 is profoundly genderqueer and inescapably tied to the king's social standing. Previous scholarship has often justified David's actions in this episode as cultically appropriate but often underestimates the inconsistencies in ritual standards or the implications of David's performance. 2 Samuel 6 appears to have been completely overlooked by biblical masculinity studies and is the subject of only limited research in queer biblical studies, which has not fully explored David's transgressive/expansive gender performativity.

Consequently, I look to address this gap in scholarship using queer theory, masculinity studies, and anthropology. Gender expansive and transgressive individuals are well documented in ancient Levantine and Mesopotamian cultic ritual with their existence providing an implicit affirmation of binary gender, particularly hegemonic masculinity, since they tend to perform liminality within strict boundaries, on the behalf of hegemony. This thesis argues that David's dress and dance function similarly, as the only appropriate religious response to Hashem's hyper-masculinity – there can be no competition between the king of Israel and the king of the universe. David's gender performativity shifts from masculine coded to both masculine and feminine coded after the murder of Uzzah, a change to which Hashem responds favourably, reinforcing the cultic suitability of David's genderfluid performativity. The narrator uses Michal's criticism to voice their unease and to place boundaries around David's actions, regulating their disruptive effects, and reinforcing its cultic necessity and divine approval. This reading has significant implications both for depictions of David as a hegemonic masculine archetype and for future trans/queer readings of cultic performativity since it establishes a set of

criteria through which even hegemonic men may perform genderfluidity while in proximity to Hashem, with Hashem's full approval, a possibility that has often been dismissed as unlikely.

## DEDICATION

I am profoundly grateful to my supervisor, Professor Andrew Davies, for his wisdom, advice, and support. Dr Deryn Guest supervised the early stages of my thesis, and their expertise, perspective, and kindness was instrumental in this process. It has been a joy to learn from both Professor Davies and Dr Guest. I would also like to thank my loved ones – Hananiah Jones, Jacob Doughty, and Charlie Sofield. Without their encouragement, *chesed*, and patience, this project would not have been completed. Lastly, I want to thank my trans ancestors and trans elders who carved out lives and loves in an often-hostile world, my trans siblings, and the trans children that are our future – we have always been here and always will be. *Mir veln zey iberlebn.*

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Queer biblical scholarship is a relatively young field, born in the 1990s from secular queer theory, and often presented as adjacent to lesbian and gay studies (Stone, 2013, pp. 157-59). Like its secular disciplinary counterparts, queer biblical studies has questioned LGB biblical studies, challenging core assumptions of identity, sex, and gender (Punt, 2008, pp. 24.1-24.6; Stewart, 2017, pp. 291-93; Stone, 2013, pp. 158-60, 162). The result of this questioning was a ‘sort of deconstruction of the opposition between heterosexual and homosexual’ as they are understood ‘in the modern West’ and the establishment of a conversation based in the ‘critical interrogation’ of power and social norms, drawing from the works of Judith Butler, Michael Foucault, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, and Teresa de Lauretis (Stone, 2013, pp. 160). Queer biblical studies, like queer theory broadly, compels ‘one to think. . . of human beings situated in a 3D universe with sexuality, biological-sex, and gender dimensions’ all of which are created and re-created within social frameworks (Stewart, 2017, pp. 290-94).

As a queer, transgender Jew, I am all too aware of the lack of queer readings of the Tanakh. While there is a range of biblical and Talmudic LGBTQ+ representation – from intersex interpretations of Abraham, Adam, Isaac, Mordecai, Rebecca, and Sarah to the queer love of David and Jonathan and Naomi and Ruth<sup>1</sup> – there are still so many stories left unread between

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<sup>1</sup> For selected biblical and Talmudic interpretations see Rebecaa Alpert (2006), Rachel Biale (2009), Daniel Boyarin (1993, 2007), Gwynn Kessler (2007), Jennifer L. Koosed (2006), Elliot Kukla (2006), Joy Ladin (2006), Noam Sienna (2019), Justin Tanis (2003), and Margaret Moers Wenig (2009). Other landmark queer readings of the Hebrew Bible include Angela Bauer-Levesque (2006), Roland Boer (1999, 2001), Deryn Guest (2005, 2008, 2011), Anthony Heacock (2011), Stuart Macwilliam (2009, 2011) and Mona West (2006). For edited collections, see *Torah Queeries: Weekly Commentaries on the Hebrew Bible* (2009), edited by Gregg Drinkwater, Joshua Lesser, and David Schneer, and *The Queer Bible Commentary* (2006), edited by Deryn Guest, Robert E. Goss, Mona West, and Thomas Bohache.

the black and white fire<sup>2</sup> of our holy texts. It is in within this space and with this perspective – foundationally queer, trans, and Jewish – that I wish to focus on David, this time separate from his relationship to Jonathan, which has long been a source of powerfully affirming readings and examine his gender performativity. For many years, much of the modern discourse around David has assumed that he personifies a form of masculinity which is inescapably and intrinsically tied to power. His role in the religious cultural consciousness of both Jews and Christians has centred on his depiction as ‘a man after his [Hashem’s<sup>3</sup>] own heart’ (1 Sam. 13.14). This sentiment is repeated in the Christian Bible, in Acts 13.22 – ‘David, son of Jesse, a man after my own heart; he will carry out my will in its entirety’. David’s actions, both the general and specific, in 2 Sam. 6, are fundamentally tied to holy praxis by the biblical narrator, who tells readers four times that David’s revelry is ‘before Hashem’ and allows David the space to repeat this claim himself twice (2 Sam. 6.5, 14, 16-17, and 21). Immediately following this incident, the narrator describes David’s favour with Hashem, beginning with military success, and ending with an intimate conversation and covenant between Hashem and David that secures David’s legacy and lineage (2 Sam. 7.1-29). If we were to find evidence of genderfluidity in 2 Samuel 6, this would represent a significant shift in how modern biblical studies understands David, both by exposing the gap between perception and praxis and by emphasizing the queer nature of Hashem’s favour.

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<sup>2</sup> J.T. Shekalim 6:1. This image of the Torah as black and white fire is tied to the interpretation of such through the four layers of Pardes/פרדס with the פשוט or ‘straight’ reading, the רמז or the ‘hints’ (symbolic or allegorical meaning), the דרש or ‘seek/inquire’ (midrashic comparisons), and finally the סוד or the ‘mystery’ (the mystical). What is said in the Torah is augmented by oral tradition, symbolism, midrashim, comparative readings, and mystical or esoteric understandings and this too, is the born of the same divine fire that consecrates the text. Modern LBGTQ+ biblical studies has embraced the ancient rabbinic practice of midrash – which will be discussed in greater detail shortly.

<sup>3</sup> In acknowledgement and celebration of my Jewishness, I refer to the deity of the Hebrew Bible/Tanakh known as Yod-Hey-Vav-Hey, as Hashem, a honorific term in Jewish communities used in place of the unpronounceable name, which typically rendered in English as ‘LORD’, ‘Adonai’, ‘Yahweh’, ‘YHWH’ or ‘G-d’/‘God.’

If Hashem is so pleased by David's genderfluid performativity what does this say about the masculinity of the Divine's favourite men? And what does it say about Hashem?

### Reading with and Against the Text: Contextual History and Statement of Aims

It is here that the fundamental question posed by my thesis arises: does 2 Samuel 6 capture a moment of divinely sanctioned (and required!) genderfluidity? Is David's dance queer? Does it trans-gress<sup>4</sup> gender and social norms? I believe that research into David's actions and the social norms of the Samuel texts will lead us to a queerer understanding of David's performance before the ark in 2 Samuel 6, but first we must return to queer theory itself.

### Contextual History

I believe it is especially valuable to understand that unlike LGBT biblical interpretation,<sup>5</sup> queer biblical interpretation is not only interested in decentring white, straight, cis, able-bodied men, but that it argues 'that there is no center' – no single meaning, no one interpretation, instead, we are to '[collect] interpretations – and questions – rather than eliminating them' (Stewart, 2017, p. 292). Crucially, without a centre, nothing is beyond interrogation. Normality –

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<sup>4</sup> I use the terms 'trans-gress', 'trans-gression', and 'trans-gressive' throughout my thesis because the actions described are both transgressive and transgender, specifically transgressing assumed textual gender norms.

<sup>5</sup> LBGT biblical interpretation and LGBT biblical studies are a specific form of biblical studies. While it is often comprised of LGBTQ+ individuals, it is separate from queer biblical studies in both its history (born from gay, lesbian, and bisexual focused analyses by majority white academics) and approach towards identities (presenting them as fixed). For example, as queer theorist David Tabb Stewart rightly observes, privileging homosexuality as the vantage point for affirming readings of the biblical text in early LGB/LGBT biblical studies effectively silenced lesbian, bisexual, and transgender perspectives – and largely ignored intersex, asexual or aromantic, and two-spirit voices all together. LGB and LBGT, as an umbrella terms, functioned as shorthand for cis gay male. To push back against this, I will be specific with my terminology.

especially heteronormativity<sup>6</sup> or cisnormativity<sup>7</sup> – are only ‘heuristic constructions’ designed to reinforce power (Stewart, 2017, p. 292).

Indeed, for many LGBTQ+ individuals, nothing marked the reinforcement of power like the HIV/AIDS crisis, a tragedy that still haunts the queer community and changed the shape of both LGBT biblical studies and what would become queer biblical studies (West, 2001, p. 146; Stewart, 2017, p. 291; Stone, 1999, pp. 21-25). LGBT biblical studies, traumatized by the loss of a generation, shifted from the defence of LGBT existence to the affirmation of LGBT lives and loves, using “‘homosexuality’” as a standpoint from which to read the Bible’ (Stewart, 2017, p. 291). This transitional period – the HIV/AIDS pandemic, and the assertion that LGBTQ+ individuals have the right to exist and love – was foundational not only for LGBT biblical studies, but the later evolution of queer studies and queer biblical studies. The immediate result was a focus on identity as an analytical tool. An excellent example of this is the transition between readings such as Tom Horner’s 1978 gay interpretation of the text in *Jonathan Loved David: Homosexuality in Biblical Times*, and Anthony Heacock’s 2011 queer work, *Jonathan Loved David: Manly Love and the Hermeneutics of Sex*, which is more interested exploring and worrying the edges of sexual identity, hierarchical relationships, socio-political pairings, and cultural interpretations of love, desire, and reciprocity, than making a case for David and Jonathan’s relationship to be understood as gay.

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<sup>6</sup> Heteronormativity assumes that heterosexuality is the expected norm, that in the absence of evidence, heterosexuality should be assumed.

<sup>7</sup> Cisnormativity assumes that in the absence of evidence otherwise, individuals and perspectives are cisgender because being cisgender is the expected norm.

## Queer Biblical Studies

A shift in aims began in the 1990s, when queer biblical studies emerged as distinct field, in large part because it questioned LGBT biblical studies' maintenance and accentuation of identity. Instead, queer biblical studies looked to the work of secular queer theorists, like David M. Halperin, who found in conversation with Foucault, a destabilizing emphasis on the 'category of identity' and the way 'unproblematic norm[s]' were deployed that encouraged queering biblical texts and theology (Stone, 1999, pp. 16-19). Identities function as 'heuristic constructions' that create categories – often binary – that obscures the nuanced reality of sexuality and gender (Stewart, 2017, p. 292).

Ken Stone, a major queer theorist in the development of queer biblical studies, emphasizes the way that the 'ideals and norms for sex, gender and sexuality activity' serve to reify 'assumptions about race, ethnicity, nation and class' on behalf of the dominant power structure (2013, p. 162). One's lived gender or sexual practices are often forced to confirm to hegemonic narratives of acceptable gender performativity – the 'doing' of gender that drives how we understand and communicate gender to ourselves and each other – and sexuality (Butler, 2004, p. 1-2; 1990, p. 34). According to Stone, it is the tension created by this striving that queer criticism investigates and pries open (2013, pp. 161-62). In this sense, LGBT biblical studies and queer biblical studies are tied to each other, first by a shared history and focus on the LGBTQ+ community, and by their continual push-and-pull, with LGBT biblical studies utilizing and maintaining the very identities that queer biblical studies unravels.

Stone suggests that queer biblical studies can be understood in two broad frameworks: one, where biblical texts are read and interrogated from 'a kind of social or communal location'

where the queer reader's perspective draws needed attention to marginalized experiences, and second, through the application of secular queer theory (2013, p. 163). Queer biblical scholar and Elder in the Metropolitan Community Church, Rev. Mona West, argues that this positionality assumes that 'we approach the Bible as a friendly text' and are therefore 'able to find our story within its story' (1999, p. 35).

This often manifests itself in unique ways, for instance, Timothy Koch's analysis of Isaiah, which boldly proclaims, 'I will be doing *highly selective work*' because '[w]e, as LGBT persons, come with our own questions, our own need for resources, our own limited energies. . . we regard biblical texts as *resources* for us' (2006, pp. 372-73). Consequently, he examines the text specifically through the lens of 'a gay man, a Christian pastor, a man living with Aids in the early twenty-first century in the Southern United States. . . believing that your (and our) aspirations, your needs, and your questions are the best maps to guide your (and our) excavations' (2006, p. 376).

Angela Bauer-Levesque reads Jeremiah through an ever-shifting perspective, noting that '[a]s power dynamics are constructed variously across the queer rainbow, gay men will find affinity to other passages than trans folk, and further differently for F to M than for M to F and in-betweens, while lesbians depending on their locations vis-à-vis power exchanges, erotic or otherwise – the fine line between pleasure and pain – might read differently again' (2006, p. 393). This diversity within a single queer reading of one text is encouraged – there is no single authoritative meaning. From the multiplicity of experience comes identities which often intersect, forcing the text and our readings of the text to evolve in new, strange, and wonderful ways.

Koch and Bauer-Levesque are far from alone. In *The Queer Bible Commentary*, fourteen out of the twenty-four chapters that discuss the Hebrew Bible utilize queer positionality to interpret the text. Queer biblical studies scholar David Tabb Stewart, who specializes in the boundaries of sex, gender, and otherness in the Hebrew Bible, ties this to ‘the ancient technique of *midrash*-making’, a unique feature of rabbinic Judaism (2017, p. 293). Midrashim allow the authors and recipients to imagine a profoundly queer place, one that is both inside and outside of the text, stretching the limits of canon in inventive and challenging ways. Stewart believes that such interpretations and interactions with the texts ‘suggests that queer hermeneuts will continue the age-old tradition of biblical rewriting and canon creation’ just as it embodies ‘the playfulness of biblical storytelling itself’ (2017, p. 293).

I believe Stewart is correct – queer hermeneutics is not at odds with biblical tradition, but rather follows it. In feminist Jewish spaces, midrashim have been indispensable tools for engaging with sacred texts and halakhic rulings, tools that reflect the spirit of the texts themselves. Rabbi Rebecca Alpert, who specializes in Jewish religious history and sexuality, race, and liberation theology in Judaism, suggests that modern affirming midrashim offers a lifeline to queer Jews, ‘help[ing] them to feel whole’ in the face of ‘subtle and destructive’ rhetoric that others queer individuals (1989, p. 67). Her work on Exodus also includes more overt midrashim – reading Shifrah and Puah ‘as lovers as well as collaborators’, observing Moses’s role as Hashem’s ‘lover’ after he is claimed by Zipporah in a reversal of cishet gender roles – to encourage ‘translesbigay religious people’ to see themselves in the Torah (2006, pp. 70, 72-75, 76). There is nothing more Jewish than LGBTQ+ Jews using midrashim and other Rabbinic traditions to claim a place at the table.



In addition to reading texts from a queer space, queer biblical studies also utilizes the application of secular queer theory. This form of queer reading is quite different, relying less on ‘the “queer” community of particular readers’ and instead on a deconstruction of the texts (Stone, 2013, p. 163). This may be delineating the difference between gender and sex through gender performativity or exploring the construction of sexuality through social norms.

David Halperin’s ‘oppositional relation to the norm’ or Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s action ‘across genders, across sexualities, across genres, across “perversions”’ is applied to queer biblical studies to illuminate areas of contention, where queerness lurks beneath the surface (Halperin, 1993, p. 62; Sedgwick, 1993, p. xii). Judith Butler’s emphasis on gender performativity and ‘regulatory practices of gender coherence’ challenges the presumption of heterosexuality or cisgender identity as thoroughly as it challenges the concept of a true or authentic gender (Butler, 1990, p. 34). Queer theory – secular or religious – is united by its anti-essentialism, its aggressive dismantling, exposure, and opposition to social norms, and its multiplicity of answers. There is room for new permutations of queerness, a fluidity that evolves in relation to identity and social behaviour.

Rachel Mann describes this complexity as a form of ‘palimpsest’, marrying queer sensibilities with literary conceits to describe ‘how texts and subjectivities hold multiple layers of meaning’, freeing texts, particularly religious texts and theologies, to be reformed into something new, something profoundly queer, and in Mann’s case, something that prioritizes and examines its trans-ness (2014, pp. 215-16).

In many ways, biblical queer studies, drawing from secular queer studies, has stretched the idea of what queerness is – moving from sexuality to gender, to race, ethnicity, time, ability,

and class. Both Sedgwick and Michael Warner, in 1993, imagined queer theory expanding to reach any aspect of social norms (Moore, et al, 2017, p. 6). Queer theory rapidly began unravelling the intersection of race, ethnicity, sexuality, and gender, critiquing the ways that cis-heteronormativity<sup>8</sup> has maintained white supremacy with the work of scholars such as Cathy J. Cohen, Roderick A. Ferguson, José Esteban Muñoz, and Siobhan B. Somerville. Postcolonialism and queer theory make excellent bedfellows – since, as Jeremy Punt rightly observes, ‘it is at the social, economic, and political levels that sexuality, gender and related issues converge’ making the wounds and scars of colonialism and neo-colonialism inescapable ‘in the global community’ (2008, p. 24.3). The intersectionality<sup>9</sup> of queer theory has been to its great benefit. Robert McRuer used both disability studies and queer theory to analyse ‘compulsory able-bodiedness’ at the intersection of ableism and heteronormativity – work that has been furthered by Anna Mollow, Carrie Sandahl, and Alison Kafer (McRuer, 2006, p. 7).

Queer biblical studies has interrogated the way ethnicity and queerness are intertwined in the biblical text – Erin Runions (2011) and Jennifer Knust (2014) –, criticizing the lack of minority voices in the field – Tat-siong Benny Liew (2001) –, and amplifying queer/crip<sup>10</sup> analysis of texts and traditions – Julia Watts Belser (2019). Black queer biblical studies features a range of scholars such as Pamela R. Lightsey (2012, 2015), Amaryah Shaye Armstrong (2019), Almeda M. Wright (2012, 2017, 2021), Darnell L. Moore (2011, 2012), and EL Kornegay Jr (2004, 2012, 2013). While queer biblical studies, as a small field, has room to expand –

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<sup>8</sup> The belief that people are assumed cisgender and heterosexual until proven otherwise.

<sup>9</sup> The history and meaning of this term will be discussed in detail in chapter four.

<sup>10</sup> Queer/crip is described by Watts Belser as ‘a reclaimed term of kinship used to signal a bold, politicized embrace of disability’ that is firmly positioned in ‘queer feminist disability circles’ and that there are significant ‘theoretical and political affinities between queer and crip analysis’ as discussed in detail by queer disability scholarship and activism (2019, p. 444).

increasing work on race, class, ethnicity, and ability – it shows great promise, dynamically evolving to address a variety of social norms that contribute to hegemonic standards.

### Statement of Aims

Thus, I follow queer sensibilities – outsider sensibilities – looking at the biblical text in opposition to normative ideals, from the position of Other, guided by secular queer theory. My reading of 2 Samuel 6 is, at its core, subversive, intended to trouble the still waters of commentary and biblical scholarship on this chapter, which are – with three exceptions – profoundly heteronormative and cisnormative. And of these queer three, only one<sup>11</sup> considers gender performativity, treating the chapter broadly and discussing gender trans-gression as a metaphorical, symbolic occurrence in the chapter without specifically addressing what exactly is gender trans-gressive about David’s dance. The other two examine sexuality.

Gender focused – particularly transgender or gender non-confirming – biblical analysis is still an under researched and emergent area of queer biblical studies. This gap in current research invites consideration, and all the more so on 2 Samuel 6, where the reference to metaphorical gender trans-gression, as discussed by Teresa Hornsby, raises compelling questions about David’s implicit and explicit gender performativity in the chapter as a whole.

2 Samuel 6, while providing archetypal images for the broader David mythos in both Jewish and Christian religious imaginations, has drawn the attention of biblical scholars, rabbis, preachers, and readers primarily for either Hashem’s jarring murder of Uzzah or David’s expression of joy before the ark. I found myself drawn to this text for its midrashic potential. In

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<sup>11</sup> Hornsby, T. (2016). ‘The Dance of Gender: David, Jesus, and Paul’, in: Hornsby, T. and Guest, D., eds. *Transgender, Intersex, and Biblical Interpretation*, 1st ed. Atlanta: SBL Press.

this story of queer societal upheaval, the reader is asked to evaluate appropriate cultic behaviour – holiness, consecration, ritual performance – and presented with what I believe is an instance of genderfluid holiness, one textually affirmed as acceptable to Hashem.<sup>12</sup>

If we were to find evidence of genderfluidity, it would carry incredible weight. This queer moment would be not only acceptable according to human cultural norms but is sanctioned by Hashem as a right and holy form of worship. This is an exciting prospect, all the more so when you consider the lack of trans-centred readings of the biblical text, much less one of this magnitude. For a trans individual to look and see themselves in this rich tapestry of religious history and tradition is a profoundly healing experience. I hope to create such a space for trans religious individuals through my research.

As a transmasculine Jew, I see myself in my heritage, in the Talmud's discussions of the six genders, in queer depictions of the divine, in the creation story as the multi-gendered Adam, as Isaac, in my mother's tents, as Rebecca, a beautiful lad, as Abraham and Sarah, born with unknowable sex, who take on new names, leaving their deadnames<sup>13</sup> behind in a holy transition into the father and mother of a great people (Brodie, 2009, pp. 34-37; Koatz, 2018; Kukla, 2006; Ladin, 2012; Meszler, 2019; Stewart, 2017, pp. 306-07).

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<sup>12</sup> In this thesis, I understand 'holiness' as ritually appropriate, cultic behaviour that marks an individual or group of individuals as set apart from their peers ('consecrated') for religious rites or intents. I do not address the possibility that holiness raises in Christian theology with the emphasis of evangelical Christianity's concept of personal holiness, although I hope that my Christian peers may further my research by exploring these themes through a Christian theological lens. I will explicitly establish a basis for textual affirmation shortly.

<sup>13</sup> Deadname is a term used to refer to a trans person's birth name. The Talmudic sages found calling Abraham and Sarah by their birth names, to be profoundly inappropriate, transgressing the divine decree to call them by their names. This has been reclaimed by trans Jews and Jewish allies to impress the significance of not referring to a trans individual by a name that is often associated with pain, shame, and gender dysphoria. For further reading, see Moskowitz and Marnin, 2018; Ruttenberg, 2021.

I do not believe I can overstate the value of trans-affirming biblical studies. Outside of academics, the need for more trans-affirming readings of biblical texts, especially during an era where the rights of trans individuals are fiercely contested and trans lives consequently face considerable prejudice, is extensive. Readings of the biblical texts that uphold the sanctity of trans lives encourage trans inclusion in churches, batei midrash, yeshivas, and synagogues. It improves the lives of religious trans and gender non-conforming individuals. It inspires trans-affirming liturgy and theology, and it encourages trans individuals to be as involved as they would like in their religious communities. Like many other queer religious individuals, it is because of the work done by my LGBTQ+ siblings that I have fought for and found a place where I am accepted and celebrated. This community and our place in history is a continual balm in the face of an otherwise, often profoundly transphobic world.

I read 2 Samuel 6, inspired by my trans ancestors, trans elders, trans siblings, and trans children, in light of queer theory, informed by anthropology and biblical masculinity studies. This interdisciplinary approach allows me to examine the text on two levels – first, the larger cultural context of ancient Mesopotamia and Levant between the end of the Iron Age II around 586 BCE and the Persian occupation of Judah between 539-332 BCE, and second, as it is understood by modern western commentary and scholarship. The result is robust, able to acknowledge and evaluate ancient sociological and cultural norms, refraining from anachronistic identity labels, while also critiquing modern biases and gender assumptions. Guided by queer theory, I do not intend to offer my reading of 2 Samuel 6 as the single, authoritative interpretation of the text, but as a compelling, logically sound addition to the field, offering something unique and valuable to future research.

## Interdisciplinary Tools for Analysis

Queer theory is an excellent tool for incisively discussing and deconstructing gender. It can evaluate how gender is continually constructed and reinforced when provided with the specific manifestations of gender within a given group. There is where anthropology and biblical masculinity studies become especially critical to my thesis, as they provide an established framework for queer theoretical interpretation. While this inter-relationship is not always a given, I believe is especially valuable for the future of involved fields since it promotes a holistic understanding of times and texts.

The majority of biblical masculinity studies approaches gender as a topic for analysis, rather than active deconstruction, and typically looks at cisgender constructions of masculinity. It is often, although not always, a cisnormative field. Queer biblical studies, however, draws heavily from its conclusions, both to establish queerness and to dismantle cis-heteronormativity.

There is no explicit research on David's gender performance in 2 Samuel 6, although biblical masculinity studies has explored many facets of David's masculine presentation. Consequently, I have collected and reviewed analysis on three categories: David's masculinity, Hashem's masculinity, and priestly masculinity. This allows me to establish a series of baseline expectations and social norms around gender roles. This is supplemented with anthropological and archaeological research, which has preserved a record of non-binary individuals. There is a disappointing lack of research focused on defining and identifying ancient femininity, which has long been understood in an essentialist contrast to masculinity. That is, femininity has been understood as that which masculinity is not. Feminist discourse has explored the significance of

framing femininity and women as the perpetual other, something I discuss in detail in chapter four. As such, I have drawn what I can from anthropological discussions of non-binary individuals, who themselves frequently expose the edges of ancient femininity, to build a definition of such.

With these social roles in mind – masculine, feminine, and non-binary – we can then understand what ‘genderfluidity’, what movement between genders, may have looked like in ancient Mesopotamia and Levant. It is also where the gaps in current research become apparent. Anthropology too often finds itself hesitant to borrow from sociological language to describe non-binary individuals, relying instead on out-dated, inaccurate binary terms and biblical masculinity studies has struggled to identify trans and gender-expansive masculinity.

This is particularly evident in my research since the three categories I use to interpret masculinity – individual, divine, and priestly masculinity – have largely been treated as distinct, without focus on the relationship between them. I believe that my thesis argues that each gender presentation and performance is, as Butler claims, informed by actor and audience in tandem. It is a community undertaking, since the community regulates itself, creating and re-creating the norms it will then maintain. This remains true even for divine masculinity, which although performed by a deity, who is arguably outside of the community, sets communal standards and is regulated and reified by the community.

## Outline of Thesis

Chapters two and three, ‘Queer Theory and 2 Samuel 6’, and ‘Masculinity Studies and 2 Samuel 6’, open my dissertation with a detailed analysis of existing scholarship, beginning with

queer biblical studies and following with biblical masculinity studies. I will detail the current state of research on 2 Samuel 6 in these fields and where there are pertinent gaps for future scholarship.

Chapter four, ‘Sacred Liminality’, takes the place of a traditional methodology chapter, since queer theory has no unified methodology (Stone, 2013, p. 156). Queer theory is more appropriately a ‘sensitivity’ that guides reading and interpretation, drawing from an interdisciplinary background (Stone, 2013, p. 156). It is not my goal to provide a singular, authoritative reading of 2 Sam. 6 or David’s dance before the ark, but to provide a *new*, profoundly transgender, reading of the text, grounded in careful research and thorough argumentation.

Chapter five will begin my analysis with a translation, brief exegesis, and commentary on 2 Samuel 6. My translation will be drawn primarily from the MT and will offer a space where I can organize and expound upon crucial differences in the MT and LXX, emphasizing the way these differences alter the text’s depiction of gender and power. Chapter six, ‘2 Samuel 6 in Time and Space’, will provide context for 2 Samuel 6, by examining 1 Samuel 4.1-7.1 – the last mention of the ark prior to 2 Samuel 6, known as the ark narrative – and detailing how I date the text. This chapter establishes who I believe to be the text’s intended ancient reader and what social conditions and norms produced the text’s narrator.

To establish a ‘straight’ reading of 2 Samuel 6, in the following chapters – six through eight – I have selected six commentaries,<sup>14</sup> although referencing more, as a sample for modern

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<sup>14</sup> I have chosen Walter Brueggemann (1990), Jan P. Fokkelman (1990), Hans Wilhem Hertzberg (1964), P. Kyle McCarter, Jr (1980), David Toshio Tsumura (2019), and Johanna W. H. Van Wijk-Bos (2020). They stretch between 1964 and 2020, offering a range of respected opinions and well-researched study that has been and continues to be a vital part of academic conversation on 2 Samuel.



commentary on 2 Samuel 6 at large. This will enable me to compare and contrast a range of styles – historical-critical, literary, feminist, and rhetorical – while still specifically addressing each argument and conclusion.

Chapter seven, ‘Sudden Death’, explores 2 Samuel 6.1-12, focusing on the crucible created by Uzzah’s death, viewed through the lens of power and gender. I will also analyse the narrator’s voice in vv. 1-11, with the hope that this will illuminate the way modern commentaries – including historical-critical commentaries<sup>15</sup> – read with the narrator, creating פשוט, the straight meaning of the text, even as they purports to uncover this single, authoritative interpretation.

Chapter eight, ‘The Second Procession’, interrogates accepted and justifiable cultic behaviour, focusing on vv. 12-19. I will examine David’s dance, dress, and his role as priest, inquiring into textual depictions of priestly gender, holiness, and power. I seek to compare David’s behaviour in vv. 1-11 with vv. 12-19 to create a dynamic image of the warrior king turned dancing priest.

Chapter nine, ‘The Seams’, closes 2 Samuel 6 with vv. 20-23. Although textually small, it contains another moment of profound (queer?) tension, as Michal rebukes David and the narrator offers their most overt input. As a result, I will focus not only the gender and power dynamics between Michal and David – which are in state of intense upheaval – but also address the narrator’s authoritative presence in v. 23.

With this framework in mind, let us begin.

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<sup>15</sup> The narrator is not necessarily the author(s) and/or editor(s) and therefore occasionally slips through the cracks.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW – QUEER THEORY AND 2 SAMUEL 6

Queer biblical scholarship has amassed a fascinating, extensive body of work on David, focused primarily on his relationships with Jonathan and Saul, but has largely ignored 2 Samuel 6, perhaps because it finds itself lost between David's tumultuous, often dramatic relationships with men and women. *The Queer Bible Commentary*, for instance, only briefly refers to 2 Samuel 6 in the context of David's 'strained' relationship with Michal, which has become political, not necessarily personal (Stone, 2016, p. 211). As such, there are only three queer analyses that address 2 Sam. 6, beginning with Theodore Jennings Jr.'s 2001 work, 'YHWH as Erastēs', Teresa Hornsby's 2014 article – republished in 2016 – 'The Dance of Gender: David, Jesus, and Paul', and ending with Karin Hügel's 2016 paper, 'King David's Exposure while Dancing: A Queer Reading of 2 Samuel 6'. All three queer criticisms of 2 Sam. 6 are fascinating, well-argued pieces of scholarship, however, given the breadth of material, more research is desperately needed. Only Hornsby's work uses gender to interpret 2 Sam. 6, both Jennings and Hügel view the chapter through the lens of homoeroticism and homosexuality.

Jennings's analysis evaluates 2 Sam. 6-7 through the lens of a pederastic relationship. Following the shift in LGBT biblical studies from defensive readings to affirming readings, Jennings specifically cites the range of 'non heteronormative sexualities' that queer studies opens to the biblical scholars that exist beyond the modern conceptions of LGBT identities, which would be anachronistic in the ancient Mesopotamia and Levant (2001, pp. 36-38). Jennings refocuses the reader's gaze to an overlooked male-on-male love affair in chapter six.

Jennings sees Hashem and David as a homoerotic pair and draws specifically from the lover-*erastēs*/beloved-*erōmenos* dynamic, informed by the famous homosocial-homogenital<sup>16</sup> relationships of Spartan, Theban, Celtic, and Samurai warriors (2001, pp. 38-39, 47-48). The relationship between Hashem and David is both ancient (pederastic) and modern – a warrior-god (Hashem) and his chosen (David) as Master/Servant<sup>17</sup> – or to borrow another set of modern queer terms: ‘top’ and ‘bottom’, as equals in a loving relationship with one partner taking an active, dominating role and the other a submissive, receptive role. Jennings is careful to note that ‘it is by no means the case that the top is always in control or that the bottom is simply dominated’ (2001, pp. 61). Indeed, according to Jennings’s reading, David wields a great deal of control in 2 Sam. 6.

David’s dancing before the ark is not a cultic celebration, but an erotic reward for Hashem after an intense lovers’ spat (2001, pp. 52-55, 60). Jennings details the overlapping fetishized imagery of Hashem’s ephod and Hashem’s ark, beginning in Judges and stretching into 1 Samuel, supplemented by Jeremiah, particularly the way the ephod functions as ‘a potent representation. . . [of] the phallic prowess and potency of God’<sup>18</sup> (2001, pp. 56-58). The ark, as an ephod, ‘sheathed’ Hashem, who ‘burst forth’<sup>19</sup> in Jennings’s translation on David’s enemies and ‘the innocent Uzzah’ (2001, p. 60). Jennings reads David as upset at this sudden phallic violence, and he leaves the ark with Obed-Edom, only to discover that Hashem’s anger has

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<sup>16</sup> I am indebted to A. Heacock for his use and definition of ‘homogenital’ (2011, p. 3)

<sup>17</sup> 2 Sam. 7:5, 18-20

<sup>18</sup> Jennings emphasizes that the ephod not only embodies Hashem’s explicitly masculine coded characteristics, but it is also something that ‘with which the men of Israel are said to prostitute themselves’ (2001, p. 57).

<sup>19</sup> Jennings ties the imagery of Hashem as ‘the one who bursts forth’ or ‘like a bursting flood’ to the phallic power the ark/ephod represents to evoke an ejaculatory connotation, observing that after Hashem’s ‘deadly “bursting forth” . . . [there is an] unexpected bestowal of fertility and prosperity’ that seems ‘like a phallic fantasy’ (2001, p. 53). I am not entirely convinced that is what the author had in mind, but the sexual overtones of the text are certainly present.

dissipated, and Obed-Edom now enjoys divine favour (2 Sam. 6: 8-12). Jennings pushes against traditional readings that see Hashem's reaction as a justified response to improper cultic behaviour, instead arguing that Hashem is at David's mercy – physically stuck in place, with a Philistine, no less (2001, p. 53). Hashem's change of heart delights David who rewards his lover-Master with a parade and erotic dance, showing off the beauty that first captivated Hashem (2001, p. 43-44). After all, Hashem does like his boys to be lookers (Jennings, 2001, pp. 43-46).

Jennings ends with 2 Sam. 7, proposing that the conversation between Hashem and David 'consummates' their relationship through 'vows of love' (2001, pp. 62-65). It is these vows, in Jennings's interpretation, that set the relational standard for Hashem and Israel as husband/wife (2001, p. 65). Integral to Jennings's readings of the vows as intimate, is his application of the connection between Jonathan and David to Hashem and David. Jonathan, like Hashem, is the lover-*erastēs*, while David the beloved-*erōmenos*: Jennings focuses on use of 'your servant' in 1 Sam. 20:7-8, mirrored now in 2 Sam. 7 and David's time serving Jonathan as armour bearer (2001, pp. 40, 65). Jennings' reading acknowledges its analysis assumes a homoerotic relationship between Jonathan and David in the biblical text (2001, p. 64). Greek pederastic relationships '[were] permanent. . . [designed] to lead to friendship for life' (Nissinen, 1998, p. 60). Jennings specifically notes the way that both of David's relationships endure, through David's protection of and symbolic adoption of Mephibosheth and Hashem's fatherhood of Solomon (2001, p. 64-67).

In the *erastēs/erōmenos* relationship, sexual acts were socially regimented: spiritual connection was primary and 'sexual satisfaction belong[ed] to the active partner [the *erastēs*]', while the *erōmenos* had to content himself with spiritual love and gifts from his suitors: an ideal

*erōmenos* was a chaste *erōmenos*, unpenetrated and sexually disinterested, permitting intercruial sex for the sake of his *erastēs*, rather than his own desire<sup>20</sup> (Nissinen, 1998, pp. 65-68).

Jennings's depiction of Hashem/David certainly fits well: David and Hashem have an intense spiritual relationship, punctuated, and coloured by homoerotic imagery. David's risqué dancing before the ark could easily be considered *hypourgein* or *charizesthai*, an intimate favour in return for Hashem's blessing (Nissinen, 1998, p. 60, 68). And perhaps most tellingly, Hashem and David's bond lasts past the fading of David's beauty and virility, growing to encompass 'the whole of Israel' (Jennings, 2001, pp. 64-69). In true *erastēs/erōmenos* fashion, social commitment and spiritual ties between the pair underscore and define the relationship. It is not a brief fling or like Assyrian homogenital sex, where men who 'assumed the passive role' faced stiff legal consequences, but according to one omen, the penetrating partner in male-on-male anal sex would 'become the leader among his peers and brothers', unlike the penetrated man, who has been made subordinate (Nissinen 1998, p. 27). Instead, Hashem and David are loving and intimate. Their power dynamic, deity/human, Master/servant, is skewed in favour of Hashem, but David is far from powerless and wields a significant measure of control and agency.

Jennings follows his analysis of 2 Sam. 6 with a brief comparison of Hashem to Zeus, both who seem to like human boys (2001, pp. 67-68). However, there are several significant

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<sup>20</sup> Nissinen draws his depiction of an ideal *erastēs/erōmenos* relationship from Greek literature, particularly Plato, Socrates, Aeschines, and Xenophon, and art (1998, pp. 58-69). Nissinen notes that based on artistic depictions of pederastic relationships, that actual pederasty likely ranged from the ideal championed by Plato to complicated, role subverting relationships, motivated by socially inappropriate sexual desire or even money/favours (1998, pp. 68-69). He observes that 'relationships with boys was a delicate issue managed with a subtle moral code' where 'reality did not always correspond with the ideal [pederastic relationship] and its limits' (1998, p. 69). The tension between *erastēs*, *hybris*, and *kinaidos*, with the latter two referring to effeminacy and penetrative homogenital sex, highlight this (1998, p. 68). *Hybris* and *kinaidos* were socially shunned, and *hybris* (male sex workers who were penetrated) permanently 'barred from public service' regardless of his motive for entering sex work (1998, p. 68). While *erōmenos* '[were] protected from being labeled a *kinaidos*', *erastēs* who challenged social conventions were not protected from derogatory labels (1998, p. 68).

differences: Hashem ‘is a rather antisocial divinity’ who does not seek the companionship of other gods, for love, sex, or friendship, and does not leave behind immortal heirs, human or divine<sup>21</sup> (Jennings, 2001, pp. 68-69). Hashem is also bound to the people of Israel, specifically Israelite men (Jennings, 2001, pp. 69-70). David (and Israel) are perpetual *erōmenos* to Hashem’s *erastēs*: this ‘view from the bottom’, with David as the subject of the narrative, yet the object of Hashem’s affection, clashes with primary ‘Greco-Roman homoerotic romance’ narrative, and as previously mentioned, also Assyrian homoerotic/homogenital customs (Jennings, 2001, 70-71; Nissinen, 1998, p. 27). While *erōmenoi* were certainly desired and those who adhered to pederastic social codes were seen as very honourable, their perspective – and even agency, Jennings argues – was not considered relevant to pederastic narratives (2001, pp. 70-71; Nissinen, 1998, pp. 57-73).

Like the majority of queer scholarship during the 2000s, however, Jennings’s understanding of and focus on trans identity is limited, signalled by his closing arguments against reading David as trans. Jennings fears that the homoerotic relationship he explores between David and Hashem is undercut by illusions to Israel as a woman/wife and he raises interesting questions<sup>22</sup> about gender, heteronormativity, and essentialism (2001, pp. 38, 65). He closes the paper with a short argument against reading David as feminine or trans, despite later explicit, textual portrayals of Israel ‘as a wife:’

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<sup>21</sup> At least, in the Tanakh.

<sup>22</sup> Jennings’s hesitation about reading David’s behaviour as feminine is tied to fears of essentialization and binarization, where feminine is coded not as a unique form of performativity, but the absence of masculine performativity. It is worthwhile to speculate about what feminine performativity appears as in the Samuel text. If a trans reading casts David as feminine/female, opposite the masculine/male Hashem, we still need not necessarily assume that a trans reading is a binary reading, given the multiplicity of ways femininity and womanhood is performed.

In any case I do not believe it is helpful to read the homoeroticism of this relationship as existing on a scale of 'more or less' masculine or, even worse, as entailing feminization. For this essentializes binary distinctions between male and female as well as casting feminization simply as the depletion of masculinity. (2001, pp. 65-66, 72-73)

Jennings unfortunately misses the queer potential in a trans reading of 2 Sam. 6 that recognizes Israel's relationship as wife and woman to Hashem and suggests that this change in gender is tied to the need 'to read homoerotic relationships in terms of heteroerotic ones' (2001, pp. 72-73). Because Jennings focuses on David's dance, he misses the significant, gendered implications of David's actions before and after, particularly, the two parades and celebratory meal. David eschews hegemonic masculinity and instead deliberately occupies both masculine and feminine spaces. I certainly agree with Jennings that a gender essentialist reading would be erroneously reductive, but I disagree that Israel's transition<sup>23</sup> must be read as affirming heteronormativity or essentialist. Movement within and beyond binary gender is seen by heteronormative, Western society as improperly performed gender, coming with steep consequences and, often, violence (Hornsby, 2016, pp. 84, 86-88). Further, David's femininity is marked not by the absence of masculinity but by deliberate action associated with ancient Mesopotamian and Levantine femininity. This positive performativity does not depict femininity as the absence of masculinity, but a socially codified set of behaviours. David, by virtue of being assigned male at birth, disrupts a heteroerotic reading of the text, especially if David/Israel is symbolically read as a wife! After all, gender transition and liminality are uniquely queer experiences, treated by heteronormativity as destabilizing and dangerous.

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<sup>23</sup> Israel's textual gender transition from literally male/masculine to symbolically female/feminine, in modern queer parlance is analogous to 'mtf' (male to female/femme) or 'transfemme' (male to feminine, although not necessarily female) transitions.

Consequently, Teresa Hornsby uses David's queer gender performativity 2 Sam. 6 and the parable of Luke 7.31-32 to subvert Pauline gender roles (2016, pp. 85-93). Hornsby focuses specifically on dance, offering it as 'a heuristic model for gender variability and transition' – a compelling example of both the necessity of boundaries and safe movement past the borders of these boundaries of gender (2016, pp. 86-88). Paul's insistence on rigid gender and sex roles for early Christians was fuelled by the need for a unique identity, neither Jewish – demarcated by the laws of circumcision and kashrut – nor Roman – defined by polytheistic ritual. Hornsby argues that both David and Jesus call for the transgression of societal boundaries through the image of dance, disrupting and subverting Paul's aims (2016, 89-91).

Notably, Hornsby interprets David's dancing as transgressing binary gender: 'David's dance occurs between two seemingly fixed points: a masculine Yahweh and the textually feminine people of Israel' (2016, p. 89). David moves queerly, oscillating between masculine and feminine, the object of a divine, male gaze, but also as subject, gazing on Israel. Hornsby reads David as the object of Hashem's gaze, like Jennings, based on Michal's reaction to the parade and David's costuming (2016, p. 89). The exact nature of both the dance and the ephod are ambiguously depicted in the text, but Michal's condemnation carries an explicit sexual censure, which itself sexualizes the ephod: the ephod may cover the genitals, thus modestly concealing them, but inescapably symbolizes them and calls attention to their presence (Hornsby, 2016, p. 89). I agree that this ambiguity is fitting, given David's liminality: he is masculine/feminine, clothed/exposed, subject/object. Whatever he is, Michal, symbolizing 'social judgement', does not approve, yet David 'defiantly dances on' (Hornsby, 2016, p. 89).



David's movement between masculine/feminine symbolically<sup>24</sup> embraces genderfluidity. It is certainly an exceptional passage given David's political power – which enables him to reject social criticism of his queerness with relative safety – and spiritual security. Hornsby uses Jesus's parable in Luke 7.31-32 to express spiritual validation of 'movement across and through . . . conventional standards', then follows it with John's account of Jesus and the disciples dancing after the Last Supper: 'Jesus danced in the lacuna between heaven and earth to make the two as one' (2016, pp. 90-93). In 2 Sam 6, Hashem approves of David's dance and parade, as evidenced by his covenant with David in 2 Sam 7, thus validating David's actions as acceptable and holy, although Hornsby does not dwell overlong on this. Hornsby also does not contextualize David's dancing – it does not need to be for Hornsby's reading – but I believe that the relationship between priestly behaviour/gender, along with the relationship between priestly behaviour/dance, would complement an examination of gender and dance. David's dance is radical because if David's dancing is indeed a queer act, it implies genderfluidity is not just textually tolerated, but sacred. Hornsby's focus is limited, specifically looking at dance as a metaphor for genderfluidity; I would like to evaluate David's dance as a manifestation of genderfluidity – is it indeed queer? Does David's behaviour fall under socially accepted standards for ancient Israelite men? I would argue that David's genderfluidity would benefit from a detailed analysis of not only his risqué dancing, but his behaviour during the entire chapter, since a significant portion of his genderfluidity is tied to how he affirms then subverts masculinity.

Karin Hügel's reading of 2 Sam. 6 departs from Hornsby's examination of gender and returns to Jennings's focus on the homoerotic and pederastic. Consequently, Hügel's provocative

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<sup>24</sup> Hornsby does not reflect on the possibility that David's behaviour is read by his audience as genderfluid or queer, instead Hornsby sees David's genderbending as a metaphorical expression of a literal act (dancing) (2016, p. 89).

reading ‘focus[es] on the erotic behaviour’ David exhibits, particularly the connection between the verb *שחק*, as ‘to dance, to play or make merry’, and the verb *צחק*, which can be translated as ‘to joke. . . to play’ and is a euphemism in Genesis 39 for sex (2016, pp. 250, 254-55). Crucial to Hügel’s argument is a thorough examination of the Masoretic text, the Septuagint, and the Targum Jonathan, along with comparisons between 2 Sam. 6 and 1 Chron. 15.

Hügel focuses on Michal’s accusation in 2 Sam. 6.20: that David has ‘exposed himself’ or according to the Septuagint “‘he was uncovered’” and argues that David’s exposure evokes Noah’s in Genesis 9:21-23, where the same consonantal root [גלה] implies that Noah is naked (ערוה) and that David’s exposure is not metaphorical but literal (Hügel, 2016, 256-57). This reading, Hügel argues, is supported by other biblical usages, which are concerned with physical nakedness and often sexually charged<sup>25</sup>. However, despite this focus on the eroticism<sup>26</sup> of David’s behaviour, Hügel avoids directly addressing who David is dancing for: ‘At what does Michal actually take offence? That David prefers to dance before G\*d. . . instead of turning towards her?’ – then promptly suggests that ‘Michal—as her father King Saul before—can be regarded as jealous of David’, specifically the favour and power David wields, with God and with the Israelite people, despite symbolically rejecting Saul’s legacy with his response in v. 21 (2016, pp. 258-60). Hügel does not address the human-divine relationship or any of the implicit

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<sup>25</sup> This noun is used to describe undefended land in Gen. 42.9, 42.12, sexual acts in Lev. 18.7-17, 20.11, 20.17, 20.20-21, Deut. 24.1, Eze. 20.10, Eze. 23.29, literal nakedness in Isa. 20.4, and indiscretion/indecency in Deut. 23.14 and 1 Sam. 20.30 (Hügel, 2016, pp. 256-57). Both forms of indiscretion are likely sexual. Deut. 23.1-3 is directly concerned with sexual practices or the organs involved in heterosexual sex, v. 4-9 concerns foreigners and their descendants, v. 10 with wartime ritual purity, v. 11-12 with wartime ritual purity and nocturnal emissions, and v. 13-14 with proper wartime disposal of excrement. In this context, the text is very concerned with literal nakedness, both sexual and non-sexual. For the sexual connotations of 1 Sam. 20.30 see Heacock (2011, 25-29) and Nissinen (1998, 54-56). While it is risky to look so far outside of Samuel for context, I find Hügel’s conclusion likely, if less than ideally argued.

<sup>26</sup> Hügel is particularly examining a queer eroticism, in which dancing is both (homo)sexual and playful (2016, pp. 255, 258-60).

queerness attached to it. David challenges political convention, not heteronormativity; his behaviour is queer – it is strange and merry –, it is not necessarily homosexual, bisexual, trans, or nonbinary, although it may very well be (Hügel 2016, pp. 250, 260).

Further, Hügel reads David's dance as a straight-forward physical manifestation of celebration, suggesting that aspects of modern Pride celebrations, particularly the scanty clothing and disavowal of traditional power structures, can be seen in the text – or perhaps more accurately, in the spirit of the text (2016, pp. 225, 260). David may indeed challenge political convention, represented by Michal, but his innate queerness – orientation, gender, or minority sexual practice – is not clearly defined<sup>27</sup> by Hügel in relation to 2 Sam. 6 (2016, p. 259). Consequently, the radical, trans-gressive<sup>28</sup> nature of David's behaviour is obscured: his queer movement between gender roles is ignored.

Like Jennings and Hornsby, Hügel offers very specific analyses on parts of 2 Sam. 6. None of the three scholars fully addresses David's genderfluidity – although Hornsby comes closest. A detailed reckoning of David's genderqueer performativity in 2 Sam. 6 requires an examination of not only his risqué dancing, but his behaviour during the entire chapter, since a significant portion of his genderfluidity is tied to his performance of, then subversion of hegemonic masculinity, while still receiving divine approval. This intersection, genderfluidity and holiness in 2 Sam. 6, offers queer scholarship a unique look at a text typically only traditionally interpreted.

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<sup>27</sup> Hügel's *Homoerotik und Hebräische Bibel* (2009) examines David's queerness in terms of homoeroticism but does not address 2 Sam. 6.

<sup>28</sup> David's behaviour is 'trans-gressive' because it transgresses the boundaries of gender.

Although there is no biblical criticism that specifically interprets 2 Sam. 6 in light of masculinity studies,<sup>29</sup> David's masculinity has long drawn attention, as a man after Hashem's own heart (1 Sam. 13.14). To provide needed specificity, I will limit my review only to intersecting topics within the larger sphere of biblical masculinity studies: David's masculinity, divine masculinity, and priestly masculinity. These divisions allow the intersecting – and conflicting – masculinities to each be properly addressed. There is no one way to be a man in any given culture: Hashem, David, and Hashem's priests and Levites all perform manhood differently, all in response to each other.

#### Individual Masculinity: David and Hegemonic Masculinity

David J. A. Clines's 'David the Man: The Construction of Masculinity in the Hebrew Bible', is an excellent analysis of David's masculinity and a compelling foundational work<sup>30</sup> with which to discuss individual masculinity in ancient Israel (1995, p. 212). Clines begins by interrogating differences between 'maleness in ancient Israel' and modern, Western, white,

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<sup>29</sup> Biblical masculinity studies is a broad field concerned with past, present, and future conceptions of manhood as it relates to religious texts, theology, and praxis.

<sup>30</sup> When first published in 1994, Clines lamented the lack of resources within biblical masculinity studies, however, in the decades since, biblical masculinity studies has gained traction and birthed several volumes on the subject and has been applied to a variety of biblical, Apocryphal, and Talmudic writings. Clines's 'David the Man' provided a template for discussing biblical masculinity without idealizing 'archetypal or mytho-poetic manly core qualities', instead exposing the existing textual tension and the tension created by the reader's interaction with the text (Krondorfer, 2017, p. 288). This deconstruction of masculinity is a common thread that binds masculinity studies together as a whole and provides a fruitful line of inquiry for scholarship interested in the ramifications of gender, especially in patriarchal societies, such as ancient Israel.

Christian masculinity<sup>31</sup> (1995, p. 215). The terms ‘maleness’ and ‘masculinity’ are used interchangeably to describe manhood and refer to socially created gender, rather than biological, phenotypic, or hormonal sex. Clines establishes five criteria for modern, Western hegemonic masculinity – a man is successful, sexual, aggressive, independent, and non-feminine – and six for ancient Israel – a man is a warrior, persuasive, beautiful, a man’s man, womanless, and a musician – using David as his proof text (1995, pp. 212-43). As Krondorfer mentions in his criticism of traditional or borderline masculinist<sup>32</sup> interpretations, simply listing these elements is insufficient: the innovation of masculinity studies lies in the interrogation and suspicion of hegemonic masculinities (2017, p. 288). Is David’s performance of masculinity subversive? Clines does not seem to believe so, although he is fascinated by the reaction of biblical commentary to this manly man.

Clines notes that in places where David’s masculinity does not conform to the readers’ expectations, mental gymnastics are employed to read David as an exceptional man, in modern, Western hegemonic terms (1995, p. 235). The eyes gloss over anything that might disrupt David’s conventionality and consequently disrupt the commentator’s perception of masculinity. Any conflict between the ancient ideal and the modern ideal would expose both forms of

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<sup>31</sup> I will refer to this specific manifestation of masculinity as modern, Western hegemonic masculinity, since it is typified by Christian, white, cis-het norms. My reasoning behind this will be explained in greater details shortly, and in Appendix 2.

<sup>32</sup> I have observed that in biblical studies, these interpretations are often focused on elevating *biblical manhood* by means of a textual blueprint for *authentic* manhood – a masculinity that uncritically benefits from and affirms patriarchal norms as a divine inheritance. In secular fields, masculinist thought is associated with men’s rights movements, which see men as oppressed victims of feminism and advocate for patriarchy (and authoritarianism) to restore men to their (alleged) rightful place in society. Naturally traditional and masculinist-flavoured biblical criticism is not keen on criticizing hegemonic masculinity, instead the focus is primarily listing the features of these archetypal men and then uncritically applying their features to modern manhood. Biblical masculinity studies, as a product of feminist studies, is interested in deconstructing these examples of masculinity and exposing the ways this masculinity continues to feed hegemonic oppression, with the intent that this masculinity and its systems be dismissed in favour of equality, compassion, and respect.

masculinity as variable cultural constructs, undermining the social power masculinity provides in patriarchal societies, and challenging the commentator's internal perception of gender and selfhood.

Clines finds ample examples of modern biblical commentaries shoe-horning ancient masculinity into modern, Western hegemonic masculine ideals. P. Kyle McCarter, A.R.S. Kennedy, and P. R. Ackroyd all struggle with David's beauty (Clines, 1995, p. 239). The men uniformly prefer terms that are coded masculine according to modern conventions. One example sees them eschewing the term 'beauty' for "good looks" or "handsomeness" in an effort to preserve David's masculinity (Clines, 1995, p. 239). After all, appearance is not a core part of modern, Western hegemonic masculinity, like it is for femininity, and such masculinity is pre-eminently defined as non-feminine (Clines, 1995, p. 212-13, 231-32). Therefore, David cannot be beautiful, he must be handsome or risk feminization by modern standards. Consequently, the commentators ignore or read symbolism in the place of David's uncomfortably good looks. Both McCarter and Ackroyd argue that beauty actually marks David's 'divine favour' and/or 'moral quality' rather than functioning independently as a mark of attractiveness (Clines, 1995, p. 239-40).

David's sexual history, including raping Bathsheba and murdering Uriah to cover it up, is another source of contention. David Howard, for instance, sees even this serious moral failing as emblematic of success: David's successful repentance subsumes his sin and leaves him unblemished, since, after all, success is a measure of the modern man (Clines, 1995, pp. 235-37). David's sin is downplayed and his achievement – forgiveness – is idealized. McCarter skirts polygamy and rape entirely with his mild observation that Absalom's 'claiming the royal harm'

is an effort to ‘publicize his claim to the throne’ (Clines, 1995, pp. 240-42). The tension between acceptable modern, Western heterosexuality, which Clines rightly observes does not include polygamy and serial rape, and the text is again ignored: David’s wives and concubines are not addressed, his sexual history is swept behind the curtain, and Absalom’s rapes along with it (1995, pp. 240-43).

Clines suggests that Absalom’s rape of the concubines inspired tension between ancient Israelite masculinity and the text as well, but for an entirely different reason. Absalom unmans David by raping the women of his household and David responds with resignation rather than manly vengeance (Clines, 1995, pp. 230, 235) Clines believes the text, unlike modern commentators, has a preeminent commitment to idealized masculinity over David, and does not excuse or ignore this lapse in hegemonic masculinity, but seizes upon the chance to ‘inscribe yet deeper the authority of the cultural norms’ (1995, pp. 230, 235).

Outside of rape and polygamy, however, David’s sexual history still continues to trouble modern commentators. Clines notes that David ‘is not very interested in sex’ with women, and ‘the only appreciative thing he says about love’ is directed towards Jonathan (1995, pp. 240-41). Clines interprets David’s sexual history as emblematic of his culture’s definition of masculinity: David rapes Bathsheba as ‘an expression of royal power’ and collects concubines like trophies (1995, p. 226). Women are accessories, a means to an end – heirs –, and in place of heterosexual love affairs, homosocial bonds take precedence (1995, pp. 225-26). Within this cultural framework, David and Jonathan’s love affair seems like yet another facet of period-typical masculinity.

While Clines ultimately reads their relationship as homosocial, he believes that the possibility of ‘sex [between David and Jonathan] *has* to be raised’ and observes that traditional biblical commentators recoil from the possibility of homoerotic – much less homogenital – overtones in the text (1995, p. 241). Clines notes that McCarter translates *דָּבַק* as ‘deeply fond’ rather than ‘delight in’ or ‘take pleasure in’ as scholarship has suggested it be interpreted (1995, pp. 240-41). McCarter is eager to obfuscate ‘the language of love’ in the text and repeatedly cools Jonathan’s ardour – it is not love, it is divine favour, spilling over into the social; it is not love, it is political language describing friendship (Clines, 1995, pp. 240-41). To borrow from lesbian experiences, they aren’t girlfriends, they’re just girl friends, gal pals! Pals who are gals! Nothing to see here.

When David’s masculinity does not align with modern, Western hegemonic masculinity, the biblical commentators are eager to force David into a manhood that mirrors their own. The tension between the two is obscured since it undermines their own perceptions of masculinity and exposes masculinity as variable, culturally constructed performance used as social shorthand (Clines, 1995, pp. 214-15, 231-32, 234-35). Clines also sees hero worship as feeding this commentary on the David story and I agree: David represents a staggering level of success, politically and theologically (1995, 234-38). In being ‘a man after his [Hashem’s] own heart’, David becomes ‘a man after their [the commentator’s] own heart’ (1 Sam. 13.14; Clines, 1995, p. 235). But does Clines fall into the same trap as his commentators?

Clines establishes his criteria for masculinity exclusively from the biblical text. He acknowledges that there are often multiple masculinities within one culture: men are not a monolith, and masculinity often exists on a continuum, from privileged to marginalized, a



concept that would be developed in detail by sociologists Anthony Synnott and R. W. Connell (Clines, 1995, Connell, 2005, pp. 45-81; p. 215-16; Synnott, 2009, pp. 11-24). Written a decade after ‘David the Man’, R. W. Connell’s seminal work, *Masculinities*, explores the construction and maintenance of ‘multiple masculinities’, sorted into hegemonic, subordinated, complicit, and marginalized masculinities, and provided scholars with new language to discuss idealized and subversive masculinity<sup>33</sup> (2005, pp. 45-81). Clines’s idealized ancient masculinity, the gold standard for manhood, against which David is held – and which he emulates – parallels Connell’s hegemonic masculinity. Naturally, even hegemonic masculinity can come in many forms within the same cultural framework – Connell specifically identifies factors such as race and class as pivotal to creating these masculinities – since hegemonic masculinity is simply a masculinity that succeeds in what DiPalma succinctly describes as ‘legitimizing claims to authority, power, and domination’ (Connell, 2005, pp. 76-81; DiPalma, 2010, p. 38). Masculinity’s appearance and practice is perpetually in flux (Connell, 2005, pp. 185-203). Clines recognizes this and further states that textual examples of masculinity do not necessarily represent actual masculinities: his analysis of the David narrative and his construction of masculine standards can be subject to the same interrogation he practices on traditional bible commentary (1995, p. 215). So how does Clines’s Davidic masculinity stand under this scrutiny?

Clines’ arguments rests on the idea that ‘the David story. . . reflects the cultural norms of the author’s time’ (1995, p. 216). David is used as the (nearly) exclusive textual example for hegemonic masculinity (Clines, 1995, pp. 216-30). Clines does entertain the idea that David does

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<sup>33</sup> This framework is discussed in greater detail in Appendix 2.

not entirely conform to hegemonic masculinity<sup>34</sup> but believes that the text chastises these lapses in power ‘conspicuously’ (1995, pp. 228-31). I agree that, certainly when it comes to Absalom, David is punished for departing from hegemonic ideals, but I do not believe it is necessarily always the rule. 2 Sam. 6, which Clines does not address, is an egregious example of David straying from hegemonic masculinity, but there are two examples that Clines does specifically mention, and I would like to examine these in greater depth.

Clines feels certain that beauty is a characteristic of manhood in the Hebrew Bible. After all, Joseph, Adonijah, Saul, David, Absalom, and a young Moses are all beautiful; the servant of Isaiah’s *lack* of beauty, Clines argues, suggests ‘that ordinarily. . . a high-ranking “servant of Yahweh”’ would be beautiful and possibly desirable (1995, pp. 221-22). Clines sees beauty in the Hebrew Bible as a crucial signifier for status – a subject for ‘praise and admiration’ of men, by men, since the subject of the Hebrew Bible is largely the stories of men, written for other men (1995, pp. 222-23).

Stuart Macwilliam in ‘Ideologies of Male Beauty and the Hebrew Bible’, argues that few men are described as beautiful, since men in the Hebrew Bible are exclusively gazers<sup>35</sup> and a male-on-male gaze exposes the man who lingers too long<sup>36</sup> and endangers the passive, gazed upon (2009, pp. 269-71). Thus, the Hebrew Bible’s metacommentary is motivated to obscure male beauty like Clines’s modern commentators (Macwilliam, 2009, p. 271) Instead of inciting desire, like female beauty, male beauty must then amplify hegemonic masculinity by drawing

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<sup>34</sup> 2 Sam. 19.6-8, where Joab dresses David down for his affection for Absalom, and 2 Sam. 15.15-26, 16.9-12, when during Absalom’s rebellion, David shows uncharacteristic apathy, mercy, and fear (Clines, 1995, pp. 228-31).

<sup>35</sup> Macwilliam notes that the Song of Songs is the sole exception, offering both ‘a direct female gaze’ and ‘articulated sexual desire’ (2009, p. 271).

<sup>36</sup> Macwilliam sees beauty as dangerous for both the beheld and the beholder in the text: Gen. 12, Deut. 21.11, Josh 6.17-21, 2 Sam. 11.2, 2 Sam. 13.1, Prov. 6.25, 31.30, Eze. 16.14-15, 25 (2009, pp. 269-70).

attention to the physical and political power coded in the ideal man: like modern commentary, it redirects the gaze to a more suitable, less homoerotic subject (Macwilliam, 2009, pp. 267-68). However, this process is not always successful. Clines notes that there is an inevitable difference between actual men and idealized men; it is this difference Macwilliam focuses on (1995, p. 215).

Macwilliam isolates areas of dissonance in Joseph, Absalom, and David's depictions of beauty and argues that all three men's beauty subverts hegemonic masculinity (2009, p. 271-85). Their beauty does not amplify their power, but fundamentally undermines it: they are cast as desired, passive under male eyes. Textually, Joseph is described in the same language as Rachel<sup>37</sup> which other commentators have recognized has serious implications for Joseph's masculinity (Macwilliam, 2009, p. 274). Macwilliam connects Joseph's intense Rabbinic censure in *Berishit Rabbah* 87:3-4 – where Joseph's sexual assault is depicted as a divine consequence for vanity – to Rabbinic anxiety over non-normative masculinity, an anxiety reflected in modern translations of Joseph's beauty (2009, pp. 273-75). Although many commentators suggest Joseph's beauty represents (exclusively or primarily) a mark of divine favour, Macwilliam draws attention to Sharon Pace Jeanson's connection between Joseph's appearance and the cows that represent years of plenty in Pharaoh's dream – both are pleasing and beautiful (2009, p. 275). It is an ominous connection, Macwilliam notes, considering the fate of the beautiful cows (2009, p. 275). Beauty, even as a signifier of favour, does not provide safety.

Beauty functions similarly in Absalom's story. While beauty marks Absalom as a charismatic leader, 'praised' according to 2 Sam. 14.25 for his beauty, it also foreshadows

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<sup>37</sup> Gen. 39.6 parallels 29.17, 'except for the gender of the adjectives, the description of Joseph. . . is word for word the same as that of his mother Rachel' (Macwilliam, 2009, p. 274).

danger (Macwilliam, 2009, pp. 279-80). Textually, the description of Absalom echoes ‘Levitical quality control’ and Daniel’s description of Nebuchadnezzar’s selection criteria (Macwilliam, 2009, p. 281). Macwilliam chafes against modern commentary that reads vanity into Absalom’s beauty, suggesting instead that Absalom’s beauty marks him as the inheritor of David’s beauty – ambiguously feminine and masculine, the gazed upon and desired – and therefore, beautiful and blemish-free, recalling the sacrificial codes, and consequently the one who must pay for David’s rape and murder, according to Nathan’s prophecy in 2 Sam. 12.10-12 (2009, pp. 281-83). It is Absalom’s Davidic beauty that unnerves the commentators: the connection between the beauty of an object and tragedy, attached to a man – the perpetual desirers, not the desired – must be disavowed to eliminate the challenge to hegemonic masculinity. Macwilliam suggests that Absalom’s charisma, in conjunction with his beauty, evokes Prov. 6.25, where ‘the object of the gaze manipulates the subject’ (2009, p. 281).

The biblical text addresses Joseph and Absalom’s disruptive beauty with expected sternness. While Absalom is hung by his lustrous hair, Joseph evades danger and gains acclaim when his intellect outshines his looks. Hegemonic masculinity appears to rule the text: men desired are men in danger, men emasculated and made passive. Their only hope of escape is to find another way, a more masculine way, to become more remarkable. Joseph’s prophecy is an excellent example. He embodies Clines’s persuasive male<sup>38</sup> and his success is directly attributed to this in Gen. 41.39: his looks are not mentioned (1995, pp. 219-20). David disrupts this trend, however. Here, according to Macwilliam’s analysis, subversive beauty is divinely endorsed.

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<sup>38</sup> Clines cites Genesis 41.33, 39 – ‘Accordingly, let Pharaoh find a man of discernment (נבון) and wisdom’ and ‘there is none so discerning (נבון) and wise as you’ – David and Joseph are both described with נבון (1995, pp. 219-20).

Macwilliam acknowledges that David ‘is allegedly the biblical *locus classicus*’ of beauty and divine favour, based on 1 Sam. 16.12, where ‘the immediate juxtaposition of David’s beauty and Yhwh’s instruction’ has formed a proof text for supporters of this theory (2009, p. 276). Macwilliam notes that translators have struggled with the ‘apparently blatant contradiction’ between Hashem’s dismissal of appearance to Samuel, then selection of David: the LXX adds ‘for the Lord’ to the MT’s ‘good to the sight’<sup>39</sup> (2009, p. 277). The explanation lies in 1 Sam. 17.42, where David’s beauty is repeated: Macwilliam notes that ‘some commentators question the textual reliability’ of this repetition, but Macwilliam finds it illuminating (2009, p. 277). David’s appearance is evoked against the hyper masculine Goliath, whose appearance in 17.4-7 is described clearly in terms of a hegemonic masculine ideal: physically powerful, with the trappings of a dominating warrior (Macwilliam, 2009, p. 277-78). Macwilliam goes further and suggests that Goliath is ‘a sort of maxi-version of Saul’ – whose description in 1 Sam. 9.2 has illusions of beauty, but the textual context suggests that Saul is striking or ‘impressive’ – the NIV’s choice of adjective works well here – and that David’s ‘boyish beauty’ stands in contrast to both men, eschewing and subverting the hegemonic ideal by killing Goliath and politically succeeding Saul (2009, pp. 277-79).<sup>40</sup>

Clines argues that departures from hegemonic masculinity come at a price and would be recognized by the authors’ peers, but Macwilliam disagrees (Clines, 1995, pp. 228-29, 232; Macwilliam, 2009, p. 279). This stems from two very different interpretations of 1 Sam. 16.12. Clines reads Samuel as Brueggemann does, ‘dazzled,’ while a dispassionate Hashem ‘seizes the

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<sup>39</sup> The MT has וטוב ראי where the LXX has καὶ ἀγαθὸς ὁράσει κυρίῳ (Macwilliam, 2009, p. 277).

<sup>40</sup> Both Goliath and Saul are decapitated (1 Samuel 17.51 and 31.8-9), emphasizing their loss of hegemonic power and agency over their bodies in death.

moment' and selects David as king (1995, p. 222). Macwilliam sees 'Yhwh himself. . . [as] pushing the queer project on', by selecting a 'pretty boy' instead Eliab, Saul, or another man who has the appropriate 'appearance or. . . stature' to rule, a man that fulfils the dominant male ideal (2009, pp. 276-77, 279). I find Macwilliam's argument much more compelling than Clines. It is based in a deeper textual examination and Macwilliam's analyses of Joseph and Absalom support his case. Clines relies on a hegemonic reading of both Joseph and Absalom to establish David as yet another example – if an exemplary one – of beautiful men, thus normalizing the intersection of beauty and masculinity (1995, pp. 221-22). Macwilliam suggests instead that there is a range of acceptable appearances for men, even non-hegemonic ones. David's looks do not evoke muscle-bound military might or regal bearing and political power but boyhood (1 Sam. 17.42). He cannot manage in Saul's armour and leaves it behind when he meets Goliath (1 Sam. 17.39). But despite this, David is anointed as Hashem's chosen and finds success. There is no negative consequence for his beauty: Saul's jealousy is directed at David's (conventional) military exploits and the resulting political popularity (1 Sam. 18.8). David's beauty openly undermines hegemonic standards, but this passes without textual comment, I believe, because David's subversive beauty reinscribes Hashem's place as the ultimate hegemonic masculine ideal.

With this in mind, I would like to examine Clines's argument on lamentation and masculinity. The text,<sup>41</sup> according to Clines, has a profound allegiance to hegemonic masculinity: David's "fallibility [from the masculine ideal] only serves to inscribe yet deeper the authority of the cultural norms" (1995, p. 229). This belief is the basis for Clines's interpretation

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<sup>41</sup> I would argue that it is not the text, but the narrator.

of 2 Sam. 12, where David's response to his son's death is 'the ultimate macho act' and perhaps serves to redeem him from a gender slip up – theorized to possibly be his 'excessive grief' (1995, pp. 229-30).

Recent essays in biblical masculinity studies have attempted to divine the gender performativity of weeping in biblical culture, but scholars seem to be divided. Corrine Carvalho, in her analysis of Jeremiah, suggests that mourning is a feminine coded performance, since professional mourners are often textually feminine (2016, p. 14). Further, in regional lamentations describing the downfall of cities, 'the weeping voice' was ascribed to a goddess (Carvalho, 2016, p. 14). However, in C.J. Patrick Davis's essay on Jeremiah, Jeremiah's lament – and entire demeanour – is masculine-coded (2010, p. 204-06). Jeremiah may sound the call for mourning, but he uses 'violence and aggression,' to do so, particularly military imagery and emasculating language (Davis, 2010, p. 196-04). Jeremiah feminizes his listeners by commanding men to seek safety in cities<sup>42</sup>, while proclaiming imminent violence that his listeners are powerless to overcome (Davis, 2010, pp. 197-98). Here, the verbal anger and fury of Hashem is poured onto Israel, who is further feminized through direct comparisons to an adulterous wife, through the conduit of Jeremiah (Davis, 2010, pp. 198-99). While women were often professional mourners, in this specific instance, Jeremiah occupies a profoundly queer space as a conduit for male violence, expressing male rage and emasculating his listeners, even while bucking hegemonic masculinity – shunning marriage, procreation, weddings, funerals, and openly weeping at his inability to persuade Israel to repent (Carvalho, 2016, p. 14). Jeremiah refuses to be neatly categorized and this emphasizes the liminality of tears in the Hebrew Bible.

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<sup>42</sup> Davis links cities to interior spaces, which as a part of the private sphere, were female-coded regions (2010, pp 197-99).

Jeremiah's inability to persuade Israel is pertinent to any reading of 2 Sam. 12. David's tears do not explicitly convey aggression or violence. He accepts without condition that he is wrong in v. 13. While he mourns and fasts, he does not rail against Hashem, although he does attempt to persuade him to let the child live (2 Sam. 13.16). David's request inherently acknowledges the relative positions of him – the supplicant – to Hashem – the master. Like Jeremiah, David attempts to persuade, but fails. However, unlike Jeremiah, David does not turn to male-coded violence: there is no call for honour-driven retribution, no rage, no anger. David accepts Hashem's ruling over him.

Milena Kirova, in 'When Real Men Cry: The Symbolism of Weeping in the Torah and the Deuteronomistic History', offers the best examination of the performativity of weeping in the text. Kirova suggests there is wide range of masculinities depicted in the Hebrew Bible: Joseph's tears and affection for his brothers does not prevent him from being 'a resourceful crook' (2017, pp. 37, 46-47). In fact, Kirova believes that this echoes the diversity of the divine (2017, pp. 47-48). Textually, it seems that '[i]n the face of God a mortal being ought to cry' to affirm 'the equilibrium [of the] human-divine' (Kirova, 2017, p. 48). As I will discuss later, it is not possible to out-man Hashem. But placing that aside for a moment, let us examine Kirova's analysis of David's weeping.

David's weeping can be best understood when read in light of two factors: audience and response. Intratextually<sup>43</sup>, David is exceptionally good at '*weep[ing] for profit*:' this weeping is public, political, and usually, David gets exactly what he wants (Kirova, 2017, pp. 40-41). David's mourning for Saul and Jonathan is an exceptional moment of performativity: he weeps

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<sup>43</sup> Within the narrative arc of David's life.



for the brother/love of his heart and father-in-law (who only pages before was attempting to kill him) as an integral part of a ‘grand scale funeral ritual’ that establishes David as Saul’s spiritual successor and the ultimate man, defined by his great love for and attachment to other men (Kirova, 2017, pp. 40-41). David’s relationship moves from the private, secretly kissing Jonathan in the field, weeping together – the reader can nearly see their tears mingling in 1 Sam. 20.41 –, to the public, solidifying his claim to the throne as not only a son-in-law, but a son-in-heart and spirit (Kirova, 2017, p. 40; 2 Sam. 1.11-12, 17-27).

This public, political mourning occurs again in 2 Sam. 3, when David mourns Abner with considerable vigour: not only does he weep, tear his clothes, and recite another poem, but follows the bier and fasts until nightfall (Kirova, 2017, p. 41). David leaves the funeral having secured his reputation and the people’s affection: in v. 32, David leads the mourning, and Israel behind him bewails Abner, but in v. 35, the focus quickly moves from the Israelites weeping over Abner to their worry for David who, lost in the throes of exceptional grief, is valiantly fasting. The funeral ends with the Israelites assured of David’s innocence in v. 37, while Joab, Abner’s killer, remains a part of the king’s retinue, appearing again in 2 Sam. 8.16 as the head of the army. Kirova notes that the Israelites are ‘pleased’ with David (2017, p. 41; 2 Sam. 3.36). David’s ability to play the lyre is rivalled only by his ability to play people.

However, in 2 Sam. 12, David’s performance fails to elicit the same response in Hashem that he does from Israel. Despite his tears, fasting, persuasiveness, and begging, David’s son dies. Kirova reads the servants’ response as ‘rightly amazed’ at David’s abrupt resumption of daily life when the child dies, and suggests it is ‘moral practicality’ not unlike Abraham’s

bargaining (2017, p. 41). Here, David's audience is private – Hashem – and David does not get what he wants. He has failed.

Kirova's analysis of weeping closes with the acknowledgement that in the Hebrew Bible there is wide range of normalized behaviours and suggests that masculinity in the Hebrew Bible is too vast to be contained in 'modern concepts' like hegemonic masculinities (2017, pp. 46-47). Although David's weeping earns him no commendations or miracles, it also faces no repercussions. David returns to his previous life and manly duties, including impregnating Bathsheba in v. 24-25, leading a successful battle in v. 26-31, even assuming the crown of the city's former king, without problem.

Kirova concludes that ultimately instances such as this call into question the validity of using 'modern concepts' to interpret the biblical text, particularly hegemonic masculinity (2017, p. 48). Instead, Kirova suggests that these inconsistencies in masculine behaviour capture aspects of divinity, making David 'beyond-human', and alluding to 'messianistic ideas implicit in his literary presence' (2017, p. 48). Yet, Kirova closes by tying weeping to pleading, as 'the most important ritualistic function' a human or group of humans can perform to draw divine favour: 'he who cries best will see the day' when his prayers are answered (2017, p. 48). It is the appropriate response to the sight of the divine, preserving human/Divine dichotomy, and Kirova correctly observes it is no coincidence that weeping is ascribed 'to some of the greatest heroes' in the Hebrew Bible (2017, p. 48).

I disagree with the first half of Kirova's conclusion as it conflicts with the second. David's inability to persuade Hashem – a masculine failing according to Clines and certainly an example of powerlessness, a departure from the hegemonic ideal – and the lack of retribution for

this gender transgression does not necessarily undermine the reality of hegemonic masculinities. David's masculinity – and Israelite male masculinity as a whole – is a precarious creature. Hegemonic masculinity, as previously mentioned, is masculinity that imbues power and typically maintains systematic oppression to achieve these ends. Hegemonic masculinity, as an idealized masculinity, cannot be entirely present in one person all of the time: it is inevitable that slippage will occur. It is a performance, not an innate, immutable force. David's performance of masculinity is forced to slip, I believe, because of the presence of Hashem. David, after all, is fundamentally human, and is therefore, subordinate to divine power, the ultimate expression of hegemonic masculinity in the text. In the contest of human masculinity and divine masculinity, the divine must always win.

There may be some bravado, as Clines notes, in David's abrupt switch from tearful to dry-eyed, but I believe it more accurately can be read in line with what Cline describes as a case of David 'capitulat[ing] to fate', a very un-masculine behaviour indeed (1995, p. 230). Clines identifies this subordination when David passively tolerates verbal abuse and Absalom's challenge to his rule, then intensely mourns Absalom's death, stirring up Joab's ire (1995, pp. 229-32). Clines perhaps misses this particular case, since he presumes that any lapse of hegemonic masculinity will come at a price to the one who fails to perform according to cultural standards. However, David accepts that he is powerless, without any impingement to his manhood, saying in v. 23, 'Can I bring him [the child] back again?'

It seems that Clines, like the commentators he evaluates, has his own blind spots regarding David's masculinity. These two examples of David's departure from the idealized man, as a boyish beauty and unpersuasive, passive acceptor of divine will, are striking because

they go unpunished, and the text does not comment further on them. Hegemonic human masculinity appears to have made an allowance for David. This textual acceptance is likely why Clines passes them by. I would argue that there is a deliberate reason for this and that to examine this sufficiently, we must turn to the hegemonic masculinity of Hashem himself, to see how it **affects** the masculinity of his adherents.

#### Divine Masculinity: Hashem as the Ultimate Man

Divine masculinity occupies a unique space in masculinity studies. Early feminist scholars have drawn attention to what Clines calls ‘the scandal of the male Bible’ – the text’s patriarchal values (Clines, 2015, pp. 1, 15; Eilberg-Schwartz, 1994, p. 2). Its heroes are largely men, and the hero of these heroic men is Hashem himself. Eilberg-Schwartz begins *God’s Phallus and Other Problems for Men and Monotheism* with the premise that ‘conceptions of divine and human masculinity correspond to and reinforce one other’ – Hashem creates men in his own image and is created in men’s images (1994, p. 15). Social and spiritual norms are interrelated. Masculinity studies, as the child of feminism, particularly ‘the expansion of “second-wave” feminist studies into “third-wave” gender studies’, which includes queer theory, finds itself with similar aims as feminist and gender studies – particularly the deconstruction of hegemonic masculinity and patriarchal oppression (Moore, 2010, p. 242). What better place to begin and focus this deconstruction than on the masculinity of Hashem?

Divine masculinity in the Hebrew Bible is a broad topic that frequently intersects with other aspects of gender and society, however, as Clines notes, while ubiquitously observed, it is seldom specifically addressed. Not unlike Butler’s discussion of sex and gender in second-wave

feminism,<sup>44</sup> divine masculinity in biblical masculinity studies is omnipresent and assumed, yet woefully unexamined. Consequently, I will focus my discussion on five key biblical masculinity studies works that address this topic, paying close attention to how Hashem's masculinity inevitably unmans human masculinity.

I begin with Clines and follow with Stephen Moore, establishing the characteristics of Hashem's gender performativity and the differences between Clines' and Moore's interpretations. Then, I analyse the way divine masculinity interacts with Eilberg-Schwartz's homoerotic reading of the relationship between divine and human masculinities and Deborah F. Sawyer's discussion of Hashem as *deusfamilias*, and close with Alan Hooker, whose work bridges the discussion of Hashem's masculinity with its effect on priestly masculinity.<sup>45</sup>

Clines opens by acknowledging that divine masculinity has fed religiously justified systematic misogyny, yet divine masculinity is an 'overlooked dimension in feminist biblical criticism' (2019, p. 62). No favours are done by ignoring this reality and no equality can be achieved without a framework by which to evaluate and challenge oppression: with this premise, Clines interrogates the text for masculine-coded language that while subtle, affirms hegemonic masculinity and its resulting systems of oppression (2019, pp. 63, 78). Clines concludes that Hashem is masculinized in several types of language: physical nature or actions – in terms of strength/might, aggression, and size/greatness –, and essence – honour, holiness (2019, pp. 64-81). This language, repeatedly and exclusively masculine, ties Hashem to his male devotees,

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<sup>44</sup> Butler discusses gender as a means by which sex, as an apparently stable identity, is created. This distinction, the instability of sex, marks Butler as distinct from second-wave feminism, which considered only gender unstable. This is discussed in greater detail in chapter four.

<sup>45</sup> Although Moore, Eilberg-Schwartz, and Sawyer also include the Christian Bible in their examinations of divine masculinity and divine-human relationships, for the sake of space, I will discuss only that which pertains to the Hebrew Bible.

since he is described in relation to their (human, male) form, serving as the foundation for their manifestation of hegemonic masculinity (2019, pp. 61-81).

Clines notes that Hashem is described as strong in both a physical and metaphorical sense (2019, pp. 64-65). In the Hebrew Bible, the language of ‘divine strength or power may be creative, supportive, or destructive’, but is linked to masculinity through sexual dimorphism (2019, pp. 64-66). This again appears in Clines’s discussion of ‘great’ and ‘be high, make high’ where he notes that ‘only once in the Hebrew Bible (never in the NT) is a woman called “great”’ – Clines reads this as a divergence from the typical use of גדול meaning ‘big’, instead translating it as ‘wealthy’ (2019, pp. 66-67). Like ‘great’, Clines notes that ‘most high’ alludes to physical size, referencing Mic. 6.6, where Hashem is called ‘the “God of height”’ and Isa. 5.16, where he is ‘the height of heaven’ in both a literal and metaphorical sense (2019, pp. 67-68). Exaltation and height are described in clusters of ‘masculine terms. . . like strength (עז) and power (גבורה) and honour (כבוד) and holiness (קדש)’ – which both class this emphasis on tallness or loftiness as masculine and mark the involvement of men in this affirmation of height (2019, p. 68). Clines draws attention to the tense of ‘be high’ or ‘be exalted’ – רום (imperative) – where ‘the speaker envisages himself as in part responsible’ for Hashem’s pre-existing glorification and exaltation through worship and devotion (2019, p. 68). These descriptors echo Macwilliam’s previously discussed descriptions of masculine beauty that reinforces hegemonic masculinity: in the competition of height, size, and presumably muscles, Hashem makes short work of his competition<sup>46</sup> (2019, p. 68).

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<sup>46</sup> Clines references both Psa. 46.11 – ‘I am exalted (רום) among the nations’ – and Psa. 113.4 – Hashem is ‘higher than the nations, i.e. presumably, than the gods of the nations’ (2019, p. 68).

Consequently, it is no surprise that Hashem is repeatedly described in terms of aggression and warfare: Clines notes that in ‘the seven key words in Hebrew for killing’ and ‘the six key terms for destroying’ that ‘Yahweh is found as a subject in all of them’, but women are not – not even the few women that are depicted as killing or partaking in war, like Jael (2019, p. 69-70). Violence is textually represented as ‘the ground of praise to’ Hashem, a ‘role model in killing’ in Psa. 144.1 and Clines draws from Theodore Hiebert to make the point that warfare, Hashem-sanctioned and directed warfare, conducted on earth against human armies, forms an integral part of the Hebrew Bible and is often justified in religious or moral terms, which obscures the text’s intent (2019, p. 71-72). Violence is a particularly useful tool by which to maintain hegemonic masculinity: competition takes on a deeper significance and higher price, while challenges that undermine hegemonic power are swiftly and permanently eliminated while providing additional validation and legitimization of the existing hegemony.

As the ultimate warrior, Hashem is the ultimate idealized man: his power, size, and height are more than window dressing, they inscribe on the bodies of his fallen enemies – men who find themselves outside of or against the hegemony – the success of hegemonic masculinity.<sup>47</sup> Related to this is the honour/shame binary, which Clines notes is a considered a fundamental cultural facet of the Mediterranean at large (2019, p. 72). Honour incites conflict, as it must be continually maintained and exists in perpetual flux (2019, p. 72). Lack of honour inevitably increases shame and men must ‘be prepared to defend’ their honour against that of their peers, who form their competitors (2019, p. 72). Clines’s use of defence in this phrase is particularly apt, since violence is a particularly useful tool to express domination, however,

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<sup>47</sup> Victory reinforces what it means to be a successful man and how failure, particularly the lack of the power destroys agency.

physical violence is not always necessary. Persuasion is useful as well, although the majority of Clines's citations see Hashem's honour increased through depictions of physical violence, rather than verbal violence (2019, pp. 74-78).

Clines acknowledges that there are 'a handful of passages' that ascribe honour to women but argues that the honour described in these verses are either depictions of private, domestic honour<sup>48</sup> or involve obtaining honour for others<sup>49</sup> – therefore they are excluded from accumulating or possessing honour themselves, despite being depicted as a 'site of shame' (2019, pp. 73-74). Honour is, then, a purely masculine virtue and the maintenance and perpetual accumulation of honour important to hegemonic masculinity in Mediterranean cultures.

Clines correlates כבוד – typically translated 'glory' – with honour in the biblical text (2019, p. 74). כבוד, Clines acknowledges, 'is sometimes a quasi-physical phenomenon' tied to theophanies, but it is also frequently described in terms that match honour, particularly as 'a zero-sum game', and one that Hashem always wins, at the expense of the cities, nations, and peoples who either oppose him<sup>50</sup> or exist nearby<sup>51</sup> (2019, pp. 74-75). כבוד is also used in terms of reputation,<sup>52</sup> or as Clines translates it, 'fame' (2019, p. 76). This connection between 'glory' and 'honour' is not radical either, there are several examples where bible translators came to the same conclusion as Clines (2019, pp. 76-77). But, as Clines notes, even if translated 'glory', כבוד is inescapably, textually linked 'the world of male achievement and competition' (2019, p. 78).

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<sup>48</sup> Exod. 20.12/Deut. 5.16, honouring one's parents, and Isa. 66.11, where glory is attributed to the metaphorical breasts of Jerusalem (2019, p. 73).

<sup>49</sup> Prov. 11.16, a wife 'arouses, or, stirs up honour for [her] husband' in the LXX (Clines believes the Hebrew's 'seize, or, keeps hold of' is a corruption), and Prov. 8.18, where Wisdom endows honour on the (male) seeker (Clines suggests here that Wisdom does not have honour herself, despite being a source of honour, offering a narrow interpretation of the passage) (2019, p. 73).

<sup>50</sup> See Exod. 14.4, Isa. 42.8, and Isa. 48.11 (2019, p. 74-75).

<sup>51</sup> Isa. 26.15 (2019, p. 75).

<sup>52</sup> Psa. 24.7-8, Psa. 22.14, Psa. 86.9, and Isa. 66.19 (2019, p. 76).



The essay closes with Clines’s analysis of holiness and divine masculinity. Holiness is separated from divinity. Clines specifies that ‘priests may be holy, but not divine’ (2019, p. 78). Holiness is therefore, a feature humans may possess, it is not the exclusive purview of deities, for which Clines reserves the term ‘divine’ (2019, p. 78). However, holiness is an innate feature of Hashem and only men are holy (2019, pp. 79-80). The adjective קדוש never appears ‘in the feminine’ and men alone serve as priests (2019, pp. 79-80). There is only one use of ‘sanctify’ – קדש – with a female subject and it is in 2 Sam. 11.4, where Bathsheba ritually purifies herself (2019, p 79). Clines correctly notes that Bathsheba does not make herself holy, she becomes ritually clean, which is a step below holy (2019, p. 79).

There are also many instances of communal holiness in the Hebrew Bible and Clines feels confident that ‘the people’ in this case are uniformly male<sup>53</sup> (2019, pp. 80-81). David Stein, however, disagrees, arguing that when comprehensively studied, both second- and third-person masculine pronouns, while it cannot refer exclusively to women, does potentially include them, unless otherwise excluded by context (2008, p. 22). The same is true of nouns when they refer ‘to a class of persons’ but not a specific individual (2008, p. 23). Thus, women may be included in אנ. However, inclusivity is a far cry from equality. It begs the question: does this challenge Clines’s belief that women cannot be in view in these calls for communal holiness? I believe it does, but in a way that reinforces hegemonic masculinity. To answer this thoroughly, let us turn to Moore’s *God’s Gym* and examine his perspective on Hashem’s manliness.

*God’s Gym* analyses divine masculinity through the lens of body building – primarily concentrating on the New Testament, but also, briefly, dwelling on the Hebrew Bible, the

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<sup>53</sup> He offers Gen. 14.16, Gen. 19.4, Gen. 26.10, Exod. 32.1-2, Num. 11.10, Jos. 6.7, and Jos. 8.10 as examples, where the people are all clearly contextually male (2019, pp. 80-81).

segment reviewed here. Hyper-masculine modern body-building spaces afford Moore a chance to examine the subversive nature of masculinity. Moore quotes Mark Simpson, who suggests that ‘bodybuilding gives an insight into the flux of masculinity right at the moment it is meant to solidify it in a display of exaggerated biological masculine attributes’ (1996, p. 100). This liminality is read onto Hashem and Moore carefully delineates the interrelation between biological sex and gender (1996, pp. 92-94, 100-01).<sup>54</sup>

Moore sees in Hashem many of the same traits that Clines does: Hashem is large, muscle-bound, strong, and aggressive (1996, pp. 86-102). Moore compares Hashem’s physical description in the Rabbinic work *Shi’ur Qoomah* to modern cover boys on weightlifting magazines (1996, pp. 86-88, 98). Like Clines, Moore translates גדול in Psalm 147.5 as ‘big’ – an established practice he cites from Martin Samuel Cohen – and consequently translates lines 5, 8, and 10 from *Shi’ur Qomah* as ‘You are big and Your name is big. . . . You are strong and Your name is strong . . . . You are awesome and Your name is awesome. . . .’ (1996, p. 88). Moore then detours briefly to Adam, who in Rabbinic sources, specifically *Genesis Rabbah* 8:10 and 12:6, boasts a ‘splendid physique. . . [that] mirrored Hashem’s own’ causing a brief heavenly confusion, when the angels mistake the creation for the creator (1996, pp. 88-89). Hashem’s godlike body is created, according to *Genesis Rabbah* 8:1, with something extra, however:

‘When the Holy One, blessed be he, came to create the first man, he made him androgynous, as it

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<sup>54</sup> This relationship will be explained in greater detail in chapter four. For now, it will suffice to say that biological sex and gender are an unstable pair, continually in flux. One’s chromosomal, phenotypic, or hormonal sex does not necessarily correlate to what kind of gender performance they favour or exhibit. For example, as Susannah Cornwall, queer theologian who specializes in the intersection of Christianity and intersex and queer identity, observes, there are people ‘who have one testis and one ovary, or a single structure called an ovotestis which contains ovarian and testicular tissue. There are people whose chromosomes are XXY rather than XX or XY, or who have a mixture of XX and XY cells in their bodies. There are people who have both a large phallus which looks more like a penis than a clitoris, and a vaginal opening. There are people whose genitalia are so unusual that they do not bear much resemblance to typical male or female genitalia at all’ (Cornwall, 2012, p. 7).

is said, “Male and female created he them. . .” (Moore, 1996, pp. 90-91). If Adam is created in the divine image, his body a reflection of Hashem’s, then, Moore concludes, Hashem is ‘*physically* androgynous’, even as he is hyper-masculine (1996, pp. 90-91).

Moore reads Exod. 11.18-33 as an effort by Hashem to affirm his physical masculinity and conceal his breasts,<sup>55</sup> hiding his face is merely an excuse (1996, pp. 92-93). Eilberg-Schwartz suggests that even the concealment of the face is significant, since the face does ‘play a critical role in our judgements about a human figure’s sex’ (1994, p. 77). But, in Exod. 33.11, Moses does see Hashem, face to face, which ultimately leads Eilberg-Schwartz – and Moore – to conclude that it is not Hashem’s face that he truly wants to conceal, but his front (Eilberg-Schwartz, 1994, p. 77; Moore, 1996, p. 93). In *Hekhalot Rabbati*, a work dating sometime between the late antiquity to the Early Middle Ages, Hashem’s tunic features prominently (Moore, 1996, pp. 93-94). Moore notes that the ‘even in the moment of supreme bliss, the visionary is left in the oddly prurient position of having to imagine what God would look like without his clothes’, a fact he attributes again to Hashem’s need to cover his breasts (Moore, 1996, p. 94). Moore further reads Hashem’s masculinity as an attempt to compensate for internal incongruity: Hashem is not secure in his masculinity and pushes against actual or perceived femininity in an effort to eliminate his own androgyny (Moore, 1996, pp. 101-02).

Whatever the driving force, Hashem’s hypermasculinity is intentional and deliberate.

Moore describes Eve’s separation from Adam and subsequently punishment when cast from the

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<sup>55</sup> If Adam is created intersex, both male and female, in the divine image, Moore believes that this means Hashem is himself intersex, with pronounced breasts (1996, pp. 92-93). Moore draws this from Biale’s interpretation of Exod. 33.18-33 and Gen. 49.25, where Hashem’s title, *El Shadday* parallels the word for breasts, *shadayim* and further references the *Odes of Solomon* 19.2, ‘And He who was milked is the Father. And She who milked Him is the Holy Spirit. Because His breasts were full. . .’ (Moore, 1996, pp. 92-93; Biale, 1982, pp. 240-56).

garden of Eden as ‘sublimely perfect.’ ‘the woman’s body [is made] a direct source of pain for her’ while ‘the man [is given] license to dominate her’ (1996, p. 101). Considered against Clines’s evaluation of biblical holiness and gender, the effect is sobering. Women may not serve as priests and never be individually holy, only clean – the presence of men is required for the communal holiness. They are in view, but without agency. The masculinity of a community subsumes their individual femininity and allows for corporate holiness. Further, Moore, reading Hashem as intersex, emphasizes the delineation between assigned sex and gender: Hashem may be chromosomally, phenotypically, or hormonally feminine, but his gender is masculine. I believe this instability in biblical and rabbinic depictions of Hashem is the unavoidable by-product of Hashem’s position as the manliest man. So, with this in mind, let us examine Hashem’s gender performativity closer.

Moore is much more optimistic than Clines and his reading of Hashem’s masculinity is much queerer than Clines’s. Hashem’s aggression, size, and strength are read as efforts to secure hegemonic masculinity and exclude femininity, but this performance, as grandiose as it is, shows cracks at the seams. These cracks underscore the fragility of gender roles in a way that Clines does not plumb. Clines is interested in presenting information – and he does an excellent job of refining and collating it – but his interpretation does not analyse the implications.

Moore turns briefly to Eze. 23.1-21, where Hashem is plagued by jealousy and size-envy: Jerusalem and Samaria, his brides, have turned adulterous, lusting after Chaldean and Egyptian men/gods, described first in traditionally masculine terms (‘governors and prefects, gorgeously clothed calvary warriors on horses, all of them handsome young men’) then in overtly erotic ones (‘whose flesh was like that of donkeys and whose semen were like those of stallions’) (1996, pp.

99-100; Eze. 23.11, 20). Compared to his peers, Moore notes that Hashem's 'daily intake of animal protein [via temple sacrifices] would have been positively anorectic relative to that of many of divine cousins in the Ancient Near Eastern pantheons' (1996, p. 99). Hashem's focus on his size and strength assuages doubts about his masculinity relative to other masculine gods: Eilberg-Schwartz notes that while 'the Canaanite god El . . . is normally described and represented in art with a long flowing beard', Hashem is not (1994, p. 78). So instead, Hashem proves his manhood by 'flexing his mountainous bicep' for mortal (men) to admire<sup>56</sup> and Rabbinic scholars ascribe greater and greater feats to him: 'the sixth heaven. . . [hangs] on his arm;' 'the primeval Torah' and 'the entire world' are held up by one divine, luminescent right arm, which is 'the most sublime secret of all [the seventh heaven]' and from which 'the 955 heavens were created' (Moore, 1996, pp. 97-98).

Hashem's size and power are not only for show, however. Like Clines, Moore agrees that Hashem's idealized masculinity is inescapably tied to violence, evoking images of 'the wrath of God' as 'steroid-induced', testosterone fuelled rage (1996, pp. 96-97). However, unlike Clines's focus on documenting these instances, Moore is more concerned with the interpretation of these aggressive outbursts, which he describes as paranoid 'local rampages . . . [with] seeds of a full-blown apocalyptic eschatology' (1996, pp. 96-97). In answer, Moore suggests that steroids provide an illuminating interpretative tool: Hashem's 'determination to get bigger at any cost' mirrors the use of anabolic steroids in bodybuilders, and like them, he succeeds, but at a surprising consequence (1996, pp. 96-97, 100). Steroids prompt the body to produce oestrogen in an effort to counteract the high levels of testosterone. This often causes breast growth, a drop in

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<sup>56</sup> Exod. 6.6, 15.6, Deut. 7.19, Ps. 44.5 (Moore, 1996, p. 98).

sperm count, and testicular shrinking (Moore, 1996, pp. 97, 100). The individual has become ‘so hypermasculine’ that they ‘[begin] to sprout female parts’ – forming a queer predicament (Moore, 1996, p. 100).

Hashem, with his size, muscles, and aggression, parallels male bodybuilders who push and sculpt their bodies into ‘a living testament. . . [to] phallic power. . . [and] massive irresistible virility’ but find themselves also attesting to ‘the fluidity of the categories male and female, masculine and feminine, hetero and homo, and the fabulous perverse tricks they play’ (Moore, 1996, pp. 100-01). Hashem, to draw from drag and gender, has more in common with a drag king than a cis man: his masculine performativity exposes the liminal boundaries between biological sexes and genders. He plays the man with such gusto, the audience begins to question not only his manhood, but manhood itself, which has been reduced to a series of jarring, campy stereotypes.

Clines is interested in establishing hegemonic masculinity’s presence in divine masculinity. However, Moore presents to us a reading of divine masculinity as inherently subversive. The very standards Clines establishes, this peak hegemony, is fundamentally unstable. Further, as Clines expects, not even the inclusion of women along men in corporate declarations of holiness are able to challenge this hegemony: Moore demonstrates it is masculinity that is prized, and both femininity and biological markers associated with such are intentionally excised in order to bulk up Hashem and outmuscle the competition. Hashem, like Israel as a whole, can be read as both masculine and feminine, biologically, phenotypically, or hormonally male *and* female, but only masculinity and maleness is permitted to wield power. The result is an unsettling caricature of manhood that unwittingly parodies itself.

Clines and Moore paint us a vivid picture of idealized masculinity, embodied by Hashem, specifically targeted at men – since women are not textually represented as large, strong, aggressive, gathering honour for themselves, or holy – that creates and reinforces (with varying degrees of success, depending on who you ask) hegemonic power. Neither examine the impact that Hashem’s masculinity has on human men, however. Indeed, divine masculinity has fascinating effects on human, male worshippers, as Eilberg-Schwartz, Sawyer, and Hooker will all demonstrate.

The primary effect of divine masculinity on human, male adherents, is systematic unmanning. Eilberg-Schwartz and Hooker both read homoeroticism into divine-human relationship: if Hashem is the ultimate depiction of masculinity, his male worshippers must de-emphasize their own masculinity while idealizing Hashem’s (masculine) virtues and features. The relational imagery – between Hashem and his worshippers – necessitates the feminization of men, since any assertion of human masculinity would fuel competition between the two. Divine, hegemonic masculinity, as we have seen from Clines and Moore, is a zero-sum game. Sawyer reads paternalism in the divine-human relationship: Hashem, again the ultimate man, is the divine father over his human male devotees, as children they lack agency and power – it is the father who controls every aspect of their lives. This infantilization functions similarly to feminization, since it undermines the men’s hegemonic masculinity. They are completely subordinate to Hashem and as Eilberg-Schwartz notes, ‘in the culture of ancient Judaism. . . the feminine and the subordinate were equated’ (1994, p. 18). They are de-masculinized.

Eilberg-Schwartz opens with a brief outline of Freudian thought and its application to his analysis of divine masculinity and divine-human homoeroticism. He suggests that textual

references to Israel as the wife or bride of Hashem was a deliberate, although perhaps unconscious, choice to avoid 'a potentially homoerotic relationship' or language (1994, pp. 18, 33, 38-39). This was accompanied by a necessary obscuring of Hashem's body: in Exod. 33.18-23, Hashem turns his back towards Moses so 'Israelite men did not have to confront the maleness of the father God they loved' and therefore their own homoerotic desire for that hypermasculine body (1994, pp. 38-39).

Eilberg-Schwartz argues that in the Hebrew Bible, Hashem's body is veiled and avoided: as previously noted, Hashem lacks the facial hair intrinsic with both gods and men 'in the ancient Near East in particular', even as Dan. 7.9 describes Hashem's hair colour and texture (1994, p. 78). The gaze of human men must be textually policed: 'the desirous gaze and the gaze that beholds beauty is generally the gaze of a man looking at a woman. . . it is never a man gazing at another man' (1994, pp. 96-97). Hashem cannot be the subject of human desire, even the desire to see him, since it places him as the object, rather than the subject; Eilberg-Schwartz links this exposure to both Noah's drunken nakedness and the attempted rape of the angels in Sodom (1994, pp. 86-88, 95, 97). The issue is not modesty, but a maintenance of hierarchical norms, the father is never the object of the son's gaze and the divine is never the object of human gaze, therefore Noah may not be seen naked by his sons and angels may not be desired as sexual objects by men (1994, p. 86-88, 95, 97).

Eilberg-Schwartz notes that during the prophetic era, the metaphor of divine-human marriage appears in the Hebrew Bible, where it 'is used more frequently and extensively than other personal metaphors' (1994, p. 97-99). It is, however, unusual, since there is no record of other ancient Mesopotamian or Levantine cultures with a divine husband and a human



community collectively functioning as his wife<sup>57</sup> (1994, p. 99). The inherent homoerotic overtones are sublimated into an affirmation of heterosexuality, according to Eilberg-Schwartz, since the (male) human community is presented as a wife, rather than a male lover. However, something very queer occurs in tandem with the prophetic marriage metaphor. The first is that Hashem is sexualized to a greater degree than previously—what was subtext in Moses’s longing eyes for Hashem becomes explicit. And the second is the trans-ference of gender: Eilberg-Schwartz notes that human, ‘Israelite women theoretically should have been the appropriate objects of divine [heterosexual] desire’ but it is Israelite men who fulfil the role of wife instead (1994, p. 138).

The textual sexualization of Hashem can be seen in full force in Ezekiel, although it occurs frequently<sup>58</sup> in both the prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible and briefly<sup>59</sup> in the deuteronomic books as accusations of adultery on the part of Israel-the-Wife (Eilberg-Schwartz, 1994, pp. 98-99). Eilberg-Schwartz is particularly interested in the ways that ‘God the father is also God the lover’, since this simmering Freudian homoeroticism is what he believes drives the queer imagery (1994, pp. 100-01). Ezek. 16.8, Eilberg-Schwartz argues, the most explicit description of Hashem ‘as an anatomically male deity’ who by “‘spreading a robe” over the naked Israel’ both marries and consummates the marriage – since in Ezek. 23.4 children are born to the pair (1994, pp. 111-12). It is no surprise then, that Ezekiel also offers us the most explicit description of Hashem’s physical body in v. 26-28: notably ‘his description proceeds from the

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<sup>57</sup> Other than the city-as-a-woman motif.

<sup>58</sup> Hos. 2.18, 4.12-15, 5.3, 6.10, 9.1; Isa. 1.21, Jer. 2.1, 2.20, 3.1; Ezek. 1, 6.8, 16.7-8, 16.23-26; Mic. 1.7; Nah. 3.4, etc (Eilberg-Schwartz, 1994, pp. 98-99).

<sup>59</sup> Exod. 34.15; Lev. 17.7, 20.5; Num. 5.11-27, 15.39; Deut. 31.16; Judg. 2.17; etc (Eilberg-Schwartz, 1994, pp. 98-99).

loins up and the loins down. . . as if his eyesight is irresistibly drawn back’ to the divine genitals (Eilberg-Schwartz, 1994, p. 78, 178-82). Faced with this glimpse of divine masculinity, Israel is unmanned. But how?

Eilberg-Schwartz presumes hierarchical norms drive homosexual prohibitions in the Hebrew Bible – a heterosexual binary is derived to maintain these norms, thus ‘being “on top” is male’ while penetrated men are feminized (1994, pp. 18-19). Hashem, Eilberg-Schwartz believes, is the pinnacle of hegemonic masculinity: he is the perpetual top. Israel, enamoured by him, accepts feminization as an unsettling, but necessary component of existing in relationship with Hashem. This feminization takes place both textually – when Israel is described and represented as a wife – and physically, Eilberg-Schwartz suggests, through the act of circumcision (1994, pp. 137-62).<sup>60</sup>

Eilberg-Schwartz sees circumcision as the physical manifestation of the feminization of Israel. In Exod. 4.21-26, Zipporah circumcises her son and lays claim to Moses, both ‘anticipating the tensions that later develop’ when Moses becomes Hashem’s exclusive mouthpiece and performing as ‘an ideal image of an Israelite woman’, who Eilberg-Schwartz explains must ‘condone the genital disfiguration of their sons and acknowledge that Israelite masculinity has been sacrificed to God’, if this is done, then they will be permitted to keep their

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<sup>60</sup> It is in Rabbinic literature that Israel is most feminized: Song of Songs is reinterpreted with references to the Patriarchs in place of the female lover and Moses is read as the exclusive intimate of Hashem (Eilberg-Schwartz, 1994, pp. 164-68). This imagery provides a fascinating interpretation of Numbers 12: Eilberg-Schwartz reads Moses ‘as having conflicting obligations, as husband to his wife, and as wife to God’ (1994, p. 150). Miriam and Aaron, according to some Rabbinic commentary, advocate for Moses’s neglected wife (Eilberg-Schwartz, 1994, p. 150). Moses’s humbleness in v. 3 is sign of complete, exclusive submission to Hashem – after all, ‘when God approaches [Israel at Sinai], men avoid women and cease temporarily to act as husbands. . . [to] collectively prepare themselves to be a feminine Israel’, consequently, Moses, the perpetual mouthpiece of Hashem, according to v. 2, has sworn off sex (Eilberg-Schwartz, 1994, pp. 148-50, 193). Eilberg-Schwartz argues this is also why Miriam is so severely punished, ‘as a woman, Miriam is a more “natural” intimate of God than Moses’ and the threat to Moses and Hashem’s relationship is greater (1994, pp. 148-49).

husbands (1994, pp. 160-61). Here circumcision is an acceptance of Hashem ‘as the ultimate male’ whose presence demands ‘a symbol of male submission’ (Eilberg-Schwartz, 1994, pp. 161-62).<sup>61</sup>

Eilberg-Schwartz’s overall argument is fascinating; however, it suffers from the lack of clear delineation as to divine masculinity. His homoerotic interpretation highlights the tension that underpins David’s failure at divine persuasion and his subversive beauty: Israel, including David, who often represents hegemonic masculinity among his peers, is made subordinate to Hashem. There is no room for two tops and thus, David becomes a switch.<sup>62</sup> While Moore reads Adam’s androgyny as fundamentally queer, Eilberg-Schwartz believes it ‘allows for a vacillation between incompatible assertions’ – man is both masculine, like Hashem, and feminine, relegated to sexual reproduction and tied to women (1994, pp. 204-05). Of course, this reading ignores the androgyny inherent to Hashem himself. Eilberg-Schwartz believes ‘humanity resembles God in the same way that Seth resembles Adam, including their physical characteristics’ based on the repetition of ‘in the likeness’ (בדמיון) in Gen. 1.1 and ‘in his likeness’ (בדמותו) in Gen. 1.3 (1994, p. 205). An androgynous Adam would mean an androgynous Hashem. The implications of a

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<sup>61</sup> The Rabbinic Sages believed circumcision, as ‘a sign of the covenant’, prepared men to see Hashem: ‘circumcision makes Israel comely in God’s sight’ (Eilberg-Schwartz, 1994, pp. 167, 173-74). Yet curiously enough, the Sages heavily regimented nakedness and prayer, forbidding any exposure of the penis during prayer, while permitting the exposure of the buttocks if necessary due the constraints of ritual obligation, time, and lack of waist deep water or clothing covering the waist (Eilberg-Schwartz, 1994, pp. 209-10). Eilberg-Schwartz rejects the idea that this prohibition on penial exposure is due to cultural taboos around penial exposure citing rabbinic ruling on the importance of ‘going to the bathhouse and cleansing the body’ and the ‘[implication] that it is Adam’s circumcised flesh that makes him like God’ (1994, pp. 210-11). Instead, he suggests that it mirrors the de-emphases on procreation by the Sages, who prioritized teacher-student training over father-son relationships and relegated sexual desire to the domain of wives – who (to prevent cases like Moses’s perhaps?) were owed both sex and a husband able to give them children (Eilberg-Schwartz, 1994, pp. 211-22). This was itself the result of tension between Israelite manhood – which Eilberg-Schwartz sees childrearing as a fundamental requirement of – and divine manhood – with Hashem as ‘a sexless God’ who nevertheless used fertility as a divine blessing and circumcision as the ‘a symbol of male fertility’ (1994, pp. 201-02).

<sup>62</sup> A switch is a term originating in the BDSM community, used in both the BDSM and LGBTQ communities for an individual who ‘switches’ between the role of dominant and submissive.

masculine, nonbiologically male god are not explored, which is strange, given Eilberg-Schwartz's intentional choice of 'phallus' over 'penis' to describe the divine genitals and his observation that Hashem, without primary or secondary sex characteristics leads to Hashem 'as a he, *without* a male body' (1994, pp. 23-29). He acknowledges the possibility while avoiding the resulting implication, which undermines his thesis: divine-human homoeroticism is textually created by Hashem. There is no divine-human relationship that is not queered if Hashem is trans, if Hashem presents as male/masculine, while having an intersex or nonbinary body. It follows then, that the feminization of his followers is not necessarily a heterosexual inevitability but is queer itself.

Eilberg-Schwartz briefly touches on the idea that men, the Patriarchs in particular, are symbolically rendered impotent without divine involvement (1994, pp. 140-41). Hashem is recognized 'by mothers who name their children after the divine and the not the human father', like Eve and Leah (Eilberg-Schwartz, 1994, p. 140). Try as Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob might, without divine intervention, procreation is not possible: they cannot father children without the aid of the divine father (Eilberg-Schwartz, 1994, p. 140-41). Sawyer, setting aside Eilberg-Schwartz's homoerotic premise, builds on this concept to present a picture of Hashem as the ultimate *paterfamilias*, what she calls *deusfamilias*.

Like Eilberg-Schwartz, Sawyer assumes Hashem's hegemonic masculinity and thus turns her focus to establishing 'the biblical concept of divine/human hierarchy' and the resulting 'all-embracing totality of divine rule' (2002, pp. 38-39). The *deusfamilias* is built on the ancient Mesopotamian and Levantine patriarchal system: the patriarch has absolute authority, 'the rest of the household. . . only existing in relation to him' (2002, pp. 48-49). The human society and laws

laid out in Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy mirror the relationship of Hashem to Israel.<sup>63</sup>

Sawyer draws several examples of this *deusfamilias* in the Hebrew Bible, through Abraham, Isaac, and Sarah, Judah and Tamar, the narratives of Judges, and Ruth and Boaz.

Hashem's masculinity as the ultimate patriarch, demands the complete submission of his worshippers. Sawyer reads Sarah's pregnancy as an act of overwhelming masculinity on the part of Hashem: Abraham's virility, ability to select an heir, and raise children are all 'usurped by God' who demands Isaac be both born and Abraham's heir, despite being the second born, then requests Abraham kill him (2002, pp. 54-55). Sawyer notes that while Abraham pleads for Sodom and Gomorrah, he is strangely 'silent with no speech at the ready to save his son' (2002, p. 55). The Rabbinic Sages raise the stakes even higher, 'Sarah has no womb' and believed that in Gen. 18.12, when she laughs at the prospect of children, she implies that the prospect of her having – or Abraham arousing – 'fertile female moistness' is absurd (Sawyer, 2002, p. 55). Abraham is unmanned: unable to reproduce and unable to arouse his wife. He is reduced to 'a child without any autonomy in regard to his life choices, even terms of his martial relationship and his own offspring' (Sawyer, 2002, p. 57). His masculinity is undone in the presence of divine masculinity.

Judah and Tamar find themselves in a similar situation. In an effort to protect his only remaining son, Judah attempts to evade the levirate system, but it is 'presented as ill-conceived and futile' – Judah's 'attempts to control [the situation] and act effectively' are roundly undermined at every turn by Hashem (Sawyer, 2002, pp. 59-61). Sawyer argues that 'the inexorable, relentless triumph of divine guidance' results in not only the subordination of divine

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<sup>63</sup> Who is alternately Hashem's wife and child (Jer. 3.1-4).

masculinity, but an acknowledgement that ‘the divine lawgiver can change the rules when he is playing the game’ (2002, p. 63). After all, father-and-daughter-in-law incest is prohibited in Lev. 18.15, yet Tamar ‘is blessed with male twins’ and included in the Davidic line, while Judah’s ‘inadvertent lawless behaviour’ makes him look foolish – he is so afraid of ‘[becoming] a laughingstock’ he ‘leaves himself open to blackmail’, then is humiliated by Tamar, who outwits him and exposes his poor judgement (Gen. 38.23-26; Sawyer, 2002, pp. 60-62).

In Judges, Jephthah, like Judah, demonstrates ‘the vacuum of wisdom and mature leadership when men and not God are in control’ – as with many of the stories in Judges, women serve to highlight ‘an anarchic world’ where women must lead in battle, like Deborah, kill soldiers and generals, like Jael and the woman who slays Abimelech, and be killed on an altar of futility, like Jephthah’s daughter, or the unnamed concubine (Sawyer, 2002, pp. 66-79). The rejection of Hashem is symbolized by familial and societal chaos, framing Hashem as the only force powerful enough to stabilize Israel – human masculinity spirals into chaos when allowed to lead independently (Sawyer, 2002, p. 79).

Naturally then, the success of Ruth and Boaz, is tied to the acceptance of Hashem’s rightful place as supreme patriarch. In Rabbinic literature, ‘Ruth was forty years old when she became pregnant. . . [and] lacked the main portion of her womb’, lest Boaz receive the credit for her fertility: he is pushed to the side so Hashem can shine (Sawyer, 2002, p. 83). Sawyer suggests that Naomi is the primary character in Ruth and that Ruth is a vehicle for ‘a variation on the miracle of older women conceiving’, since ‘the transference of the child to Naomi effectively removes both Ruth and Boaz from the scene’ (2002, p. 84). Ruth is ‘a surrogate female’ adding an additional layer to ‘levirate coupling’ and consequently ‘gaining a child for a dead man’

(2002, p. 84). The story of Ruth represents divine intervention, ‘the totality of divine power and control’ – Naomi’s bloodline is miraculously preserved despite overwhelming odds (Sawyer, 2002, p. 84-85).

In each example, the men are supplanted by Hashem’s wisdom and/or power. They are unmanned, but interestingly, they are not necessarily feminized. For Sawyer, divine masculinity is inseparable from divine power and control. Hashem’s *deusfamilias* provides opportunities for him to re-inscribe his hegemony. His assumption of masculine roles – father, king – does not allow for human masculinity to compete with him. Alan Hooker’s examination of the intersection of Hashem’s masculinity with priestly masculinity affirms this reading, although he tends to agree with Eilberg-Schwartz’s interpretation over Sawyer’s: the adoration of Hashem by male supplicants is homoerotic, although it often veers into genderqueer territory as Israel’s gender performativity moves from masculine to feminine.

Hooker focuses on ‘the relationship of כבוד to’ Hashem’s body,<sup>64</sup> particularly the way ‘כבוד highlights Yahweh’s masculinity . . . as the Most Masculine’ (2017, p. 19). The presumption of a divine body is taken from various passages in the Hebrew Bible<sup>65</sup> and Hooker notes that in these passages, ‘God’s materiality can kill’ (Hooker, 2017, pp. 18-19). It is this deadly divine body that drives Hooker’s interrogation of כבוד.

Historically, כבוד is not unlike the Assyrian *melammu* or *puluhtu*, which embodied the power ‘in the divine (kingly) body. . . the strength he possesses as warrior, and the land he is able

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<sup>64</sup> The assumption that Hashem has a body, naturally, dismisses interpretations of כבוד as exclusively “a nonmaterial and transcendent aspect of the deity” although he acknowledges that כבוד can speak of both the physical and abstract (Hooker, 2017, pp. 17-18).

<sup>65</sup> Gen. 32.30; Exod. 33; Deut. 5.24; Judg. 6.22-23, 13; Isa. 6.5 are listed as specific (although not exclusive) examples (Hooker, 2017, p. 18).

to subjugate’ (Hooker, 2017, pp. 20-22). Thus, כבוד is connected to Hashem’s masculinity – it is demonstrated when Hashem ‘is able to feed his people in the sterile wilderness. . . indicative of his power over fertility’,<sup>66</sup> and when he delivers the Israelites from Egypt, an act of power in the face both Pharaoh and the Egyptian pantheon (Hooker, 2017, pp. 22-23). Hooker draws parallels between Ps. 24 and 29 and masculinity: Hashem is ‘Yahweh of Armies’, described in militaristic imagery, dripping with physical power and larger-than-life attributes, such as ‘his majestic and powerful voice’ which is louder than ‘the mighty waters’, and ‘shakes the wilderness’, toppling ‘the strong cedars of Lebanon’ (2017, pp. 29).

But כבוד also troubles hegemonic masculinity: Hooker notes that without a consort, Hashem is ‘unable to produce divine children’ – Ezekiel offers imagery of Israel as both consort and child instead (Hooker, 2017, p. 30). Hooker argues further that ‘Yahweh’s Glory is the consort of his people’ – a surprisingly passive role (2017, p. 30). כבוד, therefore, necessitates a renegotiation of gender for both parties, Hashem and his followers, particularly his priests.

Hooker believes that ‘kingship and beauty’ are interconnected both in ancient Mesopotamia and Levant at large and with Hashem, citing both Saul and David’s beauty as examples (2017, pp. 24, 30).<sup>67</sup> Of course, Macwilliam interrogates the connection between the two as falling into two categories: beauty that stirs up desire (typically a woman’s, seen by a man) and beauty that evokes virtue (typically a man’s, seen by a man). Hooker reads both forms of beauty in Israelite priests and Hashem.

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<sup>66</sup> While this imagery may seem very feminine, Hooker reads it as a masculine trait, where Hashem’s fertility powers virilize (2017, pp. 22-23).

<sup>67</sup> ‘David’s or Saul’s handsomeness. . . arouses the deity to act and preserve his people’ while ‘Yahweh’s Glory is intended to stir the yearning of his followers’ (Hooker, 2017, p. 30). Both human kingship and divine kingship rely on beauty to reify their power.



Aaron is instructed to wear unique clothes – ‘holy garments’ – during his time before Hashem/the Ark ‘for glory and beauty’ (Hooker, 2017, p. 24). Hooker believes that Aaron – and the high priests after him – ‘will be the centre of the divine attention’ when so appalled and that ‘his beauty, like that of kings, gains divine support, and his glory demarcates the masculinity which Yahweh so favours’ (2017, p. 25). This beauty and attention evokes virtuous associations and Hooker believes it precedes Hashem masculinizing or virilizing Israel – ‘[giving] divine approval to their continued existence as a virile and fertile people’ both remembered by their children and re-membered by Hashem, who allows them the fertility to reproduce (Hooker, 2017, pp. 24-25). Simultaneously, however, an undercurrent of desire runs through this curious focus on beauty and glory that queers this moment of ‘male-male bonding’ (Hooker, 2017, p. 25).

Aaron’s costume specifically includes a pair of deeply important undergarments – to go without can cause death, according to Exod. 28.42 (Hooker, 2017, p. 25). This underwear, since it specifically covers the genitals, both beautifies Aaron and hides his penis: ‘Yahweh must not “know” Aaron is male’, Hooker explains, because ‘the exposure of Aaron’s genitals. . . would threaten the bond’ between them (2017, pp. 25-26). Aaron is to be masculine, but not male. Hooker suggests that כבוד serves to both mark Aaron as masculine, and to provide ‘a confirmation of Yahweh’s desire’ for his (male) priests (2017, p. 26). כבוד, then, does incite desire, potentially challenging hegemonic masculinity. Hashem, as the desirer, occupies the masculine role and the priests, as the desired, occupy a feminized role – but Hooker argues that Hashem is not always the desirer: ‘Moses and his people must re-member Yahweh’ (2017, pp. 26-27).

How does this occur? Hooker interprets Exod. 33 as a moment of divine feminization. Unlike Moore's conclusion, that Hashem hides biologically, phenotypically, or hormonally female features, Hooker believes Hashem hides his male attributes, in 'a reversal of Exodus 28' (2017, pp. 26-27). Hashem is desired by Moses and hides his genitals so 'the heterosexual ideal is maintained' (Hooker, 2017, p. 27). Hooker argues that in Ezek. 11, the language of masculinity – and desire – again comes into play, when 'Yahweh promises his people he will remove their hearts of stone and give them a heart of flesh' – where 'flesh' or בֶּשֶׂר can carry the connotation of 'penis' (2017, p. 29). This 'penised heart', only obtainable from Hashem, is contrasted with a 'sterile stone heart', a heart that has not been acted upon by Hashem or experienced his כְּבוֹד (Hooker, 2017, p. 29). Again, Hooker alludes to the virilization כְּבוֹד brings: Israel will be re-membered, masculinized, able to desire as it is desired by Hashem (2017, pp. 24-25, 29).

Hooker sees כְּבוֹד as a powerful 'tension resolver' – it is a crucial part of Hashem's masculinity and appears in priestly masculinity while also accompanying feminization. Similarly, when Hashem 'commands the slaughter of Israelite idolaters', for the sake of his כְּבוֹד, it draws attention away from the fertile Hashem's lack of a divine consort and reaffirms his 'warriorhood' (Hooker, 2017, pp. 28-29). Hooker notes that any potential discrepancy between Hashem-the-life-giver, mediator of fertility, and Hashem-the-killer, powerful warrior, is smoothed over with language that '[evokes] images of pruning which makes trees more fertile' (2017, pp. 28-29).

Hooker's analysis does raise many questions, however. He asks, for instance, 'is Aaron a man or a "man"? . . . Does Aaron have legitimate gender ambiguity here – is his penis

deliberately veiled, “castrated” (Hooker, 2017, p. 25)? What implications does Hashem’s copious lapse in hegemonic masculinity have, in Hooker’s interpretation of Exod. 33? Can a trans Israel or genderbending priests be truly considered a part of ‘the heterosexual ideal’ (Hooker, 2017, p. 27)?

Hooker answers some of his own questions, but others, he ignores. Aaron occupies a liminal space – according to Hooker’s own interpretation of the text, Aaron’s penis *is* consciously and intentionally hidden, a symbolic castration necessary for Hashem’s approval. Hashem’s lapse in hegemonic masculinity is partially addressed – Hooker sees the text undermining hegemonic masculinity even as it claims to assert it. Like all hegemonic systems, cracks appear when studied closely. Hashem is the ultimate man’s man, the most masculine, but even he cannot keep it up forever. However, Hooker does not address a trans Israel or genderqueer priests, which is unfortunate since this too provides an excellent place to expose the constructed nature of masculinity.

Just as Aaron and the priests perform ‘wifely submission’ inside the Tabernacle, they also perform masculinity outside of it (Hooker, 2017, p. 25). Their identities are fluid, and they occupy a liminal societal space that subverts heterosexuality. Their existence proves the inadequacy of binary gender – there no is place for them. They perform both genders and consequently cannot perform either, since binary gender is built on a rigid dichotomy, an Either/Or. Gender is then exposed as malleable construct, a product of society and culture and not immutable force. Genderfluidity undermines heterosexuality by disrupting the binary it requires. Without binary gender, heterosexuality breaks down.

Priestly masculinity, then, is on uncertain ground, as we shall see.

## Priestly Masculinity: A Response to Divine Masculinity

Priestly masculinity and divine masculinity are, as we have seen, intertwined. Serving at Hashem's behest and for Hashem's pleasure, the priests of the Hebrew Bible are cited in some discussions on divine masculinity – like Hooker and Eilsberg-Schwartz's – since they illuminate the divine ideal, what the divine desires. Full priests are uniformly biologically, phenotypically, and/or hormonally male in appearance. Although Hashem addresses all of Israel with the masculine plural in Exod. 19.6 – 'you shall be to me a kingdom of priests' – only a few chapters later, he specifies that Aaron and his sons are to serve as priests (Exod. 28.1, 41; 29.29-30). It is of particular interest to note that no (assigned male at birth) descendent of Aaron who has 'crushed testes' is permitted 'to offer the food of his God . . . or enter behind the curtain or come near the altar' as priest,<sup>68</sup> yet is allowed to eat from the priests' portion of the offerings (Lev. 21.17-23). This is echoed by Talmudic commentary that addresses the issue of intersex priests (specifically *androginos*<sup>69</sup> or *tumtum*,<sup>70</sup> – *ay'lonit*<sup>71</sup> and *saris*<sup>72</sup> are not discussed) and assumes that they are priests and may marry, conferring to their wives the normal rights of the priestly wives and households, but does not mention service before the altar (Mishnah Yevamot 8:6).

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<sup>68</sup> Additionally, no disabled, injured, sick, or scarred male descendant of Aaron is permitted to present offerings as a priest (Lev. 21.17-23).

<sup>69</sup> 'A person who has both "male" and "female" sexual characteristics' (Kukla, 2006). Rabbi Elliot Kukla was the first openly transgender individual to be ordained by Hebrew Union College Los Angeles, has worked extensively in LGBTQ+, disability, and Jewish activism, and as a faculty member of SVARA, a queer yeshiva.

<sup>70</sup> 'A person whose sexual characteristics are indeterminate or obscured' (Kukla, 2006).

<sup>71</sup> 'A person who is identified as "female" at birth but develops "male" characteristics at puberty and is infertile' (Kukla, 2006).

<sup>72</sup> 'A person who is identified as "male" at birth but develops "female" characteristics at puberty and/or is lacking a penis. . . a *saris* can be "naturally" a *saris* (*saris hamah*), or become one through human intervention (*saris adam*)' (Kukla, 2006).

Intersex, or suspected intersex, priests may claim their inheritance as children of Aaron but are barred from full participation.

Thus, it is striking that priestly behaviour involves such detailed machinations to obscure the penis and testicles, the location that determined biological and social gender in ancient Mesopotamia and Levant. Deborah Rooke, in ‘Breeches of the Covenant: Gender, Garments and the Priesthood’ expounds on what Hooker alludes to in his analysis of divine masculinity, that is, the atypical role of priests, caught between subordinate masculinity and feminine gender performativity. Roland Boer, in his examination of 1 and 2 Chronicles, provides a compelling answer to the stringent standard of biological maleness for priests, beyond the conventional interpretation that the priests, like the sacrifices<sup>73</sup> they offer, must ‘be without blemish’ (Lev. 21.1-23, 22.21).

Rooke examines priestly clothing as a signifier ‘of both gender and status’ and she reads priestly gender roles as a liminal affair: the priests are men outside of the Tabernacle, but are feminized within the Tabernacle, offering Hashem ‘wifely submission’ demonstrated by hiding their ‘redundant’ phalluses – which are rendered as such in the presence of the hyper-masculine Hashem (2009, pp. 20, 35). Rooke begins with the premise that the Hebrew Bible is not penis-shy, since ‘there is no apparent embarrassment about male genitalia’ in the Torah at large, which discusses the penis and testes and their ritual involvement – or lack thereof – quite frankly (2009, pp. 19, 28). Consequently, she dismisses outright that the priestly ephod/breeches/underwear were mandated to provide modesty, given the order of dress: ‘the chapter reads as if the robes

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<sup>73</sup> The language in Lev. 22.22-25, addressing the state of acceptable animal offerings, mirrors Lev. 21.17-23 – disability, scars, illness, injury, or damaged testes disqualify offerings, with the exception of freewill offerings, which permit at most only ‘a limb extended or contracted’ but not scarred, maimed, injured, or otherwise ‘defective’.

would be perfectly decent . . . and indeed complete without the breeches' (2009, pp. 19, 23-25).

The breeches are for someone's benefit, but who?

Rooke examines three possible interpretations – the breeches benefit the priests, the attendees, or Hashem himself. The driving impetus behind these possibilities cite Exod. 20.26 and 2 Sam. 6.16-22 – Exodus forbids nakedness, which some commentators have suggested is in response to ritual nudity practiced by fellow nations, and 2 Sam. 6 demonstrates how it may occur, since David dances in an ephod and exposes himself to his fellow revellers (2009, pp. 24-25). However, David is not wearing a tunic in 2 Sam. 6 and the priestly tunic is not unusually short – additionally, there is no contemporary ritual nudity seen in the surrounding nations, and as such, no reason for the Israelites to assume ritual nudity would be a sociological given that would need to be refuted (2009, pp. 24-25).

Claudia Bender suggests that the breeches served to prevent total nudity during ceremonial clothing changes, which Rooke finds intriguing, but ultimately wanting: why are breeches needed when the high priest changes 'inside the tent of meeting where no-one can see him' (Rooke, 2009, pp. 25-26)? Certainly, Bender does not address Ezek. 44, where breeches, as part of the priests' ritual clothing, must be 'left behind when the priests leave the inner court' – this alone negates any modesty (Rooke, 2009, p. 26). Instead, the breeches remain unseen, which leaves Rooke to conclude that they serve as a signpost for either the priests or Hashem, or possibly both (2009, p. 27).

Rooke draws parallels between prophetic metaphors – such as covering nakedness in Hos. 2.11 and Ezek. 16.8 – and a divine claim over sexuality, particularly the way priests must be 'sexually functional to serve', yet cover this functionality as a divine mandate and physical

representation of ‘submissive obedience’ – as befits the wife of Hashem (2009, p. 30). This is echoed in circumcision, in which the penis is modified as a sign of the divine-human covenant, which includes the conditional promise of fertility (2009, p. 30-31). Hashem’s priest ‘is not master of his own sexuality’, but governed by additional rules not followed by the general Israelite population; they are marked with both circumcision and in their vocational accoutrements and required to observe celibate periods to complete their cultic duties (2009, pp. 30-31). Priestly marriage is subject not to the desires of the priest-husband, but the priests’ first spouse, the divine-husband, to whom they must be always available.

Thus, the priestly underwear provides a means of conversation between Hashem and his priests. In commanding the priests to wear the breeches, Hashem demands they cede their social power and privilege, symbolized by obscuring their phalluses, ‘the traditional – and at birth, the only – visible means of determining’ sex (Rooke, 2009, p. 33). In response, the priests acknowledge Hashem’s authority and the symbolic femininity it requires of them (2009, pp. 33-34). The result, Rooke, suggests, provides a powerful self-reminder of the dangers of ‘masculine pride’, which would place them in direct competition with the ultimate man, Hashem (2009, p. 34).

Roland Boer sees ‘ho(m)mosexual’ utopia and a resulting, pervasive sense of camp in 1 and 2 Chronicles, beginning with the wider culture David fosters and ending with the priests and the temple (2006, pp. 251-60). Boer defines ‘ho(m)mosexual’ as ‘the crossover between hommosexual and homosexual – men in control and men having sex with each other’, as argued by Luce Irigaray, but notes that the premise is beset by two major problems: the variations in man/woman ‘in distinct social and economic systems’ beyond western capitalism, and a ‘[lack

of] adequate recognition of the long and often contradictory political struggles in which gays and lesbians have been engaged' (2006, pp. 260-61). *Chronicles* reads as a utopia where men have all the social and economic power and women are non-existent, or pushed the margins, and all relationships, platonic, familial, and erotic, are between men: an excellent example can be found in the introductory genealogy, where 'the verb for giving birth' applies to men, even when the mother is listed (Boer, 2006, pp. 258-60).

The result, Boer argues, is camp, since 'camp appropriates and redefines in terms of gender and sexuality', especially on 'cultural products that come from earlier moments of production' and gone on to become an unquestioned fixture in the larger cultural consciousness (2006, p. 262). A modern example can be seen in use of the 1950's housewife or diva stereotypes performed by drag queens. Rigidly gendered roles, archetypes, and myths lend themselves especially well to the camp, where the innate excess provides excellent dissonance and exposes the performance as a social construction: *Chronicles*, with its 'pregnant men waddling about' and the overwhelming 'machismo of David's mighty men' provides ample moments of camp (Boer, 2006, pp. 262-63). In his later analysis of *Chronicles*, 'Of Fine Wine, Incense and Spices: The Unstable Masculine Hegemony of the Books of *Chronicles*', Boer notes that these instances of camp unravel hegemonic masculinity – the text's hyper masculine men, men who need no women, are feminized (2010, p. 26). Who will bear the children? Men. Who plunges into battle after battle with enough vigour and violence 'to shame even those mad dog Viking berserkers' all for David's approval, or to bring him a cup of water (Boer, 2010, p. 27)? Men – David's testosterone fuelled 'mighty men' (Boer, 2010, p. 27). After all, without women, who will fetch



the water from the well for the master of the house? In the void left by women, men must step in, even the hyper-masculine ones.

What is most pertinent to our discussion, however, is Chronicle's depictions of the priests, Levites, and the Temple. Boer notes that the Temple changes proportions from Kings to Chronicles (2006, p. 254). It morphs from a large, but uniformly rectangular building, to 'a massive phallic tower' for the vestibule and 'the temple itself . . . like a somewhat angular pair of balls', lying at the base of the shaft (Boer, 2006, p. 254). Biblical scholars have chafed at the idea that this could be the Temple's actual proportion, but Boer argues that regardless of realism, it makes a fine case for 'the breakdown of descriptive language in the realm of utopian construction' (Boer, 2006, p. 254; Clines, 2010, p. 235).

Within the Temple, the Levites and priests run a queer ship. Boer notes that both Solomon and David, in Chronicles, are lavish interior designers, filling the temple with rich fabrics and golden cutlery (2006, pp. 265-66). The Levites serve as 'bouncers' tasked with protecting the expensive 'crockery and cutlery, furniture, fine flour, wine, oil, incense, spices, flat cakes and showbread' and additional Levite men manage each individual feature, 'down to overseeing the mixing of the spices' while others 'seem to have sung day and night' or were available for such (Boer, 2006, p. 265). This fixation on interior design and music was 'deadly serious' according to 2 Chron. 13.10-12 (Boer, 2006, p. 266).

Boer sees the high priest, Abijah, meticulously dressed (his feminizing breeches present, but out of sight), 'hair and beard trimmed, washed, combed and oiled' with his 'tassels and bells' extolling the importance of 'cultic correctness' in 2 Chron. 13 (2006, p. 266). Hashem is then, 'a cantankerous old queen' who demands his temple be meticulously kept his specifications, and

who sees ‘a golden basin out of place’ as an ‘unforgiveable sin’ punishable by death and ruin (Boer, 2009, pp. 266-67). After all, Jehoshaphat is commanded to put as his front line of offense/defence against ‘the marauding Ammonites, Moabites, and men of Mount Seir’ not battle-hardened warriors with phallic swords and spears, but the Temple choir, ‘battle as a musical’, and while the Israelites stand, exposed and passive, Hashem wreaks havoc upon the enemy on their behalf (Boer, 2006, pp. 266-67).

As previously alluded, Boer sees these expressions of camp not as a justification for Chronicle’s ho(m)osexuality, but as a manifestation of it (2006, p. 267). In Chronicles, it is inevitable, when only men are in view and the masculine ideal is praised, that masculinity will be subverted. Hegemonic masculinity is foundationally competitive, and Hashem’s supplicants would not dare to become his rivals. Therefore, they must be feminized, removed from the field of competition: ‘the phallic rigidity of the temple’, a manifestation of Hashem’s hyper-masculinity, the ultimate manhood and supreme phallus, allows no room for the priests, the Levites, and Israel to participate in the hegemony while the deity is in view (Boer, 2010, p. 28).

David Clines inquires if Boer’s ‘foppish dandies’ of the Temple were considered examples of ‘defective males. . . [or a] subordinate masculinity’ by the whole of Israel ‘because they were into music and incense’ (2010, p. 235). This is a fascinating line of inquiry. The Levitical requirement for biologically, phenotypically, or hormonally male priests certainly speaks to Boer’s ho(m)osexuality: the male body is the only body present; it is the social and erotic ideal. The priests are certainly not ‘defective males’ – they must be – or appear to be – biologically complete to go before the altar, lacking no limbs and certainly not any part of their penis or testes (Clines, 2010, p. 235). In Numbers, the Levites must be between twenty-five and

fifty to serve in the tabernacle – in Chronicles, they are counted from twenty onward –; they are adult men in their prime (Num. 8.24-25; Chron. 23.24). The Levites do not interact with the altar like the priests, but they occupy a liminal space: they are forbidden from taking part in censuses – which counted ‘those in Israel able to bear arms’ by ‘each ancestral house’ – and are allotted ‘no territorial portion’ (Num. 1.44-53, 18.2-6, 19.21-24; Deut. 18.1-2). The Levites may be male, but they are estranged from two important cultural markers of manhood – they have no land to pass on to their children and no census by which they may demonstrate their strength and military participation. They must instead live off of what the tithes are given and from this, offer their own tithes to the priests (Num. 19.21-32; Deut. 18.6-8).

Beyond this, the Levites serve in the Temple, in a profoundly practical, interior sphere as Hashem’s housekeepers. It is not the incense and music that feminize the Levites as much as it is the dishes, food, and cutlery. Like a wife, sister, or mother, they are bound to the divine house and assigned the washing up, the cooking, and presumably, the cleaning. Since women are not allowed in this sacred space, the chores of women fall to them. They are commanded and do not command, subservient to both Hashem and the priests they assist. Boer’s acknowledgement of their subordinate masculinity is accurate: the Levites are excluded from hegemonic masculinity while serving in the Temple, their primary occupation, according to Numbers.

Priestly masculinity, according to Rooke and Boer, is not merely subordinate, but feminized. Hashem may be the father-god, but the priests and Levites are not children as much as they are women. However, neither Rooke or Boer see priestly masculinity as upholding hegemonic heterosexuality: priestly masculinity is too trans-gressive to be itself a model of ideal masculinity or to uphold heterosexuality. Priestly masculinity exists at the margins, exposing

over and over the cracks created by Hashem's ultimate manhood. Priestly masculinity subverts masculinity even as it affirms it: the praises of the Levite singers elevate Hashem ever impossibly higher, as the shadow of the phallic Temple looms large, staffed by symbolically castrated priests and feminized Levites, reminding (a male) Israel that, bound to Hashem in an eternal covenant, there is no role they can play, but that of obedient wife.

## Conclusion

If Hashem is the ideal man, the truest expression of hegemonic masculinity, then the masculinity of both priests and non-priest adherents must create room for him. Individuals, as Clines demonstrates with David, are permitted – and textually encouraged – to embody hegemonic masculinity in their relationships with other humans. The only time that subordinate or marginalized masculinity is presented without textual censure is in relation to Hashem – thus, the priests and Levites, perpetually before Hashem in the Temple, are reminded of their place below Hashem through feminization, which moves them from a position of partial authority, like David's, to a place of complete social and cultural submission. They are not permitted to perform hegemonic masculinity since any assertion of their own power and manhood could be seen as competition with Hashem.

Priestly masculinity becomes particularly salient in 2 Sam. 6, not only because it provides the foundation by which David's lapses in hegemonic masculinity (without textual censure) can be interpreted, but also because David, by donning the ephod and leading the ark's procession, occupies, momentarily, a priestly role. Priestly gender is a valuable social shorthand that illuminates the tension between David-the-warrior and David-before-Hashem and forms an

important foundation for responses of both Hashem and Michal. David's actions in 2 Sam. 6 are profoundly queer: his departure from hegemonic masculinity, the performance of warrior-king, is a necessarily, textually approved<sup>74</sup> response to Hashem's own masculinity. Hashem, in the words of Macwilliam, is the one 'pushing the queer project on' (2009, p. 279).

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<sup>74</sup> There is no deadly response, as opposed to David's first procession, and Hashem deals with David favourably in 2 Sam. 7.

## CHAPTER FOUR: SACRED LIMINALITY: INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH

### CONTEXTS FOR 2 SAMUEL 6

In this chapter, I contextualize queer theory in relationship to hermeneutics and biblical studies, then provide definitions for relevant terminology before discussing how cross-cultural studies of ancient non-binary cultic identities provide a further research context for my analysis of 2 Samuel 6.

#### An Unruly Child

Ken Stone notes that ‘it would not be quite right to call [queer biblical theory and hermeneutics] . . . a method, if by a method, one means a set of agreed upon steps that reliably lead disciplined readers to shared conclusions’ and instead suggests that it ‘can be understood as a kind of interpretive sensibility or style of reading, which shapes particular interpretations of texts to varying degrees’ (2013, p. 156). He is certainly correct. Queer theory lives in liminal places and exists in contradictions. Its kinship with deconstructionism, as a sort of unruly child, lays an excellent framework for hetero- or cis-suspicious readings:<sup>75</sup> not only does queer theory prize the challenge, abhorring a single authoritative meaning, but it also exposes the variability of meaning in a single sign.

In deconstructionism and queer theory, the theoretical process illuminates the construction and conflict in both language and the narrative. However, where in deconstructionism, this may be applied to one or many signs, in queer theory, deconstruction focuses primarily on sex, sexuality, and gender.

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<sup>75</sup> Hetero- and cis-suspicious readings challenge heteronormativity and cisnormativity, the ideas that individuals or societies are heterosexual or cisgender until proven otherwise.

Early queer theorists, like Judith Butler and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, focused on the way that sex and gender, in particular, are both cultural constructions. As Moore has pointed out, this was a departure from LGB and second wave feminist theory, which prior to the 1990s, addressed the societal construction of gender, but missed the instability of sex (2010, p. 242). Butler, in particular, began the charge with *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter*, which will be discussed in greater detail shortly. The instability of sex and gender creates societal slippage that risks undermining heteronormativity and cisnormativity. These societal fault lines provide havens both for queers and the work of queering society.<sup>76</sup> Queer theory, when applied to biblical studies, often takes the form of queer biblical hermeneutics, where hermeneutics, distinct from the philosophical theory – which has found itself at odds with deconstructionism over disagreements<sup>77</sup> regarding the limits of ‘hermeneutic self-understanding’ – provides a framework for biblical interpretation and is therefore compatible with queer theory’s anti-essentialism and elevation of multiple, valid meanings (Nuyen, 1994, 426-28, 431).

The cracks in heteronormativity and cisnormativity are not unfortunate textual<sup>78</sup> problems to be solved but provide a chance to illuminate a multiplicity of meaning and experiences while

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<sup>76</sup> The term *queer* eschews identity labels. As a person who uses the term, I have no wish to pin down or reify *queer*, but instead reclaim its use here as an inclusive umbrella term for all minority sexuality, gender, or gender presentation.

<sup>77</sup> Deconstructionism has no space for finality and has conflicted with ‘onto-hermeneutics’ which imply that ‘the overcoming of otherness’ can be completed (Nuyen, 1994, p. 431). However, hermeneutics, as a philosophy, does not necessitate that the process of integration ending – Hans-Georg Gadamer seems to argue that ‘a complete and final understand of one’s own self is forever deferred, that every time otherness is overcome in the act of understanding, it arises anew, and thus the question of understanding re-forms’ (Nuyen, 1994, p. 431). This perpetual renewal of understanding separates texts from non-texts; A. T. Nuyen cites the broader use of hermeneutics to interpret events, such as the crucifixion, the American revolution, or the 1992 Los Angeles riots, which while partially understood, ‘continually stand before us, demanding understanding’ (1994, pp. 432-33). This understanding of hermeneutics, while it rejects ‘a Hegelian end point. . . remains metaphysical’, however, and as such, is perpetually divorced from deconstructionism because its premise (1994, p. 433).

<sup>78</sup> In queer biblical theory and hermeneutics, these texts may be biblical, Talmudic, apocryphal, theological treatises, or art that addresses religion, queerness, or their intersection.

highlighting the tensions that create intersecting forms of oppression. In this theoretical framework, the fissure is the thing. As queer theorist Annette Schlichter comments, the work of queering is a perpetually disruptive one, that deliberately seeks out “anti-normalizing processes and practices” to make strange, rather than to integrate (2004, p. 547). Queer biblical hermeneutics do not, like philosophical hermeneutics, seek understanding or truth. Like deconstructionism, it challenges essentialist readings and exposes artificial stability in language and society, but this is not its sole goal. It is not a philosophical school. Queer biblical hermeneutics are contradictory: it pushes against understanding, against standardization, it is the perpetual outsider, reinventing itself to remain out of the step with the essentialist, heteronormative, cisnormative society it criticizes.<sup>79</sup>

This is precisely my aim. I am not only concerned with the fissures created by binary sex and gender, but the way these fissures expose trans possibilities similar and strange to the reader.<sup>80</sup> Here, the process of making strange involves bringing together discourses not typically examined against interpretations of 2 Sam. 6 to create a unique dialogue on genderfluidity and holiness. My emphasis on David’s gender performativity as both sacred and queer upends and disrupts traditional, modern interpretations – represented by a range of prominent, modern, academic biblical commentaries – that assume David embodies hegemonic masculinity in the

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<sup>79</sup> Annette Schlichter (and others) have participated in ‘discourse on queer heterosexuality’ – in which straight individuals attempt to offer ‘successful failures of the reiteration of straight norms’ as a part of queer theory’s critique of heterosexuality (2004, p. 560). This controversial discourse is an excellent example of queer theory’s anarchy and intentional rabble-raising: to be queer is to be alien and queer theory is the theoretical process of making and/or exposing the alien. As a result of these subversive aims, queer biblical hermeneutics is necessarily at odds with biblical studies itself, particularly reception history and the weaponization of biblical texts against minorities.

<sup>80</sup> Although I acknowledge that the process of finding a way to be ‘read’ congruent to one’s own understanding of self may seem strange for cis readers for whom it is a given, the feeling of relief, satisfaction, and security created being properly read by society as your gender is one shared across the cis-trans experience.



highest order, likely drawing from 1 Sam. 13.14, where David is described as a man after Hashem's heart. Instead, I look to create space within what has previously been understood as the social role of Man/Manhood for queerness, through the example of David in 2 Sam. 6; after all, if Hashem reacts favourably to this queer performance, if David's actions are holy enough to warrant divine approval, then this creates space within the social understanding of the sacred for queerness. David's genderfluidity provides a template for the celebration of queer holiness, inviting compassion and inclusivity into readings of this biblical text.

### Key Terms

It is prudent to determine and define what terms will be used and what their implications are on my analysis before I detail the theoretical, historical and contextual tools that will be used in my thesis. The language of queer theory straddles two worlds: the world of academics and the world of lived LGBTQ+ experiences. I believe David's performance before Hashem/Hashem's ark is genderfluid, particularly genderqueer. In order to explain what both *genderfluid* and *genderqueer* are – particularly the inherent practical, political, and theoretical overtones – I will also explain the adjacent terms *sex*, *gender*, *trans* or *transgender*, *ftm*, *mtf*, *nonbinary*, and *homosexual*.<sup>81</sup>

David Tabb Stewart says that the term “queer” leaves space to consider “others-not-thought-of” – thus intentionally rejecting the binary that accompanies terms such as homosexual, itself an ‘[invention] of the nineteenth century’ and the ‘implied opposite’ of heterosexual (2017, p. 290). A ‘two-dimensional matrix (homo, hetero-, bi- and asexuality),

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<sup>81</sup> The italics have been used in place of quotations to mark terms in the interests of grammatical clarity. These terms will be explained in more detail shortly.

ultimately breaks down’ when confronted by ‘the complex phenomena of sexuality and its interrelations with human biology and gender’ (Stewart, 2017, p. 290). A reclaimed pejorative, queer finds itself uniquely positioned to discuss a range of sexualities and gender expressions: as an umbrella term. It is not bound by the same restrictions as *homosexuality* or *gay*, which as primary, specific identifiers are linked to both time and culture, through their production (Western – often white<sup>82</sup> – thought during the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries) and use (often describing men who are emotionally, romantically, and/or sexually involved with other men, although both terms can include lesbians, women who love women, and/or bisexual individuals). Queer specifically includes a range of gender expression in addition to minority sexualities, which may or may not be expressed concurrently.

Gender is a societal classification – in white, Western cultures, it is typically binary and consists of man-male/woman-female – that an individual is assigned, typically at birth, and typically based on the individual’s assumed sex. Sex refers to a biological classification that is seen across the animal kingdom. In mammals, this is typically categorized as female, intersex, and male. As I will explain momentarily, however, sex is as constructed as gender and does not refer to a stable biological identity, but is often wielded as a tool, if a variably effective one. A cisgender<sup>83</sup> person’s gender is congruent with their assigned sex and gender at birth; a transgender person’s gender is non-congruent with their assigned sex and may be female-to-

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<sup>82</sup> Anthony Heacock argues that the ‘the modern alliance of physiology (sex) with a fixed sexual preference (sexuality)’ is the result of ‘a combination of Judeo-Christian religious notions of gender relations and late-nineteenth-century medico-sexual taxonomies’ (2011, pp. 65-66). These ‘medico-sexual scientific discourses’ were Western, white, and imperial (2011, p. 65). While the terms *homosexual* and *gay* are used by a racially diverse, English-speaking queer community, queer people of colour have long employed their own terms to describe their unique experiences compared to that of white queers. For examples, please see Bianca Wilson’s analysis of the ‘celebration and resistance’ intrinsic to community-specific language (2009, pp. 297-313).

<sup>83</sup> Often *cis* for short.

male/ftm/female-to-masculine<sup>84</sup> or female-to-nonbinary, male-to-female/mtf/male-to-feminine or male-to-nonbinary. Nonbinary<sup>85</sup> gender covers a vast spectrum of gender identities and expressions that includes agender,<sup>86</sup> bigender,<sup>87</sup> or genderfluid,<sup>88</sup> for example.

Genderqueer, the cousin or sibling of genderfuck,<sup>89</sup> is often flamboyant in its expulsion of binary gender roles. Genderqueer is both an action and an identity and falls under the umbrella of nonbinary gender. According to Charlie McNabb,<sup>90</sup> *genderqueer* first appeared in 1995, used by Riki Anne Wilchins to express solidarity between a range of gender identities that do not conform to binary gender (2017, p. 19). McNabb notes that like *queer*, genderqueer evokes ‘political activism’ despite gaining mainstream use as ‘a White academic term’ (2017, p. 19). I have chosen the term genderqueer for David’s (binary) gender non-conforming performance over other terms, such as *genderfuck*, for several reasons. First, the words *gender + queer*, describes the actions that take place: David’s performance is queering binary gender. Genderqueer is similar to genderfuck; however, while genderfuck is a deliberate blurring and ‘mixing of masculine and feminine gender codes in ways that subvert the present bipolar gender

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<sup>84</sup> Since gender is a spectrum, the identifiers ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ in these examples stand for the range of masculine-leaning or feminine-leaning possibilities that trans people identify as. Sometimes the terms *masculine-of-centre* or *feminine-of-centre* are used, where the centre is absolute androgyny or no gender at all.

<sup>85</sup> A gender (or lack of) that does not fall, or does not entirely fall, within the male/female binary. It may move or be fixed. Often the language of nonbinary gender utilizes the imagery of a multi-dimensional spectrum, rather than a line between fixed poles. Binary gender, on the other hand, falls completely into either male or female. Just as some trans people may be heterosexual/straight, some trans people will have binary gender.

<sup>86</sup> No gender or a lack of gender.

<sup>87</sup> Two or more genders, which may be alternating and/or concurrent

<sup>88</sup> As it sounds, one or more genders which are not fixed, but fluid.

<sup>89</sup> See Guest (2011, pp. 9-43) and Erin Runions (1998, pp. 225-46) for two excellent discussions of genderfuck in biblical studies. Genderfuck is a nonbinary gender or gender presentation (that is, it may be embodied by an individual who identifies their actions as genderfuck but identifies their gender itself with a different term) that intentionally disrupts and subverts binary gender, typically in a mocking or satirical form. It is often utilized in drag performances where high femme costumes are paired with long beards or mustaches, breasts and bulges are emphasized through choreography or outfits, or other intentional juxtapositions of archetypal femininity and masculinity.

<sup>90</sup> A queer activist and librarian/archivist, with an academic background in cultural anthropology and folklore.

system' it also contains an element of mockery<sup>91</sup> that I do not see in David's performance (Bergman, 1993, p. 7; Runions, 2003, p. 93). Therefore, David's performance, which can be read as inspired by the disruptive, joyfully anarchic genderfuck, is better described as genderqueer – also subversive, joyful, and non-confirming, but without the cheeky, in-your-face contempt or farce that accompanies genderfuck

However, despite the lack of intentional mockery, subversion of gender always contains an element of satire. The exposure of gender as a construct undermines its stability: if it is unstable, if it is constructed, if the manufactured seams show, then parody and satire may appear in response.<sup>92</sup> Adherence to a norm is a reiterative act – a performance – that attempts to either stabilize or destabilize that norm. Subversion of gender calls up the performance, acknowledges it as such, then proceeds to re-perform, thus challenging the notion of an original. This call out, to borrow a drag term, *reads* the original performance and finds it wanting. The subversive re-performance and/or the critiqued original, its seams showing, are parodic and excessive. This excess is a mark of camp<sup>93</sup> and an important queer tool: in repetition and exaggeration, the familiar becomes strange and grotesque. Camp is a critical aspect of genderqueer performance and queer critique.

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<sup>91</sup> See Lonc (1974, cited in Bergman 1993, p. 7) – 'I want to criticize and poke fun at the roles of women and of men too. I want to try and show how not-normal I can be. I want to ridicule and destroy the whole cosmology of restrictive sex roles and sexual identification' – and Bergman (1993) for an in-depth explanation of the aggressive (and liberating) subversion of genderfuck and its use in the LGBTQ+ community. For an alternate view, McNabb suggests that genderfuck is 'a transgressive identity or style that purposely challenges binary ideas of gender' without mentioning ridicule as a defining element (2017, p. 244).

<sup>92</sup> Parody, satire, anxiety, and retrenchment are all possible responses to foundational instability and the resulting fear of losing oneself – one's sense of security, of the future, of identity. Both anxiety and retrenchment are often violent, physically and/or psychically. Butler (2004) touches on this in greater detail.

<sup>93</sup> David Bergman (1993) is an excellent resource for a general discussion of camp and Roland Boer (2006, 2010) provides an excellent discussion of camp within queer biblical studies.

Like genderfuck, *non-binary* is another term that holds potential to describe David's performance in 2 Sam. 6. But, where genderqueer and genderfuck dazzles and prances, nonbinary states and declares. David's performance before the Ark is marked by excess: he 'whirled with all his might' and defiantly tells Michal, he will 'dance before Hashem' (2 Sam. 6.14, 21). David's actions are flamboyant and polarizing.

I have chosen to use *non-binary* as an umbrella term for ancient Mesopotamian and Levantine non-binary genders. As scholars have discovered, like many regions and periods, some ancient Mesopotamian and Levantine cultures included a third gender category, known by various names according to individual societies and with similar, but separate social roles and responsibilities. Sociological scholarship has largely referred to these non-binary identities as "third gender," while acknowledging that the term is inaccurately homogenising: 'third gender. . . includes a wide array of possible identities, stretching beyond the dimorphic model' with disparate expressions along this 'continuum of possible gender identities' all being referred to as 'third gender' (Peled, 2016a, pp. 18-19). Non-binary avoids this misstep, since it does not evoke a monolithic, congruent expression of gender the way third gender or androgyne do.

#### Contemporary Theory and Ancient Texts: Interdisciplinary Research Contexts

Ultimately, terms like genderqueer are neologisms, however, they provide a useful framework by which to describe varying non-binary gender expression. The precision offered by the language of queer theory – taken from the queer community – allows academics to contextualize a breadth of performance and identity against the hegemonic grain. For my thesis, there are two approaches that merge to inform my research: queer theory and historical examples

of non-binary gender performance and/or identity. I begin with a condensed introduction to the construction of sex and gender in queer theory, then explore ancient Mesopotamian non-binary genders and their implications.

Judith Butler's formative works, *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies that Matter*, were among the first to challenge the assumption that gender is 'the cultural interpretation of sex' on the basis that 'sex itself is a gendered category' (1990, p. 10). Instead, sex itself is a cultural construct, designed to function 'as "prediscursive", prior to culture, a politically neutral surface *on which* culture acts' and thus establish a false stability for the understanding of sex, reinforced by the schema of 'biology-is-destiny' (Butler, 1990, pp. 9-11). Like earlier second-wave feminists, Butler clearly saw gender as a reiterative act; it is performativity, not sex, that defines gender (1990, pp. 184-93). Butler's challenge to sex provided fruitful ground for queer theory and for my reading of 2 Sam. 6. The performance of gender exposes the 'falsely naturalized. . . regulatory fiction', which Butler sees as designed to bolster 'heterosexual coherence' (1990, p. 187). The performance of sex similarly disrupts heteronormativity: it disputes binary sex as a natural, foundational truth supporting (hetero)sexuality and gender.

In 2 Sam. 6, David's queer performance serves a similar, disruptive function. I believe the performance – and resulting rupture between binary gender roles – exposes binary gender as a purely societal construct: David's performance before the ark in v. 12-19 is masculine and feminine, both and neither, explicitly eschewing binary sex and gender as a foundational, stable reality. To establish a theoretical basis for fluid gender, let us turn first to Butler's conception of drag as a powerful tool, exposing both 'the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency' (1990, p. 187).

Gender, in drag, is blatantly constructed, an intentional over-exaggeration – Esther Newton says drag declares, ‘appearance is an illusion’, it is ‘a double inversion’ where the exterior (make-up, clothing, wig) is feminine, the interior (the physical body) masculine, yet the exterior (the physical body) masculine and the interior (the essence, the self) feminine (1979, p. 103). Sex cannot provide a stable foundation for gender if gender can exist interiorly, since sex, defined by biology, is divorced from spirit or essence. Gender, if interior, is internalized: it is taught, it varies from culture to culture. Simone de Beauvoir famously argued ‘that “one is not born a woman, but, rather, becomes one”’ and Butler agrees, offering further that the ‘cultural compulsion’ Beauvoir references is not founded in sex, since sex exists within society it is ‘always already been interpreted by cultural meanings’ and therefore cannot be ‘a prediscursive anatomical facticity’ – it cannot claim to be a foundational truth, existing outside of discourse, superseding cultural norms and societies (Butler, 1990, pp. 10-12; de Beauvoir, 1973, p. 301).

This destabilization affects the discourse, cultural norms, and sociological identities that rest on the symbolic nature of sex<sup>94</sup> (Butler, 1993, p. 96). In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler goes on to argue that thus, performativity holds intrinsic power, able to destabilize or stabilize individual and group conceptions of identity (1993, pp. 139-40). Identification, they further posit, is as inherently unstable as sex: the power that performativity holds, to define and shape identity is limited by the nature of identity itself, which is ‘always beset by ambivalence’ due to the cost of identification (1993, p. 86). Butler suggests that the cost of identification is tied to re-iteration and exclusion, where identification with one social role, such as sex, excludes participation in

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<sup>94</sup> Butler is interested in the symbolic as it relates to Lacanian psychoanalysis: destabilization causes a ‘crisis in *the symbolic*. . . a crisis over what constitutes the limits of intelligibility. . . a crisis in the name and the morphological stability that the name is said to confer’ (1993, p. 96, emphasis added).

another – for example, the identification of male comes at the cost of identification with female – and must be continually re-performed against an unobtainable standard, or a ‘forcible approximation of a norm’ that is perpetually out of reach (1993, p. 86). The application of re-iteration and exclusion are most visible in response to the destabilization of sex, which results in a destabilization of binary gender as foundational truth, existing outside of culture and society and discourse. Performativity kicks in to shore up the edges: re-iteration and exclusion move from subtext to text to reify the boundaries and obscure the tensions.

Textually, I believe David stabilizes, then destabilizes sex and gender. The first parade is masculine coded, it is in many ways an excellent example of Butler’s ‘forcible approximation of a norm’ thorough the identification of David with military might and strength (2 Sam. 6.1-5; Butler, 1990, p. 86). According to Butler, this masculine norm is not an innate truth – it must be continually created and confirmed. In my previous chapter, I argued that the masculine ideal unconsciously parodies masculinity. This is particularly evident in biblical masculinity studies, where masculinity is tied to hegemonic power by the biblical narrator(s). I established that the hegemonic ideal is built on conquest and contest, with Hashem as the foremost example of hegemonic masculinity in the biblical narrative. Hashem’s actual or perceived femininity is excised to the point that he does not resemble a man any longer, but a strange caricature of manhood.<sup>95</sup> When the hegemonic masculinity of David-the-King/David-the-Warrior interacts with the hegemonic masculinity of Hashem, an insurmountable tension is created between the two.

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<sup>95</sup> This caricature, in my opinion, is so strange, so queer, that in some ways, Hashem begins to perform femininity through this hyper-masculine ideal. For a further analysis of this phenomenon, see Boer (2006; 2010).



Hashem's masculinity and David's masculinity cannot both exist as pre-eminently masculine. A conflict appears that cannot be mitigation by a re-iteration of masculine norms – since this would place Hashem and David in direct competition, a contest of masculine ideals that would further disrupt hegemonic masculinity and the narrator must turn instead to exclusion to stabilize their gender performativity. Someone must rescind the throne or be removed.

David's returning performance before the ark is markedly different – I believe David occupies both masculine and feminine coded social roles – and the response from Hashem is positive: certainly, no one is killed in a divine outburst. Further, in 2 Sam. 7, Hashem blesses David and enters into a covenant with him. David's behaviour seems divinely rewarded.

Within this premise, there is a second 'crisis in the symbolic' created by David-the-King/David-the-Warrior, David the ultimate man, suddenly setting aside his masculinity and jubilantly embracing non-binary genderfluidity (Butler, 1993, p. 96). David may be showing bravado in the face of Michal's criticism of his performance before Israel and the ark, but he seems comfortable and self-assured: after all, it was 'before Hashem' that he danced, and he goes on to declare, that this is only the *beginning* of what he will publicly do for Hashem (2 Sam. 6.21-22). There is no outward depiction of an inward crisis of identity – masculine or feminine, both or neither, David is still David. I believe that Michal's criticism, however, does allude to the viewer's ambivalence over David's genderfluid behaviour. The explicit reference to class transgression contains an implicit reference to gender transgression as well, for historical reasons I will explain shortly. David must justify his actions against the accusation that he has destabilized his identity as David-the-King/David-the-Warrior, becoming in its place David-the-Dancer/David-Between-the-Lines.

This queer transition creates sex-gender dissonance that resonates past the borders of the norm (Butler, 1993, p. 140). David's transition undermines normative masculinity by exposing it as variable rather than determined – and remains a problematic, perpetual evidence of an instability purported not to exist – in a patriarchal society, the stability of masculinity as cohesive, pre-determined identity, is the foundation for hegemonic power, thus any instability must be obscured to preserve that power (Butler, 1993, p. 140). Queerness, both theoretically and practically, challenges the prediscursive notion of sex. If sex offers a foundational truth, then David is a man, however, David has relinquished his male-coded power to Hashem and adopted a new social role. This social role, which I will argue is feminine, disrupts and upends David's masculine social role and negates sex as foundational truth. David removes himself from the hegemonic power struggle – he accepts Hashem as the ultimate man – but creates an unintended, unconscious secondary crisis: if manhood is so malleable that it can be adopted or rescinded, how can this mutable attribute be a solid foundation for the acquisition and maintenance of power?

The solution to this tension, according to Butler, is typically re-iteration of sex as an identifier: medically, socially, and personally. No space can be permitted between gender and sex. In cases where space exists, the individual – or community, such as the trans or intersex communities – must be relegated to 'a "constitutive outside"' in an effort to maintain the binary sex-gender norm (Butler, 1993, p. 140). Ironically, it is this very exclusion that undermines 'the normative force of performativity' (Butler, 1993, p. 140).

The most striking example of this can be found in scientific and medical conceptions of gender. Butler focuses on a 1987 study that purported to provide a 'testis-determining factor'

within the Y chromosome: Dr David Page and his colleagues suggested that in intersex individuals, this DNA sequence ‘must have been moved somehow from the Y chromosome, its usual location, to some other chromosome’ in the case of individuals designated male at birth, with XX chromosomes, or in the case of individuals designated female at birth, with XY chromosomes, whose TDF portion was deleted or passive (Butler, 1990, p. 145-46; Page, et al, 1987, pp. 1091-104). Current medical scholarship follows – and has expanded upon – Page’s hypothesis – the TDF gene is now referred to as the SRY (‘Sex-determining Region Y’) gene, and translocation, and/or variances in hormonal production, regulation, and absorption,<sup>96</sup> are believed to be the leading cause of intersex conditions, which, according to Dr Anne Fausto-Sterling’s research, affects 1.7-2.7% of the population (Fausto-Sterling, 2000; Kim and Kolon, 2009, pp. 161-72; NIH, 2015; Stewart, 2017, p. 306).

There are multiple scientific case studies of assigned female at birth individuals who were later revealed to have a Y chromosome. One woman ‘underwent spontaneous puberty, reached menarche, menstruated regularly, experienced two unassisted pregnancies, and gave birth’ – her child, assigned female at birth, later discovered they were both intersex, and further, had an extensive family history – ‘over four generations’ – of intersex individuals (Dumic, et al, 2008). In another case, a woman, assigned female at birth, discovered at thirty years old that she had a Y chromosome. Despite this, she had ‘normal ovarian function’ and a previous pregnancy – her Y chromosome was discovered ancillary to other testing and was believed to be caused by chimerism (Sudik, et al, 2001, pp. 56-58). Butler quotes Fausto-Sterling, who speaks in ‘Life in

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<sup>96</sup> Kim and Kolon reference ten specific variances in ‘endocrine function’ that result in intersex presentation, such as 21-hydroxylase deficiency, 11-hydroxylase deficiency, 3 $\beta$ -HSD deficiency, 17 $\alpha$ -hydroxylase or 17,20 lyase deficiency, 17 $\beta$ -HSD deficiency, lipoid adrenal hyperplasia, Leydig cell failure, androgen insensitivity, 5 $\alpha$ -reductase deficiency, and persistent Müllerian duct (2009, pp. 164-65).

the XY Corral’ about the presentation of XX chromosomes in Page’s group of assigned male at birth intersex individuals: despite having male or male-appearing external genitalia and testes, they had ‘no sperm production’ and ‘small testes’ plus ‘high hormone levels and low testosterone levels’ (Butler, 1990, p. 146).

Butler notes that the push to assign intersex individuals binary sex exposes the instability of sex: there is no ‘recognizable coherence or unity’ to binary sex, based on either chromosomes or phenotype, after all, ‘if external [or internal!] genitalia were sufficient. . . to determine or assign sex, then. . . research into the master gene [SRY/TDF] would hardly be necessary’ (1990, pp. 146-47). Butler does not address hormonal sex at all, but as Fausto-Sterling notes, like chromosomal sex, oestrogen and testosterone levels are not reliable markers for binary sex, they may occur in varying levels across individuals (Butler, 1990, p. 146). Thus, if chromosomal sex, phenotypic sex, and hormonal sex may all present in varying ways in an individual, ‘is it not a purely cultural convention’ that drives the assignation of binary sex to intersex individuals? Butler argues that it is ‘[o]nly from a self-consciously denaturalized position. . . [that] we can see how the appearance of naturalness is itself constituted’ (1990, p. 149). Indeed, intersex activists<sup>97</sup> have long agitated for the right to self-determination and a swift end to the invasive surgeries performed on intersex children to standardize their genitalia and phenotypic sex attributes. Sex cannot be a foundational truth since it has been shown to be a construction – a combination of

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<sup>97</sup> Susannah Cornwall’s *Intersex, Theology, and the Bible: Troubling Bodies in Church, Text, and Society* is a highly recommended resource for further reading. Also recommended is *Transgender, Intersex, and Biblical Interpretation*, edited by Teresa Hornsby and Deryn Guest. There are many intersex advocates: see Cheryl Chase, Kimberly Zieselman, Hans Lindahl, and Bria Brown-King, among others.

chromosomes, hormones, and phenotype that do not always agree.<sup>98</sup> The exclusion of intersex people from binary sex through forced standardization undermines binary sex, since it acknowledges that the boundaries of sex are permeable and unstable: people exist outside of a rigid definition of chromosomal, hormonal, and primary/secondary sex characteristics.

The implication for queer theory is that hegemonic norms are inscribed on queer bodies, not out of any natural, prediscursive law, but according to the needs of the hegemony, which reiterates its power through heteronormative, white, rich, male bodies. If a body's maleness – either sex or gender – is challenged, then this hegemonic pillar is disrupted. Jeremy Punt rightly argues that through 'render[ing] identity multiple and unstable, celebrating difference for contributing to and not threatening truth' queer theory works to dismantle – through analysis and criticism – modern, white, Western hegemonic power and its resulting systems of oppression (2008, p. 24.2).

David J.A. Clines (1995) argues that David, in ancient Levant, wields hegemonic power founded in masculine attributes, and that his power does not end with his death, it extends to modern, white, Western, hegemonic masculinity. I certainly agree. There are two planes on which we must evaluate the text – one, contextual, and the other, situational.<sup>99</sup> There are two separate concepts of hegemonic masculinity and of sex-and/or-gender social roles. The

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<sup>98</sup> Further, in the more-than-human world, sex is far from binary, but is a fluid category – some animal species can change their sex or are gynandromorphs, partially male and partially female (Allsop and West, 2004, pp. 1019-27; Peer and Motz, 2014, pp. 778-79). There is a famous case of a bilateral gynandromorphic blue crab, whose gonads were both male and female, despite a 'perfect bilateral division' externally (Johnson and Otto, 1981, p. 236-45). Another, equally striking case occurred in a Northern Cardinal who 'exhibited the typical bright red color of a male cardinal on the left half of its body, and the dull brownish-gray appearance of a female cardinal on the right half' (Peer and Motz, 2014, pp. 778-79). Gynandromorphs have long been documented in birds, insects, and crustaceans.

<sup>99</sup> This refers to the double-layered reader-response aspect of ancient texts. A 'contextual' reading is one that attempts to illuminate the way the way the author(s) and readers of the text understood it and a 'situational' reading is one that is based on modern understanding (and is necessarily divorced from ancient realities, instead influenced by modern society).

medicalized, scientific concept of foundational sex – while an excellent tool for exposing the constructed nature of sex – is deeply situational, rooted in modern, Western society. It is necessary to apply Kimberlé Crenshaw’s theory of intersectionality in order to fully appreciate the nuances of the text, both as it has been told and as it is told now.

Crenshaw’s work examines the axis of class, race, gender, and ability, or any combination thereof (1989, pp. 139-67). It has fundamentally shaped modern understandings of minority-centred academics, feminism, queer studies, and postcolonial studies, by challenging – both academically and practically – ‘the multiple ways that race and gender interact with class in the labor market. . . [and the way] regulatory regimes of identity, reproduction, and family formation’ are maintained (Cho, et al, 2013, pp. 785-86; Crenshaw, 1989, pp. 139-67). I would like to offer a similar matrix, tailored to 2 Sam 6 that establishes a framework for hegemonic masculinity: culture, class, time, and cultic function.

In the biblical text, David’s actions are the primary source of scrutiny since the narrative does not offer much interiority. As such, we must ask if what is read as a lapse in hegemonic masculinity truly is a lapse – would David see his actions as subversive and trans-gressive? Is David’s behaviour a unique privileging of queerness or is it an alternate form of accepted and normative masculinity? According to influential biblical scholar Martti Nissinen, ancient Mediterranean societies saw gender as a ‘social role’ that ‘members of society had to learn’ rather than a strict binary (1998, p. 15). Nissinen’s work has been partially discussed in my literature review, but I would like to place his work alongside that of other academics to build a cohesive picture of what non-binary gender looked like in ancient Mesopotamia and Levant.

Will Roscoe, a multi-faceted scholar specializing in anthropological studies of non-binary gender, offers an examination of several non-binary genders in the ancient Mesopotamia and in India in his 1996 paper. Roscoe's work – along with research by classical art historian Lynn Roller and religious sociologist Ilan Peled – investigates ancient conceptions of sex-and-gender. These four authors discuss several non-binary identities whose role in society has been preserved through images and writings, that provide a relevant context by which to understand gender in neighbouring societies during the first millennium B.C.E.: the *galli*, the *gala/kalû*, the *kur-gar-ra/kurgarrû*, and the *assinnu*. These identities all serve a specific cultic function (Peled, 2016b, p. 158; Roller, 1997, p. 549).

Sometime during 'the Phrygian period (eighth to sixth centuries BCE)', in central Anatolia – although there is mixed evidence 'from the end of the Hittite era' onward – worship of Attis/Ates and Cybele, the Magna Mater,<sup>100</sup> began (Roscoe, 1996, p. 198). With the advent of the Hellenistic period, the cult of Cybele and Attis developed unique features that carried over into Roman occupation and the Roman empire: priests and devotees were known for their 'ecstatic practices and gender transgression' (Roscoe, 1996, p. 199-201). The *galli*, as the Romans called them, were described as 'having made themselves alien to masculinity' with 'effeminately nursed hair . . . [and are barely able to] hold their heads up on their limp necks' (Roscoe, 1996, p. 196). A contemptuous Augustine of Hippo described the 'dripping hair and painted face . . . flowing limbs and feminine walk' of the *galli* (Roscoe, 1996, p. 196). The

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<sup>100</sup> Dutch religious historian, Maarten Vermaseren, who specialized in the cult of Cybele and Attis, describes the various depictions of Cybele and Attis, from Anatolia to Rome in his summation of the Cybele-Attis myth. Regardless of regional variance, Cybele appears as the 'divine Mother', and Attis as her consort, who in a remorseful rage for a period of infidelity, castrates himself (Vermaseren, 1966, p. 22-33). Their priests, the *galli*, engaged in mimetic behaviours which will be described shortly in more detail (Vermaseren, 1966, pp. 31-32, 39-42).

Romans referred to the *galli* as “‘pretty things”, “‘little doves”, “‘half-women”” or ‘soft “‘half-men”” who allowed themselves to become living conduits for their goddess (Roller, 1997, pp. 547, 550). Lynn Roller points to a ‘an inscribed votive relief from Kyzikos’ from 46 BCE where ‘a priest, a *Gallus* named Soterides’, is shown ‘in woman’s clothing, a long gown and a veil’, from which scholars have concluded suggests that Soterides – and other *galli* – were feminine-of-centre if not female-identified<sup>101</sup> (1997, p. 544).

The *galli* did not only adopt transgressive social behaviour – including the popular assumption that they were the ‘receptive partner in sex with other men’ – but also practiced ‘self-castration . . . “within the limits of injury” to avoid “dangerous results”” (Roscoe, 1996, pp. 203, 205). This and their sexual activity, served to ‘overdetermine their status as androgynes’ (Roscoe, 1996, p. 205). Roscoe notes that the *galli* were referred to as ‘a *medium genus* or a *tertium sexus*—representatives of a third gender’ (1996, p. 203). Roller cites Roman law, in an inheritance case in 77 B.C.E., that saw a *gallus* named Genucius barred both from court and from receiving *zic* inheritance, because of *zic* ‘obscene presence and corrupt voice’ which Roller believes indicates that the *galli* were not only estranged from male society and privilege, but also any allowances made for women, saying Genucius was not a man and ‘not a woman but a non-person in the eyes of the law’ (1997, p. 549). Catullus’s poem 63, which follows ‘Attis, a young devotee of the Magna Mater’ who joins the *galli*, echoes this (Roller, 1997, p. 551). Attis is

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<sup>101</sup> Roller uses language I am deeply uncomfortable with: ‘implying. . . the eunuch priest identified himself as a woman in his physical appearance’ (1997, p. 544). Given modern Western transphobia and violence towards trans women and assigned male at birth, feminine non-binary people, I find her use of pronouns unsettling. We do not know how the *galli* internally identified, since unfortunately, ‘in no case does the voice of a eunuch survive to inform us’ of their experiences (Roller, 1997, p. 544). Out of respect for their silenced voices, and in accordance with their non-binary place in ancient society, I will use the gender-neutral singular pronoun *ze* [*ze/zir/zirself*] and the gender-neutral plural pronoun *they* [*they/them/themselves*] for the *galli*. There are many gender-neutral singular pronouns in English: common ones are *they/them*, *ze/zir*, *sie/hir*, and *ey/em*.



described in masculine pronouns until zir castration, upon which ‘the poet abruptly shifts grammatical gender’ however, Attis feels alienated and grief-stricken when ze realizes ze has lost zir agency as a man, yet ‘is not a woman, but a pseudo-woman’, a ‘*notha mulier*’ (Roller, 1997, pp. 551-52).

Roller, despite describing Attis in uniformly masculine pronouns, recognizes that Attis does not see zirsself as a man: Roller assumes that the tension Catullus describes and the source of Attis’s mourning is zir forceable ejection from (binary gendered) Roman society *and* an underlying internal conflict, saying: Attis ‘can identify with the powerless state of a woman, but still remain acutely conscious of his own masculinity’ (Roller, 1997, p. 552). Roller theoretically recognizes the *galli*’s social role as non-binary gender but struggles to conceive this as anything other than a ‘counterfeit’ womanhood, as indicated by her translation of ‘*notha mulier*’ as a ‘pseudo-woman’<sup>102</sup> (1997, p. 551-52). Alternatively, Roscoe reads the ascription of the *galli*’s unique (to Roman society – not necessarily the ancient Mediterranean) blend of masculine and feminine characteristics as completely detached from binary gender, quoting Augustine who declares, that the *galli* are not ‘changed into a woman’ any more than they remain ‘a man’ (1996, p. 203). The *galli* were culturally ‘neither male nor female’ and thus ‘occupied simultaneously social and supernatural planes’, as the ultimate priests and devotees, symbolically representing the dichotomy between the sacred and mundane through their gender expression, inspiring ‘awe and horror’ (Roscoe, 1996, p. 204).

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<sup>102</sup> Modern trans women and assigned male at birth, feminine non-binary individuals will likely recognize this thinking, which is based in the assumption of sex as a foundational truth, running counter-current to their feminine gender performativity.

Sometime between the first and second century C.E., Sextus Empiricus explicitly acknowledged that this non-binary liminality was spiritual: ‘the Mother of the Gods also admits effeminates and the Goddess would not judge so, if by nature unmanliness were a trivial thing’ (Roscoe, 1996, p. 204). Certainly, the *galli*’s role as priests and devotees has been well documented, appearing in Greek records in the fourth century B.C.E. and ‘in general, the evidence from Asia Minor suggests that the priest [a *gallus* priest] was a figure of dignity who enjoyed. . . respect’ (Roller, 1997, p. 544). As for Rome,

One finds the Roman elite worshipping Cybele with bloody animal sacrifices officiated by state-appointed *archigalli*; common freedman and plebians forming fraternal associations, such as the *dendrophori* and *canophori*, to perform various roles in her annual festivals; and the poor and slaves swept up by the frenzy of her rites, often to the consternation and alarm of their social superiors. (Roscoe, 1996, pp. 196-97).

The unease and contempt seen in descriptions of the *galli* is belayed by their involvement ‘at every level of society’ (Roscoe, 1996, p. 196). Perhaps, as Roscoe notes, it is this systematic involvement that evokes alarm: the disruption of gender is cousin to the disruption of class (Roscoe, 1996, pp. 196-97). The *galli* challenged not only the sacred/mundane but wealthy/poor and powerful/powerless, becoming ‘polyvalent symbols. . . a union of opposites’ and living expression of societal transcendence (Roscoe, 1996, p. 204). Therefore, the *galli*, while serving an important, cathartic cultural function, found themselves fundamentally at odds with hegemonic power: the *galli* must be described by those wielding power as powerless, must be continually socially relegated to the ‘constitutive outside’ Butler observes (Butler, 1993, p. 140; Roscoe, 1996, pp. 202-03). The *galli* are not affiliated with hegemonic masculinity – they are not affiliated with masculinity at all, except in the exclusionary sense of ‘having-once-been’ – and they are primarily described by those motivated to control their influence.

The *galli*, therefore, raise multiple valuable insights for the 2 Sam. 6 narrative: particularly a framework by which non-hegemonic masculinity and/or non-binary gender is included within hegemonic narratives. It is reasonable to assume that the narrator of 2 Sam. 6 measures David against hegemonic masculinity, as argued by Clines, and as such, that deviance from this norm would be subject to social censure.<sup>103</sup> However, David's actions are divinely rewarded. The only overt conflict is Michal's class-based opposition to his behaviour – indeed, it is not even clear that Michal's opinions are the narrator's opinions. I believe that the narrative tension is due to conflicting interests – the narrator is intentionally ambiguous. David's deviance from hegemonic masculinity is allowed for the same reason that the *galli*'s is allowed: *it serves a necessary socio-religious function*. The socio-religious identity of Israel-the-nation takes precedence over the gender identity of David-the-individual, despite, perhaps even *because of*, his status as king. Therefore, just as 'the Roman elite' participate in state-sanctioned rituals officiated by individuals socially inferior to them, David's hegemonic power must bow (briefly) to the demands of Hashem (Roscoe, 1996, pp. 196-97). However, the narrator also cannot fully endorse such behaviour, it must be regulated, and Michal provides the perfect tool for this. As a woman, her voice is not powerful enough to constitute an open threat to Hashem and the familial dynamic allows David to reassume hegemonic power.<sup>104</sup> David is then provided an excuse by which to detail the limits of his behaviour, while acknowledging the subversive impact: it is for Hashem and *Hashem alone*. The disruption of gender is too serious a threat to be raised, so class

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<sup>103</sup> The narrator not only endorses hegemonic masculinity, but in a sense, they also *create* hegemonic masculinity by establishing the perimeters by which power is retained, consolidated, and exercised. This argument will be explored further in chapters six and nine.

<sup>104</sup> However, David's power is ambiguous. His angry outburst certainly establishes his place as head of the house and therefore, in authority over Michal and her own authority, but the narrator does not specify if it is David or Hashem who prevents Michal from having more children. David continues to be, necessarily, limited for the good of Israel's socio-religious identity.

– affected by gender transgression – is raised in its place. David’s justification cues the reader that a social rule has been breached.

In Mesopotamia, multiple non-binary genders have been documented: the *gala/kalû* the *kur-gar-ra/kurgarrû*, and the *assinnu*. Unlike the *galli*, which are recorded mostly by their colonizers in the Greco-Roman empire, ‘the texts. . . in ancient Mesopotamia are nearly all internal documents – temple records and ritual scripts’ (Roscoe, 1996, p. 213). ‘First attested in the Fara period (ca. 2600 B.C.E.)’, the *gala* are among the oldest non-binary groups (Peled, 2016b, p. 158). Although they first served with women as lamenters or mourners, like the *galli*, the *gala* were priests and served a liturgical function,<sup>105</sup> as a guild ‘created’ by Enki ‘to calm the heart of the deity’ Inanna (Peled, 2016b, p. 158; Roscoe, 1996, p. 213).

Inanna – who will be mentioned further in correlation to the *assinnu* – was a ‘gender-ambivalent deity. . . . whose institutionalized cult included [assumed biologically] male attendants who possessed ambiguous gender identity’ (Peled, 2016b, pp. 158-59). Religious sociologist, Ilan Peled recounts a Sumerian Proverb ‘of the Isin-Larsa period (ca. 1900-1800 B.C.E)’ which ‘describes a *gala* throwing his son into the water while declaring: “May the city be built like me! May the country live like me!”’ (2016b, p. 159). The *gala*’s blessing is a curse ‘to the ill-fated population, for whom to “live like the *gala*” means infertility’ (Peled, 2016b, p. 159). Roscoe cites a proverb from the same era ‘that reads, “when the *gala* wiped off his ass [he said], ‘I must not arouse that which belongs to my mistress [i.e., **should have a comma here**] Inanna]’”’ (1996, p. 214; Peled, 2016b, p. 159). Peled confirms Roscoe’s view that these proverbs mark the *gala* as culturally understood as sexually receptive and effeminate: further

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<sup>105</sup> Ilan Peled draws a distinction between the galas early work as mourners and their later (2000 BCE onward) cultic function, however, Will Roscoe does not (Peled, 2016b, p. 158; Roscoe, 1996, p. 213-14).

evidence can be found in their written name, which is etymologically drawn from ‘the signs “penis + anus” (GÌS.DÚR)’ and the dialect of their lamentations – *eme-sal*.<sup>106</sup>

The *gala*, with their feminine voices and association with women and *assinnu*, are frequently equated with the *assinnu*, who did not identify as men (Nissinen 1998, pp. 28-29; Peled, 1996, pp. 162-64). The *gala* are also depicted without beards, a crucial marker of masculinity for images of adult Mesopotamian men (Peled, 2016b, pp. 162-64). However, there is evidence that suggests in some periods ‘there may have been families. . . of professional *gala* and even female *gala*’ (Roscoe, 1996, pp. 213-14). Martti Nissinen believes the *gala* were socially defined by both their profession and ‘their wavering gender;’ however, other scholars, such as Peled, while acknowledging that the *gala* do not conform to expected hegemonic roles, refuses to rule out that the *gala* do not exemplify an alternate form of hegemonic masculinity (Nissinen, 1998, pp. 28-29; Peled, 2016b, pp. 162-64). This also raises interesting implications for our understanding of 2 Sam. 6 – hegemonic masculinity varies *significantly* by society. In the absence of social censure how can modern scholarship place a gender performance in relationship to ancient hegemony?

Peled ultimately answers his own question in a separate (more extensive) examination of ancient non-binary genders, coming to the conclusion that non-binary groups such as the *gala*, *kur-gar-ra*, and *assinnu* ‘were invented and re-invented each period by hegemonic masculine men of their own society’ to reaffirm hegemonic power because the guilds ‘constituted an

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<sup>106</sup> This dialect was used to ‘render the speech of female gods’ (Roscoe, 1996, p. 214). It ‘probably refers to the high-pitched voice in which the *gala* /*kalû* sang and uttered his lamentations’ according to Peled, since *eme-sal* ‘means thin/fine speech’ (2016b, p. 159).

integral part’ of the larger culture, despite being ‘social anomalies’<sup>107</sup> (2016a, p. 294). Peled concludes that hegemonic masculinity used a clear separation between masculinity, femininity, and non-binary genders to create well-defined ‘social markers of rules of conduct and normative behaviour patterns’ (2016a, p. 294). I agree and would argue that the most pertinent clue to the *gala*, *kur-gar-ra*, and *assinnu*’s place in relation to hegemonic masculinity is the way they support hegemonic power without benefiting from it.

The closest indication to these three guilds’ inclusion in hegemonic norms lies in their roles as priests, and their consequential presence in the cultural record. This stands in sharp contrast to the *galli*, who are largely silenced thorough social erasure and/or outright mockery. However, like the *galli*, these groups wield no power of their own: their sole agency is tied to their relationship with Inanna (known as Ištar outside of Sumer). I will discuss Inanna/Ištar’s imagery shortly, but ultimately, despite appearing often as a woman, Inanna/Ištar’s power is represented through symbols tied to hegemonic masculinity – as a warrior, bearded/virile, and

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<sup>107</sup> In yet another publication, Peled tempers his acknowledgement, arguing that the *assinnu* were ‘non-hegemonic masculine’ individuals and the *kurgarrû* were completely masculine (2018, pp. 55-62). Peled acknowledges that his conclusions are based on debatable artistic evidence – claiming that beardless, effeminate figures with penises are *assinnu* while their bearded counterparts are *kurgarrû* – and that his claim, while offering a midpoint between conflicting Assyriologist interpretations of non-binary (‘ambiguous’ genders, in Peled’s words) individuals, lacks proof (2018, pp. 55, 59-62). I disagree with Peled’s premise, although I find the beardless, effeminate figure with a penis fascinating – and certainly evocative of the *assinnu*. If this figure is the *assinnu*, however, the bearded figure is not guaranteed to be the *kurgarrû*. The *assinnu* interacted with a range of individuals and the *kurgarrû* is textually alluded to as effeminate and divorced from hegemonic masculinity (which may or may not include a beard, see Peled, 2016b, pp. 162-64). Peled’s bias shows in his introduction, where he suggests that these guilds represent ‘non-hegemonic’ masculinity rather than a unique gender role (2018, p. 55). Non-hegemonic masculinity is non-normative masculinity, divorced from patriarchal power. Connell divides this into three forms: ‘subordinate masculinity’ which is a masculinity defined by emasculation and a separation from the idea of a what makes a Real Man; ‘complicit masculinity’ which profits from non-hegemonic masculinity without parting in a particularly hegemonic role; and ‘marginalized masculinity’ or a form of masculinity that estranged from the hegemony because of an intersecting identity, such as race, class, or ability, but would otherwise be complicit or hegemonic (Connell, 2005, pp. 77-81). Peled’s interpretation is roundly heteronormative, assuming binary gender: the *assinnu* and their non-hegemonic peers are subordinately masculinity in this view, because they are not women, and therefore must be some degree of man. I believe the *assinnu*, the *gala*, the *galli*, and the *ku-gar-ra* were not interested in being men any more than being women, given their social roles, language, cultic responsibilities, appearance, and common symbols, all of which were *both* masculine and feminine.

with the ability to castrate (Nissinen, 1998, p. 30; Roscoe, 1996, p. 217). Inanna/Ištar, although female reinforces phallic power, therefore, the *gala*, *kur-gar-ra*, and *assinnu* similarly reinforce phallic power while being estranged from its benefits.<sup>108</sup> The *gala*, *kur-gar-ra*, and *assinnu*, like the *galli*, are divorced from the political and social power of masculinity, therefore their masculinity is not complicit, and they are equated with, textually surrounded by, and take their instruction from the divine feminine, removing them from marginalized masculinity, since marginalized masculinity assumes an identification with masculinity and manhood.<sup>109</sup>

While the *gala*'s written name does include penis – they are seen as passive, thus estranged from the phallic power, and effeminate/receptive, subject to phallic power. This runs counter to Mesopotamian masculinity, which saw receptive sex as an un-manning act, particularly systematic receptive sex (Nissinen, 1998, pp. 24-31). Further, the proverb that links infertility/a lack of heirs to the *gala*, again places the *gala* in opposition to hegemonic masculinity, by suggesting that the *gala* is not virile, is not permitted to be virile, or does not wish to be (Peled, 2016b, p. 159). The *gala* function as an accepted institution within hegemonic norms, but do not exemplify hegemonic masculinity.

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<sup>108</sup> Additionally, Nissinen highlights a saying that Peled does not: 'He is a *kulu'u* and not a man' (1998, p. 33). Although the meaning of *kulu'u* is still under debate, Peled acknowledges that the term, like *assinnu* and *kurgarrû* (with which it is grouped), '[constitutes] antonyms to the normative gender identity of men' and thus appear 'as pejorative expressions in order to ridicule someone's lack of masculinity' (2015, p. 762). The connection between these terms underscores the way that non-binary gender was understood as socially distinct from masculinity (Nissinen, 1998, pp. 32-33; Peled, 2015, pp. 754, 762).

<sup>109</sup> Although an argument could be made that the *assinnu*, the *gala*, the *galli*, and the *ku-gar-ra* reap some privilege from being male-adjacent, I am sceptical as to the extent of this privilege once a participant in their respective guilds: the presence of female cultic guilds and high ranking priestesses suggests that religious respect in Mesopotamia was afforded to select women, and Catullus's poem and Roller's legal ruling both emphasize the sudden revocation of the social or political dividends from masculinity once identifying with and following their respective cultic behaviour (Pongratz-Leisten, 2008, p. 49-50; Reisman, 1973, p. 187; Roller, 1997, pp. 551-52, 549). Instead, I believe any privilege experienced by the *assinnu*, *gala*, *ku-gar-ra*, and *galli* would have been tied to their having-previously-been-men, a privilege that was severed following their abdication of a masculine social role.

The biblical text is less overt, and Peled's questioning is especially pertinent to my research. My research context reads the biblical text in light of cross-cultural anthropological studies on ancient Mesopotamian and Levantine non-binary, cultic identity, and biblical masculinities, through the lens of queer theory. Anthropology in this framework allows us to examine elements of hegemonic gender in ancient Mesopotamia and Levant that may otherwise be overlooked – especially in traditional commentaries of 2 Sam 6, which offer a straight reading of the text. This 'straight' reading does not challenge the intentional obscuring of David's gendered actions – a form of silencing – and re-framing of his behaviour in purely religious terms.

Assuming that David's second parade<sup>110</sup> is genderfluid necessitates that boundaries be placed around hegemonic masculinity, delineating acceptable, normative masculinities (for not all men can be pre-eminently masculine at all times, yet most find accepted masculine social roles separate from feminine and non-binary gender performativity) from potentially feminine and/or non-binary performativity. The answer lies in the institutionalization of threatening social expressions, as demonstrated by the *galli*. Peled assumes that non-binary gender expression would have existed in these ancient societies, regardless of its integration, and that integration turns a potential weakness (non-binary gender undermining hegemonic masculinity by exposing gender as a social construct) into a strength (where non-binary gender underwrites hegemonic masculinity). In the biblical text, nothing is present that the narrator does not deem acceptable: any subversive, undermining elements can be written out, dispatched, or criticized (and

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<sup>110</sup> The term 'parade' is used in the American sense, as a community procession with carnivalesque overtones. It is not a formal procession, but a merry, disruptive one. Often candy and/or beads are distributed among the attendees and parade is marked by extravagant floats, dancing, and music.



defanged). With this mind, is it possible that David's dance is a normative, institutionally acceptable form of masculine behaviour?

Modern normative masculinity has been seen as non-feminine, therefore, according to modern standards, David's behaviour falls outside the realm of normative masculinity (Clines, 1995, pp. 212-16). However, this is not a criterion for David J.A. Clines' ancient Israelite masculinity, which instead is focused on male bonding and womanlessness, military might, beauty, persuasive skill, and musical talent (1995, pp. 216-43). I believe that Clines ignores a significant factor of ancient Israelite masculinity, however: ancient Israelite men are not submissive.<sup>111</sup> Clines acknowledges that there are times that David strays from hegemonic masculinity – and the text clearly chastises him – particularly the instance of David 'capitulat[ing] to fate' (1995, p. 230). David's second parade is unmasculine, because it is submissive: David acknowledges Hashem as the preeminent man. Like the *gala*, David is (symbolically) passive and receptive to Hashem. Not only does David adopt feminine social roles, managing the distribution of food – itself another link to the genderqueer roles of the priests – but David forfeits his masculine identifiers.<sup>112</sup> This undermines normative masculinity, even if it is institutionally acceptable since it reinforces the hegemonic masculinity of Hashem.

With that in mind, let us turn to the *kur-gar-ra/kurgarrû*, believed to be one of many terms for the *assinnu*,<sup>113</sup> which appear in the historical record up until the 'Seleucid and Persian

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<sup>111</sup> There are exceptions to this rule, however, these men who submit to other men – or more scandalously, women! – are not presented positively in the biblical text. Consider Ahab, Barak, and Samson. This is mirrored in surrounding cultures, where men who submit are portrayed as effeminate and powerless: for examples, see Peled (2015, pp. 754-55) and Nissinen (1998, p. 27).

<sup>112</sup> David's estrangement from masculine identifiers, particularly in connection with wearing the ephod, will be discussed further in chapters eight and nine.

<sup>113</sup> Roscoe includes the *sag-ur-sag* and *giri-ba-da-ra*, citing *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*, similarly Peled notes that in the Sumerian account of 'Ištar's Descent to the Netherworld' the

times’ (Roscoe, 1996, pp. 215-16). Beyond the duties of a *gala*, they ‘were typically identified as servants of Inanna/Ishtar’ and their tasks included ‘[portraying] the goddess in ritual, by wearing masks and cross-dressing’ for ritual performances that featured adoration, ‘provoking [then resolving] divine fury’ and/or performing liturgical war dances (Nissinen, 1998, pp. 28-29; Roscoe, 1996, pp. 215-16). Roscoe cites ‘an astrological omen’ that sees *kurgarrû* as ‘settling down in the house [with men] and . . . giving birth to (or procreating for) the men’, suggesting that they, like the *gala*, assumed feminine social roles and sexually partnered with men (Roscoe, 1996, p. 217).

While the *gala* were represented by penis + anus, the *assinnu* are written as ‘UR.SAL (“dog/man-woman”)’ – which Nissinen believes marks both their attachment to Ištar, as genderfluid, or gender-transformed, and their precarious place in society, where even their association with manhood – and thus power – was tainted<sup>114</sup> (1998, p. 28, 32). Ištar, herself represented ‘as a charming, erotic woman’ and simultaneously ‘a bearded soldier’, was said to have ‘transformed their [the *assinnu*’s] masculinity in femininity’ (Nissinen, 1998, p. 30; Roscoe, 1996, p. 217). Nissinen, citing the work of Stefan Maul, notes that the *assinnu* wore make up – using a specific stone, the *kurgarrānu* (Nissinen, 1998, pp. 24-31, 148). The *assinnu*, referred to as *sag-ur-sag*, are described dressing the right half of their bodies as men and the left as women (Reisman, 1973, pp. 187, 194).<sup>115</sup> They were also ‘mentioned in the same context’ as

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term *kur-gar-ru* is used, but in the Neo-Assyrian account, *assinnu* is substituted (Peled, 2015, pp. 752; Roscoe, 1996, pp. 215-16). The relationship between the *assinnu* and *kur-gar-ru* are covered further in Peled (2016a, pp. 155-91).

<sup>114</sup> The ‘dog’ in UR.SAL does not refer to an animal, but to ‘masculinity in a despicable sense’ (Nissinen, 1998, p. 147).

<sup>115</sup> Assyriologist Thorkild Jacobsen notes that men kept their right shoulders uncovered and, unlike Daniel Reisman, who translates the relevant lines in the sacred marriage hymn as ‘they adorn their right side with the clothing of women. . . / they place the clothing of men on their left side’, chooses to translate it as ‘their right arms are clothed

their female peers – distinguishing them from Mesopotamian men, who maintained a strict patriarchal hierarchy that necessitated social distinction between men and women (Nissinen, 1998, pp. 24-31). Homo-genital contact was regulated by the Middle Assyrian Laws on the premise that it feminized men:<sup>116</sup> yet the *assinnu* appear to ‘have duties in [sexual] rituals’ in addition to serving as Ištar’s ‘sex partners’ (Nissinen, 1998, pp. 26-27, 30-31). Thus, it is unsurprising that the *Šumma ālu*, a series of omen concerning sexuality, says ‘If a man copulates with an *assinnu*, a hard destiny will leave him’ – the *assinnu*, as agents of Ištar, could bring about divine favour, and as non-binary individuals, were exempt from the prohibitions of homo-genital sex (Nissinen, 1998, p. 27). The symbolic ‘gear’ of *assinnu* is the spindle and the sword – representing their ‘male and female characteristics’ as well as serving a cultic function for ritual ‘battle dances’ and cultic ‘self-torture’ (Nissinen, 1998, p. 30).

From all four groups, we can reasonably infer that binarization is modern phenomena: the *galli*, the *gala/kalû*, the *kur-gar-ra/kurgarrû*, and the *assinnu* are all given unique social places.<sup>117</sup> Silencing, however, is not. The *galli*, for instance, recorded by hostile hegemonic authorities, are the subject of scorn and derision, their voices are not recorded, but their lingering socio-religious impact conveys their cultural power. The *gala*, *kur-gar-ra*, and *assinnu* are better

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with cloth in the male fashion. . . / on their left arms they have pulled the cloth down and off’ (Jacobsen, 1987, p. 116; Reisman, 1973, p. 187). However, the following lines 68-72, describe a second instance of symbolic cross dressing as men carry female tools and women carry male tools – and consequently suggests that Jacobsen’s effort to make heteronormative sense of the poem is not in line with the poem’s actual aims. For further reading please see Leick (1994, p. 158-59) and Hoffner (1966, pp. 326-34).

<sup>116</sup> Anal sex with a peer – ‘a man of equal social status’ – was punishable by rape and castration, spreading rumours that a peer engaged in repeated/widespread homogenital activity was punished more severely than spreading rumours that a peer’s wife had been repeatedly adulterous – fifty blows versus forty (Nissinen, 1998, pp. 24-26). Nissinen goes on argue that ‘if a man assumed the passive role [during sex, particularly sex with a man], he was acting as a woman and his whole sexuality became questionable’ since homogenital sex appears most frequently as an expression of power and subjugation, and is even included in treaty language (Nissinen, 1998, pp. 26-27).

<sup>117</sup> Although some scholars, such as Lynn Roller, have read these non-binary identities in light of binary gender, the majority are described in their source texts as outside normative masculinity and femininity, something that Roller acknowledges.

integrated into their respective societies, enjoying a measure of acceptance – however, they are alienated from hegemonic power, even as their existence reinforces it.

## Conclusion

In 2 Sam 6, there are dual layers of silencing and binarization: the first occurs within the text – David’s behaviour is ambiguously portrayed. The narrator cannot avoid the tension created by David-the-King/David-the-Warrior and Hashem’s respective hegemonic masculinity clashing. However, driven by the need for a cohesive socio-religious Israelite identity, David’s genderqueer behaviour is textually permitted and even praised – followed by Michal’s criticism, a safe conduit for the narrator to provide both an explanation for and put limits on David’s gender transgression. The second layer occurs within the modern reader, who influenced by the assumption of modern binary gender, superimposes binarization onto the text, re-masculinizing David. The text’s conflict is read as exclusively social – a political conflict between Michal and David on the role of a king and tension between two ruling families – or spiritual. This modern, cis-assumptive analysis is the most pervasive and ignores the intersection of cultic practice and genderfluidity, particularly in the ancient Mediterranean. Queer theory and historical anthropological context provide tools by which silencing and binarization can be interrogated and probed, and by which 2 Sam. 6 can be further explored and critically examined.

## CHAPTER FIVE: TRANSLATION OF 2 SAMUEL 6

### Overview

Since the central context for my research is 2 Samuel 6, I will offer my own translation. My translation of 2 Samuel 6 prioritizes the MT and includes the major variances arising from differences in the MT, LXX, and 4QSam<sup>a</sup> either in my footnotes or in brackets, as applicable. I have endeavoured to preserve idiomatic language and narrative flow.

### Translation

**1** Again David assembled all thirty thousand<sup>1</sup> of Israel's chosen soldiers.<sup>2</sup> **2** David and all the people who were with him arose and went to Baale Judah,<sup>3</sup> to bring up from there the ark of Elohim, who is called name, by the name,<sup>4</sup> Hashem of Armies, the One Who Dwells Between the Cherubim.

**3** They mounted the ark of Elohim on a new cart and conveyed it out from Abinadab's house, which is on the hill, and Uzzah and Ahio,<sup>5</sup> the sons of Abindab, drove <sup>6</sup> the new cart. **4** And they carried the ark of Elohim out of Abinadab's house on the hill, and<sup>7</sup> Ahio walked in front of the ark. **5** And David and all the house of Israel celebrated before Hashem, with exuberant singing and playing on all kinds of conifer [instruments],<sup>8</sup> on two kinds of lyres, on hand-drums, on rattles, and on cymbals.<sup>9</sup>

**6** When they came to the threshing floor of Nachon,<sup>10</sup> Uzzah reached out for the ark of Elohim and grabbed it, because the oxen had stumbled. **7** And Hashem's face burned hot against Uzzah and Elohim struck Uzzah down, right by the ark of Elohim, over the *shal*.<sup>11</sup> **8** And David's

face burned hot at this outburst of Hashem, this breach against Uzzah, and he called the place Perez Uzzah, and it is still called that today.

**9** David became afraid of Hashem that day, and he asked himself,<sup>12</sup> 'How can the ark of Hashem come to me?' **10** So David refused to move the ark of Hashem with him, into the city of David, instead turning it aside to the house of Obed-edom, the Gittite. **11** The ark of Hashem remained in Obed-edom's house for three months, and Hashem blessed Obed-edom and his entire household.

**12** It was reported to David that Hashem had blessed the house of Obed-edom and everything that belonged to him, because of the ark of Elohim,<sup>13</sup> so David went and brought up the ark of Elohim from Obed-edom's house to the city of David with great delight. **13** When [the seven dancing troupes] carrying the ark had gone six paces,<sup>14</sup> he sacrificed an ox and a fatling.<sup>15</sup> **14** David twirled<sup>16</sup> with all his might before Hashem, wearing a linen ephod. **15** So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of Hashem with joyful shouting and blasts of the horn.

**16** And as the ark of Hashem entered the city of David, Michal, the daughter of Saul, looked through the window and saw King David leaping and twirling before Hashem, and she despised him in her heart.

**17** They brought the ark of Hashem and set it in its place inside the tent David had raised for it, and David sacrificed burnt offerings and well-being<sup>17</sup> offerings before Hashem. **18** When David finished sacrificing the burnt offerings and well-being offerings, he blessed the people in the name of Hashem of Armies. **19** And he distributed to all the people, to all the multitude of Israel, both men and women, to everyone, a ringed loaf of bread, a date cake, and a raisin cake. And everyone went back to their homes.

**20** David turned back to bless his household, and Michal, the daughter of Saul, came out to greet him, and said: ‘how honourable was the king of Israel today, who exposed himself today in front of the enslaved women<sup>18</sup> of his servants as shamelessly exposed as a fool.’<sup>19</sup> **21** David replied to Michal, ‘It was before Hashem – who chose me, instead of your father, and all his house, to appoint me ruler over Israel! Therefore, I will cavort<sup>20</sup> before Hashem. **22** And I will be even more dishonourable<sup>21</sup> – I will be humbled in my own<sup>22</sup> eyes, but among the enslaved women you speak of, they will hold me in honour.’ **23** So, to her dying day, Michal, the daughter of Saul, had no children.

#### Notes on the Translation

<sup>1</sup> I have translated אלף as ‘thousands’, keeping with Klein (1997, pp. 270-82) and Flanders (2018, pp. 484-506). I have based this on their excellent examinations of use of אלף in the Deuteronomistic History and the literary parallel between the 30,000 soldiers lost in 1 Sam. 4.10 in the battle against the Philistines in which the ark is taken and this re-appearance of the ark. These types of exaggerated figures are also seen in other ancient Mesopotamian and Levantine narratives, such as the Assyrian Royal Inscriptions between 1400-800 BCE (Flanders, 2018, p. 504-05).

<sup>2</sup> McCarter translates בחור as ‘elite troops’ (1984, p. 161). This is a departure from Fokkelman’s ‘picked men’, Hertzberg’s ‘chosen men’, and Tsumura’s ‘select men’ (1990, p. 184; 1964, p. 275; 2019, p. 110). The word may be used to literally describe young men; however, Tsumura acknowledges that the term ‘may be a technical term for “selected warriors”’ (2019, p. 111). In several places – Judg. 20.15-16, 34; 1 Sam. 24.2, 26.1; 2 Sam 10.9 – this is

contextually demonstrated to describe men chosen for war (Clines, 2009, p. 44; Tsumura, 2019, p. 110). In this passage, the context – the narrator’s use of 30,000 – evokes the image of young, strong soldiers, a subversion of the loss Israel took in 1 Sam 4.10. As such, I have translated it as ‘chosen soldiers’.

<sup>3</sup> The 4QSam<sup>a</sup> reads ‘Baale, it is Kirath Jearim, which belongs to Judah’.

<sup>4</sup> Hertzberg, McCarter, and Tsumura all offer explanations for this peculiar verse.

Hertzberg argues that the doubled  $\text{נש}$  ‘[shows] that originally only *šēm yahweh* stood here’, the full title a late addition and thus presents the verse as ‘. . . over which the name of the LORD is named the name of the LORD of hosts. . .’ (1964, p. 275). McCarter notes that the 4QSam<sup>a</sup> is inconclusive and follows the LXX, offering ‘. . . over which the name of Yahweh. . .’ and excising the double (1984, pp. 161, 163). However, referencing Rolf August Carlson, he suggests ‘[a] case can be made for retaining’  $\text{נש}$  by ‘reading the first as *šām*’ (Carlson, 1964, p. 63; McCarter, 1984, p. 163). Tsumura ignores the doubling and instead focuses on the specific titles (2019, pp. 110, 112).

<sup>5</sup> ‘Ahio’ may also be translated as ‘his brother’. I have chosen to render as a proper name because of its use in v. 4.

<sup>6</sup>  $\text{נָהִיג}$  may be translated as ‘drove’, ‘led’, ‘urged on’, or ‘guided’ according to Clines (2009, p. 262). Hertzberg reads it as ‘driving’ (1964, p. 276). McCarter reads it as ‘guiding’ (1984, p. 161). Tsumura reads it as ‘leading’ (2019, p. 111). I have chosen ‘drove’ over ‘led’ or ‘guided’ since both ‘led’ and ‘guided’ often evoke a more passive role to modern readers. In v. 4, Ahio is walking in front of the ark – and therefore, the cart as well. This stands in contrast with 1 Samuel 6.7-12, where the narrator emphasizes that untrained, young milch cows carry the ark to



Beth Shemesh independent of human intervention. Instead, the narrator of 2 Samuel 6 implies no exceptional behaviour: the cart is driven and managed by human hands.

<sup>7</sup> Hertzberg and McCarter both have Uzzah walking alongside the cart to this verse (1964, pp. 275-76; 1984, p. 161). McCarter defends his choice as a reconstruction based on LXX<sup>L</sup> (1984, p. 163), while Hertzberg makes the same argument but from the text of follows the Biblia Hebraica (1964, pp. 275-76). Like Polzin and Tsumura, I see no literary basis to add Uzzah to the verse (1993, p 61; 2019, p. 112).

<sup>8</sup> Following David P. Wright's interpretation, I am including the LXX ('with might and with songs') and the 4QSam<sup>a</sup> ('with songs') (2002, pp. 203-07). Wright argues persuasively that the parallels between v. 5 and v. 14, along with the 4QSam<sup>a</sup> and LXX's inclusion of the descriptive clause 'with songs'/'with might and songs', point to common original, with the MT a result of scribal error or redaction (2002, pp. 203-07). Although a historical-critical textual studies are not my primary concern, I have included this since it has a direct influence on the literary focus of the text. The parallels between v. 5 and v. 14 created by the repeating phrase compliment and reenforce the other two parallels – the repeated 'term for dance' and the phrase 'before Hashem' (2002, p. 206). However, Wright suggests the inclusion of the LXX/4QSam<sup>a</sup> come with the removal of the troublesome phrase: *בכל עצי ברזשים* (2002, pp. 203-07). Here, I disagree with his opinion. I have included the phrase – although it is absent from both the LXX and 4QSam<sup>a</sup> because I am primarily following the MT. The phrase is troublesome, and as Wright notes, unusual and awkward, but that need not deter its inclusion (2002, pp. 203-07).

<sup>9</sup> I follow Wright's excellent analysis and identification the instruments of v. 5 (2002, pp. 203-06). Wright looks at both textual and archaeological attestation of instruments – of particular

interest is the presence of hand drums, and the two types of lyres, both of which will be discussed shortly, see Exegesis (2002, p. 203). *ובכנרות ובוכלים* is often translated as ‘with lyres and harps’ – Hertzberg – or as ‘with lyres, harps’ – McCarter and Tsumura (1964, p. 276; 1984, p. 161; 2019, p. 111). However, according to Wright, this refers to two distinct forms of lyres, the ‘*כנור-lyre*’ and the ‘*נבל-lyre*’, distinctions consistent with the variation in lyre types documented between 1000-330 BCE – a generous range of dates (2002, p. 203-04). There is no English word for these two types of lyres, so I have chosen to render them collectively as ‘two kinds of lyres’. Wright translates *ובמנענים* as ‘rattles’, based on the root word, *נוע*, and notes that ‘clay rattles’ have been well documented in archaeological research (2002, p. 203). Wright also addresses the cymbals, which while well-documented in the text, are not archaeologically attested to this period, however, the language is clear enough to warrant its identification as such, either because of late authorship or an incomplete archaeological record (2002, p. 203).

<sup>10</sup> The 4QSam<sup>a</sup> has ‘Nodan’. McCarter notes that in addition to being a proper name, it may also be a Niphal participle, leading to translations such as ‘certain’, ‘secure’, ‘prepared’, and ‘of the stroke’ (1984, p. 164). The LXX<sup>L</sup> diverges significantly, attributing the threshing floor to ‘Araunah the Jebusite’ who also appears in 2 Sam. 24.18-25 (McCarter, 1984, p. 164). I have chosen to render *נכון* as a proper name, following the LXX’s *Ναχών*.

<sup>11</sup> The meaning of this word is unknown, and it is not used elsewhere in the biblical text. It is typically translated ‘his error’ – ESV, KJB, NKJB, ERV, ASV, LSV, NHEB, WEB, Young’s –, ‘his irreverence’/‘his irreverent act’/‘his lack of respect’ – Tsumura, NASB, Amplified, CSB, HCSB, GNT, NIV, GWB –, or ‘his indiscretion’ – JPS –, on the basis of 1 Chron. 13.10, where Uzzah’s murder is explicitly the direct result of touching the ark. Tsumura

does not even spare it a footnote (2019, p. 114). The LXX replaces על השל with επί τη προπετεία – ‘for the rashness’ – while the 4QSam<sup>a</sup> mirrors 1 Chron. 13.10 – ‘because he put his hand on the ark’ (2 Sam. 6.7). McCarter spends a significant amount of time on this verse, arguing that על השל ‘is a remnant of a longer addition’, with the original MT following the 4QSam<sup>a</sup> and 1 Chron. 13.10 (1984, p. 161, 164-65). I have chosen to render השל as ‘the *shal*’ because I am particularly interested in examining the tension created by the narrator’s ambiguity. This is explored in greater detail in both my Exegesis and chapter seven.

<sup>12</sup> McCarter renders David’s self-directed question as “‘How’, he said to himself, “can the holy ark. . .”” (1984, p. 161). Likewise, I have translated it as, ‘he asked himself’, emphasizing that David says this not for the benefit of any possible listeners, but on behalf of the narrator, who allows us a glimpse into David’s anxieties (and priorities).

<sup>13</sup> The LXX<sup>L</sup> and OL include ‘and David said, “I will bring the blessing back to my house.”’ McCarter argues that this was due to a scribal error, either intentionally or unintentionally (1984, pp. 165-66).

<sup>14</sup> McCarter notes that the LXX and the LXX<sup>B</sup> significantly diverge from the MT, reading ‘and with him were seven dancing troupes carrying the ark’ (1984, p. 166). The MT refers the ark-bearers only as ‘those bearing the ark’. I have included the LXX’s imagery since it is especially poignant as a reversal of the martial imagery of the first procession: where there once were troops, there are now troupes.

<sup>15</sup> 4QSam<sup>a</sup> reads ‘seven bulls and seven rams’. Tsumura notes that the MT’s ‘an ox and a fatling’ might ‘be a *hendiadys* meaning “a fattened bull”’ (2019, p. 118). Hertzberg and McCarter hotly contest if the passage suggests that a sacrifice was made once after six steps, or

reoccurring every six steps, with Tsumura following McCarter (1964, p. 279; 1984, pp. 170-71; 2019, pp. 117-18). While there is ample evidence that repeated sacrifices were a part of cultic ritual, both in the Biblical text – 2 Kings 85, 63 – and elsewhere in ancient Mesopotamia and Levant, I side with Fokkelman’s reading of the text (McCarter, 1984, p0. 170-71; Tsumura, 2019, pp. 117-18). Fokkelman argues that this numeric focus is a way to ‘[bring] together the coordinates of space and time and renders them concrete and visual’ (1990, p. 194). It does not matter if the sacrifice is repeated or singular – it does not serve (necessarily) as a glimpse into cultic behaviours in Israel or ancient Mesopotamia and Levant, but as a literary device, wielded by the narrator to add tension and symbolism (which will be discussed further, see Exegesis).

<sup>16</sup> Hertzberg notes that מְכַרְכֵּר ‘is connected with *kikkār* (circle), and represents a rotating movement’ (1964, p. 280). I have translated it as ‘twirling’, however Brueggemann, Hertzberg, Tsumura, and van Wijk-Bos all render מְכַרְכֵּר as ‘danced’ or ‘dancing’ (1990, p. 250; 1964, p. 276; 2019, p. 116; 2020, p. 251). Fokkelman translates it generally as ‘dancing’ and then, in v. 16, more specifically as ‘clapping’ (1990, pp. 194-96). McCarter renders it as ‘strumming’, following the LXX (1984, p. 166-67). The LXX reads, ‘And David played music on instruments’ (2 Sam. 6.14).

<sup>17</sup> I am indebted to the 1985 edition of the JPS for this excellent translation of the phrase וְשִׁלְמִים, which I have used in both vv. 17 and 18.

<sup>18</sup> There is a class issue broached by the word אִמָּהוֹת. Brueggemann, Hertzberg, and Tsumura translate it as ‘maids’ (1990, pp. 251-52; 1964, p. 277; 2019, p. 119-120). McCarter uses both ‘wenches’ and ‘bondmaids’ (1984, pp. 185, 188). van Wijk-Bos acknowledges the term is ‘sometimes rendered “slave girls”’ however, she argues that ‘[t]he emphasis. . . is more

likely on gender than class' (2020, p. 252). This is echoed by Tsumura's suggestion that the women actually refer to 'all the young women of Israel' rather than enslaved women in Jerusalem, either in the general or specific (2019, p. 120). van Wijk-Bos goes on to suggest that '[i]t is difficult to know how class was experienced in ancient Israel' (2020, p. 252).

While this may be the case, textually, the word is used in the Torah to refer to a woman who is bound to person of higher class than themselves (Gen. 20.17, 21.10,12-13, 30.3, 33; Exod. 2.5, 20.10, 17, 21.17, 20, 26-27, 32, 23.12; Lev. 25.6, 25.44, Deut. 5.14). It is uncertain if this same lack of agency is being described in 2 Sam, but it is certainly likely. I have specifically chosen the phrase 'enslaved women' because I do not want to soften the historical injustice of slavery, and I want to describe these women with dignity and respect, recognizing that in English, the term 'girl' has been used as pejorative to reinforce classist and racist beliefs about enslaved people as childlike and incompetent.

<sup>19</sup> הרקים is a pejorative with the primary meaning of 'empty' or 'vain' when used as a noun (Clines, 2009, p. 421). I have translated it as 'fool' – unfortunately, blunting its impact. This is discussed further, see Exegesis.

<sup>20</sup> The verb שחק appears both here, in v. 21 and in v. 5. I have chosen to translate it as 'cavort' in this instance, despite rendering it 'celebrate' in v. 5, because of the context in which it is presented. David's dancing and celebration has taken on a sexual undertone, consistent with 'cavorting' which nominally describes enthusiastic dancing and movement but carries implicit sexuality.

<sup>21</sup> I have translated ונקלתי as 'dishonourable' rather than 'undignified', 'despised', or 'trifling', since David is countering Michal's accusation of lost honour in v. 20 and closing his

pronouncement with the assertion that the enslaved women will consider him honourable.

There is precedent for translating it as such, since Clines notes that the Hiphil form is translated as ‘dishonourable’, in both Isaiah 23.9 and, more relevantly for my translation, 2 Samuel 19.44 (2009, pp. 395-96).

<sup>22</sup> LXX reads ‘your eyes’.

## Exegesis

**1-4.** The narrator opens with a description of a military parade, presenting David as both a skilful warrior and political figure, through the reference to the ‘thirty thousand. . . chosen soldiers’ (2 Sam 6.1). In v. 2, Hashem is described in explicitly martial language himself, as ‘Hashem of Armies’. This immediately lays the foundation of a contest of masculine prowess between David and Hashem: only one of them can ultimately command the troops of Israel.

The identification of the ark contains a strange moment of repetition – ‘called name, by the name’ – which may be a preserved scribal error pointing to alternate language, but also may be the embodiment of suppressed anxiety over Hashem. Names and titles convey and reinforce systemic power and authority. Hashem’s naming positions him relative to the narrative: a supreme, divine force of martial power, both in the natural and supernatural world. The doubling draws the reader’s eye and attention to the tension and unease created by referencing divine power: it is dangerous, uncomfortable business.

In v. 4, anxiety is wielded as a rhetorical device. In v. 3, the narrator’s gaze turns to Ahio, Uzzah, and the ark, but in v. 4, the gaze is extended, pushing into uncanny relief an otherwise mundane arrangement. The narrator moves at a reasonable speed, rarely using a verse to restate

already articulated information – the only possible exception is vv. 13-15, where this sudden change in form draws the reader’s attention and signals that something significant has or is about to occur.

Fokkelman notes this, asking if there is ‘an omen’ embedded in the descriptions of Ahio and Uzzah in vv. 3-4 (1990, pp. 187). He sees an implied reference to Phineas and Hophni in their introduction and description, with the grammar mirroring the pair: ‘two concrete operations. . . supported by two circumstantial clauses’ to introduce ‘two priests’ (1990, p. 187). However, unfortunately, he misses the narrator’s use of v. 4 as a rhetorical device to express actual or constructed anxiety over a holy object.

This anxiety is created through the ark’s description. In the second portion of v. 4, it is not ‘the ark of Elohim’, as it has been and is predominantly referred to, or even ‘the ark of Hashem’, as it is referenced in vv. 9-11 and 16-17. This is the only instance where the ark is described without a modifier, but simply as ‘the ark’. The narrator, who has spent such care in the preceding verses naming the ark and centring Hashem’s divinity, creates a sense of unease. Unlike 1 Sam 6.10-12, there is no supernatural hand driving the ark: it is a deeply banal moment. The ark, symbolically divorced of its divine association, becomes an object carried on a cart, pulled by oxen who are driven by a man.

This emphasis on the natural draws the reader’s attention to the pending supernatural. Ahio’s (and Uzzah’s, as we will see in v. 6-7) actions obscure the power of Hashem, paralleling David’s own emasculation of Hashem, via armed transport. However, unlike David, Ahio and Uzzah are physically closest to the ark. The ark in v. 2 is rendered as a fluid, divine object, existing in both the natural and supernatural world: the narrator hints at its future depiction as a

conduit for divine power, bursting from one world into the next. The abrupt shift in v. 4 focuses the narrative on the absence of divine power and the tension created by it: the supernatural lies just beneath the surface.

As David's celebration takes centre stage in v. 5, the narrator's foreshadowing is complete: the reader is aware that two threads, two realities, run through the text.

**5.** Wright's observation on instruments is valuable for understanding the social cues David's first procession utilize. While the lyre is a masculine-coded instrument in the biblical text, the hand drum, is traditionally both masculine- and feminine-coded (Clines, 1995, p. 227-28; Meyers, 2001, pp. 59-60, 66-73). The hand drum is referenced in 1 Sam. 10.5, as accompanying a group of prophets, and in 1 Sam. 18.6-7, used by Israelite women to celebrate David and Saul's victories over the Philistines. Elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, hand drums continue to be used as tools of both divine celebration or victory and/or human victories (Meyers, 2001, pp. 70-72). Although the explicit reference to lyres, *implicitly* references David's musical ability, a masculine-coded trait, the musical portion of the first procession itself is ambiguous. It is ostensibly for Hashem's glory and pleasure, however, David's troops and references to David's musical talents with the lyre, undermine the centring of Hashem.

**6-8.** Uzzah's murder is a narrative fulcrum in the text, and a point of intense unease. In nearly all modern commentaries, Uzzah's murder is explained and justified, as I will discuss in chapter seven. This can occur at the cost of alignment with the narrator's implicit or overt conclusions, depending on the commentary. The MT offers readers the most ambiguous depiction of Uzzah's murder and the LXX and 4QSam<sup>a</sup> offer the most concrete explanation. I



believe this preoccupation with a solution is the product of the commentator's role, interpretative style, and individual – likely, unconscious – anxieties over the murder.

Commentary, by its nature, typically attempts to provide meaning. Historical-critical analysis typically looks for evidence of narrative seams, exposing editors, redactors, and compilers. While this inevitability produces meaning and explanation, it is often critical of the narrator, who is the primary agent of the constructed final text. In commentary on vv. 6-8, this narrative suspicion is largely absent, indicating, in my opinion, that the commentator's anxiety over Hashem's behaviour drives their explanations in some part: Hashem's rage is a terrible, unpredictable thing. An explanation neuters this unpredictability – and even power! – since what is predictable can be prevented.

This is not to assume that my commentators believe in Hashem as a literal being, or the text as partially or completely accurate. Instead, Hashem embodies the unpredictability of life: Penchansky reads 2 Samuel 6 as a reflection of 'the Israelites' experience' in a world that was chaotic and dangerous (1999, p. 30). He goes on to frame this in theological terms, concluding that Hashem was 'imagined. . . as an exacting judge. . . perpetually angry' (1999, p. 30). While theological responses have varied over time and place, I believe Hashem evokes the chaos of nature and life: the commentators' anxiety stems not from a fear of Hashem, but their own understanding that we do indeed live in a chaotic and dangerous world, where birth and death, celebration and suffering co-occur without sufficient explanation.

By offering a meaning, the commentators defang this randomness: the narrative is contextualized not as a viscerally familiar image, but as a theological conclusion – if this, then that. While, like the commentaries I reference, I offer an explanation for Hashem's anger, I

believe it is important to acknowledge and sit with the anxiety of the text. Sitting through this discomfort allows the reader to remain critical of the narrator.

Additionally, I have also preserved the imagery of Hashem's – and David's – anger. In the Hebrew, the idiom used is one's 'nose grew hot' (2 Sam. 6.7-8). This visceral depiction of anger also hints at the embarrassment that Uzzah's presumption, which is based on David's presumption that the ark needs to be protected, causes. Uzzah and David implicitly un-man Hashem: Uzzah presumably by touching the ark, and David by his show of military strength. This anger re-establishes Hashem as a force with hegemonic power, to be feared and treated as a superior.

**9-11.** Both Hashem and David experience this embodied anger, but Hashem's rage leads to a demonstration of power. David's rage is subsumed into (resentful?) fear. In the contest of wills, David must bend to Hashem. His refusal to bring the ark into Jerusalem – which the narrator observes is 'the city of David' (2 Sam. 6.10) – may be motivated by anxiety or a passive aggressive attempt to regain control over the situation. The narrator addresses this by offering the reader a glimpse into David's mind through David's rhetorical question, 'How can the ark of Hashem come to me?' (2 Sam. 6.9). The narrator thus presents David as fundamentally afraid, not subversive or spiteful – David's naming of the ark acknowledges the ark's role as embodiment of Hashem, as a powerful divine object, and therefore, his place in relationship to it, as an unworthy supplicant.

We should not necessarily assume however, that the narrator intends us to accept this *פשוט*. David's actions are not placating. He diverts the ark to a subordinate's house – and not to one of his commanders, either, but an unknown foreigner. Obed-edom, as I will discuss in

chapter seven is likely a Philistine, whose name means ‘servant of (the deity) Edom’ (McCarter, 1984, p. 170). As Jennings observes, ‘YHWH can’t transport his own ark to Jerusalem’ and is symbolically discarded with ‘foreigners’ (2001, p. 53). David can now watch Hashem’s actions from a safe distance while deciding what to do (2001, p. 53). David is therefore coded as both submissive and subversive as he attempts to evade Hashem’s rage.

**12-15.** Fokkelman’s analysis of David’s dancing as a ‘concrete and visual’ symbol is particularly relevant. David, upon hearing of Obed-Edom’s success with the ark, concludes that the parade should be re-started. In line with a subversive reading of David’s motives, the LXX<sup>L</sup> and the OL include David reflecting, ‘I will bring the blessing back to my house’ (2 Sam. 6.12). The narrator appears to be centring David – in accordance with David’s own goals, apparently – however, David’s dancing tempers this dangerous focus on David over Hashem.

David’s dancing, while performed by David, is described by the narrator – from their own mouth as well as David’s – as for Hashem (2 Sam. 6.14, 21). The danger of Hashem growing jealous over David’s feature as parade conductor, organizer, and patron is tempered by David’s symbolic ‘total surrender’ through dance (Fokkelman, 1990, pp. 194, 196). The narrator skilfully builds tension as the reader watches David teeter between submission and dominance, then fall completely into submission.<sup>118</sup>

**16-19.** David’s offerings and ephod serve a similar function as his dancing: it marks him as trans-gressive. David’s dancing implicitly transgresses social boundaries establishing him as an object of desire, existing in relation to hegemonic power, as embodied by the ark, which serves as a physical manifestation of Hashem in the mundane world. His priestly role, as I will

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<sup>118</sup> It is worth asking if David’s submission is authentic or a ploy devised to secure Hashem’s favour. This is not an answerable question; the narrator of Samuel has shown David is quite capable of duplicity if it serves his interests.

discuss in chapter eight is explicitly feminine-coded. The ephod both reveals and conceals David's genitals,<sup>119</sup> according to Michal in v. 20, and visibly marks him as belonging to Hashem.<sup>120</sup> Setting aside questions of cultic ritual, particularly who could make offerings – not simply bring the gift, but perform the ceremony –, and whether the priestly stipulations on appropriate cultic dress applied to the Samuel scroll, David 'prepares' through sacrifice and serves food on behalf of Hashem, to both men and women, another feminine-coded role. The narrator depicts David as inciting pleasure for Hashem – and possibly onlookers – and serving on Hashem's behalf.

**20-23.** When David returns home, Michal meets him. As van Wijk-Bos notes, their conversation is deeply unusual for the Hebrew Bible: Michal is clearly angry at David and her sharp criticism is openly defiant. The narrator moves Michal from her liminal position in the window – in the domestic sphere – to meeting David as he heads home (2 Samuel 6.16, 20; 2020, p. 252). Did their argument occur in the street? In a courtyard? In their home? Michal's movement is not necessarily an indication of her physical position relative to David, but her social position relative to David. Her open rebuke reinforces this: Michal meets David as a social superior.

Michal's primary complaint hinges on honour – David's partial nudity and trans-gressive behaviour has marked him as vulnerable to hegemonic restructuring. נגלה refers to both literal exposure and metaphorical exposure (Clines, 2009, p. 66). In 1 and 2 Samuel, it is used to

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<sup>119</sup> This glimpse of David's penis is profoundly transgressive, it is both seen and unseen, as it is covered/exposed by the ephod. I would argue that while the penis is often understood as a foundationally masculine symbol, that it is the way this symbol is depicted that is so explicitly feminine coded: David is marked as an object of desire, down to his most intimate features, which are revealed for the enjoyment of Hashem, a profoundly and inescapably masculine figure.

<sup>120</sup> The ephod is seen in the Samuel scrolls as a wearable garment (1 Sam. 2.8, 2.28, 14.3; 2 Sam. 6.14) or item (1 Sam 14.18, 21.10, 23.6, 23.9, 30.17) exclusively in connection with Hashem.

describe divine revelation (1 Sam. 2.27; 3.7; 3.21; 9.15; 2 Sam. 15.19), uncovering a hidden act, object, or person (1 Sam. 14.8; 14.11; 20.2; 20.12-13; 22.8; 22.17; 2 Sam. 22.16), or being removed from a place, such as in exile (1 Sam. 4.21-22; 15.19). Contextually, it appears that David's dancing resulted in partial or complete nudity. David makes no attempt to refute this possibility and this exchange, as I will discuss in chapter nine, this exchange with Michal heavily influenced modern images of the ephod. Through the ephod, David is explicitly tied to the priesthood, but through his nudity, he is explicitly eye candy – for Hashem, David asserts.

By framing David's feminized performance in terms of religious adherence, the narrator is able to air and dismiss possible concerns about genderfluidity while placing regulatory boundaries around genderqueer performativity. Michal, as a woman, is a safe voice for this tension: her anger undermines David's authority over his household, however, this authority is restored through David's dismissal of her rebuke. Further, David qualifies his actions, and the narrator limits it with David's refrain – 'before Hashem' (2 Sam. 6.21). The narrator closes with the statement that Michal 'had no children', which can be understood as the result of David's agency, Hashem's agency, or Michal's agency. van Wijk-Bos notes that 'childlessness in the world of ancient Israel indeed put a woman in a precarious social and economic position' but that Michal is relatively insulated from this as a royal wife (2020, p. 253). van Wijk-Bos, Clines, Fewell, and Gunn all argue that Michal's infertility is quite possibly an intentional decision by Michal (Clines, 1991, p. 139-140; Fewell and Gunn, 1993, p. 155; van Wijk-Bos, 2020, p. 253). The ambiguity of v. 23 subverts David's familial authority even as it appears to reinforce it: David's virility and successors are not necessarily the product of his will and hegemonic masculinity, but dependent on the favour of a woman and deity.

Returning to the image of David as Hashem's trophy wife, there are three particular moments that explicitly make this point. The first is in Michal's speech, where she compares David to אהז הרקים and the second is in David's response, where he tells Michal he will ושחקתי before Hashem (2 Sam. 6.20, 22). The final moment, also from David, comes from his assertion that he will be שפל in his own eyes – or Michal's eyes, according to the LXX (2 Sam. 6.22).

אהז הרקים carries the connotation of emptiness, worthlessness, and vanity (Clines, 2009, p. 421). While I have translated it as 'fool', there are promiscuous implications, both from how Michal uses the phrase – 'as shamelessly exposed as. . .' – and in the connection to vanity, which was seen in later rabbinic sources, such as Berishit Rabbah 87:3-4, as a feminine or feminizing vice (2 Sam. 6.20; Macwilliam, 2009, p. 273). David's rebuttal, that he will 'cavort before Hashem' follows this theme (2 Sam. 6.21). Hügel draws attention to the connection between ושחקתי and its byform צחק, which retains the base meaning of 'to laugh' or 'to play' – Clines includes 'perform' – but also 'euphemistically connotes. . . sexual acts' (Clines, 2009, p. 378; Hügel, 2016, p. 255). David is nominally dancing, as indicated by the narrator's verb choice, but his nudity and feminization hint at implicit sexuality.

This is reinforced by David's assertion that he will be שפל in his own eyes (2 Sam. 6.22). The Hebrew specifically means 'low' in the both the adjective and verb form (Clines, 2009, p. 476). As a verb, it means 'to be brought low', 'be abased', 'be demoted', 'sinking' and even to 'humiliate' a person in the Hiphil form (Clines, 2009, p. 476). David's behaviour is not an example of subordinate masculinity, acknowledging Hashem has the hegemonic ideal while continuing to benefit from the social power afforded to men and masculinity, but of queerness.

David is estranged from masculinity through his continued feminine performativity: it is a deliberate choice that has made (and will continue to make) him lowly in social station.

David says he will be honoured by the enslaved women Michal mentions in v. 20, which van Wijk-Bos and Tsumura argues is primarily a reference to gender, rather than class (Tsumura, 2019, p. 120; van Wijk-Bos, 2020, p. 252). However, as discussed in Note 18, the language is too specific to warrant a generalization by gender. Michal frames David's behaviour as a class issue – he is behaving like a fool (2 Sam. 6.20). van Wijk-Bos acknowledges this when she observes that 'clearly Michal refers to a women of a lower class than herself' (2020, p. 252). It is not that David has exposed himself to women in the general sense, to 'all the young women of Israel', but that he is trans-gressing his social role and moving rapidly downwards (2019, p. 120).

## CHAPTER SIX: 2 SAMUEL 6 IN TIME AND SPACE

### Dating and Placing the Samuel Scrolls

While my analysis is not interested in the historicity of David or his peers in the Samuel texts<sup>121</sup> and a thorough evaluation of the extensive scholarship on the matter is beyond the scope of this thesis, for the sake of cultural context, I believe the text must be dated and placed in time and space. All texts, regardless of historicity, exist as constructions by authors and editors, products of the intersection between time and place, in conversation with sociological concerns and standards of such. I will begin by discussing how other scholars have dated the Samuel story, then offer my own argument for dating the text. Then, turning to the issue of place, I will analyse possible locations and justify my position.

### Dating: Deuteronomistic History and Exilic Judah in Relation to Samuel

1 and 2 Samuel are often considered a part of the Deuteronomistic History, a theory popularized by German traditional-historical biblical scholar Martin Noth which connected Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings under the umbrella of a single work – the Deuteronomistic history – during the Exilic period (Noth, 1981, pp. 1-11). As historical-critical readings of biblical texts have been subject to thorough and fascinating criticism, a range of excellent perspectives and plausible alternative theories have arisen. For the purposes of this thesis, I have limited my analysis to several distinctive historical-critical readings that include Samuel.

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<sup>121</sup> As Hebrew Bible scholar Robert Alter rightly notes, the division of Samuel in 1 Samuel and 2 Samuel is ‘purely an artifact of ancient manuscript production’ and scroll length (1999, p. x).



Bible scholar David Gunn argues that ‘the more historical perspective becomes an integral part of our understanding of the text the greater the chance that that understanding may be grossly distorted’ (1989, p. 34). I agree. Dating the text of Samuel is fundamentally uncertain work. There is no definitive answer and as scholarship has evolved, our questions grow faster than sure answers. Biblical archaeologists are continually bringing to light new artifacts that challenge our presuppositions about ancient Levant and Mesopotamia, increasing our understanding of what the ancient world was like.<sup>122</sup> It is beyond the scope of this thesis to suggest a firm date for the Samuel text, however, when considering the impact of cultural context on the narrative, it cannot be properly understood without some anchor in time and space, as risky a proposition as it may be. Instead, Gunn, and other biblical scholars and historians such as K.L. Noll, consider Samuel ‘serious entertainment’, a work of literature and art (Gunn, 1989, p. 61; Noll, 1999, p. 38).

Following Noll, I find the argument for an ‘assembled’ Samuel, with some portions the product of ‘the Judean royal dynasty’ and the narrative whole (or most of the whole), the product of the Persian period, quite compelling (1999, p. 41; 2007, pp. 311-45). This argument is supported by linguistic scholarship (Knauf, 1990, pp. 11-23; Knauf, 1985, p. 12) and narrative analysis (Noll, 1999, pp. 33-40). Noll believes that ‘the purpose of the Samuel scroll was essentially aesthetic, the story being intended for an elite educated audience who would have been expected to follow the complicated series of plot twists’ (1997, p. 185). Setting this aside

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<sup>122</sup> I am thinking in particular of evidence of large exilic and post-exilic Judean populations in Mesopotamia, of the Tel Dan Stele, with the phrase ‘בֵּית דָּוִד’ or ‘house of David’, and of on-going excavations in Israel – which may be the product of a unified tribal nation or evidence of the Israelite monarchy’s impressive reach, see Finkelstein and Mazar (2007) for a side-by-side comparison of high/low chronology arguments.

for the time being – we will return to it shortly – I believe that Noll and Gunn’s literary hypothesis is plausible.

Noll offers a broad range of dates, arguing that the text evolves as it passed from generation to generation, adapting to cultural influences (1999, pp. 42-50). I believe it is most likely that Samuel evolved from Judean stories – possibly written, although Noll acknowledges that even ‘very optimistic’ estimates place the literate population of Jerusalem at ‘no more than a few hundred’<sup>123</sup> during ‘any given generation during the Judean monarchy and the Babylonian-Persian eras’ (1999, p. 39). Noll’s vision of a narrative which coalesced during the Exile feels very plausible.

While this is much later than the typical high chronology scholarship, and slightly earlier than some low chronology scholarship, it falls comfortably within the range of possibility. Since both linguistic and narrative analysis support this dating, I have used it to anchor the text in time.

As previously mentioned, my thesis acknowledges that the author(s) of Samuel holds a metaphorical paintbrush rather than a lens.<sup>124</sup> The biblical text cannot be understood as purely the framing of pre-existent themes, characters, and pieces, but exists as wholly constructed work. Even if modelled on historical characters, the narrative may not offer any historicity. Any historicity it contains serves the narrative and the narrator: it is a rhetorical effect with a predesignated purpose – to advance the narrator’s aims.

This is not a universally held position, however. There are scholars who hold, like Noth, that the text has been created from existing (historical) material, or, like Thomas L. Thompson,

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<sup>123</sup> These figures are drawn from the work of Magen Broshi and Walter E. Aufrecht, et al (Broshi, 1993, pp. 14-18; Aufrecht, et al, 1997, pp. 116-29).

<sup>124</sup> I am indebted to Barbara Green’s artistic metaphors (2003, pp. 4, 6).

that it contains ‘fragments of memory’ (Noth, 1981, pp. 75-88; Thompson, 1999, p. 31). This theory does not necessarily imply such material is accessible. Thompson argues that any historical foundation to the Deuteronomistic history has been so enmeshed, changed, and re-purposed that it is no longer possible to disentangle it from the historian’s hand (1992, pp. 111-12).

Whilst Thompson’s views come very close to intersecting my own, I reject his underwritten assumption as unnecessary to my reading. The historicity of the text should not be supposed since it cannot be proven and is not required to offer a queer interpretation. The large sociological and cultural trends of the period and region, however, are of great importance. Within my queer analysis, genre, rhetoric, and cultural context intersect to create a matrix by which an ancient reader would understand 2 Samuel 6, and the entire Samuel text. With this in mind, let us finalize (in and as much as it is possible to do so) the situation of Samuel by placing it in space.

#### Placing: Diaspora vs. Judah

In any text dated to the exile forward, the question of place inevitability arises. Noll briefly references this in his mention of ‘Jerusalem’s literati’ (1999, p. 39). There is debate among scholars regarding the presence of readers, and indeed, the general size of Judah’s population. Archaeologists are limited in their excavations by existing structures – such as the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif – and by the practice of razing an area down to bedrock for ‘[m]any of the larger building projects from the late Hellenistic and Roman periods’ (Bolin, 2014, pp. 135-36).

Estimates vary wildly, from archaeologist Israel Finkelstein's 'not many more than 100 adult men' to archaeologist Oded Lipschits's range of 1,000-1,250 people and biblical scholar Charles Carter's '1250 and 1500, or between 6.0 and 7.3 per cent of the population of Yehud' (Carter, 1999, p. 20; Finkelstein, 2008, p. 510; Lipschits, 2009). The difference in size largely depends on how building remains are calculated, with scholars like Lipschits<sup>125</sup> accounting for both the 'huge building projects founded on bedrock' from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century onward, the region's topography, which limited where buildings could be placed on the Southwestern Hill, and the 'long transition bridging the Persian and Hellenistic periods (the 4<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries B.C.E.)' (2009, pp. 5, 8-9).

Thankfully, while this is largely theoretical, there is concrete evidence to support Lipschits's hypothesis: 'a massive early Hellenistic administrative building and residence' that covers 'a similar Persian-period structure' (Bolin, 2014, p. 136; Herbert and Berlin, 2003, pp. 13-59). This discovery covers 2,000 square meters in Kedesh, and according to archaeologists and Near Eastern scholars, Sharon C. Herbert and Andrea M. Berlin, the site 'incorporate[s] reused column drums' and a 'mixture of cut piers and rubble that is associated with the Phoenician construction methods from the eighth century B.C.E. onward' -- several portions of walls and areas of floor suggest 'a sequence of occupation phases from the Persian period through the Late Hellenistic' (2003, pp. 20-21). There are 'three clearly distinguishable assemblages of pottery', beginning with Persian era items, and two Hellenistic layers, one without Eastern Sigillata A and a later layer with Eastern Sigillata A (2003, p. 21). Areas with trauma, such as, such as the South-Eastern Corner of the building, where there is evidence of robbing, exposes 'fills . . . in

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<sup>125</sup> For example, see Ziony Zevit, 'Is There an Archaeological Case for Phantom Settlements in the Persian Period?' (2009) and Diana Edelman, ed., *Deuteronomy-Kings as Emerging Authoritative Books: A Conversation* (2014).

which the latest material dates to the Persian period’ or in the Eastern Complex of Rooms, where ‘walls were built of pier and rubble and . . . a number of large column drums from an earlier structure’ and discovered ‘in a half-meter-deep pottery-rich fill in which the latest datable material was Persian’ that was likely intended to be used as further building material (2003, p. 30, 32). Probes confirmed the presence of additional Persian era pottery under later Hellenistic layers through-out the building (2003, pp. 30, 38). These results are significant in that they emphasize the influence and ‘monumental nature of the [administrative complex’s] Persian predecessor’ – including ‘no fewer than 11 large column drums’ suggesting ‘Persian palatial structures’, ‘a fifth-century B.C.E. sealing’ of ‘two ibexes flanking a tree of life’ which ‘is very close in style, iconography, and shape to one used by a court official on tablets in the Persepolis Fortification archive ratifying texts dated to years 22 and 23 of Darius the Great, i.e., 500 B.C.E.’ alongside extensive ‘imported luxury’ pottery, suggesting the residents enjoyed upper class comforts<sup>126</sup> (2003, p. 46).

Herbert and Berlin observe that Persian-occupied Galilee has often been considered less than – or roughly equal to, in generous assessments – that of Jerusalem in population and importance (2003, p. 48). Given the wealth of findings at Kedesh and the indications of an upper-class population, it is reasonable to extrapolate at least some parallels in Jerusalem and Judah, including the presence of Persian-era building footprints under existing structures or the repurposing of Persian buildings during the building of Roman and Hellenistic ones (Bolin, 2014, pp. 135-37; Lipschits, 2009, pp. 5, 8-9; Finkelstein, et al, 2011, pp. 317-39).

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<sup>126</sup> Of interest, there are ‘two Chian amphoras’ and ‘over 50 fragments of fifth-century B.C.E. Attic table wares’ (2003, p. 46).

Biblical literature scholar Ziony Zevit, for example, pushes back against low population estimates (specifically Israel Finkelstein's 2008 analysis of locations listed in Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7 as areas repopulated by Judah during the Persian-era return to the region) by drawing attention to limitation of surveys and the conservative analysis Finkelstein uses, including his attempt to argue 'the degree of occupation' present in these locations (Zevit, 2009, p. 131). This is not to say that Zevit suggests population estimates substantially different from the current consensus, but that more research is required to understand what Persian-era Judah looked like (2009, pp. 132-34). Surveys are naturally limited by their random nature, and thus offer an incomplete picture of a site<sup>127</sup> (2009, p. 131). Further, even in excavated areas, disputes about what a 'Persian period' find constitutes, plagues scholars (2009, p. 132). Oded Lipschits and Avraham Faust, for example, both discuss how Persian era pottery does not show distinctive markings in the Levant until the fifth century B.C.E., appearing not at the beginning of the Persian period, but well after Cyrus II's victory over Babylon, nearly 50-75 years (Faust, 2003, pp. 38-39; Faust, 2007, p. 47; Lipschits, 2005, pp. 192-203; Zevit, 2009, p. 132). Faust notes that 'many "Persian" forms began to appear during the Iron Age' and suggests that 'only well stratified assemblages should be used for fine-tuned dating' (2007, p. 47). The absence of many well stratified assemblages in general makes this difficult. But, even in the presence of such assemblages, the shift in material culture was slow. Zevit observes that this is due to the effect of 'changed administrative, trade, and economic systems within (and without) the Persian empire' rather than a 'large group of foreign civilian immigrants or occupying troops' and thus only

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<sup>127</sup> Zevit cites several excellent analyses on the subject: Ammerman (1981, pp. 63-88), Gibson (2003, pp. 2-4), Faust (2003, p. 39), Iacovau (2007, pp. 1-8), and Lehmann (2003, pp. 120-23).

appears gradually and becomes distinct between roughly 489 and 464 B.C.E<sup>128</sup> (2009, p. 132).

He theorizes that the ‘the increased presence of foreigners in various official capacities, and the influence of travelled Yehudites desiring to bring new ways to the old country’ drove the eventual adoption of Persian material culture (2009, p. 132). This is certainly corroborated in Kedesh.

The conclusion Zevit rightly draws is that the archaeological record cannot offer us a complete picture of Persian Judah (2009, p. 133). Despite this, I believe that the evidence we have does allow us to extrapolate that there likely was a literate population in the Levant, particularly in Jerusalem. It is probable that the Samuel scrolls originated in either Judah or in the diaspora and that in either case, these early texts were birthed in an environment rich with cultural overlap. It is therefore pertinent to discuss what effect that had on the text.

### The Cultural Context of the Samuel Scrolls

The dating and placing of the biblical text allow us to consider how early readers would have understood the story, situated firmly within a specific cultural context. Within this early reading, genre, rhetoric, and cultural context intersect to create (and preserve) the narrative. Although the narrative’s application can (and often does) shift over time, this does not negate the original purpose,<sup>129</sup> although it may render certain portions of the narrative confusing or contradictory when read in light of its new application.

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<sup>128</sup> This falls between the reigns of Darius the Great and Xerxes I – a full two to three kings since Cyrus II’s conquest (Radner, Moeller, and Potts, 2023, pp. xiii–xvi).

<sup>129</sup> The original purpose of narrative, even those in our own time and cultures, is a contentious topic, with readers, academics, authors, and editors often disagreeing. Not every text has a singular original purpose and it is not necessary to locate this in order to see how reception and meaning in texts evolve.

For example, K.L. Noll suggests that 1 and 2 Sam., which he refers to as a single narrative, the Samuel scroll, is an example of ‘a relatively secular form of traditional storytelling’ enjoyed as entertainment by ‘a wealthy leisure class in (pre)Persian-era Judaism’ that found new life ‘as divinely authored authoritative religious literature’ (1999, p. 32). Noll explains the contradictory tensions with 1 and 2 Sam. (the endorsement and rejection of Saul, a capricious Hashem ‘who seems to “delight” in his own capriciousness’, and David’s moral failures – which never sever his relationship to Hashem, unlike Saul) as literary devices to give the story drama and maintain the plot (1999, pp. 32-34). The story of 1 and 2 Sam. is understood only as a religious narrative because of ‘the long history of the text’s interpretation’ (Noll, 1999, p. 50).

Noll offers a possible history of 1 and 2 Sam.’s reception, suggesting it was compiled with other pieces of ancient Jewish writing first as part of ‘an elaborate origin tale’ designed to create or reify community boundaries, then, under Hellenistic influence, moved from a mythology to historiography (1999, pp. 43-50). This analysis, while fascinating, is largely suppositional and is offered as a way to reconcile Hashem’s deviance from the standard for an ancient Mesopotamian or Levantine ‘Iron Age patron-god religion’ – a problem Noll finds endemic in political readings – while not neglecting or obscuring Hashem’s anger and unpredictability – a problem tied to theological readings of the text (1999, pp. 34-37, 39).

Noll rightfully criticizes the way that scholarship ‘hypothesize[s] that the ancient Israelites held to a more “primitive” theology’ compared to later Jewish and Christian beliefs or ‘tames the Yahweh of Samuel’s tale’, however reading Hashem as a plot device, designed to add excitement and intrigue, is ultimately unsatisfying (1999, p. 39-40, 50). Noll is primarily concerned with the way that the readers of the text radically altered Samuel’s interpretative lens



(1999, pp. 41-50). In Noll's view, the text is reborn, but preserved, with echoes of its original meaning accepted as narrative quirks or embarrassing word choices<sup>130</sup> (1999, pp. 45, 50). I would like to emphasise this reader-response analysis in my own reading of 2 Sam. 6.

Noll dates the anthologizing of the Sam. scroll 'to roughly the Persian period' with older components that he ascribes to 'the Judaeen royal dynasty' (1999, p. 41). I date the text of 2 Sam. 6 to Persian period, without substantial transmission prior, and argue that it originated in Judah. As I will argue more fully later, within this cultural context, I believe the text appears to offer a cohesive and relevant message which serves a specific, rhetorical function for Judeans by cementing a communal identity that enabled members to resist assimilation and provided a response to competing socio-religious influences. Hashem's hegemonic masculinity, in this reading of the narrative, is a strategic choice that emphasizes his position relative to other deities, either implicitly or explicitly. The god with the most-est – the most power, the most masculinity, the most shock value – is the god most likely to inspire to awe, terror, and respect. This god is not an example of "primitive" theology', but the product of ancient Mesopotamian and Levantine patron-god imagery, escalated to deliberate excess (Noll, 1999, p. 39-40, 50). Hashem is dangerous and he is dangerous on behalf of Israel – even to Israel, at times, lest his hegemonic authority be suspect. If an Israelite (man) were to compete with Hashem and regularly win,<sup>131</sup> it would suggest a conquerable deity, and in consequently, a weak deity. Hashem's violence is intentional (by the narrator), purposeful (to re-establish his hegemonic power), and successful

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<sup>130</sup> Noll highlights how some modern translations contribute to the erasure of Hashem's problematic moments, such as with the death of Eli's sons (1999, p. 50).

<sup>131</sup> The Tanakh has several cases of persuasive men that are still depicted as having Hashem's favour. Abraham argues with Hashem to spare Sodom and Gomorrah, for instance. See Gen. 18.17-33. This is a gray area, where Hashem remains hegemonically powerful, but accepts the argument of a mortal man.

(David defers to Hashem). This goes against conventional<sup>132</sup> modern readings, since there is no religious force behind Hashem's actions either: the only cultic law transgressed is David's feminization of Hashem by his own assumption of a hegemonic role in the procession. But how does this offer a communal identity? How does it address assimilation and integration during the Exilic period?

To examine the rhetoric of the Samuel narrative, particularly, 2 Sam. 6, and its implications on exilic Judah we must look to the intersection of postcolonial theory and queer theory – postcolonial theory, since the questions posed by reading the text as a part of a larger anti-assimilationist narrative challenge colonialism and imperialism, and queer theory, since my reading remains fundamentally queer, concerned with how gender performance is wielded. Jeremy Punt suggests that typically, 'Postcolonial theory alerts and assists Queer theory to move away from. . . homogenizing same-sex love in a White, Western, capitalist and male gay model. . . [or from] exoticising and othering' queer relationships (2008, pp. 24.2). This is certainly critical to my reading, which focuses on historical, ancient Mesopotamian and Levantine genderfluidity and non-binary gender in cultic ritual. However, I am also particularly interested in the way that 'hermeneutics of marginality' can be 'taken up and creatively exploited, redrawing the boundaries, shifting centre and periphery' (2008, pp. 24.6). This deliberate reification of boundaries, community, and self can serve to preserve marginalized, colonized, or occupied cultures against the intrusion of their colonizer's culture norms and values.

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<sup>132</sup> I will discuss what readings are conventional in chapter seven, but they are typified by arguments of Brueggemann, Fokkeman, Hertzberg, McCarter, Tsumura, and van Wijk-Bos, where Uzzah's murder is a religious response to a breach in proper cultic ritual.

I believe 2 Sam. 6 offers a dual-pronged anti-assimilationist text for Persian Judah: the narrator offers readers a narrative that cements their collective and individual identity as a people with history, honour, and agency, an antidote to oppression, marginalization, and erasure, but the narrator also offers genderfluidity as sacred act, implying a rightful time for feminization, to a people feminized by a military defeat and imperial rule.

### Judah, the Occupied Nation

The narrator presents readers with imagery of Israel rich with socio-political power, fresh out of conflict from thwarted invaders. David has not only preserved the boundaries of Israel, but expanded it, securing Jerusalem as a new royal city. As previously mentioned, David's force in v. 1, offer multiple layers of meaning – the men David selects are a contingent of warriors, whose numbers parallel 1 Sam. 4.10-11 (Fokkelman, 1990, pp. 184-85; Gilmour, 2019, p. 14; McCarter, 1984, p. 168; Tsumura, 2019, p. 111; van Wijk-Bos, 2020, p. 243). 1 Sam. 4 depicts Elide Israel<sup>133</sup> thoroughly humiliated by the invading Philistines, suffering significant losses – 30,000 men, or 30 units, following McCarter –, a deep blow to morale, underscored by the capture of the ark, and the deaths of Hophni and Phinehas (1984, p. 168; 1 Sam. 4.10-11).

In v. 21, Phinehas's wife declares, 'the Glory has departed from Israel, because the ark of God has been captured', but the effect of the Philistine's victory stretches beyond the religious sphere and into the socio-political. The Elide priesthood ends abruptly, severing the existing political leadership in tandem with the religious (1 Sam. 4.11-18). When David assembles 30,000 men to bring the ark to the Jerusalem, the narrator reclaims the number and the ark itself

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<sup>133</sup> Israel under the socio-religious leadership of Eli and his sons, Hophni and Phinehas.

through the imagery of a triumphant return. The place known as Kiriath-jearim in 1 Sam. 7.1-2 becomes Baale-judah in 2 Sam. 6.2 – what was the ‘city of woods’ is now the ‘lords of Judah’. Flush with success, David heads up a procession that includes ‘the whole house of Israel’, with the celebratory return of the ark serving as victory lap (2 Sam. 6.5). The conquered are now the conquering.

To post-exilic readers, a proud past is not enough. Israel has been made, but it has also been un-made. Their bodies are evidence that David’s power is not absolute – Israel’s borders are permeable, unstable, and occupiable. The narrator offers Hashem’s hegemony as an antidote to this unescapable knowledge, re-encoding power onto the disenfranchised.

Hashem’s patronship in the Sam. scrolls is tied to Israel’s success and self-identity (1 Sam. 7.2-17; 1 Sam. 12.1-25). The priesthood may suffer corruption, judges may die, kings rise and fall, lands are taken and lost, but Hashem offers a thread of consistency for Israel and, more importantly, the promise of access and connection to overwhelming power and agency (1 Sam. 28.15-19; 2 Sam. 7.1-29). Despite the narrator’s fondness for David – and what David’s success symbolizes, namely a unified, exceptional Israel – Hashem’s hegemony *must* take precedence, otherwise Israel dies with David.

David’s assumption of his own power as demonstrated through his performance of hegemonic masculinity – the image of David-the-Warrior, David-the-King-Triumphant – temporarily unmans Hashem, depicting him as impotent. Hashem seems dependent on David’s warriors for protection: the ark is not a symbol of might but a site of vulnerability. Like Dagon in 1 Sam. 5, David’s actions constitute a threat to Hashem’s authority and agency. David, unlike

Dagon, however, voluntarily alters his behaviour to assert Hashem's hegemonic power. This pays off since David's reign – and Israel's success under him – continues past 2 Sam. 6.

The socio-political identity of Israel in 2 Sam. 6 is inescapably tied to the socio-religious identity of Israel. The narrator reinforces this through the ark's occupation of Obed-edom's home. Obed-edom's name symbolically links him to foreigners, despite his (apparent) political allegiance to David. This political allegiance requires religious concessions – the (dangerous) ark residing in his home. Hashem's blessings are lavish, serving as yet another reminder to exilic Judeans of the rewards of religious devotion.

Judah is encouraged to maintain an exclusive religious identity, thus setting them apart from their peers. Whatever religious observance entails, in 2 Sam. 6 it demands that Hashem have no equals, no peers – no competitors. The result is strikingly effective according to records from a rural town named Āl-Yāhūdu,<sup>134</sup> located 'in the Nippur region', and dating between 572 and 477 BCE (Pearce, 2015, pp. 11-14). The settlement itself is distinctive for the 'characteristic Yahwistic names or patronymics' which provides 'a reliable marker for identifying Judeans in cuneiform documentation' (Pearce, 2015, p. 11, 18-20). One text from 507 BCE traces a single family's history back to the pre-exilic era, through Judean naming conventions; although the length is an anomaly in current research, in the Āl-Yāhūdu documents, there is a 'pattern of Judean self-identification' and 'a tendency for individuals across generations of a Judean family to bear Yahwistic names'<sup>135</sup> (Pearce, 2015, p. 27-29).

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<sup>134</sup> Pearce translates Āl-Yāhūdu as 'Judahtown', in line with other Babylonian settlement names (2015, pp. 13-17).

<sup>135</sup> Pearce references names such as Yāhu-azar, Abdi-Yāhu, Nīr-Yāma, Yāhu-azza, Yāhušu, and Yāhu-izrī (2015, pp. 11, 21-22).

However, there are complications, such as one case in which there is reasonable cause to infer that ‘upon assuming administrative duties’ a Judean individual took on a ‘Babylonian name’ (Pearce, 2015, 24-27). In another case, a Judean man ‘who interacted at some level with the administrative apparatus of the empire’ either as businessman or administrator himself, ‘bestowed a Yahwistic name on his daughter’ despite having a Babylonian name, suggesting that successful assimilation, or the perception of such, may have driven economic standing and opportunities (Pearce, 2015, pp. 27-28). The larger trend of Yahwistic names points to the importance of internal communal identity, despite the benefits of assimilation, and, I believe, hints at the gap between perceived assimilation (taking a Babylonian name for yourself but preserving some aspect of Judean cultural identity, such as giving your children Judean names) and actual assimilation (taking a Babylonian name for yourself *and* a Babylonian cultural identity).

Although the data from Āl-Yāhūdu cannot answer how many Judeans assimilated into Babylonian culture or how thoroughly they internally assimilated, it does clearly indicate the link between Judean religious and communal identity. Laurie Pearce’s analysis of the data, particularly ‘the interchange of Babylonian and Yahwistic theophoric elements’ in the Babylonian name of a Judean man, suggests that such instances ‘may well have evolved from an attempt to conceal or reveal Judean identity or stem from a Babylonian scribe’s recognition of the primacy of Yahweh in Judean belief’ (2015, p. 31). Pearce’s arguments are compelling when viewed in light of the statistical weight of Yahwistic names. A shared religious identity provided social cohesion for exiled Judeans, and that identity rested on Hashem’s hegemony.

The Samuel scrolls, particularly 2 Sam. 6, offer Judah and Judeans a historical position of dignity and power through David's ascendancy to power under Hashem's watchful eye, while simultaneously acknowledging the borders that trouble this image of agency and divine support.

#### Judah, at a Cultural Crossroads

Ziony Zevit suggests that Judah imports Persian goods, not because of an invading army but because returning Judeans '[desire] to bring new ways to the old country' and a slow trickle of foreigners assigned to the region import goods from home (2009, p. 132). I believe that Zevit is right – the archaeological record certainly demonstrates a slow acceptance of Persian material culture – but I believe there is an importance nuance, tied to the Samuel text's image of Israel as a historically powerful nation with a supremely powerful, involved god. Samuel offers Judeans a powerfully anti-assimilationist mythology.

The Samuel scrolls reinforce the socio-religious identity of Judeans, explicitly offering them a legacy of dignity and hegemonic power. And as I will illustrate shortly, Samuel, particularly 2 Samuel 6, speaks in conversation with regional norms. A complicated cultural fault line occurs in upper-class literate Judah, caused by tension between Judean and Persian identities. The text offers Judeans literature on their own terms.

#### Placing 2 Samuel 6 in Relation to the Samuel Scrolls: The Ark Narrative

The Ark Narrative is a fiercely contested interpretative tool that has seen 1 Samuel 4.1-7.1 as 'a thoroughly independent entity' with 'one of the oldest theological narratives in the Old Testament' (Bodner, 2006, pp. 169-70). As an interpretative tool, it has looked to

answer textual inconsistencies and shifts – Samuel’s sudden disappearance, the depiction of Eli and his sons, the centrality of the ark – and to close the gap between events and records. This was of particular concern for scholars arguing for the historicity of David as presented in Samuel (to one degree or another).<sup>136</sup> However, literary criticism of 1 Samuel 4.1-7.1 reads the disappearance of Samuel as ‘a plot effect, not a matter for discerning a redaction seam’ (Green, 2003, p. 136).<sup>137</sup> Current scholarship tends to view the Ark Narrative with scepticism (Bodner, 2006, pp. 169-70).

Proponents of the ‘Ark Narrative,’ such as Leonhard Rost (1982, pp. 6-34) and Anthony F. Campbell (1975, pp. 126-43, 169-74, and *passim*) have argued for the inclusion of 2 Sam. 6, arguing that the two passages represent a single cohesive (historical) event that was later edited into its current shape. Consequently, when dating 2 Samuel 6, it is necessary to address the potential ties between 2 Samuel 6 and 1 Samuel 4.1-7.1. I will begin my analysis with 1 Samuel 4.1-7.1.

The passage’s primary concern is the movement of the ark, which travels from Shiloh into battle in 1 Sam 4, where it is captured by the Philistines, only to plague these conquerors with haemorrhoids in 1 Sam 5-6 (Ackroyd, 1971, p. 55; Fox, 1999, p. 24). The Philistines initially place the ark in the temple of Dagon, however, twice, Dagon is found prostrate before the ark – the final time with the icon’s head and hands forcibly removed (1 Sam. 5.2-5). Biblical scholar Theodore Jennings offers an excellent queer reading on this violence, drawing on

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<sup>136</sup> Ark Narrative scholars Leonhard Rost and Anthony F. Campbell, as previously mentioned, both date this portion of the text to the tenth century, only a few decades after the narrative purportedly occurred (Campbell, 1975, pp. 126-43, 169-74, and *passim*; Rost, 1982, pp. 6-34). Since Samuel is considered an exilic text, this early dating of the passage closes the significant gap between record and events, a boon to historical-critical readings.

<sup>137</sup> This is a striking example of how a literary reading offers a cohesive narrative that a historical-critical reading cannot.



Dagon’s role as a fertility god, and the violent, phallic symbolism of Dagon ‘the god of phallic power, instead of dominating YHWH’ being dominated himself (2001, pp. 58-60). Jennings notes that in 1 Sam 6.6, the Philistine priests and seers warn the Philistines at large ‘about being “made sport of” by YHWH’ (2001, p. 59). The verb, לָלַץ, carries the connotations of abuse, rape, and mockery<sup>138</sup> which Jennings reasonably suggests that the incident is meant to be read as a case of ‘phallic aggression. . . [and] male dominance’, itself a familiar aspect of violence in ancient Mesopotamia and Levant, as discussed in chapter three (Jennings, 2001, p. 59).

The Philistines send the ark back to the Israelites at Beth-Shemesh, who respond first with celebration, then mourning, when a contingent is killed<sup>139</sup> and the people of Beth-shemesh summon the people of Kiriath-jearim to bring the ark home, where it stayed in the house of Abinadab, under the care of Eleazar until 2 Sam. 6 (1 Sam. 6.1-7.2).

Although the Ark Narrative neatly encapsulates the journey of the ark, it is not without rightful critiques, including those which see 2 Sam. 6 as a separate element, not belonging to 1 Sam 4.1-7.1. Franz Schicklberger (1973, pp. 129-49), Patrick D Miller, Jr and J. J. M. Roberts (1977, pp. 22-26) argue against the inclusion of 2 Sam 6 based on the differences in name and ceremony. P. Kyle McCarter (1984, pp. 182-84) and David Toshio Tsumura (2019, p. 106), whose commentaries on 2 Sam 6 will be covered shortly, concur with these analyses of the text.

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<sup>138</sup> In the *Torah* and *Nevi'im Rishonim* (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings), the phrase is used twice to describe overzealous harvesting (by a property’s owners or agents) – Lev. 19.10 and Deut. 24.21 – but otherwise is used to describe assault, tied to either rape or humiliation – see Exo. 10.2, Num. 22.29, Judges 19.25, 1 Sam. 6.6, 1 Sam. 31.4 –, or annihilation – Judges 20.45. In consideration of this, both references to harvesting can be understood as harvesting that annihilates the gleanable remains, since both verses are concerned with the injunction to allow the poor, the stranger, the widow, and the fatherless to glean.

<sup>139</sup> Those killed are killed for either not celebrating the ark’s return (MT) or for looking into the ark itself (LXX) (1 Sam. 6.19). I find biblical studies scholar Tamara Prosic’s interpretation – discussed in greater detail shortly, in the subsection, ‘Space: Liminal Places...’ – most compelling. Prosic argues that the murders are the result of Hashem’s disempowerment by the liminal space of the threshing floor itself. In this view, it is Hashem’s vulnerability that drives the murders, which enforce his hegemony over the celebrants.

Hans Wilhelm Hertzberg (1964, p. 277), Johanna W. H. van Wijk-Bos (2020, pp. 243-44), J. P. Fokkelman (1990, p. 176), and Walter Brueggemann (1990, p. 247-49), whose commentaries will also be analysed, disagree however – holding in various degrees to the united narrative theory. The assumption of continuity – or discontinuity – provides an array of valuable perspectives to the commentaries.

Separate from the issue of the historicity of the Ark Narrative – or 1 and 2 Samuel – which is beyond the scope of this dissertation, placing 2 Sam. 6 within the Ark Narrative serves to highlight the themes and influences of the chapter. McCarter is particularly interested in the way that 2 Sam. 6 diverges from the Ark Narrative by focusing ‘on the role of the king’, a stylistic difference from 1 Sam 4.1-7.1, where Miller and Roberts argue that the primary focus is the capture/return of the ark (McCarter, 1984, p. 183; Miller and Roberts, 1977, pp. 9-16). Tsumura similarly situates 2 Sam. 6 in relation to David and David’s career – the ark is not the sole focus, but must share the stage with David (2019, pp. 106-110). Hertzberg disagrees, seeing the ark as the primary subject, but separating v. 20-23 – Michal’s encounter with David – and placing it within the narrative scope of David’s succession (1964, p. 277). It is not surprising then that Hertzberg focuses on the theology of the chapter: David stands only in relation to the ark (1964, pp. 277-81). Fokkelman, Brueggemann, and van Wijk-Bos occupy a middle ground, where the Ark Narrative informs their analysis, but the Ark-as-Protagonist does not completely obliterate David-as-Protagonist (Brueggemann, 1990, pp. 247-48; Fokkelman, 1990, pp. 176-81; van Wijk-Bos, 2020, pp. 243-44). Fokkelman describes it best when he breaks down the

language of 2 Sam. 6 and notes that David and the Ark share the narrative's focus<sup>140</sup> (1990, p. 181).

I recognize the similarities and dissimilarities between 1 Sam. 4.1-7.1 and 2 Sam. 6, but I am not interested in locating scribal intent in hypothetical sources. My analysis is largely contained to the text of 2 Sam. 6 itself and is concerned with the way the passage communicates and normalizes the intersection of gender and holiness. Consequently, I offer a queer, synchronic reading that while informed by studies on the Ark Narrative, is not bound to the Ark Narrative.

Space, Ritual, Gender, and Priesthood in the 2 Samuel 6 and Ancient Mesopotamia and Levant

The historical-critical emphasis on the place of biblical passages in time and space has often proved problematic, as I have explained, however, it does draw our attention to the way texts and narratives exist in conversation with each other, a facet I wish to retain for my queer analysis. As previously established, gender is created by the society in which it functions and thus varies by period, region, and community: there is a baseline for normative behaviour, gender, and sexuality that is created and re-created by participant-performers. The narrative's gender performances exist, at its borders, in perpetual conversation with adjacent communities. Indeed, these boundaries often provide the most fruitful material for analysis: the tension

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<sup>140</sup> Fokkelman goes further and argues that 'the king and God are on an even footing' based on the prevalence of 'David' and 'YHWH' in the chapter (used 22 and 21 times, respectively) (1990, pp. 180-81). When the passage is divided into four groups, by narrative action (procession one, interval/conflict one, procession two, interval/conflict two) the usage continues to be matched, with neither character monopolizing the piece (1990, p. 180). Fokkelman also looks at the words 'ark', 'God', 'before', 'from/up from' and 'Israel' which he believes further reinforces the 'interrelationship' of David and Hashem, emphasizing the way that David, Hashem, and Israel are brought together, 'grouped around the sacred object' (1990, p. 181). I concur with Fokkelman's analysis of the chapter's language. Consequentially, David and Hashem must navigate how to relate to each other when both are imbued with hegemonic power from their respective spheres (political and religious). The solution is found in relational dynamics, in the centering of Hashem, with David orbiting this pre-eminent hegemonic figurehead.

between self and other requires a stronger demarcation, often bringing into sharp relief nuances in identity that would otherwise be unarticulated. Read against Assyrian, Babylonian and Persian cultural norms, David and Hashem's actions provide a fascinating commentary on the role of power, priesthood, and gender in Judean communal identity.

Although I date the Samuel text to the Persian period, I believe any analysis of the text benefits from a holistic understanding of the Assyrian occupation and Babylonian exile as formative, traumatic events for Judah. The narrator of 2 Samuel 6 works within a familiar narrative formula of exaggerated divine hegemony, I believe, in direct response to Judean exposure to occupying pantheons. There is precedent for this behaviour, as discussed, beginning in Assyrian culture, shortly before Judah became an Assyrian vassal through the Babylonian take-over of Assyria, to Persia and the return of Judean exiles to Levant. These narratives, like 2 Samuel 6, utilize some or all of the elements of space, ritual, gender, or priesthood to grapple with divine hegemony and mundane reality.

#### Space: Liminal Places in the Ancient Mesopotamia and Levant and in 2 Samuel 6

The significance of both sacred places and the inherent vulnerability of deities in their icons cannot be understated in ancient Mesopotamia and Levant (AML) and extensive research by biblical and Mesopotamian scholars have explored the effects of both on the construction of ritual and ritual locations.

Mesopotamian sacred topography was particularly interested in the 'theological and cosmological explorations' of cultic spaces as sacred facets of religious life that paralleled the cultic power of deities' icons and images, which could only be created according to 'divinely

revealed blueprints' (Sparks, 2007, p.638; Walker and Dick, 2001, pp. 22-24).<sup>141</sup> The intersection of the secular and the sacred creates unique, liminal spaces where divine power – and consequently divine vulnerability – had to be negotiated. While the royal city, as hub of communal and cultic life, is an obviously liminal space, existing in sacred geography through the presence of temples and secular geography as a lived space, subject to mundane concerns and claims, the threshing floor is an overlooked liminal space. I will begin with threshing floor in Israelite culture and then examine the non-Israelite ancient Mesopotamia and Levantine conceptions of the threshing floor.

Tamara Prosic argues that in the Hebrew Bible threshing floors were 'like spatial vortexes fusing and interlinking a variety of social, political, economical, and religious aspects' in a region of 'carefully constructed otherness' (2016, p. 58). In particular, she argues that textually, threshing floors 'are often places where anxiety, death, and violence lurk in the background' (2016, p. 60). Consequently, they are subject to continual 'ideological de-semanticizing and re-semanticizing' as the biblical author(s) build narratives that assert Hashem's pre-eminence and power over physical and spiritual world, and thus over competing gods and their cults (Prosic, 2016, pp. 61-72).

In Jaime L. Waters's dissertation on threshing floors as sacred places in the Hebrew Bible, she offers a detailed addendum addressing specific examples of 'Ugaritic references to threshing floors' (2013, p. 142). Waters is careful to note that she does not intend to 'suggest direct or indirect dependence between these literary traditions' but to illustrate the parallels in interpretation (2013, p. 143). In Ugaritic texts, the threshing floor is the site of divinely ordered

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<sup>141</sup> Sparks, Walker, and Dick specifically address the way cultic places were constructed and discussed in Mesopotamia.

violence in the Kirta epic,<sup>142</sup> ‘the administration of justice’ and a place for divination in the ‘Aqhatu legend’,<sup>143</sup> a communal, ‘[s]acrificial meal to Athtartu’ according to an unnamed text,<sup>144</sup> and as a place in which spirits or apparitions may arrive in the physical world and are commanded to be fed in the Rapiuma texts<sup>145</sup> (2013, pp. 143-52). Farther abroad, Prosic expounds on the link between the Egyptian Osiris and the threshing floor, through ‘the “driving of the four calves”’ a rite ‘dedicated principally to Min’ but that also includes references to Osiris in some accounts (2016, p. 66). The Mesopotamian ‘lord of the underworld and the god of war and pestilence’, Nergal, is also linked to the threshing floor, as is Ninazu, another underworld deity known as ‘the lord who carries the stretching line over the fields’ (Prosic, 2016, pp. 66-67). In Greece, this trend continues with Demeter and Dionysus’s Haloa festival – with both deities tied not only to agriculture, but also death (Prosic, 2016, p. 67).

Hashem’s violence on the threshing floor in v. 6-8, Prosic suggests, is a means for him to ‘demonstrate his authority in a deadly manner’, not only asserting his power in a moment of vulnerability<sup>146</sup> but ‘proving. . . he is ruler even over death’ (2016, p. 72). The threshing floor not only represents the power of chthonic deities, but of death itself, after all, Prosic notes that the threshing floor stands between ‘the life-teeming open fields and the tombs of granaries’, a place ‘where the whole drama of life and death reaches its paradoxical climax’ as the death of plant guarantees human and animal life, just as human and animal death will feed plant life (2016, pp. 67-68).

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<sup>142</sup> KTU 1.14-1.16

<sup>143</sup> KTU 1.17-1.19

<sup>144</sup> KTU 1.116

<sup>145</sup> KTU 1.20-1.22

<sup>146</sup> Prosic reads Hashem’s vulnerability as stemming from the threshing floor itself (2016, p. 72).

Hashem's reaction 'against might'<sup>147</sup> – against the vulnerability Uzzah's actions' imply, against the vulnerability and liminality of the place that the procession crosses, against the military power David flaunts – inscribes the power of not only the deity, but of his icon (Auld, 2011, p. 413; Gilmour, 2019, p. 17). The narrator must address the impotence of the ark or risk undermining the hegemony they have established. Hashem offers the foundational hegemony for David's power, for Israel's identity. Hashem's power must function as a prediscursive truth – however impossible it is – and because of this, the narrator is consequently bound to write Hashem's behaviour to masculine-coded excess.

#### Ritual: Reconciling the Processions of 2 Samuel 6 with AML Religious Rituals

2 Sam 6 can also be read against Mesopotamian religious rituals. McCarter hints at this in his brief evaluation of Miller and Robert's historical-critical analysis of 2 Sam. 6 against Marduk's return to Babylon under Assurbanipal, although the majority of his commentary on the text is focused elsewhere. Against Miller and Robert's reading, McCarter instead argues that the text is best compared to 'other ancient Near Eastern accounts of the introduction of a national god to a new royal city', particularly Assyrian accounts under Sargon II, Sennacherib, Esarhaddon, and Assurnsirpal II (1984, pp. 180-81). McCarter is certainly correct that there are marked similarities between in form: after the city is taken and palaces established, 'Assur and the other great gods of Assyria were "invited into them" and honored by sacrifices; there followed a banquet and "a feast of music"' (1984, p. 181). Each king McCarter lists offers the

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<sup>147</sup> Biblical scholars Rachele Gilmour and A. Graeme Auld both highlight that Uzzah's name is similar to the word for might, thus 2 Samuel 6.8 may be utilizing wordplay – Hashem broke out. . . against Uzzah/with might/against might (Auld, 2011, p. 413; Gilmour, 2019, p. 17).

gods an extravagant performance, often feeding the entire city – or in the case of Assurnsirpal II, 69, 574 ‘guests from Assyria and abroad’ (1984, p. 181). Thus, the ark, like other cultic icons, serves as physical representation for Hashem and his acceptance of Jerusalem, a tacit acceptance of David and David’s rule, as previously described. McCarter notes an account by Azitawadd, ‘king of the Danunians’, who describes in Hittite and Phoenician the process of dedicating a city named after himself in the same formula: the city is prepared, the deity’s (or deities’) icons are ceremonially brought into the city, followed by blessings and celebration (1984, pp. 181-82).<sup>148</sup> McCarter observes that ‘these accounts are . . . testimonies to the special thing the king has done for the god and his people’ and consequently tied to ‘professions of the high regard in which the deity holds the king’ alongside ‘prayers for divine favor uttered by the king’ (1984, p. 182).

I believe this holds a key to Hashem’s rejection of David’s first procession. An exilic narrator would likely hold as a piece of their cultural memory these elements of Assyrian culture. As such, Hashem’s outburst on the threshing floor is constructed by the narrator to address his hegemonic power in a way that acknowledges the larger cultural conversation around the vulnerability and power of sacred items and places, and Hashem’s dissatisfaction with David’s first performance. David’s agency and authority are centre stage – he uses the ark as a supporting character to bolster his political power and Hashem is not pleased.

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<sup>148</sup> Not all movement by deities and their icons are voluntary, however. See Appendix 1 for the connection between deities and kings and the practice of kidnapping statues as socio-political humiliation. This is an important aspect of the Ark Narrative: Hashem’s ark cannot be captured and carted off to pay his respects to a competing god like Dagon.



## Gender and Priesthood: Playing with Gender as a Religious Act

In chapter four, I briefly mentioned anthropologist Will Roscoe's excellent speculation between the connection of non-binary gender and sacred rituals, in which he concludes that nonbinary priests/priestesses/priestexxes<sup>149</sup> served several important functions in religious thought and practice: as images of 'primordial unity', as 'an apparition that defies one's sense of reality', and as individuals who 'occupied simultaneously social and supernatural planes and both poles of the moral continuum', inspiring a sublime sense of 'awe and horror' as 'polyvalent symbols' (1996, pp. 203-04).

Roscoe's argument is drawn from the work of religious scholar Mircea Eliade and feminist scholar Marjorie Garber. Eliade, a Jungian and comparativist, sees parallels across wide swaths of socio-religious practice – for instance, arguing there is a universal human drive seen in Melanesian cargo cults that spans time and space, appearing in both the Vedic era of Indian and in modern Marxism (1965, pp. 132-55). It seems to me that Eliade struggles against reductionism in such pursuits. He argues that 'one compares and contrasts two expressions of a symbol not in order to reduce them to a single, pre-existent expression, but in order to discover the process by which a structure is capable of enriching its meanings' (1965, p. 201). However, his samples are drawn too wide, and the result appears essentialist since he emphasizes a primary, foundational symbol over nuance.<sup>150</sup>

Of particular note to Roscoe's analysis is Eliade's comparison of Goethe's *Faust*, Balzac's *Séraphita*, and a large array of European and Asiatic mythologies and religions. The comparison is an ambitious work that is focused on complementarity and unity. These instances

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<sup>149</sup> 'Priestexx' is a gender-neutral term for a priestly individual.

<sup>150</sup> This is a problem that also plagues Marjorie Garber, as I will discuss shortly.

are, he argues, expressions of the same symbol, examples of ‘*coincidentia oppositorum* [that] reveal a nostalgia for a lost Paradise. . . a paradoxical state in which the contraries exist side by side without conflict and the multiplications form aspects of a mysterious Unity. . . . that has caused man to think of the opposites as complementary aspects of a single reality’ (1965, p. 122). I believe Eliade’s Jungian basis undermines his hopes to avoid reductionism and his parallels, while thought provoking, leave many questions unanswered.<sup>151</sup>

Here, we may turn with Roscoe to the work of Marjorie Garber, particularly her 1992 book, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety*, which builds on the concept gender transgression as embodying ‘polyvalent symbols’ where ‘difference is reintegrated into reality’ according to Roscoe (1996, p. 204). Garber postulates that cross-dressing and gender transgression illuminate dissonance, causing a ‘crisis of [gender] *category itself*’ (1992, pp. 16-17, italics Garber’s). Although a Freudian and Lacanian, Garber comes to a similar conclusion as Eliade, suggesting that gender transgression forms ‘a figure of nostalgia for originary “wholeness”’ (1992, p. 102).

Roscoe builds upon Eliade and Garber by seeing gender transgression, in part, as an ‘escape from the unbearable tension of the opposites’ and therefore reading binary non-conformity as a kind gender transcendence but does not neglect the multiplicity of meanings present in ancient Rome (1996, p. 203). The way that non-binary individuals disrupt social norms ‘tears the very fabric of reality for those who witness it’, Roscoe claims, citing specific

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<sup>151</sup> I am particularly interested in the way that ritual informs other ritual: Eliade does not fully analyze if his early examples (Romani and Bulgarian mythology and the Aphroditus cult, for example) may or may not have influenced later examples (*Faust*, *Séraphita*). Eliade also does not consider specifics, his examples lack context, and leave behind the sense that he has picked only things that support his hypothesis and ignored those that refute it.

examples from Diodorus of Sicily and Sextus Empiricus describing Hermaphroditus and the *galli* (1996, pp. 203-04).

This tear in reality is manifested in the supernatural and mundane world meeting. Religious intersex or gender non-conforming figures are described by Diodorus as '*terata*' – translated by Roscoe as 'marvels, monsters, prodigies, and signs' – and carrying with them immense power – 'they announce the future, sometimes for evil and sometimes for good' (4.6.5; Roscoe, 1996, pp. 203-04). The intense social disorder of the *galli* gender performance, mirrored in the sensory disorder of their religious rites, offers viewers a means for reintegration (Roscoe, 1996, pp. 202-04).

I believe it is particularly salient to note that while the *galli* are conduits for hegemonic power, they do not possess it themselves. They are alternately marvels and monsters, figures of 'awe and horror', amazement and disdain, scorn and praise (Roscoe, 1996, pp. 195-97, 201-204, cf. 204; Roller, 1997, pp. 547-48). This is particularly evident in classicist Lynn Roller's observations of a foundational *galli* anecdote<sup>152</sup> in which a *gallus*, sheltering in a cave, encounters a hungry lion and uses his 'ritual insignia. . . raucous music and . . . wild dance' to avoid being eaten (1997, p. 547). Roller notes there are two versions of the myth, one in which the *gallus* is not castrated and/or trans feminine but is still identified 'as someone deviant from normal masculine behaviour' and another where the *gallus* is identified as castrated and hyperfeminine – he has 'dainty tresses' to be styled or 'worn long and loose to toss in the wind. . . wears women's clothes and perfume', and speaks in 'a high-pitched piercing voice' (1997, p. 547). Even the dance is feminine-coded (1997, p. 547).

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<sup>152</sup> See *Anthologia Palatina*, 6.217-20, 234, 237.

In both stories, but especially in the second, which Roller describes a ‘caricature’ with ‘[exaggerated] feminine attributes for humorous effect’, ze ‘does not face the lion boldly and attack him, as a real hero should’ but instead ‘shakes his long hair, thumps his drum, or dances his dance, and the divine spirit of the goddess moves through him to drive the lion away’ or compels it to ‘[join] in the dance’ (1997, p. 547).<sup>153</sup> The *gallus* is a clear conduit for hegemonic power, while not possessing it zirsself: any power ze has is from the goddess, who works through zim. It is also precisely because of zir non-binary gender presentation – zir ritual items, specific dress, and ritual performance – that the *gallus* has access to this power. In the words of Sextus Empiricus, it is no ‘trivial thing’ (Roscoe, 1996, p. 204). The *galli* are marked supernatural vessels for hegemonic power by their gender liminality, while existing at the border of male/female and mundane/sacred.

This is also seen in the *gala/kalû*, the *kur-gar-ra/kurgarrû*, and the *assinnu*. The *gala*, Roscoe convincingly posits, engaged in ‘an institutionalized form of gender difference’ (1996, p. 214). The earliest of the categories, the Sumerian *gala* ‘appear in Akkadian texts as *kalû* (variants, *kulu’u* and *kulû*)’ as ‘servants of Inanna/Ishtar’ persisting on through to Babylonian and Assyrian religious rites (Roscoe, 1996, p. 215). Assyriologist Saana Svärd – at time of publication Saana Teppo – cites the work of fellow Assyriologist Brigitte Menzel, who argues that the *gala* had a wide-spread presence, both in the temple or outside of it, in secular service (Gelb, 1975, pp. 50; Menzel, 1981, pp. 235-36; Teppo, 2008, pp. 84-85). While there were *gala* ‘referred to as “inferior”’, the *gala-mah* or chief *gala* received a significant salary, ‘[equal to]

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<sup>153</sup> As previously mentioned in chapter four, Roller uses the pronouns he/him/his for the *galli* while, out of respect for the *galli*’s gender expansive presentation, I use ze/zim/zir.

that of the highest officials of the city’ (Menzel, 1981, pp. 235-36; Roscoe, 1996, pp. 212-14; Teppo, 2008, pp. 84-85).<sup>154</sup>

Biblical studies scholar, Tikva Frymer-Kensky argues that the role of the *gala*, as lamentation singers, was fulfilled originally by women – and there may have been later female *gala* as well – and that men took on both the role (singing lamentations) and the gender performance (female/trans-feminine) (Bottéro and Petschow, 1975, p. 465; Frymer-Kensky, 1992, pp. 43-44; Gelb, 1975, p. 73; Hartmann, 1960, p. 132; Krecher, 1966, pp. 36, 38; Roscoe, 1996, p. 214). In a letter from Mutakkil-Nusku, a circa twelfth century BCE Assyrian king, to his deposed brother, compares his brother to a *gala*, saying ‘he is a *kulu’u*, not a man!’ (Peled, 2015, p. 755).<sup>155</sup> Assyriologist Ilan Peled, as I have discussed previously, struggles to acknowledge the *gala/kulu’u* as non-binary, while still acknowledging that this is an ‘insult’ that calls into question the insulted’s (Ninurta-tukulti-Aššur) masculinity (Peled, 2015, p. 755, 762).<sup>156</sup>

Professionally, either in temples or possibly guilds, the *gala* sang lamentations in *eme-sal*, ‘a Sumerian dialect. . . whose only other use was to render the speech of female gods’ (cf.

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<sup>154</sup> See also Allotte de la Fuyè (1909), *Documents présargoniques*, no. 99 and 132, Stephen Langdon (1909), *Sumerian and Babylonian Psalms*, p. 61, and (1913), *Babylonian Liturgies: Sumerian Texts from the Early Period and from the Library of Ashurbanipal* p. xi, and Henrike Hartmann (1960), *Die Musik der sumerischen Kultur*, pp. 129-30.

<sup>155</sup> See also Jaume Llop-Raduà and A.R. George (2001), ‘Die babylonisch-assyrischen Beziehungen und die innere Lage Assyriens in der Zeit der Auseinandersetzung zwischen Ninurta-tukulti-Aššur und Mutakkil-Nusku nach neuen keilschriftlichen Quellen’ and Ernst F. Weidner (1935), ‘Aus den Tagen eines assyrischen Schattenkönigs.’

<sup>156</sup> Peled compares this example to ‘hearing a person accusing another man of “being a girl, not a man”’ in which one does not believe the man being insulted is a girl – transgender or cisgender – but that they are acting contrary to the speaker’s expectations of masculinity (2015, p. 755). He rejects the idea that this contrast is because *kulu’u* and *kalû* are both non-binary, choosing instead to read *kulu’u* as ‘male effeminacy’ (2015, p. 751). It is a profoundly essentialist argument, based in large part by his interpretation of *gala*, *kalû*, *kur-gar-ra/kurgarrû*, and *assinnu* as flavours of manhood (non-hegemonic masculinities) rather than unique gender identities (Peled, 2015, pp. 751-64; 2016a, p. 19, 203-06; 2016b, pp. 158-65; 2018, pp. 55-63). Peled seems to struggle with his own argument, acknowledging both the inherent otherness in these non-binary genders, while continuing to define them as, at their core, men performing non-hegemonic masculinity – either through social transition, dress and grooming, or literal castration (2014, pp. 128-29; 2016a, p. 19; 2016b., pp. 158-65, 2018, pp. 55-63).

Roscoe, 1996, p. 214; Gelb, 1975, pp. 43-76; Krecher, 1966, p. 36; Peled, 2016b, pp. 158-59; Teppo, 2008, pp. 83-84). *Em-sal* was profoundly effeminate, as was their association with ‘female mourners and wailers’ (Fuÿe, 1921, p. 102; Lapinkivi, 2004, p. 160; Peled, 2016b, p. 158-59; Roscoe, 1996, p. 214; Teppo, 2008, p. 84).

Visually, the *gala* have been attested in ‘several iconographic examples of beardless’ individuals (Peled, 2016b, pp. 161-62). Peled observes that it has been assumed that beardlessness in iconography is used to depict castrated men – this has been supported by textual evidence that have identified beardless individuals as eunuchs (*lu-sag*), such as a Neo-Babylonian seal impression – since ‘after the third millennium’ Mesopotamian men are depicted as bearded (2016b, p. 162).

There is no evidence to suggest that *gala* were castrated. Peled suggests that instead they may have ‘constantly shaved. . . to maintain a feminine or youthful appearance’ (2016b, p. 163).<sup>157</sup> In visual contrast, *lu-sag* are consistently depicted with a ‘characteristic muscular appearance’ that differentiate between other more ‘sexually ambiguous beardless figure[s]’ such as ‘[a]n Old Babylonian terracotta plaque’ that depicts a beardless individual who has both ‘feminine-like breasts. . . and a penis’ (2016b, p. 163). Tied to this non-binary gender presentation – the eschewing of masculine appearance in exchange for feminine or androgynous gender cues – modern scholars have attempted to divine if the *gala* practiced homosexuality. Peled, Roscoe, and Teppo all comment on a proverb tied to *gala* sexuality, which Peled guardedly suggests may reference receptive anal sex and that Roscoe and Teppo feel likely

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<sup>157</sup> Of interest is the etymology of *gala*, see Peled 2016a, pp. 126-29.

indicative of *gala* sexual norms (Peled, 2016b, p. 159; Roscoe, 1996, p. 214; Teppo, 2008, p. 84).

The proverb states: ‘When the *kalum*-priest wiped his anus, (he said) “I must not excite that which belongs to my lady Inanna!”’ (Gordon, 1959, pp. 248-49). Beyond the implicit (and inherently queer) kink of the *gala*’s body belonging to Ištar, it appears to suggest that many, if not all, *gala* were sexually receptive, since the proverb identifies the prohibition as socio-religious and therefore intrinsic to *gala* identity.

The *kur-gar-ra/kurgarrû* were also cultic personnel of Inanna/Ištar, typically included alongside mentions of *gala* and *assinnu*. There is considerable debate over their gender presentation during cultic rites, where they are textually attested to be given weapons by Inanna or use weapons on her behalf (Peled, 2014a, pp. 283-96; Peled, 2018, pp. 57-58; Roscoe, 1997, p. 216). Some scholars, such as Ilan Peled, argue that the *kurgarrû* were socially perceived as men, pointing to their distinctive use as weapons as ‘emblems of masculinity, expressing phallic connotations and stereotypical masculine militarism and vigor’ (2018, p. 56).

Peled focuses several specific textual accounts of the *kurgarrû*, arguing that ‘the combined traits of the effeminate *assinnu* and masculine *kurgarrû*. . . represented the whole of their patron goddess and the complete spectrum of her gender image’ (2014a, p. 284). He is quite confident that the *kurgarrû* are masculine, even participants in hegemonic masculinity (2014a, p. 284), however Peled frequently argues that the *gala*, the *kalû*, and the *assinnu* are non-hegemonic masculinities – forms of masculinity divorced from institutionalized power, but allegedly remain essentially *masculine* (Peled, 2015, pp. 751-64; 2016a, p. 19, 203-06; 2016b,

pp. 158-65; 2018, pp. 55-63). I would like to explore these textual attestations since there are so few and briefly address Peled's concerns.

In the 'Poem of Erra,' Tablet 4:52-59,<sup>158</sup> 'the god Erra, a manifestation or a parallel figure of Nergal, the god of war, and his companion, Išum' speak at length, with Išum extolling Erra's violence towards Uruk, 'dwelling of Anu and Ištar', and his 'rule over' the city (Peled, 2014a, p. 288). Išum describes the *kurgarrû* and *assinnu* as emblematic of Ištar's power – 'who for making the people reverent, Ištar turned their masculinity to fem[ininity]' – and as 'The carriers of dagger, carriers of razor, scalpel and flin[t(-blade)]; (Those) who, for delighting the mind of Ištar, do regularly f(orbidden things:)]' (Peled, 2014a, p. 288).

The text has been understood as proof as the *kurgarrû*'s castration (Cagni, 1969, p. 111; Lambert, 1992, p. 148; Parpola, 1997, p. xcvi). Assyriologists Wilfred G. Lambert and Simo Parpola both read the *kurgarrû*'s proximity to cutting tools, not unlike those that would be used for castration as evidence of such, although in similar contexts Luigi Cagni does not explain his translation choice of 'eunuchi' for *kurgarrû* (Cagni, 1969, p. 111; Lambert, 1992, p. 148; Parpola, 1997, p. xcvi). However, as Peled rightly observes, there is no explicit evidence in these lines that the *kurgarrû* are castrated, only that they transgress social boundaries (2014a, pp. 287-88). This conclusion is shared by Roscoe, who suggests that like the *galli*,<sup>159</sup> the passage 'could just as easily refer to a psychological transformation, the result of divine possession or visitation' and that 'there is no clear evidence that any of these priests were eunuchs' (1996, p. 217).<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> While multiple translations of this text exist, for clarity, unless otherwise noted, this is Peled's translation.

<sup>159</sup> Peled describes parallels between the *galli* and *kurgarrû* as 'dubious', however this is exclusively regarding castration. He does not offer an opinion on similarities beyond the possibility of castration, which he rejects as supposition (2014a, p. 289).

<sup>160</sup> Roscoe's argument will be explored in greater detail shortly.



Peled goes on to assert that the poem utilizing ‘a chiasm, in which the first phrase relates the term it immediately follows. . . while the second relates to the previous term’ after which there is a ‘the third phrase, which relates to both terms’ (2014a, p. 289). This claim is reasonable since chiasm appear in other pieces of Mesopotamian poetry (Smith, 1981, pp. 17-35; Welch, 1981, pp. 36-49). He continues the argument by suggesting that ‘the *assinnu*’s were portrayed as having their masculinity turned to femininity. . . while the *kurgarrû*’s were portrayed as wielding cutting weapons’ (2014a, p. 290). This divorces the *kurgarrû* from both the association with castration created by an estrangement with masculinity and a proximity to cutting tools and the association of femininity. This does not feel convincing to me because Peled removes the passage from its immediate context, since the preceding line describes Ištar’s supernatural gender transformation of the *kurgarrû* and *assinnu*. This does not provide evidence that the *kurgarrû* were eunuchs, but it does cast doubt on Peled’s portrayal of the *kurgarrû* as masculine.

Unfortunately, this same uncertainty haunts the rest of Peled’s arguments. He cites the ‘the myth of “Inanna and Ebih”’ in which Inanna says, ‘The *kurgarrû*, I have given him the sword and *patarru*’ – again explicitly tying the *kurgarrû* with at least one sharp weapon, since the *patarru*’s definition is contested and may refer to a dagger, knife, or mace (Peled, 2014a, p. 291). Peled is quick to observe that there is no reference to the *kurgarrû*’s gender being or sex being transformed. Their cultic tools appear to be gender conforming.

In ‘Iddin-Dagan’s Sacred Marriage Hymn’,<sup>161</sup> the sword and *patarru* are again referenced, this time in ritual (Peled, 2014a, p. 295; Reisman, 1969, pp. 147-211; Reisman 1973,

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<sup>161</sup> Translated by Assyriologists Daniel Reisman in *Two Neo-Sumerian Royal Hymns* (1969) and ‘Iddin-Dagan’s Sacred Marriage Hymn’ (1973), and Willem Hendrik Philibert Römer in *Sumerische ‘Königshymnen’ der Isin-Zeit* (1965), among others.

pp. 185-202; Römer, 1965, pp. 128-208). Here ‘appears a scene which describes *kurgarrû*’s as grasping the *patarru*-weapon, covering a sword with blood, and sprinkling the blood on the dais of the throne-room to the sound of loud drumming’ (Peled, 2014a, p. 295; Reisman, 1973, p. 153). Peled reads this account in concert with *úru ám-ma-ir-ra-bi*, a *balaĝ*, or cultic song, composed in *eme-sal* (Black, 1991, pp. 23-24; Gabbay, 2014, p. 126; Peled, 2014a, p. 295). In the *balaĝ*, Peled observes that a ‘*kurgarrû* is described as using a sword and a *patarru* in order to fulfill Inanna’s command. . . killing a maidservant named Amanamtagga, together with a *gala* who used his characteristic drum for the same purpose’ (2014a, p. 295). Peled seems to believe that since the *kurgarrû* is using a weapon to kill, they are performing a hegemonically masculine act, behaving as a warrior.

Peled neglects the queerness of *gala* who assists the *kurgarrû* – the parallel between this account and that of the *gallus* who kills or drives off a lion, deepens, rather than diminishes. While I agree that the presence of a weapon does not indicate castration – and given the conversation on castration and eunuchs in Assyrian culture, I do not believe any omission is due to taboo but is most likely due to the absence of the practice, at least institutionally, among the *kurgarrû* – I am also not fully convinced that the *kurgarrû* embody hegemonic masculinity because of their proximity to weapons and use of them in ritual and myth.

Indeed, Peled’s translation of ‘The Rites of Egašankalamma’ points to the innate gender non-conformity of the *kurgarrû*. There, he translates lines 14-16 as ‘[t]he *kurgarrû* and the horseman, that w[ash] each other in water; the horseman is Bēl, the “man-woman” (= *assinnu*?) is Enlil, as Bēl consigned Enlil to the netherworld’ (2014a, p. 296). Peled translates ‘*lú-munus*’ as

‘man-woman’ rather than ‘*assinnu*’, against Assyriologist Alasdair Livingstone,<sup>162</sup> following the literal meaning (Livingstone, 1989, p. 95-96; Peled, 2014a, p. 296). Peled observes that the mention of Enlil and Bēl evokes ‘Inanna/Ištar’s Descent to the Netherworld’ in which the *kurgarrû* are referenced – as are the *assinnu*, although Livingstone does not share his justification<sup>163</sup> – alludes to the dominance of Bēl over Enlil.

Peled employs a series of mental gymnastics to estrange the *kurgarrû* from this potential domination. He acknowledges an innate homoerotic subtext in the phrase ‘w[ash] each other in water’, which may be either literal or figurative, with water implying semen (Peled, 2014a, p. 297). However, he argues that since there are no (surviving) proverbs, accounts, or mythology in which the *kurgarrû* is penetrated in homogenital sex, that ‘when the *kurgarrû* is mentioned, the insinuated homoeroticism seems to be reciprocal, presumably with no sexual penetration (“The *kurgarrû* and the horseman, that w[ash] each other in water”)’ (2014a, p. 297). According to Peled’s reading, it is only the ‘man-woman’ or the *assinnu*, who is dominated and ‘assumed a receptive role’ (2014a, p. 297).<sup>164</sup>

However, the passage does not lend itself to this reading – presuming that *lú-munus* refers to an unmentioned third individual is unlikely. The *kurgarrû*, through their association with and service to Ištar, are repeatedly placed alongside known non-binary individuals. It is logical to presume that they are the ‘man-woman’ described, given the direct reference in the line above, which forms a cohesive thought with the following two lines. Excluding them because

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<sup>162</sup> Livingstone’s reading is indicated by Peled with parenthesis.

<sup>163</sup> There is speculation that Livingstone may have used *assinnu* since the similar term *ur-munus* appears as ‘a synonym of *assinnu*, or rather its logographic writing’ (Henshaw, 1994, p. 284; cf. Peled 2014a, p. 296).

<sup>164</sup> Peled continues on to argue, without evidence, ‘that just as the effeminate *assinnu* assumed the role of the sexually penetrated party in the cultic rites of Ištar, the *kurgarrû* assumed the role of the sexually penetrating party in these rites’ on the basis of the *kurgarrû* carrying weapons (2014a, p. 297).

there is no other explicit evidence of penetrative homogenital behaviour is questionable – especially since the *kurgarrû* need not be sexually penetrated to be dominated by a hegemonic masculine figure. Rather, this passage appears to confirm that the *kurgarrû* occupy a liminal space – often referenced in proximity to cultic tools of war, alluding to hegemonic power – but also estranged from hegemonic power through their continued association as equals (and as Peled rightly observes, a matched set of types) with the *assinnu*.

Peled’s speculations and conclusions on the *kurgarrû* are a fascinating push back against readings which argue the *kurgarrû* are inherently gender-expansive. Unfortunately for Peled, the textual evidence available appears to support a queer reading of the *kurgarrû*’s place in society.

Assyriologist Stefan Maul cites a stone referred to as *kurgarrānu*, which he believes was used by the *kurgarrû* as make-up, and is referenced in the Sumerian myth *Lugal-e* (1992, p. 163).<sup>165</sup> Roscoe cites the use of ‘masks and cross-dressing’ in ritual (1996, p. 215). The *kurgarrû* – alongside *assinnu* – depicted the goddess Narudu during rituals (Falkenstein, 1931, p. 17; Groneberg, 1986, p. 35; Pallis, 1926, p. 153; Roscoe, 1996, pp. 215-16; Thureau-Dagin, 1921, p. 117). Roscoe draws a parallel between the martial performances of the *kurgarrû* and the ecstatic *galli* rites, particularly the creation and resolution of ‘ritual chaos or liminality’ (1996, p. 216). These similarities lead Roscoe to conclude – rightly, I believe – that the *kurgarrû*, like the *galli*, were not necessarily castrated. Instead, Roscoe suggests a social transition, drawing from cultural ‘importance of dreams and omens in Mesopotamian cultures’ and the explicit references to the transformed gender of the *kurgarrû* and *assinnu*<sup>166</sup> (1996, p. 217). It is not necessary for

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<sup>165</sup> Maul sees the stone as both beautifying and inducing ecstatic movement (1992, p. 163).

<sup>166</sup> Roscoe does not read the Poem of Erra as Peled does, instead applying ‘who for making the people reverent, Istar turned their masculinity to fem[inity;]’ to both the *kurgarrû* and *assinnu* (Peled, 2014a, p. 288; Roscoe, 1996, p.

the *kurgarrû* to be castrated for Ištar to feminize them – they need only be (public) vessels, living yonic symbols, for her to (phallically, publicly) possess. This dramatic role severed them from hegemonic masculinity, marking them as queer, fluid beings.

This reading is supported by ‘an astrological omen’ that sees men and *kurgarrû* ‘settling down’ in homes ‘and the *kurgarrû* giving birth to (or procreated for) the men’ (Roscoe, 1996, p. 217). The *kurgarrû* are again textually cast in a profoundly queer light, despite their cultic tools seeming sociologically (cis) masculine. Whether the *kurgarrû* are birthing men or procreating as a pair with men, they occupy a feminine-coded role. Even the most heteronormative reading of the omen, in which the *kurgarrû* are symbolic progenitors of men, cannot erase the queer undertones – the *kurgarrû* are still playing house with men, still functioning as mothers, alluding to their genderqueer goddexe, herself the creator of the social role of men through warfare.

But textual references aside, how are the *kurgarrû* visually portrayed? Are they visibly estranged from hegemonic masculinity? The answer is unclear. At this time, there are no known images of *kurgarrû*, unlike the *gala* and *galli*. Peled, as a prominent researcher of the *kurgarrû*, *gala*, and *assinnu*, has speculated on the topic, suggesting that ‘in addition to the two cultic weapons of the *kurgarrû*, that images of such ‘*should*. . . [show a] bearded [individual], depicted in a worshipping posture, and if his active sexuality was to emphasized we might expect nudity and displayed genitalia’ (2018, p. 60, emphasis mine). He then volunteers one such ‘Old Babylonian terracotta plaque found in the excavations of Ur’ featuring the following characteristics: ‘human, male, naked, bearded, holding two weapons, and standing in a

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217). This is also the reading of Nissinen, who offers the translation: ‘(a city of) *kurgarrûs* and *assinnus* whose masculinity Ištar changed into femininity to strike horror into the people – the bearers of daggers, razors, pruning-knives and flint blades who frequently do abominable acts to please the heart of Ištar’ (1998, p. 30).

worshipping posture’ (2018, p. 60).<sup>167</sup> There is no firm evidence that the image depicts a *kurgarrû*, unfortunately.

A better supposition can be found in an ‘Old Babylonian plaque from Ur’ that ‘portrays two naked men wrestling. . . . one man was bearded, while his opponent was beardless’ (Peled, 2018, p. 61).<sup>168</sup> Contextually, the image is likelier to depict a *kurgarrû*, given his beardless partner, and the frequent textual pairing of *assinnu*<sup>169</sup> and *kurgarrû*. Peled suggests, and I find it plausible, if not a particularly robust argument, that this plaque captures the ritual ‘mock-battles’ performed by the *assinnu* and *kurgarrû* (2018, p. 61). This is perhaps the best evidence for the *kurgarrû* as visibly tied to cisgender masculinity, however, with our present understanding, it is tenuous at best. If the image depicted the ritual items used by the *assinnu* and *kurgarrû*, or a reference to Ištar, then Peled’s argument would be better substantiated. As it stands, like the majority of Peled’s interpretations, it is inconclusive.

There is no such ambiguity regarding the *assinnu*, however. The *assinnu* are understood, at most conservative, as ‘feminine(-like, non-hegemonic masculine)’ and thus personifying the feminine-coded portion of Ištar’s gender performativity (Peled, 2018, pp. 55-56). Naturally Peled still views this feminine-coded performativity as covering an essentially masculine identity, following with his general analysis of Ištar’s gender-expansive attendants. However, he recognises that the *assinnu* are demonstrably feminine presenting individuals who occupy a feminized social role (Peled, 2016a, pp. 155-202; Peled, 2018, pp. 55-56, 59).

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<sup>167</sup> U1782, see Woolley and Mallowan (1976), pl. 71, no. 71.

<sup>168</sup> U16972, see Woolley and Mallowan (1976), pl. 84, no. 182.

<sup>169</sup> As will be discussed in detail shortly, it is very likely that the *assinnu*, with their non-binary gender presentation and socio-religious role would have been depicted as beardless and visibly estranged from masculinity (Peled, 2018, p. 59).

At the other end of this spectrum, the *assinnu* are seen by Assyriologists and gender scholars as non-binary, feminine-of-centre individuals who are not affiliated with non-hegemonic masculinity, but consciously divorced from masculinity. Stefan Maul, Martti Nissinen, Will Roscoe, and Saana Svärd, neè Teppo, are several such researchers. Maul argues that it stems from Sumerian mythology, that they are ‘weder als ein richtiger Mann noch al seine richtige Frau’ – neither real men, nor real women – but liminal creatures, created by Enki, from the dirt under his nails<sup>170</sup> (1992, p. 161). Their gender transgression is uniquely ordained by the gods, they are created to cross boundaries<sup>171</sup> (1992, pp. 160-66).

Nissinen emphasizes the *assinnu*’s ‘wavering’ gender as typified by their ‘cuneiform sign. . . UR.SAL which means [either] “man-woman” or ‘dog-woman’ with “dog” representing masculinity in a despicable sense’ (1998, pp. 28, 32-33, 147).<sup>172</sup> He argues that an *assinnu*’s gender was ‘changed permanently’ by Ištar, per the ‘Poem of Erra’, as previously discussed: ‘[t]hese people symbolized the androgynous aspect of the goddess not only occasionally in rituals but in their whole life, action, and self-presentation, and thus [were] separated . . . from conventional gender identity and lifestyle’ (Nissinen, 1998, pp. 30-31). Whether this took place through social transition or a medical transition, such as partial or complete castration, there is no evidence. Nissinen believes some *assinnu* may have been castrated but observes that ‘their

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<sup>170</sup> Maul conflates the *assinnu* with the *kurgarrû* and *kalaturru* – Nissinen does not, citing instead the Assyrian myth where the *assinnu* are created by Ea for the same purpose and sent on the same mission. This myth does not specify if they are created from dirt or separate from other humans, and identifies them as *zikru* – Nissinen translates this as ‘person’ (following Dalley) but it has also been translated as an ‘image’ (Foster), ‘word’ (Dalley), or ‘(what was) called for’ (Foster), and ‘someone’ (Dalley) (Nissinen, 1998, p. 29).

<sup>171</sup> Maul suggests that the *assinnu* face discrimination, but not because of their gender performativity, but because of this liminality (1992, pp. 162-66). As I will discuss shortly, I disagree with Maul’s conclusion. The *assinnu*’s gender non-conformity is tied to their liminality, it is the tangible articulation of such power.

<sup>172</sup> Teppo also briefly discusses the term *sinnišānu* (‘woman-like’), which is seen once in ‘lexical material. . . in connection with an *assinnu*’ (2008, p. 80). See also Leick, 1994, p. 160.

irrevocably changed gender roles and identity largely fulfilled the same function as did the life subsequent to castration. . . a token of a lifelong devotion to the goddess’ (1998, p. 31). This is echoed by Teppo, who suggests that while the *assinnu* appear to have been assigned male at birth – or intersex, possibly<sup>173</sup> – that ‘their appearance was either totally feminine, or they had both male and female characteristics’ (Leick, 1994, p. 158; cf. Teppo, 2008, p. 77). The *assinnu*, because of their connection to Ištar were obliged to be ‘at least as ambivalent as their mistress’ and to sunder their masculinity (Teppo, 2008, p. 77). Teppo raises a question that Nissinen does not, inquiring if ‘this shedding of identity was the cause or effect of their dedication to Ištar’ (2008, p. 77).

Nissinen is particular in separating the *assinnu* from homosexuality, emphasizing multiple times that ‘[i]f *assinnu*. . . played the passive part in sexual contacts with men, they did it as a part of their role as mediators between myth and reality’ with the reference to their own sexual desires as ‘characteristically asexual rather than homosexual’ (1998, pp. 24-28, 34-35; 2010, pp. 73-77). He acknowledges that it appears that some portion of the *assinnu*’s social role may have involved sex – citing the *assinnu*’s ‘erotically loaded’ effect on Ereškigal in ‘Ištar’s Descent to the Underworld’<sup>174</sup> and power to release male sexual partners from ‘a hard destiny’ according to a *Šumma ālu* omen (1998, pp. 27, 29). Roscoe, however, remains open to the possibility that the *assinnu* practiced some form of homosexuality based on both the *Šumma ālu*

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<sup>173</sup> Nissinen also acknowledges this (1998, pp. 30, 34).

<sup>174</sup> Nissinen follows Rykle Borger in his translation of ‘Ištar’s Descent to the Underworld,’ lines 92-99 (Borger, 1979, pp. 100-01; Nissinen, 1998, p. 147). He translates the *assinnu* name Ašüş-nāmir as ‘his departure (from the underworld) is splendid’ but it can also be translated as ‘Good-looks’/‘his appearance is bright’ (Dalley, 1989, p. 158).



omen and the word play that connects Enkidu and the *assinnu* (Nissinen, 1998, pp. 33-34; Roscoe, 1996, p. 217).

Nissinen, Roscoe, and Teppo all cite the Hymn of Iddin-Dagan, where a cultic attendant, referred to as a *sag-ur-sag* dresses half eir<sup>175</sup> body in masculine-coded clothing and the other half in feminine-coded clothing (Nissinen, 1998, pp. 30, 34; Roscoe, 1996, p. 215; Teppo, 2008, pp. 78-79). Assyriologist Philip Jones observes that the ‘Iddin-Dagan’ features ‘exotic cultic personnel [who] parade beneath the heavenly gaze of the goddess’ while embodying ‘transgressive’ behaviour such as ‘cross-dressing, bondage, and self-mutilation’<sup>176</sup> (2003, p. 292). The result is ‘carnavalesque scenes. . . [overflowing with] sexual confusion’ that depict ‘an underlying fear of the divine world and a recognition that mediating that power is a lonely, dangerous, and potentially humiliating task’ (Jones, 2003, p. 300). Jones’s acknowledgement of Iddin-Dagan’s complicated, precarious position is an interesting one that will be discussed in greater detail later. For the moment, let us remain focused on how the *sag-ur-sag* embody and present gender.

In lines 45-65 of Daniel Reisman’s translation of ‘Iddin-Dagan’s Sacred Marriage Hymn,’ the *sag-ur-sag*, which Nissinen, Roscoe, and Teppo interpret as an *assinnu*,<sup>177</sup> adorn themselves ‘with colored bands’ and ‘the “cloak of divinity”’ in addition to their split gender clothing (Reisman, 1973, p. 187). They carry ‘the soothing harp’, ‘the sword belt, the “arm of battle”’ and ‘[t]he spear, the “arm of battle” . . . in their hands’ and ‘with jump ropes and colored cords they compete before her [Inanna]’ (Reisman, 1973, p. 187). The *sag-ur-sag*’s ritual items –

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<sup>175</sup> I am using the singular neo-pronouns ey/em/eir for the *sag-ur-sag* and the plural they/them/theirs.

<sup>176</sup> The ritual self-injury/bloodletting is provided by the *kurgarrû* (Reisman, 1973, pp. 187-88).

<sup>177</sup> Citations in above paragraph. Against this conclusion, Ilan Peled considers the *sag-ur-sag* a unique title (2016a, pp. 257-66).

the weapons of war, the calming harp – are explicitly associated with Inanna/Ištar’s cultic attendants, as previously discussed. They mark the *sag-ur-sag* as serving on behalf of Inanna/Ištar, while their clothing functions as a reminder of Inanna/Ištar’s ability to transform gender – an implicit threat to all present, reading, hearing, or watching that the goddess is capricious and powerful, demanding appropriate reverence.

Nissinen and Teppo both observe that the *assinnu*’s mythological duties and practical duties was deeply interconnected. Their role in ‘Ištar’s Descent to the Underworld’ meant that they functioned as *ramkūtus*, or ‘purification priests’ (Groneberg, 1997, pp. 291-303; Teppo, 2008, p. 82). When an individual became ill, according to ‘Ištar’s Descent,’ this meant ‘that Ištar – after being freed from the Underworld – was looking for someone to replace her there’ and just as ‘the *assinnu* saves Ištar in the myth’, they were summoned to ‘release’ the ill individual in the physical world from the supernatural’s influence<sup>178</sup> (Nissinen, 1998, pp. 29-30; cf Teppo, 2008, pp. 81-82).

Additionally, Teppo notes that ‘[i]n some lexical lists, *assinnu* are grouped with prophets (*maḥḥû, šā’ilu*) and ecstasies (*zabbus*)’ and that there is a record of ‘three prophetic oracles from Mari in which an *assinnu* is the prophet’<sup>179</sup> (2008, p. 82).

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<sup>178</sup> Nissinen and Teppo cite a prayer which states: ‘Let the *assinnu* stand by and take my sickness away. Let him make the sickness that seized me to disappear through the window’ (cf Nissinen, 1998, p. 30; Teppo, 2008, p. 82).

<sup>179</sup> Šelebum in ARM 26 197 and 213, and Ili-haznaya in ARM 26 212 (Teppo, 2008, pp. 82).

## Gender and Priesthood: The Importance of Non-binary Cultic Personnel in Ritual and in Liminal Spaces

The underlying theme in these different non-binary priestesses is their liminality. They functioned as the embodiment of liminality, making abstract chaos a concrete, mundane reality. They served as a continuous reminder of the sacred in the secular.

Leick observes that ‘Inanna, like other great gods, is both terrifying and comforting’ (2008, p. 126). Leick is particularly interested in Inanna/Ištar’s manifestation of ‘binarity’ – ‘[she] combines contradictory aspects of female sexuality; she is both prostitute and bride, lady of the heavens and the earth, capable of motherly love and transgressive love’ – within sexuality rather than the dichotomy of Ištar’s command of both love and war (2008, pp. 125, 127). The ambiguity of her cultic attendants, she concludes, validated both their mythological role and their earthly obligations to the liminal goddess (2008, p. 28).

Teppo notes that Inanna/Ištar’s non-binary priestesses appear to have received a complicated reception, accepted for their place in ‘a divinely sanctioned world order’ even as they ‘evoked fearful respect and abhorrence’ (2008, p. 87). Teppo theorized that Ereškigal’s curse<sup>180</sup> from ‘Ištar’s Descent to the Underworld’ captures ‘the unfriendly attitude’ of people towards the individuals themselves – the institution being sacred and protected from overt critique, lest Ištar change their gender too (2008, p. 87). While ‘[i]t is not known how much food or financial support they received from the Temple of Ištar’, the *gala*, at least, faced the risk of

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<sup>180</sup> ‘[B]read from the city’s ploughs shall be your food, the city drains shall be your only drinking place, the shade of the city wall your only standing place, threshold steps your sitting place, the drunkard and the thirsty shall slap your cheek’ (Teppo, 2008, p. 87). Nissinen suggests that this curse may carry sexual overtones as well: ‘the “plough” (*epinnu*) in Ereškigal’s curse is a euphemism for penis, and “bread from the city’s ploughs” thus refers to sexual contact with a man’ (1998, p. 33).

being enslaved, suggesting that those who were not able to ‘secure an official position in the temple’ – which, as discussed previously, could be a prosperous, respected position – lived at the margins of society, without the protections of hegemonic masculinity that free men and married women enjoyed (Teppo, 2008, p. 88).

The *gala/kalû*, the *kur-gar-ra/kurgarrû*, and the *assinnu* were social ‘anomalies: gender-ambivalent devotees of the ambivalent goddess Ištar, who herself is the supreme transgressor of boundaries’ standing at the border of ‘one of the most important boundaries in Mesopotamian society – the boundary between men and women’ (Teppo, 2008, p. 91). This transgression allowed them ‘awesome power’ manifested on behalf of their communities as intermediaries between Ištar and society (2008, p. 91). But why Ištar specifically?

Ancient Near Eastern scholar Rivkah Harris suggests that ‘Inanna-Ishtar was a paradox’ that ‘confounded and confused normative categories and boundaries and thereby defined and protected the norms and underlying structure of Mesopotamian civilization’ (1991, p. 263). Her embodiment of order and disorder parallels her embodiment of innocence and aggressive sexuality, masculinity and femininity, compassion and violence, and vulgarity and status<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Harris cites ‘In-nin Šà-gur-ra’ as a particularly excellent example this:

To run, to escape, to quiet and to pacify are yours, Inanna. . . .

To destroy, to build up, to tear up and to settle are yours, Inanna. . . .

To turn a man into a woman and a woman into a man are yours, Inanna. . . .

Business, great winning, financial loss, deficit are yours, Inanna. . . .

Neglect, careful preparation, to raise the head and to subdue are yours, Inanna. . . .

Slander, untruthful words, to speak inimical (words) (and) to add hostile words are yours, Inanna. . . .

To initiate a quarrel, to joke, to cause smiling, to be base and to be important are yours, Inanna . . . .

You have throwing into confusion those threads which have been ordered. . . . You organize those threads which bring confusion. . . . Inanna, you have destroyed what should not have been destroyed and you have made what should not have been made. (1991, p. 265)

Harris also cites various primary sources describing Ištar’s genderfluidity:

Though I am a woman I am a noble young man

(1991, pp. 262-65). '[T]he enormous potential of her raw power', Harris argues is fundamentally 'dangerous to both humans and gods' and thus her attendants are created by Enki to calm and placate her (1991, p. 266). This is not always enough, however, and in an Akkadian myth, Şaltu, a caricature of Iştar, is created by Ea to subdue her (1991, p. 267).

Iştar's festivals and cultic celebrations emphasize 'the breakdown of norms', from the *sag-ur-sag*'s split gender clothing to '[p]ornographic language' and obscenities, mock battles and children's games (1991, p. 270, 273-77, cf p. 274). Harris interprets this institutionalized excess as serving a communal function not dissimilar to Şaltu's effect on Iştar herself: '[a reminder] of the existence of rule' and a manifestation 'of law reinforcement' paralleling what medievalist Umberto Eco observed in carnival (Harris, 1991, p. 274; Eco, 1984, p. 6).

Teppo concurs, seeing the liminality of Iştar's rituals as exposing the boundaries between the accepted and unacceptable (2008, p. 90). Nonbinary cultic attendants and priestesses, like Iştar, served as continual reminders of hegemonic, binary gender. The disruptive power of their genderfluidity was tempered and limited by their social obligations – as healers, as devotees to Iştar – and persistent identity as 'the Other in their [Mesopotamian society's] midst' (Teppo, 2008, p. 87). Despite being estranged from hegemonic power, their existence upheld hegemonic norms.

Teppo speculates that the *gala/kalû*, the *kur-gar-ra/kurgarrû*, and the *assinnu*'s positions and identities may have been created as 'an outlet' for individuals 'who could not, for whatever

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Her coming forth is that of a hero. . . lordship and kingship he placed in her hand.

When I take my stand at the rear of battle, verily I am a woman who comes and draws near. When I sit in the ale-house, I am a woman (but) verily I am an exuberant man,  
When I am present at a place of quarreling, verily I am a woman, a perfect pillar.  
When I sit by the door of the tavern, verily I am a prostitute who knows *the penis*. The friend of a man, the girl-friend of a woman (1991, pp. 168-69).

reason, function in society as men or women’ (2008, p. 91). This seems like a reasonable conclusion. I would suggest that Harris and Teppo’s arguments are sound and that it also possible to use the language of the sacred and secular to examine the way non-binary cultic personnel embody social boundaries and the order/chaos dichotomy.

The *galli*, the *gala/kalû*, the *kur-gar-ra/kurgarrû*, and the *assinnu* can be read in parallel dichotomies – sacred/mundane and non-binary/binary. Each group is marked as ritually set apart (sacred) while existing in the secular or mundane world. Each group embodies non-binary gender presentation in a binary society with no recorded examples of gender expansiveness or transgression outside of religion. I believe that their gender transgression marks them as sacred – it is a central part of their cultic role, used in ritual, and a repeated identifier, both within the religious community and in larger society. Although there were binary priests and priestess, Ištar and Cybele demand genderfluidity from the *galli*, the *gala/kalû*, the *kur-gar-ra/kurgarrû*, and the *assinnu*.

The parallel between the sacred and the gender transgressive and the mundane and the gender conforming in these specific priestly identities suggests that their ability to inspire sublime awe was a powerful tool to reinforce the deity/non-deity dichotomy. I am uncertain if Roscoe’s image of ‘primordial unity’ is necessarily correct, but I believe his argument that sacred genderfluidity ‘tears the very fabric of reality for those who witness it’ is sound (1996, pp. 203-04). The institutionalized social disorder of Cybele and Ištar’s non-binary personnel provides a vent – and through that vent, a divide that emphasizes hegemonic gender roles. The excess and sensory disorder that accompany images of the *galli*, the *gala/kalû*, the *kur-gar-ra/kurgarrû*, and the *assinnu* reinforce that gender transgression is chaotic, powerful, but most of

all, dangerous and fearful. The price of their connection to the goddesses is permanent alienation as continual embodiments of their terrifying strength.

## 2 Sam. 6 in Conversation with Other Ancient Mesopotamian and Levantine Narratives

The historical-critical emphasis on the place of biblical passages in time and space has often proved problematic, however, it does draw our attention to the way texts and narratives exist in conversation with each other, a facet I wish to retain for my queer analysis. As previously established, gender is created by the society in which it functions and thus varies by period, region, and community: there is a baseline for normative behaviour, gender, and sexuality that is created and re-created by participant-performers. The narrative's gender performances exist, at its borders, in perpetual conversation with adjacent communities. Indeed, these boundaries often provide the most fruitful material for analysis: the tension between self and other requires a stronger demarcation, often bringing into sharp relief nuances in identity that would otherwise be unarticulated. Read against Babylonian and Assyrian cultural norms, David and Hashem's actions provide a fascinating commentary on the role of gender in Israelite/Judean communal identity.

David's abrogation of masculine-coded hegemony is also significant. The narrator's emphasis on Hashem, in a hegemonic framework, requires the narrator to feminize David to resolve the power struggle. I believe, however, that this solution was not necessarily disagreeable to the exilic narrator, who may subsume the transgression of gender into a transgression of class,<sup>182</sup> but who also depicts David's genderqueer behaviour with relative positivity. The

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<sup>182</sup> This possibility will be discussed in greater detail in chapter nine.

narrator explores and resolves potential tension with this blurring of boundaries by establishing David's actions as cultic necessities. However, the narrator may be also motivated by a desire to create a place for feminization and/or genderfluidity in the sacred as a way of coping with the forced feminization of an exilic Judah. This argument will be detailed further following my analysis of David's second procession.



## CHAPTER SEVEN: SUDDEN DEATH – UZZAH AND THE COST OF HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY

I will begin my analysis of 2 Sam. 6 by probing the appearance, limits, and costs of hegemonic masculinity in vv. 1-11. This portion of the text is marked by the abrupt murder of acting priest Uzzah, marking the end of David's initial attempt to bring the ark to his new capital city. I have chosen six commentaries from a range of modern<sup>183</sup> perspectives – Walter Brueggemann, Jan P. Fokkelman, H.W. Hertzberg, P. Kyle McCarter, David Toshio Tsumura, and Johanna W.H. van Wijk-Bos – representing feminist, historical-critical, literary and rhetorical readings, all of which have and continue to contribute to scholarly discussions on 2 Sam., to provide context.

### Framing Violence

Uzzah – particularly his death – occupies a central role in 2 Sam. 6, functioning as a crucible and the initial point of conflict. Fokkelman justifiably divides 2 Sam. 6 into two processions, each with a conflict, separated by v. 12, a literary 'seesaw' that balances not only the word count, but the narrative action (1990, pp. 176-78). In order to understand the violence of v. 6-11, we must begin at v. 3, where Uzzah is introduced as a part of the military parade.

Uzzah appears with Ahio in 2 Sam. 6.3 as the son of Abinadab, the man with whom the ark was left in 1 Sam. 7.1. Biblical scholars offer two explanations for why Uzzah and Ahio accompany the ark, rather than Eleazar, who was consecrated and entrusted with the ark's care: either that Uzzah and Ahio are the relatives of Eleazar or Uzzah and Eleazar were the same

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<sup>183</sup> 1964 to 2020.

individual. Hertzberg argues that Uzzah and Ahio are unique individuals, since 1 Sam. 7.1 predates Saul's anointing and reign, and as such, Eleazar 'would have to be imaged as an exceedingly old man' (1964, pp. 278). This conclusion also excludes the possibility that Uzzah and Ahio are brothers of Eleazar, instead placing them as grandchildren of Abinadab; Hertzberg also references Karl Budde's analysis of 2 Sam. 6.3, where וְאֶחָיו is translated 'and his brother' rather than 'and Ahio' – Budde then argues that Zadok followed וְאֶחָיו, and was redacted to give Zadok legitimatization as an Aaronite (Budde, 1934, p. 42-50; Hertzberg, 1964, pp. 278-79). However, Brueggemann (1990, p. 249) and van Wijk-Bos (2020, p. 244) see Uzzah – and Ahio – as the sons of Abinadab. McCarter (1984, p. 169) and Tsumura (2019, p. 112) offer both explanations, comparing the name shift of King Uzziah/Azariah from 2 Kings 15.32-34 and 2 Chronicles 16.1 with 2 K. 15.1 and Uzziel/Azarel from 1 Chr. 25.4 with 1 Chr. 25.18. Fokkelman elects to stay out of the fray entirely (1990, pp. 186-87).

Uzzah's parentage is a pertinent question so far as it addresses the issue of his cultic suitability for the position of caretaker. The narrator legitimizes Uzzah's position by tying him directly Abinadab and to Eleazar, either as Eleazar or as Eleazar's relative. This legitimization obscures an undertone of discomfort, according to Fokkelman, who suggests that 'the alliterative connection [of] *krb-rkb* wants to raise doubts' about what Uzzah is leading: a new cart (1990, p. 186).

Someone has placed the ark on a new cart, and it is this cart that Uzzah drives with Ahio. Fokkelman argues that there is a reference not only to 1 Sam. 7.1 in the new cart and Abinadab's sons, but also 1 Sam. 1.3 and the ill-fated sons of Eli (1990, p. 186-87). van Wijk-Bos (2020, pp. 244-45) and Tsumura (2019, p. 112) concur with Fokkelman's premise that the cart is

problematic, both noting the prior association to the Philistines and the departure from previously described – and approved – cultic transportation. McCarter disagrees with this reading of the chapter, where the new cart, while tied to 1 Sam. 6.7, is not viewed against Deuteronomic prohibitions or injunctions regarding cultic transportation. Instead, McCarter suggests that the cart, since it has not ‘been polluted by previous secular use’, is ritually pure (1984, p. 169). Thus, while ‘a defect in preparation for or error in the performance of such a rite’ could reasonably incur Hashem’s wrath, McCarter sees Uzzah’s death as reinforcing ‘the awesome power’ of Hashem (1984, p. 170).

Fokkelman, Tsumura, and van Wijk-Bos’s readings ignore that in the beginning of v. 3, the ark is set on ‘a new cart’. The narrator implies movement between the ark’s former form of transportation – the Philistine’s new cart – and its current form of transportation with אֶל־עגלה rather than a continuous ride from Kiriath-jearim/Baalath on the same vehicle. This first movement, from cart, or place, to the new cart, is apparently a smooth one. Instead, the commentators focus on the cart itself or the language used to describe the ark.

Fokkelman explicitly details the difference between v. 3, 6-7, where the ark is described as ‘the ark of God’ and v. 4, where it is referred to simply as ‘the ark’, an object in relation to Ahio and Uzzah (1990, pp. 187-88). This, he suggests, opens the possibility that Ahio and Uzzah ‘pay more attention to the object than to its sometimes highly demanding owner’ (1990, p. 187). This is the first time Hashem enters the scene, and the second time Hashem is referenced specifically in the chapter (Fokkelman, 1990, p. 188).

Up until this point, the ark is described only as ‘the ark of Elohim’ until v. 9 – with v. 2 specifically noting that this is ‘the ark of Elohim, who is called name, by the name, Hashem of

Armies, the One Who Dwells Between the Cherubim' –, where after witnessing the sudden divine murder of Uzzah, David refers to the ark as 'the ark of Hashem'. McCarter's translation of 2 Sam. 6, while quite good, unfortunately refers to every instance of אלהים and יהוה as 'Yahweh', which while accurate, blunts the interpersonal effect (1984, pp. 161-62). Hertzberg does better, using translating אלהים as 'God' and יהוה as 'LORD', however, in v. 9, the ark is not 'the ark of the LORD' but 'the ark of God' (1964, pp. 275-76). This may be the result of a double translation since J.S. Bowden translates the 1964 edition from German into English. Whether the work of Hertzberg or Bowden, this lapse undercuts the narrator's use of general and specific terms. As a result, I prefer van Wijk-Bos's translation, where אלהים is translated 'God' and יהוה is translated 'Adonai' (van Wijk-Bos, 2020, p. 245). The narrator's choice of language links David and Hashem through specific, intimate language, while Uzzah and Ahio are linked to Hashem through generalized language.

Hashem's greatest contact and interaction with Uzzah and Ahio is to strike Uzzah in v. 7. The Hebrew is unclear as to *why* Uzzah is so abruptly killed. Rachelle Gilmour notes that while '[m]ost suggestions for its translation are along the lines of "error" or "negligence" . . . [t]here is no grammatical indication of whose error or negligence this may have been' (2019, p. 4). I believe this indicates Uzzah's role as secondary character, even in his own death. He does not specifically, intimately interact with Hashem, even when directly touched by the divine. Uzzah is not even implicated in his own death, he is reduced to only a vague 'he'.

In this uneasy space, a wealth of explanations have been provided. Brueggemann, Hertzberg, and Tsumura see Uzzah's death as a straightforward consequence of touching the ark. Brueggemann (1990, p. 249) argues that the event underscored the need for the ark to 'not be

presumed upon, taken for granted, or treated with familiarity’ as it was the physical manifestation of Hashem, therefore, ‘to touch the ark is to impinge on God’s holiness’ and Hertzberg (1964, p. 279) accepts the narrator’s explanation without comment. Tsumura (2019, p. 115) also concurs, and like McCarter (1984, p. 169), references Naphtali Herz Tur-Sinai’s theory that that 1 Sam. 6.19 and 2 Sam. 6.6-11 are ‘two versions of a single etiological legend’ (Tur-Sinai, 1951, pp. 282-85). However, while McCarter (1984, pp. 169-70) also acknowledges the likelihood that Uzzah’s actions represented a breach in acceptable cultic behaviour, he also references Emil G. Kraeling’s theory that is an underlying connection between ‘the god of plague, Resheph, with whom the deity Edom was associated’ and the decision to leave the ark with Obed-Edom in v. 10-11 (Kraeling, 1928, p. 156). McCarter vacillates between viewing the text as a didactic narrative on cultic ritual and etiological narrative designed to excuse the ark’s movement to the home of a foreigner (Obed-Edom).

Fokkelman (1990, pp. 186, 189) and van Wijk-Bos (2020, pp. 244-45) both explore the possibility that Uzzah’s touch precipitated Hashem’s wrath, but they look at the cart itself as possible source of ire. Fokkelman suggests ‘the priest’s touching the cart is the last straw for God’ who has already endured the indignity of his preferred form of transportation – the ark borne on poles – being substituted for the transportation conceived and used by outsiders (1990, p. 189). van Wijk-Bos cites both Exodus and Deuteronomy as examples of cultically proper transportation of the ark – on poles, per Ex. 25.10-15, and carried by the Levites, per Deut. 10.8, 31.9, 25 – making the entire event a case of ‘improper conveyance’ with ‘improper personnel’ (2020, p. 244-45).

Fokkelman and van Wijk-Bos come closer to questioning the פשט, or straight reading of the text, but like the other commentaries, they look to justify Hashem's sudden lapse in morality. Uzzah is not the first person to interact with the ark – it did not pick itself up and place itself on the new cart. In some unspecified way, an individual or individuals moved the ark either from its Philistine-era new cart to its new cart, or from its resting place to this new cart. The incident occasions no deaths, or none that the narrator sees fit to mention; there is no pall over the procession until Uzzah is killed.

Biblical scholar Donald F. Murray not only notes this but suggests that Uzzah and Ahio's explicit role in the procession was to keep the ark on the cart (1998, pp. 125-26). Gilmour's reading of 2 Sam. 6 builds on this and argues that 'there is no certainty' that the cultic prescriptions found in Ex. and Deut. 'were known' and may have been 'written and included in the Pentateuch as a result of this story' (2019, p. 3). Gilmour instead argues that Hashem's anger erupts as a response to his vulnerability, looking at the chapter through the lens of Slavoj Žižek's concept of 'divine violence' (2019, pp. 1-19).

Gilmour's caution against reading the cultic prescriptions of Torah as established, universal ritual during the writing of 2 Sam. 6 is excellent advice, since in 2 Sam. 6.12-19, we again see a deviation from the Torah's cultic requirements for the ark's movement. There is no mention of Levites, much less that they are Kohathites, per Numbers 4.15, 17-20, although presumably the ark is borne on poles, since 2 Sam. 6.13 references 'those carrying the ark'. Rather than the ark proceeding ahead of the people, as in Joshua 3.6, David leads the ark, and shockingly, takes on a priestly role, '[sacrificing] burnt offerings and well-being offerings before Hashem' and distributing food in 2 Sam. 6.17-19. Hashem's willingness to overlook these

breaches in cultic propriety seem odd when only verses before, he struck down Uzzah for what appears to be a well-intentioned, although ritually wrong action. Are we to assume David obtained consecrated Levites and a priest to oversee the burnt offerings? It is reasonable that David would take careful precautions, but the narrator does not provide them for us. The narrator is utterly unconcerned with the matter.

In 1 Sam. 6.14-15, when the ark is first received from the Philistines, the narrator takes care to tell us that the Levites are the ones who remove the ark from the new cart. Their presence certainly helps to legitimize the offerings by the people of Beth-shemesh, but it does not protect them from Hashem's wrath over improper cultic behaviour.<sup>184</sup> In every instance of burnt offerings between Genesis and 2 Sam. 6, the only burnt offerings that are permitted without a priest explicitly present are those that either occur before the priesthood is consecrated by Moses, or those that are explicitly permitted via supernatural intervention, such as the cases of Gideon and Manoah (Judges 6.23-28; 13.15-20). In Judges 22.1-34, there is an extended, heated dispute about an altar erected in an undesignated place, since in Deut. 27.1-8, undesignated places are correlated with idolatry. This emphasis on a single place of authorized worship was likely the product of the editors and authors of Josiah's era, roughly 640-609 BCE.

I believe 2 Sam. 6 shows a strange lack of concern and specificity about cultic behaviour for a narrative that is so allegedly concerned with ritual and procedure. Like David Penchansky, I find that Uzzah was merely 'in the wrong place, at the wrong time' (1999, p. 29). Penchansky acknowledges that the chapter may be read as a warning against cultic ignorance or disrespect, but instead suggests that David's reaction to Uzzah's murder offers readers a depiction of the

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<sup>184</sup> The LXX says this is because the people looked into the ark, while the Hebrew says it is because the sons of Jeconiah did not greet the ark with the proper enthusiasm.

tension created by ‘a violent, unpredictable God’ that David ‘[banishes] to the unknown realm of the other’ by leaving the ark with Obed-edom (1999, pp. 27-29). David does not become angry with Uzzah and Ahio, instead, his anger (and resulting fear) is directed at Hashem (1999, p. 28).

Further, I believe that consciously or unconsciously, the narrator of 2 Sam. 6 obscures the actual subject of Hashem’s anger. If Uzzah was the root cause of Hashem’s anger, why leave the ark? Justice would have been served the moment he died. But the tension remains – the narrator has only upped the stakes. Here, I believe a queer lens offers a unique and useful perspective on the text. Uzzah is not the reason for Hashem’s anger: David is.

The connection between Uzzah and Ahio and the generalized terminology describing the ark in 2 Sam. 6.4, while intriguing, is hardly a smoking gun that Uzzah or Ahio harboured any problematic level of rote performance or callousness towards the ark itself. There is also no specific individual assigned the responsibility of coordinating the ark’s movement: is the decision to use a new cart David’s or the son(s) of Abinadab? The text is unclear. The prohibition against touching the ark is neglected entirely in v. 3 and while the cart is absent from the second procession, there is hardly narrative proof to support the argument that the ark needed to be borne by Levites, since no Levites are mentioned in v. 13.

I find it notable that Hashem’s first appearance, not as modifier, not appearing via the ark, but as a subject, as himself, is in v. 5, with David and his assembled army celebrating ‘before Hashem’. The narrator refers to David’s procession as ‘the house of Israel’ in v. 5, however, the parade is described initially as being compromised by ‘thirty thousand of Israel’s chosen soldiers’ in v. 1, and in v.2, as ‘the people who were with him’. This contingent, although possibly augmented by civilians, is described by the narrator as military: David is a conquering



king, preparing to enter his new royal city with a show of strength and power, his army around him and the ark, the foremost symbol of spiritual power, attending, offering spiritual validation to his secular success.

Brueggemann, Fokkelman, Tsumura, van Wijk-Bos all acknowledge the political aspect of David's decision. Brueggemann argues, that 'this move may have been an act of good faith, [but] it is also a nervy act of calculation' (1990, pp. 248). The ark allows David to reinforce his power, situating Jerusalem as a city in two worlds, one political and one religious (Brueggemann, 1990, pp. 248-49). Tsumura highlights how the editor places 2 Sam. 6 after 'David's victories over the Philistines' and immediately before Hashem's covenant with David: the chapter functions as fulcrum between the secular and spiritual (2019, p. 107). van Wijk-Bos notes that Jerusalem had the advantage of 'no previous tribal attachments' but 'the disadvantage of having no associations of religious and historical significance' (2020, p. 243). While the ark's residence in Jerusalem certainly legitimized David, it also legitimized Jerusalem, separate from David, precipitating a symbiotic, circular relationship between David and Jerusalem.

Fokkelman, while he acknowledges the political implications, is more concerned with the character of David. He emphasizes that 'the name Jerusalem has been clearly avoided, and systematically replaced, by "the City of David"' (1990, p. 180). The ark's presence is personal, it signifies a 'permanent connection' between the king and Hashem – an act that Fokkelman resists interpreting as either exclusively personal or political (1990, p. 180). I believe the two are inextricably tied: David's personal identity is tied to the city since his political identity is tied to the city, as indicated by this repeated usage of 'the city of David' (1990, pp. 184-85). Thus, Fokkelman argues that David's reaction to Uzzah's death is a 'spontaneous and especially

emotional reaction' that shifts into anger when David realizes 'his celebration has been utterly ruined' (1990, p. 189). Hashem's reaction is personal. The rejection of Jerusalem can be read as a rejection of David.

These traditional commentaries are unable to adequately explain 2 Sam. 6's variability in ritual instability, instead focusing on ways to obscure or allay the tension in the text, primarily by favouring the impersonal over the personal. Fokkelman comes closest to embracing this personal conflict, by highlighting the connection between David's self-identity and the procession. Fokkelman asserts that Hashem's rejection would 'not please any kind of ruler' – it demonstrates that Hashem cannot 'be organised' either as a political tool or to stroke David's ego (1990, pp. 189-90). If David wishes to throw a procession for the ark, he must do so on Hashem's terms, for Hashem's benefit. I would like to expand on Fokkelman's concept of the rejection of Jerusalem as the rejection of David and suggest that the rejection of Jerusalem would also constitute a rejection of David's kingship. David knows the murder of Uzzah undermines not only him, but his procession, his show of military might, of his kingly authority, and his political ambitions. It unmans David.

#### Masculinity in the First Procession

Brueggemann, Fokkelman, Hertzberg, McCarter, Tsumura, and van Wijk-Bos all completely miss the way masculinity underwrites David's performance and power in 2 Sam 6.1-5. The way Israelite manhood is constructed and maintained is not referenced at all. David and Hashem's masculinity is assumed to be a static, essential feature of their respective identities. This cisnormative assumption obscures a potential source of conflict between Hashem and

David: hegemonic masculinity. Here, my queer reading offers something unique – it offers the chance to examine how hegemonic masculinity and genderfluidity are navigated by David and Hashem in cultic ritual.

Hegemonic masculinity is an idealized performance of masculinity that consolidates and reifies patriarchal power and falls at the apex of the spectrum of masculinities.<sup>185</sup> As an ideal, it can never be fully realized, only ever strived towards. I used the term ‘hegemonic masculinity’ over other terms along the continuum of masculinity, such as ‘complicit masculinity’ because complicit masculinity, while in alignment with, and benefitting from hegemonic masculinity, does not maintain the hegemonic standard (Connell, 2005, pp. 79). David and Hashem do not enjoy complicit masculinity’s passive ‘patriarchal dividend’ (Connell, 2005, p. 79; DiPalma, 2010, p. 38). They are actively engaged in reaching for the hegemonic ideal. Their failures have less in common with (obtainable) complicit masculinity because their failures serve to push the hegemonic standard ever higher.<sup>186</sup>

Gender performance, as discussed in chapter four, is not the same as gender identity. Given the lack of interiority, I will not presume David’s gender identity to be masculine, feminine, or non-binary. I will continue to use the pronouns ‘he/him/his’ because pronouns do not define gender. My thesis specifically examines David’s performance of gender, which I will demonstrate as fascinatingly fluid throughout 2 Sam. 6. This fluidity is intrinsically tied to David’s social role: it is a necessary component of his shift from David-the-King/David-the-Warrior to David-the-Dancer/David-Between-the-Lines/David-the-Priest. Let us begin by

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<sup>185</sup> See Appendix 2.

<sup>186</sup> To take just one example, in 2 Sam. 6, Hashem’s failure to control who touches his ark is followed by an outburst of violence, moving him from impotent to powerful.

examining the beginning gender performance of the text's central characters, David and Hashem, against ancient Israelite gender roles.

### Competing Power

The narrator of 2 Sam. 6 begins with David 'again' assembling his men. McCarter specifically addresses the translation of  $\text{אל}$  as a military unit, and not a literal term (1984, p. 168). van Wijk-Bos (2020, p. 243) and Tsumura (2019, p. 111) concur that these men are 'warriors', and their numbers represent an army. Fokkelman notes that while the figure is likely figurative, it presents David's troops as 'somewhere between a standing army and a massive people's army' (1990, pp. 184-85). Gilmour suggests that these men are the implied protection for the ark, since the same number also appears in 1 Sam. 4.10, when 30,000 men are lost and the ark is taken by the Philistines, drawing a literary link between the Ark Narrative and 2 Sam. 6, 'regardless of the nature of the source-critical link' (2019, p. 14). By introducing David in connection with his 'chosen soldiers', the identity of David-the-Warrior is solidified in v. 1. As I established in chapter three, masculinity in ancient Israel, according to the Hebrew Bible, was understood in terms of power, persuasion, beauty that stirs up admiration (as opposed to beauty that makes ones vulnerable), an exclusively masculine social circle, and musical talent.

David J.A. Clines specifically defined power in terms of 'fighting and killing' – one's status as a warrior established one's place as a man (1995, pp. 216-19). David's army evokes his previous military conflicts – from Goliath to the capture of Jerusalem – and reinforces his fitness to rule. Clines argues that in David's total narrative arc, 'the purpose of fighting is to resist slavery for oneself and to continue to keep others in slavery' (1995, pp. 218-19). Power is won

through battle: ‘to be a man is to fight’ (Clines, 1995, pp. 218-19). To lose, to be subjugated, is to be feminized.

As briefly discussed in chapter three, there are multiple textual examples of the forced feminization of military prisoners of war and enemy combatants in the Hebrew Bible. C.J. Patrick Davis and Ela Lazarewicz-Wyrzykowska both look at different aspects of this feminization in Jeremiah and the narrative of Samson, respectively. Davis builds on Clines’ examination of prophetic masculinity to argue that Jeremiah’s call to Israel is underwritten with violence (Davis, 2010, p. 197). This violence stems from the hegemonic masculinity of Hashem and is wielded by the prophets to chastise Israel with actual or threatened emasculation (Clines, 2002, pp. 311-30; Clines, 2019, p. 71; Davis, 2010, pp. 197-98). In Jeremiah’s laments, Israel is emasculated. This begins with the symbolic transformation of her warriors into women as they leave masculine-coded spaces – movement away from public places and the battlefield – and hide ‘before advancing enemy forces’ in feminine-coded places – interior places, behind the city walls – and occurs again, when they are the (female) subject of (masculine) violence (Davis, 2010, pp. 197-99). The men of Israel are now described as the wife of Hashem, subject to military invasion and destruction as the appropriate response to ‘her adulterous crimes’ (Davis, 2010, pp. 198-99). The warriors are unmanned and subjugated, both literally and symbolically.

Lazarewicz-Wyrzykowska also documents the tie between military conquest and feminization with Samson’s capture. Samson moves from a position of hegemonic power – with agency underwritten by his aggression and strength – to a position of feminized powerlessness (2010, pp. 169-81). Samson is unable to keep himself from objectification by his Philistine captors: he cannot resist when blinded – a symbolic castration –, he cannot resist when forced to

work a grindstone – women’s work, Lazarewicz-Wyrzykowska argues –, and he cannot resist being paraded in shackles, for the amusement of his captors (2010, pp. 178-80). Lazarewicz-Wyrzykowska suggests that Samson’s castration – whether a symbolic loss of identity, or an actual castration – and abuse, which may or may not include sexual abuse, separates him from his identity as a warrior (2010, pp. 178-84). Samson is now a captive of war, subject to the emasculation typical of enemy combatants (2010, pp. 178-84). Lazarewicz-Wyrzykowska believes that Samson, once captured and wounded, cannot return a ‘wounded warrior’, he must be ‘a dead hero’ or an emasculated, estranged, living prisoner (2010, pp. 183-84).

This is seen not only in the Hebrew Bible’s conception of manhood, but also throughout ancient Levantine and Mesopotamian cultures.<sup>187</sup> Biblical scholar and Assyriologist Martti Nissinen documents several instances where rape, or threats of rape, highlight the way that sexual subjugation, like that of a captured enemy soldier or a slave, signified ‘surrender and loss of power’ – which would emasculate the victim and elevate the perpetrator (1998, pp. 26-28). A prisoner of war, as a slave, would have no legal protection from this emasculation. The threat of losing not only one’s family, community, and land to enemy soldiers in battle, but also one’s agency and sense of masculine identity underscored warfare in ancient Mesopotamia and Levant.

David’s evocation of warfare emphasizes the hegemony of his masculinity, an identity built on the backs of men he has stripped of their own masculinity. Clines estimates that according to the biblical text, ‘David’s body count. . . is something like 140,000 men’ – not counting captured prisoners, of course (1995, p. 217). He is a strong, violent, and assertive

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<sup>187</sup> For further reading on the emasculation of warriors, see Claudia Bergmann (2008), Cynthia Chapman (2004), T.M. Lemos (2006), S. Tamar Kamiokowski (2003), and H.W.F. Sagg’s (1963).

warrior-king. It is this aspect of hegemonic masculinity that undermines his relationship with Hashem when he encounters the ark in 2 Sam. 6.

Gilmour suggests that David's army reveals 'an image of vulnerability associated with the ark of God' by implying that the ark needs protecting (2019, p. 14). David has flexed his muscles and inadvertently pushed Hashem out of the limelight. David-the-Warrior/David-the-King has not taken a subordinate role in this procession. As the music begins and the cart rolls, David remains centre stage.

In both v. 2 and v. 5, David organizes and leads the parade from Baale-judah. This itself is a breach of etiquette when presented against other accounts of cultic propriety. In Num. 40.33-36, the ark leads Moses and the Israelites and in Ex. 40.34-38, the cloud that resides over the tabernacle (and ark) determines when and where the Israelites travel. In Josh. 3.3-5, the ark leads Israel through the Jordan river into Canaan. Medieval Rabbi Shlomo Yitschaki, known best as Rashi, says in his commentary on Joshua 3.3-5 that this procession marked the first time that the ark did not follow the cloud, but took the role of the cloud and led the people directly: the Israelites were and are presented in the Hebrew Bible as following the symbolic manifestation of Hashem, rather than an individual human (2023) As previously mentioned, however, it is dangerous to assume that that texts like Num. 40.33-36, Ex. 40.34-38, or Josh. 3.3-5 existed (in any form) during the compilation of 2 Sam. 6. What is clear, however, is that Hashem, or Hashem-via-the-ark, occupies the complete focus of any religious rite. Hashem does not share the stage, with the priests, with Moses and Aaron, or with Joshua. David's centrality to the procession, as Fokkelman notes, means that it is *his* parade, more than it is the ark's (1990, p.

189). David usurps Hashem not only in a display of military strength, but as the leader of Israel. His identity as a king places him in direct contest with Hashem and before *Hashem*.

Fokkelman notes that v. 5 marks Hashem's first direct mention, 'as participant. . . [is] in the line on David and the people' (1990, p. 187). David celebrates before Hashem – in a masculine-coded way, no less – but the narrator draws our attention to David, rather than Hashem. The music of the first procession is socially significant, and, according to biblical scholar David P. Wright, includes 'the voice, כִּנּוֹר-lyres, נַבֵּל-lyres, hand-drums, rattles, and cymbals. . . [or] clappers', (2002, p. 207). None of the modern, traditional commentaries previously examined have noted the gendered role of music.

Clines suggests that in this, we see a case of imposing modern, white, western masculinity on ancient Mesopotamian and Levantine masculinity. He makes a valuable point: instruments are gendered by their individual societies, not out of any essential, universal truth. Gender shapes what instruments are presented to individuals, how they are taught, what opportunities for professional or long-term playing are available and other matters, but no instrument is fundamentally, universally gendered. Musical sociologist Veronica Doubleday notes that 'to possess or play a musical instrument is to wield power' since music is a crucial function of 'many religious and secular rituals' (2008, p. 3).

Thus, musical instruments function within hegemonic masculinity as a mean of reifying social borders, consolidating masculine power and symbolising hierarchy (Doubleday, 2008, p. 5). The instruments themselves may be attached to a deity, restricted to select cults, castes, or



families, serve a socio-sexual function<sup>188</sup> (2008, pp. 5-10). Feminist biblical scholar Carol Meyers acknowledges that textually, ‘grammatically masculine’ ensembles may contain either only men or men and women and that the text, including 2 Sam. 6.5 is vague (2001, p. 59). Elsewhere, there is plentiful archaeological evidence of female musicians in Egypt, Assyria, and the Levant (Meyers, 2001, pp. 61-62).<sup>189</sup>

Similarly, Clines categorizes biblical music as ‘a gendered activity’ where both men and women may be musicians, but certain instruments, specifically ‘stringed instruments. . . [were] largely a male activity’ – only one woman in the Hebrew Bible plays a stringed instrument (a lyre) (1995, pp. 16-17). Women are textually depicted as singers and playing accompanying instruments like idiophones or membranophones (Clines, 1995, p. 16; Meyers, 2001, pp. 62-66, 70-72). However, idiophones and membranophones may not be exclusively feminine instruments either – in 1 Sam. 10.5, prophets, referred to in the masculine plural, are depicted playing two kinds of lyres, a flute, and tambourine. Hebrew scholar David E. S. Stein establishes that third-person masculine nouns, such as 1 Sam. 10.5’s ‘prophets’ cannot be read as exclusively female, but it is also not exclusively masculine – women are not explicitly referenced, but may be present (2008, pp. 11-22).

Thus, in the text of 2 Sam. 6.5 when David and his procession sing and play a variety of instruments, including two types of stringed instruments, hand drums, and two types of idiophones, the music can be read as both masculine-coded and feminine-coded. In 2 Sam. 6.5,

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<sup>188</sup> Music and instruments that serve socio-sexual functions serve a cultural shorthand and explore individual and community sexuality. Doubleday offers two examples, one of songs that are tied to ‘erotic folk texts’, and thus culturally cue sex and sexuality, and ‘the phallic associations of wind instruments’ in European cultures (2008, p. 10).

<sup>189</sup> See Richard Henshaw (1994), Ilse Seibert (1974), and Emily Teeter (1993) for more.

‘the house of Israel’ may be a mixed gender group, with women playing the membranophones and idiophones and men playing stringed instruments, or men may have been permitted to play any of the instruments, while women were restricted to the membranophones and idiophones. Regardless of who was playing what instrument, I believe the lyres appears in the text to evoke David’s relationship to music.

Clines reads David’s musical talent with the lyre as a masculine trait because primarily men play the lyre in the Hebrew Bible, but I believe David’s *skilfulness* is also a hegemonically masculine trait, not unlike the connection between hegemonic masculinity and success. Clines points to the inclusion of David’s skilfulness playing the lyre in 1 Sam. 16.18 – a list of masculine accomplishments that recommend David to Saul, such as his bravery, eloquence, aggression, and beauty (1995, pp. 227-228). When David performs, Saul finds relief from the evil spirit that plagues him: his talent is so notable that it performs a kind of spiritual warfare on behalf of Saul (1 Sam. 16.23). Not only does he demonstrate mastery over a masculine-coded instrument, but he is exceptional at this instrument. Perhaps this continual show of hegemonic masculinity – a direct threat to Saul’s reign from the popular, talented, attractive, young warrior – is why Saul, suddenly enraged, attacks David while he is performing (1 Sam. 18.10-12). Hashem appears to have a similar jealous reaction as David performs before him. David, showing off his army, his kingdom, and his knack for music, has stolen the stage and Hashem, striking Uzzah down in v. 6, reclaims it.<sup>190</sup>

In verse 7, the narrator implies Uzzah is responsible for his own death, however, there is an ambivalence in the Hebrew phrase (על־יהשל) which makes room for us to consider the cultic

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<sup>190</sup> It is worth asking why the narrator chooses to cut David down to size through Uzzah’s death.

suitability of David's actions alongside Uzzah's. I believe that David's response to Uzzah's murder reinforces his culpability, encouraging us to examine the text more closely. Brueggemann and van Wijk-Bos both read his primary reaction as fear – Brueggemann describes him as 'awestruck' and van Wijk-Bos theorizes that the anger the narrator describes 'is most likely the other side of the fear ascribed to him' (Brueggemann, 1990, p. 249; van Wijk-Bos, 2019, p. 245). Hertzberg offers a midpoint by reading David as both fearful and angry (1964, p. 279). However, Tsumura (2019, p. 115) and Fokkelman (1990, p. 189) focus on David's anger over any potential fear. Fokkelman adds that substituting words such as 'displeased' or 'distressed' are 'a half-hearted form of avoidance, and a false kind of prudishness' (Fokkelman, 1990, p. 189). David is incensed. Uzzah's death is personal.

But beyond enraging David, Hashem's actions – in something of a divine tantrum – are consistent 'with the warrior code' according to Jennings (2001, p. 43). Hashem 'is often harsh, insisting on blind obedience and utter loyalty, capricious, capable of apparent pettiness and clever strategy' however these actions are wielded as tools by which hegemonic masculinity and power is reinforced and maintained, therefore this divine anger is not challenged or marked as inappropriate by the narrator<sup>191</sup> (Jennings, 2001, p. 43). Hashem's show of power is needed to establish his place above David in the hegemonic order. Nothing could be more culturally appropriate for a warrior-king in ancient Mesopotamia and Levant; therefore, it is culturally normalized for Hashem, the ultimate warrior-king and deity (Jennings, 2001, p. 43).

Gilmour suggests this when she argues that 'God's violence stems from vulnerability rather than power' (2019, p. 16). A. Graeme Auld highlights the wordplay between 'Uzzah'

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<sup>191</sup> Of course, it is the narrator who has scripted this anger, which has led some scholars, like Guest (2018) to speculate about what this tells us about the biblical scribe.

(עזא/ עזא) and ‘might/power’ (עז) suggesting a conventional reading where the place-name Perez-Uzzah is read as ‘Breakthrough on Uzzah’ rather than ‘Breakthrough of Might’ (2011, pp. 412-13). However, Gilmour argues instead Perez-Uzzah be read as both ‘*against* Uzzah’ and ‘*against* might’ (2019, pp. 17-18, emphasis added). Gilmour’s analysis resists reading 2 Sam. 6’s divine violence as ‘a misuse of power’ however, because the text is read through Slavoj Žižek’s theory of divine violence, in which Hashem’s violence is rooted in the conflict between divine presence and divine order (2019, p. 18). The deity is present – through the ark – but is also depicted as vulnerable, thus divine violence reasserts the proper position of the deity as supremely powerful (Gilmour, 2019, p. 18).

Like Jennings, I believe that this reading runs parallel to the narrator’s expectations for and ideology of divine position and behaviour. Indeed, David’s second reaction – fear – suggests that Hashem’s point is clearly made (2 Sam. 6.9). Both Brueggemann and Fokkelman emphasize the appropriateness of David’s fear. Brueggemann suggests that David’s newfound awe of Hashem has an intended ‘salutary effect’ that reinforces the sanctity of Mosaic cultic ritual for future generations (1990, p. 249). Fokkelman meditates on the ‘spiritual depth’ David shows in his fearful reverence, which is the proper and ‘desired reaction’ to this divine revelation (1990, p. 190). Moreover, Fokkelman reads David and Hashem’s interaction as highly personal, pointing out how the narrator uses the phrase ‘the city of David’ and how David’s musings and actions suggest a relational focus: ‘How shall the ark of Yahweh come to me?’ David asks in v. 9 and ‘David’s fear of God prevents him from “removing the ark (sure enough: the ark of Yahweh) to himself”’ in v. 10 (1990, p. 190).

Tsumura and van Wijk-Bos both acknowledge David's fear of Hashem and of the ark but move quickly on to v. 10-11 and the puzzle of Obed-edom (Tsumura, 2019, p. 116; van Wijk-Bos, 2020, p. 245). David's reaction is normalized, even though '[f]or the first time, there is conflict between David and Adonai' (van Wijk-Bos, 2020, p. 245). Hertzberg and McCarter follow suit, although they offer even less space to the interpersonal tension (Hertzberg, 1964, p. 279; McCarter, 1984, p. 170). I believe this is the unfortunate by-product of Hertzberg and McCarter's emphasis on the historical-critical method in their commentaries, which obscures the reader's glimpse into ancient Mesopotamian and Levantine culture norms, particularly the way power is exercised, responded to, and systematically understood.

Fascinatingly, it is David's fear-driven decision to abruptly leave Hashem and the ark with Obed-edom that offers the first major challenge to the theory that the first parade was lacking in Mosaic cultic standards.<sup>192</sup> Obed-edom is not only from Gath, a Philistine town, but his name – 'servant of Edom' – marks him as 'the worshipper of a strange god', who has the ark pressed upon him (Hertzberg, 1964, p. 279).

There is a pervasive irony in Obed-edom's inclusion – and blessing. 'The God who has just been an extreme stickler for detail and very demanding of his priest now tolerates the housing of his ark in an uncircumcised man's residence', Fokkelman observes the narrative's apparent, sudden change of heart (1990, p. 192). McCarter suggests that it is a desire to obscure this divine incongruity that leads to the later interpretation of Obed-edom as a Levite –

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<sup>192</sup> Brueggemann completely ignores Obed-edom's textual significance (1990, pp. 249-50). Hertzberg and McCarter both agree that Obed-edom is a Philistine, rejecting 1 Chronicles 15's recasting as his lineage as Levitical (Hertzberg, 1964, p. 279; McCarter, 1984, p. 170). Tsumura entertains the possibility that Obed-edom is from 'another [non-Philistine] Gath, such as Gath-rimmon', but ultimately agrees with McCarter that he is most likely a Philistine (2019, p. 116). van Wijk-Bos concurs that Obed-edom is not likely a Levite (2020, p. 245).

apparently a rather busy and dedicated one at that too, who serves as both a gatekeeper and a musician for David's (second, successful) procession (1 Chron. 15.16-21; McCarter, 1984, p. 170).<sup>193</sup>

McCarter highlights a fascinating link between Obed-edom and the Ark Narrative. Edom, the deity Obed-edom's name connects him to, was the consort of Resheph, 'the god of plague' and the underworld (1984, p. 169-70). Under this reading, Uzzah's breach and the Ark Narrative, including the death of the seventy in 1 Sam. 6.19, 'are two versions of a single etiological legend' – however, I believe it can also be seen as a deliberate choice by the narrator to reinforce divine hegemony (McCarter, 1984, p. 169). In both texts, divine violence reasserts the hegemonic power of the ark as the physical manifestation of Hashem. This hegemonic power is demonstrated on the bodies of the Philistines who must return the ark, on the Philistine deities who are unable to protect their devotees, or in the case of Dagon, themselves (their icons, the physical manifestations of themselves), and on the Israelites whose familiarity with the ark could be read as a nascent threat to Hashem's authority. Biblical scholar Gosta Ahlström concurs, suggesting that Edom was likely a popular, regional deity and that Hashem's monopolization of Obed-edom's resources and energy provided 'an additional claim of Yahweh's supremacy over the territory' of another god (1984, p. 146). Ahlström's evidence for Edom's popularity in the region is slim – he suggests that it is probable 'since there were some Edomite clans which had settled in the region which later became Judah', including 'the Jebusite city-state' (1984, p. 146). Regardless of the historicity of Edom worship in this region – which would necessitate dating the

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<sup>193</sup> Instead, it is likely, McCarter opines, that Obed-edom joined David back in his 'days in Gath in Ziglag' – and remained with David as a part of the significant contingent under Ittai the Gittite, who is clearly described as a foreigner who has thrown his lot in with David (2 Sam. 15.17-22; McCarter, 1984, p. 170).

text – I believe it is reasonable inference. Obed-edom's name links him to Edom worship. Obed-edom's personal religious beliefs and the regional religious beliefs are not necessarily relevant to the narrator, as we are not told of any conversation of Hashem's cult; what is important is that Hashem has symbolically dominated a potential competitor (Edom/Edom's cult) and again established himself as the pre-eminent deity.

The ark's residence with Obed-edom may be at odds with cultic ritual propriety, since as a foreigner and (it is suggested) a devotee of another cult, but is an easy solution to Gilmour's divine violence. David – and thus, by extension, Obed-edom, -- in response to Uzzah's murder, affirm Hashem's power. Hashem is not to be trifled with, cannot be carted from place to place on a whim without risk of violence. The ark is fearfully abandoned, and the narrator does not record David ordering soldiers behind to guard the ark: the ark does not need guarding. David is acutely aware that it can defend itself without his help. The dominance asserted by Hashem over Edom (and Resheph) in monopolizing Obed-edom's attention, resources, and time, is implicit in the text. In response, Hashem lavishly blesses Obed-edom (2 Sam. 6.11-12). The ark is transformed into a site of power and hegemony – capable of delivering judgements and blessings in equal measure.

Žižek argues that divine violence occurs in sites of injustice, a visible manifestation of impotence, violence for its own sake, lacking a unifying cause (Gilmour, 2019, p. 12). Gilmour argues that there is no need for further violence once the injustice is rectified and hegemony is restored. David's hegemonic power, when exercised over Hashem, creates systematic injustice. Hashem's restoration of hegemonic power leads to the appearance of divine blessing. However, Gilmour's application of Žižek's theory is ultimately self-limited since it resists meaning: this

divine violence is a response to general injustice and impotence but is ‘disconnected’ from ‘specific injustice’ and cultic rite, since ‘no new law’ is created in response to Uzzah’s murder (2019, p. 13). The principles Gilmour establishes are applicable to more than Žižek’s interpretation of divine violence, however. My analysis of the text finds meaning in the conflict between Hashem and David’s respective masculinities, thus tying the general impotence and injustice of Hashem’s vulnerability to the specific – an un-manning of Hashem by David’s show of hegemonic power – in direct contrast to Gilmour, who does not consider gender as a specific source of conflict. Gilmour suggests that there is a potential link between David’s awareness of Hashem’s divine violence (as an expression of powerlessness) and his dance, in which David ‘humbles himself’ (2019, p. 17). In this respect, David *has* accepted a new law: an unwritten social rule between himself and Hashem, establishing appropriately gendered cultic behaviour.

Consequently, I also disagree with Gilmour’s assertion that the procession is ‘kept consistent’ with the exception of ark ‘carriers’ – which Gilmour suggests may not have used poles, an unwieldy possibility – and the addition of sacrifices (2019, p. 13). There are several specific differences in dress and behaviour which will be discussed in chapter eight. Although these changes do not constitute law/cultic ritual as it is traditionally conceived, it does constitute a law as conceived by theory.

#### Challenge and Acceptance: Reading with and Reading Against the Narrator

The commentaries and analyses of 2 Sam. 6 can be divided into two major groups: those that read with the narrator of 2 Sam. 6 and those that read against the narrator. All of the commentaries accept the narrator’s reliability: to some degree they accept that the narrator’s



conclusions on the ark, on David, on the procession, and on Uzzah are sound. In the majority of cases, except perhaps Fokkelman, PENCHANSKY, and GILMOUR, the moral appropriateness of Hashem's violence is not even questioned but taken as a foregone conclusion. In some cases, such as Brueggemann's, this seems to stem from a focus on rhetoric over the text itself; in others, it seems to stem from style, where close-reading the text results in reliance on the narrator, and consequently, the narrator's biases and conclusions.

Brueggemann's entire reading of 2 Sam 6 is concerned with the rhetoric of the narrative. Although he does question David – remarking '[h]ow odd that David (and the narrator) should suddenly remember the ark' – he does not question the narrator's conclusion, implication of Uzzah, or Michal's role in the chapter (1990, pp. 247-53). The purpose of the story is to affirm David's election by Hashem and to teach a moral lesson in appropriate cultic behaviour. This reading is valuable, since Brueggemann recognizes that 'David is utterly Yahweh's man' as typified by his second procession, the embodiment of 'glad yielding to. . . Yahweh' (1990, p. 252). However, because Brueggemann does not interrogate the text, he misses the social implications of both the first and second procession, particularly the way David interacts with Israelite hegemonic standards. van Wijk-Bos's reading is similar. She offers an excellent, nuanced examination of Michal's role in 2 Sam. 6, particularly how it functions as the culmination of her and David's relationship and ascribes to her both a prophetic voice and an independent one (2020, pp. 247-53). However, van Wijk-Bos's close reading of the rest of the chapter does not challenge the narrator's authority, does not prod at the edges of David and Hashem's suddenly strained relationship. van Wijk-Bos notes David's role as priest in the second procession, however, she misses the irony of a non-Levite performing priestly rites. Instead, she

also ascribes him to a kingly position, suggesting that ‘the largesse he bestows on all the people’ is a royal quality (2020, p. 246). The excess that David shares may certainly be tied to his kingship, but it is distributed not on his behalf, but Hashem’s, through David’s role as priest, as I will explain in further detail in chapter eight. The parallel between priestly duties and this generosity, particularly what David distributes, when, and how, all contribute to my reading of his role as priestly, rather than kingly, and thus divorced from reinforcing his own hegemonic power.

McCarter, Hertzberg, and Tsumura offer more critical perspectives on 2 Sam. 6; however, their attention is largely focused on reconstructing a foundational truth. McCarter is particularly interested in the way that 2 Sam. 6 may have paralleled the Ark Narrative as ‘two versions of a single etiological legend’ or served as an Israelite account of cultic rites seen in Mesopotamian cultures, particularly ‘the capture and return of divine images’ or the ‘introduction of a national god to a new royal city’<sup>194</sup> (1984, pp. 169, 178-81). Unfortunately, McCarter misses tensions within the text with this historical-critical reading – valuable as it is. Hertzberg, although he spends less time examining Mesopotamian parallels, has a similar focus (1964, pp. 276-81. Like van Wijk-Bos, he notes David’s peculiar priestly function, even arguing that ‘[i]t is important’ to understanding the text but misses the irony. The source of Hashem’s sudden wrath is ‘obscure’ but not theorized upon (Hertzberg, 1964, p. 279). The narrator is uncritically accepted.

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<sup>194</sup> For an expansion of these themes, see C. L. Seow’s *Myth, Drama, and the Politics of David’s Dance* (1989), which reads David’s parades as a victory procession influenced by Ugaritic ritual and used to legitimize David’s claim as king. Like McCarter, Seow presumes a foundational historical truth and a reliable narrator. Unlike McCarter, he follows Frank Moore Cross (1973), arguing for Ugaritic influences, rather than Mesopotamian ones.

Tsumura splits his attention between rhetoric and history, offering a detailed commentary with excellent references; however, he also is very quick to unequivocally trust the narrator (2019, pp. 106-20). Hashem's anger is the logical conclusion of cultic impropriety, the source of which is unquestioningly Uzzah (2019, p. 115). Unlike Hertzberg and van Wijk-Bos, Tsumura argues against David fulfilling a priestly position, suggesting that David's link to the sacrifices was not as officiant, but as provider of the animals, designed to underscore his importance as 'the central character in bringing the ark to Jerusalem' (2019, pp. 117-18). The tension in the narrative is obscured, along with the narrator, who quietly fades into the background.

McCarter, Hertzberg, and Tsumura's historical-critical lens does not provide them significant distance from the text. Instead, their close readings become deeply reliant on the narrator. Fokkelman and Penchansky's close readings offer some critical distance between their analysis and the narrator, but ultimately accept the narrator's perspective and biases as factual.

Fokkelman is remarkably willing to sit the tension and ambivalence in the text. His focus on narrative over historicity or rhetoric serves him well here and he acknowledges Hashem's ironic behaviour towards Obed-edom, rather than excusing it (1990, p. 192). However, Fokkelman stays close to the text: he misses the irony in David's revised role as priest, or pseudo-priest, completely (1990, p. 194-95). The moral fitness of Hashem's murder of Uzzah is left unchallenged: even as Fokkelman acknowledges that '[t]here is no simple answer', it comes on the heels of the assumption that Hashem had a good cause, that Uzzah had erred (1990, pp. 187-89).

Penchansky suggests that in 2 Sam. 6, that David does not 'direct his anger against priests who perhaps by cultic error had made God angry. . . [but instead] direct his anger against

YHWH, who unnecessarily and unfairly murdered someone who worked for him' (1999, pp. 28-29). Penchansky sees 2 Sam. 6 as a depiction of capricious, violent deity – with Uzzah as an innocent bystander, not caught in the crossfires of a conflict between David and Hashem, but subject to mundane violence (1999, pp. 28-30). Penchansky looks at the text presuming David to be not one of the main characters, but an addition that changes the meaning of the narrative – embodying the reaction of ancient Israel (1999, pp. 28-31). While Penchansky is able to appreciate the character of Hashem in the text, his perspective uncritically accepts the narrator, even as he looks for ways that the text has evolved (1999, pp. 21-29). He comes nearly to the edge of recognizing Žižek's divine violence, then backs away, instead suggesting that Uzzah's 'grasping' was a form of 'presumed power over YHWH' that led him to collide with the 'unshielded, unprotected by sanctioned ritual' power and might of Hashem (1999, p. 25). It is not that Hashem is vulnerable through the ark, but that he is overflowing with power: Penchansky situates himself with the narrator. Penchansky and Fokkelman, as narrative critics, sit at the border of acceptance and challenge, reading, uneasily at times, with the narrator, while Gilmour crosses fully over into outright challenge.

Where Penchansky is reluctant to see Hashem as vulnerable, Gilmour contests the narrator's fundamental claims by reading Hashem's violence as existing in a world of injustice – not injustice rectified by divine power, but injustice that all, including the divine, are subject to (2019, p. 12). Gilmour argues that the text 'resist[s] meaning' (2019, p. 12). Under this reading, Gilmour rejects a 'capricious' deity as soundly as she rejects 'some enigmatic transgression of the law or warning of holiness' (2019, p. 12). Divine violence necessarily resists moralizing: it stems 'from God's presence in a world "out of joint"' as much as it resists meaning (Gilmour,

2019, p. 18). Although I disagree with Gilmour on the technicalities – Žižek argues that these moments of divine violence are not ‘*against* injustice, or *caused by* injustice’, instead existing in parallel to the impotence created by the existence of injustice, while I believe Hashem’s actions are absolutely triggered by and in reaction to his powerlessness, although they are unfocused, designed to express rather than rectify – I agree with her conclusion that the text demonstrates not ‘some enigmatic transgression of law or warning of holiness connected to transcendence’ (2019, pp. 11-13, 18).

## Conclusion

My analysis of Uzzah’s murder deviates from most traditional, modern commentaries where the narrative is interpreted without challenge to the narrator’s assumptions in biases. Instead, like Penchansky and Gilmour’s analyses of the text, I question the moral appropriateness and power inherent in Hashem’s actions. I offer a unique perspective by reading Gilmour’s divine violence as related to a hegemonic power struggle, performed through gender, between David and Hashem. Uzzah’s death is not a response to an improperly performed cultic rite, but to the emasculation of Hashem by David during the first procession and it is this violence that re-establishes Hashem’s hegemonic authority.

## CHAPTER EIGHT: THE SECOND PROCESSION

In 2 Sam. 6.12-19, the narrator describes David's second procession, which is predicated by David's awareness of Hashem blessing Obed-edom and his household. An optimistic David throws together an extravagant parade that is equal parts celebration and cultic rite beginning at Obed-edom's house and ending in Jerusalem, where David has moved the ark and its tent (2 Sam. 6.17). Always the overachiever, David manages the ceremony by assuming a priestly position, offering sacrifices, and distributing food to the celebrants (2 Sam. 6.18-19). Like the first procession, biblical commentary and analysis frequently looks at the  $\text{טפס}$  of the second procession, reading with the text and narrator, and on occasions where the implications are difficult, offering a positive picture of David. Consequently, scholarship has an uneasy relationship with David's behaviour: the combination of his sudden undress, open sensuality, and priestly position seem to elicit tension that is often resolved through (conscious or unconscious) avoidance.

### The Second Procession Overview: Commentary on vv. 12-23

Alert to these tensions, let us begin by examining the reception of the text. Brueggemann, Hertzberg, and McCarter open with a brief discussion of blessing and intention. Tsumura, Fokkelman, and van Wijk-Bos, however, briefly address the narrative's formatting and then move directly into a discussion of cultic ritual. Pausing to examine blessing and intention – both David and Hashem's – offers a valuable perspective, since Obed-edom's experience with Hashem marks the first occasion of Hashem's good-will. Hashem's power up until 2 Sam. 6.11-12 has been violent.

Brueggemann suggests that Obed-edom's prosperity confirms 'that the ark (and Yahweh) are well-intentioned towards Israel' (1990, p. 250). Hertzberg theorizes about the undescribed blessing Obed-edom's household receives – 'we are perhaps to imagine fertility in his family, his cattle and his fields as well as other pieces of good fortune' – and notes that '[t]he neighbours, and David, regard this as a sign that the anger of the Lord has changed to favour' (1964, p. 279). I am particularly interested in the way that Brueggemann and Hertzberg describe the change in Hashem's mood.

Hashem is treated by both commentaries in this portion of the text as comparable to a force of nature. Hashem's mood is favourable the same way that winds are favourable – it is apparently unconnected to any direct action on the part of either David or Obed-edom. Moreover, David's feelings towards Hashem are as ignored as Hashem's feelings towards David. Hertzberg describes the second procession as a resumption of '[t]he earlier decision of the king' while Brueggemann reads the parade as 'great pageantry and a show of royal affluence' responding 'to the assurance that God is present, that Jerusalem is now a legitimate shrine . . . the coming of the ark is Yahweh's self-giving to David and to Israel's new political beginning' (1990, p. 250). It is queerly disconnected from Hashem, even as it emphasizes the interpersonal relationship that is playing out on a grand scale.

McCarter's analysis looks deeper. He draws attention to a line present in the LXX but missing from the MT: 'and David said, I shall bring back the blessing to my house' (1984, p. 165). McCarter suggests that 'a scribe's eye skipped', and thus it was omitted, although he acknowledges that it may also 'have been deleted in MT by a scribe who wanted to protect David' (1984, pp. 165-66). Obed-edom's prosperity is the driving motivation for David's second

parade into Jerusalem, which is again intimately tied to David as both his ‘house’ and ‘the city of David’ (2 Sam. 6.12; McCarter, 1984, pp. 165, 174). McCarter is not squeamish about David’s political strategy, compared to Brueggemann, who, although he acknowledges that Hashem ‘is now patron’ of David and Jerusalem, emphasizes a liturgical focus, suggesting that ‘David embodies and legitimates the gratitude of his people’ which even when read as a political act, is simultaneously an expression of ‘profound solidarity with Yahweh’ and the new Jerusalem-based shrine (1990, pp. 250-51).

Brueggemann recognizes that David’s actions ‘may be political’<sup>195</sup> but seems to feel most comfortable arguing that ‘David’s dance. . . expresses a genuine act of religious vitality, of genuine worship, making himself available for Yahweh’s power, purpose, and presence’ (1990, p. 250). Brueggemann shapes David’s intentions, which are obscured by the narrator, into an act of devotion towards ‘the founding of the new shrine around the ark’ in Jerusalem rather than a calculation to legitimize ‘the new regime’ by monopolizing Yahwistic worship (1990, pp. 250-51). Brueggemann looks to ease the tensions in the text even as he recognizes the innate ambiguity (1990, p. 250). This is no different than the distance Hertzberg imbues in his analysis, which while comfortable imagining what the implications of ‘blessing’ looks like for Obededom, does not meditate on the socio-religious tensions created by (or resolved with) David’s pivot away from ‘the old priesthood’ of Shiloh (1964, pp. 278-79).

Tsumura briefly addresses the structural parallels in the second procession compared to the first procession – although the outcome is different, the formatting is the same (2019, p. 117). Further, the conflict between David and Michal that occurs after the procession, has a twin in the

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<sup>195</sup> That is, David’s dance may be a political tool to solidify religious support from Hashem’s adherents.



conflict between David and Hashem (2019, p. 117). Tsumura does not reflect on the meaning or ascribe any motivation to Michal other than a sense of wounded propriety (2019, pp. 119-20). This will be explored in greater detail later, but it is sufficient to note that Tsumura, like Brueggemann and Hertzberg, avoids substantial discussion on two uncomfortable subjects: David and Hashem's relationship to each other, and Hashem's power.

Fokkelman similarly dwells on the structure on the text before moving into an exploration of David's thoughts and anxieties during the second parade. Like Tsumura, he sees a mirror to the first procession, although Fokkelman persuasively offers verses 10-12 as a concentric centre for the narrative, with 'the shocked' king of v. 10 serving as the twin for 'the informed king' of v. 12 (1990, p. 193). Fokkelman also reflects on the way that 'the house of Obed Edom' serves the same role as 'the house of Abinadab' in 1 Sam. 6.21-7.2, 'as emergency accommodation for attending to the ark after a terrible blow from God', but the consequences of this are not explored (1990, p. 192-93). This metaphorical supplantation of the priestly line is set aside without comment.

Fokkelman moves into a discussion of the second procession, treating verses 13-19 as a unified whole. He suggests that David's actions as the procession's 'priest-king' are driven by 'the great strain' of curiosity and fear (1990, pp. 194-95). The possibility of a second death mirroring the earlier tragic loss is inescapable even as the tantalizing prospect of Hashem's favour hangs in the air (1990, p. 194-95). Fokkelman, like his peers, is uncomfortable with the text's ambiguity in the void left by Uzzah's death and seeks to fill it. He tells his readers that the transfer of the ark has 'really become a very sensitive business' while taking for granted that David has not transgressed any Torah injunction, reflecting, '[t]he bearers [of the ark] were

doubtlessly qualified personnel, Levites we assume' despite the significant silence of the narrator (1990, p. 194). Fokkelman suggests that David's dance serves as a vent for the tension of the procession, although he notes that the breath 'held after the [first] six steps' seems to be released with the description of David's offering – Hashem is no longer angry (1990, pp. 194-95). It strikes me as odd that Fokkelman is so willing to dwell on the potential conflict, while he ignores the alleged source of this conflict, especially given verse 12's descriptor, 'with joy' (2 Sam. 6.12; Fokkelman, 1990, p. 195). The text suggests that this is a positive moment and Fokkelman's concern feels like an unconscious acknowledgement of power struggle that underlies the text.

van Wijk-Bos's analysis offers a similar focus on the procession itself over the narrative's ambiguity. Unlike Tsumura, van Wijk-Bos acknowledges the undercurrent of Hashem's violence, although unlike Fokkelman, she does not read any anxiety into the second procession. van Wijk-Bos alludes to the mirror structure of verse 12 and to the few significant departures between the first and second parades: unfortunately van Wijk-Bos does not reflect on the transformation from military parade to party, although she does highlight that the ark is carried by humans, rather than an ox cart, and travels with sacrifices headed up by David-the-Priest, in an 'ecstasy of whirling and shouting' (2020, p. 246). The inconsistency with Torah ritual is not explored, a theme shared across commentaries. These analyses read with the narrator, accepting and overlooking internal inconsistencies because the narrator has informed the reader how to interpret the passage. What the narrator does not, however, is explain explicitly what error is committed in the first procession.

Since the narrator has suggested that Uzzah's murder was the product of cultic impropriety, which is understood by our commentators to arise from a Torah prohibition against

transport<sup>196</sup> instead of an improper contest of masculinity, David's second procession is assumed to follow the rites of the Torah, with Levitical pole-bearers and offering-makers. As a result, the commentators either ignore or employ a range of mental gymnastics to bring David's behaviour in line with their expectations. This is done on three fronts: the transportation of the ark, the identity of the offering-maker(s), and the description of David's dance.

Brueggemann and Hertzberg disregard the ark bearers entirely, with McCarter and Hertzberg meditating on the portion *around* their reference and debating if there was one sacrifice after the first six steps or sacrifices every six steps (Brueggemann, 1990, p. 250; Hertzberg, 1964, p. 279; McCarter, 1984, pp. 166, 170-71). The ark bearers' cultic suitability is made a non-issue. In contrast, Fokkelman and Tsumura address the cultic suitability of the ark bearers but make substantial assumptions in the process, such as Fokkelman's assertion that the ark bearers were 'consecrated' (1990, p. 195). McCarter and van Wijk-Bos both address the ark bearers but refrain from evaluating them against any alleged cultic (in)suitability.

Fokkelman assumes that the pole-bearers were Levites, however, as previously noted, he makes this leap in the silence of the narrator (1990, p. 194). There is no textual evidence that the ark bearers were Levites, a glaring omission by the narrator who seemed previously concerned with cultic ritual<sup>197</sup> (2 Sam. 6.7, 13; Fokkelman, 1990, pp. 189, 194). Tsumura's commentary states, '[t]his time the ark is carried properly', without expounding on how he comes to this conclusion (2019, p. 117). Is the ark carried properly because Hashem does not murder anyone in this procession? If so, the narrator seems remarkably unconcerned with the intricacies of the

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<sup>196</sup> This is not to say that the commentators believe this text to post-date the Torah's legislation on the ark's movement. Instead, they assume that whatever cultic tradition drives the text led to this later codification.

<sup>197</sup> Unless, of course, this is not an issue of compliance with Torah regulations, and the issue Hashem takes offense to is a challenge of his power.

ritual that were so allegedly important only moments before. Tsumura moves into the debate around the frequency of sacrifices by citing 1 Chronicles 15.26, which explicitly references Levitical ark bearers; it is possible that he uses the 1 Chr. reference to implicitly describe what cultic suitability around pole-bearers looks like (2019, pp. 117-18). However, this assumes a great deal, just as Tsumura assumes a great deal from the text.<sup>198</sup>

McCarter and van Wijk-Bos offer a tempered view of the change in transportation, with van Wijk-Bos noting that the ark is ‘now carried by people’ and completely disconnecting this from any cultic ritual (2020, p. 246). There is no mention of Levites or how this change addresses or circumvents Hashem’s potential wrath. Instead, van Wijk-Bos is content to refer to the procession simply as ‘a successful entry’ and an ‘impressive spectacle’ before moving into a discussion around David’s adoption of a priestly role (2020, p. 246). Thus, van Wijk-Bos occupies a middle ground between the commentaries that neglect the ark bearers entirely and those that make significant assumptions about them. However, she also supports the argument that it was a lack of cultic propriety that instigated Uzzah’s murder, and consequently, it feels out of place to move so quickly past such a significant change without investigating further<sup>199</sup> (2020, pp. 244-46). McCarter highlights the differences between the LXX and MT, observing that ‘[t]he divergence of the LXX is difficult to understand’, since it reads ‘and with them were seven dancing troops carrying the ark’ (1984, p. 166). However, he places the implications of the LXX aside without comment. The ‘ritual accident’ of 2 Sam. 6.-7 is divorced from the second procession and its blatant ritual deviation in the LXX – or strangely nonspecific (and therefore

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<sup>198</sup> Tsumura does cite the LXX’s confounding divergence from the MT, but he does so in a single, short line with a footnote that reads only ‘See McCarter, II, p. 166’ – thus relegating the matter to the reader.

<sup>199</sup> van Wijk-Bos address this in a single line: ‘[v]erse 13 implies that the Ark is carried in the way it was intended when it mentions “the carriers of the Ark”’ (2020, p. 246). I find this an unsatisfactorily brief explanation.

partial<sup>200</sup>) adherence to Torah standards (McCarter, 1984, p. 174). The texts refusal to explicitly highlight the presence of any Levites, and indeed, the lack of any evidence that this is troubling to Hashem, leads into a second puzzle – who is making the offerings, and are they permitted to do so?

Brueggemann suggests that priests are present (1990, p. 251). Although David is involved in the sacrifices, Brueggemann argues that ‘David embodies and legitimates the gratitude of his people’ through an extravagant liturgical celebration (1990, p. 250). This moves the focus away from the issue of cultic ritual – who is allowed to make sacrifices to Hashem – and towards the desired outcome of the offering – Hashem’s abundant blessings. Similarly, Tsumura explicitly acknowledges that he does not believe that David necessarily ‘slaughter[ed] the animals himself’, but that attributing David as the offering-maker is a narrative tool to reinforce ‘that he was the central character in bringing the ark to Jerusalem’ (2019, p. 118). Tsumura entirely side-steps the issue of proper, cultically acceptable sacrifices with the assumption that David’s implication *must* be metaphorical. Why must it be metaphorical?

Brueggemann and Tsumura, as previously established, read Uzzah’s murder as the result of his failure to follow Torah tradition, touching the ark in a breach of cultic ritual. Hashem’s anger has a clear instigator that can be triggered or avoided. Because there is no death in this second procession, there can be no breach of cultic ritual. The Torah limits burnt offerings, meal offerings, sin offerings, guilt offerings, ordination offerings, and peace offerings to carefully prescribed formats.<sup>201</sup> The narrator attests two offerings to David – one in v. 13, which occurs

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<sup>200</sup> And if partial, then incomplete.

<sup>201</sup> Lev. 1.2-17; 2.1-14; 3.1-16; 4.1-35; 5.1-26; 6.2-23; 7.1-18, 28-38

either once after six steps or every six steps, and a second set, in vv. 17-18, comprising of burnt offerings and peace offerings at the Jerusalem tabernacle.<sup>202</sup>

Technically, David was in breach of proper (Torah, Elide priestly practice is nebulous<sup>203</sup>) protocol by making an offering outside of the tabernacle. Additionally when the second set of offerings were presented at the tabernacle, according to Torah norms, a priest should have been the officiant for all the offerings, not a non-Levite, like David.<sup>204</sup> Therefore, to preserve the argument that Hashem's anger is directly tied to Torah cultic ritual, Brueggemann and Tsumura are compelled to bring David into alignment with the Torah's standards.

As noted earlier, there is a difference of opinion on the interpretation of 'six steps', with scholars dividing into two positions. McCarter is particularly invested in this, arguing for a sacrifice every six steps, while neglecting the spectre of Uzzah's death (1984, pp. 166, 171). The lack of focus on David's offerings<sup>205</sup> suggests that McCarter sees nothing very exceptional in them – elsewhere in Samuel, offerings are made away from the tabernacle, by non-Levites<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> The verb in v. 13, וַיִּזְבֹּחַ, denotes the subject (David) making the offering himself, as it is used in Lev. 17.3-9 as a part of a prohibition against offerings made outside of the auspices of a Levite priest. Although the second set of offerings, the burnt offerings and peace offerings occur at the tabernacle, as proscribed in Lev. 1.2-13, 3.1-5, 6.2-6, there is no mention of an officiating priest.

<sup>203</sup> In addition to not specifying how the ark is to be transported (the Philistines certainly have no trouble capturing the ark and bringing it to the temple of Dagon and no difficulty returning it to Israel on a new cart, see 1 Sam. 4.3-11, 17, 5.1-12, along with an undescribed successful movement of the ark by the people of Kiriath-jearim, see 1 Sam. 6.21-7.1), it is uncertain what role individuals and priests played in offerings. In some portions of the text, it appears individuals may make the offerings themselves, although there are Levites and/or priests present (1 Sam. 1.24-25, 2.19, 3.27-29, 6.1-15).

<sup>204</sup> His father Jesse is described as 'Jesse the Bethlehemite' in 1 Sam. 16.1 and 1 Sam. 17.58, and a descendant of Judah in Ruth 4.11-12, 17-22 and 1 Chr. 2.1-15.

<sup>205</sup> He chooses to briefly recount the arguments for and against a holy of holies in the Jerusalem tabernacle but does not address if David himself makes the offerings or if a Levite does so on his behalf (1984, p. 167).

<sup>206</sup> 1 Sam. 11.14-15; 15.13-22; 16.2-5; and 2 Sam. 15.10-12 all uses the same verb, 'זָבַח'. In 1 Sam. 11.14-15, Samuel along with 'all the people' offer a sacrifice in Gilgal to celebrate Saul's inauguration, the implication is that Samuel, who has served in priestly duties, but is a non-Levite, validates the offering as a legitimate form of worship (1 Sam. 1.1-2, 20). In 1 Sam. 15.13-22, an offering is scheduled, but not made, by Saul, who claims he kept spoils against divine instruction so that they could be sacrificed. He is roundly criticized for this. In 1 Sam. 16.2-5, Samuel, under divine command, prepares sacrifices in Bethlehem and invites Jesse and his household. This narrative

but these narratives are not understood in the context of preventing harm by following cultic ritual.<sup>207</sup> The issue of cultic rite is apparently, for McCarter, a resolved topic once Uzzah's death is past. Despite the narrator's lack of scrupulous attention to detail, McCarter does not re-evaluate his assumptions. This means McCarter's reasoning is circular: in the absence of textual cultic standards, he believes that where there is no harsh divine response, there is no transgression and where there is a harsh divine response, the transgression is necessarily read against outside texts. I believe that this premise asks too much. McCarter does not explain why some behaviour is permitted and others forbidden: the application of textually distant standards is insufficiently explored.

Similarly, Hertzberg also does not interrogate the narrator, although, unlike McCarter, he is much more comfortable directly expressing David's priestly role. In fact, Hertzberg relies on this to interpret David's dance – David's dress is understood as a 'priestly garment' without 'the long upper garment' and the ceremony itself is an aspect of 'priestly functions' equal to the blessings he offers to the people in Jerusalem (1964, p. 280).

Against 1 Chr. 15.27, Hertzberg sees David's apparel as inherently both priestly and revealing, arguing that 'Michal's feelings are only comprehensible if the tradition knew that David really uncovered himself' by wearing only the priest's 'linen ephod, a short article of

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provides the most compelling evidence that sacrifices not under the auspices of a Levitical priest are legitimate because it marks David's anointing – whereas Saul's inauguration may be subject to narrative foreshadowing. Similarly, to 1 Sam. 11.14-15, in 2 Sam. 15.12, Absalom under the guise of making sacrifices in Hebron, assembles his followers for an impending coup. Both passages normalize the offering of sacrifices away from the ark, not under the auspices of a Levitical priest (but under the supervision of Samuel, who fulfils priestly duties and served during the Elide dynasty), however, the narrator's bias against both Saul and Absalom, means the passages may have been presented as cautionary tales or otherwise cued ancient readers that their behaviour was less than exemplary.

<sup>207</sup> This is not to say that the offerings are expiatory in 2 Samuel 6. I agree with McCarter that the mood appears to be celebratory (1984, p. 181). However, since Uzzah's death is read as the result of improper ritual behaviour, the passage is typically understood (and McCarter is reading it) as concerned with priority.

clothing' which 'probably covered body and loins' (1964, p. 280). Hertzberg connects David's dance to a modern Simchat Torah celebration he saw in Jerusalem, where 'a combination of rotating and skipping movements' formed 'the cultic dance. . . [at] the chief Ashkenazi synagogue in the Old City of Jerusalem' (1964, p. 280). It is unclear if Hertzberg reads David as the officiant for the sacrifices, but he does assume that '[a]n altar. . . must have already been prepared' although 'it is doubtful whether the community was thus given any opportunity of personal participation by the distribution of the portions' (1964, p. 280). This analysis disconnects David's distribution of food in v. 19 with the sacrifices, but it retains v. 18's emphasis on his priestly role.

Perhaps a clue can be found in Hertzberg's separation between the 'tabernacle', a specific tent used by Moses and Aaron, in the biblical text, and the 'tabernacle' in Jerusalem, which he believes to be a different tent (1964, p. 280). This space allows Hertzberg to place room between the cultic ritual that Uzzah has (apparently) transgressed, and Hashem's lack of retaliation when David assumes the role of priest, blessing the people and claiming to (if not actually) officiating burnt offerings and peace offerings, outside the tabernacle and inside the tabernacle (2 Sam. 6.13-18). Hertzberg's delineation signals to his readers a break between narrator's ritual standards and Torah ritual standards without needing to wade into the weeds to quantify individual cultic rites.

Hertzberg's honesty regarding his interpretation is commendable, although I find it unsatisfactorily brief for my purposes. Hertzberg's willingness to interrogate the meaning and implication of tabernacle, while setting aside Hashem's motivation is understandable, given his historical-critical focus, but signals his desire to read with the narrator. The impersonal, the ark,



the tabernacle, the temple, are more acceptable topics of investigation, while the interpersonal, Hashem and his relationship to David, to Uzzah, are more fraught topics, avoided (perhaps unconsciously) because of the stakes. Hertzberg is uncomfortable challenging foundational norms in the text, either interrogating the interpersonal textual relationships or the narrator's relationship to the reader. The narrator's omniscience parallels Hashem's power, and both are presented 'as a naturalized foundation' that presents itself not as what it is, 'a discursive formation' or a created system, functioning within language and society, subject to cultural and political influences, but as a prediscursive, innate truth (Butler, 1990, pp. 50-51).

Fokkelman similarly reads David as both 'the master of ceremonies' and a 'priest-king', assuming, like Hertzberg, that there is no conflict in his sudden change of position (1990, pp. 194-95). This change is temporary, but significant, since 'David has thus [by assuming priestly duties] become the successor of the divinely acceptable Samuel' (1990, p. 195). Fokkelman is particularly interested in the literary parallels between 1 Sam. 12.18 and 1 Sam. 6.14, where Samuel's 'linen priestly garment' is echoed in David's 'linen ephod' (1990, p. 195).

In this portion of his analysis, Fokkelman sets aside concerns about cultic suitability, not because he accepts the narrative without questioning the narrator, but because he is interrogating a different aspect of the narrative. David's performance as priest is designed to legitimize his position as Hashem's favourite: the parallel between Samuel, the priest-judge, through his association with Eli and David, now offered to the readers as a priest-king through his association with Samuel, is simply a narrative device.

Fokkelman does not expound on the implications of this tool. It is unclear why Fokkelman accepts this sudden shift in cultic attitude, from a focus on ritual appropriateness to

incredible flexibility. Indeed, while Fokkelman notes the oddity of Hashem residing peacefully with Obed-edom – and blessing him! – he does not comment on David’s sudden assumption of a priestly role, which is (elsewhere)<sup>208</sup> limited to Levites (1990, pp. 192, 194-95; 1 Chr. 15.1-2, 11-15, 26). The inconsistency is accepted unexamined. I believe, that like Hertzberg, we see a border in Fokkelman’s thinking that he is unwilling to cross.

Fokkelman is willing to question some aspects of the narrative, but he will not outright read against the narrator and challenge the presentation of Hashem (and therefore, Hashem’s standards). Feminist Biblical scholar Esther Fuchs justifiably argues that the literary critic is the ‘obedient son to the father-text’ (2000, p. 39). Hashem is ‘unquestionable’ (Penchansky, 1999, p. 27). Fokkelman is limited by his methodology and misses an opportunity to question cultic (in)stability and explore a unique aspect of the narrative.

In van Wijk-Bos’s interpretation, David is explicitly ‘kingly and priestly’, forming a braided thread, where his politics integrally support his spiritual role (2020, p. 246). I find it notable that van Wijk-Bos catches the narrator’s omission of priesthood from the first procession (2020, p. 245). In 1 Sam. 7.1, Eleazar is consecrated, but the text does not explicitly refer to him as a priest, unlike in Judges 17.5, where a son of Micah is consecrated and explicitly described as a priest – however, Eleazar *may* be Uzzah and/or Ahio, or he may be neither (van Wijk-Bos, 2020, p. 245). In 2 Sam. 6.13-19, there is again, no reference to a priest or even a consecrated

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<sup>208</sup> In 2 Sam. 8.17-18, Zadok, Ahimelech, and David’s sons are all described as priests in a larger list (vv. 15-18) of civil positions. In 2 Sam. 20.26, Ira the Jairite is also serves as priest. These verses suggests that in Samuel, the role of priest may indeed be open to (textually explicitly) non-Levites, such as David’s sons and Ira the Jairite. Fokkelman does not reference this. Like the other commentators, he picks up and places down Torah standards without exploring why he believes they can be applied to some portions of the text and not others. 1 Chr. 18.16-17 explicitly changes the text, describing only Zadok and Ahimelech as priests and David’s sons as ‘first ministers of the king’. There is a significant mismatch between Torah norms and the norms of the Samuel scroll and editing is needed to bring it into alignment. An argument can be made that since the narrator does not describe a punitive response from Hashem, that in Samuel, Torah priestly law cannot be assumed as normative cultic practice.

individual, leading van Wijk-Bos to conclude that among David's priestly duties is dressing like a priest, in the linen ephod, making sacrifices, and distributing blessings (2020, p. 246). Perhaps David is the officiant, perhaps he is merely the one bringing the offertory items, but by reading the sacrifices as part of his priestly duties, van Wijk-Bos seems comfortable with the possibility that David did indeed officiate the burnt offerings and peace offerings.

Although van Wijk-Bos bases her assumption that '[a] certain amount of neglect vis-à-vis the Ark and a too-nonchalant handling perhaps led to disastrous consequences' on Deut. 10.8, 31.9, and 31.25, she works under a flexible understanding of what appropriate cultic behaviour is (2020, p. 245). van Wijk-Bos specifically addresses the lack of Levites and the use of a cart, but by referencing 1 Sam. 7.1, she acknowledges the Samuel scroll's ambiguity in sanctioned cultic practice (2020, pp. 245). It is possible to infer that van Wijk-Bos sees a lack in standardized ritual as the reason why David, a Judean, is able to temporarily adopt the role of priest, but this ambiguity inspires its own set of problems.

Without a standard of cultic behaviour, the narrator's depiction of Hashem is that of 'a dangerous, unpredictable force that can break out against anyone at any moment' (Penchansky, 1999, p. 29). I do not believe we can assume these standards were necessarily similar to those in the Torah. van Wijk-Bos puts the matter aside completely to move into a detailed analysis of Michal's role. Like her peers, van Wijk-Bos's assumptions have far-reaching implications within the world of the text that are not fully explored.

Holding this in mind, let us turn to the final uneasy front of the second procession: David's dance. In queer analyses, David's dancing is the most visibly queer moment of 2 Sam 6. Both Karin Hügel and Teresa Hornsby focus primarily on David's dance. Theodore Jennings

may focus on the relationship between Hashem and David as a whole, but he too finds David's dance profoundly homoerotic. Despite this, none of the commentators offer a queer reading of the text, instead they alternate between outright avoidance, and a curious inability to see how queer the triangle between David, Hashem, and Michal grows.

The dance has two parts: the performance and its reception. Tsumura and van Wijk-Bos both offer a plain reading of the event. David dances 'in a type of ecstasy of whirling and shouting' while 'scantly clad' (van Wijk-Bos, 2020, p. 246; Tsumura, 2019, p. 118). Both associate the ephod with the priesthood, although van Wijk-Bos does not discuss how clothed or unclothed David appears (van Wijk-Bos, 2020, p. 246; Tsumura, 2019, p. 118). The tension between the pair is stoked by a disagreement in appropriate royal behaviour (van Wijk-Bos, 2020, pp. 247-48; Tsumura, 2019, pp. 119-20). Tsumura separates the argument from sexuality entirely, framing it as a contest between Michal's desire for David to wear 'his royal robes as befitted a king' and David's insistence 'that he was dressed simply *before the Lord*' (2019, pp. 119-20, emphasis in original). He explicitly pushes back against any reading of Michal's reference to 'exposure' as literal nakedness, by emphasizing that David could not have been naked, 'as he was wearing a linen ephod, but it was not what a king would wear in public' (2019, p. 120). Therefore, Michal's tone is 'aristocratic' and brimming with 'sharp sarcasm' (2019, p. 120).

Although van Wijk-Bos does not directly address any possible jealousy, she seems to read Michal's accusation of David 'exposing himself' as a literal description, noting that David's retort in vv. 21-22, implies that David 'will have sex with whomever he wants to' (2020, p. 248). This is an odd aside that van Wijk-Bos explores further in a piece that centres Michal over

David. Although van Wijk-Bos acknowledges that jealousy is the emotion typically seen in Michal's reproach, she instead examines the way that Michal's behaviour defies expectation: she is 'the sole example of this type of [sarcastic, critiquing] speech from a female to a male character' and she speaks 'with double-voiced references to "glory" and "exile"' that allow the author<sup>209</sup> to speak directly to their ancient readers (2020, pp. 248, 252-53). van Wijk-Bos's recognition of the narrator's voice, speaking through Michal is particularly pertinent and I will discuss this in greater detail in chapter nine.

At the moment, I would like to draw attention to the way that van Wijk-Bos addresses and dismisses sexual tension as the source of David and Michal's conflict, even as she acknowledges that there is something overtly sexual about David's behaviour, paralleling Tsumura's reading. Similarly, Brueggemann and McCarter flirt with this implied sexuality, even as they reject it as a crucial piece of the narrative. However, Brueggemann and McCarter both (unconsciously) acknowledge that there is something profoundly queer about David's behaviour: it is not simply that it is sexual, but it rubs against their interpretation of typical<sup>210</sup> sexual behaviour. I will begin with McCarter whose reading forms a bridge between Brueggemann's interpretation and that of Tsumura and van Wijk-Bos.

McCarter addresses two facets of David's dance: his clothing, and the dance itself. McCarter sees David's ephod as 'a simple linen loincloth' paralleling Samuel in 1 Sam. 2.18 and cites Phillips who sees the ephod instead as 'a child's garment, inappropriate for an adult' (McCarter, 1984, p. 171; Phillips, 1969, p. 487) The result is that David is 'scantily clad and that

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<sup>209</sup> van Wijk-Bos ascribes the narrative to an exilic or post-exilic Judean author (2020, pp. 248, 253).

<sup>210</sup> Brueggemann finds theological basis to embrace a homosocial (and accidentally homoerotic) reading of the text and does so quite cheerfully, while McCarter attempts to reframe the homoerotic as heteroerotic and cisnormative (Brueggemann, 1990, p. 252; McCarter, 1984, pp. 171, 188-89).

at least one spectator, Michal, finds this offensive' (McCarter, 1984, p. 171). McCarter and Phillips's conclusion does not satisfactorily explain David's clothing, however.

Phillips suggests that 'it was not normal Israelite practice for a person acting as a priest to appear clad only in a linen ephod' (1969, p. 487). McCarter does not address the tension that this conclusion raises – whether the garment is priestly or secular, it is a simple undergarment, and David, a Judean, is not only acting as priest, but is also not dressed in a socially appropriate manner (McCarter, 1984, p. 171; Phillips, 1969, p. 487). Phillips suggests that Michal may object to David's clothing because she is 'a loyal Yahwist' and the procession may have had roots in 'the Jebusite cultus in Jerusalem', however, he does so without evidence (1969, p. 487). McCarter suggests that Michal's reception to David's dance might also have been tied to (unspecified) non-Yahwistic roots and pauses to interrogate the sexual overtones in David's behaviour (1984, pp. 186-89).

Michal accuses David of acquiring 'a certain *sexual* honor' inappropriate for his station by 'flaunting himself' in skimpy clothing (1984, p. 186-87, emphasis in original). McCarter focuses on 'the "maidservants" or "wenches"' as the observers of David's nakedness even as he acknowledges that 'David, alert to her [Michal's] tone, will respond to her implication rather than her actual words' by proudly asserting that he will 'behave even more shamelessly' and even 'humiliate myself' before Hashem<sup>211</sup> (1984, pp. 186-87). This 'humiliation', which sounds more appropriate for a BDSM scene than a temple, McCarter gentles into 'pious modesty' (1984, p. 187). McCarter would like us to see David's behaviour as non-sexual, however, he

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<sup>211</sup> The Hebrew, שפיל, describes lowness (both literal and abstract), abasement, humiliation, demotion, and having been subdued (Clines, 2009, p. 476).

acknowledges that the conversation is deeply ironic, foreshadowing Michal's 'exclusion from David's bed' (1984, p. 187). Something very queer is occurring.

McCarter, his eye ever on historical-critical interpretation, is particularly interested in 'the original meaning of this episode' – wading through theory that suggests a range of possibilities, from 'an off-colour joke' with a 'gentle criticism' of David's sexual mores to a rebuke of a 'sacred marriage' ceremony that may have occurred (1984, pp. 188-89). I find it particularly compelling that while McCarter acknowledges that other scholars see David's behaviour as profoundly sexual, even serving as the beginning of a cultic orgy, he dismisses these readings of sexuality in favour of the theory that Michal's sexual references are only a literary device designed to emphasize her infertility (with David) and thus affirm Solomon's 'succession narrative', with vv. 20-23 being late additions to the narrative (1984, pp. 188-89). McCarter is uncharacteristically uninterested in the possibility of a sacred marriage ceremony taking place – or even the possibility that Michal's anger is a stand-in for (Yahwistic) cultic tradition that found David's behaviour ritually inappropriate (1989, p. 189). McCarter de-fangs the narrative from dangerous sexuality. Were a sacred marriage ceremony to be taking place, McCarter and his peers imagine David with one or more female partners, with the enslaved women Michal refers to perhaps stepping in when Michal 'refuses to participate' (1984, pp. 188-89). David would be performing the role of Hashem, offering actual or metaphorical sexual acts to represent Hashem's virility, power over fertility and prosperity, and vitality. Instead, McCarter argues that David's procession is actually 'the introduction of a national god into a new capital city' which did not involve a sacred marriage ceremony (1984, p. 189).

I believe that here McCarter employs mental gymnastics to maintain his heteronormative, cisnormative interpretation of the text. While McCarter devotes a good deal of time to examining the historical precedent for the introduction of gods to new capitals, he does not discuss the applicability of a sacred marriage ceremony to the procession, instead looking at the plausibility of a sacred marriage ceremony taking place as a *part of* the introduction of gods to new capitals. This circular argument is unsatisfactory and does not explore the possibility that the entire procession might be a hybrid ceremony or if sacred marriage would better describe the cultic events. McCarter also neglects to consider that in the case of a sacred marriage, David might not be performing as Hashem or on Hashem's behalf. Michal's anger, in this hypothetical scenario, is because her husband has been (publicly) sexual with enslaved women – McCarter misses the possibility that David has equated himself *with* the enslaved women and 'empty, vain men' by making himself (publicly, symbolically<sup>212</sup>) sexually available to Hashem (1984, p. 188; 2 Samuel 6.22).

By removing the possibility of a sexually-receptive David – as dangerous to many modern, Western conceptions of hegemonic masculinity as it was to ancient Levantine hegemonic masculinity – McCarter controls the perception of David's manhood. Notice how his interpretation favours David's succession narrative: he may come perilously close to acknowledging that there is something profoundly queer about David's actions in the second procession, but he resolves it by emphasizing David's sons (a reminder of David's virility and hegemonic position) (1984, p. 188). McCarter notes that it is unclear if Michal 'was excluded from David's bed' or if 'Yahweh made her barren' (1984, p. 187). But despite this, McCarter

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<sup>212</sup> I will discuss this in further detail in my analysis of David's dancing.



(unconsciously, perhaps) chooses to emphasize David's power, believing that David rejected Michal, rather than reading David's virility as subject to Hashem's will (1984, p. 187).

However, McCarter's reluctance to see David as subject, sexually and otherwise, to Hashem is not necessarily reflected in Brueggemann's reading of David's dancing. Brueggemann's interpretation is particularly interested in rhetorical implications of the chapter. Ironically, given the history of modern, white, Western, homophobic theology, it has a significantly greater tolerance for queerness – if only when between Hashem and his desired human.

Brueggemann repeatedly describes David's behaviour as driven by desire, rather than propriety, it is 'unfettered, unashamed extravagance' and David's dancing is utterly 'without restraint' (1990, p. 250), highlighting indeed that for some other scholars the episode seems to be easily and highly sexualised, becoming almost a description of 'a Canaanite ecstatic dance that become something of an orgy'<sup>213</sup> (1990, p. 250). The opposite pole, Brueggemann states, is that David's behaviour was a 'legitimate liturgic dance, the bodily expression as proper worship' (1990, p. 250). Ultimately, he concludes that the narrative is ambiguous, '[giving] us little clue about David's intention' (1990, p. 250). I would like to unwrap the implications of Brueggemann's analysis here, since it is dense with presumptions.

Brueggemann begins by constructing a range of actions described by the text, each end presented as binary opposites: Canaanite/Yahwistic, but it is also implicitly, sexual behaviour/liturgical behaviour. Brueggemann's dichotomy may be in alignment with modern Christian praxis, but it assumes much about the narrator's cultic norms, which remain

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<sup>213</sup> It is telling (and troubling) that when the commentators see an uncomfortably sexual scene it is quickly Othered by being labelled Canaanite.

unspecified in his analysis of the chapter (1990, pp. 247-53). He also asserts that it is intention – rather than action – that should drive our conclusions about David’s dance, an odd suggestion when according to his own interpretation of Uzzah’s death, it was action, not intention, that justified Hashem’s fatal rage.

I do not believe the text supports this binary. The narrator frames David and Michal’s argument not as Canaanite/Yahwistic but as proper/improper. David does not deny any sexual behaviour,<sup>214</sup> instead justifying his actions (sexual or non-sexual) as validated by Hashem (2 Sam. 6.21-22). It is this validation, not liturgical/sexual significance that justifies David’s choices to Michal. Brueggemann seems to recognize this, stating later that ‘[p]opular use of this text to justify liturgic dance is quite beside the point, unless liturgic dance is seen as a means whereby power is reconfigured and new political legitimacy is received’ (1990, p. 253). He moves the goalposts, defining David’s dance now in terms of politics and power. However, I believe that like sexuality and liturgy, politics is only applicable in and so far as it is the means by which power is obtained. David’s dance is truly about hegemonic power and how the narrator must delicately balance Hashem’s hegemony with David’s in order to maintain appropriate power, through proper behaviour.

Brueggemann has no qualms with David being subservient to Hashem, noting that ‘David’s “dishonor” consists in glad yielding to the gift of Yahweh’ since ‘David is utterly Yahweh’s man’ (1990, p. 252). Indeed, when judging David’s actions as proper/improper, he sees David’s submission as eminently appropriate (1990, p. 252). This may be why he misses the source of Michal’s conflict with David; Brueggemann dismisses the political danger in which a

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<sup>214</sup> On the contrary, he seems to double down.

submissive king finds himself, arguing ‘Michal believes David has forfeited the respect he must have to be a ruler’ only to lament that ‘[w]e do not know why Michal despises David’ (1990, p. 251-52).<sup>215</sup> According to Michal’s own words, her anger has nothing to do liturgy or sex and everything to do with hegemony. The טפס of the text is far from the only interpretation, but its potential also should not be ignored. The author(s) and editor(s) are too deliberate and intentional for us to neglect it, even as academic curiosity encourages us to question it.

Brueggemann sets aside the possibility that David’s behaviour can be both sexual and proper, but the language he uses to describe David’s dance is implicitly sexual. Brueggemann’s submissive David opens the door to a number of possibilities. David’s ‘yielding’ to Hashem’s (masculine, hegemonic) power argues that if anything sexual is occurring, David is the receptive partner, not the active one. Brueggemann ends by suggesting that ‘[t]here is something here of the exalted being humbled and the humbled being exalted’, referencing the Christian gospels and Hannah in 1 Sam. 2.7-8 (1990, p. 253). This humbled, receptive David ‘reflects a total inversion’ of social norms – Michal sees David’s actions as improper and un-hegemonic, but it is precisely his submission that delights Hashem and Hashem who imbues David with hegemonic power through divine blessings (1990, p. 252-53).

Brueggemann both steps away from portions of the straight reading of the text, without providing a substantial argument for why he chooses to do this, and uses implicitly sexual language to describe David’s submission to Hashem, while eschewing an explicitly sexual reading of the text. The result is in line with Brueggemann’s rhetorical aims – Hashem maintains

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<sup>215</sup> Teresa Hornsby’s ‘Neoliberalism and Queer Theology in Biblical Readings’ (2020) meditates on the tension created by the modern White, Western theology’s focus on ‘idealized suffering, willful self-sacrifice, glorified humiliation, and romanticized slavery’ generates ‘the types of sexual/economic subjects’ necessary to fuel neoliberal capitalism (p. 220).

his hegemonic power, David's power is clearly argued to flow directly from Hashem, at Hashem's pleasure and bidding, and sexual behaviour is presented as the antithesis of this intimate, homosocial dynamic – but it is also fundamentally unstable. Brueggemann cannot argue all of his points decisively and escape the queer relationship between David and Hashem, in fact, his rhetoric emphasizes it. The irony is palpable.

Hertzberg and Fokkelman also see David as subordinate to Hashem. Hertzberg, with his historical-critical focus, offers a reading not dissimilar to that of McCarter, although he fully embraces a humbled – and under-dressed – David. His reading lacks the homosocial – borderline homoerotic – tones of Brueggemann, but it also is willing to accept the straight reading of the text.

Hertzberg opens by establishing David's dance as exposing: 'Michal's feelings are only comprehensible if the tradition knew that David really uncovered himself' (1964, p. 280). He then proceeds to argue that it is also intrinsically liturgical – David's dance 'exercises priestly function' equal to that of his later blessing of the people (1964, p. 280). Hertzberg then ties David's priestly role to dance via a modern Simchat Torah celebration he observed in Jerusalem, a tenuous argument given the evolution of cultic ritual between even a late, Hellenistic composition of Samuel and modern Jewish praxis (1964, p. 280). Simchat Torah is a relatively new tradition, originating between 800-1200 CE (Koppelman Ross, no date). Interestingly, Hertzberg displays none of the discomfort with David's behaviour that Tsumura and Brueggemann do. In this, Hertzberg follows McCarter and van Wijk-Bos.

Against McCarter, Hertzberg considers the possibility that David's dance followed an established pattern, asking if David's response to Michal included 'a verse of the kind which was

usual in such processional dances' (1964, p. 281). Hertzberg does not, unfortunately, have any examples of what such dances may have looked like, however. He does draw the same parallel as Brueggemann, though, between David's behaviour and 'the maxim "whoever humbles himself shall be exalted"' stopping briefly to explore this inversion of social norms (1964, p. 281).

According to the narrator, David's dance is 'before Hashem' (2 Sam. 6.14, 16). Hertzberg reads this as intentional, deliberate service that acknowledges Hashem as 'the only great one' (1964, p. 281). He argues that the reference to the enslaved women is a deliberate choice that highlights submission: 'they [the women] know that reverence is to become lowly before God' (1964, p. 281). This functions as an indictment against the Saulide dynasty, and Hertzberg reads Michal's infertility as Hashem's intervention, in response to Michal's alleged rejection of Hashem<sup>216</sup> (1964, p. 281). David's power is publicly affirmed to be the direct result of Hashem favour, rather than kind of military prowess or political cunning.

This may seem to eschew the queer overtones with which Brueggemann imbues his analysis, however, Hertzberg's understanding of David's position is just as queer, since Hertzberg conflates David's partial or complete nudity with an appropriate, priestly response to divine favour. Hertzberg does not backtrack to place limits on this sensual liturgical behaviour, either, but assumes – possibly because of the general population's lack of outrage or perhaps because of Hashem's lack of outrage – that this sort of action is a side effect of zealous liturgical dancing and completely acceptable (1964, pp. 280-81). Hertzberg further reads David as 'humble, yet powerful' in this submissive position before Hashem (1964, p. 281). David's favour

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<sup>216</sup> Although Hertzberg sees Michal as primarily 'concerned for the royal dignity' rather than any kind of 'inveigh against David's participation in the cult of Yahweh', her concern with propriety over appropriate spiritual decorum leads to an inadvertent rejection of Hashem (1964, pp. 280-81). She is then guilty of the same mistake I argue that David makes in the first procession, prioritization of David's hegemonic power over Hashem's.

with Hashem, gives him a fearsome patron, as 2 Sam. 6.6-11 demonstrates. However, David's power does not originate from himself, he wields no hegemonic agency if his military strength and political success are gifts from Hashem, earned by cavorting in (a hotly debated) state of undress.

Hertzberg's reading is echoed by Theodore Jennings Jr's analysis of David and Hashem's relationship. As I have discussed previously, Jennings' homoerotic interpretation sees David's dancing as 'a kind of reward for Adonai's good behavior' (2001, p. 54). It is a marker of the deep relationship between the two, and firmly establishes David as the desired, rather than the desirer (2001, pp. 54-55, 60-61).

Fokkelman's reading of David's dance also pays particular attention to David's 'total surrender' before Hashem (1990, p. 196). The dance itself is described minimally: Fokkelman notes that David 'is putting an enormous amount of energy into dancing' for 'his addressee' although the dance also functions as a personal expression of 'release and strain' as a tense David hopes for the best, while remembering Hashem's anger (1990, pp. 194-95). The ephod is presented as priestly, with no mention to any partial or complete nudity while dancing (1990, p. 195).

It is after Michal's view from the window that Fokkelman meditates on the further implications of David's behaviour. He is particularly interested in 'the feet and the hands' of the king, 'a merismus for the ruler in total movement which stands for total surrender' (1990, p. 196). David is subject to Michal's 'objectifying view' in Fokkelman's analysis, which turns his 'religious surrender' into sexual surrender<sup>217</sup> (1990, pp. 196, 199). David's vulnerability while

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<sup>217</sup> Michal's objectification is, of course, the (male) narrator's objectification.

dancing is compounded by his clothing, since ‘the only garment which he still had on to cover his shame was the linen ephod’ (1990, p. 199). Fokkelman concludes that Michal is brimming with ‘poorly disguised. . . sexual jealousy’ rather than legitimate concern for appropriate kingly behaviour (1990, p. 199). But who is Michal jealous of?

Fokkelman would have us believe that Michal is jealous of the enslaved women, but his case is rather weak (1990, p. 199). Michal’s critique of David is as linguistically clever as it is biting, with ‘a unique combination of construct infinitive plus absolute infinitive in the simile’ she wields, along with alliteration and rhyming – the rhyming in particular tying David’s nudity to his ‘group of spectators’, the enslaved women (1990, p. 199). I believe, however, that the juxtaposition of the two is far from damning; Michal’s language may link ‘the action’s closer involvement with this group’ but it does not mean she is jealous of them; they are merely bearing witness to her humiliation (1990, p. 199). Michal’s jealousy is directed at the target of David’s advances, Hashem, and David will not apologize for it.

Fokkelman sees David’s response as a successful attempt to restore his integrity, since ‘[h]e was genuinely engaged in performing a rite which was glorifying to God from start to finish and Michal’s false criterion ricochets’ (1990, p. 201). I agree and disagree by turns. David, and the narrator, do us readers a great service by qualifying David’s actions – it is abundantly clear through David’s language that his dancing – including his nudity, which Fokkelman continues to politely ignore – is not for the enslaved women, but for Hashem (1990, p. 201; 2

Sam. 6.21). Based on Hashem's response, the procession was well-received (2 Sam. 7).

However, against Fokkelman, I do not find Michal's critique completely refuted.<sup>218</sup>

Fokkelman's fondness for David is extremely clear in his analysis. He spends a full paragraph exploring '[w]hat. . . a person can do when so much aggression and venom heads straight for him' in obvious sympathy with David (1990, p. 200). Fokkelman reads David's response as 'dignified and sincere' while also 'conceal[ing] a barb at the same time' – his election over Saul – that 'only goes to show that she really has touched a raw nerve' (1990, pp. 201-02). His emphasis on the 'intimate association' of 'king-people-God' creates a relational 'triangle' that has 'scarcely any room for Michal' (1990, p. 202). Fokkelman instinctively understands the queer relationship the narrator is composing – his language belongs to a romance, not a political analysis. This is a deeply personal discussion, instigated by nudity, coloured by sexual jealousy, and resolved by the demarcation of relational boundaries: David dances for Hashem, has been chosen by – and is desired by! – Hashem, and Michal, David's wife, is referred to, not in relation to David, but in relation to Saul (2 Sam. 6.20-23). Michal must take a backseat to Hashem. She has no claim to David's affections, time, or sexuality when Hashem is in the picture.

Fokkelman believes that the narrator is intentionally ambiguous about Michal's infertility (1990, p. 205). He is unwilling to conclusively ascribe it to a choice by anyone in the little love triangle, but instead dwells on the literary elegance of Michal's metaphorical death paralleling Uzzah's (1990, pp. 205-06). Fokkelman is not entirely unsympathetic to Michal, and he spends a

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<sup>218</sup> David's answer to Michal answers both her jealousy and allegations of impropriety with a religious justification but follows with the assertion that he may go even farther and remain justified in his actions. This does implicitly acknowledge an uneasy truce: David's behaviour is not unassailable. I will discuss in chapter nine how the narrator uses Michal to safely voice their discomfort with David's queerness, placing limits around it.



short amount of time contextualizing Michal's history with David (1990, p. 204). This has the effect of highlighting Michal's probable dissatisfaction with 'a cold or non-functioning marriage with the new king' after 'she was robbed of Paltiel's ardour' (1990, p. 204). Thus, her anger flairs when she 'look[s] down on the abundant energy of her dancing husband' (1990, p. 204).

Fokkelman assumes she is jealous of the women who catch sight of David's nudity while dancing, but from his description of her strained relationship with David, it seems much more probable that she is jealous of the devotion David displays for Hashem. David openly – cheerfully, according to his speech in vv. 21-22 – submits to Hashem, eschewing hegemonic power, but he cannot, or will not, offer Michal that same wellspring of affection. Michal is the third wheel, and she knows it. David has and will continue to choose Hashem over her.

Ultimately, on all three fronts – the revised transportation of the ark, the identity of the offering-maker(s), and in David's dance – the commentators uniformly read the text in accordance with their predetermined analysis of Uzzah's murder and their perception of appropriate behaviour. Despite this, the text refuses to conform, creating visible seams between the narrator's offering and the commentaries' conclusions. Through this, I have argued that the second procession is better understood in terms of hegemonic power and gender performativity. I will now offer a close reading of this procession, detailing what this analysis would look like.

### Gender and Power: A Close Reading of the Second Procession

The second procession opens with David receiving word of Obed-edom's good fortune in v. 12. Not only is Hashem staying outside of his tabernacle, but he is staying with a man whose given name implies worship of and allegiance to another god. Against readings that suggest 2

Sam 6 is concerned with Torah regulations, Obed-edom is able to safely bring the ark into his home and keep it without any negative incident. It is unclear if Obed-edom worships Hashem during his stay, but what the narrator does make clear is that Hashem is generous with his favour. Whatever Obed-edom has done, he has done correctly.

The incident with Obed-edom calls the traditional interpretation of Uzzah's murder into question. It is a remarkable breach of cultic consistency, but the narrator does not remark on it.<sup>219</sup> David is not depicted as surprised. The LXX adds: 'and David said, "I will bring the blessing back to my house"' (2 Sam. 6.12; McCarter, 1984, pp. 165). As McCarter notes, this may not be the most flattering glimpse of David's motives in moving the ark, but it is pragmatic, matching what the narrator has provided already.

As the procession begins, the narrator specifically mentions נשא – 'those who carry [the ark]' (2 Sam. 6.13). This is the same word used in Deut. 10.8, when Hashem consecrates the Levites to carry – לשאת – the ark and serve in the tabernacle. However, in Deut. and Josh., the ark is specifically described as being carried by priests or Levites (Deut. 31.9; 31.25; Josh. 3.3, 6; 3.8; 3.13-15; 3.17; 4.9-10; 4.16; 4.18; 6.6; 6.12; and 8.33). Further, the word is also used in 2 Sam. 6.4 to describe the allegedly improper method of conveyance, via new cart. Perhaps it cannot be assumed that 'those who carry [the ark]' are Levites since there is no mention of Levites or priests in 2 Sam. 6.12-23.

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<sup>219</sup> This is historically expected since Levantine 'material culture exhibits numerous common points between the Israelites and Canaanites in the Iron I period (ca. 1200-1000). The record would suggest that the Israelite culture largely overlapped with, and derived from, Canaanite culture. In short, Israelite culture was largely Canaanite in nature. Given the information available, one cannot maintain a radical cultural separation between Canaanite and Israelite for the Iron I period. . . . Baal and Asherah were part of Israel's Canaanite heritage, and the process of emergence of Israel's monolatry was an issue of Israel's breaking with its own Canaanite past and not simply one of avoiding Canaanite neighbours' (Smith, 1990, pp. xxii – xxiii). However, our commentaries do not directly address this – as we will see shortly – and use the Torah's cultic standards in Samuel's absence of specific protocol.

The MT alone raises many questions regarding cultic ritual, but the LXX<sup>B</sup> and OL add additional problems. The LXX<sup>B</sup> explicitly describes the ark-bearers as ‘seven dancing troops’ – an interesting logistical puzzle, considering the size of the groups – although the OL describes them not as carrying the ark, but accompanying David (McCarter, 1984, pp. 166). There is no precedent for dancing ark-bearers in the Torah. The OL’s association of the seven groups with David, rather than the ark, brings the text closer in line with the MT, but does not clarify why the LXX<sup>B</sup> reads the ark-bearers as dancers. The procession is unique enough in the absence of Levites.

The successful transportation of the ark on this procession, like Obed-edom’s prosperity, undermines traditional readings that argue Uzzah’s murder was the result of improper conveyance. It is possible that the cultic standard Uzzah allegedly transgresses is different from the tradition that has been preserved in the Torah, however, this does not satisfactorily explain the rest of David’s behaviour, just as the prevalent commentary interpretation that David’s priestly (and queer) actions serve a purely literary function, designed to emphasize his unique role, do not satisfactorily explain Uzzah’s murder. I believe examining gender offers a more cohesive explanation for the entire event, from the first procession and Uzzah’s death to Michal’s anger and David’s response.

The entire second procession differs from the first in several fundamental ways. In the LXX<sup>B</sup> and OL, the second procession is described as having seven groups of dancers and with no mention of an army (2 Sam. 6.2, 13). David’s troops have been replaced with troupes. David is no longer presenting himself as conquering king, instead he wears ‘a linen ephod’ and dances before Hashem after offering – either from his own stores, or as the officiant, the text is unclear –

a sacrifice (2 Sam. 6.13-14). David performs as a priest – his clothing evoking Samuel in 1 Samuel 2.18.

There are two implications for the ephod that I wish to explore: its connection to the priesthood and its connection to Michal's accusation of nudity. I believe the two are intertwined and that the narrator is acutely aware of this fact, as ancient readers would be. In chapter two, I discussed how Jennings's analysis of 2 Sam. 6, while excellent, was unfortunately limited in its understanding of gender. I would like to return briefly to Jennings's understanding of David's gender, since he offers the most concrete analysis of David's gender performance, then move on to Hornsby's analysis of David's gender performativity.

Jennings fears that acknowledging femininity in the pairing between humans/Israel and Hashem, with David standing in as Israel, would make his homoerotic reading heteroerotic (2001, pp. 72-73). I argued that David embodies an intrinsically queer relationship, whether as wife or boy toy of Hashem, since movement past one's assigned gender is understood as transgressive in modern white Western societies. Further, David's actions are multifaceted: David's clothing signals his affiliation not only with Hashem, but as the *property* of Hashem.

Jennings worries that reading David as genderqueer involves 'the feminization of the beloved by the male lover in highly gendered settings' as a necessary feature of societies where 'the homoerotic aspect of the relation is actually repressed in favour of a heterosexual model', therefore 'the beloved comes to have a somewhat unstable gender identity' (2001, pp. 72). 2 Sam. 6 and 7 avoid this, Jennings argues, because 'the maleness of both characters [David and Hashem] seems essential' (2001, pp. 72). He concludes a warning against essentialization and

‘casting feminization simply as a depletion of masculinity’ (2001, p. 73). However, Jennings’s premise is as unstable as David’s gender performativity is non-binary.

Jennings assumes that Hashem finds David’s masculinity inherently attractive, however, as I argued in chapter three, David’s beauty casts him as the desired, not the desirer, which runs counter to ancient biblical depictions of masculinity. Jennings sees Hashem as an archetypal ancient Mesopotamian and Levantine ‘war chieftain’ who takes David as a companion/lover, selected for his beauty and loyalty (2001, pp. 39-48) David’s beauty, I have argued, is not masculine since it makes him vulnerable. Jennings presumes it is masculine but appears to do so on the evidence that David is a male and therefore, his beauty is tied to his sex, not his gender (2001, p. 47). David fulfilling a feminine role is dismissed out of hand, because of Jennings’s concern over heteroeroticism (2001, pp. 47-48, 72-73). The beloved, Jennings argues, ‘is regularly noted for his boldness and bravery, sharing in the dangers and the adventures of the warrior, indeed sometimes outshining the hero in these masculine qualities’ however, he is also ‘selected, as are female consorts. . . because of this beauty, a beauty that awakens the desire and favor of the lover/hero’ (2001, p. 47). Jennings is inconsistent, acknowledging in one breath that the companion/beloved parallels femininity, while insisting in another that the beloved is thoroughly masculine. The youth is bound as wife to his lover, unable to take another, but may also perform as husband to a woman. The loyalty of the beloved to his lover is in this description, a feminine performance. He is not a husband to his husband, but a wife: he is performing femininity, a femininity that is able to co-exist with a masculine performance to a wife of his own. David and Hashem’s relationship is not gay, it is profoundly queer. It refuses to

be neatly defined as homosocial, homosexual, or homoerotic, instead offering a twisting kaleidoscope of genderbending and defiant fluidity.

Hornsby sees David as moving between two fixed points – the masculine, embodied by Hashem, and the feminine, embodied by Israel (2016, pp. 88-89). David’s gender transgression is symbolic, rather than concrete – he is not both Hashem and Israel but *belonging* to both Hashem and Israel. By blurring the binary distinction between the two groups, Hornsby sees David’s dance as genderfluid (2016, p. 89). I believe Hornsby touches on an unrecognized truth in 2 Sam. 6 – something deeply subversive is certainly occurring, and David’s connection to Hashem and Israel is a part of this, and I wish to expand on this.

David’s dancing is queer because it emphasizes the duality of his social performativity. The delicate social dance between who Israel demands David be – a warrior, a king, a masculine icon who will lead them into (victorious) battle – and who Hashem demands David be – a dedicated admirer who prioritizes Hashem’s wishes and whims over David’s own, property of Hashem’s household, vessel (and occasional voice) for Hashem’s aims – requires David to be both masculine for Israel and feminine for Hashem, the one who desires and the desired. All of this is implicit, rather than explicit in Hornsby’s analysis, which focuses on dance as a metaphor for the transgression of social binaries (2016, pp. 88-93). However, I believe that 2 Sam. 6 offers multiple, specific examples of genderqueer performativity in the second procession.

These concrete examples can be found in the three changes David makes between the first and second processions: his clothing – the ephod –, his actions – dancing,<sup>220</sup> rather than

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<sup>220</sup> Although I am indebted to Hornsby’s groundbreaking reading of David’s dance as gender transgressive, I read David’s dancing as gender transgressive from a perspective unique from Hornsby’s, where dancing marks David as the object of desire rather than the one who desires, especially when viewed in contrast his actions in the first parade.

commanding an army –, and the music. Let us begin by returning to priestly clothing and Rooke's analysis of its feminizing properties in order to better understand the ephod.

### The Ephod

Rooke observes that our clothes communicate 'both gender and social status': our place in our communities is telegraphed and affirmed through what we wear (2009, p. 20-21). Therefore, priestly clothing, including undergarments, like the priestly breeches, have a social significance – Rooke argues that the breeches are a constant reminder on the limits and definition of priestly masculinity (2009, p. 35). The priests must have typical-appearing bodies, including external male genitalia, but they must also obscure this evidence of their masculinity and offer a 'woman-like intimacy' to Hashem, occupying feminine social roles in their care and keeping of the tabernacle or temple (2009, pp. 27-35).

Rooke observes that when David wears the ephod, it visually cues a connection to the priesthood, as a priestly garment (2009, p. 24). In the absence of reliefs, ephod's design is debatable, ranging from Jennings's interpretation of 'a loincloth or breechcloth, a g-string or jockstrap', where the ephod 'both hides and focuses attention upon the genitals of the wearer' to Phillips's interpretation of the ephod as a 'a brief loin cloth normally found on young children' – but also referring to an 'oracular instrument' used by priests (2001, pp. 56-57; 1969, p. 487). What unifies both interpretations is the brief nature of the garment. Jennings observes that the ephod is typically a 'linen apron' (2001, p. 56). Phillips emphasizes the 'basic meaning' of the ephod as a 'covering', using this to read the oracular tool referred to as an ephod not as a 'metallic jockstrap' as Jennings does, but as a 'an empty case, like a stiffened garment' (1969,

pp. 485-87; 2001, pp. 56-57). Despite their differing emphasis, ultimately, these two readings are not entirely dissimilar.

The parallel between Phillips's 'stiffened garment' and Jennings's loincloth highlight the same function: the ephod both conceals and reveals what it covers, whether that be the wearer's body or divine power<sup>221</sup> in Judges 8.27-28, 18.31 and 1 Sam. 14.3 (1969, pp. 485-87; 2001, pp. 56-58). In 1 Sam. 14.18, the MT, which describes the ephod being carried into battle, refers to the holy object as the ark, instead (Jennings, 2001, p. 57-58). The ephod, like the ark, conceals and reveals Hashem just as the garment David is wearing both hides and flaunts his body (and genitals) (Jennings, 2001, p. 58). Unlike Phillips, Jennings is particularly interested in the phallic imagery of the ephod (2001, pp. 56-58). Here, I must diverge from Jennings's reading, in favour of Rooke's. The ephod may cover David's nudity, but its priestly association, like that of the priestly breeches, emphasizes not David's masculinity, but a feminine performance. Other scholars, such as Christine Palmer, see the ephod explicitly as 'an apron that binds tightly around the torso and leaves an opening in the front for affixing the breastpiece' (2019, p. 122). This reading presents the ephod as a marker of the "otherness" that defines the high priestly office' and 'that creates ceremonious formality, its weight slowing the priest's movements to a deliberate and stately procession' (2019, p. 122). This interpretation does not account for David's clothing at all and suggests that its connection to divination is 'through the lots contained in its pouch (1 Samuel 23:9-11; 30:7-8)' (2019, p. 122). Despite this, Palmer sees 'the sheath-like golden garment' as having a similar function as Phillips and Jennings: ritual clothing '[to] replicate in textile the ineffable splendour of the divine presence that indwells the tent shrine'

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<sup>221</sup> The ephod functions as a container for divine power, meditating the supernatural so it can be venerated in the natural world while also serving as the embodiment of that power.



(2019, p. 123). The priestly clothing parallels the ark, allowing the natural world to interact with the supernatural,

While it is difficult to frame ancient Mesopotamian and Levantine femininity and there is an unfortunate lack of research on this topic, what is apparent is that this femininity is defined by certain restrictions and negatives. In ancient Israelite femininity, women are often associated with the private sphere, afforded movement within the realm of the household/family (Emmerson, 1999, pp. 371-394). In 2 Sam. 6, David intentionally feminizes himself by wearing a linen ephod: by wearing the ephod he publicly marks himself as the property of Hashem, as the priests are. He defines himself not as a warrior-king, but as a priest, a glorified housekeeper whose sexual activity is regimented by Hashem's wishes and whims. I wish to emphasize the social implications of David's association with the priesthood and Samuel.

A young Samuel, as an aid to Eli, the priest, serves in the tabernacle wearing a linen ephod (1 Sam. 2.18). His duties as 'an attendant' immediately precede the observation that he was 'girded with a linen ephod', suggesting a correlation between the two (1 Sam. 2.18). This ephod is not likely the priestly ephod,<sup>222</sup> however the parallel language and specificity of use – in the tabernacle, while serving Hashem – suggests we are meant to understand this garment as marking the wearer as affiliated with the priesthood (Ex. 28.6-8; 39.2-5; 1 Sam. 2.18). Samuel, as a prophet, is a vessel for Hashem, serving as his voice to the people (1 Sam. 3.1-21, 4.1). Similarly, the priests serve as conduits for Hashem to communicate to Israel. Eli offers Samuel's mother, Hannah, multiple blessings all of which are granted (1 Sam. 1.17-18, 1 Sam. 2.20-21). Eli serves as an intermediary between Hashem and Israel.

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<sup>222</sup> The priest's ephod is specifically designed for Aaron as the high priest (his sons are not made an ephod) in Ex. 39.1-30, and more generally for priests in Ex. 28.1-4.

In contrast, his sons refuse to function as accurate intermediaries – in 1 Sam. 2.12-17, Hophni and Phinehas attempt to circumvent the proper process for ritual sacrifice and in 1 Sam 2.22, they have sex with the women at the tabernacle. Hophni and Phinehas act on their own interests, intentionally miscommunicating ritual steps, threatening those who do not comply with their alterations, and having unsanctioned sex.<sup>223</sup> Hashem responds by taking credit for their deaths at the hands of the Philistines (1 Sam. 2.25-36, 3.18, 4.11-17). A priest who refuses to be a submissive vessel is rejected.

David, therefore, while wearing the linen ephod, is connected to the priesthood. His sexuality is controlled by Hashem and he functions as a vessel and voice, offering blessings to the people (2 Sam. 6.18). He serves an intermediary between Hashem and Hashem’s devotees by offering sacrifices and like a wife, distributes food<sup>224</sup> (2 Sam. 6.17-19).

The ephod is not only a marker of priesthood, but also explicitly tied to David’s nudity. The ephod reveals David’s body to the attendees, marking him as an object, instead of a subject. As discussed in chapter three, David’s beauty makes him vulnerable. He is gazed upon by not only Hashem, but the lowest class of individuals the narrator can fathom – the nation’s own enslaved women (2 Sam. 6.20).

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<sup>223</sup> Phineas, at least, is married, possibly at this point, the text is unclear (1 Sam. 4.19). Priestly sexuality is tightly regimented in Lev. A priest may not marry any woman besides ‘a virgin of his own kin’ (Lev. 21.7-8, 13-15). A priest may not eat from the offerings if he has ejaculated or has genital discharge (Lev. 22.4). It is unknown if these standards were followed at the time of 1 Samuel’s authorship, but it is likely that some variant set of regulation on priestly sexuality existed, given Eli’s reaction to his sons’ promiscuity, and resulting fate (1 Sam. 2.22-25; 1 Sam. 3.18). We may not know what these are, but Hophni and Phinehas’s sexual activity was specifically cited as a ‘wrong against Hashem’ (1 Sam. 2.22-25).

<sup>224</sup> The distinctive gendered roles of women and their social performance are explored extensively in works such as Peggy Day’s *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel* (2000), Alice Bach’s *Women in the Hebrew Bible: A Reader* (1999), and Carol Meyers’s *Households and Holiness: The Religious Culture of Israelite Women* (2023).

## The Dance

Hornsby's recognition that David's dance is gender transgressive provides us with a place to begin, but, as I noted, it is concerned with symbolic movement between two binary points: Hashem/masculinity and Israel/femininity. I would like to suggest that David's dance is symbolically transgressive because of the implications of his movement, as expressed by Fokkelman, and because of the shift in the parade-viewers' gazes.

Fokkelman translates the description of David's dance in v. 16 as 'leaping and clapping' (1990, p. 196). This dancing is described in much greater detail than the first procession. The first procession's dancing is understood as a general 'celebration', 'making merry', or 'reveling' according to the MT, while the LXX suggests outright 'dancing' (Tsumura, 2019, pp. 112-13; McCarter, 1984, pp. 161, 169). van Wijk-Bos offers that David and company are playing music, following David Wright's study of the music of 2 Sam 6 (2020, p. 244). Wright reads David's first procession as a revelry, including both playing music and dancing, suggesting a parallel between the first procession and the second, however, the second procession features a much more vigorous dance, with 'cognate verbs from other Semitic languages' suggesting that מְכַרְכֵּר, used in v. 14 and 16 to describe David's movement, is a turning/circular/whirling dance (2002, pp. 216-21).

Fokkelman sees this circular dance, '[p]ointing to the feet and hands' as symbolic of 'total surrender' (1990, p. 196). Eilberg-Schwartz highlights, in his analysis on the divine body, specifically Ezekiel's theophany in Ez. 1.26-27, that 'the whole question of God's genitals has been deflected to the extremities of the body and replayed there' (1994, p. 78). This Freudian avoidance of the genitals is also seen in the periodic euphemistic use of 'feet' to reference the

penis throughout the Hebrew Bible (1994, pp. 78-79). David's vulnerability is cued to the ancient reader through the allusion to his hands and feet – his surrender has hints of sexual exposure, hints that are made explicit in Michal's chastisement (2 Sam. 6.20).

David's vulnerability is submissive: he symbolically (and literally, according to v. 20) exposes himself before Hashem, without any reciprocity. He is completely at Hashem's mercy, vulnerable not only to criticism, but to physical attack. There is no standing army following his commands. Although he dances 'with all his might', he offers no show of strength. Wright suggests that the proper response to 'cultic error. . . requires laying oneself completely open to inspection and making oneself more vulnerable to his [Hashem's] wrath, perhaps to make oneself more fully in the performance' (2002, p. 216). David's dance may or may not be sexual, Wright notes – suggesting it is possible that Michal's anger is the result of 'misunderstanding or an exaggeration' of David's actions – but if it is, '[t]he erotic elements were side effects, sparks flying off the grinding wheel' (2002, pp. 223-24). Of course, Wright sees human women as the intended recipient of David's eroticism, even as he observes, 'the deity does not reject David's endeavours' (2002, pp. 223-24).

Wright's perspective, as I have shown, is shared by the commentaries I have examined. Wright presumes that the gaze on David is that of other humans – particularly that of the human attendees (2002, p. 223). This is certainly a portion of the gaze, however, Wright momentarily ignores the divine gaze – a queer moment to do so, when David is so very adamant that it is *for* the divine gaze that he prances, whirls, and exposes himself (2002, p. 223).

I have said previously that in the second procession, David makes himself desirable to Hashem, he is not the one with power and agency, gazing on others, but the gazed upon. His

beauty has made him the desired (particularly of Hashem) before. It is a position of vulnerability and one that I have argued is fundamentally at odds with the perpetual striving of hegemonic masculinity. David's beauty has long been an inconvenient feature – as I discussed in chapter three, Clines observed that most commentaries (unconsciously or otherwise) shy away from his good looks. It is, as Clines argues, a product of their own uneasy relationship with masculinity<sup>225</sup> – choosing to ignore David's beauty because it does not fit into their own idea of manhood – but it is also accurate for biblical masculinity, where the masculinity of a man, much less a king, could be comfortably married with beauty, so long as it imbued him with hegemonic power. David's beauty, however, as Macwilliam argued, does not necessarily do that. It stands at the unsteady junction of agency-providing and agency-removing. Let us begin with the gaze of Israel, then proceed to the gaze of Hashem.

In the second procession, Israel or the common folk are mentioned three times. First, in v. 15, the 'whole household of Israel' joins the procession to carry the ark from Obed-edom's home to Jerusalem. Israel is here implicated with David – the narrator places the people at David's side. Then, they appear as recipients of a blessing by David and the distribution of food, again by David in vv. 18-19. Lastly, they appear as the 'servant women' and 'common men' that Michal disparages in v. 20.

While the first procession is also accompanied by the 'whole household of Israel' David is presented by our narrator as king of an army first, and parade leader second (2 Sam. 6.5).

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<sup>225</sup> I would personally argue that all gender negotiation is an unconsciously uneasy process, especially for those who are attached to their gender roles. Investigating and examining gender performativity that runs at odds to our own, either because of culture or queerness, asks us to enter a specific frame of mind, one that is open to sometimes frightening possibilities. The commentators Clines reviews clearly went into their commentaries expecting a historical, literary, and theological analysis. They did not expect to discover that a biblical icon of masculinity may have eschewed masculinity. The result is uncomfortable and implications significant.

David's retinue is inescapably in view. However, in the second procession, without his soldiers and dressed in the plain linen ephod, David is no longer in view flanked by symbols of his hegemonic authority. He evokes the priesthood, a sect forbidden from inheriting land, dependent on Hashem and Hashem's worshippers for food and fleece (Deut. 18.1-8). The priests are cut off from traditional inheritances, must abstain from sex to keep house for Hashem, and receive an allowance from Hashem. David no longer embodies power but pleading. He has exchanged agency for submission.

If Israel seeks him for his function as a conduit between the sacred and the secular: he provides blessings, hands out food to 'men and women alike' (2 Sam. 6.18-19). Michal argues David has dishonoured himself, or more appropriately, his rank, but David instead emphasizes that this switch in social roles is apparently 'before Hashem' and a source of honour. The traditional gaze has been subverted: David is not gazing on the enslaved women, but the enslaved are gazing on him.<sup>226</sup>

Hashem is, of course, the real target of David's performance, according to his retort to Michal. The repetition of 'before Hashem' in vv. 14 and 21 is an excellent piece of framing by the narrator to keep the narrative on track (and David's transgressive behaviour in check). David meets Hashem not as a king or patron, but as a supplicant. If David is dancing for Hashem, and his dancing is erotic, it stands to reason that David dances erotically for Hashem. Hashem's gaze feminizes David according to the standards of ancient Mesopotamian and Levantine gender. David is the object, is the desired – his every aim is to please Hashem, arranging ample

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<sup>226</sup> It is unfortunate that for all this social subversion the narrator's reference to the enslaved women does not signal any kind of societal justice. Rather, their presence underscores David's submission to Hashem. They are set dressing for a cosmic BDSM-type scene, with the focus on what degradation David will perform for Hashem.

offerings, leading rambunctious dancing, dressing in next to nothing, and through it all, evoking the priesthood's intimacy with and submission to Hashem. David seeks to be the object of the divine (male) gaze.

### The Music

The music of the second procession is described substantially differently from that of the first procession. While the first procession meticulously lists instruments (2 Sam. 6.5), the second does not, referring instead only to horns and shouting as the accompaniment to David's intense dancing (2 Sam. 6.15). There are multiple readings open to this abrupt change, but they are unified by suggesting that David alters the ritual to make it more suitable or pleasing for Hashem (2002, pp. 215-16). I would like to note two particular changes the narrator makes – the absence of lyres and the emphasis on priestly-adjacent embellishments.

The absence of the lyre in v. 15 does not, David Wright argues, preclude it from being present (2002, pp. 209-15). This is certainly possible. Wright offers extensive examples across the Tanakh of the inclusion of multiple instruments when horns and shouting are present, arguing that:

Because instruments other than horns and trumpets are explicitly associated with dance [in the Hebrew Bible], and because horns and trumpets generally have functions other than musical expression proper, one can reasonably conclude that the second procession in 2 Sam. 6 presumes the use of other instruments and musical expressions in the second procession since joyful dance is a prominent part of the ceremony (2002, p. 211).

Although Wright's examples are largely from later works – Chronicles and Ezra in particular<sup>227</sup> – there is also a reference in Psalm 98.4 where singing, shouting, trumpets, lyres,

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<sup>227</sup> 2 Chr. 5.11-13; 7.6; 29.27-28; Ezra 3.10-13 (Wright, 2002, p. 211).

and horns are all included in a general musical call to praise (2002, pp. 211-13). While it is possible that the addition of other instruments is a cultural development that postdates the composition of Samuel, Wright argues – and I concur – that the narrator’s emphasis on horns and shouting is a deliberate cue to their readers of David’s intentions (2002, pp. 213-15).

Wright does not explore the gendered role of instruments, for this we must briefly return to Clines’ attribution of David’s skill as a musician to his masculinity. David’s use of the lyre as previously established, is a net positive for his hegemonic masculinity. The inclusion of the lyre in v. 5 has led commentators to interpret David’s actions in the first procession, not as dancing, but as playing the lyre – a logical extrapolation given the emphasis on his talent elsewhere in Samuel (1 Sam. 16.15-23; 18.10). David’s playing evokes other occasions where he performed, such as in the house of Saul (1 Sam. 16.15-23; 18.10). In these occasions, David’s music is a source of delight and tension, and is specifically mentioned in conjunction with his divine favour in 1 Sam. 16.15-23.

The narrator’s absence of the lyre in 2 Sam. 6.15 shifts the focus away from David’s (masculine coded) talents. Without the lyre there is no lingering reminder of the young man who rapidly rose from a shepherd to king in the household of his predecessor, challenging Saul’s hegemonic authority and ultimately replacing him as ruler of Israel. David’s talents are muted and the tension that accompanies them is also muted.

Wright does, however, spend considerable time mapping the connection between cultic and non-cultic uses of shouting and horns. Of these non-cultic uses, the majority are marital and/or political. Horns are used to gather people for cultic or non-cultic assemblies and



announcements,<sup>228</sup> marital purposes such as summoning combatants,<sup>229</sup> signalling charges,<sup>230</sup> ‘signal[ing] retreat or dismissal’,<sup>231</sup> or serving as ‘a defensive war alarm’<sup>232</sup> (2002, p. 210). Politically, it was used in praise of a king<sup>233</sup> (2002, p. 210). Cultic use included marking rituals,<sup>234</sup> theophany,<sup>235</sup> and in praise of Hashem<sup>236</sup> (2002, p. 210). Wright also includes instances of trumpets for the stylistic similarity – serving to mark gatherings and assemblies, ‘direct movement of the wilderness camp’, signalling ‘holy times’ and ‘attract[ing] divine attention to sacrificial acts’ along with mundane purpose such as praising kings, cuing combatants during battle and as an alarm (2002, p. 210).

Shouting signals the same themes: it is used as ‘an expression of anger’ or in celebration of a human or divine king;<sup>237</sup> to describe or direct war;<sup>238</sup> and for cultic worship or praise<sup>239</sup> (Wright, 2002, p. 212). There are also places where horns and shouting are conflated, to create a sort of instrumental shouting. This follows the same division (marital and cultic) as references that appear to indicate horns or vocal shouting<sup>240</sup> (2002, Wright, p. 212). Although the second

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<sup>228</sup> 2 Sam. 20.1; Isaiah 27.13, Isa. 58.1; Jeremiah 4.5; Hosea 8.1; Joel 2.15 (Wright, 2002, p. 210).

<sup>229</sup> Judg. 3.27, 6.34; 1 Sam. 13.3; Jer. 51.27; Ezek. 7.14 (Wright, 2002, p. 210).

<sup>230</sup> Josh. 6.4-6, 8-9, 13, 16, and 20; Judg. 7.8, 18-20, and 22; Zechariah 9.14 (Wright, 2002, p. 210).

<sup>231</sup> 2 Sam. 2.28; 18.16; 20.22 (Wright, 2002, p. 210).

<sup>232</sup> Isa. 18.3; Jer. 4.5, 19, and 21; 6.1, 17; 42.14; Ezek. 33.3-6; Hos. 5.8; Joel 2.1, 15; Amos 2.2; 3.6; Zephaniah 1.16; Job 39.24, 25; Nehemiah 4.12, 14 (Wright, 2002, p. 210).

<sup>233</sup> 2 Sam. 15.10; 20.1; 1 Kgs 1.34, 39-41, and 45; 2 Kgs 9.13; Ps. 47.6; Num. 23.21 (Wright, 2002, p. 210). These passages include instances of praising Hashem as a king, as such they will also be included in cultic uses of horns.

<sup>234</sup> Lev. 23.24; 25.9; Num. 29.21; Joel 2.15; Ps. 81.4 (Wright, 2002, p. 210).

<sup>235</sup> Exod. 19.13, 16, and 19; 20.18 (Wright, 2002, p. 210).

<sup>236</sup> Ps. 47.6, Num. 23.21 (Wright, 2002, p. 210).

<sup>237</sup> Judg. 15.14; Ps. 41.12; Job 30.5; 1 Kgs 1.41; Num. 23.21 (Wright, 2002, p. 212).

<sup>238</sup> Josh. 6.5, 10, 16, and 20; Judg. 7.21; 1 Sam. 17.20, 52; Isa. 42.13; 2 Chr. 13.15; Isa. 15.4; Zeph. 1.16 (Wright, 2002, p. 212).

<sup>239</sup> Ex. 32.17; 2 Chr. 15.14; Ps. 47.2; 65.14; 66.1; 82.2-3; 95.1-2; Ezra 3.10-13 (Wright, 2002, p. 212).

<sup>240</sup> Marital references include Num. 10.2-9; 31.6; Jer. 4.19; Amos 2.2 and possible also Jer. 20.16, Hos. 5.8; Joel 2.1 (Wright, 2002, p. 212). Cultic references include Lev. 23.24; 25.9; Num. 10.9; 29.1; Ps. 42.6; 98.6; 2 Chr. 13.12 (Wright, 2002, p. 212). Wright also includes references to both vocal and instrumental shouting, with marital references including Jer. 49.2, Ezek. 21.27; Amos 1.14; Micah 4.9; Job 39.25, references to nature in Job 36.33, and cultic references in 1 Sam. 4.5-9; Ps 27.6; 33.3; 47.6; 89.16; 100.1; Job 33.26, and general celebratory references including Isa. 16.10; 44.23; Jer. 50.15; Zeph. 3.14; Zech. 9.9 (2002, p. 212).

procession is an inherently political act, establishing Jerusalem as the cultic centre of Davidic Israel, the use of horns and shouting is likely cultic, rather than political since they are used in praise not of David, but Hashem. Wright agrees, suggesting that the narrator's description is designed to serve as an 'exclamation point' and suggesting that the elements may have also been present in the first procession, but to a lesser degree (2002, p. 215). The music of the second procession 'complements the other reforms' to the ark's parade into Jerusalem – Wright argues that it indicates 'greater intensity, piety, and ritual care' (2002, p. 215). I certainly agree that the music marks greater intensity and piety.

The second procession deliberately evokes the priesthood through the narrator's description of music and sound. Wright suggests the 'theological goal' of these changes is to 'engage the deity's attention' as much, if not more than it is 'for artful or emotional expression' or 'to create the proper mood among participants' (2002, p. 215). This would place the music in parallel to the other supplication elements of the second procession, such as David's offerings.

Both the absence of the lyre – which draws attention to David's masculine-coded musical skill – or other instruments and the narrator instead referencing only horns and shouting, offer a subtle, yet distinct emphasis on the priesthood and submission. The lyre, a reminder of David's ascent to power and biblically masculine instrument, is removed in favour of music and sound that recalls cultic ritual. Hashem's power and position occupy the central themes, and David, as central as he is to the procession, publicly takes on a supportive and supplicative role, entertaining Hashem, feeding Hashem, and then feeding Hashem's people.

Feminizing the Dancer/King: Hegemonic Femininity and the Second Procession

Historically, the dual demands of feminization and masculinization David experiences are not without precedent in ancient Mesopotamia and Levant and even appear in later Jewish mystic theology. *Iddin-Dagan A*,<sup>241</sup> in addition to depicting *kurgarrû* and *sag-ur-sag*, portrays a king whose socio-religious duties to Inanna result in temporary feminization. Assyriologist Philip Jones suggests that the hymn presents ‘the mediation of divine power’ as intrinsically fraught (2003, p. 292). The piece features Inanna ‘coming down from the heavens’ with appropriate fanfare ‘and consummating a marriage with the king’, which relationship is understood ‘as a means whereby divine power. . . may be instantiated safely in the human sphere’ (Jones, 2003, p. 292).

The hymn opens by highlighting Inanna’s place relative to other astrological figures, moving to her position relative ‘to the three major deities of the pantheon: An, Enlil, and Enki’ (Jones, 2003, p. 292). It then moves to the physical world, describing a rowdy parade in her honour featuring ‘[t]he king, much of the populace, and various exotic cultic personnel’, including *kurgarrû* and *sag-ur-sag*, as discussed in chapters four and six (Jones, 2003, p. 292). The parade concludes with a celebration, then nightfall, during which Inanna judges the people in their dreams, appearing to them and determining their fates, and after, offerings are prepared for her (Jones, 2003, p. 292). In the morning, a second parade is formed and leaves the city, followed by the consummation of the sacred marriage between the divine Inanna and the human king and subsequently by a banquet in their honour (Jones, 2003, p. 292-94).<sup>242</sup>

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<sup>241</sup> *Iddin-Dagan A* is an ‘Old Babylonian royal hymn’ that first appears in tablets from ‘the eighteenth century B.C.E.’ and features the ‘third king of the first dynasty of Isin’, named Iddin-Dagan, who ‘reigned from 1974-1954 B.C.E.’ (Jones, 2003, p. 292).

<sup>242</sup> Interestingly, the poem does not describe an intermediary for Inanna – either human or statue – leaving open for interpretation how Inanna is present during the parade and marriage consummation.

Jones suggests that the movement described in the hymn, transitioning ‘from a heavenly location. . . to the Egalmah temple in the heart of the city’ mirrors and symbolises Inanna’s favour and power moving from the abstract (supernatural) to the concrete (natural/mundane) (2003, p. 294). This transition is a risky prospect. The king’s role is tied to two sets of literary archetypes – Inanna/Dumuzi and Enlil/Ninlil – neither of which is particularly fortuitous for the king (Jones, 2003, p. 296).

In playing the role of Dumuzi, the king may seek and obtain Inanna’s affections and ‘possibly receives the *me*’ – a complicated kind of ‘divine archetype of the individual elements that comprise Mesopotamian culture in its widest sense’ – but he is also very ‘dependent on her’, and is trapped in the Netherworld so she may return to the world of the living (Jones, 2003, p. 297). Jones observes that the presence of the *kurgarrû* in Inanna’s procession ‘does not bode well for the king’s marriage’ to Inanna because they assist her in her escape from the Netherworld in *Inanna’s Descent*. In another composition, Dumuzi serves as a judge in the Netherworld, while in *Iddin-Dagan A*, Inanna serves as judge of souls, emphasizing her ‘[personification of] human fears of ghostly intrusion’ (Jones, 2003, p. 297). The king is therefore doomed if he is to play the part of Dumuzi, powerless to protect himself, powerless against the hungry bonds of the Netherworld or Inanna’s power to wield such associations without becoming trapped herself.

The literary parallel between Inanna embracing the king and Enlil embracing Ninlil, based on ‘a common rhetorical trope emphasizing the movement from mythologized to mundane’ (Jones, 2003, pp. 298-99), is no more positive. In *Enlil and Ninlil*, Enlil is a violent and coercive sexual force, raping Ninlil and afterwards, tricking her into having sex with him

three times (Jones, 2003, p. 299). Jones argues, however, that just as ‘Enlil can be instantiated in the human world as a constructive rather than destructive force’ – his sexual violence towards Ninlil being transmuted into ‘agricultural prosperity’ – so Inanna’s unpredictable, dangerous power can be mediated and transformed by the king (2003, p. 299). Just as Enlil embraces Ninlil, before raping her, so Inanna embraces the king.<sup>243</sup>

This is not a particularly empowering or pleasant responsibility. Jones reflects that while this ritual is presented as a ‘crucial contribution to cosmic stability’ there is no record if ‘the feminized role the king had to adopt to achieve it elicited their admiration’ (2003, p. 299). It did not, however, present an impediment to his hegemonic authority elsewhere. The theological necessity of this queer performativity absolved the king of potential overt censure.

Outside of ancient Mesopotamia and Levant, the equivalent phenomenon is perhaps most prominently seen in the Jewish kabbalistic works such as the Zohar. The delicate kingship of David is further developed in Jewish medieval mysticism as a ‘hybrid between the androgynous, transgender, and queer’ (Kara-Ivanov Kaniel, 2020, p. 100). In the perpetual presence of the Most High Male, David takes on an explicit role as ‘the divine consort’ through his identification as the Shekhinah<sup>244</sup> (Kara-Ivanov Kaniel, 2020, p. 94). The image of David as Hashem’s beloved is made explicit through quotes from the Song of Songs, reimagined as supernatural flirtation – ‘He [Hashem] says, “Turn your eyes away from me – turn your eyes in a different direction away from Me, for they are burning Me with flames of love!”’ – and in outright seduction – ‘[b]ecause

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<sup>243</sup> Jones focuses on the parallel between divine sexual activity with a human which results in supernatural mediation of chaotic forces, but it is important to note that the power differential between Inanna, a powerful, capricious god, upon who the king depends for ‘cosmic stability’, means he cannot refuse her (Jones, 2003, p. 299). The king is unable to withdraw his consent, facing a dangerous god on one hand and a desperate populace on the other. This may not appear to be the same kind of violation that Ninlil survives, but it is rape all the same.

<sup>244</sup> The Shekhinah refers to the presence of the Divine in Jewish theology and mysticism. It is understood as feminine in both Rabbinic and Kabbalistic thought.

that supernal David is beautiful, the blessed Holy One yearns to cling to him. So David said, Turn to me and grant me grace' (Matt, 2014, pp. 22-23).

Further, David and the Shekhinah are described like the moon, created to be 'filled and illuminated by the masculine [Hashem]' – the prayer for the new moon states, 'David, King of Israel, is alive and vigorous' even as '[a] crown and splendor to the full uterus who are destined to be renewed like her' are provided as an explanation (Kara-Ivanov Kaniel, 2019, p. 78-79). Even David's vigour is inescapably feminized – his crown is paralleled by pregnancy, he is filled by divine power, reflecting Hashem's hegemony, and diminishing without it. The Zohar says, 'King David humbled himself before the blessed Holy One' and like the Moon, who is compared to 'a female adorning herself for a male. . . David adorned himself in the same manner' ultimately 'becoming a vessel in which the blessed Holy One delights' (Matt, 2011, pp. 338-40).

David is repeatedly presented in a profoundly queer framework in the Zohar and its related works – he is described as 'a feminine heroine with androgynous characteristics' and the *Sha-ar ha-gilgulim* goes so far as to suggest that David has a feminine soul, a claim supported by other kabbalistic texts (Kara-Ivanov Kaniel, 2020, p. 104, 108-09). This vision of David as a manifestation of the Divine Feminine may have served as a poignant metaphor for 'the fragile reality' of medieval Jews, perpetually estranged from hegemonic power (Kara-Ivanov Kaniel, 2020, p. 105). Kara-Ivanov Kaniel suggestion that it is a 'veiled polemic' against 'the Christian depictions of David' as a hyper-masculine, triumphant king, remade in the image of Christian political power seems convincing (2020, p. 104). The Kabbalistic David, 'as a female character. . . has no agency or responsibility for her actions' – she is blameless of David's sins, and as an

archetype for Kabbalistic messiahs and heretics, so too are the heretics (Kara-Ivanov Kaniel, 2020, p. 104, 114).

While medieval mystical depictions of David as Hashem's wife are certainly anachronistic to the Exilic period, the genderfluidity they utilize is not, as evidenced by ancient Mesopotamian and Levantine portrayals of gender expansive performativity, whether from kings in specific theological circumstances or non-royal individuals with cultic responsibility. I believe it is not a coincidence that David is read by Zohar and Kara-Ivanov Kaniel as genderfluid – with reference to this passage in particular among others<sup>245</sup> – and that 2 Samuel 6's depiction of David is uniquely appropriate for such.

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<sup>245</sup> Kara-Ivanov Kaniel ties David as he appears in Samuel with David as he is portrayed in the Psalms through 'his first appearance as a young man skilled at playing the lyre, and the scene of his ascent to Jerusalem, as he dances and crouches before the Ark' – this moves the reader from David-the-Warrior to David-the-Beloved, where 'he seduces God with the poetry of the tormented shepherd' (2019, p. 73). Kara-Ivanov Kaniel observes that '[t]he Zohar interprets David's depiction in Samuel as one who "enters and exits" before people and before God, adding to that other colorful scenes from David's life: a boy defeating a giant, a musician competing with a mischievous wind, a man disguised as a fool, a king dancing and babbling before God', but does not specify where (2019, p. 87).

## CHAPTER NINE: THE SEAMS – MICHAL AND THE CONTEXTUALIZATION OF QUEERNESS

Michal's exchange with David in 2 Sam. 6.20-23 has been the subject of several analyses, perhaps not least because it is a profoundly unusual exchange. The narrator not only gives a woman a voice but places this voice in sharp opposition with that of the central character. The consequences of this opposition are debated: Michal has no children with David, but this infertility may be yet another moment of her agency.

This portion of the text is also notable for the insistent sanitizing and neutering to which it is subjected by commentaries eager to *straighten* out an ambiguous and uncomfortable moment. The variety of ways it is addressed all miss how the narrator has intentionally scripted Michal's dissent and the usefulness of this perspective to reinforce class, gender, and hegemonic authority.

Brueggemann, Hertzberg, and Tsumura are perhaps most eager to minimize vv. 20-23, with Brueggemann and Hertzberg viewing Michal and David as stand-ins for their respective royal dynasties. Brueggemann identifies Michal as 'a Saulide', whose primary concern is David's royal dignity – a reading that Hertzberg and Tsumura echo (1990, pp. 251-52; 1964, pp. 280-81; 2019, pp. 119-20). Michal represents 'the restraints of the old tribal order', according to Brueggemann, and her aversion to 'a husband who is out of control in public' may stem both from seeing Saul's own ecstatic religious experience in 1 Sam. 10.9-13 and erratic outbursts against David (1990, p. 251). However, Brueggemann sees David's response as a thorough dismissal of Michal, saying she 'has no future, no claim on Israel, no prospect for life' since the dance she opposes '[authorizes] a new order. . . wrought out of unrestrained yielding and



worship' endorsed by Hashem (1990, pp. 252-53). Michal, in this view, is not an individual, but a figurehead – a 'barren and hopeless' one at that (1990, p. 253). Brueggemann doesn't explore the interpersonal dynamic of David and Michal, which I believe is an unfortunate omission.

While he acknowledges that it is possible that David's dance was sexual, Brueggemann is particularly interested in legitimatizing David's behaviour in the second procession and does so by placing a sexual reading at the end of a linear spectrum of possible alternative interpretations of the passage, 'the negative extreme' where 'David participated in a Canaanite ecstatic dance that became something of an orgy' (1990, pp. 250-52). Here, sexual overtones are explicitly tied to Canaanite ritual,<sup>246</sup> and the opposite, 'the positive extreme', is a 'legitimate liturgic dance, the bodily expression as proper worship' (Brueggemann, 1990, p. 250). The commentary presents David at one extreme as a whore and at the other, a madonna. As such, Brueggemann refuses to accept that David has been overtly sexual – or idolatrous – it conflicts with his rhetorical agenda<sup>247</sup> (1990, pp. 250-52). Despite this, Brueggemann cannot help but describe David's dance with language that could, ironically, be understood as sexual: it is 'glad yielding to the gift of Yahweh' where 'David is utterly Yahweh's man' (1990, p. 252). Brueggemann's solution is to repress the possibility of budding queerness and to instead draw the theological conclusion that 'David. . . humbles himself and . . . by the power of God, is exalted' (1990, p. 253). David's behaviour is sanitized and here again, Brueggemann allows his own conception of masculinity

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<sup>246</sup> Brueggemann draws on an old, now questioned divide between Canaanite religious practice (perceived to be dangerously associated with celebrations of fertility, sex, and polytheism) and the purity of monotheistic Israelite religion.

<sup>247</sup> Brueggemann acknowledges that David's behaviour 'may be a political act', but even this reading depicts David as Hashem's, emphasizing the hegemonic power and authority of Hashem's cult, particularly the way it may legitimize David's rule (1990, pp. 250-51).

(and heteronormativity) influence how he interacts with the text, and as a result, silencing the way that perceived or actual sexual behaviour impacts social, religious, and political power.

Like Brueggemann, Hertzberg also sees the argument between David and Michal as symbolic of the tension between the Davidic house (and dynasty) and the Saulide house. He is slightly more sympathetic to Michal, arguing that Michal is not opposed to ‘David’s participation in the cult of Yahweh’ and that as ‘the king’s daughter, evidently has a feeling for what is seemly, and expresses it, not to shame David, but because she is concerned for the royal dignity’ (1964, pp. 280-81). Thus, it ‘must hit Saul’s daughter very hard’ when David so thoroughly dismisses the Saulide house and ‘the Lord himself takes up the gauntlet’ against her, by preventing ‘the blood of the house of Saul’ from again sitting ‘on the throne of Israel’ (1964, p. 281).

Hertzberg seems to imagine Michal rather negatively, stating that Michal is not intending ‘to shame’ David while describing ‘her criticism’ as ‘taunting words’ (1964, p. 280). Curiously, he insists that Michal’s lack of children does not mean ‘David avoided her. . . as a punishment’ but that her infertility was a divine act (1964, p. 281). David and Michal’s argument does not end on good terms, as Hertzberg himself acknowledges, and when Michal does not appear again,<sup>248</sup> and it is logical for us conclude that the narrator may intend to present this moment as the death of their intimacy, with either David or Michal as the active agent in the absence of children. Hertzberg’s desire to fill the textual gap with an unambiguous conclusion ignores the narrator’s choice to let the ambivalence stand.

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<sup>248</sup> The MT mentions Michal in 2 Samuel 21.8, however, the LXX has Merab. In 1 Samuel 18.17-19, Merab is married to Adriel of Meholath, the father of the five sons mentioned in 2 Samuel 21.8. As such, I am counting this mention of Michal as a scribal error in the MT and follow the LXX.

Tsumura acknowledges Michal's 'sharp sarcasm' and 'aristocratic "tone"' and offers a reading of vv. 20-23 that both distinctly sides with David<sup>249</sup> and redacts any scandalous behaviour. David has not exposed his genitals, Tsumura insists, but instead is dressed in atypical clothing – atypical only in and so far, as it is not 'his royal robes' and therefore not 'what a king would wear in public' (2019, pp. 119-20). Further, the 'enslaved women of his servants' that Michal mentions, are not actual, specific women, but understood symbolically as 'all the young women of Israel'<sup>250</sup> (2019, p. 120). Tsumura concludes that '[i]t is not clear' if Michal's infertility is the result of a human decision or a divine one (2019, p. 120). He assumes a lack of agency on Michal's part that 'David was no longer intimate with her' – rather than a deliberate choice on her behalf, perhaps thinking of the way women's power is portrayed as limited elsewhere in the Tanakh, although he does not offer any citations.<sup>251</sup>

This reading neuters the text. Tsumura carefully scrubs any traces of behaviour that would offend modern sensibilities, an unfortunate change from his usual measured approach. Against Brueggemann and Hertzberg, Michal does not represent Saulide power, instead she is reduced to a pedantic and fastidious spouse whose criticism is largely meaningless when presented without context.<sup>252</sup> While Tsumura describes David wearing the ephod as 'scantly

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<sup>249</sup> Tsumura takes it as given that David's behaviour is religiously appropriate and does not spend much time defending his arguments. He tells us that 'David stresses that he was dressed simply *before the Lord*' and that v. 22 also reiterates 'David's humility before the Lord' with the phrase 'in his [the Lord's] eyes' seen in the MT (2019, pp. 119-20).

<sup>250</sup> Tsumura does not explain why he reads her as such but describes Michal's position as 'aristocratic' (2019, p. 120). According to this analysis, Michal is emphasizing the class difference between David and all non-royal individuals.

<sup>251</sup> Vashti's punishment for refusing a royal command and the resulting concern that all women would follow suit and refusing their husbands' commands comes to mind (Esther 1.12, 15-22). However, this cannot be assumed to be indicative of social standards in the Samuel scroll.

<sup>252</sup> Tsumura's analysis could have touched on the tension created by the (possibly conflicting) responsibilities of King and Priest. Instead, the implications of the ephod are obscured. The symbolic connection between David-the-Priest and Samuel-the-Judge through clothing is not expounded on and Tsumura only notes, '[the ephod] was a simple linen robe like that of the young Samuel (1 Sam. 2.18)' (2019, p. 118).

clad, without outer robes’, only paragraphs later it is apparently sufficient to cover David, its only flaw that it is not royal apparel (2019, pp. 118, 120).

Fokkelman, McCarter, and van Wijk-Bos do not uniformly side with or against David, but they do spend much more time on the incident as a whole, looking at it as a significant piece of the narrative in its own right. Like Brueggemann, Fokkelman and van Wijk-Bos both see Michal as a character with significant symbolic weight. McCarter’s historical-critical background leads him to examine Michal’s impact on the narrative as a possible way to divine cultic ritual praxis or as an obscured critique of David. These holistic analyses inevitably leads to a richer understanding of the narrative: Brueggemann, Hertzberg, and Tsumura’s arguments inadvertently do this portion of the text a disservice by not exploring Michal and David’s dispute thoroughly.

Fokkelman excellently argues that Michal’s critique of David follows the chapter’s ‘easily-recognized framework’, serving as the conflict to the second procession just as Uzzah’s murder functioned as the conflict of the first procession (1990, p. 198). Fokkelman reflects on Michal’s motives and state of mind after delving into the pair’s argument, concluding that Michal, who loved a younger David, has been ‘reduced to a pawn on the chessboard of power’, torn from ‘Paltiel’s ardour without being welcomed by David’ because of Abner and David’s political goals (1990, p. 204; 1 Sam. 18.20; 2 Sam. 3.12-16). Fokkelman rejects the idea that Michal held a religious objection to David’s behaviour, instead, it is (understandable) ‘frustration’ that isolates and alienates her from both David and David’s celebration (1990, p.

204). This sympathetic view of Michal, however, does not stop Fokkelman from describing her quarrel with David in colourful terms – terms that often implicitly side with David.<sup>253</sup>

David's return home – to bless his house as he has blessed his subjects, tying the private and public together – is met by Michal who moves from the private to public when she meets him: Fokkelman comments, '[s]he can't wait to vent her spleen' (1990, p. 198). David is greeted by a wife who 'spits venom' and 'hurls stinging abuse in the face of "the King of Israel"' (1990, p. 198). Michal places David squarely within 'the scum of the nation', with her rebuke (1990, p. 199). David's sharp response is nearly inevitable,<sup>254</sup> Fokkelman claims, 'when so much aggression and venom heads straight for him' (1990, p. 200). David's anger is described largely as justified and reasonably defensive – he 'parries' and 'utters words of principle' – and even when acknowledging that David has 'conceal[ed] a barb' and 'lash' inside his 'dignified and sincere words' is only the minor failing to 'resist the temptation' placed before him by Michal, since, after all, 'she really has touched a raw nerve' (1990, pp. 200-02). His own 'venom' – described as 'a taste of her [Michal's] own medicine', thus implicating Michal rather than David in David's own vitriol – in the closing sentence leads Fokkelman to reflect admiringly, '[h]ow eloquent is the goaded ego' (1990, p. 203).

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<sup>253</sup> Fokkelman's reading in many ways reminds me of Paul M. Joyce's 'Psychological Interpretation: Dancing David: A Psychological Reading of 2 Samuel 6' in *Biblical Interpretation and Method: Essays in Honor of John Barton* (2013). Joyce, however, acknowledges his own bias, saying, 'I identify strongly with David in my reading of the passage,' projecting his own fraught mother-child relationship onto Michal and David's dynamic, where Michal embodies 'the all-seeing eye of a judgemental, inhibiting mother figure' (pp. 277-80).

<sup>254</sup> Fokkelman does pause to consider that it is possible to 'choose a form of evasion, such as denial or flight', concludes that 'fury is a highly infectious emotion and contagious form of energy' that often results in the object of the enraged person matching their anger – symbolically or actually 'hitting him back' – or the object can fight back by 'let[ting] the venom run away like water off a snake skin' and addressing the actual source of the individual's anger (1990, p. 200). His emphasis and detail on fight over flight foreshadows his vindication of David's own anger.

Fokkelman's allegiance is split between the pair. He can empathize with Michal's pain while he cheers on David. This reflects Fokkelman's view – against Brueggemann – of David and Michal as characters first, rather than symbolic figures,<sup>255</sup> however, he does acknowledge their symbolic weight. David and Michal's actions are caused by plot developments and internal convictions or conclusions. Michal is inescapably tied to Saulide power and the old regime – by rejecting her, David both rejects the individual and symbolic power her family carries. She is not included in David's family, but marked as an outsider, a relic of a failed rule (1990, p. 201). The narrator certainly has David's – and Saul's – lineage in mind, since v. 23 pronounces Michal infertile.

The ruling, which Fokkelman correctly observes, 'is deliberately ambiguous' allowing the reader 'to work out several implications', serves as a symbolic 'creeping rot' that has marked her as other, 'doomed to [social] isolation' (1990, p. 205). While Uzzah is killed quickly, Michal's death is excruciatingly slow. Fokkelman's parallel between Uzzah and Michal negates the possibility that Michal is an active agent in choosing not to have children with David – he compares Michal's infertility to the royal concubines of 2 Sam. 20.3 (1990, p. 205).

While childbearing may have been a conduit for power and security in ancient Israel,<sup>256</sup> Michal's fate is obscured. Had she chosen not to sexually entertain David, she could have been subject to threats,<sup>257</sup> but her connection to Saul might make that politically dangerous: best then,

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<sup>255</sup> Brueggemann sees Michal and David as symbolic figures and therefore emblematic of the Saulide and Davidic royal houses, rather than three dimensional characters with unique motivations and experiences.

<sup>256</sup> See van Wijk-Bos, 2020, p. 253. However, childbirth was also risky (often deadly) business, see Brenner, 1997, p. 58-89.

<sup>257</sup> van Wijk-Bos observes that '[c]hildlessness in the world of ancient Israel indeed put a woman in a precarious social and economic position' (2020, p. 253). van Wijk-Bos then suggests that 'such would not be the case for Michal', although she does not specify whether Michal's economic station, political ties, networking, or family ties would have insulated her against this (2020, p. 253). I believe that Michal's family connections would have likely served her best in this case, considering how protective it was for Mephibosheth in 2 Sam. 9.1-13.

to keep her alive, perhaps out of sight, in the palace until necessary. It would have been preferable, Fokkelman rightly notes, if she ‘had borne children’ and the pair had presented to the public ‘a synthesis between the house of Saul and that of David’ (1990, p. 205). Politically, it would have legitimized his heirs and ‘healed many wounds’ and reinforced his ‘policy of conciliation towards the Saul family and the tribe of Benjamin’ (1990, p. 205). David could have cast himself as the logical heir to Saul’s throne. There is another possibility Fokkelman does not explore, however, that David-the-character might not *want* to be Saul’s heir<sup>258</sup> (any more than Michal might have wanted to incubate an heir for the man who had so insulted her). Fokkelman explores a range of possibilities in David and Michal’s conflict, while avoiding an outright queer reading, instead grazing the edges of how gender shapes their fight without probing deeper.

McCarter is particularly interested in how David and Michal’s argument can be used to expose historical tensions in the text. Like Fokkelman, he acknowledges Michal’s history with David and Paltiel, observing that the young woman in love with David has been replaced by ‘a mature and haughty aristocrat, openly contemptuous of her royal husband’ (McCarter, 1989, p. 188). In McCarter’s view, their argument is possibly an addition to the narrative, ‘taken up by a Deuteronomistic writer precisely because of the thematic link’ between ‘David’s rise to power’ and Solomon’s inheritance (1989, p. 188). It thus functions ‘as an editorial junction, holding together the thematic threads running backwards and forwards in the larger story’ (1989, p. 188).

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<sup>258</sup> Any question of a character’s aims in the text leads us back to the narrator. Why would the narrator resist the chance to cast David as the heir to Saul? Marc Brettler suggests the narrator may have been resisting the continuing presence of pro-Saul factions, citing 1 Chr. 8, where twelve generations after Saul the name ‘Melek’ appears, possibly hinting at continued aspirations to kingship (1989, pp. 395-418). Brettler’s argument is interesting, but the evidence to support it is slim.

This established, McCarter turns back to the possibility that the narrative exposes a historical cultic ritual, examining and then rejecting the reading of Michal and David's argument as centring on 'a sacred marriage rite' as discussed in chapter eight (1989, pp. 188-89). McCarter ultimately dismisses this possibility: it hinges on reading David's actions – including a sacred marriage with enslaved women – as tied to Canaanite cultic practice and Michal's as the Yahwistic answer (1989, pp. 188-89). McCarter concludes, however, that this reading is at odds with his conclusion that the procession is 'a historical ceremony' celebrating 'the introduction of a national god into a new capital city' rather than a 'cultic reenactment' (1989, p. 189). Michal's argument with David, in this view, becomes an afterthought, inserted by ancient editors for continuity (McCarter, 1989, pp. 188-89).

While I agree with McCarter – and Fokkelman – that David is an unlikely representative of Canaanite cultic practice, I disagree with McCarter's methodology and his conclusion that Michal's argument is not integral to 2 Sam. 6 (Fokkelman, 1990, p. 204; McCarter, 1989, pp. 188-89). McCarter draws this conclusion from the premise that it is not possible for David's procession(s) to embody both rituals – however, he provides no reason for the prohibition of overlapping ceremonies<sup>259</sup> (McCarter, 1989, p. 189). McCarter also neglects to consider the narrator or editor's biases.

David's behaviour is textually presented as cultically appropriate in the second procession. Whatever religious tradition his dance draws from, it does not provoke Hashem's wrath, and the procession is followed by a covenant between David, David's descendants, and Hashem (2 Sam. 7.1-29). Michal's objections are negated by both the narrator and David, who

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<sup>259</sup> Or for the ceremony to reclaim and/or reinterpret this practice on behalf of Hashem's cult.



insists repeatedly that his cavorting is “before Hashem” (2 Sam. 6.14, 16, 21). Michal’s dissent marks her as other, outside of this moment of divine joy and submission.

Eilberg-Schwartz excellently argues that ancient Israel marked women as other out of necessity, as a reaction to women’s ‘natural complementarity to a male deity’ and the resulting ‘symbolic threat to men’s place in the religious system’ (1994, p. 142). Michal’s view from the window emphasizes her place both in the home and out of it and her disdain estranges her from both David and Hashem – exactly what narrator needs to emphasize David’s suitability as the object of Hashem’s desire. McCarter acknowledges Michal’s appropriateness to play the deity’s bride, assuming that David will play the deity himself, and recognizes that this is not the narrator’s aim: it is something else entirely (1989, pp. 188-89). However, McCarter misses how queer this moment is – especially David’s genderbending role as the divine’s bride – and therefore concludes that there must be no sexual tension and that Michal’s criticism is a late addition designed to emphasize Solomon’s legitimacy (1984, pp. 188-89).

van Wijk-Bos’s analysis applies feminist theory to 2 Sam. 6.20-23. Like Fokkelman and McCarter, Michal is considered as a character, rather than a single-dimension symbol, however, unlike Fokkelman and McCarter, van Wijk-Bos meditates on the impact of gender on Michal’s presentation and role in the text. Elsewhere, Michal is an active figure – loving David, even if she is ‘given’ to him and advising and aiding his escape from Saul (1 Sam. 18.20-27, 19.11-17; van Wijk-Bos, 2020, pp. 249-50). She is relegated to a passive role in her final appearance before 2 Sam. 6, whereas Fokkelman notes, her movement benefits powerful men, and there is no

textual comment as to her feelings<sup>260</sup> (Fokkelman, 1990, p. 204; van Wijk-Bos, 2020, pp. 250-51). In these gaps of the text, van Wijk-Bos's reading emphasizes gender, class, and sexual behaviour.

Michal's accusations symbolically emasculate David, with van Wijk-Bos observing that her 'biting sarcasm' is 'the sole example of this type of speech from a female to a male character, a wife to a husband' (2020, p. 252). Further, she 'takes initiative' – with the narrator deliberately describing her movement<sup>261</sup> (2020, pp. 252-53). However, the queer reversal of social roles, with Michal chastising her husband for unbecoming behaviour while in public, is not acknowledged by van Wijk-Bos as queer at all, much less as a moment permitted by the narrator. Instead, it is understood as an example of a woman who 'stepped out of her place to speak honestly and prophetically and to put her husband in his place' (2020, p. 253).

But what is her husband's place? In the biblical text, it appears that a husband's place is one of considerable authority and autonomy. Michal cannot be reminding David of his place

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<sup>260</sup> For example, Michal returns to David's side in 'silence', a 'bereaved woman', whose grief is ignored by the narrator – she has lost '[h]er father and brothers. . . [and] her second husband is left behind, weeping at her departure' (2020, p. 251).

<sup>261</sup> *וַתֵּצֵא* is 'not often used with women as subject' according to van Wijk-Bos and includes 'cases involving sexual intercourse. . . [or] an invitation to the possibility of such' (2020, pp. 252-53). I disagree. Both the root, *צָצַ*, and the word used describe movement outward, including movement from the private sphere to the public sphere, however, it is used to describe women throughout the Torah (Gen. 24.11 and 15, 24.43 and 45, 30.16, 34.1, 35.1, 38.24-25; Exod. 15.20, 21.3, 7, 11, and 22; Num. 12.4-5) and *וַתֵּצֵא* is specifically used fifteen times in the Tanakh – eight of these with a woman subject (Gen. 30.16, 34.1; Judges 4.18 and 22; Ruth 1.7; 2 Sam. 6.20; 2 Kings 4.37, 8.3). Of these, one describes explicitly sexual moments – 'then Leah went out to meet him [Jacob] and said, "You must come in, since I have hired you with my son's mandrakes" and he slept with her that night' in Gen. 30.16. In Gen. 34.1, 'Dinah, the daughter of Leah who she borne to Jacob, went out to see the daughters of the land', an incident that is followed by Shechem's rape in v. 2, but does not describe Dinah intending her actions to be understood as sexual. In Judges 4.18 and 22, Yael goes out to meet Sisera, but how sexual Yael's offer of shelter is, is debatable. Ruth 1.7 describes Naomi 'going out' from Midian and returning to Israel and 2 Kings 4.37 and 8.3 describe the Shunammite woman leaving her house with her resurrected son and her return to Israel – particularly her entering the presence of the king of Israel. Of these, only four can be understood as implicitly or explicitly sexual. However, seven of these cases do describe either outward movement or movement from the private to the public sphere. As such, I suggest retaining van Wijk-Bos's analysis of Michal's action as a moment of 'initiative' but refraining from any assumption that this is unique past the focus afforded to a woman in an otherwise male-focused narrative (2020, p. 253).

since it is precisely his place, as king, to go out into the public sphere. van Wijk-Bos acknowledges Michal is probably to some degree jealous of David's sexual behaviour – however this is again, an accepted part of masculine social roles, especially hegemonic masculinity in the biblical text. David has multiple primary and secondary wives/concubines.<sup>262</sup> David J.A. Clines observes that in the biblical text, hegemonic masculinity often entails a man having 'several women in a casual kind of way. . . he owes them nothing' and needs nothing from them, 'except children' (1995, p. 266-67).

van Wijk-Bos then suggests that Michal may have class<sup>263</sup> concerns – that she is 'sensitive about her own background as the granddaughter of a farmer and the wife of a farmer's son' (2020, p. 252). Thus, her rebuke is designed to bring David's actions in line with her – or Israel's – expectations for a king. This is undercut by the reality that in doing so, Michal has placed herself above David. She reminds him of his royal station by treating him as inferior, thus reinforcing the malleability of hegemonic power in her attempt to prioritize it.

van Wijk-Bos does not explore this tension in her reading, and like Brueggemann, Fokkelman, Hertzberg, McCarter, Tsumura, and many other feminist commentators,<sup>264</sup> she does

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<sup>262</sup> David marries Michal in 1 Sam. 18.27 – she is then married to Paltiel of Laish and David demands she be returned him in 2 Sam. 3.13-16. In 2 Sam. 3.3-5, while in Hebron, David's wives include Ahinoam of Jezreel, Abigail of Carmel – formerly married to Nabal of Carmel –, Maacah of Geshur – daughter of King Talmai –, Haggith, Abital, and Eglah. In 2 Sam. 5.13, David marries an unspecified number of women, both primary and secondary wives while in Jerusalem. Of these women, only Bathsheba is mentioned by name in 1 Chron. 3.4-9. In 2 Sam. 15.16, David leaves behind ten secondary wives/concubines, which are raped by Absalom in 2 Sam. 16.21-22. When David returns to Jerusalem, he places the women under guard in a separate house, 'until the day of their death', where they live 'as if in widowhood' (2 Sam. 20.3).

<sup>263</sup> van Wijk-Bos acknowledges that '[i]t is difficult to know how class was experienced in ancient Israel' (2020, p. 252). However, it is not difficult to offer a materialist reading of David's rise to power, exploring the establishment of a formal court. Consequently, I believe van Wijk-Bos's class reading is logical.

<sup>264</sup> Feminist commentaries on Michal, while often portraying her sympathetically, like van Wijk-Bos does, do not often probe 2 Samuel 6's atypical autonomy, see Alice Bach (1991), David Clines (1991), Jo Ann Hackett (1992), Lillian R. Klein (2000), Benjamin Morse (2013), and Karla Shargent (1994). For a feminist analysis of Michal that is critical of the narrator, see J. Cheryl Exum (1991, 2016).

not analyse the way that the narrator scripts Michal's actions and utilizes Michal as a voice for the narrator's own discomfort. I believe there is a fascinating internal tension to be found in this moment. I will begin with examining the reception of David's dance through the intersecting lenses of class, gender, and hegemony, then investigate how Michal's protest reenforces and undermines cisnormativity and static gender roles.

#### Reception: David's Dance Understood in Terms of Class, Gender, and Hegemony

Michal's protest against David's dance acknowledges three specific aspects to his performativity: class, gender, and hegemonic power. David trans-gresses all three categories, moving between upper/lower class imagery, masculine/feminine imagery, and subject/object agency. These spheres are typically understood as binaries with distinct boundaries. David, by moving between poles, exposes these categories not as binaries, but spectrums with considerable variability. Further, as discussed in chapter four, each of these roles intersects, inescapably colouring each other. David's genderfluidity is affected by his actual and perceived class, his subject/object agency and class gender him. The narrator skilfully manipulates this imagery to present David as affirming the very hegemonic system he is undoing. Let us begin by examining each spectrum in detail, then evaluate their intersections.

Despite Tsumura and van Wijk-Bos's readings of the text, which prioritize a generalized view of gender, Michal first invokes class and hegemony, contrasting David's rank – king – with the view of 'the enslaved women of his servants' who equate him a common 'fool' (2 Sam. 6.20; Tsumura, 2019, p. 120; van Wijk-Bos, 2020, p. 252). As I briefly explained in chapter five, her

allusion to enslaved women is a queer glimpse into class – one that will be explored in greater detail shortly.

The language of Michal's rebuke is profoundly hegemonic. Michal says that David 'נגלה' and 'כהגלות נגלות' using the Niphal (2 Sam. 6.20). Between 1817 and 1999, '[t]raditional Biblical Hebrew grammars' understood the Niphal as 'reflexive or passive', a view challenged by Steven Boyd (1994), Holger Gzella (2009), Ernst Jenni (2012), and Ellen van Wolde who argue instead that the Niphal instead is a primarily 'middle voice' (Boyd, 1994, pp. 274, 281; Gzella, 2009, pp. 292-325; Jenni, 2012, pp. 131-303; Wolde, 2019, pp. 453-54, 463-67). Wolde suggests that the Niphal allows equal focus to 'the Agent/Experiencer/Mover and the Patient at the same time' (2019, p. 468). This is significant in 2 Sam. 6.20, because it suggests that either David is the passive, reflexive subject or he shares the focus with the enslaved women that see him (2 Sam. 6.20). He may be the king in name, but he must share the spotlight with lowest class – his servants and their enslaved women – and he is behaving like a commoner. Consequently, he must surrender his agency – he is linguistically demoted from the Hiphil and Piel in vv. 2, 5, 10, 12, 14-21 to the Niphal. In 2 Sam. 6, the Niphal appears first to describe Michal, in v. 16, by the narrator, then is used by Michal to refer to David in v. 20, but it is also used by David to describe himself in v. 22, as he reclaims Michal's rebuke.

Michal is then contextualizing David's nudity with class. While as I discussed in chapter five, Michal appears to be addressing class over gender, her allusion to gender has cued commentary to the sexual undertones of the second procession (Brueggemann, 1990, p. 250; Fokkelman, 1990, p. 199; McCarter, 1984, p. 188; Tsumura, 2019, p. 120). David's (sexual) body is open to view, but there is not significant textual evidence that this nudity is directed at

human women. The narrator describes David's dancing as exclusively 'before Hashem' with no mention of onlookers, only fellow participants – 'David and all the house of Israel' (2 Sam. 6.12-16). Michal herself sees only 'King David leaping and twirling before Hashem' (2 Sam. 6.16). Although the narrator describes David blessing a mixed-gender populace after he offers sacrifices inside of Jerusalem, there is no reference to dancing or ecstatic movement. David's response to Michal – 'I will cavort before Hashem' – suggests that David's nudity was exclusively confined to the second procession, rather than the blessing of the people and distribution of food (2 Sam. 6.21).

The allusion to the enslaved women is therefore not an indication of human-to-human promiscuity, but a comparison between David and femininity. David is naked in view of the enslaved women not because they are the object of his desire, or he the object of theirs, but because they are similarly divorced from hegemonic power. David's response, affirming his position within this framework – as an object of sexual desire for Hashem – also attempts to place him back within a hegemonic hierarchy, as honoured – and exalted – by the enslaved women (2 Sam. 6.22). In order to better understand this tension, let us briefly examine femininity and genderfluidity in hegemony.

Just as masculinity can be divided into hegemonic, subordinated, complicit, and marginalized masculinities, so can femininity and genderfluidity. Femininity is typically split into hegemonic or emphasized femininity and disenfranchised or pariah femininity, depending on the scholar (Connell, 1987, p. 187; Messerschmidt, 2020, p. 4; Schippers, 2007, p. 94-96).<sup>265</sup> Genderfluidity can be similarly split into complicit and censored genderfluidity. Complicit

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<sup>265</sup> See Appendix 2.

genderfluidity reifies hegemonic masculinity.<sup>266</sup> Because it maintains hegemonic ideals, it is necessarily divorced from most of its benefits. Its purpose is to redirect and redeploy otherwise subversive gender performativity to legitimize hegemonic masculinity.<sup>267</sup> Censured genderfluidity, however, is fundamentality at odds with hegemony.<sup>268</sup> Because it undermines hegemonic masculinity (and its authority), censured genderfluidity is anarchic, pushing the boundaries of gender and power.<sup>269</sup>

But how does this intersect with David in 2 Sam. 6? David's relationship with hegemonic masculinity, as a king and warrior in a patriarchal society, has been clearly established through rigorous scholarship, however, any examination of his relationship to femininity or genderfluidity necessitates the establishment of a frame of reference. After establishing this, I will evaluate how David interacts with these social roles, classifying his actions within normative and non-normative gender.

The narrator of Samuel offers no overt indication that there are non-binary genders present in Israel. Hebrew, like Akkadian has only two grammatical genders.<sup>270</sup> However, as

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<sup>266</sup> This is also seen in hegemonic/emphasized femininity (Connell, 1987, p. 187; Messerschmidt, 2020, p. 4; Schippers, 2007, p. 94-96).

<sup>267</sup> The *galli*, *gala*, *kur-gar-ra*, and *assinnu* are all examples of complicit genderfluidity. They are not considered men or women but recognized as a unique category. Their genderfluidity is protected because of their connection to hegemonic masculinity (Inanna/Ištar) and institutionalized power (Cybele/*Magna Mater*), and yet ostracized. See Appendix 2.

<sup>268</sup> This is similarly seen in pariah femininity and some portions of disenfranchised femininity (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 848; Schippers, 2007, pp. 95-96).

<sup>269</sup> For more, see Appendix 2.

<sup>270</sup> Sumerian has two grammatical genders, but they are divided into person/animate and non-person/inanimate (Jacobsen, 1988, p. 126; Thomsen, 1984, p. 49). Consequently, there is one singular pronoun for all individuals (Prince, 1915, p. 30). For an analysis of how Sumerian language influenced gendered representations of divinities see Assyriologists Julia M. Asher-Greve and Joan Goodnick Westenholz (2003, pp. 1-2; 1998, pp. 63-82). Hebrew utilizes male and female third person pronouns and binary grammatical gender, with occasional variable gender agreement (Tiemeyer, 2017, pp. 307-323; Zehnder, 2004, p. 21-45). Akkadian also uses binary third person pronouns and binary grammatical gender (Bertin, 1885, pp. 65-88). For an analysis on Akkadian and gendered representations of divinities in Mesopotamia, see Julia M. Asher-Greve (2003, pp. 1-59). For a broader examination of Mesopotamian and Hebrew gendered representations of divinities, see Assyriologist Tikva Simone Frymer-Kensky (1992, pp. 1-292).

discussed, the *gala/kalû*, the *kur-gar-ra/kurgarrû*, and the *assinnu* all occupy unique non-binary gender roles in their respective societies. Thus, it is unwise to assume non-binary gender did not exist in Israel on the basis of language alone.<sup>271</sup>

Currently, there are no archaeological attestations of non-binary Israelites or Canaanites, however, given the relationship between Levant and Mesopotamia,<sup>272</sup> it is reasonable to expect that more than the Mesopotamian pantheon reached Levant<sup>273</sup> including knowledge of

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<sup>271</sup> Although language creates and enforces gender – it is difficult to normalize something that is not named – binary languages do not guarantee that there are no non-binary individuals in those cultures. For example, English has been documented using ‘they’ as a singular pronoun since around 1375-1450 as a work around for a binary pronoun system (‘They, pron., adj., adv., and n.’ 2023). While ‘it’ is an option, it is mostly used to refer to inanimate objects, and there is social stigma applying this term to humans, especially minorities who already face systemic dehumanization.

<sup>272</sup> While ‘the Old Assyrian trade network’ dating ca. 1970-1700 BCE marks ‘a pivotal moment’ in the ancient Mesopotamian and Levantine world, there is archaeological evidence that this may have been ‘the mature stage’ of exchange between Levant, Anatolia, and Mesopotamia that stretched between ca. 3200-1600 BCE, or the Early Bronze Age and Middle Bronze Age (Massa and Palmisano, 2018, pp. 65-83). This early trade route appears to be primarily in northern Levant, as opposed to southern Levant – a theory supported by close reading texts such as Deuteronomy, which appear to be primarily concerned with Canaanite influence rather than Mesopotamian cultural influence on early Israelite identity (Crouch, 2012, pp. 541-54; Massa and Palmisano, 2018, pp. 66-83). A significant amount of study has been given to the Anatolia-Assyria trade network of the Middle Bronze Age, for further reading, see Barjamovic, 2008 and 2011, Barjamovic et al., 2012, Dercksen 2001 and 2004, Greenberg, 2019, Larsen, 1976 and 2015, Veenhof, 1972, and Veenhof and Eidem, 2008. Anatolia traded with Mycaean and Aegean via “‘international” sea routes’ but also traded with Egyptian Canaan – southern Levant – by land and sea (Klengel, 2013, pp. 90-96). However, between c. 1250-1150 BCE, during the Late Bronze Age, ‘a series of calamities led to the disintegration of all major political and economic entities around the Mediterranean’ leading to consider upheaval, resulting in ‘a global economic crisis and the near-cessation of cross-Mediterranean maritime trade’ and impacts on overland travel (Eshel, et al., 2021, no pagination; Klengel, 2013, pp. 95-96). This is evident in, among other things, silver coins in southern Levant, which has been demonstrated by a ‘shortage of silver for a very long time (~1200-950 BCE), during which silver did not reach the Levant at all, or in very limited quantities’ resulting in ‘Ag-Cu alloying and the reuse of existing silver’ – starting first under Egyptian-Canaanite rule and extending past ‘the Egyptians’ withdrawal (Early Iron Age I; ~1150-1050 BCE)’ until ‘the Philistine Ashkelon [silver coin] hoard’ marks ‘the beginning of the revival of long-distance trade in silver from Anatolia(Taurus) and the Western Mediterranean (Sardinia/Iberia) to the Southern Levant’ (Eshel, et al. 2021, no pagination). For further information, see Cline, 2014, Eshel, 2014, Eshel, et al., 2019, Klengel, 2013, Sherratt and Sherratt, 1991, and Sherratt, 1998. For archaeological examinations of Mesopotamian-Levant trade immediately before the exilic period, including how this trade made Judah a desirable potential vassal to Assyria, see Na’aman, 2019, Schneider, 2013, and Tebes, 2007.

<sup>273</sup> The Mesopotamian pantheon reached Levant through trade. The Ugarit inscription ‘Ishtar equals Astart’ in ‘the RS 20.24 document’ is an excellent example of the syncretism that occurred between Mesopotamian deities and Canaanite deities (Budin, 2004, pp. 104-06). Mesopotamian deities again reached Levant when Israel and Judah were targeted by Babylon and the Neo-Assyrian Empire.



Inanna/Ištar's queer priests, especially given the prevalence of Astarte to Canaan and Israel.<sup>274</sup>

During the Exilic period, significant cultural exchange occurred between Judah and Babylon, including the conquered Neo-Assyrian empire. According to K.L. Noll and David Gunn, the scribe/scribes of Samuel were likely upper-class and literate, which would have given them access to considerable information, including to *kur-gar-ra/kurgarrû* and to historical and literary accounts of the *assinnu* (Gunn, 1989, p. 61; Noll, 1999, pp. 38-39, 41-51).<sup>275</sup> Reading 2 Samuel 6 against this diverse background allows us to holistically consider David's movement from masculinity to femininity under the umbrella of genderfluidity.

David's femininity – dancing as the subject of Hashem's gaze and for Hashem's pleasure, cooking, serving, and blessing on Hashem's behalf, in Hashem's tent, the mixed gender multitude of Israel – is an excellent example of complicit genderfluidity.<sup>276</sup> David appears to continue to enjoy the long-term benefits of hegemonic power: he remains the king and (nominal)

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<sup>274</sup> Astarte/Astart/Astoreth was a Sidonian and Phoenician goddess (Day, 2002, pp. 128-29; Day, 2012, pp. 301, 304). Astarte is believed to have 'emerged out of an amalgam-type syncretism between the Sumerian goddess Inanna and the Semitic god Athtar' and 'traveled westward', as 'Ishtar/Estar/Ashtar. . . simultaneously male and female. . . on three 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium inscriptions from two temples in Mari, a city located on the upper Euphrates' (Budin, 2004, pp. 104-06). Further, 'the earliest instance of the goddess name Ashtar(a)t' is also 'the earliest association of this name with the Mesopotamian goddess Inanna/Ištar' – this continued as Astarte moved westward, eventually reaching the Mediterranean coast where in Ugarit, an inscription reads 'Ishtar equals Ashtar' (Budin, 2004, pp. 106-07). While in Phoenician territory, Astarte appears on 7<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE, 'invoked in matters of battle' in a peace accord between Esarhaddon of Assyria and Ba'al of Tyre, as well as 'funerary inscriptions from the royal family' (Budin, 2004, p. 108). In the Tanakh, Astarte appears in the singular and plural in Judg. 2.11-15 and 10.6-9, 1 Sam. 7.3-4 and 12.9-11, 1 Kgs 11.5 and 33, 2 Kgs 23.13 with additional debatable attestations in 1 Sam. 13.10, Deut. 7.13, 28.4, 18, and 51 (Day, 2012, pp. 304-05; Nakhai, 2007, p. 516).

<sup>275</sup> Gunn argues that the Samuel narratives are 'serious entertainment', a culturally valuable narrative where 'the character of "truth"' sits comfortably alongside 'demonstratively fictitious or highly conventional elements' a work that is neither fiction nor history but maintains a crucial 'firm feeling for actuality (or potential actuality) and. . . realism' (1989, p. 61-62). Noll expands upon this to argue that the scrolls were 'designed to be read only by an educated few. . . who had the time and monetary means to engage in the pastime of reading' and therefore was 'an ancient luxury item' (1999, pp. 38-39). The story itself, Noll attributes to 'roughly the Persian period' composed of 'older texts. . . probably manufactured by the Judaeen royal dynasty' (1999, p. 41). Jonathan Stökl, on the basis of Ezekiel-scholarship, excellently argues that scribal training exposed individuals – including Judeans – to multiple languages, including Akkadian, and 'to Mesopotamian literary and scholarly traditions' (2015, pp. 223-67).

<sup>276</sup> Complicit genderfluidity affirms and supports hegemony by restraining and then redirecting the potentially destabilizing effect of genderfluidity as a means of solidifying hegemonic masculine power. See Appendix 2.

household head. His submission to Hashem is not necessarily the mark of his movement away from hegemonic power, but the support of it through the guise of femininity – he is the perfect patriarchal wife: submissive, sexually available, although only to his (divine) husband, subservient, and dutiful, paying careful attention to the concerns of the house.

David's movement between genders – while dangerous<sup>277</sup> – results in a picture of complicit genderfluidity, despite his lack of permanent positionality within complicit genderfluidity, a distinct difference from the *galli*, the *gala/kalû*, the *kur-gar-ra/kurgarrû*, and the *assinnu*. Despite the significant differences of application, the result is the same.

Complicit genderfluidity is necessarily limited: in order to maintain a homologous relationship with patriarchal power, it must be continually restricted, lest it undermine hegemonic masculinity and hegemonic/emphasized femininity by proving gender a constructed ideal, no more a fitting basis for authority than any other fabricated system, with arbitrary boundaries. The *galli*, the *gala/kalû*, the *kur-gar-ra/kurgarrû*, and the *assinnu* were intentionally estranged from systematic power. While David loses no long-term power, instead gaining Hashem's favour and blessing, the narrator does place boundaries around David's queer performativity, an implicit acknowledgement to the potential for hegemonic disaster.

David suffers no permanent repercussions because of his position relative to the intersection of class, gender, and hegemony. Although David's actions carry significant risk – as demonstrated by Michal's reaction – the narrator has a vested interest in maintaining David's power. David's kingship, endorsed by Hashem, must logically capitulate to Hashem's whims. David's submission reinforces hegemonic power – he may be Hashem's boy toy, but he is *only*

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<sup>277</sup> Dangerous because David risks losing the benefits and protections of hegemonic masculinity – not only his kingship, but his autonomy and authority in the public sphere.

Hashem's. This creates cognitive distance between competitors, such as Jonathan, who is implicitly<sup>278</sup> and explicitly<sup>279</sup> feminized in relation to David and affirms his rightful position as the ultimate (human) man. Further, if David did not have a successor, Israel's masculinity itself would be undermined if the narrator permanently alienated David's masculinity from hegemonic authority. Since David serves as an avatar for Israel's cultural representation of masculinity, the narrator has written himself into a bit of a hole – David, for the sake of national masculinity, must not be permanently estranged from hegemonic masculinity.

#### The Protest: Michal as a Voice for the Narrator's Discomfort

Michal's protest against David is exceptional for many reasons, but foremost is the way the narrator provides Michal with a voice, and within that voice, encodes their own.<sup>280</sup> Michal, as a woman, is a socially safe conduit to expression the narrator's discomfort with David's behaviour, allowing the narrator to place borders and limitations on genderfluidity, without directly contradicting either the image of Hashem as the hegemonic ideal or David-the-King as human avatar for hegemonic masculinity.

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<sup>278</sup> Jonathan is implicitly accused of feminization by a furious Saul, jealous of Jonathan's 'love and loyalty' to David, 'a political rival' over him, Jonathan's father (1 Sam. 20.30; Heacock, 2011, pp. 25-29).

<sup>279</sup> David's memorialization of Jonathan is overt link between Jonathan and feminization, '[b]y claiming that Jonathan's love was more wonderful to him than the love of women' David suggests that 'Jonathan is a woman, more women than women are' (2 Sam. 1.19-27; Heacock, 2011, pp. 29-31). Thus, 'David defines his relationship with Jonathan', which has likely been the topic of gossip, 'to his favor, ensuring that Jonathan's masculinity is blurred and derided while simultaneously rebutting queries about his own virility' (Heacock, 2011, p. 31). Jonathan's femininity would cast him as unfit for hegemonic (masculine) rule (Heacock, 2011, pp. 31-32). This does not negate the possibility that Jonathan and David did have a romantic or sexual relationship but does underscore a moment of deft political manoeuvring (Heacock, 2011, pp. 29-34).

<sup>280</sup> This may seem counterintuitive, since Michal is censured by the narrator, however it this censure that makes her such an effective voice. David's actions – theologically sanctioned genderfluidity in a patriarchal society – requires the narrator to limit this behaviour, lest it undermine masculine hegemony. Any concerns the narrator has about David's abdication of masculinity can be voiced – then dismissed in a way that permits David's behaviour.

David-the-King and the David-the-Dancer stand at odds with each other without narrative aid. It is not possible for David to maintain his authority in the face of divine power, but secession of his hegemony would expose it as a constructed, scrabbling system. Michal's protest – which specifically address the loss of honour and inherent shame of David's submission – allows the narrator, through David, to reframe his genderfluidity as a divinely sanctioned act that has not decreased his authority but *increased* it. Despite this, the narrator cannot fully detangle David from beneath Hashem – the narrator leaves a fascinating trail of ambiguity in David's wake, a final reminder of Hashem's authority over David.

Michal's protest opens with a criticism of David's hegemonic abandon, a disruption of class and gender that has led to a king behaving like a peasant, a man dancing for the eyes of his social superior, gazed upon by enslaved women in the process. The narrator crafts Michal's rebuke in intentionally bold terms – this allows the narrator to reframe David's behaviour within existing hegemonic structures.

Consequently, Michal does not mention Hashem's presence in the second procession at all. She is completely limited to the natural world, emphasizing David's honour and responsibility (as 'the king of Israel') against other humans ('the enslaved women of his servants. . . as a fool') (2 Sam. 6.20). David has violently forsaken his appropriate hegemonic role, according to Michal, transgressing gender and class boundaries in the process.

David's response, while addresses his social subversion, is overwhelmingly religious. He repeats the phrase 'before Hashem' twice – echoing how Michal's disdain is introduced immediately after the phrase 'before Hashem' in v. 16 (2 Sam. 6.16, 21-22). The narrator is thus

able to erect boundaries around David's genderfluidity – it occurs within a specific context, for a specific purpose, and ultimately affirms hegemonic masculinity.

By marking David's genderqueer performativity as completely religious, the narrator implicitly prohibits non-cultic, non-normative genderfluidity.<sup>281</sup> David's entire argument for the suitability of his behaviour hinges on Hashem, who legitimizes David's participation through his election as king (2 Sam. 6.21). David's withdrawal from hegemonic masculine performativity affirms hegemonic masculinity: Hashem is recognized as the ultimate man, but David is the ultimate human man, 'ruler over Israel', chosen by Hashem (2 Sam. 6.21). The conception of election further implies that David is more fitting for the position of king than Saul: 'Michal, the daughter of Saul', finds this abdication of hegemonic power unthinkable and degrading but David, the king hand-picked by Hashem, is willing to 'cavort before Hashem', an act that he claims is ultimately imbued with honour (2 Sam. 6.20-23).

By establishing a cultic context for David's behaviour, the narrator is also able to define its purpose: for Hashem's pleasure, and in the broader view of both the first and second procession, for Hashem's elevation. David acknowledges Hashem's rightful place as the ultimate man and in doing so, supports the hegemonic system by providing a template for hierarchical gender relationships. This is the same approach and result as priestly gender, where individuals recognized as men serving a male deity emphasizes the hegemonic power of the deity. David, as king, commands warriors, themselves embodiments of masculine-coded power, and by assuming

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<sup>281</sup> Non-normative or censured genderfluidity, like subordinate masculinity or pariah femininity, undermines hegemonic masculinity and authority by embodying qualities that are at odds with hegemonic standards and expose the constructed nature of hegemony and identity. See Appendix 2.

a feminine-coded role, elevates, by virtue of his own usual station, Hashem, by acknowledging Hashem as more powerful and more masculine than he is.

Elsewhere in Samuel, this acknowledgement of another's power is followed by a permanent social station decrease – conquered kings and commanders are reduced to vassals<sup>282</sup> or are killed – with phallic weapons.<sup>283</sup> Priestly gender is also marked by a permanent estrangement from hegemonic masculinity. Samuel himself enjoys respect on behalf of Hashem,<sup>284</sup> but has a complicated relationship to hegemonic power.<sup>285</sup> David, though, appears to suffer no negative lasting effects from his foray into genderfluidity. It is endorsed at the highest level and is followed by a divine covenant assuring his legacy (2 Sam. 7). However, there is one lingering moment of tension.

‘So, to Her Dying Day, Michal, the Daughter of Saul, Had No Children’: Virility and Hegemony in 2 Sam. 6

Although David J.A. Clines does not consider virility to be an essential component of ancient Israelite masculinity, at least in David's stories, he does acknowledge the adjacent importance of fathering heirs (1995, pp. 226-27). This oversight is perhaps because David has a

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<sup>282</sup> 2 Sam. 8.1-2 and 10.18-19. In 2 Sam. 12.29-31 the entire population is taken and enslaved.

<sup>283</sup> 1 Sam. 13.3-4, 15.8 and 32-25, 17.50-51 and 54, 13.1-12; 2 Sam. 23.20. Elsewhere, political opponents are dispatched – David attempts to place space between himself and these killings in 2 Sam. 3.27 and 36-39, 4.1-12 and in 18.14-15 and 20.8-10 the killings are explicitly Joab's. In 2 Sam. 19.29, Mephibosheth says he deserves death, but is spared (see also 2 Sam. 9.1-12) – he is spared again by David in 2 Sam. 21.1-9 when David hands over seven of Saul's descendants to the Gibeonites.

<sup>284</sup> The narrator repeatedly describes Samuel as trusted and respected (1 Sam. 3.20, 7.15-17, 9.5-27, 10.1-27, 1 Sam. 25.1). When he travels to Bethlehem, the elders treat him with deference (1 Sam. 16.4-5). Samuel's authority to postpone the sacrificial meal until he has seen David is respected (1 Sam. 16.11-12).

<sup>285</sup> Despite his respect, Samuel is repeatedly ignored (1 Sam. 8.1-22, 12.1-23) and Saul forges ahead on his own in Samuel's absence (1 Sam. 13.8-14, 15.1-35). Samuel's power is not rooted in his own agency, but conditional agency from Hashem. This is demonstrated when Saul approaches Samuel in 1 Sam. 19.18-24 but is waylaid (along with his messengers) through divine intervention.

considerable number of sons – nineteen according to 1 Chr. 3.1-9 – several of whom are included in 2 Samuel (2 Sam. 3.2-5, 11.26-12.25, 13.1-19.7). David is not worried that his legacy will be given to someone outside of his biological family, like Abraham (Gen. 15.2). However, fertility and virility often plays a complicated role in the biblical text.

Elsewhere, the subject of sons is marked by practical necessity.<sup>286</sup> The importance of having a biological son causes considerable tension to many biblical women's narratives.<sup>287</sup> Infertility is treated as a feminine concern, rather than a masculine one.<sup>288</sup> I believe this underscores the importance of virility to ancient Israelite masculine identity: Hashem is forever opening women's wombs, when their husbands are unable to.<sup>289</sup>

Biblical scholar, Deborah F. Sawyer, suggests that this control over fertility places Hashem as the perpetual head of the 'divine/human hierarchy', by emphasizing '[t]he all-embracing totality of divine rule' (2002, pp. 38-39). Abraham's supernatural fertility treatment is needed because 'divine whim' has kept Sarah infertile. The result is that '[h]is role as father. . . is usurped by God, along with his role as husband and primary instigator of his wife's pregnancy'<sup>290</sup> (Sawyer, 2002, p. 54). Sawyer also references Rachel Adler's work on 'midrashim from the Talmudic to the late medieval collections' which give Hashem an outsized role in

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<sup>286</sup> In the biblical texts, a woman with sons has class security that a woman without sons does not. This is intensified in a dynastic monarchy, where there are additional political stakes for sonless queens.

<sup>287</sup> For some examples, see Sarah, Gen. 16.1-6, 17.15-21, 18.10-15; Rachel, 29.31-30.24; Tamar, Gen. 38.6-30; Sampson's mother/Manoah's wife, Jdgs. 13.2-25; and Hannah, 1 Sam. 1.2-2.11.

<sup>288</sup> 'The biblical text does not admit to the possibility of male infertility among Israelites' (Klein, 2000, p. 37). For more see Sawyer (2002) and Brenner (1997).

<sup>289</sup> When women petition a masculine god to give them children, it emphasizes that while infertility may be assigned to women, their husbands are also impotent, unable to solve their wives' infertility. Of course, luckily for everyone, Hashem's supernatural virility is no match for this natural impediment.

<sup>290</sup> This is echoed by Seth Kunin, who upon examining the biblical language around Sarah's conception, concludes that 'God becomes the ancestor of Israel rather than its actual human progenitors' (1995, p. 91). This is seen further in the etymology of the names of Israel's children, where 'God is the active partner in the birth of the sons from all four mothers' (Kunin, 1995, p. 123).

conception: ‘Sarah had no womb’, Samson’s mother is infertile, Ruth also lacked part of her uterus and ‘was forty years old. . . and had Obed as a miracle’ (2002, p. 83).

Children are the exclusive purvey of Hashem, according to this reading of fertility. The men in these stories are not overtly depicted as infertile, but they are ultimately powerless to impregnant their wives. As previously discussed in this chapter, Michal’s infertility can be read both as an act of human will and divine will – a choice by either Michal or David not to have children, or even to abstain from any sexual contact, or a judgement by Hashem.

The narrator’s lack of specificity is interesting, since two of these three possibilities are demasculinizing. It is reasonable to assume that for ancient Israelite readers, a king would not ordinarily be turned down by a woman, especially his wife. It would be a serious blow to both his place as head of the household and head of state to be shown up by a social inferior.

As previously discussed, it would also be de-masculinizing for Hashem to ‘[take] up the gauntlet’ on David’s behalf, as Hertzberg theorizes Hashem does (1964, p. 281). Hashem’s action on David’s behalf would overshadow David, emphasizing that Hashem wields a power David does not. While the Tanakh is full of narratives where the patriarchs and kings are dependent on Hashem to win wars, have heirs, and maintain political authority, these men are complicitly masculine – benefiting from their position adjacent to Hashem and his hegemonic masculinity, but cannot embody hegemonic masculinity themselves without overthrowing Hashem.

There is a subtle difference between Hashem’s hegemonic masculinity causing complicit masculinity in his followers and hegemonic masculine men/deities utilizing other men’s (or other deities’) masculinity to augment their own authority. Roland Boer analyses the hegemonic



masculinity of Chronicles in terms of camp and his readings illuminate the way that masculine authority is constructed on the backs of other men's masculinity (2006, pp. 262-67; 2010, pp. 26-28). I will compare this to 1 Sam. 18.6-9, where hegemonic masculinity is undermined by the masculinity of a social inferior.

Boer astutely argues that in Chronicles, hyper-masculinity is presented as hegemonic masculinity, where 'the ideal world [is restricted] to men' (2010, p. 26). This ultimately undermines hegemonic masculinity, illuminating it as an unobtainable exaggeration of manhood, but it also provides readers with a wealth of relationships to examine (2006, pp. 258-67; 2010, pp. 26-28). David's relationship to his 'mighty men' in 2 Sam. 23.8-39 and 1 Chron. 11.10-47 is one excellent case: David's warriors practically pour over each other in their eagerness to show off their slaughters (Boer, 2006, pp. 262-63; Boer, 2010, pp. 26-28). In one poignant moment, while out campaigning against the Philistines 'David looks wistfully out over the troops, licks his lips and croaks, "O that someone would give me water to drink from the well of Bethlehem which is by the gate"' (Boer, 2010, p. 27). 'Dumbly obedient to their king and his wish,' three of David's warriors 'crash through enemy lines' to procure the drink, only to watch David, 'in (mock?) awe of their feat' pour it out to Hashem (Boer, 2006, p. 263; 2 Sam. 23.16-17; 1 Chron. 11.18-19).

David uses the hegemonic masculinity of his elite troops to augment his own masculinity: their feats on his behalf underscore his power as a leader and a man, the kind of leader and man that these men blindly, devotedly follow. His wish – no matter how oddly specific or difficult – is their command. Their success is his success, even when he is present only on the side-lines, although he is frequently an active participant in their exploits (2 Sam. 23.8-39; 1 Chron. 11.10-

25). So why is David's masculinity strengthened by his elite team, the Thirty, but Saul's is undermined by David's victories in 1 Sam. 18?

In 1 Sam. 18.5-9 and 12-16, tension between David and Saul escalates after David is promoted to commander in Saul's army and enjoys general acclaim. David's success marks him as exceptional, however, his success surpasses Saul's in popular imagination – a group of women sing 'Saul killed his thousands, and David his ten thousands' (1 Sam. 18.6-7). The incident is followed by David slaughtering one hundred Philistines for their foreskins at Saul's request, as a *mohar* for Michal (1 Sam. 18.17-30). David's victories should reflect positively on Saul, as one of his commanders, however, Saul sees David as a rival.

David acts as an independent agent in 1 Sam. 18, compared to the Thirty of 1 Chron. 11 and 2 Sam. 23. Like them, David serves under the king, winning victories and racking up an excessive body count, however, he is consistently cast against Saul. In 1 Sam. 18.7, David and Saul are compared as equals, while in 1 Sam. 18.21-27, Saul's aims are directly contrary to David's.

If Hashem is the architect of Michal's infertility, Hashem has more in common with David in 1 Sam. 18, than the Thirty in 1 Chron. 11 and 2 Sam. 23. He is an independent agent with a unique agenda. David is subject to Hashem's desires, but Hashem is not interested in fulfilling David's wishes simply because David wishes them. Hashem poses a challenge to David's hegemonic authority, one that, based on 2 Sam. 6.1-22, David will bend under.

So why did the narrator encode this ambiguity into the text? I believe it is because it captures the tension between David-the-King and Hashem and also allows the narrator to provide consequences for David's subversive behaviour. David abdicates his hegemonic masculinity, and

the narrator is not keen to return it unmarked, regardless of how necessary it this forfeiture is in such a direct interaction with Hashem. Like Michal's rebuke, the ambiguity of David and Michal's relationship is a way for the narrator to enact a level of power themselves by passive-aggressively emphasizing this brief emasculation.

## Conclusion

The seams of 2 Sam. 6 run through vv. 20-23. The narrator utilizes Michal's voice as safe conduit to place boundaries around David's queer behaviour and even hints at emasculation. Commentary has largely missed this contribution to the text, instead focusing on symbolic significance of Michal to Samuel's larger narrative arc or Michal's importance to feminist analyses of both Samuel and the Tanakh.

## CHAPTER TEN: CONCLUSION

### Chapter Summaries

My thesis began by examining prior research, moving from queer biblical studies to biblical masculinity studies in chapters two and three. I argued that there were several gaps in our existing knowledge of 2 Samuel 6 in both fields.<sup>291</sup> Biblical masculinity studies has explored David's gender presentation, but not in relation to 2 Samuel 6 and not in relation to transgressing binary gender – indeed, there is a serious lack of research on what ancient Israelite feminine performativity looks like in Hebrew Bible, much less non-binary performativity.

These unexplored areas were enormously promising. The ability to understand normative and non-normative masculinity contextually is vital to a queer reading of the text, adding new depth to future explorations of gender, particularly around reading characters as trans and gender expansive. In order to understand what – if any – social norms David subverted, I first established what masculine, feminine, and non-binary gender performativity looked like in 2 Samuel 6. I expanded my gaze from the text itself and drew parallels in adjacent cultures. David's behaviour is unique within the biblical text, but it is not historically unprecedented. I argued that his conduct would have been intelligible to the early readers of 2 Samuel 6 as evoking a specific social role, that of genderfluid priest.

As such, chapter four, 'Sacred Liminality', evaluated and contextualized the historical archetype of non-binary cultic personnel within my thesis's methodology. Queer theory lacks a

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<sup>291</sup> As we saw, queer biblical studies still has few trans analyses, for instance. For this piece of text, there are only three queer readings, only one of which considers gender and that reading of 2 Samuel 6 examines David's dance as a metaphor for genderfluidity (Hornsby, 2016, pp. 88-80). The other two look at sexuality. The field is ripe for further analysis of gender, especially gender expansive performativity. Biblical masculinity studies has no trans examinations of David's gender.

unified methodology, and instead typically manifests itself as a ‘sensibility’ that directs interdisciplinary skills (Stone, 2013, p. 156). I utilized this to draw from Assyriology, anthropology, biblical studies, gender theory, and biblical masculinity studies. I did not aim to provide a singular, authoritative reading of the text. Instead, I offered a new lens for examination, a profoundly and inescapably transgender queering of 2 Samuel 6, grounded in diligent research and careful analysis.

This queer analysis was divided into five chapters, starting in chapter five with my translation, exegesis, and commentary on 2 Samuel 6. My translation was primarily rooted in the MT and, while it was not exceptionally different from other translations, translating myself allowed me the ability to focus on, and draw the reader’s eye to, conflicting or ambiguous portions of the text that are frequently overlooked in modern commentary. Highlighting such features was particularly pertinent for a queer reading of the text, which encourages readers to sit with ambiguity, rather than explain it away. Additionally, offering my own translation also provided a space to detail and explore crucial divergences in the MT and LXX, with a focus on how these differences effect the text’s portrayal of power and gender.

I proceeded with my textual analysis in chapters six, seven, eight, and nine, opening each with a discussion of the ‘straight’ reading of the text provided by modern commentary and closing with a systematic review and analysis of themes and contentious areas. For this, I selected six commentaries to address in detail the core arguments and conclusions of each from the many excellent academic contributions to analysis on 2 Samuel 6. These commentaries stretch between 1964 and 2020, and utilize a range of methodologies, although I have drawn

from the whole of research on 2 Samuel 6 and the ark narrative in order to properly situate both the text and my own analysis.

I utilized commentaries not only to offer perspective on the text, but also to provide a glimpse into the modern reception of the text. Modern reception of the biblical text has often been conflated with ancient receptions<sup>292</sup> – especially with characters with as much cultural weight as David (Clines, 1995, pp. 215-16). This assumption of continuity, unfortunately, has obscured the history of the text by assuming a single authoritative reading that has remained consistent over time, often inadvertently discouraging further research. My thesis approached modern interpretations with a careful, methodological suspicion that acknowledged all analysis – including my own – must be subject to the same rigorous caution as the biblical text.

Modern preconceptions<sup>293</sup> may also mask areas of contention and conflict – either between the commentators and the text, the commentators and their peers, or the commentators and themselves – and this is a fruitful area for study. As I explored 2 Samuel 6, I partitioned high conflict areas in chapters six through eight, using natural dividers in the texts and argued that the commentators’ debates will likely centre on moments of hegemonic instability or ambiguity.

Chapter six, ‘2 Samuel 6 in Time and Space’, provided historical and socio-religious context for my analysis. It included an examination of 1 Samuel 4.1-7.1 – often referred to as the ark narrative – and an investigation of how timeframe and cultural context shaped early

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<sup>292</sup> This is particularly true in Christian biblical studies, where modern receptions are assumed to be the standard by which everyone has understood the text. Clines’s analysis of David’s masculinity is a particularly good example of this, and I explore this thoroughly in chapter three.

<sup>293</sup> For instance, the narrator’s voice, which is often presumed by modern commentary – particularly historical critical commentaries – as authentic or accurate and without bias. However, the narrator’s biases and conclusions are an inescapable foundation for the text, determining what is included and excluded. My thesis critiqued the ways modern commentaries uncritically accepted the ‘straight’ reading of the text, even when its conclusions were contradictory.

receptions of the text, which can be understood as an anti-assimilationist narrative that could have offered exiled Judeans a history depicting their community as people with agency and honour as an antidote to marginalization, oppression and erasure. Further, any positive depiction of genderfluidity, as a sacred act, might assert that there is a rightful time for feminization, even for the most hegemonic human man, a powerful claim for Judeans feminized by imperial rule, exile, and defeat.

Chapter seven, ‘Sudden Death’, analysed 2 Samuel 6.1-12, the first half of the chapter which builds to a roaring crescendo with the sudden murder of Uzzah. This examination focused on David’s hyper-masculine performance, which served as a catalyst for competition between David and Hashem’s hegemony – one that is resolved by Hashem’s outburst (and David’s changed behaviour). I evaluated David’s military posturing as successful warrior chief surrounded by his fit, young men (2 Samuel 6.1-2) and musical skill as the talented king triumphant (2 Samuel 6.5) against other textual examples of gender roles to better understand how gender and hegemonic power are intertwined in the text.

Chapter eight, ‘The Second Procession’, studied David’s performativity, particularly his priestly performativity in light of textually acceptable cultic behaviour. 2 Samuel 6.12-19 presents a different perspective on power, priesthood, holiness, and gender than vv. 1-11, a reality that is often justified according to modern cisheteronormative sensibilities. This has led to current commentaries obscuring David’s queer dancing, dress, and pageantry.

Chapter nine, ‘The Seams’, focused on the final three verses of 2 Samuel 6. Although brief, this portion of the text is significant, since it provides the most overt justification of the narrative provided in the chapter. Like vv. 12-19, this passage is often obscured, and the focus is

diverted from the textual tension. Michal not only speaks but speaks against David. David's behaviour is explicitly condemned as inappropriately sexual and then sanctioned by the narrator, not because it was unsexual, but because it was cultically proper.

#### Main Research Question

With this in mind, does 2 Sam. 6 depict a moment of divinely sanctioned genderfluidity? Does David's dance before the ark – and actions after, in Jerusalem – transgress gender norms? And is his behaviour divinely just sanctioned, or is it required?

Not only does my thesis argue that David – an iconic figure in Christian and Jewish spiritual life – fully embraces a moment of genderfluidity, but it also argues that this instance was treated as *theologically mandated*.

#### Summary of Thesis

My research expanded the limits of socially acceptable, masculine biblical Israelite behaviour. While prior to the writing of Samuel, there is ample evidence of cultic genderfluidity in Sumerian, Akkadian, Assyrian and Babylonian veneration of Inanna/Ištar, there has been no overt evidence that these practices were integrated in Judean religious practices. It is likely that Judah was familiar with Inanna/Ištar given her impact on ancient Mesopotamian life, and her non-binary devotees, who were well documented, visible members of society. It is plausible that the author(s) of Samuel held these practices in mind as they depicted David's behaviour, although it is also true that David's actions are borne from theological necessity, one which parallels the way that genderfluidity is wielded by Inanna/Ištar.



Ištar deploys gender transformation and transgression as evidence of her power (‘who for making the people reverent, Ištar turned their masculinity to fem[ininity]’) (Peled, 2014a, p. 288). It serves a permanent mark of affiliation with the goddess (Nissinen, 1998, p. 31; Teppo, 2008, p. 77). Hashem also wields genderfluidity as a tool; however, it appears to be a non-permanent mark of affiliation. David’s gender performance elsewhere appears to embody hegemonic masculinity – although there is an occasion following the death of his first son with Bathsheba where he eschews hegemonic behaviour. There is no explicit social penalty for his actions.

David’s gender performance is a mark of Hashem’s power. Like Ištar, Hashem’s feminization of David, a devotee, reifies Hashem’s place as the Most Masculine, the Ultimate in hegemonic masculinity. David must relinquish his position in order to appropriately venerate Hashem – and he is rewarded for this with Hashem’s favor and power deployed on his behalf in 2 Sam. 7.

The death of Uzzah serves as the catalyst for this contest in masculinity. While it is possible – and is typically understood by modern commentators – that Uzzah is murdered because he touches the ark, a Torah cultic prohibition for a non-Levite not seen in the Samuel text, it is also possible that Uzzah is murdered because in touching the ark, he is the last straw in a series of feminizing actions committed by David. David’s strong young soldiers, the same number as Israel lost when they lost the ark, embody David’s hegemonic prowess: he is a triumphant warrior-king, taking the ark to his new capital city. Even his musical celebration emphasizes his masculine skill with the lyre.

In response, Hashem violently establishes himself as dominant force in the pair. Uzzah, poor fellow, falls not because he has done anything exceptionally awful, but because Hashem is making a point to David and wants to remind David that he is still dangerous, still awesome, still so much more of a man than David can comprehend and that he will not be carried around on a cart at the whim of others.

David is cowed by Uzzah's murder. He abandons the ark at the household of one of his followers, Obed-edom, a man with a Philistine name, whose unknown actions must have been sufficiently placating and respectful, since Hashem blesses him. David's second attempt to bring the ark to the city of David – to himself as much as to Jerusalem – is markedly different. His actions are deferential. David is not a victorious warrior king, he is a dancing priest – he entertains Hashem, serves Hashem with vulnerability and gusto. His soldiers are gone, and the ark needs no external protecting. Hashem is a force enough. David spends a lavish amount on offerings which he personally oversees and distributes. He publicly identifies himself with the priesthood through these actions, recasting himself as a cheerful little homemaker, managing his divine husband's celebration and serving the food.

David's dance is of particular note. Hornsby suggests in her analysis of David, Jesus, Paul, and genderfluidity, that David's dance represents movement between genders, particularly a masculine-coded Hashem and a feminine-coded Israel (2016, pp. 88-89). This is a valuable interpretation. Modern commentary usually reads David's dance as a holy act and sometimes a carnivalesque one that subverts typical power dynamics, focusing on David, a king and free man, dancing in the ephod, exposing some portion of himself (either literally, with the ephod being understood as a loincloth, or figuratively, in his ecstatic experience being witnessed by the

general population) to enslaved women. This reading comes very near my own analysis. David's actions are subversive and do play with conventional power dynamics, however, I also believe that there is another layer at play.

David's dancing in the ephod, a garment associated with Hashem and the priesthood in Samuel, marks him as priestly, just as his interactions with the offerings do. There has been significant debate as to why David dances, especially in the ephod. Is it a reference to regional religious practices? Is it sanctioned by the Deuteronomistic Historian as a valid form of worship?

There seems to be narrative anxiety about David's behaviour. Michal speaks out against it in uncharacteristically sharp and bold terms. I believe that the author uses Michal to vent potential anxiety over David's behaviour, which Michal describes in sexual terms. David's actions are divorced from hegemonic power: sexy dancing in priestly garments is not what Israelite kings do. However, it is also the proper theological response to Hashem's hegemony. David cannot be a powerful king. He must be subordinate to Hashem or face further violence.

David's response to Michal emphasizes the theological necessity of his behaviour which allows the narrator to both defend David's actions and restrict them – his gender transgression is de-fanged and placed in an appropriate context. Michal is dismissed; however, the narrator does not specify who dismisses her – perhaps either she or David eschew any further closeness or perhaps Hashem prevents her from conceiving children. The ambiguity of the conclusion ultimately continues to feminize David – the possibility that Hashem has championed David's cause by making Michal infertile emphasizes David's lack of agency. His virility is dependent on divine whim.

This reading of David and Hashem's dynamic is not without precedent elsewhere in ancient Mesopotamia and Levant. It is likely that the author(s)/editor(s) of the Deuteronomistic History were acquainted with the literature and mythology of their oppressors, the Babylonians. *Iddin-Dagan A* depicts a similar occasion of theologically mandated feminization of an otherwise hegemonically masculine king against 'carnavalesque scenes' (Jones, 2003, p. 300). Inanna is a dangerous, powerful force who requires mitigation, provided by the king whose submission provides a 'crucial contribution to cosmic stability' and 'mediating the divine' (Jones, 2003, p. 300). David fulfils the same role. His feminization, like that the king in *Iddin-Dagan A*, brings harmony and prosperity (to his own reign and to his subjects) through submission to Hashem.

Elsewhere in the Tanakh, priestly behaviour is tied to feminization. Hashem's priests serve as wives and homemakers for the divine, caring for his phallic temple, decorating, serving food, and providing entertainment. By putting on the ephod, David evokes the priesthood – men set apart, consecrated to fulfil feminine duties on behalf of Hashem. The Samuel scroll uses a uniquely Israelite social shorthand that would be understood both in the wider context of ancient Mesopotamian literature (theologically sanctioned and required gender non-conformity) and the specific context of their readers (Judean literati).

### Contribution to Scholarship

My analysis on 2 Sam. 6, as a whole, benefits the current state of research in an emerging field by offering an original perspective that connects previously assumed disparate themes and research. While queer biblical studies has looked briefly at David's gender and Hornsby has even touched on 2 Sam. 6, Hornsby sees David as moving symbolically between two points, the

masculine, Hashem, and the feminine, Israel (2016, pp. 88-89). I expand on this genderfluidity, looking at concrete examples of David's performance, considering the wider cultural framework of ancient Mesopotamia and Levant during and just before the exile, and evaluate 2 Sam. 6 as a whole. Biblical masculinity studies has examined David's connection to hegemonic masculinity but has not probed the way that David and Hashem's masculinity is in conflict in 2 Sam. 6 and how as a result of that conflict, David is feminized.

Further, my analysis offers an answer to the conflict often ignored by biblical commentators. Commentaries offer explanations for Hashem's sudden outburst in 2 Sam. 6, but their conclusions often rely on conflicting, extratextual,<sup>294</sup> or unsatisfactory arguments. My reading of the text is not dependent on Torah regulations and is applicable whether Samuel was an early Deuteronomistic composition or a late one.

Additionally, my framework for complicit and censored genderfluidity offers a new paradigm with which biblical scholars can discuss gender performativity. This is vital for conversations in queer biblical studies and biblical masculinity studies where binary gender performativity has led scholars to conclude that the text deals primarily in binaries and that characters crossing gender lines do so within the confines of their birth gender.<sup>295</sup> Interpreting David's gender as queer challenges established expectations about trans representation in the Tanakh/Old Testament and opens the door for cis-suspicious analyses of other traditionally

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<sup>294</sup> Here, referring to conclusions that require the reader to look outside of Samuel for answers – typically done by suggesting Torah regulations guide Hashem's actions when elsewhere in the surrounding chapters of Samuel, these standards are not upheld.

<sup>295</sup> For example, Moses's gender performativity in Rhiannon Graybill's (2015) 'Masculinity, Materiality, and the Body of Moses' and Amy Kalmanofsky's (2019) 'Moses and His Problematic Masculinity'.

masculine characters, such as Abraham, Moses, and Hashem, whose forays from hegemonic norms have been read as hetero-suspicious, but not explicitly trans.

Finally, I believe that there are valuable social consequences for gender affirming research, particularly in the field of biblical studies, where queer individuals often find themselves used as socio-political weapons by fundamentalists. For LGBTQ+ people, especially trans individuals, who are religious, my research offers encouragement and solidarity.<sup>296</sup> We have always existed and moments of our complex journeys with gender and sexuality are captured in the biblical text. Too often, LGBTQ+ individuals hear straight and cis interpretations of our sacred texts from the bimah or pulpit. It is healing to instead see ourselves in holy books, our loves, our queerness depicted as sacred and powerful. Recent waves of transphobic legislation in the United States have battered the LGBTQ+ community and affirming theology offers a much-needed salve for religious queer individuals who may feel isolated and face social, economic, and legally reprisal for their existence.

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<sup>296</sup> In un-affirming (typically fundamentalist) Christian circles, the phrase ‘love the sinner, hate the sin’ is often wielded alongside ‘clobber’ texts (Gen 1.27, 19.1-9; Lev. 18.22, 20.13; Deut. 23.17-18; Rom. 1.26-27; 1 Cor. 6.9; 1 Tim. 1.9-10; Jude 1.7) to justify homophobic and transphobic theology. Suggesting genderfluidity may be theologically proper posits that there is no sin at all (something affirming Christians have long convincingly argued in other texts).

In Jewish communities, there is a great range of theological responses with Reform, Reconstructionist, Humanistic Judaism and the Jewish Renewal movement openly supporting affirming theology, Conservative Judaism holding a position of plurality (with both affirming and un-affirming communities) and Orthodox and Ultra-Orthodox (including Chabad, Modern Orthodox, Hasidic, and Haredi) Judaism typically un-affirming with accepting and rejecting communities. In un-affirming communities, אהבת ישראל (‘Love of Israel’, understood as ‘love of [other] Jews’) is often used to extend acceptance to Jews who observe halacha differently, including those who hold affirming theological positions. As in Christian communities, this argument for theologically instigated genderfluidity has great potential to add to the many excellent arguments for affirming textual interpretation and it is a normalized part of kabbalistic readings of David (although one that is not often described in modern terms, such as ‘genderfluidity’) opening doors for those in un-affirming communities to find a way towards their own affirming beliefs.

## Future Research

Reading 2 Sam. 6 through the lens of genderfluidity and holiness opens two avenues for future research: re-examining David's gender performativity and evaluating other portions of the Tanakh for connections between non-binary gender and cultic ritual or identity. David has been understood as an unflinchingly hegemonic masculine figure with debates on possible lapses in this treated as unlikely, given his social role. There is room now to analyse texts for other places where theologically mandated gender transgression may appear in David's life. This can also be expanded outside of Samuel and midrashic or aggadic narratives on David and applied to other areas where individuals and positions in close proximity to Hashem dance between gender roles – the priests who must balance their wives and their calling as housemakers for Hashem and the patriarchs and prophets who find their genders queered by divine demand.

My research has interesting implications for both queer biblical studies and biblical masculinity studies. In both fields, there are a limited number of analyses that build on genderqueer or trans readings of texts and/or individuals. Specifically, reading David's performance before the ark as genderqueer asks us to build upon Roland Boer's work on Chronicles and consider other ways that priestly behaviour manifests as queer gender performativity.

It expands the kind of individual who may be seen queering gender – previous research has assumed that such individuals would be systematically divorced from hegemonic gender, like other ancient Mesopotamian non-binary cultic devotees, however, David is deeply connected to hegemonic power. Do the patriarchs queer gender? It is certainly possible. Their connections to masculinity do not preclude them from adopting transitory or situational non-

binary gender roles, indeed, it may exacerbate such depictions. Any masculine figure who is placed in close proximity with the Most High Masculine must undergo a theologically-mandated transition. It has been assumed that this change in social role is from hegemonic masculinity to subordinate masculinity, but it may not always be the case and it is well worth investigating further. Much attention has been (rightly) paid to hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinities and my framing of complicit and censured genderfluidity offers new avenues for exploration, building on Connell's work.

It also expands the kind of behaviour interpreted as non-masculine. There is a significant lack in academic analysis of what constitutes feminine behaviour in biblical studies texts. In order to fully appreciate the spectrum of gender presentation, further research into feminine socio-religious norms across biblical economic and ethnic spheres is desperately needed. Although overt cases of queer femininity – Rahab, Jael, Deborah, Jezebel, Ruth, Judith, and various Christian women – have been examined, without a thorough conversation about what comprises hegemonic/emphasized femininity and disenfranchised femininity, it is difficult to adequately explore if other female or feminine-of-centre individuals in biblical texts capture queer movement outside of the bounds of social norms. The matriarchs or Miriam, in particular, would benefit deeply, given the closeness to the gender-destabilizing presence of Hashem and his smitten devotees. How are they estranged from the Most High Male, being, as Howard Eilberg-Schwartz rightly observes, the ideal partner for Hashem, yet superseded by the queerly beloved men in their lives (1994, p. 148).

These avenues for analysis are only the beginning and I look forward with great excitement to further exploration and queer-ies.



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## APPENDIX 1: THE CONNECTION BETWEEN DEITIES AND KINGS IN ASSYRIA AND BABYLONIA

Within the historical and literary contexts recovered from Assyria and Babylonian, there is ample evidence that cultic identity was a tool for instigating imperial aims and resisting colonization by an occupying empire. The relationship between kings and their deities is well documented, with Assyriologists tracking the explicit connection between Aššur and kingly authority (Astola, et al, 2019, p. 161; Maul 2017, p. 351). Aššur served as ‘the ultimate king of the gods as well as the representation of Assyrian power’, and was notably ‘[set apart] from other Mesopotamian gods, who tended to be shared or identified with similar [regional] deities’ (Astola, et al, 2019, p. 161). Assyriologist Stefan Maul observes that the relationship between Assyrian and Babylonian cultic practices became heavily intertwined between ‘the late Middle Assyrian and Neo-Assyrian periods’ (2017, p. 336). Aššur thus appears ‘paired (or in a triad) with other gods such as Marduk or Ištar, depending on the context and the king’ with Sennacherib going so far as to substitute Aššur in Marduk’s place ‘in rituals, literature, and other cult practices’ (cf, Astola, et al, 2019, pp. 161-62; Frahm, 1997, pp. 282; Pongratz-Leisten, 2015, pp. 416-26; Maul, 2017, p. 352).

Foremost among Sennacherib’s theological revisions was an effort to ‘[match] the king’s imperial claim to universal control’ by ‘increasing [Aššur’s] astral dimensions’ (Pongratz-Leisten, 2015, p. 417). Aššur replaced Marduk outright in the Assyrian *Enūma Eliš*, took on the name AN.ŠÁR – linking him with the ‘primeval gods preceding Marduk/Aššur in *Enūma Eliš*’ and thus leading to the ‘his epithet “the one who creates himself”’ –, and, under Sennacherib’s careful guidance, saw extensive revisions to his temple (Pongratz-Leisten, 2015, pp. 416-19;

Maul, 2017, p. 352). This revitalization of Aššur, while extensive, had precedent. During the reign of Šamši-Adad, between 1808-1776 BCE, Aššur was first linked with Enlil, ‘the king of the gods of the Sumerian-Babylonian pantheon’, and Šamši-Adad drew a deliberate link between the cultic centre of Nippur and the city Aššur, as ‘a mirror image’ of each other, a feat that persisted in ‘historical-mythological narratives’ and contributed to Aššur’s increased fame (2017, p. 342-43). This act later inspired a brief foray by Hammurabi into similar language and theology, where Babylon was touted as ‘the “new Nippur”’ and Hammurabi ‘the appointee of Enlil’ – leading to ‘Marduk, the previously rather unimportant god of Babylon’, growing into a hegemonic god, ‘modelled after Enlil’ (Maul, 2017, pp. 343-44).

Sennacherib’s successor, Esarhaddon, emphasized a ‘commensal community’ in which ‘through the act of collective offering, rulers and subjects together become a people of god’ through sacrifices and labour, such as ‘the ritual of the ceremonial laying of the foundation’ of the temple, where nobility, royalty, and the working class worked together for a specific cultic function (Maul, 2017, pp. 345-46). Esarhaddon prohibited foreigners from participating in cultic sacrifices, however, they were responsible for contributing offerings (Maul, 2017, pp. 345-46). Maul describes the situation elegantly: ‘the regular offerings imposed on the conquered forced them, in addition to everything else, to show their respect to the almost transcendent power of a power deity, and to ask for divine benevolence from those who had disempowered them’ (2017, p. 346).

The gods’ wills – when successfully articulated by careful kings – drove politics and military campaigns (Maul, 2017, pp. 349-50). Cultic ceremonies, such as ‘the day on which the king wears the crown [a divine artifact belonging to Aššur]’, were designed to demonstrate that

Aššur and ‘the king essentially flowed into each other’ (Maul, 2017, pp. 348-49). ‘Under the last Assyrian kings, martial actions were often scarcely described anymore as achievements of the royal warrior but rather as the work of the gods’ who advanced before the king ‘in the form of standards’ – often Ninurta and Nergal or Aššur and Ištar (Maul, 2017, pp. 350-51). Conquered lands had their divine statues ‘godnapped’, and brought to Aššur’s pantheon, where the image would be inscribed with ‘the might of Assur’ and possibly returned (Maul, 2017, pp. 351-52). Marduk spent ‘no fewer than 106 years’ in the city of Aššur after he was seized by Tukulti-Ninurta I [t]owards the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century BCE’ and again was captured by Sennacherib after his ‘deluge’ of destruction on Babylon, only returning during the reign of Assurbanipal (Maul, 2017, pp. 349, 351-52). In the aftermath of the Neo-Assyrian empire, Aššur – the city and temple both wreckage after the Medes departed – lost his power. ‘The god Assur, people concluded, had apparently abandoned his charges’ and as such, ‘the spirit of Assyrian imperial rule entirely cease[d] to exist’ (Maul, 2017, p. 354). Aššur’s worship saw a revival ‘under the Parthians in the first century BCE’, likely because of the Assyrian influence on the city of Uruk, but Aššur was unable to maintain his primacy in Babylon (Maul, 2017, p. 354).

In Babylon, Marduk maintained his hegemony, occupying a role similar to Aššur’s: Marduk legitimized the kingship and cultic rites and literature offer historians a glimpse of the ‘triangular relationship between king, gods, and temples’, observes Assyriologist Caroline Waerzeggers (2015, pp. 1887-88). In the Babylonian *Enūma Eliš*, ‘Marduk plays the part of the human king, while the other gods declare their willingness to obey on the condition that he takes care of their temples’ (Waerzeggers, 2015, pp. 188-89). Between 597 and 539 BCE, Marduk was the epitome of hegemonic power, however, in the years following Cyrus’s capture of Babylon in



539 BCE, Marduk's power was slowly undermined by rising socio-political tensions between occupying Persians and occupied Babylonians.

The *Cyrus Cylinder* – which includes glowing descriptions of the relationship between ‘Marduk, the great lord’, and Cyrus, who ‘every day sought him out in awe’ – offers an image of the ‘the process of negotiations’ in which Cyrus acknowledged and acquiesced to Babylonian cultural norms (Waerzeggers, 2015, p. 191). One passage even implies that Cyrus's reign over Babylon ‘was but a continuation of the contract that had been made between Marduk and the gods at the beginning of the created world’ (Waerzeggers, 2015, p. 191). However, it did not last. In the waves of anti-Persian sentiment and rebellion that plagued the kings that followed Cyrus, there is a distinct lack of royal ‘initiative’ and ‘funding’ for Babylonian temples in the archaeological record, along with a marked absence of ‘Persian donations of chariots, jewels, vessels, or cultic paraphernalia’ and food offerings (Waerzeggers, 2015, pp. 191-98). There was ‘[a]n unexplained confiscation of temple vessels’ and significant ‘cultic innovation’ – including expanding the list of sacrificial beneficiaries to include a Persian queen, the creation of a ‘sacrificial cult for a statue of Darius in the Ebabbar temple of Sippar’ and the formation of a new cult, “‘Sin-of-Heaven” in the temples of Sippar and Uruk’ (Waerzeggers, 2015, p. 198). Against ‘the early Neo-Babylonian wisdom text *Advice to a Prince*’, Darius included priests in corvée labour, a sin punishable by Marduk by the subjugation and humiliation of any king bold enough to impress taxation on the priesthood (Waerzeggers, 2015, p. 200). However, Babylon remained occupied under the Persians, then under the Macedonians

Consequently late Babylonian texts ‘between c. 400 and 60 B.C.E’, indirectly addressed the waves of occupation Babylon witnessed, first through the Persians, then through the Greeks

(Waerzeggers, 2015, pp. 213-19). In the *Nabopolassar Epic*, for example, the narrative features ‘the language of vengeance and divine providence’ with ‘Marduk as mover of history’ and Nabopolassar, as the kingly agent of divine will (Waerzeggers, 2015, pp. 213-15). *Chronicle P* features Tukulti-Ninurta I – a ‘late 13<sup>th</sup> century BC . . . Assyrian king’ who occupied Babylon – as the villain to Adad-šuma-ušur’s heroic liberator (Waerzeggers, 2015, p. 215). *Chronicle P* is particularly interesting because in addition to violently conquering Babylon, Tukulti-Ninurta I also takes for himself ‘sacred property’ and Marduk’s statue (Waerzeggers, 2015, p. 215; Grayson, 2000, pp. 175-76). Caroline Waerzeggers notes a pattern in these works (and other narratives or narratives fragments) where ‘the oppressive reign of a foreign king is followed by an act of liberation by a Babylonian king with the help of Marduk’ (2015, p. 217). Although the dating of *Chronicle P* and the *Nabopolassar Epic* are both uncertain and could post-date 2 Sam. 6, I believe they offer insight into the way that ancient Mesopotamian (and Levantine) societies used literature to cement socio-religious identity, and consequently stabilize community boundaries in times of occupation and/or diaspora.

## APPENDIX 2: GENDER HEGEMONY IN MASCULINITY, FEMININITY, AND GENDERFLUIDITY

Sociologist Raewyn Connell divides gender hegemony and masculinity into four forms: hegemonic masculinity, complicit masculinity, marginalized masculinity, and subordinate masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity is the patriarchal goal – an idealized, unachievable form of manhood – that reinforces masculine dominance (Connell 2005, pp. 76-78; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 832, Messerschmidt, 2012, p. 64). Complicit masculinity is the most widespread masculinity in patriarchal societies – it profits from hegemonic masculinity and does not resist it, despite the individuals embodying hegemonic norms to varying degrees (Connell, 2005, pp. 77-81). Biblical scholar Gil Rosenberg argues convincingly that ‘if a man agrees with the ideals of hegemonic masculinity, even if they are unable or unwilling to live up to those ideals, his masculinity is complicit’ (2019, p. 45). Marginalized masculinity is masculinity marked as Other solely because of intersecting identities such as race, class, or ability (Connell, 2005, pp. 77-81). These individuals, unlike those with complicit masculinity, are not acknowledged as hegemonic, even though their actions would otherwise qualify. The final form of masculinity, subordinate masculinity is defined in perpetual opposition to hegemonic masculinity – it results in emasculation and estrangement from what it means to be a Real Man (Connell, 2005, pp. 77-81).

Gender and sexuality sociologist, Mimi Schippers theorizes that gender hegemony in femininity takes on a different form from masculinity. She divides femininity into hegemonic femininities and pariah femininities, where hegemonic power is tied ‘the relationship between masculinity and femininity’ based on heteronormative desire and cisnormative presentation

(Schipper, 2007, pp. 94-95). Feminine hegemony forms a foundation for masculine hegemony, creating and enforcing the borders of ‘a hierarchical and complementary relationship’ between binary genders (Schipper, 2007, pp. 94-95). Pariah femininity is femininity in conflict with hegemonic masculinities – where ‘the quality content of hegemonic masculinity’ co-opted and wielded by women, who ‘are simultaneously stigmatized and feminized’ to preserve masculine power (Schipper, 2007, pp. 95-96).

Schipper argues that feminized men are not subject to ‘pariah masculinity’ because they are inescapably masculine, contaminated by femininity; subordinate masculinity is ‘hegemonic femininity embodied or enacted by men’ (2007, p. 96). Within identities there are degrees of subordinate masculinity, corresponding to the level of femininity performed: ‘[b]eing effeminate, a twink, a bottom are male femininities in that they are symbolically constructed as men embodying femininity’ with steeper social penalties compared to “‘a straight gay”, a bear, and a top’ (Schipper, 2007, p. 96-97).

This hierarchy is sex and gender essentialist. It presumes gender roles function as pre-discursive, immutable truth, inescapably tied to a binary sex role. Indeed, for the hierarchy to function, it must be essentialist – without these boundaries, the actual intricacies of performed gendered, at some moments masculine, at others feminine, and still more moments neither, would prove patriarchal power to be fundamentally unstable and constructed. However, just as hegemonic femininity must deny the existence of non-binary, fluid gender performativity and identity, it appears to me that Schipper provides no theoretical basis for interpreting behaviour outside of this binary, essentialist framework. Numerous other feminist sociologists have interrogated hegemonic femininity in relation to hegemonic masculinity, including Carrie

Paechter (2018), Laura T. Hamilton, et al (2019), and James W. Messerschmidt (2020), looking for a way to articulate the complex nuance of gender and power.<sup>297</sup>

Connell, like Schippers, began with the presumption that delineating hegemonic power meant articulating the way that gender interrelation legitimizes patriarchal oppression (Connell 2005, p. 77; Messerschmidt, 2020, p. 5; Schippers, 2007, 90-94). Connell, however, disagrees with Schippers, that femininity can be ‘hegemonic’, instead labelling it as “‘emphasized’ femininity’ to underscore the way hegemony validates and enables ‘unequal relationships between men and women, masculinity and femininity, and among masculinities’ (Connell, 1987, p. 187; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005, 829-59; Messerschmidt, 2020, p. 4). Schippers and Messerschmidt concluded that hegemonic and disenfranchised feminine performativity remains a distinctly localized practice, ‘affected by new configurations of women’s identity and practice’ (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 848). Shelley Budgeon argues that this results in a ‘hybrid femininity’ that ‘appears to be progressive’ while remaining, in her quote of Angela McRobbie, ‘consummately and reassuringly feminine’ (Budgeon, 2014, pp. 325-27; Messerschmidt, 2020, p. 5). It is possible to expand the social definition of hegemonic/emphasized femininity without challenging the gendered system of oppression it is built upon.

The question for 2 Sam. 6 and a feminine David is then, what precisely is David performing when he moves between gender roles? How does hegemony, masculinity, and femininity intersect, and what role would David be perceived as? To answer this, I wish to briefly summarize my earlier conclusions in chapter four and expound upon them.

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<sup>297</sup> See also Jack Halberstein (1998), *Female Masculinity*.

In the ancient Mesopotamia and Levant, we see multiple examples of non-binary individuals – all linked across time and space by their similar socio-religious function – who were assigned male at birth, but who did not live as men and were estranged from the benefits of masculinity. I argued that they were best understood, not as examples of subordinate masculinity, but as divorced from masculinity. This conclusion was built on social responses, roles, legal rulings, and writings on these individuals.

When viewed in light of feminine hegemony, they would be similarly estranged: marked as other against the cast of masculinity and femininity. The *galli* called both ‘half-women’ and ‘soft “half-men”’ neither male nor female (Roller, 1997, pp. 547, 550). Roscoe suggests that this is echoed by Augustine who sees the *galli* as profoundly queer, no more ‘changed into a woman’ than ‘[they] remain a man’ (1996, p. 203). Catullus deems Attis a ‘*notha mulier*’ or a fake woman (Roller, 1997, pp. 551-52). Similarly, the *gala*, *kur-gar-ra*, and *assinnu*, are also cut off from hegemonic masculinity, but they are considered a class apart, not included with women (Nissinen, 1998, pp. 24-31; Peled, 2016b, p. 159; Roscoe, 1996, p. 217). The *galli*, the *gala/kalû*, the *kur-gar-ra/kurgarrû*, and the *assinnu* are therefore outside of normative masculinity and femininity, divorced from hegemonic masculinity, complicit masculinity, marginalized masculinity, and hegemonic/emphasized femininity. They are also, however, not affiliated with subordinate masculinity or pariah femininity, since they are not men or women.

Instead, these individuals performed complicit genderfluidity. Like hegemonic/emphasized femininity, complicit genderfluidity affirms and supports hegemonic masculinity. The potentially de-stabilizing effect of genderfluidity is harnessed and redeployed as a means of solidifying masculinity. The *gala/kalû*, the *kur-gar-ra/kurgarrû*, and the *assinnu* –

as discussed in chapter four – are all legitimized through their devotion to Inanna/Ištar, herself the embodiment of hegemonic masculinity and phallic power, adorned with a beard, a powerful warrior, castrating who she pleases (Nissinen, 1998, p. 30; Roscoe, 1996, p. 217).

Complicit genderfluidity incorporates elements of both masculinity and femininity, but it remains a distinct entity, founded on non-binary performativity, but is tied to hegemonic power, both legitimized by its proximity and support of hegemony, and estranged from most of its benefits. Non-normative genderfluidity, or censured genderfluidity, parallels subordinate masculinity<sup>298</sup> and pariah femininity: it is a failure to perform socially acceptable gender. Censored genderfluidity is seen in the western conception of genderfuck, a disruptive, subversive non-binary performance that fundamentally undermines hegemonic authority, particularly hegemonic masculinity. Drag often embodies censured genderfluidity through exaggerated performativity, despite being untethered to an individual's gender identity – straight men and women can perform drag, although it is typically associated with the queer community.

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<sup>298</sup> It is close kin to marginalized masculinity, where an intersecting identity has estranged someone from complicit or hegemonic masculinity. A good example of this is seen how Black and working-class masculinity is divorced from hegemonic masculinity based only on race and/or class, rather than how well an individual embodies other aspects hegemonic norms.