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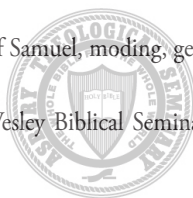
On the Moding and Diachrony of the Books of Samuel

Abstract

The three “lamp” passages in Samuel (1 Sam 3:3; 2 Sam 21:17; 22:29) cooperate to establish an *inclusio* that serves as the hermeneutical lens for the final form of Samuel. Contrary to Graeme Auld, therefore, 1 and 2 Samuel is not necessarily all about David, but rather it’s about David insofar as he is the chief vehicle through which the narrative communicates a particular ideology. To account for this dynamic, there appears to be at least two phases of development within Samuel’s lamp metaphor, the latter of which imported a more critical posture toward the monarchical institution. Moreover, the latter phase of this metaphor’s development appears to have important implications for Samuel’s literary development away from an ancient apology. Alastair Fowler argues that literary genres change through time, and when this happens ideas encroach upon literary forms and become the driving force of the work’s presentation. Synthesizing this framework with some of the ideas of John Van Seters, this essay proposes that the certain phases of Samuel’s literary development may constitute the moding of a royal apology.

Keywords: lamp, diachrony of Samuel, moding, genre

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Introduction

Graeme Auld repeats in the opening pages of his commentary on 1 and 2 Samuel, “This book is about David” (2011: 1–2). According to Auld, “We find David presented and represented with and against a very large supporting cast” (2011: 1). “[A]ll other personalities are there so that we may see and know David better” (Auld 2011: 2). Auld is correct. The books of Samuel largely revolve around David and his exploits. And when David is considered alongside other characters—such as Eli, Samuel, Saul, and others—1 and 2 Samuel can be classified as a biographical book (Bauer and Traina 2011: 83).

However, one can detect a tension within Samuel regarding biographical and ideological concerns. I have previously argued that Samuel’s three appearances of *נָא* affect how one should understand the primary emphasis for 1 and 2 Samuel (Schreiner 2016). The *נָא* passages of 1 and 2 Samuel establish a hermeneutical lens that ultimately renders the narrative as exhortation upon its readers regarding guiding principles for navigating change that inevitably faces every community. As for the cause of such tension, it may be traced back to Samuel’s compositional history. Consequently, this essay begins with a reiteration of these previous arguments in order to set the stage for the reframing ideas offered by John Van Seters. Alastair Fowler’s continuum of literary development is invoked to make sense of the general contours of Samuel’s literary development.

The Collaboration of the *נָא* Passages and the Literary Implications¹

The noun *נָא* thrice appears in 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 Sam 3:3; 2 Sam 21:17; 2 Sam 22:29, and these occurrences collaborate to form a complex metaphor (Schreiner 2014). Close attention to the syntactical, pragmatic, semantic, and symbolic dynamics of the three occurrences demonstrates a metaphor that communicates socio-political and theological convictions. The rise of Samuel inaugurated a dispensation that eventually saw the community’s leadership develop into the royal institution, which climaxes with David and becomes the responsible agent for the community’s vitality. Yet the narrative in due course proclaims that the ultimate source of the community’s vitality and endurance is through the Lord by way of the king.

By implication, these passages can also be understood as an *inclusio* for the Samuel narrative, constituting a hermeneutical lens through which one reads the narrative.² To this end, 1 and 2 Samuel is a narrative that addresses communal transition and the role that the Lord and his covenant plays in the process. It recounts Israel’s socio-political transition to emphasize that the Lord’s relationship

with his people is not fundamentally compromised by any socio-political transition so long as the covenant continues to provide the governing principles for his people as they move forward. As for the person of David, he is certainly *the* major character. One could therefore say that Samuel in its canonical form is about David, *insofar as he is the chief vehicle through which the narrative communicates these theological truths*.

Consequently, there are grounds for questioning the widely held conclusion that 1 and 2 Samuel is a biographical book. Yet one must not forget that the structural breakdown of 1 and 2 Samuel corresponds with the presentation of persons, which should be expected if the narrative is biographical (Bauer and Traina 2011: 89); hence, the tension. On the one hand, the Samuel narrative is about people, and David in particular, and its structural breakdown follows accordingly. On the other hand, the נֶחֱד passages encompass virtually the entire narrative, communicate a particular point, and thus in a sense destabilize the biographical classification.

Naturally, these observations encourage some questions. What produced such a tension? What were the historical and literary realities that resulted in the collision of ideological and biographical concerns in the final form? To answer, one must first abandon a synchronic frame of reference for a diachronic one.³ Yet this is not done whimsically. According to the ideas of Serge Frolov, the abandonment of any frame of reference should only occur when there is sufficient warrant, qualitatively or quantitatively (Frolov 2004: 29–32). So, “What is the warrant for adopting a diachronic posture, particularly when it comes to understanding the נֶחֱד passages and their implications for understanding the major concern of Samuel?”

To answer, there is an overwhelming scholarly consensus that the so-called “Appendix,” which is the literary context of two of the three occurrences of נֶחֱד , is a late insertion.⁴ In addition, there is reason to believe that the נֶחֱד passage of 2 Sam 21:17 preserves an archaic ideology surrounding the monarchal institution and it has been transferred from its original context (Schreiner 2014: 24–25). Third, the occurrence of נֶחֱד in 1 Sam 3:3 may have been inserted in conjunction with a redactional scheme that sought, in part, to question the Davidic line as the unassailable foundation for the Judean community (Schreiner 2014: 27–28). Finally, there are other, more general considerations, such as the textual history of Samuel and the occasional explicit literary markers. For example, the presence of a *Weideraufnahme* in 1 Sam 24:13–14 demonstrates that Samuel has been subjected to processes of textual development. Overall, the warrant for transitioning into a diachronic frame of reference is quantitative *and* qualitative.

John Van Seters has offered the most recent, and quite possibly the most comprehensive, literary critical analysis of 1 and 2 Samuel. In his monograph *The*

Biblical Saga of King David Van Seters argues: 1) that there appears to be at least two distinct perspectives toward David throughout 1 Sam 16-2 Sam 20 and 1 Kgs 1-2 and 2) that they are linked to two distinct compositional phases. Van Seters argues that a pro-Davidic account, what he calls “Account A,” was tempered by a more critical one, “Account B.” Van Seters identifies the genre of “Account A” as historiography and “Account B” as a saga.⁵ “Account A” is largely comprised of the so-called “History of David’s Rise,” and “Account B” is largely comprised of the so-called “Succession Narrative,” which Van Seters entitles the “Court History.”

The particulars of Van Seters’ diachronic analysis notwithstanding,⁶ such a two-fold compositional scheme is generally laudable, for it avoids any gross atomization of the text while explaining a large portion of the literary-critical data. However, there may be a more nuanced way to describe the literary developments observed by Van Seters. Instead of what he describes as a radical reversal imposed by the tradents of “Account B,” perhaps Van Seters observes the expected literary progression associated with the perceptual developments that occurred in the wake of the community’s experiences.⁷ To tease this out, I invoke Alastair Fowler’s continuum of literary development.⁸

Fowler’s Continuum

In *Life and Death of Literary Forms*, Fowler (1971) discusses the susceptibility of literary genres and their respective forms to change and the principles behind those developments.⁹ Fowler believes that genre generally develops through three identifiable phases. The initial phase is the result of a process whereby a distinguishable form is assembled by the regular association of motifs, themes, and other forms. In the second phase, variations occur within the common themes, motifs, etc. while retaining all the essential definitional characteristics. In phase three, the most dramatic variations occur. According to Fowler, the third phase can be characterized as “radical” and may be “burlesque, antithetic, or symbolic modulation of the secondary” (1971: 213).

Modes, which essentially are attitudes or perceptions, are a driving force in this process. Under certain conditions, attitudes and perceptions become so influential that they spur the author to violate the original literary form in accord with their particular sensitivities. Taken to its logical conclusion, the author’s attitudes and perceptions become so dominant that innovations proliferate, to the point where the original form may be barely recognizable. In a word therefore, “Genre tends to mode” (Fowler 1971: 214). Attitudes and perceptions become the driving force of the literary presentation, not the form. Yet Fowler also declares, “[A]

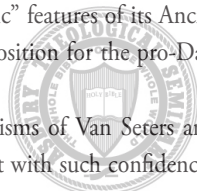
mode too may pass, if its attitude becomes inappropriate” (1971: 214). To put it more bluntly, modes can die if the values and perceptions they espouse “grow alien” (1971: 214). In such instances, particular experiences of the community undermine attitudes and perceptions to the extent that they are ultimately abandoned. New modes then arise, and these modes drive the development of new genres and literary forms.

The mechanisms of this transformation are often fluid and numerous (Fowler 1985: 170–90). One of those mechanisms is the inclusion of segments of text, which is particularly important for this investigation. This essay proposes that Fowler’s developmental continuum can explain the differing portrayals of David in 1 and 2 Samuel so clearly articulated by Van Seters. The shift in genre identified by Van Seters may be better understood as the moding of the apologetic literature by means of literary inclusion.

The Moding of Apologetic Literature in Samuel

In 1980, P. Kyle McCarter argued that much of the large block of material in 1 Sam 16–2 Sam 5 should be classified as an apology on behalf of King David (1980: 489–504). Comparing the biblical text with the “Apology of Hattushili,” McCarter concluded that the biblical text was probably composed to answer charges leveled against David as he took the throne to unite the northern and southern tribes.¹⁰ The idea that much of the pro-Davidic material in the Samuel narrative is apologetic has been widely accepted, so much so that influential monographs have been written with this as a fundamental principle (Halpern 2001; McKenzie 2000). Yet Van Seters boldly cuts across the grain when he argues on historical and literary grounds that an apologetic classification misses the mark. Van Seters is convinced that the socio-political realities of tenth century Judah were not conducive to the production of this type of apologetic literature (2009: *passim*). Literarily, Van Seters believes that attempts to classify the pro-Davidic material as apologetic “abuse the form critical method” (2009: 59). Van Seters first notes the first person/third person discrepancy between the biblical text and other Ancient Near Eastern apologetic texts. Second, the third person narration of the biblical text does not exhibit the “apologetic” or “propagandistic” features of its Ancient Near Eastern counterparts. Finally, the late date of composition for the pro-Davidic material militates against an apologetic classification.

However, the criticisms of Van Seters are not convincing. On the one hand, Van Seters cannot assert with such confidence that the socio-political milieu

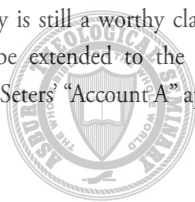


reflected in the Samuel narrative is anachronistic and that tenth century Judah was not conducive to sophisticated literary composition. Khirbet Qeiyafa and other locations, such as Khirbet en-Naḥas, have yielded data that challenges minimalist assumptions regarding the socio-political developments of the southern Levant during early Iron IIA.¹¹ On the other hand, Fowler's continuum of development further undermines the potency of Van Seters' already uncertain literary criticisms. The difference in person that Van Seters observes hardly seems to be the "radical transformation" that precludes an apologetic classification (2009: 59). Furthermore, the notion that the third person narration of the biblical text does not properly parallel the "apologetic" intentions of other Ancient Near Eastern texts fosters more questions than answers. Consequently, the criticisms of Van Seters upon the apologetic classification are less than convincing.

McCarter does offer an important statement on the form of an apology and where his Davidic apology would have fallen on a developmental continuum.

Hoffner's reluctance to define this 'tradition of royal apologies' too strictly is, I think, prudent. Surely there is nothing distinctively Hittite or even ancient Near Eastern about the literary category of political self-justification with accompanying claims for the legitimacy of the usurper, his ability to rule, his moral rectitude, and his divine election to office. *Efforts to find more than 'a certain loose literary form' shared by the several examples of the category would probably fail. On the other hand the apology of Hattushilish demonstrates the potential for an elaborate development of this genre in the general cultural milieu in which the history of David's rise was composed, and the striking similarity of themes in the two compositions is a clue to the original character of the Israelite document.* (1980: 489, emphasis mine)

McCarter rightly acknowledges the probable existence of an ancient apologetic genre with a corresponding literary form while acknowledging its elastic tendencies. Indeed, the Hittite/Israelite comparison does not permit a systematic reconstruction of the genre's form, but it is enough to postulate the existence of such genre with an identifiable form. The differences between the Israelite and Hittite accounts suggest that the apologetic genre, at least by the time of the Israelite writer, had begun to evolve. Consequently, McCarter's classification of the "History of David's Rise" as an apology is still a worthy classification. By implication, the apologetic character should be extended to the remainder of the pro-Davidic material of Samuel. Thus, Van Seters' "Account A" apologizes David's legitimate and divinely sanctioned rule.



The insertion of the so-called “Account B” appears to represent the moding of the apologetic material by importing skeptical, uncertain, perhaps even satirical, attitudes. Second Samuel 5-8 brings all of David’s efforts to a climatic conclusion. Politically, David unites the northern and southern tribes under his rule and effectively eliminates the Philistine threat. He also conquers Jerusalem, which offers a capital devoid of any history that would exasperate the tensions between the northern and southern tribes. Religiously, David secures the Ark and transports it to Jerusalem, establishing a new cultic center. Most importantly, the Lord, through the prophet Nathan, presents David with a dynastic promise that includes a “charter” (Halpern 2001: 134). Therefore, upon the conclusion of 2 Sam 8, the questions that plagued the community early in the Samuel narrative are answered decisively. The community enjoys, and will continue to enjoy, stable political leadership in the form of a dynastic family, and that family is able to deal decisively with socio-political issues of the day. Furthermore, the founder of the dynasty embodies the community’s religious ethos, ruling with justice and equity, so declares 2 Sam 8:15. In other words, 2 Sam 5-8 also establishes the pillars of the dynastic ideal: stable leadership with an anticipation of peaceful succession, an identifiable territory, and an ethos to govern society.

As the David Saga—Van Seters’ “Account B”—begins in earnest with the start of chapter nine,¹² the positive atmosphere quickly falls away (2009: 262–63). David subtly moves to control the remnants of Saul’s household under the pretext of loyalty. In chapter ten, the Ammonites and Aramean conflicts are recounted, which contextualizes the David and Bathsheba episode. According to 2 Sam 11:1, “In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab with his officers and all Israel with him. They ravaged the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained in Jerusalem” (NRSV). Van Seters is correct when he suggests that this statement compares David to a typical ancient Near Eastern ruler with imperialistic ambitions (2009: 290), but such a comment transcends a simple comparison. That David is enjoying the comforts of Jerusalem while men are exerting so much effort in the Ammonite conflict is ironic. The reader expects David to be on the battlefield, particularly since David’s military prowess was a focal point in the previous chapters. Such irony anticipates trouble.

This anticipation is realized quickly. The text quickly discloses David and Bathsheba’s night of indiscretion and her subsequent pregnancy (vv. 2-5). The episode then turns to its primary purpose, juxtaposing a pious foreigner with a devious and immoral Israelite king, which flies in the face of 2 Sam 8:15 (Van Seters 2009: 297–99). Again, this episode is deeply ironic and shocking. Chapter 11 concludes with the terse statement, “The deed which David did was evil in the eyes

of the Lord” (2 Sam 11:27). Such a statement is particularly damning, for it not only accentuates the deviousness of David’s deeds but it also echoes the condemnation of the evil kings of Judah and Israel. At this moment, David is amongst the worst Israel has to offer.

Things worsen for David. In chapter twelve, the prophet Nathan condemns the king publicly. This public censure includes a curse that, according to the narrative, spurs a sequence of events that plunges the royal family into a cycle of immorality, vengeance, and dynastic instability. By implication, the community is also destabilized. Recall that socio-political stabilization is a critical point communicated in the dynastic oracle and 2 Sam 5-8. Consequently, I echo Van Seters’ idea that the David and Bathsheba episode criticizes certain elements of the royal ideology and its dynastic ideal, ideology that informs so much of the pro-Davidic material in Samuel (2009: 287–301).

Dynastic destabilization bubbles below the surface and intensifies as the David saga progresses. Like his father, Ammon’s libido consumes him. He ignores all discretion and violates Absalom’s sister. This of course incurs Absalom’s wrath, which is satisfied only when he kills Ammon. Absalom is then exiled for three years in Geshur and another two in his Jerusalem residence. Only when Joab intervenes does Absalom enjoy the presence of his father again. Yet Absalom was cunning and ambitious. The David saga informs the reader that he had his sights set on the throne. He orchestrates a coup, and if it were not for his desire for publicity and sexual gratification, his coup could very well have succeeded. Ultimately, Absalom is killed in battle, against the explicit commands of David.

Other revolts sprung up during David’s reign, but more telling is the David saga’s portrayal of the king throughout. David is characterized very differently in these episodes than in those of the apologetic material. He is neither the valiant warrior nor charismatic leader. Rather, he is often subject to his carnal desires, passive, and unable to control or influence those around him. The picture painted is by no means flattering, and it suggests that the Davidic dynasty is just like any other powerful family—subject to jealousy, violence, and political maneuvering.

The David saga concludes with 1 Kgs 1-2, and again the prophet Nathan is at the center of the events that unfold. Again, a critique of the dynastic ideal is one of the principles being communicated. According to 2 Sam 7, David is promised an heir *after* his death. “When your days are filled and you sleep with your fathers, I will establish your seed after you.” However, as Van Seters notes, Solomon’s succession is secured neither after David’s death nor through peaceful means (2009: 331–40). Rather, an ambitious faction within the royal court secures Solomon’s succession. Worse is the characterization of David. His physical needs are dependent on those

around him, and he is incapable of detecting the deception of those within his court. Yet most provocative are David's last words to Solomon. In 1 Kgs 2:1-4, David encourages Solomon to live in accord with Moses' law so to secure the dynasty after him. However, in vv. 5-9, David's advice quickly turns dark, exhorting his son to enact the repercussions against Joab and Shimei that he was incapable of enacting. In Joab's case, David calls for his execution. Unexpectedly, at the moment of his death David is able to channel the ambition and charisma of his early years, an intriguing way of concluding the David saga.

In summary, when the David saga begins in earnest in 2 Sam 9, the charismatic and righteous David essentially gives way to an immoral and passive David. Furthermore, the David saga communicates that one moment of indiscretion resulted in judgment that fostered a series of violent and vindictive events that consumed the Davidic house for the remainder of patriarch's life. In fact, sexual deviance is a motif that recurs throughout the presentation, functioning as the vice that repeatedly consumes prominent members of the royal family. Culminating these unfortunate events was the manner by which Solomon secured the throne, a bloody battle engineered by an ambitious faction within the royal court. This is hardly the peaceful transition to which the dynastic oracle of 2 Sam 7 alludes.

It is clear then that the author of the David saga did not have an overwhelmingly positive view of the Davidic dynasty. In his eyes, the Davidic dynasty was not above humanity's vices. Carnal desires, vengeance, ambition, and other negative qualities were present amongst members of the royal family. More importantly, the implications threatened the socio-political stability that the dynasty offered. However, and somewhat paradoxically, the author of the David saga never explicitly questions the legitimacy of the Davidic line. Therefore, perhaps the author of the David saga was more concerned with whether the dynasty is even capable of exhibiting the stability about which it boasts. Because the political power that accompanies a monarchy coupled with the depravity of humanity combine to provide a formidable obstacle for righteous and stable rule, the author hints at a deeper question. Can the community's ethos be kept faithfully amongst kings?

The author of the David saga communicated his reservations masterfully. By recounting certain events of David's lifetime with irony and subtle tones of skepticism in the immediate context of the literature that nurtured the ideas he was trying to critique,¹³ the author effectively tempers an overwhelmingly positive view of the Davidic dynasty with its dynastic ideal. Despite the positive implications that the Davidic monarchy offers Israel, the author emphasizes that it is an institution comprised of humans who are susceptible to temptation. Furthermore, the author emphasizes that there are repercussions to succumbing to those temptations,

repercussions that have implications for the dynasty and society at large. Clearly, the author of the David saga was skeptical, and such a perspective was probably fostered by experiencing the final days of Judah wherein incompetence and dynastic instability was at its highest degree.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I return to the construction and insertion of the so-called “Appendix.” I have suggested that the complex metaphor associated with the recurrence of *נִרְ* communicates the Lord is the ultimate source of the community’s vitality. Thus, the inclusion of the “Appendix” may represent a final layer to the literary development of the Samuel narratives. Moreover, it may represent a perceptual pendulum swing back toward the middle. Where the first layer was unashamedly pro-Davidic and convinced of the dynasty’s magnificence, “Account B,” or the David saga, seriously questioned—to the point of doubting—the dynasty’s abilities. The insertion of the “Appendix,” in a mediating fashion, allows the narrative as a whole to advocate a perception of the monarch that is neither hagiographic nor overly cynical. The Davidic dynasty is what the community needs, so long as it keeps the proper perspective. Literarily speaking, this layering demonstrates the erosion and virtual death of the apologetic form and ideal.

End Notes

¹ The following section contains a synthesis of discussions published elsewhere (Schreiner 2012a; 2014; 2016). They are reiterated here because they are foundational for this paper’s argument.

² An *inclusio* “establishes the main thought of the book (or passage), pointing to the essential concern of the book (or passage)” (Bauer and Traina 2011: 117). As precedent for the flexibility of where an *inclusio* may appear, see Bauer and Train’s discussion of Matthew’s *inclusio* (2011: 118). Brevard Childs and Walter Brueggemann have also argued that the Canonical form of 1 and 2 Samuel manifests an *inclusio* (Brueggemann 1988; Childs 1979: 271-80).

³ Frolov’s term “frame of reference” refers to the textually determined posture that the reader is to adopt initially (Frolov 2004: 29–32). For example, in the case of 1 and 2 Sam and 1 and 2 Kgs, the frame of reference the reader is to adopt initially is synchronic, for the text exists as a prose-narrative. In the case of the prophetic corpus, the frame of reference is often diachronic, for the superscriptions allude to the schematic organization of numerous oracles delivered throughout the prophet’s career.

⁴ While not the original proponent, see P. Kyle McCarter (1980-84: 2:16-19). The consensus appeals to the artistry and the intrusive nature of the chapters.

⁵ Saga is to be understood in Icelandic sense, not the German *Sagen* (Van Seters 2009: 42-49).

⁶ The specifics of Van Seters' redactional analysis are open to criticism. However, this essay is not the context for the technical discussion that is necessary. See my review for some examples (Schreiner 2012a). The value of Van Seters' work stems not from his specific conclusions but rather his general scheme.

⁷ Much of what follows depends upon the general conclusions of Van Seters. However, this essay proposes that the perspectives toward David and the dynastic idea expressed throughout 1 Sam-2 Sam 20 is not as radical and incompatible as what Van Seters suggests.

⁸ Invoking Fowler for issues of the Bible's literary development is not without precedent. See Donna Lee Petter's *The Book of Ezekiel and Mesopotamian City Laments* (2011).

⁹ For a more developed system, see Fowler's *Kinds of Literature* (1985).

¹⁰ Those charges included: 1) the accusation that David maneuvered himself politically at Saul's expense, 2) the accusation that David was a military deserter, an outlaw, and a mercenary, and 3) the accusation that David was implicit in the murders of Saul, Abner, and Ishbaal.

¹¹ Any discussion on these sites, particularly Khirbet Qeiyafa, is a glaring lacuna in Van Seters' work. For a discussion of Khirbet Qeiyafa and its effect on biblical studies, see David B. Schreiner (2012b).

¹² Van Seters argues that the author of the David saga certain episodes before 2 Sam 9.

¹³ In this sense, Van Seters' idea that the David saga used the earlier account as a "framework" for his presentation is helpful.

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