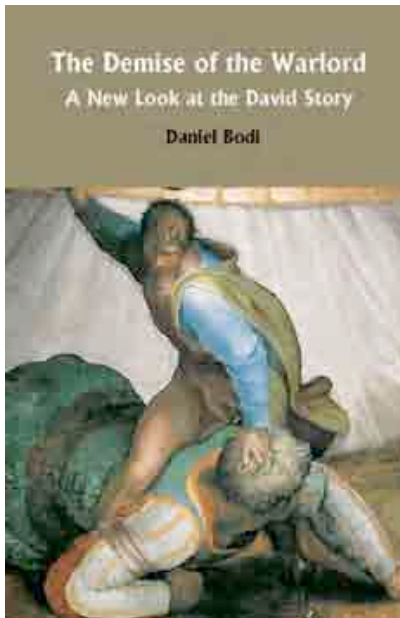


RBL 12/2011



Bodi, Daniel

The Demise of the Warlord: A New Look at the David Story

Hebrew Bible Monographs 26

Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2010. Pp. vii + 270.

Hardcover. \$85.00. ISBN 9781906055820.

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The figure of David is an ambiguous one in the book of Samuel. His shining star rises throughout 1 Samuel, reaching its zenith in the first several chapters of 2 Samuel. After Nathan conveys a divine promise to him (2 Sam 7), however, the meteoric rise of this new king of Israel and Judah halts abruptly. Within the span of only eight subsequent chapters, David and his kingdom have become embroiled in a seemingly intractable international conflict, he has disgraced himself with the wife of one of his soldiers, murdered her husband, lost one child emotionally to an incestuous rape, lost another physically to murder, and lost the loyalty of a third, who launches a rebellion against him. The luster is tarnished, and the reader is forced to question whether and how David's reputation may be salvaged.

Bodi's book examines two of these chapters (2 Sam 11–12), asking whether the opprobrium with which the narrative treats David in the aftermath of the Bathsheba affair might be linked to a larger motif prevalent throughout the ancient Near East. This motif, he argues, comes in two thrusts. First, there exists the common ideal that warlords must lead a "warlike existence"; dallying with women and avoiding war is worthy of rebuke. The second aspect of the motif is the belief that resident aliens remain a somewhat protected class and may not be treated with impunity. Bodi argues cogently, through both

a literary and historical-critical analysis of the text, that these two themes find their expression in the episode of David's "dalliance" with Bathsheba.

In a brief introduction (1–4), Bodi lays out the problem, provides a helpful overview of the book's structure, and, finally, discusses an interpretive principle adopted from the work of Moshe Held: "if one can show how insights gained from the study of newly discovered ancient Near Eastern texts have been anticipated by medieval rabbis who did not have access to these buried ancient Semitic documents, then the probability that one's interpretation is plausible may be increased" (4). Bodi relies heavily (and fruitfully) on this principle in the remaining chapters of the book.

Bodi provides a history of research on 2 Sam 11–12 in an initial chapter (5–18). This sketch is dutiful and will be familiar to anyone who has worked with this text. But the creativity in Bodi's work relies on his fluid movement between modes of analysis: the history of literary research serves as a *précis* for a short reflection on the *historicity* of the Davidic kingdom. In Bodi's opinion, "The use of the term 'Monarchy' is a misnomer and should be abandoned when talking of Saul, David and Solomon. ... Therefore, in describing the reigns of these rulers, in the present work I have adopted the expressions 'tribal chieftain' or 'warlord', believing that they better describe their position among ancient Israelite tribes. Moreover, the domains they governed less resembled full-scale 'states' and more 'chiefdoms'" (16). Although there is a growing literature on the state/chiefdom debate that Bodi has not been able to fully engage in the space of this monograph, his recognition of the variety of governance-types is commendable; nonetheless, eschewal of "state" terminology is an interpretive move allowing him to draw connections more closely with the rhetoric of Amorite chieftains (without asking specifically about the status of their territorial holdings in Mari, for example). All in all, I believe Bodi's inclination to identify early Israel's political structure as of a similar type to that of the early Amorite "chiefdoms" of Syria (which are usually spoken of as "kingdoms") is correct. I would be less inclined to make such a hard-and-fast distinction between kingdoms and chiefdoms, however, and would point to the following comment of Bodi's as an example of the degree to which he himself permits some (nonpatrimonial) bureaucracy to have infiltrated the nascent "state": "David had adopted a new manner of exercising power that is different from traditional Bedouin warlords. He does the fighting beyond his borders through the medium of his general, officers, messengers and subordinates sent to do his bidding" (24).

Chapters 2 (19–70) and 3 (71–100) comprise a detailed literary reading of the biblical text. After providing his own translation of the text with a few annotations noting important repetitions of lexemes or other stylistic devices in the Hebrew (19–22), Bodi launches into his examination, discussing problems as diverse as the structure of the

Ammonite war accounts (2 Sam 10:1–19; 11:1; 12:26–31; pp. 22–28); the timing of the New Year and, concomitantly, of campaign season (28–32); the meaning and intention of the reading מלאכים in 11:1 (33); compositional causes and literary effects of “original” versus “secondary inclusio” (35–38); the historico-literary parallels between cities and women (38–41); the name, age, and status of Bathsheba (50–56); and many others. Throughout this analysis, Bodi demonstrates a solid and diverse knowledge of previous interpretations (both modern and rabbinic), deep familiarity with ancient Near Eastern cognate literature, and a keenly sensitive reader’s eye.

After establishing his own reading of 2 Sam 11–12, Bodi includes two chapters detailing the ancient Near Eastern literary *topoi* that he finds particularly important in comprehending the biblical text: chapters 4 (101–37) and 6 (157–91). The former investigates the Akkadian-language (specifically, Amorite) instantiations of what Bodi calls “the Bedouin ideal of the warlike existence.” As Bodi memorably claims, “The ideology expressed here is the exact opposite of the modern slogan ‘Make Love, Not War’” (126). The latter chapter details Egyptian, Hittite, and Mesopotamian texts implying disdain for the ill treatment of the “resident alien” (Akk. *ubāru*) and argues for Uriah’s identity as an Aramean (i.e., Western Semite) of some sort, rather than being of Anatolian Hittite origin. Bodi’s analysis of what is meant by Akkadian *ubārum* (and its Hittite reflexes) in various literary corpora (167–81) is of particular note for its detailed argumentation and philological rigor. In each of these chapters Bodi adduces ample literary evidence for his theory, usually providing both the normalized (but sometimes merely transcribed) Akkadian version of the text and an annotated translation, as well as a thorough exposition. In short, it is not necessary for the reader to know Akkadian in order to be able to follow along, although familiarity with the language will allow the reader to track each of the arguments a bit more closely.

Intervening between these two discussions is “a brief account of the history of Mari and the importance of the Amorites for Biblical Studies” (ch. 5, pp. 138–56). Although this sequence of chapters may strike some as somewhat forced, the necessity of inserting the historical chapter between the two comparative literary chapters can be explained: it serves to show that the literature from Mari deriding those men who “eat,” “drink,” and “lie down” (i.e., have sexual intercourse) while their compatriots are off at battle has a clearly identifiable context in a society that is undergoing a transition from a more segmentary and nomadic organization to a more urban and bureaucratic organization—it is the former ethos from which this trope derives. Bodi’s discussion of the social and economic organization of Mari’s society is well-documented and nuanced, although picky readers may balk at his use of the term “Bedouin” to designate the practitioners of enclosed nomadism or transhumant pastoralism (a bit more could have been stated at the outset, I think, separating Bodi’s “Bedouin” from the specifically Arabic-speaking groups

designated by the same moniker today). Similarly, Bodi uses the rather vague term “nomadism” a bit too frequently without specification or elaboration. Despite this potential for confusion in the mind of modern readers, Bodi’s brief analysis helpfully summarizes a great deal of data and serves as a welcome corrective to overly simplified views of ancient Near Eastern social structure.

Chapter 7 (192–211) discusses “the retribution principle in 2 Samuel 12 and its Amorite and ancient Near Eastern background.” Bodi’s goal in this chapter is to have us recognize that the principle of divine retribution for wrongdoing is not an invention of Hebrew literature but is rather a much older, demonstrably Amorite, *Weltanschauung*, one that may be found in later Greek and Egyptian texts as well. Although some of the examples are stronger than others (for example, the comparison of Sargon’s punishment in the *Weidner Chronicle* with Saul’s cultic misdeeds in 2 Sam 13 [200–202] is somewhat loose), Bodi adduces enough similarities here at least to make the suggestion a credible one worthy of further consideration. The most troublesome aspect, though, of this endeavor is that he has not gone through a full reading of the biblical text of 1-2 Samuel and analyzes it solely from a synchronic standpoint. The final section of this chapter asks, “When could the Story of the House of David have been written?” To this question, Bodi responds with a somewhat nebulous discussion of previous suggestions. He concludes, finally, that a postexilic dating of the Story of the House of David is unnecessary; all the themes central to the plot of 2 Sam 11–12 were currently in circulation well before the end of the Judahite monarchy.

A final, somewhat ancillary chapter 8 (212–24) rounds out the book’s bulk. In it Bodi discusses Rashi’s suggestion that Uriah had given his wife a *gēṭ*, a letter of divorce given by departing soldiers to their wives, which would become effective retroactive to the date given should the soldier die in battle. This rabbinic tradition parallels similar Assyrian legal conventions (216–20), even if we cannot establish a precise mode of transmission whereby the Assyrian legal tradition was adopted by the Israelite or Judahite legal system. (Bodi does posit, however, that such transmission may have occurred directly between these two cultures during the Neo-Assyrian or Neo-Babylonian periods [221].)

In a short conclusion (225–28) Bodi recapitulates the main points of his argument: “the *topos* seems to have been a literary reflection of the Amorite Bedouin warlord ideology dating from the eighteenth century BCE as attested in three Mari texts. ... The same ideology found further literary elaboration ... in the ninth-century BCE Babylonian *Poem of Erra*” (226). But in these final pages of the book, Bodi adds a complicating hypothesis to what has, until then, been a relatively straightforward argument: “The novelty of the Hebrew narrative is the *deconstruction of the traditional warlord ideology*. ... While David is blamed for his shameful and criminal behavior, history nevertheless continues with his

descendants. ... The critique of the traditional warlord ideology, showing the uselessness of trust in military valor and bravura, might have occurred in the late pre-exilic period when Judah repeatedly faced superior military power—the Assyrians in 705 [sic] and the Babylonians from 605 BCE onward.” This critique Bodi locates in wisdom circles (227).

This provocative and underargued closure to the book is jarring, both because of the degree of its speculative impulse following an otherwise tightly argued and cogent analysis of the biblical text and because of its implications and assumptions concerning the compositional unity and date of 2 Sam 11–12. Although the reader may not always agree with Bodi’s exposition of the biblical text in chapters 2 and 3, his arguments are cleverly intriguing and worthy of further reflection. (For my own part, I find Bodi’s assertion that Uriah is portrayed as having sensed little or nothing of David’s exploitation of Bathsheba during the former’s absence [e.g., 60–62] difficult to affirm on the face of it; nonetheless, the interpretive upshot from this assertion—namely, that Uriah’s rebuke in 2 Sam 11:11 is an example of the larger, pan-Semitic trope that Bodi wants to highlight—becomes an important adjunct to his larger argument.) But this final, casually considered hypothesis seems to neglect the possibilities of redactional elaboration and of subsequent (re)interpretation: a number of recent volumes (e.g., Jacques Vermeylen’s *La loi du plus fort: Histoire de la rédaction des récits davidiques de 1 Samuel à 1 Rois 2* [BETL 154; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2000]) have argued that 2 Sam 11–12 underwent a long process of redactional revision. One must wonder, then, the degree to which the Amorite trope, “Make War, Not Love,” was in fact indigenous to the passage’s *Grundschrift* (I would affirm that it was) and—*contra* Bodi, if I have understood him correctly—indicative of the author’s(/authors’) true sympathies. Is it possible that the story in its original form was in fact intended to levy this particularly Amorite accusation against a king who had essentially been caught (or who was at least plausibly accused of) “eating, drinking, and lying,” only to have received interpretive revision in the ensuing decades and centuries? Or, if Bodi is correct in his assessment that the *topos* was wielded ironically in its earliest appearance, is it plausibly much earlier than the seventh century B.C.E.—perhaps even early enough to serve as a justification of the many bedmates of Solomon (who is, after all, claimed to have been “a Lover, not a Fighter,” in another popular formulation)?

A bibliography (229–255), citation index (256–65) and author index (266–70) round out the book.

All in all, this volume is both fascinating and thought-inducing. Its primary audience should be scholars and students interested in the history of the interpretation of Samuel, although it will also undoubtedly be of interest to anyone concerned with the literary interactions between ancient Israel and the wider ancient Near East. I am pleased to

recommend it as a captivating interpretation of the David and Bathsheba affair, a complex and provocative text in its own right.