
The progression of chapters 2, 3, and 4 is not coincidental. According to the opinion of the author, the Saul-David tradition grew gradually from the end (the stories about David’s ascension to the throne) to the beginning (the stories about David’s youth). In Adam’s view, this writing process started not before the seventh century B.C.E., reached its peak in postexilic times, and continued until the Hellenistic era. If this holds true, this would mean that many centuries lie between the time being described and the time of the actual account, thus making the books of Samuel purely fictional literature.

In the first chapter Adam attempts to build the material and methodological foundation for this hypothesis. Its first section (1–10) is apparently meant to be a research history, although it is not; some research positions briefly appear but are not discussed in terms of either their context or their intention. Early on Adam discloses his own opinion, according to which “the narratives about the early monarchy are a mythological prehistory narrative with a legitimizing function for the later kingship in Israel and Judah” (15). To support this, alleged analogies of the ancient Near East are cited (the Etana Epic, the chronicles of
Sargon the Great and of Naram-Sin, as well as Mesopotamian omena [16–20]). The SaulDavid narratives are said to be basically nothing but “allegories” (21; see also 73)—a significant and highly consequential choice of concept. Indeed, the subsequent text analyses bear the traits of allegorical exegesis, when they interpret the Saul-David stories in the light of something with which they have nothing to do (at least in my view): events and texts of the seventh to third centuries. Such an approach could make sense if this was under the label of “intertextual interpretation,” as the playful, postmodern linking of arbitrarily chosen texts alone at the level of perception. But the author asserts his claim to render literary-historical judgments!

A section dealing with the hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur that is focused on the term “mimesis” (21–28) is said help one to understand the books of Samuel as freely created literature in which later reality is fictitiously reflected back into an earlier time. According to Adam, “the Judean historiography of the books of Kings is the starting point and reference framework for the narratives of the early monarchy” (29). The obvious possibility that the figure of Saul is anchored in the genuine northern Israelite tradition (see, e.g., Georg Hentschel, Saul: Schuld, Reue und Tragik eines „Gesalbten“ [Biblische Gestalten 7; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2003], esp. 16–20) does not enter into consideration, due to the author’s preconceived notion that all must be Judean. In his eyes, the Saul of the books of Samuel gives the picture “of an incapable and therefore actually illegitimate king” (3), while David appears all around as an ideal king. On a certain text level of the books of Samuel, David might indeed stand for the Judean south and Saul for the Israelite north, but the kind of black-and-white painting that Adam believes he has discovered is hardly justified. The biblical narrators think in much too differentiated a manner and their craftsmanship is much too refined for such a crude judgment.

The subsequent chapters 2–5 contain the already-mentioned allegorical interpretations, as shown in the following examples. (1) The account of the overtaking of Jerusalem by David (2 Sam 5:6–8) solely serves to prepare for the later accounts of the burial of Judean kings in Jerusalem (e.g., 1 Kgs 15:8, 24; pp. 31–33). (2) The account of the building of the walls of Jerusalem by David (2 Sam 5:9b) points to their meaning during the later attacks from the Assyrians and Babylonians (33–34). (3) The account of David’s rule in 2 Sam 5:4–5 generally presupposes the corresponding accounts in the books of Kings and anticipates specifically those from 1 Kgs 2:11 (34: the unrounded number of “seven and one half” in 2 Sam 5:5 makes exactly the opposite probable). (4) David’s victory over the Philistines according to 2 Sam 5:17–21 is linked to 2 Kgs 18:8, where a war between Hezekiah and the Philistines is mentioned. This originates for its part from the time of Zedekiah. (Does it not, however, find its confirmation in the annals of Sennacherib? See ANET, 287). In late postexilic times a further final (eschatological) Philistine onslaught
was added: 2 Sam 5:22–25 (37–42). (5) The idea of a fraternity between Israel and Judah has been transferred from the postexilic passage 1 Kgs 12:21–24 to 2 Sam 2:25–31 and 3:22–27 (50–53). (6) The narrative of the assassination of Ishbaal in 2 Sam 4 “is a narrative reflex of the murders of Israelite kings” (54). (7) The list of David’s sons in 2 Sam 3:2–5 “stems from the following David narratives” (55—but where does the name Chileab and the other names in 2 Sam 5:14–15 come from?). (8) That Ishbaal’s dominion is depicted as so small (2 Sam 2:9) and his reign so short (2:10) is explained by the anti-Israelite tendency of the texts (56–57; it is remarkable how easily important historical information is to be squandered here). (9) The assassination of Ishbaal in Mahanaim/ Gilead (2 Sam 4) “plays … on the disposal of Pekahiah with fifty Gileadites (2Kgs 15:25)” (68). (10) The mention of Geba in 1 Kgs 15:22 is “the origin of the traditions” of Gibeah and Gibeon in the Saul-David narratives (73). (11) The “Achish-David narratives reflect Israelite-Judean history, particularly in the ninth and eighth century” (78); David’s behavior toward Achish is a justification for the submissiveness of Manasseh toward the Assyrians (81). (12) The dialogue between Saul and David in 1 Sam 24:10–22 revolves allegedly around the distinction between intentional and unintentional killing and is based on the relevant legal regulations in Exod 21:13–14; Num 35:23; Deut 19:11–13 (102–6). (13) David’s flight to places such as Keilah, En-Gedi, and Ziklag is derived from the province list in Josh 15, in which exactly these places mark the Judean south border; that this list is dated from the seventh century gives a *terminus a quo* for the flight stories (120). (14) “The execution of the YHWH priests of Nob [1 Sam 22] reflects the slaughter of the Baal prophets and priests in 2 Kgs10:25 by Jehu” (125), and the introduction of the Edomite Doeg presupposes the exilic-postexilic enmity to Edom (126). (15) With Jonathan, the Judean tradition creates for itself “a representative of Israel who stands for a credible concept of federal alliance between Israel and Judah” (136); borrowing words from the “postexilic youth history of Samuel” shows that this happened only very late (137; how, then, should we judge David’s lamentation about Jonathan and Saul in 2 Sam 1:19–27?). (16) In 1 Sam 18:18–30 David is portrayed as lowly and poor “and to that extent as a messianic figure. His stylization … developed in postexilic times” (140). (17) The fact that David had “success” according to 1 Sam 18:5 is reminiscent of Josh 1:7; 8; 2 Kgs 18:7; Ps 1:3 and points to a “sapiential, late-Deuteronomistic interpretive text layer” (142). (18) The shorter LXX version of 1 Sam 17 was developed in the late Persian period, the longer one of the MT not before the third century; the Hellenistically shaped “diatribe” in 17:43–47 points to this (150). (19) Because 1 Sam 16:18 is dependent on Isa 11:2, the narrative of David as a music therapist in 1 Sam 16:14–23 cannot be preexilic (152–53). (20) The anointment story in 1 Sam 16:1–13 is again younger, and 1 Sam 10:17–27 developed from it (158–60). Since, therefore, the course of Saul’s kingship is told from a Judean perspective, the practice of choice by lot must be “principally culpable” and Saul’s “election” (1 Sam 10:24) can only be meant to be “ironic” (161).
Such ease and associative skills in handling the texts is astonishing, but the reproach of a quick simplification cannot be made. Strings of argumentation and conclusions are quite complicated. Like a detective, the author uncovers connections with alleged comparison texts. Occasionally within individual sections of the books of Samuel the most difficult text layering is maintained. The repeated occurrence of a motif is never explained as the result of an author’s literary artistry but always as diachronic text growth, always from the end forward: such as Saul’s repeated spear throwing (1 Sam 20:33 to 19:9–10 to 18:10–11), the double sparing of Saul’s life by David (1 Sam 26 to 1 Sam 24), the victory song of the women (1 Sam 29:5 to 21:12 to 18:6–7), and David’s defection to the Philistines (1 Sam 27:4–12 to 21:11–16). With all this, Adam strives for a clear style, which should reflect competence; however, it sometimes produces inconsistencies (e.g., “the act gives the structure of the reflection of the role of a vassal” [78]). In all other respects, the book is worked carefully; the number of misprints and/or writing errors is small.

In the last chapter Adam turns to the source of the alleged literary development. First, in a few pages he brushes aside Noth’s theory of the Deuteronomistic History (169–73)—probably because it stands in the way of Adam’s hypothesis of a continuously evolving process of tradition from the seventh to the third century. Following Jepsen, he then develops the outlines of the “Synchronistic Chronicles” of the kings of Judah and Israel: it is supposed to have originally reached from Solomon to Hezekiah, originated around 700 B.C.E., and be arranged according to the model of Mesopotamian kings chronicles. Their topics were successions of reign and dynasty, alliances and wars, uprisings and rebellions, building activities, and burial locations of the kings. It was then updated gradually—of course, only with Judean data—up to the fall of Judah (174–206).

This part of the work belongs to those to which the reviewer can relate the best. (Besides, one can positively point to the quite illuminating discussion of the relationship between David and Achish [73–77] or the comparison between the oracle practice in the David narratives and the divination practice of the Assyrian kings in the era of Sargon [127–30].) But in the end the author demonstrates again how swiftly he arrives from relatively solid insights to completely speculative assertions: the Saul-David traditions, in Adam’s opinion, are “narrative extensions of the Synchronistic Chronicles” (as stated in a subheading on 206); they wrote the relationship between the Judean and Israelite kings and their relationship to superior rulers backward so that an “early monarchy in Israel” was created (206–11).

This procedure, with all due respect, is reminiscent of a computer animation in which a virtual driver steers his vehicle in a more or less disciplined manner through a defined, manageable practice area—but then suddenly breaks through a barrier and races through the streets of the adjacent city, disregarding traffic lights, one-way streets, crosswalks, and
so forth. Other traffic users play at best minor roles; they simply need to get out of the way. In the end, one rubs one’s eyes and asks: What happened? Actually nothing, almost nothing.

I have the feeling of a certain perplexity but also that of respect for so much daring courage. I gladly recognize the indisputable scholarliness of the author. Extraordinary amounts of often-remote information and hidden research opinions have been taken into account; different areas of scholarly knowledge are inspected (general literary aesthetics, classical antiquity, ancient Near East), which testify to the far-reaching interests of the author. In this way, one may well benefit here and there from the book. Whether it will leave clear marks in the progress of research, however, remains to be seen.