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# Intrigues at the Royal Court

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## ABSTRACT

*Saul used his son and daughters as pawns in his plan to kill David, his arch enemy. Contrary to his plans, Jonathan and Michal aided David. David's goal was to reach the throne thus he befriended and fooled them. It was a sympathetic author from the house of David who exaggerated the description of love between David and Jonathan and the tense relationship between Saul and his son Jonathan. By doing so he tried to legitimize David's right to the throne.*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Examination of texts from the Ancient Near East shows that deception was a way of life. Even the gods engaged in deception and trickery. In Mesopotamian literature Ea the god of great wisdom and cunning appears to be a trickster. In the myth of Adapa, the god Ea fears that the great god Anu was planning to offer Adapa the food and drink of eternal life. To prevent Adapa from accepting it, Ea tricked him into believing that the food and drink are deadly. Adapa listened to the advice and did not accept the food and drink and therefore humans are mortals.<sup>1</sup> Similarly in Egyptian literature four deities are mentioned as engaging in deception: Re, Isis, Horace, and Seth. In one papyrus Isis's talent for deception is mentioned:

"Now, Isis was a wise woman. Her heart was more devious than millions among men; she was more selective than millions among the gods; she was more exacting than millions among the blessed dead."<sup>2</sup>

The Hebrew Bible, with its high moral standards did not approve deceitfulness as we read in the Ten Commandments (Ex 20,7). However, deception was a way of life, and the Hebrew Bible contains many stories of trickery and deception. The patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob used deception. Abraham and Isaac passed their wives as their sisters, and Jacob deceived his older father Isaac to steal the blessing from his brother Esau.<sup>3</sup> No different is the story of Saul and the establishment of the monarchy. All the main characters; Saul, his son Jonathan, his daughters Merab and Michal, and Saul's arch enemy David, are engaged in deceptive acts. King Saul used his daughters in his battle against David. He offered his daughter Merab and later Michal to David but then negated on those promises. Michal who was supposed to help her father in his feud with David turned against her father and helped David, but later despised David. David, like Saul, used Merab and Michal, he did not love them but used them for his own personal gains. Saul wanted his son Jonathan to replace him, but Jonathan, in contrast to his father's wishes, made a covenant with David and concealed his meetings with him. He aided his father's arch enemy. So, what led him to abandon his father and to aid his father's foe, how can we explain the covenant between Jonathan and David? What did Jonathan gain from it? Was David sincere about the covenant and his relationship with Jonathan? Why was Saul, who tried to trap and kill David, so zealous in his pursuit of him? We will examine the different acts of deceptions to understand the

<sup>1</sup> Speiser, Adapa, 101-103.

<sup>2</sup> Legend, Ritner, 33-34.

<sup>3</sup> In the Jacob cycle all the protagonists take part and play a role in deception: Jacob, Rebecca, Laban, Leah, Rachel, Simeon, and Levi, Hamor and his son Shechem. Later in the Joseph's stories Jacob's sons, deceived their father, Tamar -Judah's daughter- in- law paused as a harlot and slept with Judah, Joseph put his brothers through a series of test and ordered to put the silver goblet in Benjamin's bag and afterwards accused the brothers with theft.

rationale behind them, to see what our protagonist tried to gain by those acts.

## II. SAUL VERSES JONATHAN

Although Jonathan is one of the main characters in the book of Samuel, he does not appear alone. Jonathan is always mentioned with his father Saul or with David. From the start, tension exists between Saul and Jonathan.<sup>4</sup> This tension will intensify with David's arrival at Saul's court. In Jonathan's second attack against the Philistine garrison, we read: "but he did not tell his father" (1 Sam 14,1). At first glance, it is possible that Jonathan did not reveal his plans to his father to guard the element of surprise. Had he known, Saul probably would not have approved his plan. Another possible explanation holds that Jonathan wanted to glorify himself, not his father. While Jonathan did not inform his father of his plan to attack the Philistine garrison, he does tell David that his father, Saul, wants to kill him (19,1). Later he again informs David about his father's plans (20,9). The narrator inserted these pieces of information to illuminate the tension between father and son. Jonathan repeatedly sides with David and conceals his relationship with David from his father.

To further demonstrate the gap between father and son, the text says that Saul wanted to kill David, yet on the other hand, Jonathan was "*very fond*" of David (1 Sam 19,1). The narrator used the words "*very fond*" to show the disparity between father and son. In the previous chapter ,Saul's servants told David that the king was "*fond of him*," but evidently, they were not being honest (18,22). Originally Saul planned to kill David indirectly "by the hand of the Philistines" (18,17; 21; 25),however his plan failed therefore, he urged his son Jonathan and all his courtiers to kill David (19,1). He tried to enlist his son to join him in his murderous plan. But Jonathan who was "*very fond*" of David went directly to him and informed him about his father's plan. So, he advised David to hide which saved David's life. Jonathan acts contrary to his father's wishes; he aids his father's enemy. He also promised David that he would

<sup>4</sup> Long, Reign, 101; Whitelam, *Just King*, 78.

speak on his behalf and keep him informed about what he discovered; in other words, he was David's spy. At this point, Jonathan tried to mediate between David and Saul. Jonathan is torn between his loyalties to his father and to his father arch enemy. In his plea to save David, Jonathan spoke well of David.<sup>5</sup> Jonathan stressed the fact that David did not sin against his father Saul, therefore, his father should not sin against David. He admonished his father to not shed David's blood. For a while Jonathan succeeds, since Saul agreed with him and swore that he would not kill David (19,6).

### 2.1 Saul's Fury Against Jonathan

An open rift between Saul and his son Jonathan is displayed at a sacrificial meal. What is not clear however, is why after three escapes recorded in chapter 19, did David returned to Gibeah. More so, what made him think that Saul would expect to see him in his usual place at the king's table? When Saul noticed David's absence, it appears he forgot about his murderous intentions towards David. He thinks that David's absence has to do with ritual uncleanness; therefore, he asked Jonathan why was David absent? In reply to his father's question, Jonathan answered with a lie that was arranged between him and David. Accordingly, David had to attend a family feast; therefore, he asked his permission to leave for Bethlehem. Jonathan used the phrase "let me slip away" to describe David's request. The verb *mlt* appears several times to describe David's flight from Saul in the previous chapter (v. 10, 11, 12, 17, 18).<sup>6</sup> The usage of that phrase is striking since it provoked Saul's anger. In the previous chapter, it described Michal's assistance to help David escape; now it is Jonathan who helps Saul's archenemy. The mention of the sacrifice also contributed to Saul's anger; it reminded Saul of David's rumored anointing by Samuel in a similar

<sup>5</sup> McCarter points to the Amarna archives, where the king of Jerusalem Abdi-Heba requested the Egyptian scribes act as his advocate and "speak good/beautiful words" to the king. McCarter recognizes the political overtones in Jonathan's words; that David has done well, that he acted with the loyalty that he owes his king. See: McCarter, *I Samuel*, 322.

<sup>6</sup> Edelman, *King Saul*, 159; Fokkelman, *Narrative*, 335.

situation.<sup>7</sup> Not surprisingly Saul's reaction was harsh. He insulted Jonathan and called him a son of a perverse rebellious woman; he puts doubt on his mother's qualities.<sup>8</sup> Saul is very angry with Jonathan since he sided with his enemy. Jonathan forsakes him uniting with David, an act that casts a shadow on him and his mother who gave birth to him. His friendship with David was embarrassing, as it was embarrassing to the nakedness (*'erwo*) of his mother.<sup>9</sup>

Saul commanded Jonathan to bring David to him because he is "a son of death."<sup>10</sup> In contrast to his son Jonathan, who was naïve, Saul realized the danger that David posed; "For as long as the son of Jesse lives on earth, neither you nor your kingdom will be secure" (20,31). He tried to appeal to Jonathan's self-interest as the future king.<sup>11</sup> Despite his father's harsh words Jonathan still tried to defend David. He asked why should David be put to death, what did he do? This is the same question that David asked Jonathan 'What did I do?' at the beginning of the chapter (20,1). In response to Jonathan's question Saul tried to kill him, he cast his spear at Jonathan. Jonathan finds himself in the same situation that David experienced when Saul tried to kill him twice. Jobling points to the merging of identities and roles played in the portrayal of David and Jonathan in these chapters.<sup>12</sup> According to Josephus, Saul was eager to kill him but: "he did not indeed do what he intended, because he was hindered by his friends."<sup>13</sup> Saul was so consumed with hatred and fear of David that he considered every ally of David as his enemy, even his own son.

<sup>7</sup> Edelman, King Saul, 159.

<sup>8</sup> 4QSamb and LXX have "son of rebellious maidens," and McCarter accordingly reads "You son of a rebellious servant girl!" Saul accuses Jonathan of forsaking him, being "son of" meant member of the class, but Jonathan forsakes those to whom he owed allegiance see McCarter, I Samuel, 343.

<sup>9</sup> The Hebrew word *'erwo*, most often refers to genitalia, which seems to suggest that through his disgraceful actions, Jonathan also brought shame to his mother.

<sup>10</sup> The Targum translates here "for he is a man deserving death."

<sup>11</sup> Gordon, I&II Samuel, 168.

<sup>12</sup> Jobling, Sense, 14.

<sup>13</sup> Josephus, Ant. 6.11.9.

Until this point Jonathan tried to convince himself that his father did not have any lethal intentions, but now he realized the true goal of his father. The rift between father and son is on full display. Jonathan rose from the table with rage, he was so angry with his father that he left without asking permission and without bidding farewell. He was so grieved that he did not eat that day. Jonathan was shocked by his humiliation; his father not only rebuked him in public but also tried to kill him. Klein suggested that Jonathan was more shocked at his father's humiliation of David.<sup>14</sup> Jonathan resented the wrong done to David, his father referred to David as the son of Jesse and a son of death. However, we believe that he was angry over his own humiliation in addition to David's humiliation.

## 2.2 Not a Mad King

Many passages in the book of Samuel portray Saul negatively- as a paranoid man who chased demons obsessed with the pursuit of David. More than once the text says that Saul feared David (18,12; 15; 29). At first it is not clear why Saul the king of Israel feared him. But a close reading of the biblical text reveals that Saul had good reasons to fear David. Saul understood that David planned to replace him as a king. As Saul's armor-bearer and leading the troops in the battlefield made him popular, all Israel and Judah loved him (v.16). The word "love" has the connotation of political loyalty here.<sup>15</sup> David received the loyalty of the troops because of his victories against the Philistines. Saul was acclaimed king after his victory against the Ammonite (1 Sam 11), he controlled his kingdom with his military troops. Now it is David who leads the troops that increased his popularity which caused Saul to fear him. In the ancient world kings feared for their life, many times they were overthrown by their own military leaders. Saul was fearing for his life and for the life of his son Jonathan. He wanted to create a dynasty that Jonathan would inherit. Therefore, he tried to speak to his son's conscience by telling him that

<sup>14</sup> Klein, 1 Samuel, 209.

<sup>15</sup> Moran, Ancient, 77-87; McCarter, I Samuel 33, 313.

his kingdom would not be established if the son of Jesse is alive (1 Sam 20,31).

The impression that David obtained power to rival Saul is a realistic one. Not only did David lead the troops, he also tried to sway the people to his side which is indicated by Saul's own words to his people: "Listen, men of Benjamin! Will the son of Jesse give fields and vineyards to every one of you? And will he make all of you captains of thousands or captains of hundreds? Is that why all of you have conspired against me? (22,7-8). David was a shrewd cunning man, he led the troops in the battlefield, befriended Jonathan the heir to the throne, and married Michal the king's daughter. His aim was to get closer to the royal family to have them support him and to seize power. He got closer to the royal family and he fooled Saul. At first Saul did not grasp the danger that David posed to his dynasty. Had he known, he would not have allowed David to undermine him.

David's rising popularity among the people following his victories against the Philistines led Saul to realize the danger that David posed to his kingship. Therefore, he started to fear him and planned to kill him. McKenzie suggested that Saul's pursuit of David is a result of a failed coup attempt although he maintained that it is impossible to prove it.<sup>16</sup> But reading the text indeed points to this direction. David led a group of rebels which means that he had his own army ready at any time to overthrow the king. He fought independently without Saul's aid and approval against the Philistines (1 Sam 23,1-4), and the Amalekites (1 Sam 30,17-20); all of this leads us to the conclusion that at some point he tried to overthrow the king.

Still the question remains; why did David failed in his attempt to seize the throne? The simple answer is that he did not receive enough support. The declaration that all Israel and Judah showed loyalty to David is an exaggeration (18,16). The description of David's flight from Saul in chapters 20-27 reveals that David and his people were unwelcomed in Judah which is David's own tribe.

<sup>16</sup> McKenzie, King David, 87-88.

David had to ask the king of Moab to let his father and mother stay in his territory so they would be protected (1 Sam 22,3). He experienced hostility from the inhabitants of Maon, Carmel and Zipah who were willing to surrender him to Saul. It is suggested that David was rejected by the people of the Judean hill territory because they feared Saul. This is unlikely, if they sided with David, we would expect to find some deeds that would show some support.<sup>17</sup>

What emerges from the stories about Saul and Jonathan is a rift and mistrust between father and son. Saul wanted to create a dynasty where his son Jonathan would replace him as king. He tried to use Jonathan in his fights against David. But Jonathan did the opposite he helped his father's archenemy David to escape. He became a loyal friend of David, the man who would be king instead of him. In the first part of the stories, Jonathan is portrayed as a military hero who fought for freedom from the Philistine oppression. These stories which stress Jonathan's heroism were written by the supporters of the house of Saul. On the other hand, supporters of David wrote the stories that describe the friendship between Jonathan and David. These stories came to legitimize David's right to the throne. Therefore, not surprisingly, we read about the rift and mistrust between Jonathan and Saul. Yet, despite all of it, with all the negatively that describes the tense relations between Jonathan and Saul, Jonathan did not desert his father. In the final battle on Mount Gilboa, he went and fought with his father against the Philistines, where he and his two brothers died.

### III. JONATHAN AND DAVID

Following David's defeat of Goliath, Jonathan's soul became attached to David's soul and Jonathan loved him as himself (1 Sam 18,1). This is the first time that the two met and they became "soul brothers." According to Ackroyd, Jonathan felt bound to him by affection and political loyalty.<sup>18</sup> The friendship between the two is repeated in the text (20,18); and when the two

<sup>17</sup> Brooks, Saul, 71.

<sup>18</sup> Ackroyd, Verb, 213-14.

finally were separated “they kissed each other and wept together” (20,41). In David’s lament for Saul and Jonathan, we read: “My brother Jonathan, you were most dear to me, your love was wonderful to me more than the love of women” (2 Sam 1,26). According to McKenzie there is an exaggeration in the description of this relationship. The two he suggested may have been friends once. But David break from Saul was also a break from Jonathan. Jonathan did not abandon his father and did not follow David into the wilderness. Instead, at the end he was loyal to his father and fought with him in the battle against the Philistines where they both died.<sup>1919</sup>

The love between the two led to a covenant which was based on Jonathan’s love for David. Later David will mention this covenant: “Deal faithfully with your servant, since you have taken your servant into a covenant of the Lord with you” (20,8). David’s motives for the covenant with Jonathan are clear. It took place during the period when Saul started to fear him and began his plans to kill him. The friendship between the two came to help David during this period, he used Jonathan to assist him to survive. What is not clear are Jonathan’s motives for the covenant. Why did he help David who sought to replace his father and take his own place as the future king of Israel? What did he gain by this covenant? Trying to explain the rational for the covenant Morgenstern raised the possibility that the son-in-law had greater claim to the throne than the son, so a pact between Jonathan and David was sealed.<sup>2020</sup> The fact that David was the son-in-law and a mighty warrior made him the natural candidate to replace Saul.<sup>2121</sup> However, this is unlikely since Jonathan was also a great warrior and was the king’s son. We believe that this description of the covenant between the two is hyperbole. More than likely, a sympathetic author who wanted to legitimize David’s right to throne composed these stories.

As part of the covenant David promised not to cut Jonathan’s house (20,15; 42). This covenant spared Jonathan’s crippled son Mephibosheth’s

life (also called Meribbaal). David brought him back to the court and restored to him all the land that belonged to the Saulide family “for I will keep faith with you for the sake of your father Jonathan” (2 Sam 9,7). In another incident he spared his life when he handed seven males of Saul’s house to be sacrificed by the Gibeonites to end the three -year famine.

In ancient Israel, a king was a sacred person who had the authority to perform religious functions such as a priest.<sup>2222</sup> But the text of Leviticus (21,16-24) states that even a man of priestly descent could not qualify for priesthood if he suffered from any physical disability.<sup>2323</sup> The king was supposed to lead his army into the battlefield, but Mephibosheth’s physical condition prevented him from leading the troops. In other words, he was not a threat to David. By describing David showing compassion towards Miphiboseth after Jonathan’s death, the narrator depicted him as a merciful man who kept his promise to Jonathan and as a legitimate heir to the throne. However, in reality, David’s show of kindness was only because Mephibosheth was lame, nevertheless he kept him in the royal court so that he could watch him closely.

(We believe that this description of the covenant between the two is hyperbole. More than likely, a sympathetic author who wanted to legitimize David’s right to throne composed these stories. By mentioning the mercy that David showed to Jonathan’s son Miphiboseth after his death, the narrator depicted David as a merciful man who kept his promise to Jonathan and as the true legitimate heir to the throne.)

In addition to his covenant with David, Jonathan removed his robe that he was wearing and gave his own weapons which were the most important to him as a warrior, to David. Noteworthy that the text says that he removed his clothes. The robe that he removed and gave to David was his royal robe. In other words, Jonathan relinquished his right to the throne in favor of David.<sup>2424</sup> It is a recognition by Jonathan that David and not him is

<sup>19</sup> McKenzie, King David, 84-85.

<sup>20</sup> Morgenstern, David, 322-25.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> De Vaux, Ancient Israel, 113.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 346.

<sup>24</sup> Prouser, Suited, 27-35.

to be the next king of Israel (20,13-17; 23,17). Later David would take a slice of Saul's robe which meant that David took the kingdom from Saul (24,5; 12). King Saul understood it as a sign from God that his kingdom would be given to David. Jonathan's armor; his sword and bow were other symbols of his princely status that he passed to David.<sup>2525</sup> Before when Saul gave David his armor, he returned it to the king since it was just too big (1 Sam 17,39). By Jonathan giving his own weapons, he removed himself from commanding the army in favor of David. (This act has the implication of political surrender (2 Kgs 11,10).) Dressed in Jonathan's clothes and having his weapons Saul put David in command of all the soldiers "David went out [with the troops], and he was successful in every mission on which Saul sent him" (1 Sam 18,5). It is odd and unlikely that Jonathan who just became David's friend would give up his right as the future king to someone who he just met. True, the monarchy in Israel was a new development and the question of successor had not been determined, but hereditary kingship was the norm in the Ancient Near East and it was expected that Jonathan would replace his father. Indeed, after the death of Saul we read that Abner son of Ner Saul's army commander took Ish-boseth and made him king over Gilead, the Ashurites, Jezreel, Ephraim, and Benjamin -over all Israel (2 Sam 2,9).

#### IV. MERAB

The first time the reader learns Saul had a daughter occurs before the battle against Goliath (1 Sam 17; 25). We read that the person who would slay Goliath would receive Saul's daughter in addition to riches. However, no further information is given, not even her name. As Hertzberg pointed out, this is a folkloristic common theme.<sup>2626</sup> Daughters had no say in virtually anything and were totally under their father's authority. The offer itself was made by the man of Israel but more than likely originated with Saul. This story is like 18,20-27 where Saul gives his youngest daughter Michal to David. It is only

<sup>25</sup> The bow that Jonathan gave to David is mentioned later in David's lament of Jonathan "The bow of Jonathan never returned back" (2 Sam 1,22).

<sup>26</sup> Hertzberg, I & II Samuel, 151.

after David's victory against Goliath that readers learn that Saul had more than one daughter and her name was Michal. It is noteworthy that the story of Merab, which appears in chapter 17, is not found in the LXX but appears in the Masoretic text. McCarter suggested that the offer of Merab (v.17-21) originally appeared after the battle against Goliath.<sup>2727</sup> The setting of verses 17-19 are a logical continuation to the story of Saul's fear of David and prepare the reader for the following section of Michal as David's wife.<sup>2828</sup>

David's victory against Goliath increased his popularity among the people and the realization that God was with David frightened Saul. This led him to devise a plan to get rid of his adversary. He negated on his promise to give his daughter to whoever could defeat Goliath. Instead set a new condition that David would have to fight his war against the Philistines (1 Sam 18,17-18). He appointed David to lead a combat battalion where he would be exposed to the enemy and would die on the battlefield. Saul said to himself "Let not my hand strike him; let the hand of the Philistines strike him" (18,17). God uses people to carry his plan so in the same way Saul was hoping that the Philistines would get rid of his adversary, but his plan failed. Was David aware that Saul tricked him? We do not know. However, David would later use similar trickery to eliminate Uriah the Hittite.

When the time came to give his daughter Merab to David she was given instead to Adriel the Meholathite which again invalidated Saul's agreement with David. Adriel, the Meholathite, is mentioned in 2 Sam 21,8 as Adriel the son of Barzillai. Adriel was from the settlement Abel-meholah, which was in Trans-Jordan. It appears that by this marriage Saul wanted to strengthen the ties between his kingdom and the settlements in Trans-Jordan. Merab was only a pawn in Saul's plan, and he was willing to use her to achieve his goals.<sup>2929</sup> Merab does not utter a single word and there is no description of her

<sup>27</sup> McCarter, I Samuel, 301.

<sup>28</sup> Tsumura, First Book, 482.

<sup>29</sup> This episode is missing from LXXB it is possible that Saul offered Merab to David he refused and only then Michal was offered to him, and he agreed.

thoughts and feelings, she appears as a mute character.

## V. MICHAL

In the Bible we read many times about men who loved women, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Rachel, Samson and Delilah, and Elkanah and Hannah. Michal is the only woman in the Bible where it states she loved a man “Now Michal daughter of Saul had fallen in love with David” (1 Sam 18,20). She loved David but his behavior and deeds do not demonstrate that he loved her. When David left Jonathan, they kissed each other and cried. When Michal helped David escape, no kissing or crying is mentioned. More so, David found various times to meet with Jonathan, but not with Michal. When Michal was given to another man, he neither protested nor raised any objections.

After negating his promise to give his older daughter Merab to David, Saul decided to trap David with his second daughter Michal. He used her love for David to implement his plan to kill him. David, on the other hand, used this opportunity to advance his political ambitions to become the king’s son in law. As with Merab, Saul set his conditions here. Instead of the payment of the bridal price, David had to fight Saul’s war and deliver foreskins of a hundred Philistines. Although Saul used trickery in his dealings with David, his request for the bridal price was not unusual. In ancient Israel, the groom paid the bridal price to the woman’s father. David was poor and unable to pay the bridal price for a princess. Fathers could indicate the bridal price; thus, Saul established the price of one hundred Philistine foreskins. But as we read in the text, this was only a ploy, Saul was hoping that David would die in battle against the Philistines. Unfortunately for Saul his plan failed, David went out with his men and killed two hundred Philistines and brought their foreskins. Not only did David fulfill the conditions, but he went beyond what he agreed to; he brought twice what Saul requested. It appears that the narrator exaggerated here, to depict David in a favorable light. Later in his demand to return Michal, David would mention the bride price: “Give me my wife Michal, for whom I paid

the bride price of one hundred Philistines foreskins” (2 Sam 3,14).<sup>3030</sup> It is only at this point, after David fulfilled his part of the agreement, that Saul gave Michal to David as a wife. Ishida suggests that the marriages took place before Saul started to mistrust David.<sup>3131</sup> Noth argues that Michal’s marriage during Saul’s lifetime is not historical, but his view cannot be verified.<sup>3232</sup> Although Saul mistrusted David, we believe that he gave his daughter Michal to David because this allowed him to have better control of his adversary, to keep a close eye on him. For David his marriage to Michal was an important step, he became part of the royal family. As for Saul his fear of David increased overtime, at first, he feared David (v.12), than he dread him (v.15) and following the marriage of Michal ‘he grew still more afraid of David’ (v.29).<sup>3333</sup>

### 5.1 Meddling with her Father’s Plan

Michal, like her brother Jonathan, saved David’s life. She helped David to escape from her father who sent messengers to kill him. The Bible refers here to her as David’s wife (19,11), and not Saul’s daughter as she usually appears. The narrator stresses this to tell the reader that her love for her husband surpassed the love for her father. She lowered David through the window so he could evade Saul’s messengers. This description is reminiscent of the Rahab’s story who helped Joshua’s spies make a similar escape. David’s thoughts about his escape are described in Psalm 59. The psalm’s title is “A miktam when Saul sent men to watch his house in order to put him to death” (Ps 59,1). In the Psalms, David thanks God and not Michal for delivering him from his enemies, the evildoers, and murderers.

When Saul’s messengers came to capture David, they were deceived by Michal. She took the household idols (*teraphim*) and laid them in the bed and covered it with cloth; and at its head she put goat’s hair. She made it look as if David was still in bed. She did not give clothing to David as her brother did but used garments to help him to

<sup>30</sup> The LXX has a hundred for 1 Sam 18,27.

<sup>31</sup> Ishida, Royal, 72.

<sup>32</sup> Noth, History, 184, n.1.

<sup>33</sup> Driver, Notes, 155.

escape. The presence of *teraphim* in David's house is not clear since they are denounced critically in the Hebrew Bible. According to Budde, the existence of the *teraphim* in David's house was only accepted because "the person concerned was the daughter of the rejected Saul."<sup>3434</sup>

Michal's usage of the *teraphim* in our story has some interesting parallel with the theft of the *teraphim* by Rachel. In both stories the daughters deceived their father and used *teraphim* in the deception act. The daughters betrayed their fathers' trust. Rachel is the mother of Benjamin, and Michal belonged to the tribe of Benjamin. At first Jacob and David had respectable relationships with their in-laws but this changed, and they had to escape; Jacob from Laban (Gen. 31,20), and David from Saul (1 Sam 19,12). Still, there are notable differences between the two stories. In Genesis, the *teraphim* disappear while in our story it is David who disappears. The act of deception goes undiscovered in Genesis, while in Samuel it is Saul who discovers his daughter's deception. More than likely, the author of Samuel 19 was familiar with the Rachel story and approved Michal's act of deception. He used the image of Rachel as a model for Michal. However, Rachel was punished for deceiving her father; she died while giving birth to Jacob's son Benjamin. Michal was also punished; she remained childless until her death (2 Sam 6,23).<sup>3535</sup>

When Saul discovered his daughter's act, he asked her why she tricked him and let his enemy escape. This is the first time that Saul refers to David as his enemy. Interestingly, while in chapter 18, the narrator referred to Michal as Saul's daughter, here he mentions only her name. Perhaps the narrator wanted to convey a break in their relationship. Michal answered her father with another lie. She said that David threatened her: "help me get away or I'll kill you" (1 Sam 19,17). These words are allegedly the only words spoken by David to Michal, words that she invented to protect herself. She emphasizes that she was following David's orders and was not responsible

for his escape. She tried to gain her father's sympathy and trust by putting the blame on David. Saul's reaction is not mentioned; maybe he was satisfied with his daughter's explanations. Like Jonathan, Michal helped David to escape; she helped her father's enemy. David does not appear again in Saul's court after this incident.

Michal is not mentioned again until a brief note in 1 Sam 25,44 regarding David's marriage to Abigail and Ahinoam. The narrator states that Saul gave Michal, his daughter and David's wife, to Palti son of Laish from Gallim. His act had political implication. It broke the family ties with David, signaling that David has no claim to the throne. Strangely there is no reaction or protest by David. On the other hand, when Abigail and Ahinoam, and the wives and children of David's followers were taken in an Amalekites raid we read that David and the people who were with him cried (1 Sam 30,4-6).

## 5.2 The Return of Michal

Following Saul's death and a bitter civil war, Abner urged the elders of Israel to transfer their allegiance to David (2 Sam 3,12-21). In response to Abner's initiative, David set a condition that Michal would be returned to him before negotiations can begin. Once again David's political shrewdness is displayed. This move had one purpose: to ensure his legitimacy to the throne. The restoration of Michal was part of David's ambition to have complete control over Israel. Michal the daughter of the dead king was supposed to be the bridge of unification between Israel and Judah. David did not want to regain his beloved wife but to get the daughter of the former king. By doing so he could make sure that Michal would not bear a child to claim the throne after his death.

What is not clear, however, is the role that was played by Ish-bosheth. He complied with David's request and did not object to the return of Michal to David. The return of Michal meant the end of his kingdom and possibly his own life. According to Ben-Barak, Ish-bosheth gave Michal to David because David's demand was based on basic law and contemporary customs of society. Not

<sup>34</sup> Budde, Die Bücher, 138.

<sup>35</sup> Zakovitch, David, 83-84.

complying with David's demand would tarnish his reputation. He would be the king who undermined the legal foundation of society. He could be portrayed as not caring about social order and lawfulness in his kingdom.<sup>36</sup><sup>36</sup> However, there is a simpler, more logical explanation for his actions. Ish-bosheth was an ineffectual weak king. The real power was in Abner's hands who Ish-boseth feared (2 Sam 3,11). Ish-bosheth was also realistic; he was aware that more and more people were siding with the house of David (2 Sam 3,17), which left him without any alternative but to agree with the demand to return Michal.

Michal left her husband Palti who she lived with for years. No words or description of her feeling towards him such as love, or sorrow are mentioned. Her husband on the other hand went with her walking and weeping (2 Sam 3,15-16). Michal suffered from being used by her father, and David's intrigues, now it includes the devoted husband Palti. When she returned to David after many years no verbal exchange between the two, the reunion is suppressed. The exchange between the two will take place later when the ark was brought to Jerusalem (2 Sam 6,16-23).

The moving of the ark from its location at Gibeah, Saul's hometown to the City of David had political implication. By doing so David wanted to break the links between the ark and Saul's family. Worshipping the ark at Gibeah would remind the people of Saul therefore, David transferred it from Gibeah. Bringing the ark to Jerusalem and setting it in the City of David signaled David's dynastic ambitions to displace the house of Saul and establishing Jerusalem as his capital.<sup>37</sup><sup>37</sup> Michal and her Benjaminite tribesmen probably felt resentment towards this act which took the ark from Saul's hometown.

When Michal, Saul's daughter looked and saw David dancing before the ark, she despised him (v.16). The mention of Michal peering out the window is a reminder of the window through which Michal helped David to escape. But in the first story she was referred as David's wife (v.11) while here she is Saul's daughter. At first David

<sup>36</sup> Ben Barak, Legal, 88-89.

<sup>37</sup> Alter, Art, 123.

was dependent on her mercy but here he is the king of Israel. Michal gazing through the window has also a negative connotation it is more like Sisera's mother (Judg 5,28), and Jezebel (2 Kgs 9,30), stories that ended with death. Michal criticized David for his behavior, she despised him, she did not share his enthusiasm of this joyous day. She despised him in the same way that the worthless men did not accept her father's leadership and did not acknowledge him as a king (1 Sam 10,27).

When David came home to greet his household, Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David. She speaks to him in sarcasm, in the third person and referred to him as riffraff. She felt that dancing was an insult to royalty. At this point, we can see that she did not love him anymore. She probably realized that David used her to advance his political ambitions. The fact that she was David's wife is not mentioned here; she is referred to solely as Michal, the daughter of Saul. She is no more David's only wife but one of the other wives that David had. David rebuked her; his response was harsh. God had chosen him and rejected her father and her family. The narrator ends this interchange with a note that Michal remained childless until her death.<sup>38</sup><sup>38</sup> Was Michal infertile as a punishment for her criticism of David or David stopped having sexual relations with her or maybe it was "the last painful twist of a wronged woman's fate."<sup>39</sup><sup>39</sup>

What lies behind David's demand for Michal was his desire to get the daughter of the former king, not regain his beloved wife. In other words, David could make sure that Michal would not bear a child to claim the throne after his death. In light of this outcome Rost suggested that the 'Succession Narrative' started with verses (16,20b-23) which describe the final rejection of the house of Saul and opened the door to the succession struggle within the Davidic family.<sup>40</sup><sup>40</sup> Michal gained nothing by returning to David. She lost the most in this story.

<sup>38</sup> The reference to Michal and her five sons that she bore to Adriel son of Barzillai the Meholathite is a scribal error and should read Merab (2 Sam 21, 8).

<sup>39</sup> Alter, Art, 125.

<sup>40</sup> Rost, Succession, 85-87.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The aim of deception was to gain the advantage to be in control. Therefore, Saul who wanted to get rid of David set a trap. He offered his two daughters to him on the condition that he would perform heroic deeds against the Philistines with the hope that David would die on the battlefield. At the same time, he gave his oldest daughter Merab to another man and similarly he gave Michal to a different man. Michal betrayed her father for David's sake because her love for him was true. Her character is tragic. David like Saul used Michal to advance his political ambitions; he married her because he craved admission to the royal family. Later he demanded her return to solidify and attract support from the Benjaminite's to establish his claim to throne. Jonathan acted behind his father back and aided David. What is not clear is why he gave his royal right to David. Therefore, we believe that there is an exaggeration in the description of the friendship between Jonathan and David and the tense relationship between Jonathan and his father. Saul was not naïve and understood David's intentions very well. He was angry with Jonathan because he gave up the throne too easily. Saul wanted his son to succeed him. Jonathan, despite his quarrels with his father did not desert him and went and fought with him in the last battle on Mount Gilboa. As for David we believe that it was a sympathetic author from the Davidic circle who was responsible for the negative view of Saul. On the hand, the narrator claims that David was loved by Jonathan and Michal, in addition to all Israel and Judah who loved him. The goal was to legitimize David's ascension to the throne.

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