

Book Reviews

Jacob L. Wright. *David, King of Israel, and Caleb in Biblical Memory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014. 271 pp.
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Of the numerous books on David that have emerged in recent years, Jacob Wright's recent volume is one of the more interesting and, frankly, worthwhile. Wright does not retread the much-traveled ground of historical David studies to produce a biography of this figure. Neither does he engage in the alternative recent fad, eschewing historical questions in order to provide a dubious "literary" reading. Instead, he attempts to establish how certain parties utilized the traditions about David to negotiate their own status among the communities of ancient Israel. After an introductory chapter (1–14), Wright introduces the idea of "war commemoration," which serves as the lens through which he interprets several texts (15–30). "Via memories of wars and battles," he writes, "the biblical authors address issues of belonging and status within an emerging national community that they call 'Israel'" (16). His later chapters illustrate this. For example, the honorable service of Ittai the Gittite during David's flight from Jerusalem "commemorate[s] the loyalty of devoted foreign mercenaries" (116).

The third chapter (31–50) presents Wright's source-critical findings, which I will examine further below. The following seven chapters (51–166) present the meat of the study, investigating how the biblical authors "negotiated belonging" for such parties as the Ziphites, the Jabesh-Gileadites, and many others in Judah and Israel. In a fascinating codicil, Wright provides three chapters (167–220) analyzing the figure of Caleb from a similar perspective, showing from the disparate texts about this figure how the biblical authors negotiated the competing interests of the Calebites within Judah. A brief summarizing chapter concludes the book (221–30).

David, King of Israel, and Caleb in Biblical Memory manages to be provocative yet responsible, accessible yet erudite. I would challenge Wright on several points, some minor and some more foundational, but the following critiques should not detract from the value of this book. Many aspects of the work demand engagement. Unfortunately—and perhaps unfairly to Wright—I do not have the space available to respond to all the stimulating proposals in his book, such as the statehood/nationhood contrast in the text or the splendid final few chapters on Caleb.

Wright offers a framework for understanding the overarching David narrative that broadly follows recent European trends, exemplified by scholars such as Reinhard Kratz. Two features of this are particularly salient. First, Wright argues for the complete divorce of David and Saul material in the earliest strata of the biblical text. These traditions developed independently, he contends: "The synthesis of the independent Saul and David histories that we find in the Book of Samuel" (46) derives from later Judahite authors fabricating a Davidic reign over Israel to win Israelites to their cause after the fall of the northern kingdom in 722 BCE.

Second, following this, Wright subscribes to a new way of understanding the so-called History of David's Rise (HDR). Like Wellhausen recognizing that the law came after the prophets, Wright supports a chronological reversal that

challenges recent understanding of the David narrative: in Samuel, the texts connecting David with the state of Judah precede those connecting him with the nation of Israel. This derives from Wright's idea of the development of the text; if David was connected with Saul—and therefore Israel—at a later stage, then what is left of the original narrative is entirely Judahite.

This scheme for understanding the narrative is internally coherent, yet I find it ultimately difficult to sustain. Wright's assessment demands viewing the majority of the David material in 1 Samuel as an invention to connect him with Saul. The elaborate story of David's early relationship with Saul's family (1 Samuel 16–21) makes little sense in Wright's scheme, even less if one accepts the growing consensus that this complex itself consists of two narrative strands that both link David to Saul. Moreover, occasionally Wright employs the sort of European methodology that is usually (and in my opinion, correctly) greeted with skepticism by North American scholars—namely, he performs surgery on the current text without clear warrant, then uses the result to support his argument. For example, when he discusses his epiphany that 1 Samuel 17:12 served as the introduction to the HDR, he writes, “Remarkably, when we eliminate all the material that has to do with Saul in the following chapters” (37), it appears that this single verse was originally followed by 22:2. This is rather convenient, especially when only two pages later he argues his case by asserting that “the complete absence of references to Saul, his family, and the people of Israel ... suggests that the authors were not cognizant of any connections between David and the kingdom of Israel” (39).

Methodologically, Wright presents his book as an alternative to those scholars who focus on the David source material as apologetic, but it appears that he creates a false dichotomy. Despite Wright consciously channeling his own training “in a German tradition of biblical studies that sees the Bible's formation and Israel's history very differently from the views [Frank Moore] Cross presented in his various writings” (xii), the underlying approach does not seem out of place in North American scholarship. Wright's “supplemental” methodology appears to differ from more traditional “documentarian” methodology not in essence, but in degree. It strikes me as odd that Wright dismisses the source-critical enterprise while also acknowledging the sources underlying the present text, even adopting the traditional terminology of the HDR.

What distinguishes Wright's study from those more focused on the Davidic apology is his point of departure. Whereas scholars such as Baruch Halpern (*David's Secret Demons: Messiah, Murderer, Traitor, King* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001]), Kyle McCarter (“The Apology of David,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 99 [1980]: 489–504), and others focus on the earliest “documents” of the David narrative and mostly ignore later additions, Wright mostly takes the sources for granted and examines their later “supplements.” In fact, one salient feature of Wright's work when read alongside the monographs by Halpern, Jeremy Hutton (*The Transjordanian Palimpsest* [Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009]), and even my own on the subject (*Royal Apologetic in the Ancient Near East* [Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015]), is that the foci of Wright's study differ significantly. Halpern and Hutton explore the narratives about Jonathan, Michal, Abner, Ish-Baal, Merib-Baal, and

other figures who are mostly absent from Wright's book. I expect that this is because such figures were crucial for the contemporary justification of David's reign, but less so for later groups attempting to "negotiate belonging."

And herein lies the major contribution of Wright's book. Although I remain unpersuaded by Wright's overarching framework for understanding the development of the David story, I expect he is correct about how he fits together several of the later accretions. I see his work not as an alternative to those who ascribe to a genuine historical connection between David and Saul, but as something that can be incorporated into this scheme. Oddly, it strikes me that most of Wright's well-executed study bolsters, rather than undermines, the view that has prevailed in recent decades. Another scholar interested in the apology, Jeremy Hutton, introduced the idea of viewing the biblical text as a palimpsest. Applying this apt analogy here, I would contend that whereas most recent work has emphasized the "original" layer of writing, Wright emphasizes the texts that appropriate the earlier work by overwriting it. He lucidly shows how later groups utilized extant material to negotiate belonging in (primarily) Judah. But if they manipulated David's relationship with Saul and Israel, it seems almost inevitable that there already existed such a relationship to be manipulated. Wright's powerful introductory image supports this. He describes a sculpture on Boston's Beacon Hill commemorating the service of "Americans of African descent" in the Civil War (15–20). By commemorating the acts of valor of these men, the sculpture reminds its audience "that African Americans have what it takes to be citizens" (16). Wright's analysis is perfect—but he neglects the fact that such war commemoration would not make any sense if African Americans had not actually served in the war. By chalking up David's relationship with Israel to later fabrication, Wright composes a book about war commemoration when there was no war to commemorate.

This critique notwithstanding, Wright deserves credit for his excellent analyses of passages in Samuel too often overlooked, and for doing so in a knowledgeable, engaging manner. He has done a service to Hebrew Bible scholarship specifically and Jewish studies more generally by advancing the conversation about David's role in both history and tradition.

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JUDAISM IN ANTIQUITY AND RABBINICS

Joshua Ezra Burns. *The Christian Schism in Jewish History and Jewish Memory*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016. 304 pp.
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If the only compelling feature of this book were its bibliography, it would be easy to recommend. That it also contains concise and up-to-date descriptions of