Review: On Texts, Contexts, and Countertexts

Reviewed Work(s): David, King of Israel, and Caleb in Biblical Memory by Jacob L. Wright

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On Texts, Contexts, and Countertexts
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Jacob L. Wright, *David, King of Israel, and Caleb in Biblical Memory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, xvi + 266 pp.

Accusations of Jewish misanthropy have a long history. Consider the following litany of charges from a Byzantine-era text, for example:

> [The Jews] refuse to acknowledge that others do them kindness. Come see! What did they too do that poor man, Pharaoh? When they went down to Egypt, he welcomed them with a smiling face, and settled them in the best part of the land, sustained them during the years of famine, and fed them all the best food of his land. He had palaces to build, and they were building there. . . . When Pharaoh heard that they were fleeing, he went after them to get his money back. What did they do to him? There was one man with them, named Moses, son of Amram, and with his magic, he cast a spell over his staff and struck the sea, and it dried up. So they all went in, on the dry land, and passed through. I don't know *how* they passed through, or how they dried the water. When Pharaoh saw, he went after them to retrieve his money, and they pushed him into the sea! He and his entire army drowned. [The Jews] certainly did not recall the good he had done for them—so you see how ungrateful they are!

They arrived at Sihon and Og, the great warriors of our land, whom no creature could challenge, and I don't know how, but they killed them. They arrived at the kings of Midian, and I don't know how, but they killed them. What else did that disciple of that man Moses do? He brought the Israelites into the land of Canaan, and it's not enough that he took their land, but also killed thirty-one kings, carved up their territory, and had no mercy on them. Those whom he didn't try to kill, he enslaved! . . . After that, they had another king, David, son of Jesse, and he used to destroy and exterminate all the kingdoms, pitying no one, as it says, "David did not leave a man or a woman alive" (1 Samuel 27:11).

This text, meant to denigrate and degrade Jews by retelling their history in a disparaging way, appears to be blatantly antisemitic. It draws on Jews' own texts and narratives, but perverts them, turns them on their head, and constructs a tale of immorality and ethical breaches that leaves the audience with the clear sense that the Jews have a long history of violence and treachery, and certainly cannot be trusted as friends or allies. One scholar commenting on this text wrote that it "may rightly be considered . . . one of the precursors of . . . the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*."[1]

But this passage is drawn from rabbinic literature:[2] it is a midrashic text purporting to report the contents of the letter sent out by Ahasuerus to the people of the Persian empire, justifying the genocidal decree that serves to kick off the tension of the book of Esther. These midrashim, which date from the Byzantine era in their current forms, put a counter-history in the mouth of Haman.[3] As is plain, the rabbinic authors of this passage don't believe anything they wrote; in fact, they presumably composed these stories, these counter-histories, as a way of delegitimizing them. The authors are conceding that there may be alternative ways of thinking about the history of the Jewish people and of the biblical stories. But no *reasonable* person sees things that way; only Haman and other irrational antisemites would say things like this. The rabbis marginalize these stories through their act of telling them.[4]

Counter-histories are a phenomenon that has been studied, sporadically, over the past few decades. A working definition might be: "A history of an adversary written for polemical purposes, which takes as its sources the adversary's own primary historical sources, and draws on them to construct a narrative which

undermines the story usually told by that adversary." This form was most famously discussed by Amos Funkenstein,[5] and there are a small number of parade examples from pre-modern times. Within Jewish studies, the third-century BCE Egyptian historian Manetho's version of the Exodus story[6] and the medieval *Toledot Yeshu* literature[7] are compelling instances.

If counter-histories are used by one people against another, the example of the antisemitic letter with which this paper opened is a *preemptive* counter-history, constructed by a people against its own narratives. Here the culture invents a subversive, damaging version of its own history, presumably in order to undermine the effect of any similar story an adversary might choose to tell later on. Within the culture that is telling these stories, the point, one assumes, is that telling this story immediately undermines its power and its danger.

There is an earlier example of a preemptive counter-history from around the year 700 BCE, or slightly later, told as part of the story of Sennacherib's attack on Jerusalem (2 Kings 18–19; Isaiah 36–37). In this story, an Assyrian *rav shaqeh* "cup-bearer" (now known to be a title for the major domo of the palace), shows up at Jerusalem and gives two speeches, quite long by biblical standards, detailing why the Judeans should give up the fight and not try to hold out against the Assyrians. His arguments combine political and military realities with rather subversive theological claims. Among the former: that the Judeans are vastly outclassed, that Egypt cannot help, and so on. Among the latter: that God is using the Assyrians to punish the Judeans for the sacrilege of cultic centralization.

No doubt there really were eighth-century and seventh-century Judeans who opposed the centralization of worship, but for the biblical authors this is an unambiguously positive move on the part of Hezekiah.[8] Why does the Bible give so much space to views with which it disagrees so vehemently? Peter Machinist has suggested that the authors took views that were held by Judeans, about centralization, politics, and other issues, and put them in the mouth of an Assyrian—that is, that they wrote a preemptive counter-history.[9] By attributing these views to enemies, the authors defanged and delegitimized them.

It is worth adding the observation that this whole idea—of telling counter-historical narratives, or preemptive counter-historical narratives—presupposes that the stories that are told *matter*. The stories a society tells about itself define

how the society is viewed, what its core values and identity issues are. For preemptive counter-histories to be effective, a society must be (a) self-reflective enough to realize what the alternative narratives are, (b) self-conscious enough to appreciate that these stories matter, and (c) self-assured enough to give voice to alternatives and be sure that they are thereby undercut, not given currency.[10] The authors who put in the mouth of Haman the claim that Moses may have been some sort of sorcerer, and the writers who attributed to the Assyrians the claim that God was furious because the altars in the countryside had been destroyed, were aware of those readings of history, but were not seriously concerned that their audience would follow this line of thought once it was voiced.

The reason we can say so much about the meaning of these texts is that the contexts are known.[11] In biblical scholarship, scholars have, for lack of data, become quite used to the idea of not knowing the context of a text, and working backwards from meaning to context. In fact, one of the primary tools in the field is the "discovery" of the *Sitz im Leben*, in which a scholar posits a context (e.g., cult festival, Temple ritual, political conflicts, dynastic struggles) for a text, based on the scholar's theory about the meaning of the text, and this context is then utilized to elucidate the meaning of the text with more precision. The history of the use and abuse of *Sitzen im Leben* need not be rehearsed here; let us suffice with the observation that it is a powerful tool, but by its nature it involves entering a hermeneutic circle, where the text suggests a context, which in turn informs the text.

How can scholars avoid flights of fancy, in which contexts fabricated out of whole cloth become the basis for interpreting texts in ways that have little in common with the ways they were read in antiquity? (No doubt each scholar of the Bible, and ancient literature more generally, has personal favorite examples of such flights of fancy within their fields.)[12] Here comparative evidence plays a crucial role. If there is evidence for the recitation of psalms by an individual when entering a temple, it is not unreasonable to see a biblical psalm as serving that role. There is no way of entirely avoiding the hermeneutic circle, but with careful controls provided by comparative and contextual data, the text and the reconstructed context can fruitfully clarify each other.

It is worth adding that on occasion, biblical scholars do not pay sufficient attention to comparative data in thinking about the possibilities of literary composition.

Ethnographic work among Bedouin, for example, tells us that poets compose songs in praise of victories in battle or other momentous occasions. These take some time to compose, but by "some time," I mean a few days or weeks.[13] After the songs are composed, they are recited and committed to memory, by the poet himself and by other poets, who may add them to their repertoire of songs.

We know that this occurred in the ancient world, as well; Ramesses II's hymn on the battle of Qadesh, or his son Mer-en-ptah's poetic victory stele, attest to the practice of composing poems in the wake of battles and then quickly disseminating them. Still, biblical scholars often insist that poems such as the Song of Deborah, the Song of the Sea, or some of the songs mentioned in the book of Samuel, must have been composed centuries after the events they purport to celebrate. Of course, this is not to assert that the songs must be dated earlier than is commonly thought, but to urge that comparative data has to be taken into account more fully in considering the possibilities.

These preliminary observations bring us to a consideration of Wright's book. The book is densely packed with insights, observations, and conjectures, and no summary can capture that. I will offer a summary of what I take to be the core arguments of the book, and then offer some reflections. Wright's central argument consists of two primary claims, one about the history of the text of the David story, and one about the genre of that text. Regarding the history of the text, Wright argues that there are three stages to the development of the story of David. The first occurred before 722 BCE, and contains all the references to David ruling over only Judah; Wright takes it for granted (see below) that no David ever actually ruled over anything beyond Hebron and the surrounding areas. The second stage occurred after 722 BCE. Omri, king of Israel in the ninth century, had forged a pan-Israelite identity encompassing both Israel and Judah, of course privileging Israel, and when, in 722 BCE, the kingdom of Israel was destroyed, that pan-Israelite identity shifted its center southwards and was claimed by some Judeans. David then naturally became king of all of Israel. Finally, after the destruction of Judah as well, in 586 BCE, the bulk of the narrative was composed.

Regarding the genre of the text, Wright proposes that we approach many of the stories in the saga of David as "war commemoration," where people and groups and locales are singled out for praise or criticism based on their participation and exploits

in battle on behalf of the group. This approach builds on the very sharp observation made at the outset of the book, that there is a staggering number of characters in the David narrative, many of whom are, in the scheme of things, unimportant. Wright's idea is a powerful one that needs to be reckoned with, and his book is a worthy contribution to the scholarship on the David story for bringing to the fore the delineation of borders and the emphasis on insiders and outsiders in it.

Let me try to exemplify the methods of the book by looking at one chapter, entitled "Uriah the Hittite." Uriah is, of course, one of the many named minor characters in the narrative, although he actually plays a pivotal role in one of the most critical stories in the life of David. Wright identifies the earliest narrative as consisting of what is now 2 Samuel 12:29–31:

> Then David mustered all the people and went to Rabbah, and fought against it and took it. He took the crown of Milcom from his head; the weight of it was a talent of gold, and in it was a precious stone; and it was placed on David's head. He also brought out the people who were in it, and set them to work with saws and iron picks and iron axes, or sent them to the brickworks. This he did to all the cities of the Ammonites. Then David and all the people returned to Jerusalem.

According to Wright, this episode was expanded with another narrative fragment, which included the following crucial lines (2 Samuel 11:17, 26–27):

> The inhabitants of the city made a sortie against Joab, so that some of the people, David's servants/warriors, fell in battle.[14] When Uriah's wife heard that her husband was dead, she made lamentation from him. After the mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house. She became his wife and bore him a son.

In this version of the story, the "taking" of the dead soldier's wife is meant, according to Wright, as a way of honoring the name of the fallen soldier by granting her the privileged place of royal wife, with the claim that this act of paying tribute to a fallen soldier was not unusual in the ancient world.[15] Wright's

third stage in the development of the story is represented by the identification of this wife of the fallen soldier at Bathsheba, known from the story of Solomon in 1 Kings 1–2. This must be quite a late addition, because it is clear to Wright that David and Solomon were originally independent figures who only secondarily became father and son.[16]

By the end of the chapter, some crucial points have emerged (which have been made by other readers, as well). The final form of the story comments critically on David's kingship at this point in his biography: remaining behind in Jerusalem, while sending his general and army out into the field to war against the Ammonites, David has come far since his days as a rogue brigand roaming the hill country of Judah or the plains of the Shephelah. He has retained the same ruthlessness visible in those days, but has much more power at his disposal. When the hunger for power is married to the unbridled authority of kingship, even within a small state, one gets the abuses evident in the intricate story of David, Uriah, and Bathsheba.

For Wright, the most important questions about the story are not the textual ones, but the political ones. Overarching all other questions: why include the story of the death of Uriah the Hittite at all? In a section of the chapter called "The Politics of Dying," Wright observes, quite perceptively, that the Hebrew Bible typically does not exalt heroic death on the battlefield, unlike the Homeric epics among many others. For this he provides a very thought-provoking historical explanation: "Its authors were writing in the aftermath of defeat, during the reign of imperial powers. . . . One of the things they did was eliminate depictions of noble death, producing a strange corpus of battle stories in which Israel achieves victory without any loss of life whatsoever." Why, then, include the story of the death of Uriah in the final form of the narrative? Wright answers that the degeneracies of the state are revealed through this death: a state (personified by the king) that detaches itself from the plight of the people (personified by Uriah). Although the death is a display of civic virtue, and demonstrates how a nation can sustain itself, it puts the moral failings of the state on display.

The historical implications of this analysis are not self-evident, however, and here we arrive at the point with which this paper opened: the crucial importance of context in interpreting ancient literature, and the need for comparative data in

assessing alleged contexts. Interpreters need to know who was telling the story and when—which would strongly indicate the purposes of the telling.

So what could this story of David and Uriah mean, in various contexts? It may be a criticism of David, or of his dynasty; it may be an apology for the legitimacy of Solomon's kingship, inasmuch as the story "demonstrates" the relationship of Solomon to David; it may be a criticism of the whole institution of monarchy. If we knew that the story emanated from Solomon's scribes, we could be quite sure of what the political purposes of the story are. By the same token, if we knew that the story was composed in anti-monarchic circles in Achaemenid Judea, we would have different insight. And of course we have to reckon with the fact that the story may have been composed in one context, and then reinterpreted in a very different context, thus introducing the importance of reception history, a theme to which we shall soon return.

Wright assumes, but never argues, that many of the stories of David were not just circulating, but were composed, in the Persian period, and have no basis in the factual history of the Iron Age, much less the tenth century. One surmises that Wright has hooked his star in this book to the theories of Israel Finkelstein and a number of other scholars, including Wright's Doktorvater Reinhard Kratz, who have argued that archaeological data precludes the notion that there was a United Monarchy in the tenth century. He writes, for instance, that "[t]he attempt to link all kinds of [archeological] finds to Saul and David betrays an impoverishment to the historic imagination. The biblical account represents a thoroughly simplified historical construction, with a pronounced political message and theological-didactic function" (48).

But of course, this is no impoverishment to the historical imagination if it is a plausible hypothesis. No one thinks that linking many of the destruction layers of early sixth-century BCE to the Babylonians is an impoverishment of the historical imagination, because *we know they destroyed a lot*. Wright's position presupposes that there was no impressive David to whom finds can be attributed. This is quite far from a secure position, however.[17] To my mind, without that archaeological-historical foundation secure, the entire textual enterprise, insightful though it is, crumbles. There is simply no way of arguing compellingly from only the texts that the parts of the story that mention only Judah must be early, and those that include

Israel are by definition late. Graeme Auld, for example, argues precisely the oppo-site: the parts of the narrative that mention only Judah are the *latest* parts of the text, added to reckon with the reality of post-exilic, small, Judah.[18] This is not to assert that the latter position is correct, either, but to say that the textual analysis on its own is not capable of providing sure results here. And with the archaeology debated (and to my mind, convincingly against Finkelstein's wholesale revision of the chronology), Wright's argument regarding the history of the text cannot stand on its own.

This brings us back to the question of the saga of David. Some prominent American scholars have argued in the past decades that the ways in which the story defends David repeatedly suggests that it is an apology for David.[19] And as many scholars have articulated, no one writes an apology if there is nothing to apologize for. Furthermore, one needs to apologize only if the audience knows that there is something to apologize for, which means that the text was written relatively soon after David's existence. This influential idea was formulated (inde-pendently?) in the same fascicle of the *Journal of Biblical Literature* in 1980 by Kyle McCarter and James VanderKam[20] and developed with the most force and nuance by Baruch Halpern in *David's Secret Demons*.[21]

The claim that the text is an apology is a claim about the genre of the text; the historical conclusions drawn from this are claims of a *Sitz im Leben*. We should ask, therefore, whether there is at least evidence from elsewhere in the ancient Near East for such politically oriented literature, and more specifically for apolo-getic literature. And indeed, the answer is in the affirmative. To take one example, Peter Machinist showed that the epic of Tukulti-Ninurta, the Middle Assyrian king from the thirteenth century, which tells of his battle against Kaštiliaš IV of Babylon, is political not just in its content but in its form and style: it borrows Babylonian elements and incorporates them into an Assyrian context, just as Tukulti-Ninurta conquered Babylon and incorporated it into an Assyrian sphere of influence. The epic was written, Machinist speculated, for an Assyrian audience that may have been disinclined to follow Tukulti-Ninurta's politics: some may have objected to the subjugation of Babylon, some may have balked at the importation of Babylonian culture, some may have been disenchanted with the rising power of the king, and so on. To counter such thoughts, his scribes drafted an epic, which

tells a story for political benefit.[22] It is also worth emphasizing that the Tukulti-Ninurta epic is contemporary with the king himself; the politics were resonant and relevant, and the royal scribes produced a text about and for their contemporaries.[23] Even closer to the example of David, there were explicit royal apologies; McCarter developed this point, noting that the best-attested examples of the genre are from Late Bronze Age Hittite kings, and there are also examples from later times, such as Neo-Babylonian kings. The comparison of these texts to the narrative of David's rise to power and reign is cogent and productive.[24]

It is important to note that while there are good ancient parallels for Apologies, Wright concedes that for his alternative hypothesis—that the story was originally, and primarily, about war commemoration—"[w]e have a very difficult time locating parallels in ancient Western Asia, what is commonly called the 'ancient Near East'. . . . For ancient analogies to the type of war commemoration found in biblical and modern contexts, we must look to the East Aegean" (26–27). This is a striking point, and one that cannot be passed over lightly. The best parallels for Wright's hypothesis come from Greek society and modern-era memorials, and while those raise fascinating possibilities for biblical literature, closer evidence is needed to persuade that there was anything comparable in the Levantine world of long ago. With no parallels in ancient Western Asia, this notion must be judged appealing, but unlikely.

The generic claims have historical implications. If the final form of the David story is an Apology, meant to defend David against all sorts of accusations, it was likely written when these accusations represented live issues. If the text denies that David was responsible for the death of Nabal, Saul, Abner, Absalom, and Ish-baal, there were people who asserted that he was. (And in some cases, the odds that David was entirely innocent are remarkably low.) The "Apology," then, is a whitewashing, an attempt to provide plausible alibis, excuses, and justifications for everything untoward of which David's enemies accused him. Of course, this does not mean that this whitewash is accurate, and as Halpern memorably puts it, "We know that Samuel is accurate because it is nothing but lies."[25]

It is worth emphasizing that this method of reading, "against the grain," is common in the interpretation of political literature. If a text tells a story that yields an inconvenient reality, made acceptable only because of some twist of fate or quirk

of reality, it is quite likely that the result is real but that there are other ways of explaining how it came about. If Sargon, king of Akkad, claims to have been the son of the high priestess, abandoned as a child and raised by a water carrier, only to fortuitously ascend the throne, one can be sure that others were saying that he was a usurper, son of a water drawer, asserting an aristocratic birth for himself. And if, in the opposite direction, the story claims that Moses was born to an Israelite mother, but abandoned and raised in the palace and given an Egyptian name, only to return later and lead the Jews out of Egypt, one can be sure that others were saying, as Freud surmised, that he was an Egyptian prince who was involved with the Israelites for his own reasons, now being given a "native" birth. Of course, formulated this way, this presupposes that there was a Moses whose birth could be discussed, and that the story of Sargon has some basis in third-millennium reality; pursuing these questions would take us too far afield here. The point for now is that sometimes a story's content seems to require a certain context. The story of David, with its many cover-ups and alibis, seems to require a context in which the legitimacy of David's rule could be debated, within a generation of his own life.[26]

Wright rejects the idea of the text as apology: "The problem," he notes, "is that [the Apology approach] fails to explain the texts that are critical of David." The key point, however, is that for the Apology hypothesis to be coherent, the question is not whether the story is positive or negative, but whether it is the best story that could have credibly been told. Halpern suggests that the damning narrative of Uriah was still preferable for the authors than the alternative, which was the claim that Solomon was unrelated to David and had usurped the throne. The narrative presented is more positive than what others were saying, and thus is an effective Apology. The authors were constrained by known facts; denying those would have undermined any claims to credibility. Only authors of fiction get to decide the terms of their stories fully.

This brings us to the final point of discussion: the importance of distinguishing between the original meaning of the text and its reception history.[27] The argument that the text is an Apology relies on *Cui bono?* as a crucial interpretive tool. But not every deployment of this tool is equally compelling. If a story of Jabesh Gilead, or of the Calebites, or of some other group discussed by Wright, could have served to legitimize or delegitimize that group at a certain point in

time, does that really suffice as evidence that this was the story's original intention?[28] Wright suggests numerous cases where a story's *purpose* is discernible from the ends to which it could have been put. When this is compelling, and when this only suggests how the story may have been later used, rather than its original intent, is a question that interpreters have to struggle with. Ideally, however, we need to know the context in which it was written, because context is king in interpretation.

Having discussed the importance of context for so long, I will note the importance of Wright's book in the current historical context. As a sophisticatedly interdisciplinary book, it helps to bring biblical scholarship back closer to the broader humanities, where it belongs. This book also comes at a time when there is a real gap between the methodologies regnant in Europe and in North America with regard to the historical narratives of the Bible. Both of these geographical areas are, of course, more complicated than simple dichotomies can convey, and yet there are real differences between the intellectual cultures of the two continents within the field of Bible.[29] Israeli scholarship seems to have representation of both cultures, although probing further would take us too far afield now. Wright, an American who studied in Germany and completed his Habilitation there and then returned to the United States to teach, is uniquely suited to reflect methodologically on the differences.[30] Such reflections could help the field move to a better stage, in which the two intellectual cultures can learn from each other rather than—as it seems to me—talk past each other. Wright's book does not explicitly engage with methodology at any length, but raises key questions about the narratives of David that would benefit from it. One hopes that Wright will return to these issues in the future.

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NOTES

▢ I am very grateful to Seth L. Sanders and Tzvi Novick for their detailed comments and criticisms of earlier drafts of this review essay. This does not imply, of course, that they agree with everything therein.

1 Myron B. Lerner, "The Works of Aggadic Midrash and the Esther Midrashim," in *The Literature of the Sages, Second Part: Midrash and Targum, Liturgy, Poetry, Mysticism, Contracts, Inscriptions, Ancient Science, and the Languages of Rabbinic Literature,* ed. Shmuel Safrai, Zeev Safrai, Joshua Schwartz, and Peter J. Tomson (Assen and Minneapolis: Van Gorcum and Fortress, 2006), 214.

2 The example cited here is from Esther Rabbah 7:13. A synoptic edition, prepared by Joseph Tabory and Arnon Atzmon, is available at http://www.schechter.ac.il/pdf/%D7%96.pdf.

3 For some comments and surveys, see Moshe David Herr, "Sin'at yisrael ba-imperya ha-romit le-or sifrut hazal," in *Sefer Zikkaron le-Binyamin de Vries,* ed. Ezra Zion Melammed (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 1968), 149–59; and Joshua A. Berman, "Aggadah and Anti-Semitism: The Midrashim to Esther 3:8," *Judaism* 38 (1989): 185–96.

4 See the analysis of the Alphabet of Ben Sira as a somewhat comparable parody in David Stern, "The *Alphabet of Ben Sira* and the Early History of Parody in Jewish Literature," in *The Idea of Biblical Interpretation: Essays in Honor of James L. Kugel,* ed. Hindy Najman and Judith H. Newman (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 423–48.

5 See Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 22–49. The term was first used in print within Jewish studies by Funkenstein's student David Biale, *Gershom Scholem: Kabbalah and Counter-History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979). Biale also didn't like everything that his mentor, Funkenstein, did with the term, and tried to refine it later on; see "Counter-history and Jewish Polemics against Christianity: The *Sefer Toldot Yeshu* and the *Sefer Zerubavel*," *Jewish Social Studies* 6 (1999): 130–45. The term itself seems to have been used earlier by Foucault; see Michel Foucault, *"Society Must Be Defended": Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–1976,* trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003), 66–76.

6 Jan Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 23–54; Aryeh Kasher, "'Iqvoteha shel 'Historya Negdit' be-Girsat Maneton 'al yetziat yisrael mi-mitzrayim," in *Yehudim ve-nokhrim be-eretz yisrael: bi-ymei ha-bayit ha-sheni, ha-mishnah,*

ve-ha-talmud ed. Aharon Oppenheim, Menahem Mor, Jack Pastor, and Daniel R. Schwartz (Jerusalem: Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, 2003), 52–81.

7   The study of this text has benefited in recent years from new manuscript discoveries and more sophisticated treatments, both philological and cultural-historical. For an overview, see the many articles in *Toledot Yeshu (“The Life Story of Jesus”) Revisited: A Princeton Conference,* ed. Peter Schäfer, Michael Meerson, and Yaacov Deutsch, *Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism* (TSAT) 143 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), as well as Peter Schäfer, “Jesus’ Origin, Birth, and Childhood According to the *Toledot Yeshu* and the Talmud,” in *Judaea-Palaestina, Babylon and Rome: Jews in Antiquity,* ed. Benjamin Isaac and Yuval Shahar; TSAJ 147 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 139–61. Interestingly, there are also Christian translations of the Toledot Yeshu narrative, which, according to Martin I. Lockshin, “Translation as Polemic: The Case of *Toledot Yeshu*,” in *Minhah le-Nahum: Biblical and Other Studies Presented to Nahum M. Sarna,* ed. Marc Brettler and Michael Fishbane, JSOT Sup 154 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 226–41, are a counter-counter-history.

8   Making these claims cut even deeper is the possibility that the one saying them was an Israelite: the Assyriologist Hayim Tadmor argued that the Rab-Shaqeh himself may actually have been an exile, formerly of the Northern Kingdom of Israel; this would explain (a) how he knows Hebrew so well (as is explicit in the story), and (b) why someone with a domestic post would be sent on an international diplomatic mission. Tadmor, “Rav-Shaqeh,” *Encyclopedia Miqra’it* 7.324–26. As Tadmor knows, the Talmud (troubled by the same questions?) already claimed that Rab-Shaqeh was an apostate, and there are many sources from Late Antiquity that make the same claim. See Stephen D. Ryan, “The Rabshakeh in Late Biblical and Post-biblical Tradition,” in *Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature Yearbook 2008: Biblical Figures in Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature* (Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 2009), 183–95.

9   Peter Machinist, “The *Rab Šāqēh* at the Wall of Jerusalem: Israelite Identity in the Face of the Assyrian ‘Other’,” *Hebrew Studies* 41 (2000): 164.

10   It need not be the case that all of seventh-century Judah was self-assured, but the circles in which the Rab-Shaqeh originated and circulated apparently were.

11   Or at least, we think they are. I mentioned Manetho’s version of the Exodus story as a parade example of a counter-history. Erich Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 41–72, argued, however, that this narrative was not originally Manetho’s, and that it was more likely to have

originated among Hellenistic Jews, from whom Manetho learned it. This change
in context could change everything about the meaning. If the story Manetho tells
was originally a Jewish story, it cannot be an antisemitic tale (although Manetho
himself may still have been antisemitic). Similar questions could be asked about
many episodes found in ancient texts, since although we may know where they are
currently located, their original context may have been quite different, as would
their original meanings have been.

12   For an example, see J. J. M. Roberts, "Mowinckel's Enthronement Festival: A
Review," in *The Book of Psalms: Composition and Reception,* ed. Peter W. Flint and
Patrick D. Miller, Jr., VT Sup 99 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 97–115.

13   See Clinton Bailey, *Bedouin Poetry from Sinai and the Negev: Mirror of a Culture*
(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

14   Wright's translation includes the phrase "along with the militia troops," but I do not
know where this is from.

15   It should be noted, however, that neither in the book nor in the two articles cited in
the corresponding footnote (chapter 6, n. 6), are any actual examples of such a
practice given. This raises the problem of the lack of ancient evidence for what is
posited here, on which see further below.

16   Here and elsewhere, the textual arguments offered are thoroughly circular, perhaps
inescapably so. Most generally, Wright argues that there was originally no
connection between the story of Saul and the story of David. Note the argumen-
tation in a passage such as the following: "[W]hen we eliminate all the material
that has to do with Saul in the immediately following chapters, we come across
another line that is closely linked to this piece of biographical data. . . . One could
perhaps argue that the authors conceived the [History of David's Rise] as a
prelude to the account of David's succession to Saul's throne. But the complete
absence of references to Saul, his family, and the people of Israel—even in later
portions that have been added to it—suggests that the authors were not cognizant
of any connections between David and the kingdom of Israel." First we eliminate
all references to Saul, and then reject the possibility that the story of David could
have anything to do with Saul because, after all, there is a complete absence of
references to Saul.

17   For thorough critiques, among a number that have been published by archaeologists,
see Raz Kletter, "Chronology and the United Monarchy: A Methodological
Review," *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins* 120 (2004): 1–54 and Amnon
Ben-Tor and Doron Ben-Ami, "Hazor and the Archaeology of the Tenth

Century B.C.E.," *IEJ* 48 (1998): 1–37. The bibliography on Finkelstein's theories, by Finkelstein himself and others, continues to grow quickly. See Amihai Mazar, "The Debate over the Chronology of the Iron Age in the Southern Levant," in *The Bible and Radiocarbon Dating: Archaeology, Text and Science,* ed. Thomas E. Levy and Thomas Higham (London: Equinox, 2005), 15–30, and http://www. cjconroy.net/bib/chron-low.htm (accessed September 24, 2015).

18 See A. Graeme Auld, *I & II Samuel: A Commentary* (Old Testament Library; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001).

19 For a survey of some recent scholarship, see David A. Bosworth, "Evaluating King David: Old Problems and Recent Scholarship," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 68 (2006), 191–210.

20 P. Kyle McCarter, "The Apology of David," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 99 (1980), 489–504, and James C. VanderKam, "Davidic Complicity in the Deaths of Abner and Eshbaal: A Historical and Redactional Study," *JBL* 99 (1980), 521–39.

21 Baruch Halpern, *David's Secret Demons: Messiah, Murderer, Traitor, King* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2004). See also recently Joel Baden, *The Historical David: The Real Life of an Invented Hero* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2013). See the criticisms in J. Randall Short, *The Surprising Election and Confirmation of King David,* Harvard Theological Studies 63; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), which are pointed but not, I believe, fully valid.

22 Peter Machinist, "Literature as Politics: The Tukulti-Ninurta Epic and the Bible," *CBQ* 38 (1976), 455–82, here at 475.

23 See also John Van Seters, *In Search of History: Historiography in the Ancient World and the Origins of Biblical History* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 93–95.

24 For recent discussions, see Sung-Hee Yoon, *The Question of the Beginning and the Ending of the So-Called History of David's Rise: A Methodological Reflection and Its Implications,* Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft, 462 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 81–122; Short, *The Surprising Election and Confirmation of King David*; Andrew Knapp, "David and Hattushili III: The Impact of Genre and a Response to J. Randall Short," *Vetus Testamentum* 63 (2013), 261–75.

25 Halpern, 100.

26 It should also be noted in this context that with regard to David—as opposed to the other examples mentioned in this paragraph—there is evidence that during his life or soon thereafter, the scribal infrastructure necessary to create such literature existed. For one line of evidence, see Christopher Rollston, "Scribal Education in

Ancient Israel: The Old Hebrew Epigraphic Evidence," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 344 (2006): 47–74, and for the tenth century, add above all the ostracon from Khirbet Qeiyafa, which is the most "literary" text yet discovered from that century in the southern Levant, as well as the internal evidence of the notice of Shoshenq's campaign. See Nadav Na'aman, "Sources and Composition in the History of David," in *The Origins of the Ancient Israelite States,* ed. Volkmar Fritz and Philip R. Davies, JSOT Sup 228 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996), 170–86, and idem, "The Temple Library of Jerusalem and the Composition of the Book of Kings," in *Congress Volume Leiden 2004,* ed. André Lemaire; VT Sup 109 (2006): 129–52.

27   Perhaps it strikes some as quixotic to pursue the "original meaning" of the text. It is not my intention to engage this debate here. I will simply note that if one abandons that quest, and moves exclusively to the realm of reception history, this distinction should always be kept in mind, and it should be explicit that what is being elucidated is the way the text was read and not what it meant when it was written.

28   This point is discussed thoroughly, with amusingly devastating examples of where this method would produce absurd results, by Benjamin D. Sommer, "Dating Pentateuchal Texts and the Perils of Pseudo-Historicism," in *The Pentateuch: Perspectives on Current Research,* ed. Thomas B. Dozeman, Konrad Schmid, and Baruch J. Schwartz, Forschungen zum Alten Testament 78 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 85–108.

29   For reflections on these differences, see the (mostly unjustified) comments in David Carr's review of Joel Baden's *J, E, and the Redaction of the Pentateuch* (Forschungen Zum Alten Testament; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), in the *Review of Biblical Literature* (http://www.bookreviews.org/pdf/7801_8507.pdf), and Niels Peter Lemche's comments in his review of Carr's *The Old Testament: Sacred Texts and Imperial Contexts of the Hebrew Bible* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010) in the *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 24 (2010), 287–88.

30   See his comments in the preface, p. xii, on the dedication of the book to the American scholar Frank M. Cross.