

HEBREW STYLE IN 2 SAMUEL 6

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2 Samuel 6 presents the story of the movement of the ark from Kirjath Jearim to Jerusalem. In the first part of the account the ark begins its journey but is interrupted because Uzzah, one of the men who drive the cart upon which the ark is carried, steadies the ark with his hand and is struck dead by God. David is afraid to continue to transport the ark, and it is placed in the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite. In the second part David succeeds in bringing the ark to Jerusalem. The reason for his success is delineated in the subtle and laconic yet definite development of the story. David recognizes that the ark needs to be carried in the manner stipulated by Pentateuchal law—that is, upon the shoulders of priests—rather than on a cart as had been done by the Philistines in 1 Samuel 6. A comparison of the two attempts reveals that after the Uzzah incident there are indications that the ark was carried by humans rather than on a cart, that the sacrificial law is considered essential when Israelites are in the presence of the ark, and that the priestly function is now given its rightful place. David himself, in an extraordinary demonstration of God's favor toward him, is allowed to fulfill the role of a priest as he dons a priestly ephod and leads the ark to Jerusalem. The final episode of the chapter, Michal's challenge of indecency against David, continues the cryptic but forceful narrative depiction. Michal's complaints are against God's selection of David, and God curses her as a result. In summary the stylistic depiction of the action throughout 2 Samuel 6 is terse, especially in comparison to the parallel account in 1 Chronicles 13, 15, 16, and this has caused much misunderstanding. The purpose of the story can only be appreciated as the reader acknowledges the full force of the stylistic minutiae of the narrative.

This summary, of course, is a matter of dispute. S. Mowinckel argued that there is an ancient Near Eastern ritual background to this event in the consecration of the temple of the new king.¹ P. D. Miller and J. J. M. Roberts sought to establish a Mesopotamian background for the story in the capture and return of divine images.² Miller and Roberts stress the historical rather than mythic nature of the action, though they claim that

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¹ S. Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962) 1.175.

² P. D. Miller, Jr., and J. J. M. Roberts, *The Hand of the Lord: A Reassessment of the "Ark Narrative" of 1 Samuel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1977).

the depiction reveals that the movement is accompanied by ritual actions to purify the district through which the procession walked and the place of rest of the sacred object. P. Kyle McCarter agrees with Miller and Roberts that a Mesopotamian background is likely but argues that the movement cannot be considered a "return" since the ark had never been in Jerusalem.³ McCarter suggests a parallel with Assyrian accounts of the introduction of national deities to new royal cities:

This ceremonial pattern—the invitation of the national god into a new capital city, the presentation of sacrifices, and the provision of a banquet for the people of the land—is also present in 2 Samuel 6, where the ark of Yahweh, the god of Israel, is conducted into the new capital city, the City of David, and honored with sacrifices after which a feast is served to the people of the land.⁴

C. L. Seow has recently argued that the mythological background for the chapter is the Canaanite myth of the divine warrior that was associated with the two sanctuaries, Shiloh and Kirjath Jearim, where the ark is known to have resided.⁵ He argues that the story is a ritual drama reenacting the victory of the divine warrior and his accession to be king. What is lacking in these studies, however, is that there has been no examination of Pentateuchal laws that may provide the rationale for the development of the story, not even an examination to refute this possible alternative. The reason, to be sure, is that Pentateuchal laws are not considered the precursor for the story in the Former Prophets but are the later accumulation and invention of the priestly community of the second temple. The effect of this view can be seen even in R. P. Gordon's recent commentary that speaks of Pentateuchal laws regarding the movement of the ark only with reference to the interests of the Chronicler. In comment on 2 Sam 6:13 he writes: "It may well be that later ceremonies involving the ark reproduced the sort of ritual described here; this may even account for the mention of the *six paces*."⁶ The result of these readings is to make the action of God against Uzzah capricious: Since the procession is in some sense a ritual pattern, the manner in which the ark is moved is not the cause of Uzzah's death. The author of the parallel account in 1 Chronicles 13, 15, 16 provides a reason for Uzzah's death: The Levites were to carry the ark (1 Chr 15:2, 13), and they were to bear it upon their shoulders (15:15). That is, the Pentateuchal laws regarding the movement of the ark explain the story. But does the account given in 1 Chronicles contradict or confirm the account in 2 Samuel?

³ P. K. McCarter, Jr., "The Ritual Dedication of the City of David in 2 Samuel 6," *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth* (ed. C. L. Meyers and M. O'Connor; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1983) 273–277; *II Samuel* (AB 9; Garden City: Doubleday, 1983) 178–184.

⁴ McCarter, "Ritual" 275.

⁵ C. L. Seow, *Myth, Drama, and the Politics of David's Dance* (HSM 44; Atlanta: Scholars, 1989) 1–8.

⁶ R. P. Gordon, *1 & 2 Samuel: A Commentary* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1986) 233–234 (italics his).

Upon preliminary inquiry the stylistic depiction in 2 Samuel 6 is more laconic than 1 Chronicles 13, 15, 16. The story in 2 Samuel is terse, whereas the story in 1 Chronicles is expanded and more detailed. Does the terseness obscure the presentation of the story? What is the effect of the stylistic depiction in this chapter? That is, what is the complete effect of the uses of the Hebrew language in the creation of the story?

The most influential study of the style of the chapter is that of L. Rost.⁷ The purpose of Rost's stylistic analysis is to distinguish the existence of two styles in the books of 1 and 2 Samuel: the style of the ark narrative, and the style of the succession narrative. The two styles evince two sources. Rost considers 2 Samuel 6 (omitting vv. 16, 20–23) as the conclusion to the ark narrative. 2 Samuel 6, therefore, belongs to a different source than 2 Samuel 5 and 7, and each chapter is written for different purposes. There can be no recognition of the continuity of the story in 2 Samuel 5–7 if Rost's stylistic account of the chapter is correct. The identification of the source on stylistic grounds serves Rost's argument that the entire source gives the history of the ark and the reason that the ark is in Jerusalem, but as in the case of other recent interpreters he does not explain chap. 6 by reference to Israelite law. Although F. Schicklberger has expressed caution recently regarding aspects of Rost's account of style,⁸ there has been insufficient recognition of the problems with Rost's study. Moreover since Rost's stylistic analysis of the ark and succession narratives was the single most important argument in the establishment of the modern theories that the sources of the books of Samuel and the Former Prophets as a whole were small sources placed end to end rather than long Pentateuchal-like sources, his study cannot continue to go unexamined and yet be considered authoritative.⁹

In an examination of Hebrew prose style it is not possible to distinguish easily what constitutes style and what is a problem of manuscript transmission or, perhaps even more difficult, what are the grammatical and literary conventions of the language and how the author has either used or parodied these conventions. Such alternative explanations must be weighed in each instance. My essay, however, attests that the study of Hebrew style heightens our awareness of the subtleties of the Hebrew language that have all too often been attributed to carelessness in manuscript transmission, the stylistic idiosyncrasies of distinct authors and

⁷ L. Rost, *The Succession to the Throne of David* (Historic Texts and Interpreters in Biblical Scholarship 1, Sheffield Almond, 1982)

⁸ F. Schicklberger, *Die Ladeerzahlung des ersten Samuel-Buches Eine literaturwissenschaftliche und theologiegeschichtliche Untersuchung* (FB 7, ed R. Schnackenburg and J. Schreiner, Wurzburg: Echter, 1973)

⁹ The essential acceptance of Rost's stylistic analysis of the books of 1 and 2 Samuel can be seen, for example, in the following statement "For the lack of a better alternative, we accept with certain reservations and modifications Rost's basic thesis that 1 Sam 4 1b–7 1 and 2 Sam 6 formed, at one time, a single compositional unit (see *Succession*, 33–34), the so-called Ark Narrative, even though some parts of the original text may have been lost or omitted" A. A. Anderson, *2 Samuel* (WBC 11, Dallas: Word, 1989) 99

editors, or crudities of Hebrew language and thought. And if it is true that the resources of the Hebrew language are more varied and subtle than is often thought, then we might expect that the stories written in the language will be richly and delicately presented.

Verses 1–10 present the story of the initial attempt to bring the ark to Jerusalem. Verse 1 introduces the episode by noting the military preparations David makes for the task. David is prepared for a fierce war and gathers both the best and a goodly number of troops (30,000) so that his intent will not be thwarted.¹⁰ His devotion to the preservation of the ark at this point appears laudable, but unfortunately he gives more attention to gathering the warriors than to making the preparations, which were even more necessary (as the rest of the chapter depicts). David's military preparations are nonetheless a continuation of his military actions in 2 Samuel 5 and are an initial indication that chap. 6 should not be separated from chap. 5. The use of the phrase "and he gathered again," in particular, marks the continuity with chap. 5.

The reading of v. 2 presents three problems, all of which illustrate that the language found in the verse is explicable without emendation. These difficulties show us how the language is used to create emphasis. The first problem is the phrase *b'ly yhw dh* in v. 2. It has been translated in several ways: as the place name "Baale of Judah" (KJV, RSV, Luther, de Vaux, NIV), as "the lords of Judah" (LXX, Syr, Vg), as "the cities of Judah" (*Tg. Neb.*). McCarter suggests an omission of "Judah" and retains the place name "Baalah."¹¹ The reading of the phrase raises the question of the existence of an ark narrative because in 1 Sam 7:1, the final verse of the first part of the ark narrative, the ark is left at Kirjath Jearim. If *b'ly yhw dh* is a place name, why are two different names for the same place used in three contiguous verses in the original source? As a place name the phrase is an argument against the notion of a continuous ark narrative from 1 Sam 7:1 to 2 Samuel 6.¹²

Rost answers this objection by examining the occurrences in which Baalah is identified with Kirjath Jearim (Josh 15:9) or Kirjath Jearim is identified with Kirjath Baal (15:60; 17:14). He thus suggests that Baalat-judah, as he spells it, was an older and more sacred name that fell out of use. But it is easier to understand how a synonym is used if numerous chapters are set between 1 Sam 7:1 and 2 Sam 6:1 than if the verses immediately follow one another, as would be the case in an "ark narrative." Moreover A. A. Anderson has rightly noted that place names with Kirjath

¹⁰ The LXX raises the number from 30,000 to 70,000. See a similar procedure in the LXX of 1 Sam 11:8. McCarter makes no comment on the higher number in the LXX, but he claims the number in the MT is too large. He follows an argument by Mendenhall that an *'elep* is a small military contingent, perhaps 5–14 men. Thirty contingents are about 150–450 men. McCarter does not give us a reason for saying that the numbers are too large, and his judgment should not therefore be accepted. In both 1 Sam 11:8 and 2 Sam 6:1, McCarter accepts the MT rather than the LXX.

¹¹ McCarter, *II Samuel* 162.

¹² Rost, *Succession* 7.

are usually the older Canaanite name, such as Debir (called Kirjath Sepher in Josh 15:15; Judg 1:11) and Hebron (called Kirjath Arba in Josh 14:15).¹³ 1 Chronicles 13:6 supports the translation as a place name. It has "to Baalah, that is, to Kirjath-jearim, which belonged to Judah" (KJV). The Chronicler's style is fuller, less abrupt and more explanatory than that of 2 Samuel. It is possible that the Chronicler deliberately explicates the abbreviated name in 2 Sam 6:2. What remains of the 4QSam^a fragment is similar to the phrase in 1 Chr 13:6: Q has *b^clh hy⁷ qr[yt y^crym ⁷šr] lyhwdh*,¹⁴ which suggests that Q read the phrase as a place name and also added several words that made it more like, though not identical to, the phrase in Chronicles.¹⁵ The *y* at the end of *b^cly* is unusual if the word is the place *b^clh*. The *y* would suggest that the word is a common plural noun in construct form. But *y* is often a variant for *h*, and the pointing of the MT is not necessarily as a common noun. The translation of the phrase as a place name is also supported by the use of the adverb *mšm* in 2 Sam 6:2 because the adverb needs an antecedent. The best reading of the phrase seems to be as a place name.

The second problem in v. 2 is the preposition *min* preceding the name, and it has caused much textual emendation. Wellhausen recommended that it be deleted, as it is in front of the name in 1 Chr 13:6.¹⁶ The preposition initially appears awkward because the preceding verb *hlk* suggests that David and the people are going to Baale Judah. What we expect from the two verbs at the beginning of the verse is for the army to arise, go to Baalah of Judah and bring up the ark. We expect a third verb, but it is not there. Rost, however, offers an explanation. He says that the preposition is proleptic and that it moves the sentence immediately to the final and most significant action in the sequence, that of bringing the ark from its resting place. Thus the style of the sentence is laconic. In contrast the Chronicler diminishes this abrupt style and explains the use of the place name more fully. But the style of 2 Sam 6:2 makes the central point of the verse, and it is unnecessary to resort to emendation.

The third problem in v. 2 is the repetition of *šm*, which according to the MT is pointed in both cases as the noun meaning "name." The Syr and Tg. Neb. preserve both words, although the Syr translates the first as *tmn*, "there." The LXX and the Vg delete one *šm*, as numerous recent commentators have done as well. But it is possible to see in the repetition of the noun a point that the author is making in the story. The repetition of the word "name" recalls the significance of the ark in a story in which the ark is taken more seriously than it was in the days of Saul but is still not

¹³ Anderson, *2 Samuel* 101.

¹⁴ Ulrich suggests the addition of a *y* in the fragment so that the word is *qry[t]*. E. C. Ulrich, Jr., *The Qumran Text of Samuel and Josephus* (HSM 19; Missoula: Scholars, 1978) 194.

¹⁵ McCarter does not accept either the Q reading or the LXX reading at this point as representing the original Hebrew but says that originally only Baalah existed as the shorter and more primitive reading. McCarter, *II Samuel* 162–163.

¹⁶ J. Wellhausen, *Der Text der Bücher Samuelis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1871) 166–167.

adequately respected. God's presence is manifest in the revelation of his name (Exod 3:14; 6:3), and this name dwells, as God does, between the cherubim on the ark (1 Sam 4:4). The first *šm* is the subject of the relative clause, "whose name is called," and the second introduces the full phrase, "the name of the LORD of hosts who dwells between the cherubim." The insistence on the fullness of God's presence should not go unheeded. What is often thought to be careless repetition underlines the purpose of the ark.

I am unsure whether vv. 3–4 contain dittography, and I think a good argument can be made on either side. Whether there is dittography or not, there are two aspects of the style of vv. 3–4 that are especially significant for the development of the story. The verses give the names of the two men who drove the cart that carried the ark and say that they are the sons of Abinadab. Who are these men? Are they priests? Although a man named Eleazar, the son of Abinadab, was sanctified in 1 Sam 7:1 to guard the ark when it was first placed in the house of Abinadab, we do not know whether he was a priest because of the obscure nature of his sanctification. According to the story in 1 Samuel 22, a succession of priests through Eli's family ends brutally with only Abiathar escaping. Eleazar is not said to be part of this succession. Uzzah and Ahio¹⁷ are not mentioned in 1 Sam 7:1, and there is little basis for an argument that they are priests. McCarter, who supposes that all three—Eleazar, Uzzah, Ahio—are priests, does not make a sufficient case. He writes in regard to 1 Sam 7:1: "Abinadab, father of the priests Eleazar, Ahio (II Sam 6:3, 4; I Chron 13:7), and Uzzah (II Sam 6:3, 6, 7, 8; I Chron 13:7, 9, 10, 11), lived 'on the Hill.'"¹⁸ McCarter's argument is that the names of these sons of Abinadab are also names of priests. He suggests that the name *ʿzh* is a variant spelling of *ʿlʿzr* and that the variants refer to the same man.¹⁹ The examples that McCarter cites to show that names with *ʿz* are sometimes spelled *ʿzr* do not account for the omission of *ʿl* in Uzzah. In McCarter's commentary on 2 Samuel 7 he asserts again that Uzzah is the "officiating priest" on this occasion.²⁰ There is only slight justification for Eleazar being a priest in that he may be a namesake of Aaron's son Eleazar, the first Kohathite to be assigned the charge of the ark according to Num 3:29–32. But the link is too speculative. Further, the ark was at Kirjath Jearim for some time: twenty years between the events in 1 Sam 7:1 and 3,²¹ either twenty or forty years during the reign of Saul, depending on the length of Saul's reign, and about eight to ten years into the reign of David, for a minimum total of fifty years and, if

¹⁷ There is no reason to support one reading over the other in the translation of *ʿhyw*. The MT points it as a proper name. The LXX has "his brothers"; *Tg. Neb.*, Syr and Vg have the same reading as the MT. The name Uzzah is spelled in two different ways in the MT of this passage, although not in 1 Chronicles 13.

¹⁸ P. K. McCarter, Jr., *I Samuel* (AB 8; Garden City: Doubleday, 1980) 137.

¹⁹ McCarter, *II Samuel* 169.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 174.

²¹ Klein says that the twenty years referred to in 1 Sam 7:2 are from the time the ark is brought to Kirjath Jearim to the battle in 1 Samuel 7. R. W. Klein, *I Samuel* (WBC 10; Waco: Word, 1983) 65.

Saul reigned for forty years (Acts 13:21), for a possible and likely total of seventy years.²² Uzzah cannot easily be identified with Eleazar, and Uzzah and Ahio are probably grandsons of Abinadab.

Verses 3–4 also note that the ark is transported on a new cart. In 1 Sam 6:7 the Philistine diviners instructed that the ark should be placed on a new cart in order to send it back to the Israelites. David and his men attempt to transport the ark in the same way that the Philistines had done. Moreover the Israelite cart is pulled by oxen as the Philistine cart was. In 2 Samuel 6 we are told that the sons of Abinadab “drove” the ark—that is, they drove the oxen. Later when Uzzah puts forth his hand to steady the ark (v. 6) it is because the oxen stumble. But the Pentateuchal laws are definite regarding the movement of the ark. The Kohathites are to bear the ark on their shoulders (Exod 25:12–15; Num 4:15; Deut 10:8), they are not to carry the ark on a cart pulled with oxen even though Moses gave the other Levites carts and oxen to transport their parts of the tabernacle (Num 7:6–9), and they are not to touch the ark lest they die (see Num 4:15). There are therefore four infractions of Pentateuchal laws in this story: (1) Uzzah is not a Kohathite, (2) the ark is to be carried on the shoulders of priests, (3) it is not to be carried on a cart pulled by oxen, and (4) Uzzah touches the ark, which is even forbidden to Kohathite priests. Any one of these infractions could be the reason for his death. As the story turns to David’s second attempt, small but forceful differences in the story mark the infractions of these laws.

There have been a variety of proposals regarding the nature of Uzzah’s error. McCarter says, “The ancient Israelite understood that all sacred things were to be approached with great care and that the manipulation of sacred objects was an activity necessarily insulated by ritual precautions and taboos. The transference of the ark from one place to another, therefore, was not a task to be taken lightly; it amounted to a sacred rite.”²³ Since, according to McCarter, Uzzah is a priest, there is nothing out of order in Uzzah transporting the ark. The problem is that there is some kind of “ritual accident.”²⁴ Hertzberg says that Uzzah had disregard for the “usual precautions” taken in serving the ark. He does not say what precautions are necessary, and he makes no reference to the laws of the Pentateuch.²⁵ Gordon claims that the point of the story is that the ark is not to be handled familiarly. David was manipulating it to serve his ambitions as “king and would-be emperor.”²⁶ These suggestions are not adequately precise regarding Uzzah’s error. In contrast, Josephus at least asserted that although there were priests with David from the outset of his journey,

²² The length of Saul’s rule is difficult to determine. Josephus contradicts himself in saying that it was either twenty or forty years. Compare Josephus *Ant.* 10.143 and 6.378. Hertzberg claims the number forty may have been part of 1 Sam 13:1. H. W. Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976) 103.

²³ McCarter, *II Samuel* 170.

²⁴ *Ibid.* 174.

²⁵ Hertzberg, *Samuel* 279.

²⁶ Gordon, *Samuel* 232.

the ark was attended by Uzzah, who was not a priest, and Uzzah was killed for this reason.²⁷ Josephus' reading is consistent with 1 Chr 13:1-5; 15:1-14. J. Carl Laney provides a concise summary of the legal infractions in his commentary.²⁸

Nor in v. 7 is Uzzah's action described as innocent. It is called an "error" (*šl*). The ancient versions translate the word as if Uzzah is not innocent. *Tg. Neb.* and the Syr use the verb *šly*, "to err"; the LXX^{AL} and others have *epi tē propeteia*, "on account of rashness"; the Vg translates *šl* as *temeritate*, "temerity."

David's distress causes him to discontinue his attempt to bring the ark to his city (v. 10). He sets the ark in the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite (vv. 10-11). The story here as elsewhere is laconic because it does not clarify the significance of placing the ark in the home of a Gittite. If Obed-Edom is a priest, then he may be the clue to the cause of Uzzah's death. 1 Chr 15:18, 21, 24, 25; 16:5, 38 list Obed-Edom as a Levite, but is there any indication of this from 2 Samuel 6 alone? The gentilic term Gittite is used of anyone from a village named Gath. Goliath is called a Gittite because he is from the Philistine city of Gath (see 2 Sam 21:19). There is, however, an Israelite city named Gath Rimmon (Josh 19:45; 21:24-25), and Obed-Edom may well come from this place.²⁹ There are three psalms that use the word "Gittith" in their superscriptions (Pss 8:1; 81:1; 84:1), but the precise force of the term is not understood. It may refer to either an instrument or a group of performers, perhaps even Levitical musicians. The uses indicate, at the very least, that the word Gittite is found in an Israelite context. A Gittite need not have been a foreigner. The use of "Gittite" in 2 Sam 15:18-19 complicates the matter because the Gittites there are foreigners, albeit loyal to David. There are insufficient grounds for arguing from 2 Samuel 6 alone that Obed-Edom is a priest.³⁰

Verses 13-14 are the central verses in the chapter. They mark the three distinct changes David makes in the transportation of the ark. First, individuals are now carrying the ark. The first indication of this is the use of the verb "to bear" (*nšʔ*) in v. 13. In 2 Sam 6:3 *nhgym* is used for the action in lifting up the ark from the house of Abinadab to put it on the cart. The participial form *nšʔy* is used again in v. 13, but it is not used of the oxen. The active participle *nšʔym* is also used in 2 Sam 15:24 for the Levites who are carrying the ark at that time. The use of the verb in v. 13 thus describes human activity.

Second, v. 13 also says that after the procession has marched six steps, David sacrificed an ox and a fatling. It is possible that the sacrifices were

²⁷ Josephus *Ant.* 7.81-82.

²⁸ J. C. Laney, *First & Second Samuel* (Chicago: Moody, 1982) 95-96.

²⁹ It is also possible that a Gittite is from the city of Gittaim (2 Sam 4:3; Neh 11:33). The LXX of 2 Sam 4:3 uses the same term as in 6:11. That Obed-Edom is a Gittite is not necessarily evidence against his Levitical ancestry. The Levites were reckoned as belonging to those tribes in which they lived (see Judg 17:7).

³⁰ Josephus perpetuates the tradition that Obed-Edom is a Levite. See Josephus *Ant.* 7.83.

offered every six steps,³¹ but the use of *ky* can also simply introduce a temporal clause for one event in past time. What is the significance of these sacrifices? If we restrict ourselves to the Former Prophets, "ox" (*šwr*) and "fatling" (*mry*), v. 13) are used elsewhere of sacrificial animals: the former in Judg 6:25, the latter in 1 Kgs 1:9—though we cannot be certain whether they have any special meaning. The "burnt offerings" and "peace offerings" mentioned in 2 Sam 6:17–18 are also found in 1 Sam 6:14–15, in relation to the movement of the ark as well, in a different context in 1 Sam 13:9–10, and so on. Again the Mosaic law illumines our passage. According to Leviticus 1, burnt offerings are for atonement, and in Leviticus 3 peace offerings are for thanksgiving.³² These sacrifices are necessary for the Israelites as they approach God in the tabernacle. It is fitting that they are offered here, as David is in the presence of God whose presence is above the ark.

Third, v. 14 says that David wears a linen ephod. A. Phillips argues that it is not a priestly garment because in 1 Sam 2:18 the boy Samuel wears such a linen ephod and a priestly ephod would be out of place for a child.³³ But the point of 1 Sam 2:18 is that Samuel is ministering before the Lord, and he may well be a young priest-in-training. There are also several instances in the Former Prophets in which the mention of an ephod is the principal indication of priestly function. Gideon makes an ephod in order to establish a priest in Ophrah (Judg 8:27). In 1 Sam 14:3 Ahiah, one of Eli's descendants, is wearing the ephod and is consulted by Saul. Ahimelech possesses an ephod in 21:9 and when he flees to David in 23:9. The best example is in 22:18 in which the phrase "to wear a linen ephod" is synonymous with being a priest. The mention of a linen ephod in 2 Sam 6:14 is a bold affirmation that David is wearing priestly attire for the celebration.

Although we do not know from 2 Samuel 6 alone whether there were other priests at either the first or second attempt to bring the ark to Jerusalem, v. 14 affirms that David is fulfilling a priestly role. What is remarkable is that there is no particular offense against God in David's deportment. If there is a Levitical priesthood at this time, it could be especially problematic for David to wear the garment. Yet the donning of the priestly ephod indicates the measure of God's blessing of David. There is further confirmation of David's priestly role in 2 Sam 7:18, since David is also treated as a priest as he goes in and sits before the Lord. McCarter

³¹ Miller and Roberts, *Hand* 17 and 96 n. 157. Miller and Roberts do not consider 2 Samuel 6 as part of the ark narrative, although they dismiss Rost's stylistic analysis without adequate criticism. While the argument of this paper agrees with them that the ark narrative cannot be identified, their dismissal of Rost is gratuitous without (1) giving an account of his stylistic divisions and (2) explaining why they disagree with his stylistic argument.

³² Milgrom says that the *šlmym* is an offering (1) expressing thanks, (2) completing a vow, or (3) of free will. J. Milgrom, "A Prolegomenon to Leviticus 17:11," *Studies in Cultic Theology and Terminology* (Leiden: Brill, 1983) 96–103. See esp. 100.

³³ A. Phillips, "David's Linen Ephod," *VT* 19 (1969) 485–487.

says that "sitting" before God is otherwise unknown in the Bible.³⁴ The rabbinic tradition that only Davidic kings were allowed to sit in the temple court (*Yoma* 25a) may stem partly from this verse and partly from the statement in Ps 110:1 that David or Davidic kings are commanded to sit at the right hand of God until the king's enemies are made his footstool. Psalm 110, to be sure, affirms that David is a priest after the order of Melchizedek. Note the contrast in Heb 10:11–13 between priests that stand before God offering sacrifices and the Messiah who is "sitting" at the right hand of God because he has offered the perfect sacrifice.³⁵

The question whether David is a priest is explored by C. E. Armerding in an essay that is initially concerned with the passage in 2 Sam 8:18 in which it is said that David's sons are priests.³⁶ Armerding argues that there are at least two other passages—2 Sam 20:23–26; 1 Kgs 4:1–5—in which individuals are priests even though they are not Levites. He concludes that there is "a strong tradition of royal priesthood within the OT itself."³⁷ 2 Samuel 6:14 could be added to this list, and it should be considered the preeminent passage showing David's priestly role. The subtle but deliberate affirmation here in 6:14 is central to the entire chapter. David exceeded Saul's respect for the law by initiating the movement of the ark to Jerusalem (1 Chr 13:3). But David also misunderstood or disregarded the full teaching of the law regarding the ark. When the ark is moved according to the stipulations of the law, David is not only allowed to continue to move the ark but is also made a priest who wears the ephod and who offers sacrifices to God. Thus the Davidic covenant has two aspects, both delicately depicted in this chapter. The covenant is in continuity with the law of Moses. David, in contrast to Saul, lives with respect for the Mosaic law. The Davidic covenant also is a move away from the Mosaic law inasmuch as a non-Levite is given the supreme honor of being a priest. 2 Samuel 6 is both an affirmation of the law of Moses and a criticism of the sufficiency of the Levitical priesthood that was instituted by the law of Moses. The chapter evinces a growth beyond the law but not a rejection of it. If both attempts to bring up the ark from Kirjath Jearim are accompanied by Levites, as 1 Chr 13:2 says and that the references to music in 2 Sam 6:5, 15 strongly suggest, then the affirmation of David's priestly role is even more striking. The Levites are present this day, but David is the officiating priest. And if, as Psalm 110 affirms, the model of Davidic priesthood is Melchizedek, a non-Levite, 2 Samuel 6 is a check on the authority and sufficiency of Levitical institutions. These bold affirmations of David's priestly role are made delicately in 2 Samuel 6. The tension between the old way of the law and the modified way of law and king are subtly depicted in the language of this chapter. The failure to sense the precision in

³⁴ McCarter, *II Samuel* 263.

³⁵ Gordon, *Samuel* 241.

³⁶ C. E. Armerding, "Were David's Sons Really Priests?", *Current Issues in Biblical and Patristic Interpretation: Studies in Honor of Merrill C. Tenney* (ed. G. F. Hawthorne; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) 75–86.

³⁷ *Ibid.* 76.

the way the author handles this tension leads to the obtuse conclusions that a "linen ephod" is not a priestly garment and that the theme of priesthood has no place in the chapter or is a later redacted element to alter the depiction of a purely political event.

In summary with respect to vv. 13–14, these three changes in the manner of movement of the ark are subtly yet deliberately delineated. Each of the changes is a clue that laws for the transport of the ark are now being obeyed. The ark was not to be moved in the manner of the Philistines but as enjoined by Israelite law.

But the two actions of the story have not only points of variation but also a common element that binds them together. In both attempts to move the ark, it is transported amid music and singing. In v. 5 David and the house of Israel play before the Lord. Verse 14 says that David dances with all his might. In v. 15 the entire people of Israel bring up the ark with a great shout. The uses of the word *mkrkr* in vv. 14, 16 are the only occurrences of the word in the Hebrew Bible. The traditional translation as "dancing" is confirmed by the use of the word in Ugaritic.³⁸ Rhetorical devices are used to enhance the narrative imitation of this occasion. The numerous participles in vv. 14–16 are used to create continuous and lively action. There are five participles in these three verses, all describing the actions of David or the people as they rejoice with great vigor. Part of the celebration of this day is David's generosity in providing not only the representative of each house a portion of food but also every adult, both man and woman.³⁹

Verses 20–23 end the story with the account of David's return to bless his own house. He is challenged by Michal for his actions of this day because she claims that David has acted immodestly. Michal's comment is strongly stated. In a formation nowhere else attested in the Hebrew Bible as far as we know, in v. 20 an infinitive construct is followed by an infinitive absolute to strengthen the force of Michal's accusation of David's foolishness.⁴⁰ We do not know the extent of David's indecency, but David does not deny the charge.

³⁸ Y. Avishur argues against the translation "dancing." See Y. Avishur, "KRKR in Biblical Hebrew and in Ugaritic," *VT* 26 (1976) 257–261. G. W. Ahlström argues in response to Avishur's article that the word is best translated "dancing," and Ahlström has made the better argument here. G. W. Ahlström, "Short Note: KRKR and TPD," *VT* 28 (1978) 100–101. The word is also known in Palestinian Aramaic where the meaning is not controversial. See the sense of *krkr* in Aramaic. M. Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (New York: Shalom, 1967) 1.670.

³⁹ *špr* is used only here and in the parallel passage in 1 Chr 16:3. Rabbinical sources treat the word as a choice portion of meat and the LXX as bread or cake. If it is a valuable portion of meat, the gift is not slight because thousands of animals would have had to have been slaughtered for all the people of Israel.

⁴⁰ See Driver's excellent discussion of the formation. S. R. Driver, *Notes on the Hebrew Text and the Topography of the Books of Samuel* (2d ed.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1913) 272. Although the ancient versions vary on the sense of the phrase, all but *Tg. Neb.* reflect one verb used twice as it is in the MT. *Tg. Neb.* replaces the infinitive construct with a verb of a different root (*hls*, "to strip").

David's reply in v. 21 is cryptic. The verb is deleted at the beginning of the sentence, and the reader must continue to the end of the verse to find what verb is used.⁴¹ David's first assertion in reply is the phrase "before the LORD." It is before the Lord rather than the handmaids that David dances. The contrast is deliberate and is also a clue to the impact of the entire passage. David's insouciant dancing is his sheer delight over God's blessing toward him. David reminds Michal that he has been chosen over her father and all Saul's house, and Michal's complaint is against God's appointment.⁴²

A similar explanation links David's donning of the lined ephod and his insouciant dancing. Even as David is honored through his position as priest, so he is not to be condemned for his dance for joy. Both of David's actions are bold, yet they are honored by God. Michal fails to appreciate the degree of David's glorification in these events and the extent to which the Davidic covenant is not identical to the law. David's unique position is also attested in the early part of the chapter when Uzzah is killed. David is partly responsible for the neglect of priestly duties in the first attempt to move the ark, but he is not punished, as Uzzah is, for his negligence. David must be exonerated in part simply because of God's favor. David's unique position throughout the chapter does not suggest that David is lawless but that he learns greater respect for the law while learning that the law does not embody the whole of God's purposes.

Barthélemy notes that the cohortative at the end of the verse refers to the honor that will be given to David in the future.⁴³ Although David is glorified in this passage, he will be further glorified in the future. Finally, v. 23 is not spoken by David, and we have no reason to think that David interrupts conjugal relations with Michal. The author intends us to recognize that it is God who has cursed Michal for her rejection of David.⁴⁴

In summary, the style of the Hebrew used in this chapter works to create a powerful depiction of central events for the understanding of the story of David. We have noticed that one of the chief stylistic characteristics of this chapter, though not its only one, is its terseness. This characteristic, however, does not make the story unintelligible. David began to move the ark as the Philistines had done and had to be reminded to obey the Mosaic laws regarding its movement. At the same time there is a deliberate hint that the Davidic covenant will not be a simple reaffirmation of the law.

⁴¹ The LXX includes the verb *orchēsomai* immediately after the first phrase "before the Lord." In doing so it recognizes what the Hebrew is doing but modifies the terseness of the line so that the Greek makes better sense.

⁴² A preposition is unnecessary before *ngyd* even though it is added by many Heb. mss. In the textual apparatus to *BHS*, de Boer notes another usage of the word in a similar context without a preposition in 1 Kgs 1:35.

⁴³ D. Barthélemy, *Critique textuelle de l'ancien testament* (OBO 50/1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1982) 244. Barthélemy's comments are in the midst of his support for the MT in regard to the word *yny*.

⁴⁴ Gordon, *Samuel* 235; Hertzberg, *Samuel* 281.

My account of the style of this chapter bears some resemblance to Rost's account inasmuch as Rost says that the style of the ark narrative is terse. But Rost uses "style" differently than I have. Rost understands style as the peculiarity of an author that distinguishes him from everyone else. Certainly an author's style may be idiosyncratic, but individual peculiarity is not the only sense of the word "style." Eissfeldt criticizes Rost's understanding of style on the basis that a change in style need not indicate a change in authorship.⁴⁵ An author may have several styles, and the styles may be used deliberately for the effects the author intends in a particular passage. Eissfeldt's criticism of Rost on this point is unanswerable—though Rost never, to my knowledge, confronted it—and I have not found evidence that anyone has ever read Eissfeldt's article since it was published.

But a more adequate account of the use of the word "style" in language can be readily witnessed in English literary criticism. For example, J. Baxter shows how Shakespeare is a master of many English styles and how he juxtaposes various styles in the creation of dramatic tragedy.⁴⁶ According to Rost's sense of style, Biblical authors could not be a master of various Hebrew styles and could not use a range of styles for the depiction of events. Much Biblical scholarship operates with this view of style, especially for the purpose of the identification of sources, without realizing the inadequacy of the foundation upon which it rests.

Rost's account of the style of the ark narrative, however, need not be completely inaccurate even if Rost is incorrect in supposing that variations in style reveal different sources. But even a few preliminary comparisons between the "ark" and "succession" narratives reveal that Rost's stylistic examination is also inadequate. Rost's account of the style of the ark narrative is summarized as follows. First, the Hebrew prose of the ark narrative consists of short, simple sentences, few subordinate clauses, few participial constructions, few comparisons and metaphors, and few rhetorical devices. Second, the author uses speeches to enliven the narrative. They occur at crucial points in order to reveal what people think, act and feel. The speeches are used to express moods because the author has difficulty expressing emotions in any other way. Speeches are also used because the narrator either does not wish to or is unable to present the external appearance of a person, and we know who they are because of what they say. The narrator is unable to depict a person's nature. Third, the mode of narration as a whole is vivid and characterized by a minimum of details. The narrative moves quickly to its conclusion. It is seamless, without pauses, and has a closely interwoven structure. Fourth, since the whole of the source is devoted to the ark, the story is a cult legend rather than a political history. Fifth, God is depicted as a fearful and terrible god who brings punishment. Occasionally he graciously brings salvation. On each of these aspects of style Rost contrasts the ark narrative and the

⁴⁵ O. Eissfeldt, "Noch einmal: Text-, Stil- und Literarkritik in den Samuelbüchern," *OLZ* 31/10 (1928) 801–812. See esp. 806–807.

⁴⁶ J. Baxter, *Shakespeare's Poetic Styles* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980).

succession narrative. For example, where the ark narrative uses short, simple sentences, the succession narrative uses longer, more elaborate ones. Where the ark narrative omits metaphors, the succession narrative has many. And so on.

Many of the aspects of the style of the ark narrative as he states them are characteristic of Hebrew narrative depiction in general and cannot be limited to one chapter or one source. Hebrew prose uses coordination of clauses frequently in contrast to other languages, even other Semitic languages such as Arabic with its use of *fa*- and *hal*-clauses.⁴⁷ I discovered ten circumstantial clauses marked with some type of circumstantial particle in the section of 2 Samuel 6 that Rost ascribes to the ark narrative (vv. 1–15, 17–19): six relative clauses (vv. 2 [twice], 3, 4, 12, 17), one temporal clause (v. 13), three causal clauses (vv. 6, 8, 12). Despite these usages in 2 Samuel 6 the prose of this chapter is predominantly paratactic (see esp. vv. 3, 7, 17, in which three verbs in each verse are in coordination in the Hebrew).

But other passages, even in the succession narrative, have a tendency to coordination. I will make a comparison of 2 Samuel 6 and 2 Sam 16:1–19 since the latter chapter is about the same length as 2 Samuel 6. Chapter 16 has thirteen marked circumstantial clauses: eight relative clauses (vv. 2, 4, 8, 11, 14, 16, 18, 19), two conditional clauses (vv. 10, 11), a temporal clause (v. 9), two causal clauses (vv. 8, 10). The prose of 2 Samuel 16 is also paratactic. Notice in particular the coordination in the dialogue in vv. 2–4 and in narration in vv. 13–15. It is not possible to use coordination and subordination as a standard to distinguish the two sources.

Does the ark narrative avoid participles? There are eight participles in 2 Samuel 6; there are only three participles in the test passage in 2 Samuel 16. Rost also says the ark narrative has few metaphors. In chap. 6 Perez Uzzah receives its name as a symbol of God's slaying of Uzzah, and the common Hebrew metaphor of heart is used in v. 16. In chap. 16 there are three metaphors: David is called a bloody man twice (vv. 7, 8), Abishai calls Shimei a dead dog (v. 9). There is not a significant variation in style in either the case of participles or metaphors between the two chapters.

Does the ark narrative use speeches to enliven the narrative, to reveal character and display emotion? Is there little description of appearance? These characteristics again do not seem limited to the ark narrative. Speech is one of the central Biblical modes of characterization, as R. Alter has aptly shown.⁴⁸ Chapter 16 depicts a number of confrontations of various individuals. The depiction of appearance is minimal in chaps. 6 and 16. We know David wore a linen ephod because it is necessary to the story. In chap. 16 we do not know what any of the characters look like or what they are wearing on this eventful day. Again, the comparison of actual passages does not confirm Rost's distinctions.

⁴⁷ S. R. Driver, *A Treatise on the Use of Tenses in Hebrew* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1892) 157.

⁴⁸ R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic, 1981) 63–87.

Is the ark narrative characterized by brevity and seamlessness? Parts of chap. 6 are certainly terse. The changes that take place between the first and second actions of the story in 2 Samuel 6 are presented subtly and without elaboration, as if we are to know them instinctively through a sensibility already formed by Israelite law. But the succession narrative has terse sections as well. For example, David's inaction amid the sins of Amnon in chap. 13 is an example of much that is left out that should have been done, but the lacuna is part of the story. Rost's generalizations regarding terseness of style are not a distinguishing feature of the author of the ark narrative.

The identification of the ark narrative as a legend and the succession narrative as political history is also difficult to maintain. The stylistic distinction between historical or legendary depiction is essential to Rost's account. Rost, to be sure, is not the innovator of this distinction. It is evident in the works of Gunkel and Gressmann and is assumed too often in the study of Biblical narrative. Are narratives, such as the succession narrative, that are free from interventions by God necessarily more historical than narratives that depict miracles, or does the difference simply indicate that God does fewer miracles at that point in the story? Can miracles be so easily ruled out unless it is provable that every event that takes place in the world has a causal explanation that we already know? Is David's exaltation in 2 Samuel 6 more "legendary" than if he is reaping the consequence of his own sin in the succession narrative? The literary criteria for using the succession narrative as a standard for historical writing in the OT are faulty.

Finally, is the depiction of God in chap. 6 that of a punishing God? His severity is certainly manifest against Uzzah and Michal. But he is gracious to David, the anointed one. In the succession narrative God is severe toward David as bloodshed arises within David's house as a result of his disregard for the law in the story of 2 Samuel 11.

In summary, the styles Rost identifies are not limited to particular sources and thus cannot be used to identify the sources of different passages.⁴⁹

David's initial attempt to bring the ark to his city is a failure because he overlooks the laws regarding the movement of the ark. Certain aspects of the style of the chapter are laconic, especially in comparison to the account of the

⁴⁹ Many of the aspects of style that Rost studies are also explained in Auerbach's account of Biblical style, although Auerbach makes the point that the style is part of the Biblical depiction of events. Auerbach, *Mimesis* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1953) esp. 3-23. Rost's account of the style of the succession narrative is similar to Auerbach's account of classical Greek epic, and the ark narrative to classical Greek tragedy. Although Auerbach judges that the laconic style of Biblical depiction is more "pieced together" than Homeric epic, he is not so much arguing for the existence of sources on the basis of style as using style to explain Biblical reality. Auerbach's work is helpful, although he uses too few examples of Biblical style to support his generalizations. It is possible in principle that Rost could have distinguished two styles in 1 and 2 Samuel. But whereas Rost's stylistic analysis notes some characteristics of Hebrew narrative, it remains to show the effect of this style on the presentation of the story rather than suppose that sources can be identified.

same events in 1 Chronicles 13, 15, 16. The force of the narrative, however, provides the reason that God slays Uzzah. The story depicts neither a static nor perfect David. He is not a flat stereotype of piety. He is a living, changing entity who comes to recognize what is required of him but who nevertheless is blessed by God. Rost's examination of the Hebrew style of this passage points out several significant aspects of style, but these stylistic characteristics are deliberate uses of language to develop the story and are not evidence that a source has been identified.