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Karin Hügel, King David's Exposure while Dancing: A Queer Reading of 2 Samuel 6[1]

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ABSTRACT: According to the Hebrew version of the transport of the ark to Jerusalem in 2 Samuel 6, King David is so scantily dressed that he publicly exposes himself while dancing before G*d (יהוה). David's wild, gay and possibly sexual conduct can evoke associations with the behavior of gay persons of today. Queer readers may identify with David and like him turn their backs on dominant rulers – like the members of Saul's dynasty – if they are not respected because of their queer way of life, but persecuted – as David was persecuted by King Saul. Such an interpretation implies that G*d (יהוה) is on the side of persons like King David, who – from the point of view of other people as well as of David's wife Michal – behave in a strange fashion, thus act queerly.

ABSTRACT: Nach der hebräischen Version der Ladeüberführung nach Jerusalem in 2 Samuel 6 ist König David so leicht bekleidet, dass er sich beim Tanz vor G*tt (יהוה) öffentlich entblößt. Davids ausgelassenes, fröhliches und eventuell sexuelles Verhalten kann Assoziationen mit dem Verhalten heutiger Personen auslösen, die sich als gay („fröhlich", „schwul") bezeichnen. Möglicherweise identifizieren sich queer Lesende mit David und wenden sich wie er von vorherrschenden Machthabenden – wie den Mitgliedern von Sauls Dynastie – ab, wenn sie wegen ihrer queeren Lebensweise nicht respektiert, sondern verfolgt werden – wie David von König Saul verfolgt wurde. Eine solche Auslegung impliziert, dass G*tt (יהוה) auf der Seite von Personen wie David steht, die sich – aus der Sicht anderer Menschen, wie auch Davids Frau Michal – sonderbar benehmen, also queer verhalten.

Key words: queer reading; intertextuality; 2 Samuel 6; David; gay

King David's exposure while dancing in the narrative of the ark in the second Book of Samuel, chapter 6, is the last passage in the Books of Samuel that is relevant for a queer reading.[2] I discuss this passage of the Hebrew Bible within the framework of queer readings

[1] This article is an English version of a part of my dissertation in progress with the title "Queere Lesarten der Hebräischen Bibel". It has been presented at the International Meeting of the European Association of Biblical Studies in Vienna 2014.

[2] Before that, I explain in *Queere Lesarten der Hebräischen Bibel* how male beauty arouses male desire – above all, how the beauty of the young David evokes sexual feelings of the pederast Goliath – and address the triangle relationship of David to King Saul and his son Jonathan. Further articles on

to avoid heteronormativity. Interpretations based on queer commentaries contribute to the goal altogether of producing more queer ways of living for different queer persons.[3] The value of queer intellectual work lies above all in its effects, in the spaces that it opens for voices previously unheard, and in the possibilities that it creates for a transformation of the practices, pleasures, desires and identities associated with sexuality.[4] To focus on the erotic behavior of a biblical character, which is extremely unusual, thus queer, for the readers back then and today, is one possible way to read the Bible queerly.

My queer discussion of King David's exposure while dancing can be captured under five headings, *viz*. (1) "King David as a Dancer – Girded with a Linen Ephod", (2) "King David as a Musician – Clothed with an Extraordinary Robe", (3) "King David as a Praising Man – Girded with a Long-Sleeved Tunic of Byssus", (4) "King David's Exposure" and (5) "King David Will Be Gay".

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these topics are K. Hügel, "Queere Aneignungen von David und Goliat: Künstlerische Selbstporträts als besiegte Knabenliebhaber", in W. Dietrich/C. Edenburg/Ph. Hugo (eds.), *The Books of Samuel: Stories – History – Reception History* (BETL, 284; Leuven: Peeters, 2016), pp. 541-553 and K. Hügel, "Lesungen für Segnungsfeiern gleichgeschlechtlicher Paare, queer ausgelegt: Jonathans Zusage der Lebensgemeinschaft an David (1 Sam 18,1-4) und Ruths Treueschwur gegenüber Noomi (Ruth 1,14-17)", in A. Krebs (ed.), *Alt-Katholische und Ökumenische Theologie: Jahresheft 2016 des Alt-Katholischen Seminars der Universität Bonn* (Bonn: Alt-Katholischer Bistumsverlag, 2016), pp. 31-48.

[3] In contemporary usage, queer is an inclusive, unifying, sociopolitical umbrella term applied to people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, intersexual and asexual as well as those who question their sexual orientation or their identification with the sociocultural gender assigned to them. It can also include gender normative heterosexuals whose sexual orientations or activities place them outside the heterosexually defined mainstream (e.g. polyamorous persons or BDSM practitioners – the acronym BDSM refers to the terms Bondage & Discipline, Dominance & Submission, Sadism & Masochism). These people took the previously abusive word "queer" – which means "strange" or "odd" – for their affirmative self-designation and use it in the sense of "positive perverse". An affirmative reinterpretation of swear words like the term "queer" is not new, e.g. "Quaker", French *huguenots* or Dutch *geuzen* (as self-designation of Dutch freedom fighters in the Eighty Years' War which have been reviled as French *gueux*). In linguistics such words are called – in connection with the last-named example – *geuzennaam*. The verb "to queer" is used for "to spoil". The noun "queer" signifies e.g. "counterfeit money". It plays with the association that these kind of people are something like counterfeit money with which the *straight world*, the world of the *right* women and men, shall be deceived.

[4] K. Stone (ed.), *Queer Commentary and the Hebrew Bible* (JSOT Supp., 334; London and New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), p. 33.

King David as a Dancer – Girded with a Linen Ephod

David has been anointed king over Judah[5] and Israel[6] in the meantime and transports the ark of G*d (יהוה)[7] to Jerusalem, to a city which he has already chosen as his royal residence[8] and which he now also constitutes as the religious centre. The ark means *God's (*אֱלֹהִים*)* ark because "over it is called the name of the G*d of Hosts [יהוה צְבָאוֹת] enthroned on the cherubs".[9] According to Exod 25,18-22, two golden cherubs – winged creatures – are sitting on the golden cover on top of the ark. The ark symbolizes the mighty presence of G*d (יהוה). According to the poetical description of the transport of the ark in Ps 132,3-8, David vows not to enter his tent, not to lie on his bed, and not to sleep as long as he has not found a dwelling place for G*d (יהוה). It is the deed of David that the ark of G*d (יהוה) gets transported to Jerusalem, whereby Jerusalem is constituted as the holy city and her special status for generations is defined, not only for Judaism, but also for Christianity and Islam. During this transport of the ark of G*d (יהוה), a dispute broke out between David and his first wife Michal, for whom he has sent again,[10] once her father Saul had given her to another man named Palti,[11] though she was already married to David. After a depiction of Michal's emotions in connection with her heteronomous partner changes has been ignored in the biblical text, an insight into her view on David is exceptionally given here,

> David turned while dancing [מְכַרְכֵּר][12] with all [his] might [בְּכָל-עֹז][13] before G*d [יהוה], and he was girded with a linen ephod [אֵפוֹד בָּד].[14] David and all the

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[5] 2 Sam 2,4.

[6] 2 Sam 5,3.

[7] The spelling of the names of God with an asterisk, G*d (יהוה), G*d (יוי) etc. is mine and is inspired by queer theory. For יהוה has no gender which can be unambiguously grammatically determined. The body concept of this name of God omits the dimension of the sex. Furthermore, this spelling can be understood as an additional indication of the traditional Jewish practice not to pronounce the Tetragrammaton, but to conceive it as a name.

[8] 2 Sam 5,5.

[9] 2 Sam 6,2.

[10] 2 Sam 3,13-16.

[11] 1 Sam 25,44.

[12] כרר ("to be round") means in pilpel "to dance". L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (HALOT) (Leiden: Brill, CD-ROM edn, 1994-2000), s.v. II כרר pilp.

[13] בְּכָל-עֹז means in connection with 2 Sam 6,14 "with all his might". HALOT, s.v. I עז 1. In the name Boaz (בֹּעַז), which means "in him is might", occurs also עז.

[14] אֵפוֹד בָּד means in connection with 2 Sam 6,14 "a cultic garb made of linen". HALOT, s.v. I. אֵפֹד 3. In 1 Chron 15,27 is also written that David wears a linen ephod (אֵפוֹד בָּד), but in 1 Chronicles is additionally previously mentioned that he was enveloped in a sleeveless, cloak-like outer garment made of byssus (בִּמְעִיל בּוּץ), which is a fine, costly, white fabric. HALOT, s.v. בוץ.

> house of Israel brought up the ark of G*d [יהוה] with the shout of joy and with the sound of horn. As the ark of G*d [יהוה] came into the city of David, Michal the daughter of Saul looked down through the window and saw King David dancing and turning while dancing [מְפַזֵּז וּמְכַרְכֵּר][15] before G*d [יהוה], and she despised him in her heart.[16] (2 Sam 6,14-16)

The form כרר in pilpel exists only here in 2 Sam 6,14.16, and therefore its sense is not completely clear. Since the verb כרר means "to be round", the intensive form must describe a movement from which a round form results, thus "to move in a circle", "to turn a cartwheel"[17] or "to perform a flic-flac". In the initial in the Winchcombe Double-Psalter, MS 53, fol. 151r, which dates from the first half of the 12th century CE and is located at Trinity College in Dublin, David is depicted, for example, while back handspringing.[18] However, the first meaning in connection with a translation in terms of "to dance" makes most sense for me. As no certain body parts like arms or hands which David turns are quoted, it can be assumed that he turned as a whole on his own axis while dancing with all his might before G*d (יהוה). David moves in circles, he dances.[19] In case of a circle dance, more dancers would have been mentioned who form a circle together with David.

That it is related that a man like David – according to the text of the Hebrew Bible 2 Sam 6,14 – "turned while dancing with all [his] might (בְּכָל־עֹז) before G*d (יהוה)" and in doing so was girded only "with a linen ephod (אֵפוֹד בָּד)", gives rise to a queer reading. In modern times, it might be queer for readers that a man was dancing in this way. Some men don't want to dance today at all. In certain religious contexts, polemics exist or existed against

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[15] מְפַזֵּז וּמְכַרְכֵּר is probably a hendiadys ("two for one"). Othmar Keel translates as "to turn agilely the cartwheel" ("*behende das Rad schlagen*"). O. Keel, *Die Weisheit spielt vor Gott: Ein ikonographischer Beitrag zur Deutung des m^{e}saḥäqät in Spr 8,30f.* (FZPT, 21; Freiburg: Universitätsverlag, 1974), p. 36. However, I follow Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner (HALOT, s.v. II כרר pilp. or II פזז pi.) who translate both Hebrew words כרר in pilpel and פזז in piʿel as "to dance". פזז in piʿel exists only here in the Hebrew Bible. Syr. *paz* in peʿal means "to dance" and Syr. *pazzīzā* in etpeʿel "agile". K. Brockelmann, *Lexicon Syriacum* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1995), p. 561 bzw. HALOT, s.v. II פזז.

[16] The translations of the text of the Hebrew Bible, according to K. Ellinger and W. Rudolph (eds.), *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1990), are mine.

[17] Keel, *Die Weisheit spielt vor Gott*, p. 36 n. 105.

[18] Concerning the illustration cf. J. Zimmermann, "'histrio fit David …' – König Davids Tanz vor der Bundeslade," in W. Dietrich and H. Herkommer (eds.), *König David – biblische Schlüsselfigur und europäische Leitgestalt: 19. Kolloquium (2000) der Schweizerischen Akademie der Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaften* (Freiburg: Universitätsverlag, 2003), p. 534.

[19] Sh. Bar-Efrat, *Das Zweite Buch Samuel: Ein narratologisch-philologischer Kommentar* (trans. J. Klein; BWANT, 181 = 10,1; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2009), p. 70.

dancing, as the following can be read, for example, in the Midrash on Numbers,[20] "Rabbi Abba bar Kahana[21] said, 'A [professional] dancer is the lowest of the low, for there is none more neglectful of religious duties than he is, and like him David danced before the ark.'"[22] (NumR 4,20)

The biblical story about a king dancing before G*d (יהוה) is probably strange for most readers. Who knows a ruler today that dances scantily dressed in a religious context? It cannot be excluded that the aspect of sexual potency is connoted in the term "might" (עז). The sexual allure of David results from his dancing before G*d (יהוה) and from his very scanty clothing with the linen ephod (אֵפוֹד בָּד). It might be objected that the kind of the ephod (אֵפוֹד) could not yet be clarified, except that it was made of linen (בָּד).[23] The ephod is an attribute of the sanctuary service: Samuel was girded with it as he served at the sanctuary at Shiloh,[24] and the priests of Nob wore it.[25] David's scanty clothing with the linen ephod during the procession of the ark into Jerusalem refers to his double role as a priest and a king, which was not unknown in the ancient Near East.[26] But it is not unlikely in connection with David's dancing before the ark that the ephod is a loin cloth so that it could easily happen to the priest and king that he exposes himself.[27]

King David as a Musician – Clothed with an Extraordinary Robe

Precisely because the Greek and the Aramaic translations have interpreted the Hebrew original text differently, the Hebrew of 2 Sam 6,14-16 is additionally striking for a queer reading. Now I will show these two translations in comparison, starting with the Septuagint.[28]

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[20] The first part of the Midrash on Numbers, to which belongs also section 4, is a haggadic treatment of Num 1-7. A Tanḥuma midrash, which was later greatly enlarged, is regarded as its textual basis. The development of the expanded version cannot be assumed prior to the 12th century. G. Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash* (trans. M. Bockmuehl; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), pp. 310-311.

[21] The Jewish tradition locates Rabbi Abba bar Kahana, a student of Yoḥanan and an eminent haggadist, in Palestine in the third generation of the Amoraim. Ibid., p. 91.

[22] H. Freedman and M. Simon (eds.), *Midrash Rabbah: Numbers in two Volumes* (London: Soncino Press, 1961), vol 1, p. 135.

[23] Bar-Efrat, *Das Zweite Buch Samuel*, p. 70.

[24] 1 Sam 2,18.

[25] 1 Sam 22,18.

[26] Melchizedek is called king of Salem and priest of the most high God (אֵל עֶלְיוֹן) in Gen 14,18.

[27] R. Alter, The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), p. 227 n. 14.

[28] The Septuagint is the ancient Jewish translation of the Old Testament into Greek. According to the Letter of Aristeas the Greek translation of the Torah was made during the rule of Ptolemy II. Philadelphus (285-247 BCE) in Alexandria by 70 or 72 Jewish scholars; hence it received the name of "Septuagint" (LXX). As the Prologue to the Book of Ecclesiasticus shows towards the end of the

Using italicization, I mark the words in my translation from the Greek, which are different from the Hebrew text,

> David *struck up with tuned musical instruments* [ἀνεκρούετο ἐν ὀργάνοις ἡρμοσμένοις][29] before the Lord [κυρίου], and he *was clothed with an extraordinary robe* [στολὴν ἔξαλλον][30] (…) As the ark came into the city of David, Michal the daughter of Saul looked down through the window and saw King David dancing and *striking up* [ὀρχούμενον καὶ ἀνακρουόμενον][31] before the Lord [κυρίου], and she despised him in her heart.[32] (LXX 2 Sam 6,14.16)

Two alterations exist in the Greek translation, and the same passages will also be differently reproduced later in the Targum. First, in the Septuagint it is written *to strike up* (ἀνακρούω) in LXX 2 Sam 6,14.16 instead of *to turn while dancing* (כרר in pilpel in 2 Sam 6,14.16). The reason for that was most likely the quite similar tradition of the story of David's dancing before G*d (יהוה) in the first Book of Chronicles,

> As the ark of the covenant of G*d [יהוה] came in to the city of David, Michal the daughter of Saul looked down through the window and saw King David dancing and being gay [מְרַקֵּד וּמְשַׂחֵק;[33] ὀρχούμενον καὶ παίζοντα[34]],[35] and she despised him in her heart. (1 Chron 15,29)

2nd century BCE, there was in existence a Greek translation of the whole, or at least of the essential parts, of the Hebrew Bible. Influences existed assumingly up to the 4th century CE, when our most ancient complete manuscripts were produced. A. Rahlfs (ed.), *Septuaginta* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006), p. XXXV. From now on this edition of the Septuagint is abbreviated as LXX.

[29] Ἀνακρούω means "to strike up". T. Muraoka (Muraoka), *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint* (Louvain: Peeters, 2009), p. 41. Ὄργανον means "instrument: for music making". Muraoka, p. 503. Ἁρμόζω means "to tune". Muraoka, p. 92. Also in the translation of the Septuagint of 2 Sam 6,5, the phrase ἐν ὀργάνοις ἡρμοσμένοις is additionally inserted, "David and the Israelites were playing mightily before the Lord (κυρίου) *on tuned musical instruments*" (καὶ Δαυιδ καὶ οἱ υἱοὶ Ισραηλ παίζοντες ἐνώπιον κυρίου ἐν ὀργάνοις ἡρμοσμένοις ἐν ἰσχύι).

[30] Στολὴ means "robe". Muraoka, p. 637. Ἔξαλλος means "extraordinary". Muraoka, p. 246.

[31] Ὀρχέομαι means "to dance". Muraoka, p. 507.

[32] The translations of the Septuagint from the Old Greek, according to A. Rahlfs (ed.), *Septuaginta* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006), are mine.

[33] רקד means in piʿel "to leap about", "to dance". HALOT, s.v. רקד pi. שׂחק means in piʿel in connection with 1 Chron 15,29 and 2 Sam 6,5.21 "to dance", "to play", otherwise i.a. also "to be merry". HALOT, s.v. שׂחק pi. 1.3.b.

[34] Παίζω means "to play", "to have fun". Muraoka, p. 519.

[35] A completely different translation is provided in TJon to 1 Chron 15,29, namely "leaping and praising" (מטפז ומשבח). טפז means in paʿel "to leap". M. Jastrow (Jastrow), *Dictionary of the Targumim, the*

Here occurs a Hebrew word instead of *to turn while dancing* (כרר in pilpel in 2 Sam 6,16), which means in piʿel *to dance*, *to play* or *to be merry*, namely שׂחק. Did David behave perhaps like people today that are referred to as gay – in the sense of homosexual? The verb שׂחק can have a sexual connotation. It is a by-form of the verb צחק,[36] which means in piʿel not only "to joke",[37] but euphemistically connotes also sexual acts in Genesis 39: Potiphar's wife, which has been rejected by Joseph, invents a rape in stating to her husband that Joseph has come to her in order *to play* with her (צחק בְּ).[38] The Septuagint reproduces the Hebrew term שׂחק in connection with 1 Chron 15,29 as παίζω ("*to play*" or "*to have fun*") –, that is, as another word than ἀνακρούω ("*to strike up*") in connection with 2 Sam 6,16.

According to the Greek translation of 2 Sam 6,14, David plays *on tuned musical instruments* (ἐν ὀργάνοις ἡρμοσμένοις), which refers to David the musician, who plays symphonia (κινύρα).[39] David is referred to, for example, in 2 Sam 23,1 as the "darling of the songs of Israel" (נְעִים זְמִרוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל).[40] According to the understanding of the Septuagint, Michal despises her husband David not only because he is dancing before the Lord (κυρίος), but also because he is *playing music* before him.

As the second alteration in comparison to the Hebrew text, the Greek words in LXX 2 Sam 6,14 give rise to speculation: What could be meant by the *extraordinary robe* (στολή ἔξαλλή) with which David was clothed? Some queer people are unusually and extravagantly dressed today –, for example, at the Viennese Life Ball, which is the biggest European charity event supporting people with AIDS. In the same manner many queer people are originally and often also scantily clad at the Christopher Street Day Parades like the *Rainbow Parade* in Vienna.

King David as a Praising Man – Girded with a Long-Sleeved Tunic of Byssus

The Aramaic translation in the Targum Jonathan[41] to 2 Sam 6,14-16 strikingly shows David's behavior much more decent than the text of the Hebrew Bible,[42]

Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2006), p. 545. Chald. שׁבח means in Paʿel "to praise", "to sing" Jastrow, p. 1512.

[36] HALOT, s.v. שׂחק. Arab. *ḍaḥaka* ("to laugh") changes in Hebrew first by progressive assimilation into צחק and then dissimilated into שׂחק. C. Brockelmann, *Grundriss der vergleichenden Grammatik der semitischen Sprachen* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1961), vol. 1, pp. 238-239.

[37] HALOT, s.v. צחק pi. 1.

[38] Gen 39,14.17 or K. Hügel, "Eine queere Lektüre von Josef: Jüdische Interpretationen des schönen jungen Manns aus der Hebräischen Bibel," *BN* 157 (2013), pp. 69-99 (86).

[39] Κινύρα is the transliteration of the Hebrew word כִּנּוֹר ("symphonia"). Concerning David playing such an instrument cf. 1 Sam 16,16.23 and 2 Sam 6,5. Concerning David who knows how to play string music cf. 1 Sam 16,18.

[40] HALOT, s.v. נְעִים.

[41] According to the Babylonian Talmud Megilla 3a, the Targum of the Prophets – the Targum Jonathan to Samuel belongs to the Former Prophets – was attributed to Jonathan ben Uzziel, who was

> David *was praising* [משבח] with all power before G*d [יוי], and he was girded *with a long-sleeved tunic of byssus* [כרדוט דבוץ][43] (…) As the ark of G*d [דיוי] came into the city of David, Michal the daugther of Saul looked down through the window and saw King David dancing and *praising* [מרקיד ומשבח][44] before G*d [יוי], and she despised him in her heart.[45] (TJon to 2 Sam 6,14.16)

First, in TJon to 2 Sam 6,14.16 *to praise* (Chald. שבח in paʿel) occurs instead of *to turn while dancing* (כרר in pilpel in 2 Sam 6,14.16). And secondly, only according to the Hebrew verse 2 Sam 6,14, David is so remarkably scantily dressed, according to which his loins are girded with a *linen ephod* (אֵפוֹד בָּד). For in TJon to 2 Sam 6,14 David is described as wearing a *long-sleeved tunic of byssus* (כרדוט דבוץ). Byssus is a fine and costly white fabric.

What Michal has actually to look at of David through the window is thus reproduced strikingly differently in the Hebrew text and in the Greek and Aramaic translations. Besides the version of the Septuagint, above all, the Hebrew version in 2 Sam 6,14-16 – together with 1 Chron 15,29 – is interesting for a queer reading, which I discuss further now.

King David's Exposure

In 2 Sam 6,16 Michal, who sees David through the window in the street or in a place dancing before G*d (יהוה), is referred to as daughter of Saul, and not as a wife of David, because she, as a daughter of the king, distances herself from the behavior of her husband. She despises David in her heart. Michal's fierce reaction can be interpreted differently: She might have perceived David's conduct as awkward. Does a king behave like that? Or was Michal only jealous of her husband? At what does Michal actually take offence? That David prefers to dance before G*d (יהוה) instead of turning towards her? After that, Michal criticizes David as follows,

> When David returned to bless his house, Michal, the daughter of Saul, came out towards David and said, "How dignifiedly the king of Israel behaved today, as he

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a famous disciple of Hillel, which is interpreted today as a late attempt at enhancing the authority of the Targum. The Targum Jonathan of the Former Prophets originates perhaps in Judea before 135 C.E. – the crushing of the Bar-Kokhba revolt –, and the insertion of later material into the text and the possibility of some editorial activity in Babylonia prior to the Arab invasion are assumed. D. J. Harrington and A. J. Saldarini, *Targum Jonathan of the Former Prophets* (AB, 10; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1987), pp. 1.3.

[42] Using italicization, I mark the words in my translation from the Aramaic, which are different from the Hebrew text.

[43] כַּרְדּוּט is equivalent to Lat. chiridota or χειριδωτός and means "a tunic with sleeves". Jastrow, p. 664. בוץ means "byssus". HALOT, s.v. בוץ.

[44] Chald. רקד means in connection with TJon to 2 Sam 6,16 "to dance". Jastrow, p. 1496.

[45] My translation from the Aramaic according to A. Sperber (ed.), *The Former Prophets According to Targum Jonathan* (BiA, 2; Brill, Leiden 1959), pp. 168-169.

exposed himself [נִגְלָה][46] before the eyes of the female slaves of his slaves, as one of the rabble shamelessly exposes herself [כְּהִגָּלוֹת נִגְלוֹת אַחַד הָרֵקִים]!"[47] (2 Sam 6,20)

Michal confronts her husband David sarcastically with the accusation that he behaves exactly contrarily to a king. Before the absolutely lowest – female – persons he has shown himself naked as otherwise only a woman shamelessly exposes herself, who is considered in society as despised – thus a whore? The linen ephod, which usually covers his loins, probably lifted at the intense moves of the dance or at the fast turns due to the centrifugal force and his genitals came into view. Thus, David's dancing is to be definitely considered by the spectators and by the readers – back then and today – as an erotic event. And it would be extremely unusual if a key figure of the present time, be it one of religion, politics or military, would show itself naked in a similar way.

In 1 Sam 19:24 there is another king, namely Saul, who takes off his clothes, exhibits the behavior of a prophet before the prophet Samuel and falls down naked all that day and all that night, and it is not reported of any person who sees him lying naked. But it is not suggested of David in 2 Samuel 6 that he behaves like a prophet. David is not completely uninvolved in his full exposure with his wild dancing. It remains open concerning the narrative of Ham and Noah in Gen 9,21 if the drunken Noah exhibited his genitals deliberately. Later the exhibition of the penis is generally forbidden in the Rule of the Community of Qumran, in 1QS VII,13-14, whose origin dates back to the second half of the 2nd century BCE. However, neither the Greek nor the Aramaic translation of 2 Sam 6,20, which report on David's exposure like the original Hebrew text,[48] seem to have influenced this Rule of the Community of Qumran.

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[46] גלה means in nif'al "to expose oneself". HALOT, s.v. גלה nif. 1. It can be imagined that Noah exposes himself (גלה) completely so that his genitals come into view, too. Gen 9,21, "He [Noah] drank of the wine, became drunk and he exposed himself in the middle of his tent." The Septuagint translates 2 Sam 6,20 as "he was uncovered" (ἀπεκαλύφθη). Ἀποκαλύπτω means "to uncover and bring into view". Muraoka, p. 75. The Targum translates similarily as "who exposed himself" (דאתגלי). Chald. גְּלִי means in etpe'el "to be uncovered" and דאתגלי means in connection with 2 Sam 6,20 "who exposed himself". Jastrow, p. 248.

[47] רֵיק means – metaphorical for people – "empty", "unprincipled" and אַחַד הָרֵקִים means in connection with 2 Sam 6,20 "one of the rabble". HALOT, s.v. רֵיק 2.a.b. Because the numeral אֶחָד can mean not only "one" (masculine), but also "one" (feminine) (HALOT, s.v. אֶחָד 1.), I translate here as a feminine form on the basis of the textual connection with 2 Sam 6,22 – cf. footnote 50. The Septuagint translates differently as εἷς τῶν ὀρχουμένων ("one of the dancers"). כְּהִגָּלוֹת נִגְלוֹת is a figura etymologica of גלה in nif'al that is why I add intensifyingly the word "shamelessly". The Septuagint also translates as "shamelessly exposed" (ἀποκαλύπτεται ἀποκαλυφθεὶς). The Targum translates with two different verbs as "undress and expose" (דחליץ ומתגלי). Chald. חֲלַץ means "to take off", "to undress". חָלִיץ is a passive participle. Jastrow, p. 473.

[48] Cf. my notes on my translation of 2 Sam 6,20 in the footnotes 46 and 47.

King David Will Be Gay

From Michal's point of view, David has shown himself entirely undignified with his dancing. Her class consciousness as Saul's daughter thereby appears. On the other hand she, as David's wife, has every reason for feeling disregarded and hurt because of his unusual and – in her view – unseemly conduct. David responds to Michal after that as follows,

> "Before G*d [יהוה], who preferred me to your father and to all his house to appoint me leader of the people of G*d [יהוה], of Israel, before G*d [יהוה] I will be gay [וְשִׂחַקְתִּי].[49] I will know myself to be even more insignificant than this [one of the rabble; מִזֹּאת],[50] and I will be of little value in my eyes. But by the female slaves of whom you have spoken I will be held in honour." However, Michal daughter of Saul had no child until the day of her death. (2 Sam 6,21-23)

David makes it clear that he has gained his power from G*d (יהוה) and that he has in mind not to bow to the members of the house of Saul any more. Only before G*d (יהוה) he will be gay. I translate שׂחק in piʿel, which could also be reproduced as "to dance" or "to play", here – and in 1 Chron 15,29 –[51] as "to be gay", thus to allude to the original meaning of gay – in the sense of homosexual –, namely ("merry", "happy", "joyful"). As already mentioned above in connection with 1 Chron 15,29, the verb שׂחק in piʿel can have a sexual connotation. David's statement in 2 Sam 6,21 that he will "be gay" or "play" (שׂחק) before G*d (יהוה) can, therefore, euphemistically refer to his sexual acts before G*d (יהוה). Did David behave like a gay man today? If the derogatory term "*Schwuchtel*" was indeed related to the old German verb "*schwuchteln*", then in that way a comparison with David's dancing before G*d (יהוה) would be obvious, "*Schwuchteln* actually is an old German word for to swing, to gambol, to sway the hips, to sashay."[52] In *Deutsches Wörterbuch* of the brothers Jacob and Wilhelm

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[49] The Septuagint translates in another way using two different verbs "I will play and dance" (παίξομαι καὶ ὀρχήσομαι) – like "dancing and playing" (ὀρχούμενον καὶ παίζοντα = מְרַקֵּד וּמְשַׂחֵק) in 1 Chron 15,29. The Jewish historian Flavius Josephus translates in *Jewish Antiquities*, in Ant. 7,88, paraphrasingly as "play and dance many times" (παίζειν τε καὶ πολλάκις χορεῦσαι) where χορεύω means "'to dance' esp. from joy". *LSJ. The Online Liddell-Scott-Jones Greek-English Lexicon*, accessed March 14, 2014, http://www.tlg.uci.edu/lsj/#eid=1&context=lsj, s.v. χορεύω A.2. In TJon to 2 Sam 6,21 is written instead of "I will be gay" (וְשִׂחַקְתִּי) "I will praise" (ושבחית) – relatively similar to "to praise" (Chald. שבח in paʿel) in TJon to 2 Sam 6,14.16 instead of "to turn while dancing" (כרר in pilpel) in 2 Sam 6,14.16. Chald. שבח in paʿel exists also in the phrase "leaping and praising" (מטפז ומשבח) in TJon to 1 Chron 15,29.

[50] זאת is the feminine form of the demonstrative pronoun זֶה and means "this" (HALOT, s.v. זֶה) and I identify this female person with the person which Michal qualified as "one of the rabble" (אַחַד הָרֵקִים) in 2 Sam 6,20.

[51] Cf. chapter "King David as a Musician – Clothed with an Extraordinary Robe".

[52] My translation from German according to J.D. Skinner, Warme Brüder – Kesse Väter: Lexikon mit Ausdrücken für Lesben, Schwule und Homosexualität (Essen: Verlag Die Blaue Eule, 1997), p. 143,

Grimm,[53] for example, the reference can be found that the term "*schwuchtln*" means "to cavort in wild lust"[54] in the dialect of the Saxon Ore Mountains. Also in *Duden* the noun *Schwuchtel* is associated with the verb "*schwuchteln*" ("to dance", "to sashay").[55]

David reminds Michal that G*d (יהוה) has appointed him leader of Israel and preferred him thereby to her father, the former King Saul. David settles a score with Michal. For his whole status derives from G*d (יהוה), he will consider himself even lower than that whore, with which Michal has compared him. He attaches importance only to the standing with low women. What Michal thinks of him as the king's daughter has no significance for him. That power relations are now in fact reversed is shown by the following statement in 2 Sam 6,23 that Michal will remain without children.

A feminist criticism of the context in the Books of Samuel, which is shaped by phallogocentric interests, is legitimate.[56] Indeed, a woman like Michal exceptionally receives a literary voice here that is otherwise suppressed: Michal articulates her resistance to David and shows her autonomy from her husband by criticizing him in 2 Sam 6,20. But her rebellion might be considered as the reason for her childlessness, which testifies to a misogynistic attitude that is criticized from a feminist and queer perspective. Michal – as her father King Saul before –[57] can be regarded as jealous of David. Is Michal's childlessness perceived in causal relationship with her resistance to her husband and with his extraordinary, in her view, indecent conduct, the sexual dimension of David's behavior is additionally emphasized. It is not explained why Michal remains childless. Theoretically, before and/or after the dispute between the married couple, both David and Michal might have refused sex altogether or might have abstained from such sexual acts that could have led to procreation, or G*d (יהוה) – according to the ideas of the Hebrew Bible – might correspondingly have acted.

I have provided a new angle from a queer perspective. It is possible that different queer readers identify at this point with David and like him turn their backs on dominant rulers – like the members of Saul's dynasty – if they don't obtain respect, acceptance or treatment with dignity from them because of their queer appearance and their queer way of

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"Schwuchteln ist eigentlich ein altes deutsches Wort für schwenken, ausgelassen herumspringen, in den Hüften wiegen, tänzeln."

[53] *Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm* (Leipzig: Verlag von S. Hirzel, 1854-1961), 16 vol., accessed March 14, 2014, http://woerterbuchnetz.de/DWB/, s.v. *SCHWUCHT*.

[54] "In toller Lust umherspringen". E. Goepfert, Die Mundart des sächsischen Erzgebirges nach den Lautverhältnissen, der Wortbildung und Flexion (Leipzig: Veit, 1878), p. 40.

[55] "*Tanzen*", "*tänzeln*". *Duden online*, accessed March 14, 2014, http://www.duden.de/woerterbuch, s.v. *Schwuchtel*.

[56] J.Ch. Exum, "Murder They Wrote," in J.Ch. Exum (ed.), *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)versions of Biblical Narratives* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), pp. 16-41.

[57] 1 Sam 20,30, "Saul's anger was kindled against Jonathan, and he said to him, 'Perverse rebel! Do I not know that you have joined the son of Jesse [i. e. David], to the shame of you yourself and of your mother's womb?'"

life, but, on the contrary, are persecuted – as David was persecuted by King Saul. The referenced figures might change for queer persons today. Other people become important. Where does the power of queer people come from? Thus, before whom do diverse queer people want to dance and to be gay today? Before whom do they not mind if they expose themselves? Such an interpretation implies that G*d (יהוה) is on the side of persons like King David, who – from the point of view of other people as well as of David's wife Michal – behave in a strange fashion, thus act queerly.

Summary

King David's exposure while dancing is a relevant narrative for a queer reading of the Books of Samuel. Only according to the Hebrew version of the transport of the ark to Jerusalem in chapter 6 of the second Book of Samuel, the king of Israel and Judah is so scantily dressed that he publicly exposes himself while dancing before G*d (יהוה). King David's linen ephod, which usually covers his loins, probably lifts at the intense moves of the dance or at speed turns due to the centrifugal force, so that his genitals come into view. Thus, David's dancing can be definitely regarded by the spectators and by the readers – back then and today – as an erotic event. It would be extremely unusual if a leader of the present time, be it one of religion, politics or the military, would show itself naked in a similar way. King David's uninhibited dancing and his wild, gay and possibly sexual conduct can evoke associations with the behavior of gay persons today. These persons identify perhaps with King David and like him turn their backs on dominant rulers – like the members of Saul's dynasty – if they are not respected because of their queer way of life, but persecuted – as David was persecuted by King Saul. Such an interpretation implies that G*d (יהוה) empowers persons like King David, who – from the point of view of other people as well as of David's wife Michal – behave in a strange fashion, thus act queerly.