

HISTORY-WRITING AS PROTEST: KINGSHIP AND THE BEGINNING OF HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

James G. Williams
Syracuse University

I. Introduction

This paper is an attempt to apply René Girard's mimetic theory to the origins of historical writing, specifically the composing of Israel's story, vis-à-vis the origin of kingship. What I *do not* intend to deal with is the exact chronological beginning of historical narrative in ancient Israel. Whether or not this sort of writing began immediately, it is quite clear that kingship is a problem in a way that no other office or role was in the scriptural texts.

In the study of Israelite historiography and Israel's understanding of history there are many issues that have been discussed and debated. Among English speaking scholars the works of John Van Seters have been, in recent years, the most widely read on this topic.¹ Van Seters himself argues that the "Court History" or "Succession Narrative" in 2 Samuel and the Yahwist (J) narrative of the Pentateuch, or Torah, which scholars have commonly thought to be the oldest ancient Israelite history works, were composed in the exilic period (after c. 586 B.C.E.) subsequent to the completion of the "Deuteronomistic work" (Josh., Judg., Books of Sam., Books of Kings). A Greek model of history writing was by then known and used by the authors of these histories previously and wrongly understood to be so old. However, prior to these historical works influenced by a Greek model was the work of the Deuteronomist, i.e., the books of Joshua through Samuel, which integrated various earlier sources and traditions into a view of Israel's past that was informed by a definite theology of history. This history is that of "the first known historian

¹ In his approach to the texts Van Seters does not deal with any of the questions raised in the recent readings and hermeneutic approaches informed by literary theory.

in Western civilization truly to deserve that designation" (Van Seters, "Search" 362).

My purpose is not to argue with most of Van Seters's conclusions. In my judgment he is right to question the thesis of Hermann Gunkel and Gerhard von Rad that history writing evolved from earlier legend (*Saga*). I likewise agree that although there are many parallels among Israelite, Mesopotamian, Egyptian, and Hittite texts (including divine intervention in history, as shown by Bertil Albrektson), one still does not find among these other peoples a genre that could be called historiography. Van Seters borrows Johan Huizinga's definition of history as "the intellectual form in which a civilization renders account to itself of its past" ("Search" 1). I think the definition is helpful but it lacks both a generative center and a delimitation of literary form. I propose that it be changed by extending it in two respects: (1) The intellectual form of self-understanding is rooted in the sacred as its primary problematic. In this essay I will try to show that the beginning of history writing in ancient Israel both starts from and attempts to break from the ancient sacred order as mediated through the sacral institution of kingship. (2) Concerning literary form, history in the sense intended here requires a narrative about a nation and specific individuals (even if the divine and miracles are part of this world) that is long and continuous enough to form a coherent picture of the significant past. There was clearly no writing like that prior to Israelite historiography.

I think the main problem in Van Seters's approach is that he misses the *impulse* of history writing. That impulse is *kingship*. I don't mean this simply in the older sense, going back to L. Rost and Gerhard von Rad. that history writing begins with the cultural efflorescence that emerged in the reign of Solomon (c. 960-922 B.C.E.) and used even earlier sources stemming from the period of David's rule (c. 1000-960 B.C.E.).² Kingship was, rather, an office created by the fundamental dynamic of culture, namely the sacred and its mechanisms. What made Israel different, I will argue, is that it established this office, thus becoming "like all the nations," and yet many of its distinctive witnesses, writers, poets, and prophets, understood it as an impediment to the covenant community formed by the God of Israel. It was opposition and critique that led to history writing in its ancient Israelite form.

It is striking that Van Seters himself provides clues that could be construed as leading precisely in this direction. He points out that for both ancient Greece and Israel there were three genres that offered a basis for the

¹ Solomon's reign would therefore have occurred about three and a half centuries before the Babylonian exile.

historiography that developed: the king list, the royal inscription, and chronicles. The first two are obviously associated with the royal court and its attendant bureaucracy, including the priesthood. The third, chronicles, is doubtlessly also so connected. As kingship developed in the great centers of "civilization," that is, where city life emerged,³ the main representatives of this state of things, the "kings," understandably wished to validate their rule, establish their ancestry, proclaim their accomplishments. But the ruler is a *representative*: he or she is not simply an individual who happens to be the ruler but the representative individual.⁴ The ruler "makes present again," as it were, the reality of the social order, which is always of course a sacred order. One does not have to accept Theodor Gaster's seasonal pattern theory to find his commentary on kingship and ritual full of insight. He held that the ceremonies of the given social-political order were concentrated "in a single individual who is taken to personify and epitomize the entire group or topocosm [the natural as well as the social world] in its contemporary aspect. This individual is the king—that is, the representative of the 'kin' or social organism (cp. O.E. *kyn-ig*, German *könig*)" (48). Thus Gaster can show quite nicely, within the framework of his own theory, that the king must embody and reenact both the threats to the sacred order and its reestablishment. The king is the representative figure, the agent, the substitute (from the Latin *substituere*, to put under, next, or in place of) who is put in place of the group, enduring what they would otherwise have to suffer and embodying on their behalf the victory and blessings that the sacred order provides.

From the standpoint of Girard's mimetic theory, the seasonal pattern, where one can discern it, is secondary, derived from the mythic ramifications of the scapegoat mechanism, which is the generative dynamic of prohibition, ritual, and myth. As I summarize in *The Bible, Violence, and the Sacred*. Girard holds that both kingship and the gods stem from the emergence of a victim in reference to which a group becomes a community and begins to define itself. *Reference* begins with the victim, and this is to say that representation begins at the point that the victim, the minus one vis-à-vis the chaotic mass, emerges or is selected or expelled. If there is little or no lapse

³ "Civilization" is a word formed from the Latin word for city or city-state, *chitas*. So citizen, civil, civilize, etc. are words deriving from concepts of *civitas*, although these have different connotations in different cultural and historical settings. See also the Greek *polis*, city-state, from which we have many words in English: polite, police, politics, etc.

⁴The classic work in English on the ruler as the representative or "person" of the sovereign state is that of Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*. Wolfgang Palaver explicates Hobbes's thought in light of the mimetic theory in *Politik und Religion*. On the king as representative person see the further discussion below in the text of the paper.

of time between selection and immolation, if the victim is already completely expelled from the community (which probably means his or her death), then the mimetic interpretation sees this as the way in which the gods came about. The victim is quickly killed and then becomes a deity. However, if there is a time interval between selection and immolation the victim, due to his or her sacral status, could conceivably gain more and more influence over the others. In this case, the mimetic interpretation emphasizes the growing time interval between selection and execution (Williams, *Bible* 26, n. 22 and 131-4; Girard, *Things* 51-7). If the theories of Gaster and Girard even give us good *clues* concerning the meaning and function of kingship, whether or not their full theories are accepted, then we cannot proceed in the usual way of historical positivism, as instantiated in Van Seters's work, if we are going to be able to understand the relation of kings and writing. We must rather test hypotheses that stem from theories about what generates history, or specifically in this study, historiography.

But what are the good clues? If Gaster and Girard are right, or on the right track, this does not mean that we must find all the features of the ancient Canaanite or any other traditional or primitive setting where the king as the sacred leader and victim is more apparent (see Williams. *Bible* 261 n. 22, 131-4; and Girard. *Things* 51-7). What we must find, rather, is evidence that traditional notions and practices are still operative, even if greatly modified. This evidence must highlight two things. One is the representative function of the king, viz. the dynamic of the king's relation to his people as the main subject to those who are his subjects. To the extent that we get close to the origin of kingship (or of leadership of any kind) we must find a certain instability in the relationship of leader to led, for the leader has power and authority as the reflector and polarizer of the mimetic impulses of the subjects. This instability is closely related to the second thing, which is the bivalent status of the king as both leader and victim. There is also a third matter which is important in a mimetic reading of narrative: does the evidence permit a judgment on whether or to what extent mimetic desire is at work in the relationship between the monarch and the other principal figures in the account?

A historical positivist approach is not able to respond adequately to these questions, and so is unable to deal with the generative level of the relation of kingship to historical narrative. My own general thesis, to be argued here, is that the emergence of the monarchy was decisive for the beginning of historical narratives in ancient Israel, and that the generative principle of these historical narratives was that of *giving up ("sacrificing") the monarchy and substituting the writing of narrative protest (witness) in its stead.*

II. The Beginnings of the Monarchy: The Story of Saul

A. Saul's Rise and Fall from Two Perspectives

Traditional historical criticism and exegesis of the last century has generally held that an early and a late source have been brought together in the Books of Samuel. I think it is worthwhile to survey these so-called "sources" for indications of perspectives on kingship. The early source has been viewed in general as promonarchic, that is, the establishment of kingship is understood as a divine blessing for Israel. The late source is antimonarchic and views Samuel as the true ruler of Israel on God's behalf. The texts commonly ascribed to the early source that are particularly pertinent for this study are 1 Samuel 9-10:16; 11; 14; 16:14-23; 19:1-17; 19:18-24; 28. The texts commonly ascribed to the late source that will be discussed are 1 Samuel 8;10:17-27;12; 13:7-15; 15; 16:1-13; 17:55-58; 18.

It is doubtful that this division of sources can any longer be cogently argued, but in this paper I simply wish to acknowledge that the differentiation of sources is a fact of traditional biblical criticism and to see what it amounts to in light of a mimetic hermeneutics. The most important task is then to ask how these perspectives are related to the emergence of the earliest form of history writing.

In the Deuteronomic History, the Book of Judges as we have it leads toward kingship and the creation of order in the midst of the anarchy that prevailed. There were abortive attempts to establish a monarchy with Gideon and his son Abimelech, attempts that the narrator associates with idolatry (Judg. 8:22-28) and violence (Judg. 9). In 1 Samuel the prophet-judge Samuel is represented as a link with the past. He selects Saul by lot as king. Earlier in the same chapter, 1 Samuel 10, Saul also undergoes a prophetic initiation at Samuel's behest. These two experiences, the prophetic initiation and being selected by lot, which are different views of how Saul became king, have conventionally been assigned to the early and late source, respectively. Interestingly, however, they are structurally very similar.

The story of prophetic initiation recounts that the spirit of God "rushed" (*wattitslach*) upon Saul when he met the band of prophets foretold by Samuel. These prophets were using musical instruments. The translation of the New English Bible (NEB), "took possession," and the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), "possessed," are quite appropriate. The verb *tsalach* is clearly rooted in the basic meaning, "suddenly take over/ consume" (concerning Samson see Judg. 14:6, 19; 15:14; fire from God, Amos 5:6). There are three other instances in which the verb is used in 1 Samuel. The spirit of God possesses Saul when he hears that Ammonites have attacked Jabash-gilead (11:6) and it possesses David after Samuel chooses David in

the stead of Saul, whereas an evil spirit from YHWH "tormented" Saul (16:13-14). Subsequently, as his envy of David deepens, "an evil spirit from God seized upon Saul; he fell into a frenzy in the house ... Saul had his spear in his hand, and he hurled it at David, meaning to pin him against the wall; but twice David swerved aside" (18:10-11, NEB). The NEB notes that the translation "seized upon" could be translated "fell into a prophetic rapture."⁵ This is because the verb *nava* means to prophesy, and the particular stem used here indicates reflexive or repeated action. It is the same verb and stem employed in 10: 6, 10 and 11:6.

Saul is a radically mediated figure trapped in a mimetic crisis. He is caught between war with the Philistines, the demands of his followers, and maintaining his position as David's popularity increases. Both the prevailing crisis and his final collapse are portended in 1 Samuel 19. Jonathan takes "great delight" in David (19:1). David has great success against the Philistines, and Saul, taken over by an "evil spirit" from the LORD, hurls his spear at David (19: 10).⁶ When Saul seeks David's life, David's wife and Saul's daughter, Michal, helps David escape. David flees to Naioth in Ramah with Samuel (19:24). This brief passage, 1 Samuel 19:18-24, forms a kind of inclusio with 10:1-16, for just as Saul became king through the initiation experience with the prophets, in which he was transported or "seized" in rapture, so now his loss of divine favor is utterly evident in a mimetic paroxysm signaling the end of his reign and his life. Saul sends messengers to take David but they fall under the spell of the frenzy of prophets led by Samuel. Two more times Saul sends messengers, with the same results. He finally travels there himself.

On his way there the spirit of God came upon him too and he went on, in a rapture [*wayyitnabbe*, "and he prophesied"] as he went, till he came to Naioth in Ramah. There he too stripped off his clothes and like the rest fell into a rapture [*wayyitnabbe*] before Samuel and lay down naked all that day and all that night. That is why [people] say, 'Is Saul also among the prophets?' (19:23-24)

⁵ It is interesting that "rapture" comes from the Latin *rapere*. to seize, carry off, which is also the root of "rape."

⁶ He does this also to Jonathan, 1 Samuel 20:33. David Jobling has astutely identified an "identification-replacement" pattern in the relationship between David and Jonathan (12-30). However. I think it goes much further than a pattern of identification and replacement: there are triangular mimetic relationships among Samuel-Saul-Jonathan and Saul-Jonathan-David.

The monarchy is now, from the standpoint of the sacral convictions communicated in the narrative,⁷ at the point of collapse as represented in the king who lies naked and prostrate; the differentiation that obtained in his having been "transported" in prophetic experience—a quintessentially mimetic process—and set aside as king is now reversed. He simply falls in with the other prophets "*before Samuel*"—Samuel, his old mesmerizer, who had selected him at the beginning.⁸

Saul's final rejection by Samuel and the God of Israel comes as an anticlimax in the received text of Samuel. Saul is so under the spell of Samuel that he seeks Samuel's "ghost" or "spirit" (*elohim*, god) in disguise by night because he desires his guidance and approval (1 Sam. 28). Beset by the Philistines and David's switch to the Philistines with his band of mercenaries, he sneaks by night to consult a medium in En-Dor in the hope of contacting the now deceased Samuel. The woman is reluctant because King Saul himself had banned mediums and wizards as antithetical to worship of YHWH. Saul swears she will be safe from prosecution, so she brings Samuel up out of the ground. What follows is worth quoting:

When the woman saw Samuel appear, she shrieked and said to Saul, 'Why have you deceived me? You are Saul!' The king said to her, 'Do not be afraid. What do you see?' The woman answered, 'I see a ghostly form [*elohim*. "god"] coming up from the earth.' 'What is it like,' he asked: she answered. 'Like an old man, wrapped in a cloak.' (28:12-13)

Saul cannot see Samuel; the medium must be his intermediary. He needs an intermediary to communicate with his mediator, who is now, in effect, his god. Samuel is an *elohim*. It is most revealing that *she does not recognize Saul until Samuel appears*. Samuel has become Saul's double, the antagonistic other from whom Saul can no longer distinguish himself. The former differences—between the YHWHist religious practice and the veneration of

⁷ This is not to say that the narrative is in complete accord with these convictions. A story like this, even if it existed prior to being worked into a laigei narrative framework, already "exposes" the king who lies naked after an orgy of prophetic rapture.

⁸ The saying that became proverbial. "Is Saul also (or "Is even Saul") among the prophets?", likewise occurs in Saul's prophetic initiation into kingship, 10:11-12. The question of an anonymous person, "And who is their father?". *ma* be a good clue to an explanation of the saying. As I argued many years ago. the implication of the question may be that if one understood who the leader or "father" of the prophets was. then one would understand why Saul is found among the prophets prophesying. Samuel, the leader of the prophets, is Saul's model of authority. See Williams. "Father" 344-8.

the dead, between Saul as an individual and Samuel—are now dissolved.⁹ Saul is now completely possessed, he is "haunted" by Samuel. The voice of the possessor tells him that YHWH has become his enemy and Saul will die at the hands of the Philistines. Hearing this message, he falls full length to the ground, terrified.

This episode of Saul's final collapse discloses a number of important social and psychological insights that become partly differentiated from the relatively mythic and legendary form of the tale. That is, though the form of the narrative is substantially determined by the claims and power of the primitive sacred, there are some breakthroughs, some points of emerging differentiation. These include: (1) The irony that Saul, unable to obtain an answer from YHWH concerning his fate against the Philistines, resorts to communication with the deceased Samuel in spite of the fact that he himself had banned mediums and wizards. We see time and again in Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Hittite, and Canaanite texts that the dead, particularly kings and heroes, were described as "gods." This is a fundamental aspect of the religiosity associated with sacral kingship, and here Saul reverts to it in spite of his own ostensibly YHWHist policies. Though he must still face the Philistines again, the reader-hearer knows that this is anticlimactic. The moment of his reversion to the sacred is the completion of his fall. (2) The medium recognizes Saul in conjunction with the appearance of the *elohim* Samuel. Although this recognition is not abstracted for reflection outside of the narrative flow, the narrative recognizes in its own way that Samuel is Saul's double. There was more than a hint of this in 19:24 ("and he too prophesied before Samuel"). (3) Just as Saul had lain naked a day and a night after prophesying before Samuel (19:24). so now he lies prostrate—a fallen king, felled by his double-mesmerizer Samuel and his attempt to negotiate between the forces of the ancient sacred and the emerging faith in the God of Israel. Because he was famished "there was no strength in him" (28:20). But doesn't the text imply that his kingly "virtue" has left him, that he is now utterly and desperately human?

Now as we turn to the putative late source from the standpoint of traditional criticism, we take up first Saul's ominous selection by lot in 1 Samuel 10:20-24. In *The Bible, Violence, and the Sacred* I discussed at length this passage and others in the Saul story. The NRSV translates, ". . . and Saul the son of Kish was taken by lot," as does the Revised Standard Version. The rendering "taken" probably goes back to the King James Version. The Hebrew verb is *lakhad*, which may often be translated "take" but whose usual

⁹ See Girard's statement about worship of the dead in *Violence* 254-5.

sense is a much stronger "capture" or "seize," either in military battle or hunting. For example, the Israelites under Joshua capturing Ai (Josh. 8:21), Samson capturing foxes (Judg. 15:4), or a snare capturing a bird (Amos 3:5). NEB's rendering, "... and Saul son of Kish was picked," seems at first very weak and wide of the mark. However, it may be a better choice of verbs than even the translators realized. Most of the dictionary entries under "pick," cognate of the German *picken*, have to do with clearing, differentiating, opening, and the specific type of action is cutting, piercing, digging, etc. The complex of nuances associated with such verbs suggests the violence involved in ordinary forms of choosing or selection.

In any case, Saul is the "pick," he is "captured" by lot and is thus a "captive." There are there other biblical texts that recount someone taken by lot. According to Joshua 7, Joshua determines by oracle that some Israelites have transgressed the ban on taking booty in holy war. Achan is captured by the lot, he confesses his transgression, the booty is found in his tent, and he and his family are killed by stoning. The second instance is in the Saul story, 1 Samuel 14, which is commonly accounted to the early source. Here Jonathan is captured by the casting of lots as Saul tries to determine who broke his oath not to eat anything during the day while his army fought the Philistines. However, the troops *ransom* Jonathan (14:45), presumably with an animal sacrifice at the altar Saul had constructed (14:35).

Finally, in the story of Jonah, the lots cast by the gentile sailors identify Jonah as the offender responsible for the ocean storm that threatens to take the ship down. The specific terms are different from the language in Joshua and 1 Samuel: the sailors "cast (lit. "cause to fall") lots" and they "fall on Jonah" (Jon. 1:7). This passage in Jonah and its relation to the entire little book of Jonah are worthy of extensive commentary. Suffice it to say here for our purposes that the casting of lots in Jonah indicates the ordinary understanding of the ritual, even if embedded in irony in the Jonah story: the lot is identical with the portion (*goral*) that falls upon a given individual or group by the power of deity or fate. The object of the ritual is to identify the "odd man out," that is, to bring about differentiation in prevailing chaos, which entailed expelling or eliminated the one identified as threatening the community.

These other instances of someone identified by lot are instructive. We see here classical instances of *fate* at work. The casting of the lot is a fateful thing; it finds the *odd*, the *different*, that allows the others involved to agree.¹⁰

¹⁰ On fate as "lot" or "portion" which establishes difference through victimary or sacrificial means, see Williams. *Bible* 134. 139-40, 235. 257-8. I suspect that the original

The troops whom Saul governs now govern him in the mimetic process. As Jonathan is redeemed or ransomed (Hebrew root **pdh*), Saul is left once more isolated, singled out by default as the difference, the scapegoat-king. Sparing Jonathan, the people have a scapegoat-king in reserve should something happen to Saul. And at the same time, given that Jonathan's life is as star-crossed as Saul's, the selection by lot from which he was redeemed is a portent of Jonathan's fate. Jonathan "delighted much in David" (19:1), who would usurp the house of Saul. It was the house of David, not that of Saul, that became the first and only enduring dynasty of ancient Israel.

Biblical exegetes have long recognized the ominous implications of the selection of Saul by lot, partly due to the obvious parallels with the Achan story in Joshua 7, partly due to the element of a predetermined destiny or fate in the story of Saul taken in its totality. P. Kyle McCarter is a good representative of the more recent form of traditional historical criticism in observing that Saul seems somehow to be blameworthy when he is selected by lot, but as yet there is nothing for which he could be guilty. There is a shadow over Saul: he has not committed a criminal offense like Achan, yet "he is an offending party by virtue of the election itself" (196).

From the standpoint of new literary perspectives, David Gunn has been one of the pace-setting literary critical exegetes since the late 1970s. He is one of the few biblical interpreters clearly to see that Saul is an innocent victim beset by fate—or by YHWH, for the two amount to the same reality in Gunn's reading (see chap. 7).¹¹ Yet it is striking that Gunn does not observe the connection between the "negative undertone" of the divine choice by lot in 10:17-27 and Saul as "pawn" or "scapegoat," an "expiation" for YHWH's acceptance of the monarchy (see 63, 128).

I think the reading to be developed here unravels the seeming conundrum of the chosen one who is viewed as an offender, of being the disfavored favored one. And it does so because it proposes a hermeneutic theory that illuminates the paradox of the scapegoat king. The use of the lots, particularly

meaning of odds in games of chance and in statistical projections has to do with the difference sought that would reestablish order or stability. This difference was the victim. As this mechanism developed in various spheres of life and as rules developed, which seem at first to be far removed from the originary mechanism, the notion of odds came to be that the party with a lesser chance to prevail is allowed a difference by the party with the better chance of winning. This difference that the latter has to acknowledge and accept amounts to a "sacrifice in advance": more money in a bet, more weight on a horse in a horse race, a handicap in golf, higher insurance rates if one is older, etc.

¹¹ Yet Gunn takes more or less literally the myth of YHWH as the fateful power, not catching on to the biblical text's own demythologizing tendencies—tendencies that are precisely the dynamic of history" and "literature."

when done to select or isolate one person or party, stems from the basic structure of victimization and scapegoating. It is no wonder that Saul hides among the baggage or vessels after he is chosen by lot! Saul has become "odd man out," and furthermore the text notes that he *is* odd in the sense of being "head and shoulders taller" than any of the others around him. It is striking that this narrative literature, obviously far removed from "primitive" or "tribal" culture, could so clearly present the newly selected king as victim. Of course, the king is no longer, as in Girard's originary hypothesis, a victim or captive who has only a certain period of time to gain influence over his captors, an influence made possible by the sacred status of the one chosen to die. However, aspects of captivity may still be discerned in the depiction of Saul and his reign. He is, as already observed, a mediated figure, bound to the people, particularly the military, whose desires must be his desires, as well as to Samuel and his prophets. So as we follow Saul's inexorable descent to collapse and death, including the condemnations by Samuel for not fulfilling obligations associated with sacrifice (1 Sam. 13:7b-15 and 1 Sam. 15), the final and absolute rejection by Samuel and Samuel's god comes as no surprise.

Saul is mimetically entrapped in a triangle with Jonathan and David. Saul, impressed with the stripling David after he has slain Goliath, takes him into his own household. The implication is that David son of Jesse is now a kind of adopted son of Saul (17:58; 18:2). Saul's son Jonathan "made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul" (18:3). Jonathan goes so far as to give David his robe and his armor. My reading is that Jonathan imitates his father in loving David; or to put it another way, he appropriates the desire of his father by desiring David's friendship. David becomes the surrogate son who displaces the son who is heir to the throne. With David's military successes Saul begins to sense this. The return of the attacks of the evil spirit on Saul is clearly connected to Saul's jealousy of David (18:6-10). As the spirit seizes him he tries to kill David by throwing a spear at him.

I have more or less distinguished the account of the "early" source and the "late" source on the rise and decline of Saul. It is quite clear that different perspectives and accounts have been brought together in the present work. But as now argued by many interpreters, particularly those of a literary bent, the differentiation and dating of sources early and late does not adequately deal with the complexities of narrative discourse. Of course, there are inconsistencies: How does Samuel meet Saul? How did Saul become king? (Or was there more than one means by which he assumed royal leadership?) How and when does David enter the story? Is the given narrator

promonarchic, pro- or anti-Saul, or what? There are many seams that show, no question about it. On the other hand, from both a literary and a psychological standpoint the composite character of the narrative in 1 Samuel is an expression of *artistry in composition*. Composing well could also involve an artistic way of handling different sources, which in any case would be closer to what was expected in a traditional society than "original composition."¹² Robert Alter has argued this in commenting on the two introductions of David into Saul's court (1 Samuel 16:14-23 and ch. 17), which have conventionally in criticism been ascribed to the early and late sources, respectively. Alter says that

the joining of the two accounts leaves us swaying in the dynamic interplay between two theologies, two conceptions of kingship, two views of David the man. In one, the king is imagined as God's instrument, elected through God's own initiative, manifesting his authority by commanding the realm of spirits good and evil, a figure who brings healing and inspires love. In the other account, the king's election is, one might say, ratified rather than initiated by God; instead of the Spirit descending, we have a young man ascending through his own resourcefulness, cool courage, and quick reflexes, and also through his rhetorical skill. (152-3)

Whether one agrees with every aspect Alter's description of the dynamic interplay of oppositions in the composite account, it surely offers important clues to a kind of unity in diversity. There are two accounts of how Saul comes to be king, prophetic initiation and selection by lot. Even though different at the surface level of narrative, they are structurally similar, as already noted. In both instances Saul is acted upon, seized, picked out. The difference is in perspective: Samuel is God's primary agent in both cases, but in the prophetic initiation it is the divine spirit that overcomes Saul, in the selection by lot it is a social-religious procedure led by Samuel. Of course, the narrator presupposes that God is working through Samuel and the lot, but no special gift or ability is given to Saul as through the prophetic experience.

In 1 Samuel 16 David comes first to Saul's attention due to his reputation as a skillful player of the lyre. Saul was being tormented by the evil spirit

¹² Note the root of composite and composition, the Latin *componere*, to put together. Given our modern literary suppositions we do not usually think of "composing" prior sources in some new way as "creative." assuming instead that the making of the text originates with an individual "author."

from YHWH, and David was brought into his retinue to soothe him with his music. So whenever the evil spirit was upon Saul, David played and the spirit left him. In the other account, 1 Samuel 17, David comes to Saul's attention when he takes on the giant Philistine Goliath and slays him with stones from his slingshot. Saul so admires the young shepherd lad that he becomes as a father to him, as already remarked. Saul makes him the head of his army and David continues his feats by slaying so many Philistine warriors that Saul becomes jealous. So when we read in 1 Samuel 18 that Saul becomes intensely jealous of David, who wins the affection of his son and daughter and succeeds marvelously against the Philistines, we know that Saul has already paved the way towards mimetic conflict and possible violence by being drawn to the young warrior David; as a model-mediator for Saul David became Saul's chief rival, for Saul could not tolerate this competitor, even as he exalted him. Jonathan imitates his father in loving David (18:1, 3) and giving way to him. In this so-called "late" source the mimetic conflict through which David's rise to the kingship takes place is not initiated in the divine realm, with the Spirit possessing the protagonists, but in the human realm of relationships and emotions. This account not only *complements* the other, it also, at least implicitly, *criticizes* it. I will return to this.

As for the mimetic triangles, they obtain equally in both sources or perspectives. Saul is subject to Samuel and David, Jonathan is subject to Saul and David (note "subject" from *subjectum*, "cast under"). The difference in the two perspectives lies in the contrast between emphasis on mimesis as charisma and mimesis as exercise of authority and power. In the one, Saul's rise and fall is a matter of being seized by the right spirit, whose agents are the prophets led by Samuel; David is also led by the divine spirit, and Jonathan's attraction to David is noted without any narrative context to explain it (see 1 Sam. 19:1). David's "charisma," of course, is the broader narrative context for understanding his attractiveness. In the other perspective, Saul's fate is brought to an inevitable climax through the machinations of his model-mediator Samuel and Saul's own mimetic tendencies. His feeling for David amounts to a displacement of Jonathan, and Jonathan responds not in rebellion but by imitating his father's desire *in appropriating it and submitting to it*: "his soul was knit to David as his own soul" (18:1).

As for David and his rise to role of king of Judah and Israel, that is another subject in its own right. Hans Jensen has recently contributed an excellent study of the so-called "succession narrative" (2 Sam. 9-20 and 1 Kings 1-2) in which he shows that the narrative reflects on the same themes as the mimetic theory and in the same sequential order: "mimetism creates desire, desire creates rivalry, and rivalry creates a general crisis which may

be solved by an 'all-against-one' (scapegoating)" ("Desire" 59). The same pattern can be observed in the narrative perspectives on the relationships in the story of Saul.

In the one account Saul becomes king through subjection to the mimesis of the activity of the prophets, whose leader was probably Samuel. The "good spirit" that possesses Saul becomes an "evil" spirit in his relation to both Samuel and David. David becomes the rival whom he seeks to kill, and Samuel becomes the double who even from the realm of the dead "slays" Saul, in effect. Saul cannot shake off his *elohim*, Samuel. The upshot is that Saul, whose prophetic initiation has much the same structure as the choosing of a victim (see above), becomes the one rejected as king by the same process that made him king in the first place.

In the other narrative perspective Saul is much more obviously a scapegoat because there is a certain clarity about human interactions and social processes. His selection by lot is fundamentally a scapegoating process and as such tied to ancient traditions of fate or, in the Greek, *moira*, as we see in Sophocles's *King Oedipus*. His downfall is connected with his inability to handle the fundamental role of the king: that of being the source of differentiation, which creates and maintains social and political order. The king is both the difference and the differentiator. He is the "person," i.e., the "personification" or representative of the community and its tradition. He is the "subject" of those he leads, i.e., the chief actor who leads the way, but also the one subject to (the *sub-jectum*) them. One of his main responsibilities is to oversee, if not actually to offer, sacrifices. Sacrifices, the offering of victims, is the fundamental mode by which the community represents its origins in victimization while disguising this victimization at the same time. The king *is* the sacrifice if he cannot handle the processes of exchange and substitution which prevent a reversion to chaos, and this is the fate of King Saul.¹³

B. Saul and Sacrifice

In another study I have focused on the role of sacrifice in 1 Samuel (see "Sacrifice"). It is not appropriate here to lay out that argument in detail, but I will summarize it because it strengthens my thesis in this essay on kingship and the beginning of historiography. It shows the interrelation of kingship, sacrifice, and the beginning of historical writing.

¹³ For a field anthropologist's research demonstrating the scapegoat mechanism, see Simonse. Frazer's material in *The Golden Bough* is replete with instances of ritual regicide and the scapegoating of monarchs.

The book of 1 Samuel recounts the greatest number of sacrificial occasions of any narrative portion of the Hebrew Bible:

1. The piety of Elkanah's family is described with reference to sacrifice and vows at Shiloh (1 Sam. 1).

2. The sons of Eli, priest of Shiloh, are immoral priests who reserve the best portions and raw meat for themselves when worshipers bring animals to offer in sacrifice (2:12-17).

3. The Philistine capture of the ark of the covenant of YHWH occurs during the crisis of war and occasions further crises (4:1-7:2). The ark is a sacrificial object (see Jensen, "Pattern"), and the narrative is replete with sacrificial offerings in what is nothing else than a sacrificial crisis.

4. As Saul approaches the city where he will find Samuel, he learns that Samuel is presiding over a sacrifice (9:12-13). Saul, whom Samuel will anoint as ruler, is subsequently placed at the head of the table at the meal that follows the sacrifice.

5. In 1 Samuel 10 Saul encounters a band of prophets descending from what was probably a sacrificial occasion at Gibeath-elohim. He is caught up by the divine spirit in a prophetic frenzy with these prophets.

6. When messengers inform Saul of the Ammonite siege of Jabesh-gilead, the spirit of God possesses him and he cuts a yoke of oxen into pieces, sending them throughout Israel (11:7-8). There is no doubt this is a kind of sacrificial act. The same verb, **ntch*, used for severing an animal, is employed also in Judges 19:29 and 20:6 in the story of the Levite's concubine and the tribal warfare with the Benjaminites; otherwise it is employed only with reference to cutting up an animal for a peace offering (Exod. 29:17; Lev. 1:6, 12; 8:20; 1 Kings 18:23,33).

7. Saul sacrifices a burnt offering at Gilgal. Samuel condemns him for not waiting until he arrives, and announces that Saul's kingship will not continue (13:7-15).

8. Saul supervises a sacrificial slaughter of sheep and oxen and calves when he notices that some of his troops are eating animals with their blood (14:31-5). The altar Saul builds is presumably used also to offer an animal for the ransom of Jonathan after he had transgressed Saul's oath and was taken in the casting of lots (14:36-45).

9. Saul disobeys Samuel's command on behalf of YHWH utterly to destroy the Amalekites (15:3). The Amalekites were *cherem* to YHWH (15:21), i.e., to be devoted to utter destruction. This is a sacrificial act. Both the verb **chrm* Hi and the noun *cherem* could be used in a manner not directly related to the realm of the sacred and sacrifice, but it is evident that in origin they represent the sacred quality of persons, animals, or things that

are set aside for utter destruction. This is especially the case in the occurrences of the noun. A *cherem* to YHWH could not be redeemed or ransomed; it must be destroyed or put to death. Every devoted thing is "most holy" (Lev. 27:28-29). In Joshua 7 the people must be sanctified before the lots are cast to find out who has taken of the *cherem* (Josh. 7:13; cf. 7:1, 11, 15). Passages like these clearly reflect the ancient belief that the sacred is not only life-giving and beneficial, but also dangerous and deadly.

When Samuel himself executes Agag, the king of the Amalekites, he does it "before the LORD in Gilgal" (15:33). In other words, Agag, who is *cherem* to YHWH, is done away with as befits a sacrifice in the form of a *cherem*.

10. When Samuel visits the house of Jesse in Bethlehem in order to anoint a new king, he uses sacrifice as his *cover* (1 Sam. 16:1-13). Fearing Saul's reprisal, sacrifice is the justification of his visit. This appears to be simply a ruse to avoid violent retaliation. Yet according to Girard, that is basically what sacrifice is, a "trompe-violence," an attempt to maneuver around violence, to "deceive" it.¹⁴

11. David tries to elude Saul by going to Bethlehem under the pretext of offering a yearly sacrifice with his family (20:6, 29). Again, a "trompe-violence," which is highly ironic when read in conjunction with Samuel's ruse in 1 Sam 16:1-13. However, David's attempt at deceiving Saul does not work (20:30-34).

12. In the aftermath of Saul's vision of the dead Samuel, who has been conjured from Sheol by the medium of En-dor, the latter feeds Saul and his servants. She took a fatted calf and she "quickly slaughtered it" (*wattiz-bachehu*, 28:24). The verb used here, *zabach*, is the most common word in the Hebrew Bible for offering sacrifice. The occasion is probably, therefore, a sacrificial one and an important bit of evidence for the connection of slaughtering an animal, sacrifice, and eating a meal in ancient societies.

The frequency of sacrifice and sacrificial occasions in 1 Samuel indicates the text's awareness of both the sacrificial roots of kingship and the sacrificial crisis which the selection of a king is intended to resolve. Saul is both the sacrificer, the differentiator, and the sacrifice, the scapegoat. His failure associated with his inability to handle sacrifice is closely related to his status as a scapegoat in the narrative. The narrative itself begins to take precedence as the "ruler" of the reader-hearer in the tradition. The standpoint of this historiography is that of a witness against the king and sacrifice and a witness for the God of Israel.

¹⁴ Girard calls Abel's animal sacrifice in Genesis 4 a "trompe-violence" (*La violence* 4) The English translation renders "violence-outlet" (4).

The combination of the failure of the first king as sacrificer and the failure of sacrifice itself is generated from the heart of a religious vision that begins to replace kingship with the writing of history and sacrifice with law and scripture. But this is not achieved without making the first king a kind of sacrifice, a scapegoat offered to the critique of sacrifice.

III. Historical Narrative as Protest

My argument is that "historical" biblical narrative, which is the first form of historiography in human history, arises out of protest against the institution of kingship.¹⁵ Kings, and the traditions that depend on them and are expressed through them, tend to assert themselves quite strongly. By the agency of priests and scribes they "inscribe" themselves, as it were, in king lists, royal inscriptions, and chronicles. This is also the case in the Hittite treaties, which contain one of the prototypes of historiography, namely the recounting of the past relations of the Hittite king and his ancestors with the vassal king and his people. Emphasis is placed on the virtue of the Hittite kings, their beneficial sovereignty, the protection they offer. The Hittite treaties may, arguably, have influenced Israel's historiography. Yet they serve only the interests of the Hittite king. Or, if one views the king in his representative function, they serve the interests of the Hittites but these interests are communicated and controlled by the monarch.

Israel's own texts refer to the "book of the deeds of Solomon," the "book of the deeds of the kings of Israel," the "book of the deeds of the kings of Judah," and the "book of Yashar" (1 Kings 11:41. 14:19. 14:29. and 2 Sam. 1:18, respectively). The deeds or chronicles (from Hebrew *davar*, word, deed) of the kings of Israel and Judah are cited many times in the Books of Kings. The common pattern in royal inscriptions is to aggrandize the king's person and accomplishments, as we see also in some of Israel's psalms, e.g.. Psalms 2, 45, 72. and 110. As YHWH's anointed he will lead Israel/Judah to overcome the enemies that rage against them, he will be the conduit of divine blessings, the agent of justice. "He will execute judgment among the nations,/ filling them with corpses" (Ps. 110:6).

If kings were entirely responsible for inscribing themselves for posterity, we would not have history as we know it. For the king's difference is that of the sacral victim turning the sacredness of this victim status into power and authority, which means, in effect, the ability to create substitutes for the

¹⁵ Aspects of this argument are very similar to the position presented by Herbert Schneidau, esp. 187-211. His treatment combines a demythologizing perspective with a kind of deconstructionist literary approach. While I value his book. I don't think he moves very far toward understanding the role of the king in representing the sacred.

victim who lives and dies for all. This power and authority is exercised over the "others," those who accept this order starting from and returning to the king as difference. But to the extent that any of the "others" gain their voice in human affairs, then history writing is always at least an implicit critique of kingship. Although I have little familiarity with the Greek historians, I think it would be interesting to pursue this as a hypothesis with respect to their "*historial*" or "enquiries," as Herodotus puts it.

One of the narrative perspectives in 1 Samuel could be characterized as an inscribing of the power and blessings of the monarchy that includes an implied critique or exposure, while the other perspective is simply and clearly a protest against kingship. It is a public witness (test-ifying) for (pro) the rule of the God of Israel and against the institution of the monarchy. This is indicated clearly in Samuel's warnings to his people in 1 Samuel 8 and 12. The people want a king so that they can be "like all the nations" (1 Sam. 8: 5, 20); he would govern them and fight their battles. Later, after Saul is selected as king, Samuel declares in a public ritual, "The LORD is witness (*ed*), and his anointed [the king] is witness this day, that you have not found anything [deserving of guilt] in my hand" (1 Sam. 12:5). In other words, Samuel here makes the people forswear themselves concerning his life and conduct, and particularly his role in the appointing of Saul as king.¹⁶

In sum, my argument is that Israel's historical narratives stem from the problem of kingship. This sort of literature establishes the monarchy — *but only secondarily*. Even the great dynasty of David, which would last "forever" is not "authentic" or "original" by comparison to the time of the judges (2 Sam 7: 7, 13). That is, kingship is not authentic in the sense of belonging to Israel's origins. *Kingship is recognized as a supplement*. It is an addition and substitute for the form of rule of the people Israel that has been displaced. In 2 Samuel 7 the judges are the "originals" of which the kings are supplements. According to the Book of Judges the judges, the charismatic leaders, depicted as like Saul in 1 Samuel 10:1-16, are raised up by YHWH because of the Israelites' apostasy in getting caught up in Canaanite religiosity. There the judges, too, are supplements, inadequate substitutes for Moses and Joshua. We could keep pushing the question of origin and

¹⁶ Samuel himself is viewed as a rightful ruler of sorts, a "judge" (1 Sam. 7:3-7), perhaps in the ancient charismatic pattern. It is outside the purview of this paper to deal with the figure of Samuel as representing an alternative righteous form of rule that acknowledges the kingship of God. Even if Samuel is so depicted, it is also true that the text includes facets that could be read as quite critical of him.

supplement back or look at the question in the writings associated with the great prophets. That has not been my purpose here.¹⁷

My purpose has been rather to show that historical narrative stems from wrestling with the problem of kingship and that it serves a kind of protest function. It not only recounts the beginning of kingship as a positive phenomenon but exposes its tendency to victimize the people governed (1 Sam 8:10-18). It even betrays more than a hint of sympathy for the first victim, Saul son of Kish.

To conclude, one way to put my thesis is that biblical historiography originated and developed as a supplement for kingship. It is not possible to understand how it came about apart from kingship but at the same time it is a substitute, a religious and cultural differentiation that is put in the place of kingship. It conveys a differentiation which spins off of kingship and calls kingship, and by implication all modes of the sacred, into question. This historiography is not only the first "history" writing in the story of humankind, it is the decisive beginning of "literature" as we know it in the Western traditions.

WORKS CITED

- Albrektson, Bertil. *History- and the Gods*. Lund: Gleerup. 1967.
- Alter, Robert. *The Art of Biblical Narrative*. NY: Basic Books. 1981.
- Bandera, Cesáreo. *The Sacred Game*. University Park: Penn State UP. 1994.
- Derrida, Jacques. "Plato's Pharmacy." *Dissemination*. Trans. Barbara Johnson. Chicago: U of Chicago P. 1981. 61-171.
- Gaster, Theodor. *Thespis: Ritual, Myth, and Drama in the Ancient Near East*. 2nd rev. ed. Garden City: Doubleday, 1961.
- Girard, René. *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1987.

¹⁷ My own thinking about the kingship as supplement, based on the work of Girard and Jacques Derrida, has been more oriented to a comparative religion and literary reading of the biblical texts. Norman Gottwald is the most prominent contemporary biblical scholar who has propounded a historical and sociological hypothesis concerning Israel's origins. Gottwald's own version of a Marxist theory posits an egalitarian peasantry that rebelled against Canaanite overlords and established their own claim to the land in the name of their god YHWH. In proposing this hypothesis on the basis of Marxist theory Gottwald's interpretation suffers from the usual burden of Marxist thought: the scapegoating of some hierarchical (and so impure) set of institutions in this or some present in order to assert the existence of some pure, nonhierarchical past. For a mimetic analysis of scapegoating in the Marxist concept of history see Cesáreo Bandera.

- . *La violence et le sacré*. Paris: Grasset. 1972. *Violence und the Sacred*. Trans. Patrick Gregory. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1977.
- Gottwald, Norman. *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Tribes of Liberated Israel, 1250-1050B.C.* Maryknoll: Orbis. 1979.
- Gunkel, Hermann. *The Legends of Genesis: The Biblical Sagas and History*. Trans. W. H. Carruth. NY: Schocken. 1964.
- Gunn, David M. *The Fate of King Saul: An Interpretation of a Biblical Story*. Sheffield: JSOT P, 1980.
- Jensen, Hans J. L. "Desire, Rivalry and Collective Violence in the 'Succession Narrative.'" *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 55 (1992): 39-59.
- . "An Oedipus Pattern in the Ark Narrative?" *The Study of Religion in Denmark. An Anthology*. Ed Armin W. Geertz. Aarhus: Aarhus U (forthcoming).
- Jobling, David. "Jonathan: A Structural Study." *The Sense of Biblical Narrative I*. Rev. ed. JSOT Supplement Series. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic P, 1986.
- McCarter, P. Kyle Jr. *1 Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes and Commentary*. Anchor Bible 8. Garden City: Doubleday. 1984.
- Palaver, Wolfgang. *Politik und Religion bei Thomas Hobbes: Eine Kritik aus der Sicht der Theorie René Girards*. Innsbruck-Wien: Tyrolia. 1991.
- Rost, L. "Die Überlieferung von der Thronnachfolge Davids." *Das Kleine Credo und andere Studien zum Alten Testament*. Heidelberg: Quelle und Meyer, 1965.
- Schneidau, Herbert N. *Sacred Discontent: The Bible and Western Tradition*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP. 1976.
- Simonse, Simon. *Kings of Disaster: Dualism, Centralism, and the Scapegoat King in Southeastern Sudan*. Studies in Human Society 5. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992.
- Van Seters. John. *Abraham in History and Tradition*. New Haven: Yale, 1975.
- . *Prologue to History: The Yahwist as Historian in Genesis*. Louisville: Westminster/John Know. 1992.
- . *In Search of History*. New Haven: Yale. 1983.
- von Rad, Gerhard. "The Beginnings of Historical Writing in Ancient Israel." *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays*. Trans. E. W. T. Dickem. NY: McGraw-Hill. 1966.
- Williams, James G. *The Bible, Violence, and the Sacred*, San Francisco: Harper Collins. 1991.
- . "The Prophetic 'Father': A Brief Explanation of the Term Sons of the Prophets." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 85 (1966): 344-8.
- "Sacrifice and the Beginning of Kingship." *Semeia* (issue on "Passages, Transformations, and Processes: Ritual Approaches to Biblical Texts." Ed. Mark McVann. Forthcoming).