



Appendix A

The popular story that David was a young shepherd boy who killed Goliath with a slingshot and stone is itself a myth propagated as part of the political campaign to show that the Spirit of God was with David and his dynasty. We know that his three oldest brothers served in King Saul's army, and David himself was a pretty lad who used to work under Saul as his armour-bearer, serving him wine and playing the harp to soothe his master's mood whenever needed. And evidently Saul "loved" this cup-bearing (*catamite*) boy very much at the beginning (1 Samuel 16:15–23).

An older and probably genuine tradition holds that when David was working as an officer in Saul's army, it was a warrior under his command named Elhanan, also from Bethlehem, who slew Goliath of Gath—the same Goliath whose spear shaft was as thick as a weaver's beam (2 Samuel 21:19; 1 Samuel 17:4, 7, 18:5,13; Qur'an 2:249–51; Weber 2014, pt. II). Three points from the book of Samuel itself support this alternative tradition:

- (1) In 2 Samuel 21:15–22, four different warriors with their names clearly mentioned are described as killing a Philistine giant each, with Goliath of Gath being one among the fallen. In one of these incidents, a warrior named Abishai rescues the weak and exhausted David from a giant and even swears at David, "You are not going out to battle with us again!" Still, the last verse concludes that all four giants "fell at the hands of David and his servants" (2 Samuel 23:18, 24, 27, 32–33; 1 Chronicles 11:20, 26, 29, 34).
- (2) One can easily notice that the chapter of "David versus Goliath" (i.e. 1 Samuel 17) was inserted at a later date. There is a painfully obvious discontinuity in the narrative as a result: Saul already knows David very well before this chapter begins, but there is a part in this chapter where Saul seems to find out for the first time who the heroic young lad is (1 Samuel 16:15–23, 17:55–58).
- (3) Also, if he were a previously unknown shepherd boy, David would not have had his own military tent in the camp. But this chapter carelessly mentions that he brought back and stored Goliath's armour in his own tent after the battle (1 Samuel 17:54).

The apparent contradiction caused by the chapter insertion in Samuel's book, where David kills Goliath in one battle and Elhanan kills the same Goliath in another battle, seems to have been noticed by a chronicler who later solves this difficulty by writing in the book of Chronicles that Elhanan killed the brother of Goliath. But we can see this chronicler's intention to always portray David as a hero and in good light when he completely removes the part about Abishai and his snide remark from Samuel's book but copies the rest exactly into his own work (1 Chronicles 20:4–8; cf. 2 Samuel 21:15–22).

Some scholars believe that David was a privileged and scheming military officer who vied for the throne for a long time and obtained it by less than honest means (1 Samuel 18:5, 13, 30; Boadt, Clifford, and Harrington 2012, 199). He first created a personal army loyal to no cause but only his own interests, and he slowly bought

Appendix A

the allegiance of the many elders of the southern region called Judah (1 Samuel 22:1–4, 30:26–30). Then, as 1 Samuel 27–31 hints, he might have played off Saul against the Philistines, and when the kings of Philistines waged war and killed Saul and his three sons in battle, David exploited the situation to divide the kingdom and became king over the people of Judah. About seven years later, when the last capable son of Saul, King Ishbaal, was assassinated and the Israelites were left without a king, David quickly convened the elders of all the twelve great Jewish houses and became king of the whole united kingdom (2 Samuel 4:1–7, 5:1–3). But many years later, after the death of his son Solomon, the kingdom would again be divided into two, as the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah (1 Kings 12:1–20).

David might not have been as ideal a king as he was later depicted to be. His impetuous adultery with Bathsheba and the brutal murder of her husband became well known and disliked by his court members (2 Samuel 11–12). His use of forced labour camps, taking of census for compulsorily drafting men into military service, and revolts by his sons, Absalom and Adonijah, and the widespread support they received by his own ministers and some northern houses, show that many were generally unhappy with his despotic rule (2 Samuel 15–18, 19:41–44, 20:24, 24:1–10; 1 Kings 1; Boadt, Clifford, and Harrington 2012, 197–201).