

MUSIC AND THE SACRAL AUTHORISATION OF DAVIDIC KINGSHIP IN II SAMUEL 6

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With its deliberately eye-catching title, Susan Day Piggott's blog post, "Was David Dancing in His Tightly Whities (II Samuel 6)?"¹, has no doubt attracted a substantial readership. The biblical text that prompted this reflection, II Samuel 6, has likewise received sustained attention across scholarly discourse.² The questions generated by the chapter are many. Why does the narrator present the ark's ascent as a public event saturated with music and bodily movement? Why is David's dancing described so prominently, and why is his attire specified as a linen ephod? How does Michal's reaction to David's performance expose a deeper conflict over the nature of legitimate kingship in Israel? Finally, how does this musical spectacle in II Samuel 6 relate to earlier scenes in which music accompanies Saul's rise and fall in I Samuel?

II Samuel 6 itself invites such questions by refusing to neutralise the spectacle. David's behaviour is not merely exuberant but conspicuous and publicly exposed, culminating in Michal's biting rebuke in v. 20: *How the king of Israel honored himself today, uncovering himself today before the eyes of his servants' maids, as any vulgar fellow might shamelessly uncover himself.*³ Her critique crystallises a tension already latent in the narrative, namely, whether David's musical and bodily performance constitute appropriate engagement with the presence of the LORD or a collapse of royal distinction in public space.

This article argues that in I Samuel 10 and II Samuel 6, music marks decisive moments of royal legitimation by mediating the LORD's presence in public space. Saul's encounter with prophetic music temporarily authenticates his divine selection through charismatic empowerment. In contrast, David's orchestration of music before the ark enacts a more durable model of sacral kingship grounded in the localisation of divine presence. To establish this thesis, this study proceeds in four stages that correspond to the argument's major movements.

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First, it examines music and Saul's sacral authorisation in I Samuel 10:5–7, focusing on prophetic performance and Spirit-empowerment as a momentary mechanism of royal legitimation. Second, it turns to music and David's sacral consolidation, reading II Samuel 6 as the transition from political establishment to cultic reorientation, and analysing how the ark procession localises the presence of the LORD within Israel's newly configured public space. Third, it traces music, transformation, and the fall of Saul's house, showing how earlier patterns of Spirit-driven embodiment and royal visibility are inverted in I Samuel 19 and refracted through Michal's rebuke in II Samuel 6, where questions of honor, exposure, and dynastic memory come to the fore. Finally, it concludes by drawing together the essay's findings on music, embodiment, and kingship in Samuel, arguing that sound functions as a public medium through which divine presence both authorises and tests royal authority.

MUSIC AND SAUL'S SACRAL AUTHORISATION (I SAMUEL 10:5–7)³

Throughout Tanakh, musical sound frequently accompanies royal action and royal legitimation.⁴ Trumpets and horns mark moments of military engagement, coronation, and public acclamation. Saul's reign later includes the sounding of the *shofar* in battle, when Jonathan strikes the Philistine garrison and Saul has the trumpet sounded throughout the land (1 Sam. 13:3). Solomon's anointing is similarly accompanied by trumpet blasts and public rejoicing (I Kgs. 1:34), as is the proclamation of Jehu (II Kgs. 9:13) and the coronation of Joash, where musicians lead the people in praise (II Chron. 23:13).

Against this backdrop, the presence of music at this stage of Saul's rise is neither incidental nor decorative; it signals his entry into charismatic royal agency. Prior to I Samuel 10:5–8, the narrative consistently portrays Saul as hesitant, dependent, and ill-suited for leadership.⁵ His introduction in 1 Samuel 9:3 situates him not in a command arena but in a domestic errand, searching for his father's lost donkeys. If a character's initial speech functions as a key moment of characterisation, Saul's first recorded words, "Let us go back," expose his reluctance and lack of perseverance in fulfilling even this modest responsibility. Rather than pressing forward, Saul is prepared to abandon the task altogether.

By contrast, Saul's servant displays precisely the qualities absent in his master.⁶ Refusing to follow Saul's retreat, the servant proposes a concrete and

informed alternative: "Look, in this town there is a man of God; he is highly respected, and everything he says comes true. Let us go there now." The servant's response demonstrates initiative, geographical awareness, courage, and an understanding of how to seek divine guidance. These traits, ironically embodied by a subordinate, mark him as possessing qualities expected of a king, while Saul remains dependent and uncertain.

Saul's reliance on others is further underscored when he must ask his servant what sort of gift should be offered to the prophet (I Sam. 9:7–8). The future king is unable to navigate even the basic protocols of approaching a man of God without assistance. Likewise, the unnamed women at the well (9:11–14) exhibit greater situational knowledge than Saul, providing precise directions concerning Samuel's location.⁷

This pattern, however, shifts decisively with Saul's anointing. In I Samuel 10:6, Samuel announces that God will transform Saul into "another man," a change confirmed through three authenticating signs. Of particular importance is the third sign in 10:5, where Saul encounters a band of prophets descending from the high place, accompanied by musical instruments including lyres, timbrels, pipes, and harps. This moment situates Saul within a broader biblical association between music and divine presence.

At the same time, Saul's encounter with the prophetic musicians coincides with the powerful coming of the Spirit of the LORD upon him (I Sam. 10:6). The presence of God, mediated through both Spirit and sound, produces two immediate effects. First, Saul joins the prophets in prophesying, a striking reversal for someone who had previously been unable to locate his own donkeys.⁸ Second, he is fundamentally altered, becoming "another man." As Hans Hertzberg correctly observes, this change should not be understood as a spiritual conversion in the later theological sense, but as a divinely induced readiness for action.⁹ The transformation equips Saul to act decisively in accordance with divine purpose, enabling him to do what his *hand finds to do* (10:7), anticipating the Philistine conflict that soon follows. Music here does not merely accompany the Spirit's arrival; it marks the mobilisation of divine presence for imminent conflict.

The once-hesitant figure is thus equipped for courageous royal action, even if the narrative later shows him failing to embody this potential consistently.¹⁰ Yet the subsequent story makes clear that this transformation is neither

permanent nor uncomplicated. Saul still hides among the baggage at his public selection (I Sam. 10:22), indicating that charismatic empowerment does not erase his deeply ingrained tendencies toward avoidance. In such contexts, sound functions as a ritual means of activating divine intervention rather than as an aesthetic accompaniment. Priests blow trumpets as part of the battle procession (Num. 10:9; 31:6; II Chron. 13:12), audibly invoking the LORD's presence on the battlefield. In II Chronicles 20, Jehoshaphat sends singers ahead of the army, and victory follows precisely at the moment praise begins, as the LORD sets an ambush against the enemy. Music, in these scenes, operates as a catalyst that transitions divine presence from the cultic sphere to martial action.¹¹ Read in this light, the prophetic music of I Samuel 10 functions analogously: it signals not only Saul's charismatic authorisation but the activation of divine power for warfare. The reference to the Philistine garrison just before the prophetic band hints that this convergence of Spirit, sound, and prophecy is ordered toward conflict with Israel's enemies, even if Saul himself will not fully inhabit this vocation. This logic appears again in I Chronicles 25, where military commanders help appoint temple musicians for worship. In that scene, music links the temple directly to Israel's military security.¹²

Consequently, in I Samuel 10:5–8, music operates as a key symbol of Saul's divine selection and temporary transformation. Accompanied by prophetic music, the Spirit of the LORD empowers Saul to prophesy and reshapes his inner disposition. Through music and Spirit together, Saul is publicly and powerfully authorised to act as the LORD's chosen leader, though without establishing the institutional or cultic foundations of a stable monarchy. A further dimension of music and Saul appears in I Samuel 16, where David's lyre temporarily relieves the evil spirit that torments the king. Here, music does not authorise Saul's kingship, nor does it secure the LORD's enduring presence. Instead, it provides intermittent relief within a kingship already under judgment. This episode confirms that sound can soothe and restrain destructive spiritual forces, but it cannot, on its own, reverse Saul's loss of divine favour.

MUSIC AND DAVID'S SACRAL AUTHORISATION (II SAMUEL 6)

By the time of II Samuel 4, the collapse of Saul's house is completed with the assassination of Ish-bosheth by his own officers. As in earlier episodes, David refuses to profit from illegitimate violence. He condemns the assassins

and orders their execution, publicly disavowing any role in the bloodshed. This response reinforces David's portrayal as a king who does not seize power through violence, even when such violence might appear politically expedient. With Saul's house extinguished, the tribes of Israel gather at Hebron and anoint David king over a united Israel (II Sam. 5:1–3), grounding their action in divine election and recalling that the LORD had already designated David as shepherd and ruler.

David then consolidates his kingship through a series of strategic political, territorial, and military initiatives. He captures Jerusalem, a former Jebusite stronghold unaffiliated with any tribe, and establishes it as a neutral capital, the "City of David" (II Sam. 5:6–9).¹³ An alliance with Hiram of Tyre, who supplies materials and artisans for David's palace (5:11), signals international recognition and royal stability. Militarily, David secures Israel's borders through decisive victories over the Philistines (5:17–25), victories explicitly framed by repeated inquiry of the LORD.¹⁴ This narrative configuration prepares the reader for the ark's relocation in II Samuel 6. The ark is not required to legitimise David's kingship, since that work has already been accomplished. Instead, the relocation of the ark functions as an act of sacral consolidation, aligning the newly established political centre with the presence of the LORD. By bringing the ark to Jerusalem, David transforms the city from a royal capital into a cultic centre, reorienting kingship around divine presence rather than royal self-assertion.¹⁵

There are several similarities between Saul's and David's sacral authorisation as monarchs. First, in both accounts, God's presence is central. Just as Saul's initial authorisation as king is marked by a public encounter with divine presence through the Spirit in a musically charged prophetic setting (I Sam. 10:5–8), David's kingship is marked by a public encounter with the LORD mediated through the ark (II Sam. 6). In both scenes, kingship is defined not primarily by political consolidation but by proximity to divine presence, even as that presence is mediated through different cultic forms: prophetic ecstasy in Saul's case and ark-centred ritual in David's. Second, both passages frame sacral authorisation through verbs of movement rather than static ritual. In I Samuel 10:5, the prophetic band is described as "coming down" (*yordim*) from the high place, situating Saul's encounter with divine presence within a moving, audible procession.¹⁶ Likewise, in II Samuel 6, the ark is repeatedly described as

"brought up" or "carried" (*ma 'alim; bo '*) as it advances toward Jerusalem, accompanied by music and communal participation.¹⁷ In both scenes, kingship is not ratified in stillness but in motion through public space, with divine presence encountered *en route* rather than confined to a fixed cultic location.

Third, in both I Samuel 10:5 and II Samuel 6, sacral authorisation is accompanied by a largely overlapping set of musical instruments, creating a shared soundscape for royal legitimization. In Saul's encounter with the prophetic band, music is produced by the *nebel* (harp or lyre), *tof* (hand drum or tambourine), *halil* (flute or reed pipe), and *kinnor* (lyre), accompanying prophetic activity and coinciding with the rushing of the *ruah* of the LORD upon him.¹⁷ Similarly, in David's procession before the LORD, *kinnor* (lyre), *nebel* (harp or lyre), and *tof* (hand drum or tambourine) again form the core of the ensemble, now expanded with *mena 'anim* (castanets or rattles) and *tsetselim* (cymbals), and later marked by the sound of the *shofar* (ram's horn trumpet).¹⁸ The recurrence of *kinnor*, *nebel*, and *tof* in both passages establishes a deliberate instrumental continuity, suggesting that similar musical resources frame both Saul's initial authorisation and David's mature kingship, even as the scale and cultic setting of the music intensify in the later narrative.

Fourth, both Saul and David are portrayed in Samuel as undergoing moments of heightened, ecstatic embodiment in contexts marked by music and divine presence. Saul's final public encounter with the Spirit occurs when he approaches the prophetic company, at which point *the Spirit of God came upon him, and he prophesied* until he stripped off his garments and lay exposed (I Sam. 19:23–24; cf. 10:5–10). This episode marks the collapse of Saul's royal agency, as his body becomes the site of involuntary prophetic seizure and political incapacitation. By contrast, David's experience in II Samuel 6 is likewise saturated with music and bodily intensity, yet framed in decisively different terms. As the ark is brought up, David is described as dancing before the LORD *with all his might*, accompanied by instruments and the sound of trumpets (II Sam. 6:14–15). The verb used for David's action, *karar*, rendered "dance," is rare and semantically marked.¹⁹ As a rare and semantically marked verb, it denotes vigorous dancing or whirling bodily motion rather than measured or decorous movement. Coupled with the phrase "with all his might," the verb presents David's movement as deliberate, exhaustive bodily exertion rather than uncontrolled frenzy.

Fifth, in both texts, theology is apprehended first aurally before it is articulated conceptually. In I Samuel 10:5–6, Saul encounters a band of prophets descending from the high place accompanied by a dense musical ensemble, including the *nebel* (harp), *tof* (hand drum), *halil* (flute), and *kinnor* (lyre). The narrative does not begin by explaining the theological significance of this moment. Instead, it immerses the reader in sound. Only after the music is already in motion does the text state that *the Spirit of the LORD will rush upon you, and you will prophesy with them and be turned into another man* (I Sam. 10:6). Theology is thus experienced before it is interpreted. The sonic environment establishes the conditions in which divine agency becomes perceptible, and Saul's transformation follows the audible manifestation of the LORD's presence rather than a verbal declaration of royal legitimacy.

A comparable pattern operates in II Samuel 6. As the ark is brought toward Jerusalem, the narrative foregrounds sound and movement once more before offering any explicit theological reflection. David and *all the house of Israel were celebrating before the LORD with all kinds of instruments* (II Sam. 6:5), and the ark is later brought up *with shouting and with the sound of the horn* (II Sam. 6:15). The meaning of the event is not initially articulated in doctrinal terms. Instead, holiness, joy, and danger are communicated through noise, rhythm, and embodied celebration. Only subsequently does the narrative pause to articulate the theological weight of the moment, most sharply in the episode of Uzzah, where the power and peril of proximity to the LORD's presence are made explicit (II Sam. 6:6–9).

The rushing of the Spirit upon Saul (I Sam. 10:6) and the movement of the ark as the locus of the LORD's presence (II Sam. 6:14–15) are first disclosed through audible and bodily experience rather than propositional speech. Divine endorsement is therefore recognised through participation in a charged acoustic environment, allowing kingship to be perceived through embodied and public encounter with the presence of the LORD before it is ever articulated conceptually.

MUSIC AND CHANGES

In both Saul's and David's authorisation narratives, divine presence effects visible change. In Saul's case, this transformation is explicitly stated in I Samuel 10:6. The Hebrew expression *nehpachta le'ish 'acher* ("you will be turned

into another man”) employs the verb *haphak* (“to turn, overturn, transform”), a term often used for decisive reversals rather than subtle development.²⁰ The verb signals a reconfiguration of identity rather than the acquisition of a new skill or role. With David, change is also on the horizon. However, unlike Saul’s transformation, David’s change is provoked by a confrontation with holiness itself. This confrontation is prepared for the reader by the narrator’s highly charged introduction of the ark in II Samuel 6:2. The verse reads in full: *David arose and went with all the people who were with him from Baale-judah, to bring up from there the ark of God, which is called by the Name, the Name of the LORD of hosts who is enthroned upon the cherubim* (II Sam. 6:2).

The clause “which is called by the Name” (*asher niqra shem*) in II Samuel 6:2 is exegetically dense and theologically programmatic.²¹ Across Tanakh, the idiom of having the LORD’s Name “called upon” designates a locus in which divine presence and authority are concretely concentrated, as attested in references to cities and peoples marked by covenantal belonging (Deut. 28:10; Jer. 14:9; Amos 9:12) and, paradigmatically, to the temple as *the place where the LORD causes his Name to dwell* (Deut. 12:5, 11; I Kgs 8:29). In such contexts, the language locates divine presence spatially and relationally rather than symbolically. Applied to the ark, the idiom signals that the ark does not merely belong to the LORD but is uniquely bound up with the divine Name, thereby participating directly in the manifestation of divine presence and authority, and resisting reduction to a manipulable cultic object. The appositional clause *the LORD of hosts who is enthroned upon the cherubim* further intensifies this framing by locating divine kingship above the ark.²² Elsewhere, this enthronement imagery functions as a marker of the LORD’s sovereign rule (I Sam. 4:4; II Kgs. 19:15; Ps. 80:1; 99:1), spatially associating divine authority with the ark as the locus of Israel’s true kingship.²³ By invoking this language in II Samuel 6:2, the narrator clarifies that the ark’s relocation concerns the movement of the divine throne rather than the transfer of a sacred object.

Against this backdrop, David’s initial treatment of the ark in 2 Samuel 6 is deeply ironic. Despite the narrator’s repeated insistence on the ark’s holiness, David transports it in a manner that closely mirrors Philistine practice rather than Israelite instruction.²³ As in I Samuel 6:7, the ark is placed on a new cart and drawn by oxen (II Sam. 6:3). Terence Kleven rightly observes that the Israelite cart is pulled by oxen just as the Philistines had done, reinforcing the

narrative parallel.²⁴ When Uzzah later reaches out his hand to steady the ark because the oxen stumble (v. 6), the irony intensifies. What appears to be an instinctive act of reverence is in fact the culmination of a series of prior transgressions.

The Pentateuchal laws governing the ark's transport are unambiguous. The ark is to be carried by the Kohathites on poles placed through its rings, and it must not be touched directly (Ex. 25:12–15; Num. 4:15; Deut. 10:8).²⁵ Within the opening verses of II Samuel 6, multiple violations of these instructions occur. First, the narrative gives no indication that Uzzah is a Kohathite, and several contextual factors make such an identification unlikely.²⁶ The text identifies him only as a son of Abinadab, in whose house the ark had resided for many years at Kiriath-jearim (I Sam. 7:1). Nothing in the narrative associates Abinadab or his household with the Levitical clans, let alone the Kohathites specifically.²⁷ Given the narrator's consistent practice elsewhere of identifying Levitical or priestly status when it is relevant, this silence is significant. Moreover, Kiriath-jearim is not designated as a Levitical city in Joshua 21, making it unlikely that Abinadab's household belonged to the Kohathite line.²⁸ The burden of proof, therefore, lies with any claim that Uzzah was authorised to handle the ark, and the narrative provides no such evidence.

Second, the ark is carried on a cart rather than on the shoulders of designated bearers, directly contradicting the prescriptions of Exodus and Numbers (cf. Num. 7:9).²⁹ Third, the use of oxen to pull the ark repeats the very mode of transport introduced by the Philistines, a striking narrative reversal in which Israel adopts the practices of those from whom the ark had earlier been recovered.³⁰ Fourth, Uzzah's act of touching the ark violates the explicit prohibition against physical contact, regardless of motive.³¹

The narrative thus frames David's first attempt to relocate the ark not as an act of careful obedience but as a well-intentioned yet theologically inattentive enterprise, one that imitates foreign practice and neglects the ritual knowledge embedded in Israel's own tradition. Chronicles' parallel retelling underscores that the catastrophe was not arbitrary but diagnostic.³² When David later attempts the transfer again, he interprets the earlier "breach" as the result of failing to seek the LORD "according to the rule," and therefore has the ark borne by its proper carriers in accordance with Torah-shaped mediation (I Chron. 15:13–15). Read alongside Samuel, Chronicles makes explicit what is implicit

in the Samuel narrative: David's "change" is not merely an affective shift from joy to fear, but a recalibration of kingship itself – divine presence is not managed by expedient technique but approached through commanded order.

Uzzah's death functions as a decisive turning point in David's approach to the ark.³³ The episode exposes the inadequacy of transporting the ark without regard for Pentateuchal instruction and forces a recalibration of David's practice. After a three-month pause (II Sam. 6:11), the narrative resumes with a marked contrast in procedure, signalling that David has learned from the catastrophe. In II Samuel 6:13–14, four concrete changes are enacted, each indicating a renewed attentiveness to the holiness of the LORD's presence.

First, the ark is no longer conveyed on a cart; individuals now carry it.³⁴ Although the text does not explicitly name the Levites, the shift from vehicular transport to bodily bearing aligns with Pentateuchal prescriptions concerning the ark's movement (cf. Num. 4:15; 7:9). This change corrects the earlier imitation of Philistine practice (I Sam. 6:7–8) and reorients the procession toward Israel's own cultic tradition. The ark is no longer treated as cargo but as a sacred burden borne by human bodies, underscoring the gravity of proximity to the LORD.

Second, the procession is punctuated by sacrifice after six steps: *he sacrificed an ox and a fatling* (II Sam. 6:13). The Hebrew terms are significant. The word translated "ox" (*shor*) regularly designates bovine animals used in sacrificial contexts, particularly in burnt offerings (*'olah*) and peace offerings (*zevah shelamim*).³⁵ In Leviticus 1, the burnt offering may be taken "from the herd" (*min-habbaqar*), a category that explicitly includes the *shor* (Lev. 1:3–5), and functions as a rite of atonement, effecting acceptance before the LORD. The *shor* thus carries strong associations with expiation and an approach to divine holiness.

The second animal, the "fatling" (*meri*), denotes a well-fed, choice animal and appears frequently in contexts of festal sacrifice and thanksgiving.³⁶ In Leviticus 3, peace offerings may likewise be drawn from the herd, and the emphasis falls on the fat portions (*helev*) offered to the LORD (Lev. 3:3–5, 16), marking the sacrifice as an act of communion and gratitude rather than expiation alone. The *meri* therefore evokes abundance, celebration, and fellowship in the presence of God. Elsewhere in Samuel, oxen and fattened animals appear together in sacrificial settings (I Sam. 6:14–15; 13:9–10), reinforcing their

conventional association with formal cultic worship rather than spontaneous slaughter.

Read together, the pairing of *shor* and *meri*’ in II Samuel 6:13 suggests a deliberate convergence of sacrificial functions. As the procession advances toward the ark, burnt-offering logic and peace-offering logic operate simultaneously. Atonement and thanksgiving accompany movement toward the enthroned LORD, mediating Israel’s approach to divine presence. The sacrifice is thus not incidental to the procession but integral to it. Given that the ark is explicitly identified as the throne of *the LORD of hosts who is enthroned upon the cherubim* (II Sam. 6:2), such sacrificial mediation is fitting and necessary, marking the procession as a regulated act of worship rather than an unstructured celebration.

Third, instead of following the Philistines’ method of transporting the ark, David here leaps and dances *before the LORD* (II Sam. 6:16), a phrase that carries decisive theological weight.³⁷ The expression *before the LORD* (*lîp̄nê YHWH*) is at minimum locative (“in the presence of the LORD”), and throughout the books of Samuel it frequently functions as an evaluative marker by locating action under divine gaze rather than merely human observation. Actions performed *lîp̄nê YHWH* are consistently oriented toward the divine presence, with accountability directed vertically rather than toward human observers. Therefore, Hannah prays *lîp̄nê YHWH* at Shiloh (I Sam. 1:12), the boy Samuel ministers *lîp̄nê YHWH* as a legitimate servant despite his youth (I Sam. 2:11; 3:1), and Samuel later calls Israel to testify concerning his integrity *lîp̄nê YHWH* (I Sam. 12:3), locating moral judgment in the divine rather than the popular court. The phrase is likewise employed in moments of royal crisis, as when Saul seeks honor *lîp̄nê YHWH* and the elders after his rejection (I Sam. 15:30), exposing his confusion between divine presence and public approval. Within this established semantic pattern, David’s leaping and dancing *lîp̄nê YHWH* in II Samuel 6 is framed not as spectacle for the crowd but as embodied performance enacted before the LORD as primary audience.

Fourth, David’s attire marks a significant shift in role and posture.³⁸ He is described as wearing a linen ephod while ministering before the LORD (II Sam. 6:14). Elsewhere in Tanakh, the ephod is closely associated with priestly service. Samuel wears a linen ephod while ministering before the LORD as a child (I Sam. 2:18). Priestly figures such as Ahijah, a descendant of Eli, wear

an ephod and are consulted for divine guidance (I Sam. 14:3), while Ahimelech possesses an ephod that later accompanies David (I Sam. 21:9; 23:9). Most decisively, in I Samuel 22:18, wearing the ephod is synonymous with priestly identity. By donning a linen ephod, David symbolically adopts a priestly posture, presenting himself not as sovereign commander but as minister before the LORD.

In sum, the narratives of Saul and David present divine authorisation as an event that affects transformation. In both cases, an encounter with the LORD's presence does not leave the king unchanged. Saul is "turned into another man" as the Spirit rushes upon him amid prophetic sound. At the same time, David's encounter with the holiness borne by the ark compels a reconfiguration of practice, posture, and approach. Though the modes differ, the underlying logic is the same: divine presence demands response. Kingship in Samuel is therefore not conferred as a static status but enacted through change, whether in identity, behaviour, or cultic alignment. Legitimate rule emerges where the king proves responsive to the LORD's presence, allowing divine holiness to reshape how authority is embodied and exercised.

MUSIC, TRANSFORMATION, AND THE FALL OF SAUL'S HOUSE

The bodily, musical, and performative expression of David's response to divine presence not only legitimates his rule but simultaneously exposes unresolved fault lines inherited from Saul's reign. These tensions are crystallised in the figure of Michal: the narrator first signals conflict through Michal's internal response: she *despised him in her heart* (II Sam. 6:16). The verb *bazah* ("to despise") denotes contempt or disdain; in context it marks an evaluative rejection of David's act as a violation of social and royal norms.³⁹ Michal's accusation is then articulated explicitly in verse 20, where she confronts David with biting irony: *How the king of Israel honored himself today, uncovering himself today in the eyes of the maidservants of his servants, as one of the worthless fellows shamelessly uncovers (galah) himself.*

At first glance, Michal's charge appears to imply sexualised exposure.⁴⁰ The root *galah* regularly appears in contexts of sexual uncovering, so it is unsurprising that Michal's words carry a sexual charge. Her bitter tone may also reflect frustration with David's lack of sexual interest in her, as later tradition and some interpreters suggest, even if the narrator does not make this explicit.

The ambiguity may be deliberate. Michal's language can simultaneously insinuate sexual impropriety and condemn David's collapse of royal distance. The text thus allows sexual innuendo to reinforce a deeper concern with public honor and dynastic memory.

Closer attention to the Hebrew idiom, however, complicates this reading. The verb *galah* ("to uncover") does not necessarily denote nudity but frequently refers to the removal or displacement of outer garments. The reflexive form in v. 20 (*mitgalleh*) intensifies the rhetoric by portraying repeated self-exposure in public space, without requiring complete nudity. Earlier in the chapter, the narrator has already specified David's attire: he is clothed in a linen ephod (v. 14), a garment associated with priestly service. The text nowhere indicates that David removes this ephod or becomes naked. When the narrative intends to describe literal nakedness, it does so unambiguously, as in Saul's stripping off his garments in I Samuel 19:24. Alternatively, Fritz Stolz has suggested that David may have lost his loincloth during his ecstatic dancing.⁴¹ While imaginative, this proposal remains speculative and cannot be verified from the narrative itself. Robert Polzin similarly observes that, "for one thing, many commentators see David's 'revealing himself' as a reference to his dancing almost naked, yet nothing in the text, so far as I can see, supports this view."⁴²

A plausible reading is that Michal's accusation that David "uncovered himself" operates on more than one level.⁴³ On the surface, the idiom evokes sexual exposure, especially given the frequent sexual use of *galah* elsewhere.⁴⁴ At the same time, in this narrative context the primary offence lies in David's abandonment of visible royal distinction and dignity before lower-status women. This interpretation gains further traction when II Samuel 6 is read alongside the roles of music and embodied prophecy in I Samuel 10:5–8 and I Samuel 19:20–24. Across these passages, music functions as a narrative sign of divine authorisation of kingship. In I Samuel 10, Saul encounters prophetic communities characterised by sound, movement, and collective performance. The Spirit of God rushes upon him, and music accompanies his transformation into "another man," publicly authenticating his anointing. The repeated use of *naba* ("to prophesy"), the emphasis on the Spirit coming "upon" Saul, and the recurring refrain "Is Saul also among the prophets?" present prophetic ecstasy as an embodied and public phenomenon rather than a merely verbal one.

In I Samuel 10, therefore, music and prophecy serve a positive function: they mark divine approval and inaugurate Saul's kingship. Read against this backdrop, David's dancing before the ark participates in the same nexus of music, bodily expression, and divine presence – yet now in the context of consolidating rather than initiating kingship. David's public musical self-abasement before the LORD signals a rule that is visibly aligned with divine presence.

By the time the narrative reaches I Samuel 19, however, Saul has already been decisively rejected as king.⁴⁵ The prophetic declaration of judgment in I Samuel 15 has stripped his reign of divine legitimacy, even as he continues to occupy the throne in practice. What follows is a prolonged unravelling marked by Saul's increasing fixation on eliminating David, the divinely chosen successor. When Saul pursues David to Naioth in Ramah, intent on murder, the familiar constellation of Spirit and prophecy reappears – but with a crucial reversal. Instead of authorising kingship, the Spirit now interrupts Saul's agency, thwarting his violent purpose and rendering him passive. Saul's rejection reaches its symbolic climax when *the Spirit of God came upon him also*, and he strips off his garments and prophesies before Samuel, lying exposed all that day and night (I Sam. 19:23–24).

Within Samuel, clothing functions as a visible marker of power, status, and legitimacy.⁴⁶ As David rises, he accumulates garments, weapons, and royal symbols; as Saul falls, he is progressively divested of them. Saul's nakedness thus visually enacts the earlier prophetic verdict that *the kingdom of Israel has been torn from you today* (I Sam. 15:28), translating theological judgment into bodily humiliation. This loss of covering anticipates the grotesque exposure of Saul's corpse in I Samuel 31:9, where his armor is stripped and his body displayed by the Philistines, completing the arc of dynastic disgrace.

Significantly, unlike Saul's earlier encounter with prophetic music in I Samuel 10, this final prophetic episode is narrated without any mention of music. Where sound once accompanies divine election and transformation, the narrated soundscape now foregrounds interruption, exposure, and incapacitation. The Spirit still comes, but no longer to authorise or transform. Instead, it immobilises, silences, and exposes Saul. In theological terms, this shows that his kingship has already ended before he ever falls on the battlefield.

Against this backdrop, Michal's response to David's dancing acquires narrative coherence. For David to lay aside his kingly garments, as Michal's father

Saul once did, is in her eyes to relinquish royal power, rendering himself indistinguishable before the handmaids (v. 20). For Michal, music, ecstatic embodiment, and the loosening of royal decorum do not signify legitimate worship but recall the shameful collapse of Saul's house. David's exuberant movement before the LORD thus reactivates the memory of Saul's final prophetic humiliation. What David understands as appropriate self-abasement in divine presence, Michal interprets through the lens of dynastic trauma as a repetition of disgrace rather than an expression of faith.

Interestingly, Michal also appears in both I Samuel 19 and II Samuel 6. In both narratives, she appears at critical thresholds, observing David from a distance rather than participating. In I Samuel 19, she enables David's escape *be'ad ha-ḥallôn* ("through the window," v. 12); in II Samuel 6, she watches him *mibba'ad la-ḥallôn* ("from the window," v. 16). The repeated window motif marks Michal as an interpreter of David's exposure. In the earlier scene, her concern is preservation rather than piety. Her support is enacted through concealment, deception, and covering. She hides David's body, substitutes a *ter-afim* (household image), covers it with a *begeg* ("garment"), and places *kebir ha-'izzim* ("goat's hair") at the head, constructing a visible body to mask an absent one (I Sam. 19:11–17). Concealment preserves David's life and royal future at a stage when kingship must remain hidden.

In II Samuel 6, however, the same logic leads to rejection rather than support. David no longer conceals his body but exposes it willingly in musical, embodied devotion before the LORD. Michal "despises him in her heart" (*va-tivez lo be-libbah*), judging his performance as royal *qalon* rather than faithfulness. What changes is David's posture. In I Samuel 19, he flees danger and accepts concealment. In II Samuel 6, he embraces exposure as an act of obedience. Michal cannot recognise this as legitimate kingship.

As a result of her contempt for David, Michal is isolated narratively. Throughout II Samuel 6, Michal is identified not as David's wife but repeatedly as *Michal, daughter of Saul* (vv. 16, 20, 23), anchoring her identity to a dynasty whose future has already been foreclosed.⁴⁸ While David and *all the house of Israel* move, rejoice, and celebrate before the LORD, Michal remains static, observing from a window. Jerusalem is designated *the City of David* three times (6:9, 12, 16), reconfiguring political and cultic space around Davidic kingship.⁴⁷ Blessing circulates within David's orbit, first resting upon the

house of Obed-edom (6:11) and then flowing through David to the people (6:18-19). Saul's name is absent from every act of worship and favour.

The window motif further aligns Michal with biblical scenes of female spectatorship at moments of reversal and doom.⁴⁸ Sisera's mother peers through a window in Judges 5:28, waiting in vain for a son who will never return, while Jezebel looks out from a window in II Kings 9:30 immediately before the eradication of Ahab's line. Michal's posture in II Samuel 6:16 plausibly places her within this literary pattern. The chapter's closing notice seals the judgment: *Michal, daughter of Saul, had no child to the day of her death* (6:23). The formulation is deliberately genealogical.⁴⁹ As the final living link to Saul's house, Michal's barrenness completes what the chapter has already enacted spatially, rhetorically, and theologically. With her, Saul's line loses its capacity to generate future kingship, while David's rule, authorised through music, movement, and embodied submission before the LORD, stands fully consolidated.

CONCLUSION

This study has argued that music in I Samuel 10 and II Samuel 6 is not ornamental but politically and theologically determinative, marking decisive moments of sacral authorisation by mediating the presence of the LORD in public space. In Saul's case, prophetic music accompanies the rushing of the Spirit and effects a temporary transformation that equips him for royal action (I Sam 10:5-7). Nevertheless, this configuration does not secure enduring legitimacy. As Saul's reign unravels, prophetic ecstasy returns without music, and his final encounter with the Spirit culminates not in empowerment but in exposure and incapacitation (I Sam 19:23-24), bodily enacting the verdict that the kingdom has been torn away (I Sam 15:28).

By contrast, the musical spectacle of 2 Samuel 6 reconfigures kingship around the ark rather than the king. Music functions as a public medium of divine presence, through which holiness, joy, and danger are apprehended before they are articulated. David's dancing *lipnê YHWH* is not a spectacle for the crowd but embodied submission before the LORD as the primary audience. At the same time, Michal's rebuke reveals a competing Saulide vision of kingship invested in visibility, decorum, and distance. As blessing circulates through David's orbit and Jerusalem is constituted as the City of David, music

becomes an index of dynastic transition, distinguishing kingship grounded in guarded honor from kingship shaped by vulnerable presence.

Seen in this light, Piggott's playful question about David's "tighty whities" ultimately misdirects the reader's attention. Samuel's concern is not what David wore, but what kind of kingship he embodied. Legitimate rule, the narrative suggests, belongs to the king willing to stand unguarded before the presence of the LORD rather than to one who secures authority by shielding himself from exposure.

NOTES

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