

**Warrior, Poet, Prophet and King: The Character of
David in Judaism, Christianity and Islam**
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The international conference *Warrior, Poet, Prophet and King: The Character of David in Judaism, Christianity and Islam* was hosted by the Institute of History, University of Warsaw and the Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, and sponsored by the European Association for Jewish Studies (EAJS) Conference Grant Programme in European Jewish Studies.¹ It was organized by Marzena Zawawska (University of Warsaw & Jewish Historical Institute) and Mateusz Wilk (University of Warsaw), while Camilla Adang (Tel Aviv University), Juan Pedro Monferrer-Sala (University of Córdoba), Łukasz Niesiołowski-Spanò (University of Warsaw), and Meira Polliack (Tel Aviv University) formed the scientific advisory board of the event.

Event rationale

So far, scholarly research has mostly (though not uniquely) been devoted to the study of various ways in which different biblical characters had been represented in a given religious tradition, in isolation from others. The purpose of the conference was to question this dominant approach and investigate transformations of the image of the biblical character of David in the intertwined worlds of the three major monotheistic traditions in cross-fertilizing contact. The main intention of this initiative was to foster international, multidisciplinary cooperation by bringing together scholars from various research disciplines related to Jewish, Christian and Islamic

¹ Another version of this academic report will also be published in *Jewish History Quarterly* (2017) where it will be partially reproduced with kind permission of the editors of this Journal.

studies, in order to critically examine different source texts related to King David and Psalms, the book traditionally linked with him, as well as his visual representation. The close scrutiny of various distinct perceptions and receptions of this central biblical figure and his attributed literary composition helped to trace possible venues of cross-cultural transfer, inter-faith transmission and mutual influence, both direct and indirect, among the major monotheistic traditions. Accordingly, the conference comparatively examined the ways in which the image of King David had been created and transformed in many distinct literary genres (not only Bible and Qur'an exegesis, but also historiography, polemics, pietistic literature, etc.), written in different languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, Arabic, including Judeo- and Christian-Arabic, Syriac and Latin), as well as in art and iconography. All this helped to look at the reception of biblical traditions in general, and perceptions of King David and the book of Psalms in particular, in a more integrative fashion, by questioning the conventional study of scriptural characters or books and their interpretative evolutions within a given religion in isolation from others. Yet the objective of the proposed conference was not only to give an overview of the field/s and on this basis to detect contact points between different cultures or to trace various channels through which certain themes, motifs, iconographic images and topoi found their way into different religious traditions, but also, and more importantly, to raise new questions; not only to give answers by presenting the results of a completed research, but to ask questions. The additional objective of the conference, then, was to map out possible research avenues in an attempt to establish a multidisciplinary network of established as well as early-career scholars, in order to form an international research team to collaborate in further investigation of the subject.

Sections and papers

One of the most complex and ambivalent characters in the Bible is King David. Traditionally considered to be the pious author of the book of Psalms, a brave warrior and a perfect ruler, he was also a vassal of the Philistine king and a sinner whose morally dubious

behaviour is criticized in the Bible itself. Little wonder, therefore, that his image underwent significant interpretative changes in perception and reception in different monotheistic traditions. So far, scholarly research has mostly focused on the ways he was appropriated by some of these traditions in isolation from others. The conference questioned this dominant exclusive approach and attempted to scrutinize perceptions and receptions of King David and his book in different monotheistic traditions from late antiquity until the early modern period in a more inclusive fashion. Its aim was to take a new, critical look at the process of biblical creation and subsequent exegetical transformation of this figure, with particular emphasis put on the multilateral fertilization and cross-cultural interchanges among Jews, Christians and Muslims in different genres of their respective religious literatures and arts. The conference programme was structured so as to discuss the question of David's perceptions and receptions chronologically, beginning with the biblical texts (Late Antiquity), through Jewish, Christian and Muslim exegetical appropriations of this figure and his attributed Book of Psalms in the Middle Ages and beyond, until early modern and modern interpretations of Davidic materials as found in religious and secular literature, as well as the arts. Below, all the sessions and papers are discussed in accordance with the order in which they were presented at the conference and not the original (printed) version of the programme. For the discrepancies between the original (printed) version of the programme and its final (actual) version, resulting from the fact that two speakers were in the end unable to attend, see below, section "Programme."

The conference opened with a keynote (1 hour) lecture, *A Question of Character: Biblical Bathsheba as a Case Study of Cross-Cultural Exegesis and Typology*, given by Meira Polliack (Tel Aviv University). It explored the reception history of the biblical story of the David-Bathsheba affair in Judaism, Christianity and Islam discussing a number of possible exegetical strategies to solve exegetical cruxes posed by the biblical account of David's sin, namely: (1.) To ignore it; (2.) To overemphasize his piety; (3.) To present it as a purposeful trial; (4.) To blame another character. It demonstrated that all three religious traditions concurred in their endeavour to overemphasize David's

piety. The paper also attempted to chart possible venues of cross-cultural transfers of concepts, ideas and iconographic motifs related to this biblical episode as well as mutual influences among the major monotheistic traditions (e.g., the motif of the dove appearing in Jewish midrashim and in selected Islamic sources might have been taken from or inspired by the Christian tradition). The paper raised fundamental questions related to migration trajectories and the possibility to tracing them back, and thereby prepared the ground for the discussions during the next two days.

The subsequent discussion focused on the question of why no religion blamed Bathsheba, which would be an easy way to acquit David of any guilt. The conclusion was that there was nothing to blame her for and that the fact that Solomon as well as the future Messiah were to descend from Bathsheba prevented the shifting of the blame on her.

The first session (chaired by Marzena Zawadowska, University of Warsaw & Jewish Historical Institute) was devoted to David's characterization in biblical historiography and Jewish Bible exegesis. It opened with a paper *Retelling the David and Bathsheba Narrative in Josephus' Antiquities of the Jews* presented by Michael Avioz (Bar Ilan University), which focused on the way Flavius Josephus in his *Antiquities of the Jews* interpreted the biblical story of the David-Bathsheba affair (2 Sam. 11.1-12.25). It discussed this subject against the backdrop of the biblical text and its traditional rabbinic interpretations, and demonstrated that despite some minor changes, Josephus retained most of the problematic source material in his account (Ant. 7.130-61). The paper also analyzed the ways in which Josephus rewrote this narrative and the techniques he employed to do so, as well as possible reasons behind the changes he introduced (influence of Greek culture and its values, such as piety, justice, courage, obedience).

The following discussion focused on the claim, mentioned in the paper, that Josephus had considered himself a reflection of David (one participant asked whether there were other examples of Josephus identifying himself with King David; the answer was yes; Josephus described himself as a prophet, just like David is described in the Bible; in addition, in Josephus' retelling of 1 Samuel 25, he presented

David as a non-violent leader, akin to Josephus himself). Another issue raised after the paper concerned Josephus' attitude towards people having double names (one participant asked whether the case in which Benjamin was also called Ben Oni was relevant; the answer was not, since all the cases mentioned related to biblical kings).

Next, Sivan Nir (Tel Aviv University) gave a talk on *Midnight Lyres and Demon Flutes: David's Music in Medieval Jewish and Muslim Exegesis*, which focused on the influence of midrashic interpretations of the biblical descriptions of David's musical talent on later medieval Jewish commentators, as well as on Muslim portrayals of David's piety. The paper analyzed different images of David in Judaism and Islam while showing their interdependence and originality. Using the methodology of close (comparative) reading of a selection of source texts it demonstrated that Jewish and Muslim commentators addressed this subject in a manner reflective of their differing religious traditions, communities and views on music. It showed that the Rabbis presented David as a pious Hellenistic king in oriental attire; a brave warrior during the day and diligent Torah student by night, and intentionally downplayed his musical inclinations, since they associated music with pagan culture. In Islam David is depicted as a paradigm of piety, doing more than required, while his musical talents are associated with his enchanting voice (singing as a path to God) rather than his ability to play instruments.

The ensuing discussion revolved around the question of why David's character was being distanced from playing musical instruments in Islamic sources. The conclusion was that most likely David was disassociated from playing string instruments by Muslim authors due to those being possibly connected with magical applications in pre-Islamic Arabia and ancient Yemen. Such notions would certainly not suit the very pious Muslim David. One participant also asked about the exact Arabic word used by Ibn Asakir to denote family in a Hadith mentioned during the presentation. It was the term *ahl*.

The last paper in this session, *David and Jonathan: A Medieval Bromance*, was presented by Ruth Mazo Karras (University of Minnesota). It analyzed four late medieval texts from Western Europe (the Latin Bible commentary by Denis the Carthusian; the Middle

English *Metrical Paraphrase of the Old Testament*; the French *Mistère du Viel Testament*; and the Yiddish *Shmuel-Bukh* from Ashkenaz) dealing with the friendship between David and Jonathan. The descriptions of this friendship were compared with those of the romantic/marital relationship between David and Jonathan's sister Michal. It appeared that all these texts depicted the love of men for each other as greater than men's love for women, both essentially being the same kind of love, while the marriage with a woman (Michal) served the purpose of bounding an alliance between men (Jonathan and David). The paper demonstrated that though using different techniques all the sources tried to de-eroticize their love (stressing the innocent character of their friendship; depicting their relationship in terms of chevalier loyalty; emphasizing that marriage intensifies the bond between men but does not replace it).

The following discussion touched upon the issue that what the texts did not say is as important as what they did say (e.g., Michal's critique of David). It also raised the question of how, on a conceptual level, this was reconciled with the homophobia present in all major monotheistic traditions.

The second session (chaired by Mateusz Wilk, University of Warsaw) was devoted to the transformations of David in ancient and medieval Christian exegesis. It started with a paper entitled *King David's Psalter in Christian Arabic Dress: 'Abd Allāh ibn al-Faḍl's Translation and Commentary*, presented by Juan Pedro Monferrer-Sala (University of Córdoba), who discussed in detail one of the most important and original Christian Arabic translations and commentaries on the Book of Psalms, produced by a Melkite deacon, 'Abd Allāh ibn al-Faḍl. It demonstrated that this theological Christological commentary presented David as a prophet very differently from his depiction in classical Jewish sources, such as Sa'adyah's texts. It also explored the rich reception history of this text as testified by its many different adaptations indicating the need for preparing a critical edition of this important work.

The discussion after the paper, focused on the Vorlage of the Arabic translation (one participant asked whether it was made from, or influenced by the Syriac version of the Psalms; the answer was no, because the translation was clearly made from the Greek source text),

and on the theological content of both translation and commentary (someone asked whether it was different, and if yes, in what respects, from earlier Greek translations and commentaries; the answer was that the Arabic version preserved the Chalcedonian dogma without making major changes to this theological tradition).

The second talk in this session, *Psalms to Reason, Psalms to Heal: David and His Book in Rūm Orthodox Communities*, was given by Miriam Lindgren Hjälms (Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München). It examined the exegetical approach to David and his attributed book of Psalms in early Arabic-speaking Rūm Orthodox (Melkite) communities, focusing on two works representing different literary genres: selected theological tracts by Theodore Abū Qurra (9th C.E.) and a chronography composed by Agapius of Manbij (10th C.E.). The paper demonstrated that exegetical principles developed in Patristic times were adopted and developed by early Arabic-speaking Christian authors who all acknowledged the supreme status of the Davidic Psalter. The preliminary survey of Abū Qurra's texts shows that he interpreted selected Psalm quotations in their most literal sense to prove that Jesus was the Messiah, mostly by using typological methods, but also by means of analogy. Agapius likewise interpreted Psalm quotations literally, but as opposed to Abū Qurra not as pointing towards the incarnation, but back in time to recapitulate events that already had taken place. As such, Psalms played some kind of meta-function in that they interpreted the same corpus they were part of. These two authors did not use Psalms as expressions of their own mind, in the way many Church Fathers and the Karaites often did. However, the huge production of Arabic Psalm translations, recited extensively in the liturgical life of the Church, shows that outside of theological tracts (often polemical in character), Psalms were used not only to recall the past and foretell the future, but also understood as possessing healing powers, as summarized in Sinai, Ms Arabic 271, an Arabic translation of Basil the Great's commentary on Psalm 1.

The following discussion addressed the question of whether it was possible to find similarities between Near Eastern Christian and Jewish use and/or understanding of David and the Psalms (the answer was yes) and whether the Patristic heritage bears any impact on

Muslim tradition (the conclusion was that it required further investigation). Someone also raised the issue of the Christian concept of the redaction of the book of Psalms and the need to authenticate the historicity of the text against the Muslim claims of forgery of the Jewish Scripture.

The third paper, presented in French by Jerzy Pysiak (University of Warsaw), was entitled *David noster... Saint Louis comme nouveau David vu par les hagiographes*. It dealt with the way in which David was appropriated in Christian royal ideology of the Carolingian monarchs, beginning with Pepin the Short, whose royal anointment was intentionally modelled (or interpreted) on the biblical anointment of the prophets and kings of Israel. It demonstrated that since then, David became an ideal model for the kings of the Franks whose tasks were believed to be similar to those of the kings of Israel in terms of their responsibility for the purity of the Temple and Divine worship, and for leading their subjects to salvation. It also showed that, according to this ideology, further developed by the Capetian kings, the Frankish people replaced the Jews as the new Chosen People, while their kingdom became the new Promised Land, and Paris the new Jerusalem. The paper concluded with a reflection on the instrumental approach to David being used to sanction royal claims not only to temporal (militant), but also spiritual power (Christian king and priest akin to the biblical king prophet).

The subsequent discussion revolved around David not only as a positive, but also a negative role model, by addressing the issue of the sins committed by these Christian kings who attempted to justify them by referring to the sin of David.

The third session (chaired by Meira Polliack, Tel Aviv University) was devoted to the perception of David (Arabic: Dāwūd) in classical Islam. It opened with the paper *Exonerating David. Ibn Ḥazm's Reading of Q 38:17-25* presented by Camilla Adang (Tel Aviv University) who analyzed Ibn Ḥazm's treatment of David's sin with Bathsheba as reflected in his *Kitāb al-faṣl fī l-milal* against the backdrop of the Muslim doctrine of the infallibility or impeccability of prophets (*iṣma*). In contrast with some other Muslim, mainly Ash'arite thinkers and exegetes, Ibn Ḥazm held that a prophet cannot deliberately commit any major transgressions, although minor slips are

conceivable. The paper discussed the ways in which the author sought to clear David of all suspicion of having disobeyed God as suggested by the qur'anic verse stating that he asked God's forgiveness (Q 38:24). According to the Andalusian scholar, the David-Bathsheba affair never happened and was invented by the Jews ("fables of the Jews"), while David merely asked forgiveness for the people of the earth and not himself. Following this line of thinking the Prophet Nathan's parable was not a parable, but a real dispute on which David was asked to rule. The paper demonstrated that although the Andalusian scholar extended his criticism to biblical and post-biblical accounts, his main concern was an intra-Islamic polemic.

Following the presentation, the discussion related to Ibn Ḥazm's possible sources of knowledge – was he acquainted with Jewish literature directly or indirectly and if the latter, who were his informants. The answer was that he seems to have had Karaite informants.

The second talk in this session, *'God Guides Whom He Will to the Straight Path': Ibn Kathīr's Treatment of the David and Uriah Narrative in His History and in His Tafṣīr*, was given by Marianna Klar (University of London), who began with the reinvestigation of the origins of the term *isrā'īliyyāt* and of the attitude of Muslim scholars and exegetes in general, and Ibn Kathīr in particular, towards this corpus of "Jewish traditions." It also attempted to ascertain what Ibn Kathīr actually intended with his use of this term. The paper then scrutinized different ways in which Ibn Kathīr discredited the received explanation of the qur'anic description of David's repentance (Q. 38:21–25), moving from his initial denial of the truth of this event, to allusions to David's repentance, to descriptions of David's extremely high standards of justice and piety, to references to 'legitimate pleasures', and, finally, to Jewish envy of Muḥammad. A close comparison of the contrasting information presented in his *History* and his *Tafṣīr* cast new light both on Ibn Kathīr's exegetical strategies, and on the precise nature of his discomfort with the David and Uriah episode. Ibn Kathīr's treatment of Q. 38:21–25 was reassessed within the wider exegetical tradition. The paper posited the existence of a specifically Syrian school of exegesis, whose parameters influenced Ibn Kathīr much more profoundly than the wider exegetical tradition

that preceded or surrounded him. It concluded with a remark that Ibn Kathīr's usage of the term *isrā'īliyyāt* should meanwhile be viewed within a discussion not of textual politics per se, but of genre.

The ensuing discussion focused on Ibn Kathīr's sources and the reasons for his providing so many different explanations of the Qur'anic verse mentioning David's repentance. The conclusion was that these issues require further investigation.

The last paper in this session, entitled *The Weeping King, David in the Kitāb al-wara' of 'Abd al-Malik b. Ḥabīb*, was presented by Mateusz Wilk (University of Warsaw). It dealt with the image of King David in the traditions contained in the *Kitāb al-wara'*, a compilation on Islamic piety (or more precisely religious scrupulosity aimed at avoiding all doubt) by 'Abd al-Malik b. Ḥabīb. In contrast with a more common ("standard") Islamic view, Ibn Ḥabīb was of the opinion that David never recovered from the committed sin. The interpretation found in *Kitāb al-wara'* was compared with other similar sources from the same or similar time period (e.g. Ibn Ḥanbal's *Kitāb al-zuhd*) in an attempt to frame the role of David in the paradigm of Islamic piety of the 3rd/9th century. The paper ended with an endeavour to answer the question why David was so special to pietistic authors.

The following discussion addressed this issue mentioning the political significance of this biblical figure and his importance in eschatological schemes (the pietistic circles were very much concerned with the end of time). One participant suggested that Ibn Ḥabīb used King David to admonish his own patron and give him an edifying example of repentance to emulate. The discussion also related to specific terminology and titulature employed in the analyzed text (one participant asked whether David is called king; the answer was yes, there were references to him as king, as well as to his royal garments).

The fourth session (chaired by Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, University of Aberdeen) was devoted to the reception of David in Jewish, Christian and Islamic religious denominations and mystical messianic movements. It opened with a paper on *King David as a Messianic Topos in the Teaching of Jacob Frank*, presented by Jan Doktór (Jewish Historical Institute) who focused his analysis on the shaping of the image of King David in the teaching of Jacob Frank (1726-1791), a

Polish-Jewish religious leader who claimed to be the reincarnation of the biblical patriarch Jacob and of self-proclaimed messiah Sabbatai Zevi, and who arguably created a new religious movement, later on called Frankism, which combined some aspects of Judaism and Christianity. The paper discussed the questions of why at all the figure of David caught the attention of Frank, despite the fact that he pointedly abandoned the traditional messianic idea of returning to the Holy Land and the restoration of the kingdom of David. In addition, it explored the question of which of David's "messianic attributes" Frank wished to imitate and why. It demonstrated that, according to Frank, "David was secretly a woman" (an incarnation of the Shekhina) and that it was his femininity that endowed him with salvific skills. It also delved more deeply into the question of how this Davidic femininity should be understood (in a literal sense, that he was a woman, or that in his person a feminine aspects of divinity manifested itself) and dealt with Frank's idea of messianic times which will put an end to gender segregations.

The discussion after the paper addressed the question of how David's friendship with Jonathan, as well as his sin with Bathsheba should be understood in the context of his being a woman, and how Frank's ideology contributed to promoting gender equality and empowerment of women.

The second talk in this session was given by Arje Krawczyk (Jewish Historical Institute) who presented a paper entitled "*I Will Raise unto David a Righteous Shot*" (Jeremiah 23:5) - *How the Davidic Notion of Warrior-like Messiah is Encoded in r. Abraham Abulafia's Sefer ha-Ot, 'Book of the Sign', XIII-century Kabbalistic Treatise*. It explored the way in which the 13th-century Jewish mystic and self-proclaimed prophet-messiah, Abraham Abulafia, understood the meaning of the Hebrew expression *tzemach tzadik* ("righteous shot") from Jeremiah 23:5. According to the speaker, Abulafia identified this term with a plant called *orphys apifera*, a native Maltese species, and provided a mystical justification to support this interpretation.

Following the presentation, the discussion related to the possible Christian (Syriac) influences on Abulafia's original interpretation.

The last paper in this session was presented by Zsuzsanna Olach (University of Szeged) who talked about *David's Psalms in Eastern*

European Karaite Literature. It opened with a concise historical introduction describing the shift from Hebrew to Karaim language that occurred in the 19th and 20th century in Karaite liturgy. Next, it discussed various Eastern European Karaites' adaptations of Psalms into poems using the examples of Zarach ben Natan's incorporation of Psalm 4 into his poem *Cahyramen, rast Tenrim!* ['I call (you), my right God!'] and Josef ben Szemuel's adaptation of Psalms 142 and 143 into a poem *Awazimba Ha sa firyat etemen* ['I cry to you, Lord, with my voice']. It demonstrated that the biblical book of Psalms was not only read during religious ceremonies, but also quoted and adapted into hymns and religious poems composed by Eastern European Karaite poets. All these texts prove that the Karaites were conversant with the Talmuds, medieval Jewish philosophy and mysticism.

The subsequent discussion concerned the Karaite knowledge of Hebrew and the Hebrew Bible. Someone asked whether the Karaites were "literalist" in their approach to Psalms or rather read the Scriptures through the prism of their own traditional interpretations of this book. This opened the issue of the Karaite approach to the book of Psalms and the fact that they did not attribute it to King David in its entirety, being aware of the complex historical process of its composition as a book. In addition, one participant asked whether there were Hebrew originals of the discussed hymns, or were they perhaps original poetical compositions, and inquired about the Hebrew loanwords in the language of the Eastern European Karaites.

The fifth session (chaired by Camilla Adang, Tel Aviv University) was devoted to the cross-cultural migrations of David's name and his attributed book of Psalms. It began with a paper *Sharif of the Jews: The Family of King David in the Medieval Islamic World* presented by Arnold Franklin (City University of New York) which explored the reception of King David through the lens of social history. It demonstrated that the medieval Islamic period witnessed a noticeable transformation in the status of the family of David and its members (*nesi'im*), as reflected in: (1.) The rise in the number of claimants to membership in the royal house; (2.) The production of ancestor lists tracing medieval dynasts back to their alleged Israelite forebear; (3.) The new and unmistakable preference for Davidic names among members of the family. The paper showed that this renewed veneration for the royal

line was articulated in ways that make it clear that the Jews' perceptions of the family were shaped by ideas circulating within Islamic society and that sudden Jewish interest in genealogy ("genealogical turn") was a product of their acculturation to the host culture. Thus David and his line were used as a kind of Jewish equivalent of Muḥammad and his family (a descendant of David was called *sharīf* or *sayyīd* just like a descendant of Muḥammad) to underscore the nobility of a given individual.

The following discussion evolved around the question of why the figure of David and his family were chosen as a Jewish equivalent of Muḥammad and his line. It was suggested that David's house was associated with monarchy and ruling already in the Bible so it was a most convenient choice for those who wished to rule the Jewish diaspora (the exilarchs; *nesi'im*). In addition, the connection to the House of David linked the medieval Jewish society to its biblical roots and cultural heritage, underscoring its social and religious continuity. One participant posited that this attempt at connecting might have been related to the intra-Jewish polemic with the Karaites who tried to emphasize their connection with the Bible, contrasting it with their adversaries' (the Rabbanite Jews) dependence on the Talmud.

The second talk given by Yonatan Moss (Hebrew University) was entitled *From David to Davids: An Abrahamic Onomastic Revolution* and dealt with the reception history of David's name (a nickname denoting "beloved"). It pointed out that it referred only to one person throughout the entire Bible and, with only two or three doubtful exceptions, this name was entirely absent from literary, documentary and epigraphic sources for more than a millennium afterwards. Applying religious-historical, onomastic and socio-linguistic tools, the paper attempted to answer the questions of why the name David was strictly avoided prior to the 7th century CE, and why it suddenly became popular in the orbit of Islam (onomastic shift) both among Jews and Christians in this period. The conclusion was that the popularity could not be attributed to the Muslim influence, since the name David had started to be used already before the emergence of Islam, but rather to the internal dynamics of change within Jewish population as well as the fact that Jews joined the debate conducted by the Christians and later on by Muslims concerning the use of

names of great figures from the past (whether such use honoured or dishonoured them).

The ensuing discussion was a continuation of that following the previous talk in that it again addressed the question of why David became so popular after the appearance of Islam, in Muslim milieu. Was it reflective of the need felt within Jewish communities to have a great leader from the past akin to Muḥammad; was it due to the internal Jewish (Rabbanite-Karaite) debate; was it under Christian influence (in Christianity this name became much in fashion about a hundred years earlier than in Judaism). No unequivocal answer could be provided.

The last paper in this session, *Images of David in Several Muslim Rewritings of the Psalms*, was presented by David Vishanoff (University of Oklahoma). It analyzed in great detail the several different extant Arabic versions of “the Psalms of David” (called “pious,” “Sufi,” “orthodox” and even “the Torah of Moses”) and demonstrated that they usually turned out to contain fresh compositions by Muslim authors, who edited, reorganized, rewrote and expanded the shared core material of one hundred psalms. It also showed that although all versions presented David as a model of repentance and otherworldly piety, each author focused on different aspect of his image ([1.] Psalmist and sinner; [2.] Caliph and prophet; [3.] Adīb and scholar), using it to advance his own vision of Islamic piety, as a critique of worldliness within the Muslim community. As a result, each version provides a different, not infrequently contradictory explanation of the David-Bathsheba account (e.g., Uriah was killed as a punishment for his grandfather’s sins; Uriah was killed to enable him to join his righteous grandfather in the paradise). The paper concluded with a remark that despite the fact that the Psalms were considered a sacred text, Muslim authors of the analyzed texts felt free not only to change it, but even to completely rewrite it.

The following discussion addressed the question of the identity of people mentioned in the *isnād* (mentioned in one of the manuscripts) which led back to Wahb b. Munabbih. It also related to the provenance, dating and status of the Islamic Psalms (*Kitāb al-Zabūr*; *Kitāb al-Mazāmīr*) in Islam. It was observed that some copies of these texts were beautifully produced, like the Qur’ān and that individual

Psalms were called *sūra*, just like qur'anic chapters. In addition, one participant raised the following questions related to the biblical subtext and the relationship between the Jewish and Muslim Psalms: To what extent does the target text reflect the Hebrew source and was it, or was it not intended to be its Arabic translation of some sort. The answer was that it occasionally echoes the biblical text (e.g., the first three Psalms), yet in general it is a different corpus of texts and makes (at least an implicit) claim to be the real Psalter which replaces the allegedly corrupted or forged version included in the Hebrew Bible. In this context, one participant made a comment on the Qur'anic divine-to-human address of the Islamic Psalms, in contrast to the Biblical Psalms. Another issue raised concerned the various strategies for adapting the figure of David, which were also seen in other papers: selection, retelling, omission, elaboration, etc. Finally, one participant asked a more technical question about how to use visualization software to create diagrams from notes in a spreadsheet.

The sixth session (chaired by Miriam Lindgren Hjälml, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München) was devoted to the iconographic and literary representations of David in Jewish, Christian and Islamic traditions. The first paper in this session, *Looking for David in Ethiopian Literature and Art*, was jointly prepared by Witold Witakowski and Ewa Balicka-Witakowska (Uppsala University). It gave a comprehensive account of the perceptions and receptions of David and his attributed book not only in Classical Ethiopic (Gə'əz) literature, but also in popular Ethiopian culture and tradition which attributed to him the entire biblical *Book of Psalms* (called *Dāwit*), and in which his figure is generally connected with the sphere of the cult of Mary as one of her ancestors (often being called "the Father of Mary"). The paper analysed inter alia texts devoted to Mary, such as the *Miracles of Mary*, but also several others (e.g., devoted to the departure of Mary, or hagiographic texts), as well as impressive testimonies of David's importance found in his iconographic representations (manuscript illuminations, wall paintings, etc.). It pointed out that Psalm 68:31 was of particular importance in Ethiopian culture, since it was interpreted as an allegory of the divine elevation of Ethiopia ("Ethiopia chosen by God"), its kings believed to be the heirs of Salomon and Sheba, traditionally considered an Ethiopian queen.

The discussion that followed the paper focused on iconographic representations of David and their meanings (one participant asked about the meaning of the umbrella often depicted at David's side; the answer was that it symbolized his high social status) and addressed the question of the usage of the name of David in Ethiopian culture which was told to be rare.

The second paper in this session, *Beyond Davidic Messianism: On Complex Redemption Notions in Hebrew Illuminated Manuscripts from Ashkenaz*, was given by Sara Offenberg (Ben-Gurion University of the Negev). It opened with an overview of images of David in Jewish art from late antiquity to late Middle Ages concluding that from 6th-century Palestine to 13th-century Germany there was no iconographic representation of David in Jewish arts. Next, the paper investigated the role of the Davidic house in Jewish messianism and analyzed selected case studies of multiple Messiahs (the son of Joseph, from the tribe of Ephraim, and the son of David, from the tribe of Judah) depicted in manuscripts from 13th- to 15th-century Ashkenaz (Germany and France) and referred to in illuminated texts.

The discussion after the paper attempted to answer the question of why after a break of many centuries, the figure of David reappeared in medieval texts. The tentative answer was that it was due to the influence of Christian art and iconography.

The third talk in this session, *David in the Lack of Kingship: Transforming Symbol of Sovereignty in Exilic Ashkenaz*, was given by Elah Langer-Ravitzky (Hebrew University). It discussed the questions of how the Jews of Ashkenaz (Germany and Northern France) in the Middle Ages viewed the image of King David and to what extent was the Jewish perception of this biblical figure (with an emphasis put on his being a wise and diligent scholar; *talmid chacham*) influenced and shaped by (or in response to) the surrounding Christian culture. It demonstrated that in light of the prominence of David in the Christian society, and especially in the royal ideology of the Christian "kings of the Franks," as a symbol of the perfect king, the Jews of the time tried to minimize the kingly facets of his image. In *Sefer Chasidim*, for example, David was portrayed as a model of the ideal Chasid, a person of great piety who failed when put to the test (Bathsheba;

incidentally, such an interpretation was meant to teach a lesson that it is better to avoid women).

Following the presentation, the discussion focused on the conclusion reached in the paper that the David of medieval Ashkenazi Jewry was barely a king, the main stress being put on his image as an ideal Jew. This raised the question to whom the lessons learned from his stories were addressed. The answer was that in contrast to the Christian milieu, where the Davidic stories were appropriated by monarchs to shape the royal ideology of a Christian kingdom, the Jewish accounts were directed to laymen rather than monarchs and meant to provide moral examples for common people.

The seventh session (chaired by Maciej Tomal, Jagiellonian University) was devoted to the metamorphoses of David in the early modern and modern periods. It opened with a paper entitled *The Nature of Relations Between King Saul and Young David on the Basis of a Crimean Karaim Translation of the Drama "Melukhat Sha'ul"*, presented by Dorota Smętek (Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań), which discussed the reception of Davidic narratives in a Karaim version of a maskilic Hebrew drama translated in the first half of the 19th century by Abraham ben Yashar Lutski and preserved in a Crimean manuscript. It demonstrated that in contrast with the concise biblical story, the play *Melukhat Sha'ul* elaborated on the character of David in a much more sophisticated and detailed fashion.

The following discussion related to the questions of whether there were more plays of this kind, based on biblical accounts, preserved in Crimean Karaite manuscripts (the answer was scarcely any); whether the Karaites wrote their own plays of this kind, as well as where they staged these plays (the answer was in private houses of members of the community).

The second paper in this session, *David and the Wives of His Youth in Twentieth-Century European Fiction*, was presented by Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer (University of Aberdeen), who analyzed the way in which four select twentieth-century novels (Stefan Heym, *The King David Report*; Joseph Heller, *God Knows*; Allan Massie, *King David*; Geraldine Brooks, *The Secret Chord*) interpreted the relationship between David and Michal by filling narrative gaps, elaborating on the characterization of the main characters and proposing motives

behind their actions. The paper demonstrated that all these interpretative methods could already be found in classical rabbinic midrash and attempted to determine to what extent the selected novels were informed by both classical Jewish sources and modern perspectives of their authors. It argued that the ambiguity of the biblical story paved the way for a wide range of interpretations, each of the authors basing his/her reading on the informative lacunae in the biblical source text.

The subsequent discussion touched upon the question whether it is possible to perceive these modern novels, and the valuable interpretation of the biblical David narrative they offered, as a continuation or new incarnation of traditional Bible exegesis, and also whether the classical Jewish midrashim offer interpretative materials that could be both inspiring for modern authors and appealing to modern readers.

The last paper in this session, entitled "*I Heard There Was a Secret Cord*": *David in Contemporary Catholic Practical Exegesis*, was presented by Ela Lazarewicz-Wyrzykowska (independent researcher from Warsaw). It explored different ways in which David was characterized in contemporary Catholic practical exegesis in Poland, by analyzing texts representing a variety of relevant genres, including homilies, spiritual instruction, retreats, seminars etc., in comparison with the selection of biblical texts pertaining to David included in the Catholic liturgy (daily mass readings and breviary). It showed that some aspects of the biblical image of David were regularly omitted, downplayed or altogether suppressed.

The ensuing discussion focused on the question why this was so. In addition, one of the participants asked about the issue of the Christian perception of David as a prefiguration of Christ which surprisingly did not appear in the sources analyzed. Finally, someone raised the issue of perspectives for future research, including comparisons with Catholic interpretations in other cultural contexts and with other Christian traditions, as well as enquiries into the history of the reception of David in the Catholic Church.

The conference ended with a roundtable discussion (chaired by Marzena Zawadowska, University of Warsaw & Jewish Historical Institute, and Mateusz Wilk, University of Warsaw) and concluding

remarks including a discussion of possible avenues of further research and of next steps with regard to a possible research grant (ERC starting grant). As part of this discussion, Andrzej P. Kluczyński (Christian Theological Academy) summarized the sessions and gave his response to the main topics discussed at the conference. He observed that it had shown two common notions in the reception history of the character of David in Judaism, Christianity and Islam: (1.) The abundance of mutual dependencies, influences and transfers of concepts, ideas and motifs between the three Abrahamic religions; (2.) The introduction of original exegetical solutions to particular interpretative cruxes aimed at adapting Davidic narratives to specific historical times and different socio-religious circumstances of a given author. He pointed out that, in general, all three religious traditions concurred in their endeavour to emphasize David's piety and present him as a model of perfect repentance, while downplaying other features of his complex and ambiguous character, and that they usually attributed to him the authorship of the entire Psalter, irrespective of the fact that the biblical text itself made no such claims. He concluded with the suggestions concerning the subjects worth of further investigation. First, he spoke about conducting a more synchronic study of the reception history of David's character as presented in the Bible which would not focus on one particular biblical narrative (such as the Bathsheba affair), but rather on a variety of narrative threads and biblical sources devoted to this character. The second area of investigation is a diachronic study of the evolution of David's image in different monotheistic traditions, and especially the Christian perception of David, given the ongoing process of de-Christianization of the Hebrew Bible and the detachment of the New Testament from it, as well as the detachment of the Christian concept of Savior (*Christos*) from the Jewish conception of the Messiah. This related to the paramount question of whether the Hebrew Bible could still be conceived of and read as part of the Christian Holy Scripture, or perhaps with time it has become considered a really "Old" Testament.

During the following discussion, different people pointed out the religious traditions and their cultural legacies that were missed at the conference (e.g., Shiʿī's reception of David and/or Psalms; the

Protestant, especially reform Calvin texts; the Coptic, Armenian, Byzantine and Russian orthodox sources). The conclusion was that it would have been impossible to cover and compare all the existing Jewish, Christian and Muslim sources and their respective approaches to King David and the Psalms.

Summary

Among the most significant and productive threads in papers and discussions were the following:

- The degree to which the rich and fascinating biblical picture of David's complex, ambiguous and truly human character was considered problematic from the religious viewpoint and, as a result, downplayed or dissolved in traditional religious interpretations which generally tended to harmonize and idealize his image.

- The similarity in endeavours made by the representatives of all major monotheistic traditions to turn King David into an icon of exemplary piety and religious scrupulosity, together with the dissimilarity in the main focus of their respective interests in this biblical figure, which reflected not only a given author's vision of what real piety should look like, but also his specific ideological agenda and religious background, as well as historical and socio-geographic situation (e.g., Muslims felt the need amply to discuss and justify the very possibility of David's sin, and given the doctrine of the infallibility or impeccability of prophets (*iṣma*), sometimes went as far as to deny it altogether (e.g., Ibn Ḥazm); Jews who had no such doctrine, were more interested in drawing a positive, morally instructive lesson from his actions (e.g., Hasidei Ashkenaz); Christians, in turn, being chiefly concerned with David's being the forefather of Jesus, were more focused on his prophetic abilities as reflected in his attributed book of Psalms, than on his actual history as related in the narrative portions of the Bible).

- The substantial amount of exegetical freedom that different authors exercised when approaching Davidic narratives and the Psalter (e.g., well visible in the way Muslims approach the Psalms, or in Jacob Frank's approach to biblical materials).

- The use and abuse of Davidic materials for political purposes (even to justify sinful behaviour on the part of Christian monarch).
- The use of Davidic materials to construct one's own religious identity vis-à-vis other religious tradition (e.g., the concern with "the house of David" as an equivalent to "the house of Muḥammad").
- The inner dynamics of parallel developments within different religious traditions (e.g., the concern with Davidic lineage in Western Christianity [royal ideology of the Carolingian and Capetian monarchs] and in Eastern Judaism [*nesi'im*]).
- The cross-cultural transfer of concepts, ideas and motifs (e.g., the motif of the bird in Jewish and Muslim texts related to story of Bathsheba as reflective of Christian representations of the Holy Spirit, or Jewish interest in the Davidic family as inspired by the Muslims' interest in Muḥammad and his line).
- Diverging and converging interpretations of Davidic materials, as well as exegetical methods and techniques applied by Jewish, Christian and Muslim authors.
- The various possible reasons for the sudden, unprecedented interest in David and his family in the medieval period (need to connect with the biblical past, or to find a historical Jewish role model, both pietistic and political, equivalent to Muḥammad).
- The extent to which different interpretations were informed by the *Sitz im Leben* of a given Jewish, Christian or Muslim author (e.g., Josephus represented David as a kind of Hellenistic king, while for some Muslim writers he was almost a Sufi).
- The infinite fertility of Davidic materials that inspired so many varied interpretations not only in religious texts and exegesis proper, but also in secular literature and the arts.
- The use of midrashic techniques to interpret biblical narratives on David in modern literature.
- The number of people who wished to identify themselves with David (e.g., Josephus, Shmuel ha-Nagid, but also, at least to some extent, Christian kings).
- The absence of women from most religious interpretations of these texts (for good or for bad, as far as we could see, no author blamed Bathsheba for David's sin; the exception to this rule was Jacob

Frank who claimed that David was a woman), and/or their de-sexualisation.

All these subjects require and inspire further, more detailed, cross-disciplinary investigation which will hopefully be carried out by a research group that crystallized during this conference.

Outcomes and output

The outcome of the event is the establishment of an international and interdisciplinary network of scholars, including early career researchers, and the enhancement of multidisciplinary academic cooperation. The aim of this cooperation is to transgress the boundaries of different scholarly disciplines, such as Jewish, Christian and Islamic studies, in order to examine the cross-cultural transfers of concepts and ideas in light of the interpretative transformations that the figure of King David underwent in the major monotheistic traditions. The underlying assumption is that none of these traditions operated in isolation from others, and that they all had a far-reaching, cross-fertilizing effect on one another. Accordingly, the main objective and outcome of the event was not so much to overview the state of the art in research as to critically assess it, and go beyond it in an attempt to map out new avenues of research which may lead to the crystallization of a major collaborative research project. The planned output of the event includes a major collaborative research project (possibly within the ERC Starting Grant for which a proposal was submitted in October 2016) to further investigate the subject, and the publication of a collection of articles based on the papers presented at the conference.

Programme changes

There were basically two major changes to the original (printed) conference programme which are: Łukasz Niesiołowski-Spanò, University of Warsaw, was unable to attend. His original slot was filled by Ruth Mazo Karras, University of Minnesota. Dennis Halft, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, was unable to attend. His slot in the

session was filled by Zsuzsanna Olach, University of Szeged, who was originally due to speak on the next day.