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Three-Way Intertextuality: Some Reflections of Abimelech's Death at Thebez in Biblical Narrative*

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Abstract

Through examination of intertextuality in biblical narrative, this article investigates how the stories of the campaign at Rabbah (2 Sam. 11.20-21) and of the siege of Abel Beth-maacah (2 Sam. 20.14-22) reflect the story of the death of Abimelech at Thebez (Judg. 9.52-53). It first considers the shared characteristics of these stories: each involves a siege situation in which women play a vital role. It is, however, close consideration of the differences between these stories and how their authors adapted the details of the Abimelech story to the needs of the new contexts that enables determination of which story is the source and which the reflection and what motivated their use of the Thebez narrative.

Keywords: literary parallels, intertextuality, succession narrative, Abimelech, David and Bathsheba, Joab, wise women, siege situations.

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Whereas, for the most part, analogies in biblical literature are hidden, allusive, or deductive, the reference to Abimelech's death at Thebez (Judg. 9.52-53) in the David and Bathsheba narrative (2 Sam. 11) constitutes a rare example of an explicit analogy between characters, circumstances, and events.¹ But, whether hidden or obvious, recognition and creation of the underlying connections and contrasts between the narratives are up to the reader.

Consideration of these related texts not only raises the question of literary dependence between them, but also of their intriguing relationship to another pericope involving a siege situation: the narrative of the capture of Sheba ben Bichri at Abel Beth-maacah (2 Sam. 20.14-22). The three-way intertextuality examined here has ramifications for our understanding of the portrayal of the main characters in the broad context of the succession to David narrative. It also impacts on our understanding of aspects of the growth and development of the literary units of which these narratives are composed and their building blocks.

As recounted in 2 Samuel 11, Joab's instructions to his messenger to David anticipate both the king's expected anger at hearing the news of the death of his warriors at Rabbah—among them Uriah the Hittite—and his projected criticism of the inept management of the campaign (vv. 20-21). In outlining the conjectured course of this conversation between David and his messenger, Joab first assumes that the king will berate them for coming too close to the wall. He also conjectures that, as a means of demonstrating the inherent dangers of approaching the wall of a besieged city, David will recall a previous incident from Israelite military history: the precedent of Abimelech, who was killed at Thebez when a woman dropped an upper millstone on him from the wall (v. 21).

Comparison of these two descriptions shows that 2 Sam. 11.21 contains the main elements depicted in Judg. 9.50-55: the name of the protagonist (Abimelech),² the agent of death (an upper millstone dropped

1. See Sternberg 1985: 220 (who defines it as a 'closed analogy'—namely, at least one comparison appears explicitly in the text); Garsiel 1985: 22-23; and Shalom-Guy 2003: 4-5, 244. Two other examples of explicit analogy are Esau's reaction in the story of the stolen blessing (Gen. 27.1-45), in which he refers to his earlier sale of his birthright to Jacob (Gen. 25.27-34), and the naming of Rachel and Leah, and of Perez, Judah, and Tamar by the people in the gate and the elders (Ruth 4.11-12). See Garsiel 1985: 22.

2. In Judges the protagonist is referred to as Abimelech or Abimelech ben Jerubaal, whereas 2 Samuel uses the name Abimelech ben Jerubboshet. Note that MT's shift in 2 Samuel from the suffix *baal* to the derogatory *boshet* is not reflected in the LXX, which reads Jerubaal. This, however, is not the sole biblical instance of a shift from *baal* to

by a woman),³ and the location where the events took place (the town of Thebez).

The two passages also exhibit shared language:

הלא אשה השליכה עליו פלח רכב מעל החומה וימת בתבץ

‘Was it not a woman who dropped an upper millstone on him from the wall at Thebez, from which he died?’ (2 Sam. 11.21)

והשלך אשה אחת פלח רכב על ראש אבימלך והרץ את גלגלתו...וימת

‘But a woman dropped an upper millstone on Abimelech’s head and cracked his skull...and he died.’ (Judg. 9.53-54)

Although the two verses share the roots שלך and מות, and the nouns אשה and רכב, none of these are distinctive words. Even the appearance of פלח רכב, confined to these above-cited verses, may simply reflect the widespread use of millstones in biblical society.⁴

But, as the historical order of the events related in Judges 9 and their recall in 2 Samuel 11 does not necessarily reflect the dating of the literary sources,⁵ this raises a number of possibilities for the relationship between these two descriptions. One is that the author of the David and Bathsheba story had the Abimelech narrative as found in Judg. 9.50-55 in front of him and used it as a building block in his narrative. A second is that 2 Samuel 11 served as the basis for the description of Abimelech’s death in Judges, or that the similarities stem from the fact that both describe an historical event: Judges in historical sequence and 2 Samuel as a precedent. Yet another possibility is that each relied on a postulated third, historical or literary, source, or a folktale describing Abimelech’s death.⁶

Various criteria assist determination of direct dependence between literary parallels.⁷ Evidence of direct dependence between texts comes

boshet; for example, Eshbaal, Saul’s fourth son (1 Chron. 8.33; 9.39), is denoted Ishboshet in 2 Sam. 2.10; 3.8, 14; and 4.8, 12. See Mulder 1977: 192-93; Tov 2001: 267-69; and Amit 1999: 158.

3. Modern commentators follow in the wake of the rabbinic interpretation of Abimelech’s death, viewed as ‘measure for measure’: just as he killed seventy of his brothers on one stone, so too he met his death by means of a stone. See *Tanhuma* (ed. Buber), *Vayera* 4.28. For modern scholars who accept this interpretation, see, for example, Simon 1965: 32; Boogart 1985: 51; and Amit 1999: 180.

4. Talshir 1982: 72.

5. As Talshir (1982: 73 n. 18) notes.

6. Talshir (1982: 71-72) notes these possibilities.

7. Scholars call for the creation of clear criteria to determine whether or not similarities are deliberate. See Amit 1988; Malul 1990: 7-8, 81-112, 155-59; Tigay 1993. In his

from the extent of analogy—not just individual elements but also the conjunction of structure, content, language, style, and other narrative building blocks⁸—and distinctiveness—features unique only to the traditions under consideration.⁹ But determination of its direction requires further criteria. One such criterion is how the analogous features fit the context. Thus, if an analogous feature creates tension or clumsiness in one tradition and its removal enhances the flow of the text, yet fits the elements in the other, it can then be argued that the first tradition depends on the second.¹⁰ Another is *Weltanschauung*. If, for example, one parallel refines a concept found in the other tradition, we can then assume that not only is it later but also perhaps in a polemical relationship with the earlier tradition.¹¹ Note that not all of these criteria necessarily come into play in every instance of literary dependence.

Given the absence of strong, unique literary connections, such as rare words, expressions, or forms, it is careful consideration of the differences between these two traditions that facilitates determination which of the relationships between the texts postulated above is most likely.¹² There are two main differences between these traditions. One relates to the place from which the millstone was dropped. In Judges 9 the narrative focuses on a ‘fortified tower’ (9.51; also called ‘the tower’ once in v. 51, and twice in v. 52). It was to this tower that the residents of Thebez fled, and which Abimelech intended to set on fire. And it was at its entrance

introduction, Sommer 1998 discusses and exemplifies the main means of utilization of earlier works by later authors: quotation, covert allusion, and insertion, among others.

8. See Amit 1988: 388; Garsiel 1985: 23-25; Zakovitch 1995b: 13; Polak 1999: 192.

9. Garsiel 1985: 26-27; Amit 1988: 388-89; Zakovitch 1995b: 13. For the importance of distinctiveness in determining the relationship between biblical traditions and their Near Eastern parallels, see also Malul 1990: 93-97, 157-58.

10. See Zakovitch 1982: 56-57. Garsiel (1985: 26-28) concludes from the clumsiness and repetition in Jer. 38.6 (its use of וישלכו alongside וישלחו and the superfluous comment בבור אין מים) that this pericope used building blocks from Gen. 37.23-24. Amit (1988: 389-90) cites examples from the last two stories in Judges (chs. 17-18; 19-21), which mention a priest of the third generation after the Exodus (18.28; 20.28). As many suggest, the mention of Phinehas ben Eleazar ben Aaron (20.28) is a secondary addition (e.g. Moore 1895; Soggin 1981: 293) because it interrupts the flow of the narrative and because Phinehas plays no role in the continuation, even where a priest is required.

11. See Zakovitch 1982: 56-57 for a discussion of how to date traditions. On hidden inner-biblical exegesis, see Zakovitch 1987b. On hidden polemic in the Bible—its definition, shaping, and criteria for its identification—see Amit 2003.

12. On the significance of differences and not just similarities in determining dependence between literary traditions, see Sternberg 1985: 479-80; Amit 1988: 387; Malul 1990: 82, 158-59, who treats biblical and ancient Near Eastern parallels.

that Abimelech received his injury. But 2 Sam. 11.21 makes no mention of a tower—here the woman drops the millstone from the wall.¹³ A second difference relates to the omission of Abimelech's death at the hand of his attendant from the David and Bathsheba narrative. As described in Judges, Abimelech's death takes place in two stages: he first sustains an injury from the millstone dropped by a woman (v. 53); he is then killed by his armsbearer (v. 54). Yet the brief recall of Abimelech's death in 2 Sam. 11.21 makes no distinction between Abimelech's injury and death. Also missing is the description of his death at his armsbearer's hands in order to avoid the shame of dying at the hands of a woman.

Based on the differences between these passages, which direct the reader to evaluate the elements of the comparison, I suggest that the author of the David and Bathsheba narrative had the story of Abimelech's death at Thebez before him. He deliberately borrowed the main details of this event from Judges, incorporating and adapting them to the purposes of the new context.¹⁴ I suggest that 2 Samuel's omission of mention of the tower resulted from its author's application of the description of Abimelech's death to the campaign at Rabbah, where the warriors fell in battle because they approached the wall of the besieged city. David's purported questions to the messenger, as framed by Joab, stress the wall and the battle near the wall: 'Why did you come so close to the city to attack it? Didn't you know that they would shoot from the *wall*?... Why did you come so close to the *wall*?' (2 Sam. 11.20-21). The wall also receives mention in the messenger's report to David on the battle at Rabbah: 'But the archers shot at your men from the *wall*' (v. 24).¹⁵

Similarly, the omission of Abimelech's death at the hand of his attendant in the David and Bathsheba context also reflects its narrator's aim. Here the author had no need to stress the heroic aspect of Abimelech's death at the hands of his attendant;¹⁶ for him, Abimelech's death serves rather to exemplify the extreme folly of approaching the wall of a besieged city.¹⁷ To my mind, it is less likely that this description of Abimelech's death at the hands of his attendant was added to the story of

13. Talshir 1982: 72; Zakovitch 1995b: 28.

14. As Talshir (1982: 72-73) assumes. She argues that here the source has been transformed into an example relevant to a different situation. She notes, however, that this may not have been the present text of Judg. 9.

15. Talshir 1982: 72.

16. Talshir 1982: 72 and n. 16 there.

17. Sternberg 1985: 116; McCarter 1984: 288; Brueggemann 1990: 277; Alter 1999: 254.

the war at Thebez at a later stage, as a counterweight to his despicable death at the hands of a woman. After all, this element is familiar from a specific narrative type, in biblical and extrabiblical contexts alike. At the critical moment in battle a king in distress turns to the figure by his side and requests that the latter kill him, also providing the rationale underlying this request. These stories end with the king's death.¹⁸ Other biblical examples are the two descriptions of Saul's death in 1 Sam. 31.4 and 2 Sam. 1.9-10. An extrabiblical example comes from the Assyrian Annals, in the description of how Nabu-Bel-Shummati, the grandson of Marduk Baladan, asked his armsbearer to crush him with his sword, so that he would not fall into enemy hands at the surrender of Elam.¹⁹

These two differences or omissions assist discovery of what motivated the author of 2 Samuel 11 to incorporate building blocks from the story of Abimelech's death at Thebez in his narrative. Here I identify two main rationales. The first is conceptual: to highlight the inept management of the campaign at Rabbah, and the gross stupidity of approaching a city wall in battle, as explained earlier. Further evidence that the narrator of 2 Samuel reworked the Thebez tradition comes from the inconsistency between Joab's description of the battle and that of the messenger in 2 Samuel 11, namely, from the clumsiness that the analogous feature creates in its new context. According to the messenger, the death of David's warriors was caused by archers shooting from the wall (vv. 20-21, 23-24). The narrator, however, nowhere states that those stationed on the wall were responsible for killing Uriah and David's other warriors. He describes the residents of Rabbah as sallying forth from the city: 'The men of the city sallied out and attacked Joab, and some of David's officers among the troops fell; Uriah the Hittite was among those who died' (v. 17).²⁰ The significance of the introduction of the motif of the wall will be addressed further in the discussion of the link between this narrative and that of Joab's campaign at Abel Beth-maacah.

18. Talshir 1982: 71 n. 11; Weinfeld 1992: *28-*29. Gunn (1974: 297-301) treats six biblical passages involving violent death, including the description of the death of Abimelech, and the two descriptions of Saul's death (Judg. 8.20-21; 9.54; 1 Sam. 22.17-18; 31.4; 2 Sam. 1.15) in the context of a broad examination of stereotypical literary patterns found in war descriptions in Judges and Samuel. He views the similarities between these passages as a manifestation of a widespread narrative technique often found in oral literary traditions, characterized by use of similar motifs and language.

19. Streck 1916: 60, par. VII, lines 34-35.

20. Zakovitch 1995b: 28.

The reference to Abimelech's death in 2 Samuel 11, deliberately introduced in my opinion in order to highlight the danger of approaching the wall of a besieged city, contributes to the discovery of additional links between the stories: in this case between David and Abimelech.²¹ Both stories share a similar background: a war—one at Thebez and the other at Rabbah. In each, a warrior's approach to the fortified tower, on the one hand, and to the wall of the besieged city, on the other, leads to a turning point in the campaign and to the hero's death. In both, the wording *עַד הַפֶּתַח* serves to indicate the degree of proximity to the tower or to the wall: 'Abimelech approached the door of the tower' (Judg. 9.52); 'we drove them back up to the entrance to the gate' (2 Sam. 11.23). Notwithstanding this close similarity, this is a natural combination and does not necessarily indicate direct literary dependence between the stories.²² Another shared feature is the efforts by the protagonists to hide their shame; however, the reasons for this shame differ. Abimelech wishes to hide his shameful death at the hands of a woman and asks his arms-bearer: 'Draw your dagger and finish me off, that they may not say of me, "A woman killed him!"' (Judg. 9.54).²³ David seeks to conceal his shameful adultery by sending Uriah home (v. 8), but Uriah's refusal forces David to choose another solution—bringing about Uriah's death in war (vv. 15, 17). Note too that a woman plays a central role in the plot of each story: a woman kills Abimelech and David kills because of a woman.²⁴ 'By mentioning the death of Abimelech at the hands of a woman, Joab seemingly reveals David's secret, as if saying, if Abimelech was killed by a woman, Uriah the Hittite died in a similar fashion because he too was killed by a woman: namely, Uriah died because of his wife.'²⁵ The parallel constructed between King David and Abimelech sharpens the negative side of David's behavior; it also serves to effect an ironic lowering of David. True, Abimelech fell at the hands of a woman,

21. Sternberg 1985: 220-22 and Polak 1999: 413.

22. Talshir 1982: 72.

23. Death at the hand of a woman is a literary motif in biblical and extrabiblical literature. In the Bible we have Sisera's death at the hands of Jael (Judg 4.9, 17-22; 5.24-27); and Jezebel's bringing about of the death of Naboth (1 Kgs 21). In postbiblical literature we have Judith and Holofernes (Jud. 13; 15; 16.6-9). In extrabiblical literature we have the death of Pyrrhus the king of Epirus who was killed in the streets of Argos by a brick thrown from a rooftop by a woman (Pausanias 1.13; Plutarch, *Pyrrhus* 34). See Moore 1895: 268; Talshir 1982: 71 n. 10; Weinfeld 1992: *29; Zakovitch 1987a: 20.

24. Fokkelman 1981: 68-69; Alter 1999: 254.

25. Ehrlich 1969: 212.

but that was at war, whereas David ‘fell’ at the hands of a woman because he *did not* go to war. He brings about her husband’s death in battle to hide his adultery in town.²⁶

The second reason motivating the narrator’s incorporation of building blocks from the narrative of Abimelech at Thebez is literary-redactional: I suggest that both Joab’s instructions to the messenger and the messenger’s speech to David (vv. 18-24) serve to prefigure a similar situation²⁷—Joab’s future campaign at Abel Beth-maacah, which also centers on a city wall.²⁸ I refer to the narrative of the capture of the rebel Sheba ben Bichri (2 Sam. 20.14-22), itself shaped as an inverted reflection of the story of Abimelech’s campaign at Thebez.²⁹ Here the wise woman—the heroine of the story—initiates the dropping of the rebel leader’s head from the wall of the besieged city.

I begin in this instance as well by noting the similarities (and differences): both stories tell of a siege,³⁰ although the besieged precincts and the nature of the attack differ. In Judges 9 the siege is of a ‘fortified tower’, which Abimelech planned to set on fire (vv. 51-52). In 2 Samuel 20 the siege is of the town itself and involved the erection of a siege-mound that stood against the rampart,³¹ and Joab’s troops were engaged in battering the wall (v. 15).³² Second, both protagonists—Abimelech and Joab—approach the besieged precinct. Abimelech reached ‘the door of the tower’ (Judg. 9.52); Joab answered the call of the wise woman who asked to speak to him and ‘he approached her’ (2 Sam. 20.16-17). Third, in both accounts a resourceful woman ends the siege by killing a single individual; and both use the root שִׁלַּח to describe the killing. The woman from Thebez directly causes Abimelech’s death by dropping (וַתִּשְׁלֶךְ) a millstone on his head and cracking his skull (Judg. 9.53). The clever woman from Abel Beth-maacah initiates the killing of the rebel leader, but the townspeople carry out the plan: ‘The woman came to all

26. Sternberg 1985: 221-22; Bodner 2002: 29-30.

27. On prefiguring in biblical narrative, see Zakovitch 1985; Polak 1999: 112-15.

28. Zakovitch 1995b: 28.

29. Zakovitch 1995b: 28-29.

30. On the military, legal, economic, and social aspects of siege warfare in the ancient Near East, and the difference between it and war on the battlefield, see Eph’al 2009.

31. The חָל is evidently a protective outer wall (cf. Isa. 26.1; Lam. 2.8). See Smith 1899: 372; Segal 1956: 360; Bar-Efrat 1966: 220.

32. On the use of ramparts to breach a siege in the ancient Near East, see Eph’al 2009: 82-90.

the people with her clever plan; and they cut off the head of Sheba son of Bichri and threw it down (וַיִּשְׁלְכוּ) to Joab' (2 Sam. 20.22). There is a difference, however, in the description of these women. At Thebez, we learn nothing more of the woman or her qualities; she is simply denoted 'a woman' (אִשָּׁה אַחַת), using the indefinite אַחַת. At Abel, in contrast, the woman is defined as 'wise' (חַכְמָה), namely, as possessing rhetorical and persuasive powers: the adverb בַּחֲכָמָהּ is used to describe her approach to the townspeople (v. 22).³³

Note, in addition, the great similarity between the figure of the wise woman from Abel and her deeds and those of the wise woman from Tekoa (2 Sam. 14.1-24). In both stories a 'wise woman' plays a central role alongside Joab (Judg. 14.2; 2 Sam. 20.16) and acts to save a life: in one case, her son (2 Sam. 14); in the other, her town (2 Sam. 20). Both women are endowed with persuasive powers (2 Sam. 14.12; 20.17) and their efforts are, moreover, crowned with success. The stories also exhibit shared language: the use of the root שָׁחַת (2 Sam. 14.11; 20.20), and 'נָחַלְתָּ אֱלֹהִים/הָ' (14.16; 20.19).³⁴ This comparison highlights the wisdom of the woman from Abel, who saves not just one person but an entire town, without having to resort to war with its concomitant loss of life.³⁵

More significantly, the story of Abel Beth-maacah is an inversion of the story of Joab at Rabbah. Here the above-mentioned similarities serve to build the analogy, but its main thrust lies in the distinction between its components.³⁶ Thus, Abimelech is unaware of the potential danger of approaching 'the door of the tower' (Judg. 9.52). Joab, on the other hand, is certainly cognizant of the danger of approaching the wall. Nonetheless, he responds to the woman's summons and approaches the wall (2 Sam. 20.16-17)—this notwithstanding his full awareness of the risks involved, given the similarity between his present situation and that of Abimelech: namely, a woman is asking him to approach the wall, a place from which it will not be difficult for her to kill him. After all, it was Joab who mentioned the precedent of Abimelech at Thebez in his instructions to

33. Bar-Efrat 1996: 148, 221.

34. On the similarity between the stories, see, for example, Fokkelman 1981: I, 331; McCarter 1984: 431; Zakovitch 1995b: 29-30; and Bar-Efrat 1996: 216.

35. As the rabbis state: 'Regarding her Solomon gave praise, "Wisdom is better than instruments of war"' (Eccl. 9.18). The wisdom of Serah was better than the instruments of war that were in the hands of Joab' (*Tanhuma* [ed. Townsend], 100). See also Eccl. 9.14-5, which mentions 'a poor wise man' who saved a city from the siege works erected by a mighty king.

36. See Zakovitch 1995b: 28-29.

the messenger to David in 2 Samuel 11. Also, if in the Thebez story a woman drops a millstone on the leader of the siege party, Abimelech (Judg. 9.53), at Abel Beth-maacah, on the other hand, the wise woman takes the initiative of throwing the head of the rebel Sheba ben Bichri to the leader of the siege party, David's commander Joab (2 Sam. 20.21-22).³⁷ Finally, if the story of Thebez ends with the victory of the besieged and the death of the besieger, the story of Abel Beth-maacah ends, in contrast, with the victory of the besiegers, who receive the enemy's head.

It remains to inquire which of these stories is the original one and which its mirror image. I contend that Thebez is the original and Abel Beth-maacah its inversion. The mention of Abimelech's death in Joab's instructions to his messenger to David was intended to concretize the danger of approaching the wall of a besieged city and to explain Uriah's death at Rabbah. This recollection serves an additional function in the broader literary context of the story of the succession to David (2 Sam. 9–20; 1 Kgs 1–2),³⁸ of which the David and Bathsheba narrative is a part. The mention of the wall and the stressing of the fact that the approach to the wall caused the death of David's warriors, including Uriah—both in Joab's instructions to the messenger and the messenger's report to David (vv. 18-24)—belong, in my opinion, to the reworking of the story by the author of the succession story. He fashioned them to prefigure a similar situation in the story of the capture of the rebel Sheba ben Bichri at Abel Beth-maacah, itself part of the succession narrative. As noted, the purpose of this allusion was to highlight Joab's awareness of the inherent danger of answering the wise woman of Abel's summons and approaching the wall.

37. In the MT David's reply does not include what Joab anticipated that he would say. In the LXX, on the other hand, Joab's remarks are inserted in David's (between vv. 22 and 23). This version preserves greater symmetry between David's anticipated remarks as constructed by Joab and the king's subsequent remarks. Some commentators (Smith 1899: 321; Driver 1913: 290; McCarter 1984: 278, 282-83 [with some expansion]; and Anderson 1989: 155) adopt the LXX version as it stands, or with emendations. Actually, this symmetry seems artificial and secondary, as others submit. See Talshir 1982: 69-70; Zakovitch 1995b: 27; and Simon 1997: 109-12. Hertzberg (1964: 306-307 and note *a*) argues that the original placement of the mention of Abimelech's death was in David's and not in Joab's remarks. For a detailed analysis of the literary design of David's remarks as anticipated by Joab and David's response to the messenger, and their contribution to the uncovering of the unit's message and the shaping of the personalities of David and Joab, see Fokkelman 1981: 60-70; Bar-Efrat 1996: 2, 113.

38. This term was coined by Rost 1982.

Moreover, it is possible to uncover not only what motivated the shaping of the recollection of Abimelech's death in 2 Sam. 11.21 as pre-figuring the story of Abel Beth-maacah (2 Sam. 20.14-22), but also what underlies the fashioning of events and characters at Abel Beth-maacah as an inversion of the Thebez narrative. The sparking of unambiguous associations to the story of Abimelech's death at Thebez, and the simultaneous heightening of the contrast between the events, actors, and their deeds in both stories, serves to place Joab in a positive light. Although cognizant of the danger of approaching the wall of a besieged city, Joab is prepared to take this risk in order to save lives, as he states in his answer to the wise woman, who berates him: 'But you seek to bring death upon a mother city in Israel' (v. 19).³⁹ 'Joab replied, "Far be it, far be it from me to destroy or ruin... But a certain man from the hill country of Ephraim named Sheba son of Bichri, has rebelled against King David. Just hand him alone over to us, and I will withdraw from the city"' (vv. 20-21).⁴⁰ Joab's risk-taking bore fruit. The wise woman does not throw down an object to crush Joab's skull; on the contrary, she throws him the head of the rebel, putting an end to the insurgency without further loss of life.

Placing Joab in a positive light in the Abel narrative serves the purposes of the narrator of the broader literary context of the story of the succession to David's throne. As shaped in the narrative, the treatment of the figures of David and Joab, both as individuals and in relation to each other, is polyphonic in nature. Each of these figures is subjected to affirmation and criticism in the narrative, both overt and covert. On the one hand, Joab displays loyalty to David and seeks to ensure his possession of the throne; he does not, however, hesitate to criticize David.⁴¹ On the other hand, Joab's positive portrayal at Abel Beth-maacah serves to express covert criticism of David's treatment of Uriah. Joab's willingness to risk his life in order to prevent bloodshed, and the successful conclusion of the encounter at Abel Beth-maacah, contrast with David's behavior and its negative consequences. David 'did not recollect the Abimelech episode and did not hesitate to command the sacrificing of a

39. Underlying the woman's rebuke is the law found in Deut. 20.10-14, which requires the offering of peace terms before besieging a town. If the town does not accept vassal status, when captured all its warriors will be put to death and the women and children belong to the spoils along with animals and other property. On the laws of war in Deuteronomy—including siege warfare—and their origins and purpose, see Rofé 1988.

40. Zakovitch 1995b: 29.

41. See the discussion by Zakovitch 1995a: 101-105, 106-12.

life to defend his honor and to win his friend's wife, to murder and inherit'.⁴²

What emerges from this comparison of Judg. 9.52-53 and 2 Sam. 11.21 is that the author of the David and Bathsheba story does not just cite the episode of Abimelech's death at Thebez as a historical precedent. Nor, given the marked differences between the narratives, can its inclusion be considered as simply grounded in the transmission of a shared folk motif. Rather, the author of the Samuel pericope directly borrows details from its main elements and incorporates them in his story, adapting them to the needs of the new context. This is apparent from the switching of the tower for a wall, and the omission of the death of Abimelech at the hands of his attendant. As we have seen, two motives underlie the changes made by the author of 2 Samuel 11 to the description of the death of Abimelech and to the shaping of Joab's instructions to the messenger and the messenger's speech to David. One is to highlight the inept management of the campaign at Rabbah; the other is to shape events at Rabbah as prefiguring a similar situation: Joab's future campaign at Abel Beth-maacah, which is an inversion of the Abimelech story. I also suggested that comparison of the description of the death of Abimelech and its mention in the story of David and Bathsheba enables the unveiling of additional similarities between the stories as well as the creation of new affinities, not just between Uriah and Abimelech, but also between David and Abimelech. These analogies serve to highlight the negative aspects of David's behavior in this affair specifically and shed light on the succession narrative's structure and development.

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42. Zakovitch 1995b: 29.

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