Necromancy and Cleromancy in 1 and 2 Samuel

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SCHOLARSHIP in recent decades has enriched our understanding of the worship of ancestors and related rituals surrounding death in Israel's popular religion.[1] However, the Bible's only uncontested example of necromancy contains several unexplained features and for obvious reasons, continues to raise fascinating issues. In this study, I propose that the Deuteronomistic historian used the account of Saul's necromantic inquiry at Endor rhetorically as a means of characterizing the ill-fated king (1 Sam 28:3-19) and has elsewhere used Israel's legitimate means of divination—that is, divination by means of casting lots, or

[1] Important work has been done on both the textual and archaeological evidence. So, e.g., Theodore J. Lewis, *Cults of the Dead in Ancient Israel and Ugarit* (HSM 39; Atlanta: Scholars, 1989); Brian B. Schmidt, *Israel's Beneficent Dead: Ancestor Cult and Necromancy in Ancient Israelite Religion and Tradition* (FAT 11; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1994); Klaas Spronk, *Beatific Afterlife in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East* (AOAT 219; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1986); Nicholas J. Tromp, *Primitive Conceptions of Death and the Nether World in the Old Testament* (BibOr 21; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1969). For a summary of the issues, see Patrick D. Miller, *The Religion of Ancient Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000) 71-73; and for a slightly different approach, see Philip S. Johnston, *Shades of Sheol: Death and Afterlife in the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002). Thorough analysis of the evidence for an Israelite cult of the dead may be found in Karel van der Toorn, *Family Religion in Babylonia, Syria and Israel: Continuity and Change in the Forms of Religious Life* (SHCANE 7; Leiden: Brill, 1996) 206-35. For archaeological evidence, see Elizabeth Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead* (JSOTSup 123; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992). It is possible that interest in the dead developed first in the Neo-Assyrian empire and entered Israel only in the late eighth and seventh centuries B.C.E. because of Assyrian influence (Schmidt, *Israel's Beneficent Dead,* 201-20).

cleromancy—as a contrastive literary device to prepare for this characterization of Saul.[2]

It has been emphasized recently in the pages of this quarterly that the History of David's Rise (1 Sam 16:14–2 Sam 5:25) explained and legitimized David by means of an extended narrative devoted primarily to characterizations of Saul and David.[3] Specifically, it can be demonstrated that Saul and David are introduced and characterized in strikingly similar ways, which also serves to heighten their more important differences. Thus, the narrative legitimates David through contrastive portraits of Saul as the rejected king and of David as the ideal king. In light of these contrasting theological identities that distinguish David and Saul in the extended narrative, my intent in this article is to examine in more detail one particularly striking feature in which the contrast is drawn between them, namely, the way the narrative uses David's growing reliance on cleromancy as an intentional and deliberate preparation for Saul's reliance on necromancy in 1 Samuel 28.[4]

I. Necromantic Terminology in 1 Samuel 28:3-19

In 1 Sam 28:3-19, the *locus classicus* for any examination of necromancy in the Hebrew Bible, Saul goes to a necromancer, a "spiritist," in order to conduct a séance in which he converses with the deceased Samuel. In an extraordinary turn of events, the first king of Israel consults the medium of Endor in order to "bring up" the old prophet, whose death had been reported in 1 Sam 25:1 and was emphasized again at the beginning of this text, presumably to remove all doubt about Samuel's demise (28:3a). Samuel is then described as coming up out of the ground (28:13) and engaging in a conversation with Saul. The deceased Samuel announces that the next day Saul and his sons would be "with" him (28:19).

The complexities of the text are considerable as regards both literary features and logical points of view.[5] The final literary form of the text contains numerous "gaps," more than are customary even for ancient Hebrew narrative, in which such gapping is a standard feature. So, for example, when and how had Saul previously banished the mediums and wizards from the land (28:3b)? What were the circumstances around that event? Who was this medium at Endor, and how is it that Saul's servants knew of her (28:7b)? Had they previously been her

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[2] I will use the terms "cleromancy" and "cleromantic" in this paper for divination by means of casting lots, which in this case was likely stones or pebbles (see below). The terms "psephomancy" and "pessomancy" also appear in the literature, apparently with the same meaning.

[3] Mark K. George, "Yhwh's Own Heart," *CBQ* 64 (2002) 442-59, esp. 447-50 and 453-55.

[4] I am therefore interested in the particulars of the "inquiries" discussed by George ("Yhwh's Own Heart," 453-55).

[5] Early Jewish and Christian interpreters expended great effort trying to deal with the historical *realia* of this text. See K. A. D. Smelik, "The Witch of Endor: I Samuel 28 in Rabbinic and Christian Exegesis till 800 A.D.," *VC* 33 (1977) 160-79.

clients? Why was it necessary for Saul to disguise himself (28:8)? Why did the woman cry out at Samuel's appearance (28:12)? How did Samuel's appearance reveal Saul's identity to the woman (28:12b)? Does necromancy really work? Did Samuel really appear? In familiar Hebrew narrative style, readers are invited to fill these gaps using a standard set of literary factors and criteria that work together in the process of reading to bring together the bits and fragments of the narrative.[6] Our text, however, leaves many gaps unattended; the reader is simply left without enough factors and criteria to fill them. Thus, the literary difficulties are multilayered.

Moreover, the specific terminology related to necromancy is obscure, although it becomes clear enough from usage elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. The narrator explains in 28:3 that Saul had previously expelled "mediums" (sg. ʾôb, defective pl. ʾōbôt) and "spiritists" (sg. yiddĕʿōnî, pl. yiddĕʿōnîm) from Israel. The precise denotation of the first of these, "medium" (ʾôb), is not at all clear, although it now seems likely that ʾôb in the Hebrew Bible signifies, at first, the deified spirit of one's ancestor, and subsequently the ancestral image.[7] The use with yiddĕʿōnî expresses the necromantic practices involved in communicating with the deceased ancestor and, metonymically, the phenomenon of the ancestor cult generally.[8]

Specific terminology in 28:8 may also reflect certain aspects of the necromantic ritual. Saul's visit at night may have been a simple military necessity, but nighttime may also have been the approved time for such séances, the darkness of night being the appropriate time to communicate with those who live in darkness.[9] Saul's imperative to the woman (ketib *qāsŏmî,* "*consult* [a spirit for me]" [qere *qosŏmî*) involves a *terminus technicus* for divination generally, which is not limited to necromancy but includes all forms of divination.[10] Saul's intention is narrowed to necromancy here by the prepositional phrase *bāʾôb* (lit., "in the medium" or "in the deceased ancestor"). I take the preposition to be the *bĕ* of

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[6]   Meir Sternberg (*The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987] 186-229, esp. 188-89) warns of "illegitimate gap-filling" when readers' subjective concerns override the text's own norms and directives. Accordingly Sternberg presents a taxonomy of factors and criteria, from most explicit to least.

[7]   *HALOT*'s "spirit of the dead" (1:20) may not be entirely accurate, cf. "ghost; medium, necromancer" (*Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* [ed. D. J. A. Clines; 5 vols.; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993] 1. 148).

[8]   J. Tropper, "Spirit of the Dead אוב," *DDD²,* 806-9, esp. 809. For complete review of the most recent work done on this problem, see Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22:* A new translation with introduction and commentary (AB 3A; New York: Doubleday, 2000) 1768-85; also William F. Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan: A Historical Analysis of Two Contrasting Faiths* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1968; repr., Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990) 141-42.

[9]   Job 10:21-22; and see Lewis, *Cults of the Dead,* 114.

[10]   Thus, "divine for me" or "consult by divination." See *HALOT* 3. 1115; Malcolm J. A. Horsnell, "קסם," *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (ed. W. A. VanGemeren; 5 vols.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997) 3. 945-51.

specification,[11] which clarifies the immediately preceding imperative "divine" by clarifying precisely *which* divinatory practice Saul wants to use. Thus, we may translate: "divine for me using necromantic rituals" (compare NJPSV's "please divine for me by a ghost").

The necromantic ritual involved is probably also designated by the recurring use of language for "bring up" or "raise," which I accept as another *terminus technicus* for this practice. Saul's command in 28:8 is for the woman to "bring up" the one he requires. Likewise in 28:11, she asks the king, "Whom shall I *bring up* for you?" and he answers, "*Bring up* Samuel." When she describes the disturbed prophet in 28:13, she sees him "*coming up* out of the ground" (and in 28:14, "An old man is *coming up* . . ."). Finally, Samuel's words repeat the imagery (28:15): "Why have you disturbed me by *bringing me up?*" These references to the deceased "rising up" use the same verbal root, which however is quite common in the Hebrew Scriptures (ʿālâ, used here in the hiphil, but in the qal in 28:13). Furthermore, the medium's description in 28:13 uses the prepositional phrase "out of the ground" (*min-hāʾāreṣ*), which in Hebrew as well as in other Semitic texts can express departure from the netherworld, the realm of the dead.[12] The idea that the deceased rises up out of the ground reflects the concept of Sheol as a place for the dead beneath the earth's surface to which people descend at death.[13]

The medium's description of Samuel requires further comment (28:13): "I see a *divine being* coming up out of the ground." The term translated here as "divine being" is the ordinary Hebrew word for "God" or "gods" (ʾĕlōhîm), and it has long been recognized that it can stand simply for "godlike being" or "celestial spirit."[14] More recent comparative studies in ancient Near Eastern cultures have demonstrated that the demarcation lines between human and divine

[11] Bill T. Arnold and John H. Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 104-5, §4.1.5,c, although the "instrumental" *bĕ* is also possible (ibid., 104, §4.1.5e), "divine for me by necromancy." On the possibility of the preposition marking the direct object ("divine for me a deceased individual"), which may in fact be supported by the parallel line ("bring up for me the one whom I name"), see Schmidt, *Israel's Beneficent Dead,* 209-10.

[12] *HALOT* 1. 91; *AHw* 1. 245. Hence the "land of the living" is often contrasted with the underworld (Isa 38:11; 53:8, etc.; see Magnus Ottosson, "אֶרֶץ," *TDOT* 1. 390-404, here 399-400). On the underworld receiving the dead, see F. M. Cross, Jr., and D. N. Freedman, "The Song of Miriam," *JNES* 14 (1955) 237-50, here 247-48; and William L. Holladay, "'ereṣ – 'Underworld': Two More Suggestions," *VT* 19 (1969) 123-24.

[13] Philip S. Johnston, " 'Left in Hell?' Psalm 16, Sheol and the Holy One," in *The Lord's Anointed: Interpretation of Old Testament Messianic Texts* (ed. P. E. Satterthwaite, R. S. Hess, and G. J. Wenham; Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1995) 213-22, here 216-21. Some scholars assume that the medium at Endor dug a hole in the earth in order for the world of the living to be joined to the netherworld, a custom paralleled by a similar ritual of digging described in Homer's *Odyssey,* book 11. See Bernhard Lang, "Afterlife: Ancient Israel's Changing Vision of the World Beyond," *Bible Review* 4/1 (February 1988) 12-23, here 16.

[14] C. F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Books of Samuel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956) 263.

are not so clearly drawn in those cultures as in modern ones, and most languages of the ancient world used the noun for "god" also in an attributive sense of "divine" or "extraordinary."[15] Specifically in relation to the worship of ancestors, such comparative research has confirmed that the dead could be referred to as "gods" in an attempt to describe some type of transcendent character that existed beyond the natural realm (the "preternatural").[16] A passage profitably compared to 1 Samuel 28 is Isa 8:19.

> (19) Now if people say to you, "Consult the ghosts (*hā'ōbôt*) and the familiar spirits (*hayyiddě'ōnîm*) that chirp and mutter; should not a people consult their gods ('*ĕlōhîm*), the dead on behalf of the living, (20) for teaching and for instruction?" Surely, those who speak like this will have no dawn!

Although the context does not require it, '*ĕlōhîm* may have the sense here also of "ancestral" preternatural being, rather than simply the "shades of the dead."[17] This is even more likely if, as it has now been proposed, "medium" ('*ôb* and its defective pl., '*ōbôt*) is etymologically related to '*āb,* "father, ancestor."[18] Thus, the Levitical and Deuteronomic law against such practices had ancestral cults of the dead specifically in view rather than simple séances (Lev 19:31; 20:6, 27; Deut 18:11). The parallel in Isaiah 8 seems to confirm that the use of '*ĕlōhîm* in such contexts denotes the ancestral dead,[19] and not simply ghosts or the spirits of the dead.

The Isaian parallel also lends credence to the idea that necromancy and other forms of divination were available to ancient Israelites to enable them to garner the information they sought; they did not have to wait for Yhwh and his prophet, whether Isaiah or Samuel. Thus, the populace widely assumed that such practices were available, whereas the Israelite cult—namely, the prophetic schools and the later orthodoxy of the Deuteronomists—was unequivocal in its condemnation of the cult of ancestors and associated practices. Nonetheless, Isa 8:19-20 together with 1 Samuel 28 indicates the presumed circumstances under which one might consult such a necromantic medium. In times of acute economic, political, or

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[15] Karel van der Toorn, "GOD (I) אלהים," *DDD²,* 352-65, here 363.

[16] That is, they are merely *beyond* or different from that which is natural, as opposed to the "supernatural," which is *above* what is natural. See Lewis, *Cults of the Dead,* 49-50, 112-16; but see also Philip Johnston, "The Underworld and the Dead in the Old Testament," *TynBul* 45 (1994) 415-19.

[17] So also, possibly, '*ĕlōhîm* in Mic 3:7, since the text is dealing with "diviners"; also possibly in Exod 21:6 (H. Niehr, "Ein unerkannter Text zur Nekromantie in Israel," *UF* 23 [1991] 301-6, here 304).

[18] Johan Lust, "On Wizards and Prophets," in *Studies on Prophecy:* A collection of twelve papers (by D. Lys et al.; VTSup 26; Leiden: Brill, 1974) 133-42, here 135-39; Josef Tropper, *Nekromantie: Totenbefragung im Alten Orient und im Alten Testament* (AOAT 223; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag; Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker, 1989) 312-16; *contra* the older discussion in Harry A. Hoffner, "אוב '*ôbh," TDOT,* 1. 130-34, here 131.

[19] Or simply "the dead" (*mētîm*) in some contexts.

perhaps especially military crisis, recourse to necromancy seems to have been a distinct cultural inclination.[20] The immediate context of the Isaian reference is especially helpful. The prophet is encouraging his hearers to "bind up the testimony (*tĕʿûdâ*)" and "seal the teaching (*tôrâ*)" among his disciples, who are witnesses with him to Yhwh's faithfulness to take action (Isa 8:16-17). Thus, Isaiah is aware that in this military crisis, Ahaz and his people are as likely to turn to the old necromantic standby as they are to wait patiently for Yhwh to act (so "I will wait for the Lord . . . ," 28:17).

Beyond a military crisis, the occasions when some Israelites might turn to ancestor-related necromancy include especially the times when Yhwh has ceased to provide much-needed information,[21] which, I will argue, is precisely the canonical function of the episode at Endor as it has been edited by the Deuteronomistic historian. Thus far, we have demonstrated that the narrative gathers as much terminology as was available to denote necromancy, and does this repeatedly. The rhetorical effect is that the reader cannot avoid the conclusion that the king of Israel has indeed resorted to necromancy.

II. Literary Features of 1 Samuel 28:3-19

As always, we would do well to read deliberately at the beginning of the text, where markers are usually clearest. We begin by observing that the opening verse of the pericope is nearly identical in its lexical particulars to 1 Sam 25:1.

1 Sam 25:1	1 Sam 28:3a
וימת שמואל ויקבצו כל ישׂראל	ושמואל מת
ויספדו לו	ויספדו לו כל ישׂראל
ויקברהו בביתו ברמה	ויקברהו ברמה ובעירו
Now Samuel died; and all Israel assembled	Now Samuel had died,
and mourned for him.	and all Israel had mourned for him and
They buried him at his home in Ramah.	buried him in Ramah, his own city.

In the literary context of 25:1, the announcement of Samuel's death came just as Saul was learning how valid Samuel's message was (1 Sam 24:20) and just as David was entering into new circumstances in which he needed prophetic

consultation. Now that the great prophet was dead, David left the stronghold of
En-gedi and began his journeys as a refugee in the "wilderness of Paran" (25:1b).
In 28:3, the reminder of Samuel's death is the narrator's way of "reorienting" the
reader and preparing for what follows.[22] Thus, the reader is reminded that Saul
has lost his prophetic source of divine guidance; and one is also reminded, by
implication, that Samuel rests among the shades of the underworld, which means
that he can still be consulted through the practice of necromancy.[23]

The additional information from the past in 28:3b is new to the reader ("Saul
had expelled the mediums and the spiritists from the land"), and it contains
interesting links with other texts. On the surface, it is clear that the phrase antici-
pates the medium's initial objections (28:9): "Surely you know what Saul has
done, how he has cut off the mediums and the spiritists from the land." More
importantly, the clause in 28:3b highlights an important detail that aids the reader
in judging Saul's actions. Even Saul himself, at some point earlier in his reign,
had forbidden the use of necromancy.

Thus, the narrator has already, by implication, condemned Saul's actions
with this reference to the king's previous expulsion of mediums and spiritists. By
using the technical terms "mediums" (ʾōbôt) and "spiritists" (yiddĕʿōnîm) in
28:3b, the narrator goes even further in the critique of Saul, inasmuch as the text
appears to have the pentateuchal proscriptions against such practices in view (Lev
19:31; 20:27; Deut 18:10-11—perhaps especially the latter text; see below). This
sort of scriptural "echo" is especially important for reading this text and raises
the question of its links to earlier texts. Kirsten Nielsen has recently proposed
distinguishing three separate phases in intertextual reading.[24] In phase one, we
should consider the "author's intentions," by which Nielsen means the particular
signifiers embedded in the text that point the reader to specific intertexts.[25] The
second phase has to do with the editorial work involved in the formation of the
canon, in the course of which new meanings were discerned in old texts.[26] The
third phase involves intertexts that are clearly of a later date than the biblical

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[22] I use "reorient" deliberately, in contrast to "orientation" as used in sociolinguistic studies
as the means of placing the narrative in time and place (see Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation
of Biblical Narrative* [Sheffield: Almond, 1983] 102).

[23] Lewis, *Cults of the Dead,* 112; Mark S. Smith, "Ugaritic Studies and the Hebrew Bible,
1968-1998 (with an Excursus on Judean Monotheism and the Ugaritic Texts)," in *Congress Volume,
Oslo 1998* (VTSup 80; ed. A. Lemaire and M. Sæbø; Leiden: Brill, 2000) 327-52, here 337-38.

[24] Kirsten Nielsen, "Intertextuality and Hebrew Bible," in *Congress Volume, Oslo 1998,* 17-31,
here 18-19. I am modifying slightly.

[25] Of course, her use of "author's intentions" will need nuancing for most today, although she
has included a helpful discussion of this point as well.

[26] Thus acknowledging the importance of contributions to the interpretive enterprise from
disciplines such as source and redaction criticism. It is not necessary to accept the dichotomy between
historical criticism and literary criticism assumed by many working on canonical intertextuality. I
would argue that we are currently moving toward a *tertium quid,* in which it is becoming clear that

books. In this phase, Nielsen asserts that it is the reader and the tradition of which he or she is a part that identifies the intertexts.[27]

I propose that the example of necromancy in 1 Samuel 28 is based on an older, pre-Deuteronomistic source that has been intentionally redacted and placed in its canonical location in the Deuteronomistic History, with specific and precise terminology employed to characterize the ill-fated king further as part of a larger trajectory in the Books of Samuel.[28] In other words, consonant with Nielsen's definition of second-phase intertextuality, the redactional history of 1 Sam 28:3-19 resulted in a narratival function that created a new meaning.

As is widely recognized, 1 Sam 28:3-19 has been chronologically and geographically dislocated.[29] It naturally precedes the account of Saul's death in 31:1-13, since the séance occurs on the night before the battle with the Philistines

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"final form" readings are not inconsistent with historical criticism and, in fact, never have been. See John Barton, "Intertextuality and the 'Final Form' of the Text," in *Congress Volume, Oslo 1998,* 33-37; and Daniel B. Mathewson, "A Critical Binarism: Source Criticism and Deconstructive Criticism," *JSOT* 26 (2002) 3-28.

[27] Nielsen's definitions and examples from the Book of Ruth ("Intertextuality," 17-23) are compelling and useful, and I have adapted her methodology only slightly.

[28] The idea that 1 Sam 28:3-19 is based on an older source is not new (see, e.g., Henry Preserved Smith, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Samuel* [ICC; Edinburgh: Clark, 1898] 238). The most widely accepted view of the redactional history of the chapter is that proposed by P. Kyle McCarter, Jr., (*I Samuel:* A new translation with introduction, notes and commentary [AB 8; New York: Doubleday, 1980] 421-23). In his view, the text as we have it is a "prophetic reworking" of an older account, in which Samuel the prophet plays no role; instead, Saul consults an anonymous ghost. The original version of the account did not contain 28:11-12a, in which the woman asks whom she should contact and Saul's response gives Samuel as the answer. Understanding 28:11-12a as a late insertion, according to McCarter, gives a clearer explanation of the woman's cry of recognition of Saul. His assurance that she would suffer no consequences (28:10) leads immediately to her awareness that she is in the presence of the king (28:12b); only King Saul could give such assurances. Likewise, a portion of Samuel's condemnation of Saul (28:17-18) refers directly to Saul's rejection in 1 Sam 15:1-34 and is, in McCarter's view, a result of the prophetic reworking. Thus, a pre-Deuteronomistic source has been adapted and inserted into the narrative for literary effect.

[29] In 28:4, battle lines with the Philistines are being drawn in the fateful Jezreel Valley, where the enemy is encamped at Shunem, approximately nine miles east-northeast of Megiddo, in the northern reaches of the valley. On the opposite side of the valley to the south lay the Gilboa ridge, approximately ten miles south-southeast of Shunem. Saul's position on Mount Gilboa would place him strategically on a type of observation deck, so that he can observe the outcome of the battle. See James B. Pritchard, *The HarperCollins Concise Atlas of the Bible* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997) 46-47; Yohanan Aharoni and Michael Avi-Yonah, *The Macmillan Bible Atlas* (New York: Macmillan, 1977) 64. The town of Endor has not been conclusively located, but according to all the biblical data it was likely located in the southern portion of the Jezreel valley, near the Kishon River (Diana V. Edelman, "En-dor," *ABD,* 2. 499-501). However, in 1 Sam 29:1 the Philistines are still at Apheq in the Sharon Valley, and they do not arrive in the Jezreel Valley until 29:11. Thus, the Endor episode would fit geographically and chronologically *after* chaps. 29–30. See McCarter, *I Samuel,* 422-23; Ralph W. Klein, *1 Samuel* (WBC 10; Waco: Word, 1983) 269; and Robert P. Gordon, *I & II Samuel: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986) 193.

at Mount Gilboa, in which Saul loses his life. Similarly, the account of David's dismissal from the Philistine army and his punishment of the Amalekites (29:1–30:31) follows naturally, in both geography and chronology, from his arrangement with Achish in 27:1–28:2. Clearly, the account of Saul's visit to Endor has been intentionally inserted in its present location for particular literary reasons; and the literary intention is confirmed by the lack of concern in the narrative for history, chronology, or geography.[30]

I agree, in general, with the view that 1 Sam 28:3-19 is a Deuteronomistic adaptation of an earlier source. I propose, further, that the earlier source has been reworked in order to highlight the expulsion of mediums and spiritists (28:3b), with the intentional use of the technical vocabulary of Deut 18:11 drawing out the intertextual implications. If these two words, "medium" and "spiritist," were the only links to Deuteronomy, perhaps it would not be prudent to assume any redactional intentionality.[31] However, Saul's request to his servants is also instructive (28:7): "Seek out for me a woman who is a medium, so that I may go to her and inquire of her." Interestingly, the series of verbs ("seek out . . . go . . . inquire") may contain an additional link to the Deuteronomic prohibition. The Levitical statements speak of "turning unto" (*pānâ*) necromantic specialists, and once of "seeking" them (*biqqēš,* Lev 19:31). Saul uses not the Levitical "turn unto" but the Deuteronomic "inquire" (*dāraš*). Although the Hebrew Bible contains a limited number of technical terms for necromancy, the links would hardly have been imperceptible. It seems that the redactional reworking may have intentionally echoed the proscriptions against the very practice Saul was using. His actions were self-condemnatory; his very words remind the reader of the illegality of his actions: "so that I may go to her and *inquire* of her." The reader may be surprised to encounter the deceased prophet brought up from the netherworld, but he or she is certainly not surprised to hear Samuel's emphatic condemnation (28:16-19). Saul has, in effect, sealed his own doom by inquiring of the dead.

III. The Role of Cleromancy in 1 and 2 Samuel

Why has the Deuteronomistic historian characterized Saul's self-condemnatory actions in such a way? What role do the references to necromancy have

[30] In the nineteenth century, Karl Budde (*The Books of Samuel: Critical Edition of the Hebrew Text* [Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1894] 26-27, 73-74) made the proposal that this text was originally placed immediately before chap. 31 but was extracted by an editor offended by its content, presumably under the influence of the Deuteronomic view of necromancy (Deut 18:11); subsequently, when a different editor restored the text, it was to the wrong location in the narrative. However, on the general lack of concern for chronology in the Books of Samuel, see Bill T. Arnold, *1 and 2 Samuel* (NIV Application Commentary; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003) 23-25.

[31] Especially since the prohibitions in Leviticus also contain the technical terminology for necromancy (Lev 19:31; 20:6, 27).

in the larger context of the Books of Samuel? The answer, I propose, is found in the way the narrative characterizes Saul and David, at first generally and then more specifically, using cleromancy as a foil for Saul's necromancy.

The contrast begins from the moment David is anointed (1 Samuel 16). Early in Saul's reign, Samuel the prophet was his source of Yhwh-prophecy. Samuel had been established as the giver of Yhwh's word and the only trustworthy prophet in the land (1 Sam 3:20). He had been directed by Yhwh to identify and anoint Saul as the first king of Israel (1 Samuel 9–10). The rejection of Saul in 1 Samuel 13–15 is attributed to his failure to accept the structure of authority established for him by Yhwh and his prophet Samuel at the time of his appointment (13:14).[32] Samuel announces dramatically that Saul has been rejected as king (15:23), and the two men go their separate ways, Samuel to Ramah and Saul to Gibeah (15:34). That unit of the book closes with the simple observation that "Samuel did not see Saul again until the day of his death" (15:35). Saul is now on his own; he has none of the benefits of the prophetic word of Yhwh. When Samuel anointed David with oil, the spirit of Yhwh rushed upon him with force from that day forward (16:13). The next verse states succinctly that the spirit of Yhwh departed from Saul and an evil spirit from Yhwh tormented him.[33] From that point until Saul's death in 1 Samuel 31, the narrative follows David and Saul along opposite trajectories. The fledgling nation now has two anointed kings: Saul, who was also anointed by Samuel and who nominally continues as king, and David, who has only the anointing and the prophetic promise of kingship. But Israel cannot have two kings. One is illegitimate and the other is not yet enthroned. The narrative eventually resolves the tension, but not without painstakingly characterizing the two antagonists.

The issue of divine guidance becomes an important feature of the characterization of Saul and David in 1 Samuel and comes to the surface in 1 Samuel 28 in the narrator's details in 28:5-6. After Saul's inner life is exposed as that of paralyzing terror (28:5), we encounter the important statement (28:6): "When Saul inquired of the LORD, the LORD did not answer him, not by dreams, or by Urim, or by prophets." Removed from the book's context, this sentence would be a sad statement about Saul's relationship with Yhwh; but when the expression "inquired of Yhwh" is read in light of other uses of the same expression in 1 and 2 Samuel, we glean a more nuanced perspective—and one, I believe, that is intentionally embedded in the narrative.

From Saul's rejection in chap. 15, the narrative follows him along a gradual but undeniable trajectory downward, in which he continues to reject Yhwh's authority in graver and more self-destructive attitudes and actions. We reach a

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[32] This is not to minimize the complicated nature of this narrative, which has led to much scholarly discussion about the causes for Saul's demise. Ultimately, the text is about rejection of Yhwh's authority as defined by Samuel. See V. Philips Long, *The Reign and Rejection of King Saul: A Case for Literary and Theological Coherence* (SBLDS 118; Atlanta: Scholars, 1989) 87-93.

[33] See Arnold, *Samuel,* 239-40, for details of the contrast in 1 Samuel 16.

turning point in 1 Samuel 22, when Saul, in a fit of rage and jealousy, slaughters the 85 priests of Nob, who were politically neutral but guilty, Saul believes, by reason of their complicity with David. However, Abiathar, one of the priests, escapes and flees to join David, incidentally bringing with him the sanctioned means of consulting Yhwh, that is, the priestly ephod with its Urim and Thummim (22:6-23; and see 23:6). The precise nature of the Urim and Thummim is, of course, a disputed question, but the evidence suggests that they served as a form of divinely approved divination, that is, casting lots.[34] In 1 and 2 Samuel, the phrase ''inquire of Yhwh/God'' (*šā'al* plus *bĕ* [Yhwh/God])[35] is used consistently as a technical expression for seeking an oracle of God whenever the expectation of response is binary, that is, of a simple affirmative or negative answer.[36] From this point forward, David will have unlimited access to the priestly ephod, with its Urim and Thummim, because Saul has driven these away and placed them in

[34]   Jean-Michel de Tarragon, ''Witchcraft, Magic, and Divination in Canaan and Ancient Israel,'' in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East* (ed. Jack M. Sasson; 4 vols.; New York: Scribner, 1995) 3. 2071-81, esp. 2072. The purpose, however, of the use of Urim and Thummim in the Bible was ''not so much to look into the future as to bring one's own deeds into conformity with the instruction of God'' (W. Dommershausen, ''גּוֹרָל *gôrāl*,'' *TDOT*, 2. 450-56, here 453; and for a parallel Hittite ritual, Anne Marie Kitz, ''The Plural Form of *'Ûrîm* and *Tummîm*,'' *JBL* 116 [1997] 401-10, here 405 n. 23).

The provision of Urim and Thummim was thus a sacral adaptation of the use of ''lots'' (*gôrāl*— see *HALOT*, 1. 185; *Dictionary of Class. Heb.* (ed. Clines), 2. 337-38; Christopher T. Begg, ''Inquire of God,'' *ABD*, 3. 417, contra Cornelis Van Dam, *The Urim and Thummim: A Means of Revelation in Ancient Israel* [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997] 34-38, 229-32), which was a common custom from everyday life in the ancient world especially useful for making impartial decisions, much like our coin toss (Dommershausen, ''גּוֹרָל,'' 451). Inquiries of Yhwh were ideally directed through the priests, who kept the Urim and Thummim in the sacred ephod (Exod 28:30; Lev 8:8; Num 27:21). The words *'ûrîm* and *tummîm* have been taken to denote ''light(s)'' and ''perfection(s),'' respectively, or ''accursed'' and ''acquitted,'' or perhaps to symbolize the first and last letters of the Hebrew alphabet (Van Dam, *Urim and Thummim,* 131-36). Some speculate that these objects may have been small cubic stones, perhaps differentiated by color to mark ''yes'' and ''no,'' although small sticks are also possible (E. Lipiński, ''*'Ûrîm* and *Tummîm*,'' *VT* 20 [1970] 495-96; Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions* [New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965] 353; and J. Lindblom, ''Lot-casting in the Old Testament,'' *VT* 12 [1962] 164-78). It seems likely that the Urim and Thummim as divinely sanctioned instruments of prophecy have a parallel in a seventh-century Assyrian text recording the use of a white or translucent alabaster stone and a black hematite stone (W. Horowitz and V. Hurowitz, ''Urim and Thummim in Light of a Psephomancy Ritual from Assur (*LKA* 137),'' *JANES* 21 [1992] 97-98, 114; Victor Hurowitz, ''A Psephomancy Ritual from Assur,'' in *The Context of Scripture* [ed. William W. Hallo; 3 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 1997–2002] 1. 127: 444-45). For contrasting views, see Van Dam, *Urim and Thummim,* 40-42.

[35]   On the use of this phrase in 1 and 2 Samuel for directing inquiry to Yhwh/God (presumably by means of Urim and Thummim, although without explicitly so stating in every case), see 1 Sam 10:22; 14:37; 22:10, 13, 15; 23:2, 4; 28:6; 30:8; 2 Sam 2:1; 5:19, 23; 16:23. The preposition *bĕ* marks the object of inquiry, which is usually ''Yhwh'' in 1 and 2 Samuel, but ''God'' in 1 Sam 14:37; 22:13, 15, and ''the word of God'' in 2 Sam 16:23. For a summary of its use elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, see Van Dam, *Urim and Thummim,* 182-90.

[36]   That the collocation ''inquire of Yhwh/God'' is associated with the cleromantic ritual can hardly be questioned, as seems clear from 1 Sam 14:37, 41-42; 23:1-14, and elsewhere in 1 and

David's power by his action of slaughtering the priests. As Saul drove Samuel away, now he has banished the all-important ephod and, with it, the guiding hand of Yhwh.

While the contrast between Saul and David in the History of David's Rise has long been noted,[37] not enough has been made of the narrative's various references to cleromancy in contradistinction to Saul's necromantic actions as an important means of characterizing Saul and David. Saul is forced to rely on his own instincts and intuition, such as they are. David, by contrast, frequently turns to the priestly ephod for cleromantic guidance (1 Sam 22:10; 23:2, 4; 30:7-8; 2 Sam 2:1; 5:23; similarly also 1 Sam 22:13, 15—all of which contain the collocation "inquire of Yhwh/God").[38] David's rise to power is, in fact, characterized by the importance he placed on seeking guidance from God; indeed, this dependence on Yhwh for guidance came to characterize David and is partly what it means to describe him as the ideal king of Israel. By contrast, Yhwh eventually stopped answering Saul's inquiries altogether, presumably because Saul summarily made up his mind before asking (1 Sam 14:36-37). Thus, the use of Urim and Thummim by Saul early in his reign (1 Sam 14:41-42) is even more remarkable, revealing that he understood the proper role of cleromancy at that point, just as he originally relied on the prophetic word of Samuel.

The silence of Yhwh (1 Sam 28:6) so near the end of Saul's reign was an ominous indication of the depth of his despair. The verse catalogues methods that the Deuteronomistic editor believes are acceptable for seeking God's guidance: dreams, lots ("Urim," again serving as a metonym for Urim and Thummim, as in Num 27:21), and prophecy. But Yhwh had long since stopped answering Saul;

2 Samuel (I accept the LXX reading of 1 Sam 14:41, contra Van Dam, *Urim and Thummim,* 199-203). For a fascinating theory of how a result of "no answer" could be attained, see the private communication of David N. Freedman reported in Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16:* A new translation with introduction and commentary (AB 3; New York: Doubleday, 1991) 510-11.

Numerous examples of a Hittite ritual, the so-called KIN-oracles, provide parallels that suggest more than one simple query anticipating an answer of yes or no. Indeed, the use of Urim and Thummim *may* have involved much more flexibility, giving the diviner "favorable" or "unfavorable" readings to a whole series of questions and giving considerable freedom to the diviner in interpreting a pronouncement—as certain biblical texts may, in fact, indicate (e.g., 2 Sam 5:23-24). The Hittite parallels may also partially explain the plural forms "ʾûrîm" and "tummîm" (Kitz, "Plural Form of ʾÛrîm and *Tummîm,*" 407-8).

[37] Most recently by George ("Yhwh's Own Heart," 457-58), who argues that the main difference between Saul and David is the type of heart each man has. He believes the Deuteronomistic historian understood this to designate religious identity, which at least included continual appeal for Yhwh's counsel and guidance before taking action.

[38] In a sense, the contrast is continued even after the pitiable Saul is dead and buried. The phrase thus continues to characterize David, who inquires of Yhwh before taking a step (2 Sam 2:1), while Ish-Bosheth, Saul's son, becomes king of the northern tribes as a result of political machinations (2 Sam 2:8-11). David is portrayed as reliant only on the power and timing of Yhwh, while Ish-Bosheth is introduced as a puppet in the hands of human power structures.

now the ill-fated king is desperate to discern the plan of God. In short, the Deuteronomistic historian appears to have characterized Saul as the diametric opposite of David. The extended narrative has contrasted Saul and David by showing that David often ''inquired of Yhwh''; by contrast, Saul killed the priests of Nob and forfeited the means of consulting Yhwh (22:6-23). Now the contrast comes to a climax, because Saul *finally* ''inquires'' of Yhwh, as the narrative has longed for him to do. But, tragically, it is too late; Saul receives no answer. The text anticipates 30:7-8, where again David inquires of Yhwh before avenging the war crimes at Ziklag. The geographical and chronological arrangement of narrative (see n. 29 above) may therefore be explained in terms of the narrator's intentional juxtaposition of these chapters in order to contrast Saul's failure with David's successes. So 1 Sam 28:3-25 is Saul at his worst, as a foil for David in 29:1–30:31.

Samuel's prophetic condemnation of Saul (vv. 16-19) is both required and confirmed by Saul's use of necromancy. The Deuteronomistic historian's use of the old episode has transformed it into a condemnation of the practice but, more significantly, has added it to the characterization of Saul. The contrast is one between legitimate Yhwh-prophecy, on the one hand, and illegitimate magical ritual, on the other. Saul turns to the illegitimate use of magic as a means of seeking guidance because he has closed his eyes to the prophetic word. The result, ironically, is that the magic he uses confirms the prophetic word he has scorned. Samuel's speech makes this clear (28:16-19). The prophecies about Saul and David have been fulfilled; they cannot be rescinded or ignored and are, in fact, confirmed by Saul's use of necromancy. From the Deuteronomistic perspective, these two—magic and prophecy (necromancy and cleromancy)—are related to each other as opposite sides of the same coin and are mutually exclusive. The anointed of Yhwh must choose between them. The use of magic will bring only prophetic condemnation, while reliance on Yhwh's word will result in the expulsion of magic from the land. In this way, the Deuteronomistic narrative has not only legitimized David as king; it has established him as an ideal paradigm for all future kings of Israel, who must, in this narrator's view, learn to rely on Yhwh's word as David has done.

Finally, the Chronicler's brief comments on Saul's reign may be insightful on this point. The Books of Chronicles devote painfully little space to Saul and his ill-fated kingdom, which is completely consonant with the nature of the Chronicler's work as the first commentary on the Scriptures. Its purpose was to trace the history of faith and salvation, following a straight line of trust and faithfulness with no detours. Readers in the mid to late fifth century B.C.E. stood in the second or third generation after the exile and needed reminders of the victories of Israel's history. Thus, 1 Chronicles passes over Saul's life in order to trace God's chosen instruments of salvation: the Davidic line of kings, the city of Jerusalem, and the temple. Only Saul's ignominious death, narrated by the Deuteronomistic historian

in 1 Samuel 31, is summarized in one brief chapter (1 Chronicles 10) as background information to David's rise to power. As a result, the canonical shape of the account of Saul's death in 1 Chronicles 10 is isolated from its original theological framework in the Deuteronomistic History. In other words, its *Vorlage* in 1 Samuel 31 was a largely secular account that was given theological meaning by its broader narrative framework in the Books of Samuel;[39] but that theological meaning is now lost in the Chronicler's use of 1 Samuel 31. The Chronicler, in laconic fashion, provides a separate theological framework with an important two-verse assessment of Saul that is pertinent to this discussion (1 Chr 10:13-14):

> (13) So Saul died for his unfaithfulness; he was unfaithful to the LORD in that he did not keep the command of the LORD; moreover, he had consulted a medium, seeking guidance, (14) did not seek guidance from the LORD. Therefore the LORD put him to death and turned the kingdom over to David son of Jesse.

This succinct summary presents one of the Chronicler's most important theological concepts. Saul's "treacherous act" (*maʿal*)[40] against Yhwh is further defined as the king's failure to "keep" the word of Yhwh. But the Chronicler goes still further in describing the specific nature of Saul's failure by using the same collocation used in the Books of Samuel—that is, *šāʾal + bĕ*. The significant difference is that here "medium" (*ʾôb*) is substituted for "Yhwh" as the object of inquiry: Saul even went so far as *to inquire of* a medium for guidance![41] The Chronicler has still more to say. The next verse (10:14) opens with yet another variation of the collocation for cleromancy, again as a means of modifying further the precise nature of Saul's sin: ". . . but he did not *seek guidance* from Yhwh."[42] The assessment of Saul quickly ends by stating that Yhwh turned the kingdom over to David son of Jesse, who is, of course, the Chronicler's main interest.

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[39] Sara Japhet, *I & II Chronicles* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993) 229; H. G. M. Williamson, *1 and 2 Chronicles* (NCB; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) 92-96.

[40] Or, more generally, "sin," "transgression," or "sacrilege" (see *Dictionary of Class. Heb.* (ed. Clines), 5. 401; *HALOT,* 2. 613). W. Johnstone ("Guilt and Atonement: The Theme of 1 and 2 Chronicles," in *A Word in Season: Essays in Honour of William McKane* [ed. J. D. Martin and P. R. Davies; JSOTSup 42; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986] 116-26) takes this term to express "willful negligence toward God" and theorizes that it functions as a historiographic marker in Chronicles. So, for example, *maʿal* is typological in 1 Chr 2:7 and programmatic in 1 Chr 5:25; 9:1; and then it closes the reign of Saul in 10:13 and sets Saul apart from the glorious period of David.

[41] The use of the technical collocation occurs in the form of an infinitive construct of "specification," also known as "epexegetical" or "explanatory," which is used with the preposition *le* after a verb to clarify or explain further the preceding verbal action, in this case the failure to keep the word of Yhwh (Arnold and Choi, *Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax,* 72-73, §3.4.1g). The second infinitive construct indicates a purpose clause: ". . . by inquiring of a medium in order to seek guidance. . . ." The specification is further modified by the use of the asseverative *gam* before the infinitive, which lends particularly striking emphasis to the Chronicler's condemnation (ibid., 133, §4.2.5b).

[42] I take the *waw conjunctive* before the negative particle as an adversative *waw* (Arnold and Choi, *Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax,* 146, §4.3.3a). Japhet has observed that the content of these

All of this is instructive for the reading of 1 Samuel 28 presented above. In essence, the Chronicler recognized the intentional contrast between cleromancy and necromancy in 1 Samuel, and therewith between Saul and David. The Chronicler has identified and poignantly summarized one of the major themes of the Deuteronomistic account of the two kingdoms: David faithfully sought guidance from Yhwh by "inquiring in" Yhwh, that is, by cleromancy as the legitimate means of seeking such counsel; but Saul went so far as to seek guidance from the very means prohibited by Yhwh. If, indeed, necromancy and cleromancy function as contrastive literary features in 1 and 2 Samuel, as I have suggested here, then the Chronicler has effectively encapsulated these differences between Saul and David.[43]

Summation

In sum, the Deuteronomist was less concerned with filling the gaps of the older narrative source than with characterizing Saul and driving home the contrast between Saul and David. In Saul's moment of crisis, he turned to the deplorable necromantic option, whereas David consistently and commendably relied on the prophetic word of Yhwh, as discerned through cleromancy. In the hands of the Deuteronomist, David's reliance on cleromancy in the History of David's Rise and Saul's use of necromancy in the *Vorlage* for 1 Sam 28:3-19 were shaped and reworked into a continuous narrative, in which David and Saul were contrasted by means of the contradictory ways in which they sought divine guidance.[44]

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two verses may be found, with a single exception, in Samuel's speech to Saul at Endor (1 Sam 28:16-19; Japhet, *Chronicles,* 229). The assertion that Saul "did not seek guidance from Yhwh" is the Chronicler's own conclusion, based, I believe, on the Chronicler's reading of the entire Book of Samuel. Moreover, the concept of "seeking Yhwh/God," expressed by both *biqqēš* and *dāraš,* is central to the Chronicler's purpose, being "the key to the message and aim" of 1 and 2 Chronicles (Christopher T. Begg, " 'Seeking Yahweh' and the Purpose of Chronicles," *LS* 9 [1982] 123-41, here 139).

[43] This portrait of Saul's life and death became, for the Chronicler, a prototype or pattern of the exilic situation. The specific terminology and phraseology of these two verses (10:13-14) recur in the Chronicler's history, revealing the paradigmatic nature of this description. It was a pattern with which the readers of Chronicles could identify; that is, it was an "exilic" archetype. By contrast, the author balanced this prototype with the theme of "restoration" in the following chapters, culminating especially in 2 Chr 7:14, which kerygmatically establishes the archetype of salvation (Williamson, *Chronicles,* 92-95, 225).

[44] Thus, the Deuteronomistic note on Yhwh's silence, even "by Urim" in 1 Sam 28:6, is a summary of the historian's rhetorical use of cleromancy to this point in the narrative and succinctly prepares the reader for necromancy as a contrasting device. Especially illuminating, then, are Saul's following words of self-incrimination (28:7), which include other words for inquiry (*biqqēš* and *dāraš*): "Seek out (*baqqěšû*) for me a woman who is a medium, so that I may go to her and inquire (*wě˒edrěšâ*) of her."