DID SAUL MAKE GIBEON HIS CAPITAL?

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The present paper addresses itself to one of the most crucial and neglected aspects of Saul’s reign, namely, his relations with the Gibeonite cities and their inhabitants. That Saul experienced difficulties with these cities is one of the few facts which has independent attestation outside of the main body of Saul traditions (2 Sam. xxi 1-14). Here we learn that in order to bring to an end a disastrous three-year-long famine David “sought the face of Yahweh” and learned that the cause of the famine was Saul’s attempt to extirpate the Gibeonites in violation of their rights guaranteed by treaty. The phrase יָבִיא תְּבִיָּה דָּוִיד אֶת-פֶּשַׁנֶּ הַיָּהֹוָה connotes a visit to a sanctuary, in the circumstances most naturally that of Gibeon itself referred to in the narrative (vv. 6, 9). From the conversation between David and the Gibeonites it is clear that the latter were not Israelites in the full sense of the term, and this is stated explicitly in the note or gloss added at v. 2 Yet they had acquired by treaty the right of residence, and this right Saul had attempted violently to rescind. The reason given is his zeal for Israel and Judah, and of this intemperate zeal we have other indications in the tradition 1).

At what point during his reign would this hostile action against the Gibeonites have been undertaken? No one will underestimate the difficulty of using the Saul traditions in 1 Sam. as historical source material or arranging them in some chronological order. Many of these traditions, for one thing, have been edited in such a way as to testify against Saul and most of them, in any case, deal only with the early years of what must have been a fairly long reign—certainly longer than is indicated at 1 Sam. xiii 1 2). While any reconstruction

1) E.g. 1 Sam. xiv 24ff; xiii 7bff.
2) Leaving aside the tradition of a forty-year-long reign (Josephus, *Ant*. 6 14 9 and Acts xiii 21), one must suppose a considerably longer period on the basis of the surviving traditions alone: his exploits against Ammonites, Philistines, Gibeonites and others, not to mention David (see, for example, the summary in 1 Sam. xiv 52); the fact that his grown sons fight alongside him (1 Sam. xiii 14; xxxi 2); what must have been a fairly long period of struggle with David including

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will be tentative the following very brief outline may be proposed as reasonably certain 1). Saul first came to prominence after his action on behalf of the Transjordanian Gileadites (1 Sam. xi 1-11; xii 12), after which he was proclaimed king of a restricted amphictyony or symmachy of tribes at Gilgal (xi 12-15). It was therefore only after he became king that he fought against the Philistines. The account of his commissioning by Samuel, added on to an older story about the lost asses and an anonymous seer (ix 1-x 16), seems to require as its sequel an act of war against the Philistines (see ix 16 and x 1), a conclusion strengthened by the phrase "whatever your hand finds to do" 2). Unfortunately, however, nothing is said in this source of such an exploit, but instead Saul goes on to the high place (or, with LXX, to haggib'āb) and is questioned by someone referred to as his did from whom he withholds "the matter of the kingship". The account in xiii 2-xiv 23 of a successful revolt against the Philistines would seem to be best explained as a conflation of two traditions ascribing the initiative respectively to Saul (xiii 4) and his son Jonathan (xiii 3). The earlier of these, that in which Saul alone featured, may with probability be read as the sequel to the commissioning, especially since it refers to a Philistine military governor 3) stationed at a place called geba or, with LXX, haggib'db (cf. x 5, 10). At some point, therefore, Saul did defeat the Philistines and drove them back to the Coastal Plain; and despite intermittent warfare (xiv 47, 52) this situation remained essentially unchanged until his defeat and death at Gilboa (xxxi). The importance of this turning-point is also reflected in the late and tendentious vii 2-14 which, however, attributes the defeat of the Philistines to Samuel rather than Saul. I have no doubt that Samuel did play a historical role with Saul, as other prophets did with other charismatic leaders, but that this attribution is unhistorical

the latter's stay of one year and four months with the Philistines (1 Sam. xxvii 2). The perspective is misleading since the redactors were interested almost exclusively in his rise to power, abetted or opposed by Samuel, and his political eclipse corresponding to David's ascendancy.

1) For further detail see my Gibbon and Israel, Cambridge 1972, pp. 62f.

2) In this and other sources in 1 Sam. Saul appears as a charismatic military hero upon whom the ruah YHWH falls, similar to figures such as Samson and Jephthah in Judges (1 Sam. xi 6 cf. Judges xiv 6, 19; xv 14).

3) The meaning "governor" or "military commander" rather than "garrison" is suggested strongly by the context which describes an individual coup de main setting the revolt in motion; political assassination being a time-honored way of starting an uprising (e.g. Judges iii 15ff.). In 1 Kings iv 19 (cf. v. 4) n'sib must refer to an individual; in other occurrences the context provides no clear guidance.