

*Ernst Axel Knauf*

## **Bull-jumping David Crosses Gender-lines (Once Again). Three additional remarks to Philippe Guillaume**

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Zusammenfassung:

Die Entdeckung von Guillaume/Blockman, dass Psalm 18,30= 2Samuel 22,30 Stierspringen verbalisiert, hat eine Reihe von genderspezifischen Konsequenzen: die buchstäbliche Übersprungshandlung passt in das Image Davids. Sie ist eine religiöse, keine sportliche Handlung. Der physische Ausdruck von Religion ist im biblischen Kontext frauendominiert, besonders in den Bereichen Trauer und Tanz. Auch hier überspringt David einmal wieder Geschlechtergrenzen. Letzteres ist mit einer neuen Körperbetonung von Religion im Christentum neu zu entdecken.

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The significance of Philippe Guillaume's discovery of the true sense of Psalm 18,30 = 2 Samuel 22,30 may be enhanced by three additional remarks.

1. "With (the help/power of) my God I jump bulls" – a case of *b- instrumentalis* – or "In (the rôle of) my God" – *b- essentiae*: the line represents a religious *reminiscence* from the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BCE. Ceremonial bull-jumping is not attested from Iron age contexts. One might speculate that this feature of specific Aegean cult (an area which, in the MB and LB periods, did not exclude Syria and Palestine) was still practiced in Philistia for a while, and that the verse in question adds to the cultural impact of Philistia on David, or on the image of David. It is, however, to be admitted that traditional rites and phrases tend to be transmitted long past their cognitive content; e.g., when an atheist says "thank God", or when the Protestant church of the city quarter where I live rings for the *Angelus*, and nobody falls to her or his knees and actually prays it, or even knows that s/he once was supposed to do so. So the verse, in its present context, might not mean more than the addition of a very precious (since ancient) pearl to a necklace for the further adornment of David's memory.

2. As a *religious* reminiscence it clarifies beyond doubt that 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BCE Aegean bull-jumping was an act within a religious context, and not the "sport" on which Decker's treatment focusses.<sup>1</sup> Sport, as we know it today, is a cultural perversion of decadents lacking the physical challenges of daily hard work, and was first invented, as far as I see, by lecherous ancient Greek adults enjoying the sight of naked young male bodies in action.<sup>2</sup>

3. Even if Decker is right that all (or, at least, most) performers in the bull-jumping ceremony were male (or at least, male adolescents), the *physical* enactment of religion is, in the biblical

context<sup>3</sup>, much a female thing, whereas the *verbal* enactment of religion tends to be dominated by males.<sup>4</sup> Mourning (which implied quite a lot of bodily action) was a female domain<sup>5</sup>, and so was dancing (mostly, if not exclusively mentioned in the Bible in ritual or at least religious contexts), as the following table shows (chapter and verse numbers according to the New Revised Standard Version):

Dance/Dancing	Biblical Reference
by females	Exodus 15,20; Judges 11,34; 21,21; 1 Samuel 18,6; Jeremiah 31,4. 13; Song of Songs 6,13
by sub-adolescents	Job 21,11
ungendered, or by both genders	Exodus 32,19; Qohelet 3,4; Lamentations 5,15; Psalm 30,11; 149,3; 150,4
By non-human beings	Isaiah 13,21
By males	1 Samuel 30,16 <sup>6</sup> ; 2 Samuel 6,5(= 1 Chronicles 13,8).14.16(= 1 Chronicles 15,29).21

The Hebrew terms for dancing are gender-differentiated:<sup>7</sup> women dance in circles (root **חגל**), whereas men hop (root **קרקר**). Male dancing, then, is attested by Isaiah 13,21; Job 21,11; Qohelet 3,4; 1 Chronicles 15,29 (≠ 2 Samuel 6,16!), female dancing by Exodus 15,20; 32,19; Judges 11,34; 21,21-23; 1 Samuel 18,6 (quoted in 21,12; 29,5); Song of Songs 6,13. The festive behaviour of the Amalekites is circumscribed by **חגג** “feasting” (presumably not gender-specific, although raiding parties are usually made up by men). Iron Age depictions of dancing scenes mostly show ungendered persons.<sup>8</sup> In the light of the linguistic evidence, dancers in rows, especially if linked to each other, might be interpreted as female, whereas individual dancers (or persons dancing on the spot) should be male. The only undisputably male dancer adduced by Mazar is a single figure and derives from Qitmit in the Negev, a 6<sup>th</sup>-century site of mixed culture with strong Edomite and Arabian influences<sup>9</sup> (cf. again the Amalekites in 1 Samuel 30,16!).

There is only one biblical attestation for a single male dancing in front of his god, and the individual in question was, once again, David (2 Samuel 6). The terminology in 2 Samuel 6 is not gender-specific: **כרכר** “to cartwheel” and **פזז** “acting the gazelle”. Michal’s anger might have been more directed against David’s crossing a gender line (by indulging in physical worship) rather than crossing an ethnic line (Israelite versus Canaanite).<sup>10</sup> Or was she afraid that a trans-gender activity (as expressed by the choice of verbs in 2 Samuel 6,14, and as opposed to the parallel in Chronicles, where David's dancing has become undisputably male) expressed an inter-gender personality? And note, that David’s dance incorporates a movement which we usually classify as “sport”, cartwheeling.

Physical exercise of religion seems to be largely abandoned nowadays, and not just among protestants. Fasting and kneeling are out, processions restricted to the interior of the ecclesiastical buildings. A visitor from another planet, attending a typical continental European church service, will observe some standing and much sitting, some singing (usually unintelligible) by all and much more speaking by a single person (also quite unintelligible, at least for our extra-terrestrial visitor). It seems, as if the “cult of the word” has obliterated a whole religious world of which the biblical word was still aware. From a biblical point of view, the purge of the physical from western Christianity is by no means necessary; whoever witnessed the feast of *Simkhat Torah* at Jerusalem only once will never forget that studying Torah does not exclude dancing with it. There is more to a successful life with God than trying to be good. Jews, Eastern Christians and Hindoos might remind western Christianity one day what it has lost, or forgotten. Maybe, some of it can be revived. Maybe, new gender-lines in the physical exercise of religion will be drawn, or not (it would not be necessary, but would it be bad?). One thing seems to be sure: should the Canaanite-Biblical tradition of physical religion be revived, we will have less need for sport.

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<sup>1</sup> Wolfgang Decker, “Zum Stand der Erforschung des ‘Stierspiels’ in der Alten Welt”, in R. Dittmann et al.(eds) (2003), *Alturtumswissenschaften im Dialog. Festschrift für Wolfram Nagel zur Vollendung seines 80. Lebensjahres (Alter Orient und Altes Testament, 306; Münster: Ugarit Verlag, 2003)*, 31-79.

<sup>2</sup> For sport and the differing cultural appraisal of bodily challenge in Ancient Greece and the Ancient Near East see also: Silvia Schroer, *Sport ist ungesund. Die Widerständigkeit des Alten Testaments gegenüber Körperkultur und Sport: Berliner Debatte Initial 14 (2003) 4/5, 54-62.*

<sup>3</sup> The gendering of physical vs. verbal religion might start in Canaan during the first half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BCE, where the vast majority of theophoric elements in personal names are male, and the vast majority of deities attested in the iconography are female.

<sup>4</sup> That it is necessary to remind oneself, from time to time, that there were also prophetesses in Israel proves the obvious rule; and there were no priestesses (teaching being one of the main occupations of the priests).

<sup>5</sup> Silvia Schroer, *Häusliche und ausserhäusliche religiöse Kompetenzen israelitischer Frauen – am Beispiel von Totenklage und Totenbefragung: lectio difficilior 1/2002.*

<sup>6</sup> The subjects are foreigners (Amalekites).

<sup>7</sup> Tal Ilan, *Dance and Gender in Ancient Jewish Sources: Near Eastern Archaeology 66 (2003) 135-136*

<sup>8</sup> Amihai Mazar, *Ritual Dance in the Iron Age: Near Eastern Archaeology 66 (2003) 126-132.*

<sup>9</sup> Pirhiya Beck, *The Cult Objects from Horvat Qitmit: id., Imagery and Representation. Studies in the Art and Iconography of Ancient Palestine: Collected Articles (Tel Aviv Occasional Publications 3; 2002) 171-202 (first published 1995).*

<sup>10</sup> See Silvia Schroer, *Die Samuelbücher (Neuer Stuttgarter Kommentar Altes Testament 7; Stuttgart 1992) 151-154; id., Sport, 58-60; Othmar Keel, Davids “Tanz” vor der Lade: Bibel und Kirche 51 (1996) 11-14.* One might also recall the case of the Syro-Arabian priest Heliogabal, who, after he ascended the imperial throne of Rome, scandalized his new subjects by dancing around altars and divine images – the same Romans who had adopted, previously and quite eagerly, the Greek invention of “secular” sport.

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