A Figure Study:
Depictions of King David in Renaissance and Baroque Art

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Beyond the pages of the Bible, King David remains alive in the imagination of readers and works of art. As shepherd, victor, and king, the character of David is multifaceted and complex as are his artistic depictions through the ages. In the Renaissance and Baroque periods, King David became a prominent subject in works of art and an allegory for contemporaneous history and culture. The life of King David was revived by artists that explored his character with an analytical lens and delineated stories that span the scope of developing styles and modes of expression. Although David can previously be found in Medieval art such as manuscript illuminations and stained glass windows, beginning in the Renaissance this significant character of the Bible gained breadth and fervor.

A forefather of Judaism and Christianity, King David is an Old Testament figure whose life experiences are richly described within the Bible. The story of King David appears in I Samuel 16 onward, the whole of II Samuel, and I Kings 1-2. Traditionally attributed as the author of the Psalms, at least seventy-three psalms are indicated to be “Of David” (Clifford 773). Native of Bethlehem and the youngest son of Jesse, David is associated with several milestones that are repeatedly translated into works of art.

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David expresses a range of characteristics and emotions, from; I Samuel 16:1-13 where David is chosen by God to be the future King of Israel and is anointed by Samuel, to his melodic lyre playing that is able to subdue Saul (I Samuel 16:14-23), his victorious battle with the Philistine giant Goliath (I Samuel 17:37-51), and his adulterous affair with Bathsheba (II Samuel 11:2-5).

**King David and the Bible**

Separated into two books, I and II Samuel are believed to have been one complete work named after the Samuel who becomes a valiant prophet of the Lord. While these Old Testament books bear Samuel’s name, David is not only the main character but also considered to be the focus of Deuteronomistic History (McKenzie 399-400). Samuel was born to Hannah who was previously barren and offered as a nazirite (I Samuel 1:22) and it becomes clear that “the Lord was with him” (I Samuel 3:19). He faithfully serves God who later sends him to select Saul as the first king of Israel (I Samuel 9:17). Saul initially appears to be a promising ruler leading in battle against Israelite enemies but loses favor with God by I Samuel 13 because of a transgression. Samuel proclaims to Saul that, “you have not kept your commandment of the Lord your God,” (I Samuel 13:13) and the nature of his sin appears to arise from the God’s contempt with Saul for presiding over a burnt offering without Samuel’s supervision (I Samuel 13:8-12).

God calls upon Samuel to anoint a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite to succeed Saul as the future king of Israel (I Samuel 16:1) and instructs as follows:

Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature,
because I have rejected him; for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart (I Samuel 16:7).

Seven of Jesse’s sons arrive before Samuel but God rejects each one. Samuel then questions Jesse as to whether all of his sons are present and Jesse informs that his youngest son, David, “is keeping the sheep” (I Samuel 16:11). David is described as having “beautiful eyes, and was handsome”; descriptions that certainly fueled the imaginations of artists who interpreted David’s appearance with a personal sense of beauty in keeping with their times (I Samuel 16:12). David is also described as being “ruddy,” having a red toned complexion and red hair, a detail that is very rarely translated into works of art (I Samuel 16:12). David’s characterization as being “handsome” is curious considering God’s previous statements regarding the importance of one’s inward appearance, but holds true to the descriptions of other Old Testament leaders such as Joseph (Genesis 39:6) and Moses (Exodus 2:2). The nature of David’s goodness recalls Plato’s Euthyphro dilemma, “Is the pious loved by the gods because it’s pious, or is it pious because it is loved [by the gods]?” (sec. 10a). Is David loved by God because of he is virtuous, or is he virtuous because he is loved by God?

After David is anointed by Samuel “the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward” (I Samuel 16:13). Subsequently, “the spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord tormented him,” leaving ample room for David’s ascent (I Samuel 16:14). The strength of these statements indicates a palpability to God’s presence as well as the consequences one might incur if they act against God. To soothe the afflicted Saul, David is employed to play the lyre within his court (I Samuel 16:15-23). Music was believed to offer relief to the Saul’s instability and
Saul’s servant recommended David explaining, “I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite who is skillful in playing the lyre, a man of valor, a warrior, prudent in speech, and a man of good presence; and the Lord is with him” (I Samuel 16:18). Even at this young age, David appears to have quite a respectable reputation and his lyre playing had the ability to cause the evil spirit to leave Saul during those musical interludes (I Samuel 16:23). Notably, while David is described as having played the lyre in the biblical text, most regularly he is depicted playing a harp within works of art.

King David is perhaps most recognized and remembered for his triumphant slaying of the Philistine Goliath (I Samuel 17). While the biblical passage is relatively short in length, inspired interpretations by artists and readers alike enliven the text. David becomes Saul’s armor-bearer and Saul initially “loved him greatly” for David’s ability to allay his mind (I Samuel 16:22). Saul was at war with the Philistines and was challenged by “a champion named Goliath of Gath whose height was six cubits and a span,” which measures to approximately 9.5 feet (I Samuel 17:4). Jesse called upon David to deliver provisions to the Israelite camp in the valley of Elah, bringing David to the Philistine conflict (I Samuel 17:17-19). The Israelites hesitated to take up the contest, but David assuredly offered to fight Goliath and described his previous victories with a lion and a bear (I Samuel 17:37). Moreover, David relayed his confidence in God’s protection and deliverance (I Samuel 17:37, 46).

With only “five smooth stones” chosen from a streambed and a slingshot in hand, David succeeds in defeating Goliath against the overwhelming odds (I Samuel 17:40). Saul attempts to cloth David in his armor, but its cumbersome weight was more of a hindrance than a help relating an impression of David’s small stature (I Samuel 17:38).
On David’s first attempt, he hits Goliath in the forehead causing him to fall face down on the ground, and then grabs Goliath’s sword and beheads him (I Samuel 17: 50-51). The Philistine armies retreat and David takes Goliath’s severed head back to Jerusalem. Impressed by David’s bravery and perhaps beginning to fear his strength, Saul asks the commander Abner whose son David is (I Samuel 17:55); a question that seems quite out of place considering their relationship and David’s earlier introduction.

The biblical retelling of the narratives of David’s anointment to his escape to Nob (I Samuel 21) is quite fast paced and smoothly interconnected. In between, David sparks a profound friendship with Saul’s son Jonathan and it is described, “the soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul” (I Samuel 18:1). Saul’s jealousy of David surmounts as David was not only right with God, but was celebrated for his victories and it was sung, “Saul has killed his thousands, and David his ten thousands” (I Samuel 18:7). Making attempts at David’s life by throwing a spear at him on two occasions, Saul grew to despise David (I Samuel 18:11, 19:10). David’s bond with Jonathan and marriage to Saul’s daughter Michal were also troublesome to Saul and despite David’s efforts in reconciliation, he had to take flight to Nob and the cave at Adullam (I Samuel 22:22).

The story of I Samuel carries on with Saul’s continued efforts to eliminate David, regardless of David sparing Saul’s life on two occasions. Samuel dies by I Samuel 25:1 and by the end of I Samuel, Jonathan dies in battle and a wounded Saul commits suicide (I Samuel 31:1-6). A pause in the narrative of pursuit and ongoing battles with the Philistines occurs during an episode with David and Abigail, the wife of Nabal, who later becomes David’s wife (I Samuel 25). This lengthy tale regarding Abigail’s
diplomacy in entreaty, David to spare her family after Nabal refused to grant tribute to David and his men, introduces David’s interest in women that comes to fruition in his affair with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite. This second book of Samuel marks the rise of David as king and chronicles his continued military conquests. David’s marriage to Bathsheba, and the descriptions of his troubled relationships with sons Amnon and Absalom create a character that is complex. Most importantly, II Samuel secures a vital link in David’s progeny with the birth of his son Solomon with Bathsheba who would later prove to build the Temple of Jerusalem and rise as the King of Israel. I Kings commences with the story of David’s last days and his appointment of Solomon as his successor (I Kings 1:32-37).

King David in the Art of Late Antiquity

Perhaps the earliest extant depictions of King David in art can be found in the remains of the Synagogue of Dura-Europos in Syria dating to 244-45 CE where a depiction of Samuel Anointing David (Figure 2) was excavated in 1920 (Perkins 1-2). The Synagogue at Dura-Europos represents a rare occasion in which figural imagery was used in Judaic art and the paintings are regarded as “the earliest continuous narrative cycle of biblical images known in art” (Gutmann 25). Jewish law strictly adheres to the Second Commandment, translated in the King James Version of the Bible as, “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image” (Exodus 20:4). The faithful often follow this law by prohibiting the representational arts, especially sculpture in the round, as man is believed to be made in God’s likeness and image and representations of such are suspect to idolatry. Accordingly, the majority of depictions of King David in
works of art are created by non-Jewish artists for non-Judaic purposes (Museum Label, The Synagogue at Dura-Europos).

At the time of the consecration of the Synagogue at Dura-Europos however, artists working for Jewish patrons often depicted both symbolic and narrative subjects where these images served as an illustrative aid to Torah lessons and a visualization of prayers (Museum Label, The Synagogue at Dura-Europos). Within the Samuel Anointing David from Dura-Europos, the prophet Samuel anoints the future King of Israel while the sons of Jesse stand in a line. The painter draws attention to Samuel by depicting him larger than the rest and David is dressed in a purple toga-like garment seemingly foreshadowing his royal status. The composition and frontality of Samuel Anointing David in a style comparable to that of Early Christian painting, appears to stylistically prefigure the sixth century Early Byzantine mosaic frieze of Emperor Justinian and Attendants (Figure 3) from San Vitale, Ravenna.
King David in Medieval Art

During the Middle Ages, depictions of David were not as superfluous as in the Renaissance and Baroque periods and images of the biblical king were usually found within works of art rather than serving as the sole subjects. Illustrations of King David occurred within illuminated prayer books where images of David playing the harp were used frequently as a frontispiece for the book of Psalms. The illumination of David Composing the Psalms (Figure 4) from the first folio of the Paris Psalter, portrays David as a harpist and blends biblical and Greco-Roman traditions. Recalling classicism in figure style and character, David appears reminiscent to the Greek musician and poet Orpheus who also had the ability to please with his music. Surrounded by restful animals within an intriguing landscape, a male figure on the lower right of the composition personifies the mountain of Bethlehem. While the allegorical figures of Melody (who sits beside David) and Echo (who hides behind a column) are shown, the depth of David’s concentration makes it appear as though he may be unmindful of their presence (Kleiner and Mamiya 348-49).

Figure 4: David Composing the Psalms from the Paris Psalter. 10th century. 14 1/8 x 10 1/4 in. Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.

Figure 5: Detail of King David from the Tree of Jesse lancet stained glass window, west façade, Chartres Cathedral. 1150-70.
The depiction of David as a harpist from the Paris Psalter, “has both a religious and a political meaning: As a religious figure, David is a ‘type’ of Christ; in the political sense, he is the model for the ideal ruler” (Stokstad, *Medieval Art* 131) The Paris Psalter is believed to have been commissioned by the Byzantine emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenesis who might have looked to David’s kingship for inspiration (131-32). As a forefather with direct lineage, comparisons of David to Christ are quite familiar. Tree of Jesse scenes, such as the grand window from Chartres Cathedral (Figure 5) from the Gothic period, delineate Christ’s genealogy stemming from Jesse to David and Solomon.

A rare occurrence dating to 629-30 CE, the *Silver Plates of David* feature stories regarding biblical king alone. The seventh century Byzantine emperor Heraclius is thought to have commissioned this series of ceremonial plates that chronicle nine
scenes from the life of David. Currently, six belong to the Metropolitan Museum of Art and three to the Cyprus Museum in Nicosia. *The Silver Plate of David and Goliath* (Figure 6) ostensibly served as an allegory for Heraclius’ triumph over the Persians in 628-29 that led to the conquest of Jerusalem (“Silver Plate with David and Goliath”).

Larger in size and most dynamic among the plates that feature scenes including the anointing of David (Figure 7), the David and Goliath plate appears to foretell later depictions in the Renaissance and Baroque periods (Wander 91-93).

The tale regarding David’s victory over the bear and the lion became symbolic during the Middle Ages of “Christ repulsing the temptations of the Devil” and “Christ descending into Limbo to deliver the just” (Osborne 302). Taking the role of a good shepherd, in these episodes David tried to rescue a lamb which is analogous to the narrative of the Harrowing of Hell. The endearing column capitals from the Church of Sainte-Madeleine, Vézelay with figurative details depict David’s struggle with the lion (Figure 8) as well as his triumph over Goliath (Figure 9). Like didactic marginalia within
an illuminated manuscript, these capitals provided added visual interest to this celebrated pilgrimage site (Stokstad, *Medieval Art* 212-13). The Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela where pilgrims to Vézelay might ultimately arrive, also bears a sculptural relief of King David on the Puerta de las Platerías (*Figure 10*) located near the south transept. Distinctly Romanesque in figure style with deeply folded-drapery and a dance like pose, King David looks to the side as if to greet his many visitors.

**Introducing Davidic Themes in Renaissance and Baroque Art**

In the Renaissance and Baroque periods, artists began to create works of art that focus on the life of David alone in narratives that are imbued with metaphorical analogies. It is during these times that the story of David and Goliath is recreated continuously in works of art and various allegories and symbolisms can be interpreted from the heroic scene. David’s slaying of Goliath can symbolize the victory of good over evil, the importance of faith as God appears to intervene on David’s behalf, and the steadfast nature of the human spirit against formidable odds (Osborne 302). With regard to the New Testament and Christian interpretations, the episode of David and Goliath may also serve as a precursor to Christ and his triumph over Satan (McHam 34).

As a king of Jerusalem and ancestor to Christ, David satisfies both Messianic traditions (P. Murray and L. Murray 130). The story of Bathsheba bathing can be seen to foretell the sacrament of baptism in which believers could seek salvation through the Church (Osborne 302). The biblical text details that from the roof of the house in which he was staying, David saw a woman who was bathing as her monthly ritual of
purification (II Samuel 11:2-4). This ancient Jewish rite performed in a bathing pool (mikvah) ceremonially involves natural waters relating to the outdoor setting of the scene (Slonim). The timing of David and Bathsheba’s meeting also accounts for her fertility in the conception of David’s unborn child (II Samuel 11:5). Creative liberties were employed by artists who translated the framework of this scene into a pretense for exploring the female nude (Osborne 302).

**King David in Renaissance Art of the Fifteenth Century**

While Quattrocento Italian city-states strengthened in political power, King David was adopted as an emblematic figure of bravery, virtue, heroism, and might. As the Italian Renaissance advanced, so did innovations in depictions of King David, and anatomy, perspective, and humanism were explored. David metaphorically stepped out of the pages of the Bible and provided a picture window onto Italian Renaissance life. During this time, the young shepherd from the Bible becomes a dynamic Renaissance man and “a new conception of David himself was developed” (Osborne 302).

The character of David was understood to be a metaphor of Florentine strength and victory over foreign enemies such as Milan and Naples (Schneider 213). Florentines of the fifteenth century often “saw themselves as ‘David’s’ facing the evil, ‘Goliath-like’ tyrants of the other city-states on the Italic peninsula” (Cole 54). Additionally, King David became a symbol of the Medici family and the concept that they were the “defender of Florentine liberty” (McHam 32). Through iconographic and stylistic analysis of these works of art depicting King David, one learns more about the political and historical tensions of the period.
The marble sculpture of *David* by Donatello (Donato di Niccolò di Betto Bardi) (Figure 11) presents David with the severed head of Goliath at his feet. David’s softly modeled face and form adds an air of youth and seems to foretell Donatello’s marble *Saint George* sculpture (Figure 12). He points to Goliath with his right hand and has a nonchalant facial expression. David’s slingshot lies on Goliath’s head and is loaded with a stone, while Goliath has already been slain and another rock is embedded in his forehead (I Samuel 17:49). Perhaps this element is intended to add to a “cause and effect” relationship, lending to a narrative approach of the free-standing sculpture (Olszewski 70).

Although Donatello’s marble *David* was intended to be placed as a buttress for Florence Cathedral, it was not displayed due to its diminutive size in relation to the
surrounding architecture. In 1416 Donatello’s *David* was displayed at the Palazzo dei Priori and later stood in the Palazzo della Signoria. The Priori of the Republic recognized the sculpture “as a symbol of the Florentine Republic.” The sculpture bears the inscription of: “To those who bravely fight for the fatherland, the Gods will lend aid even against the most terrible foes” (Hartt and Wilkins 185). This appears to be a commentary on Florentine might and “independence” with regard to the impending threat of King Ladislaus of Naples (Kleiner and Mamiya 593).

Donatello was later commissioned by the Medici family to sculpt a bronze version of *David* (*Figure 13*) for their Palazzo in Florence. The sculpture was to be centrally placed in the courtyard, and can be seen to be an image extolling the Medici name (McHam 32). The statue’s inscription is strikingly similar to the inscription on Donatello’s earlier marble sculpture, and reads: “The victory is whoever defends the fatherland. All-powerful God crushes the angry enemy. Behold, a boy overcomes the great tyrant. Conquer, o citizens!” (Stokstad, *Art History* 631). Donatello’s bronze *David* can be interpreted to subvert “the charge of tyranny” associated with the Medici family who were often thought of as the de-facto rulers of Florence (McHam 43). Donatello’s sculpture places the Medici in the role of David, insinuating that they too were protectors of Florentine liberty and independence. The sculpture also appears to allude to the victory of the Florentines over the Milanese in 1425 (Stokstad, *Art History* 632).

Donatello’s bronze *David* is considered to be the first life-size male nude since antiquity. David’s eased stance and contrapposto position looks back to classical compositions of sculpture from Greece and Rome. David is depicted as an introspective young man who triumphantly places his foot on the severed head of Goliath (Partridge
He appears somewhat androgynous in form and the sleek surface of the bronze, his long hair, and foppish hat adds to this sense of femininity. Still holding the sword of the slain Goliath and the fateful rock in his left hand, Donatello emphasizes David’s miraculous triumph over the Philistine giant.

Heading northward, depictions of King David in the early Renaissance period by Netherlandish artists appear to follow conventions established in Medieval art. Vignettes of David are included within larger works and are reexamined through an artistically innovative lens. Claus Sluter’s celebrated *Well of Moses* (Figure 14) bears the prophet from Exodus’ name but also includes five other Old Testament prophets within the
hexagonal base, seen clockwise: David, Jeremiah, Zechariah, Daniel, and Isaiah. The *Well of Moses* was created for the Great Cloister of the Carthusian monastery of Chartreuse de Champmol in Dijon and was commissioned by Philip the Bold, Duke of Burgundy who also funded the construction of this building complex and had residences in Dijon and Paris. A great patron of the arts with an interest in biblical renditions, Philip the Bold also commissioned Sluter to design a portal for a Chartreuse de Champmol chapel that was consecrated in 1397. This sculptural group at the entrance featured a trumeau of the Virgin and Child as well as donor figures of Philip and his wife Margaret of Dampierre, Countess of Flanders and their patron saints; John the Baptist and Catherine of Siena, respectively (Snyder 44-47).

While the figures from the *Well of Moses* have not yet broken free from their niches within the stone base, they stand life-size measuring almost six feet tall. Moses may indeed be the most visually compelling of the patriarchs who holds the tablets of the law and wears sumptuously flowing robes seemingly hinting to the rich Netherlandish fabric trade. Even so, the depiction of David (Moses’ neighbor) is quite significant (Stokstad, *Medieval Art* 349-50). Portrayed in the utmost realism and with traces of polychrome paint, there is more than first meets the eye with the figure of David. Most noticeably, David is depicted as king and an older man with a full beard that suggests wisdom. The ornate crown with fleur-di-lis crests remind viewers of Philip the Bold’s Valois lineage, and David’s elegant robe with tassels features trim with repeated images of harps emblematic of his early history (Snyder 44-47).

As originally conceived by Claus Sluter, an additional figure group with the Crucifixion was intended to surmount the extant base thereby unifying both Old and
New Testament themes (Stokstad, *Medieval Art* 349). This sculpture only remains in fragments and the figures of Virgin Mary, John the Evangelist, and Mary Magdalene are believed to have surrounded Christ crucified on the Cross. With water pouring from Christ’s wounds that would fill a basin held above the surviving base, a metaphor regarding the sacraments of the Eucharist and Baptism could be understood (Snyder 47). The presence of David most certainly reflects a correlation between him and Christ in ancestry.

The delineation of Sluter’s figures can be seen to be a visualization of contemporaneous mystery plays like that of *The Judgment of Jesus* in which Mary “pledged the cause of her Son before the great men of the Old Testament,” who reply that “Christ must die to save mankind” (Stokstad, *Medieval Art* 350). Art historian Emile Mâle supports the latter argument citing the well-known French mystery play entitled the *Trial of Christ* in which the prophets serve as members of a jury and “their lines are remarkably close to the inscriptions painted on the banderole” held by the figures (Snyder 48). Perhaps Sluter’s knowledge of these mystery plays informs his theatrical rendition with dramatic mourning angels hovering below the upper basin and Old Testament figures who appear ready to read their lines (47-48).

John of France, Duke of Berry was even more prolific in his art patronage than his younger brother Philip the Bold, Duke of Burgundy. John can be considered to be “one of the greatest patrons of art of all time” with commissions that span various mediums including; architecture, metalworks, and precious illuminated manuscripts (Stein). A series of tapestries from the Cloisters Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art are believed to be one such commission and include the coat of arms of his uncle
Charles VI, King of France ("Heroes Tapestry"). These *Nine Heroes Tapestries* (Figure 15) recall a Medieval allegory of the Nine Worthies that commemorate honorable legendary, historical, and biblical figures including King David who serves as "an allegory of good government" (Osborne 302). Composing the Psalms, holding a harp, and seated next to Joshua, here King David appears with his iconographical symbols to identify his character. Surrounded by personages like King Arthur, Julius Caesar, as well as musicians and maidens within architectural designs, this depiction of King David provides a glimpse into the luxurious arts of court life ("Julius Caesar and Attendants").

The *Très Riches Heures* that bears John of Berry’s name marks a transition from the late Medieval International Style to that of the Renaissance in the North. John of Berry employed the prolific Limbourg Brothers (Paul, Herman, and Jean) who were
previously commissioned by his brother Philip the Bold. The Brothers died of the plague in 1416 before completing the commission that was resumed by Jean Colombe (Snyder 38-39). The Très Riches Heures du Jean de France, Duc de Berry is book of prayers that comprises of two hundred and six bound sheets of vellum that includes full page illuminations, marginalia, and intricately decorated initial letters that speak of the finest artistries of the age (Longnon and Cazelles 23). Replete with careful details and “personal touches” regarding its patron, the delineation of the Très Riches Heures recalls the early Medieval manuscript tradition of portable religious arts like that of the Book of Kells (Snyder 38).

Depictions of King David abound within the Très Riches Heures such as those found within the Hours of the Virgin (Figure 16) and Office of the Dead (Figure 17) that
are believed to have been completed by Jean Colombe. In *David Foretells the Coming of Christ* from the Honors of the Virgin, David stands with his harp and two musicians and points to the Christ child who descends from the heavens with golden rays. This illumination follows the tradition of associating David as a “prefiguration of the coming of Christ” (Longnon and Cazelles sec. 22). As if from a fantastical vision, *King David within the Pit of Misery* accompanies Psalm 40 and depicts King David kneeling before God thanking for His deliverance. This nightmarish image provides a poignant interpretation of the biblical Psalm that details a narrative from the perspective of an individual who thanks God for his goodness and relates a continued need for protection in the face of future dangers. With the closing line of, “Do not delay, O my God,” Psalm 40 speaks of the humbling fear of the unknown. The drowning male and female figures to the right of the illumination appear to foreshadow the tortures in hell for sinners, once again linking the Old and New Testaments (Longnon and Cazelles sec. 86).

Reminiscent to Medieval Psalters that opened with images of King David, Zanobi Strozzi’s illuminated *Initial B with King David in Prayer* (*Figure 1*) places David at the very beginning of the Psalm 1 text within a capital letter corresponding to the Latin translation:

“‘Beatus vir qui non abiit in consilio impiorum et in via peccatorum non stetit et in cathedra pestilentiae non sedit’
(Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers)” (qtd. in “Zanobi Strozzi: Initial B”).

Kneeling humbly before God whose hand descends from Heaven, a haloed David appears as prophet and divine messenger. Completed for the Benedictine abbey of Florence, two miniature figures of monks on the left corners and a watchful angel to the
right devotedly look to the Old Testament prophet. Strozzi, a pupil of Fra Angelico as discussed by Giorgio Vasari, was a Florentine manuscript illuminator and panel painter working in the style of his teacher (“Zanobi Strozzi”).

Lorenzo Ghiberti’s *Battle Against the Philistines and David Slaying Goliath* (Figure 18) from the Gates of Paradise portrays a crowded scene of the biblical narrative depicted in a bronze panel. Ghiberti’s work of art portrays a distinct recession in space that is achieved in low relief with minimal use of protruding metal (Figure 19) in order to take into account the location of the panel at the lowest tier of the doors as well as one’s viewpoint from above (Butterfield 27). These ten door panels that explore Old Testament scenes from Adam and Eve to Solomon and Sheba, were deemed by Michelangelo to be as deserving as the ‘Gates of Paradise.’ Ghiberti’s doors are one of
the earliest works that explore linear perspective with orthogonal lines as “described by Alberti in his 1435 treatise” (Stokstad, *Art History* 630).

Among armored soldiers in battle, Saul stands on a chariot ordering his soldiers forward. The scene is set among rugged cliffs and a picturesque cityscape. Ghiberti creates several picture planes added recession with distant buildings, trees, and rocky cliffs. David appears in the full drama of beheading Goliath, as seen in the lower center portion of the panel, and is carved in higher relief to emphasize a close proximity to the viewer. Ghiberti’s panel adds innovative dimension to the scene as David is placed within the greater biblical context (Butterfield 27).

![Triumph of David](image)

*Figure 20: Paolo Uccello, Triumph of David. ca. 1440-50. Distemper on panel, 17 x 46 1/4 in. National Gallery, London.*

Paolo Uccello’s *Triumph of David* (**Figure 20**), provides a comprehensive depiction of David’s actions leading up to and after his slaying of Goliath, as detailed in I Samuel 17:40-54. This scene (as in Ghiberti’s panel) is depicted in a narrative format and like a story-book depiction of the biblical tale, is meant to be read from left to right. In this painting, David is dressed in a pink colored outfit and can be followed through the panel appearing four times as the events of the biblical narrative progress. Uccello’s *Triumph of David* details the story of David’s victory over Goliath through an experimentation of perspective. Similar to Uccello’s three part series of the *Battle of San Romano* (**Figure 21**), the horses and spatial depth are indicative of a “mathematical"
calculation of the scene (Stokstad, Art History 619). With Uccello’s Triumph of David, the biblical subject becomes a means of continuing his adoration of Brunelleschi’s perspective, and provides an intriguing look onto Renaissance artist techniques and interests. Delineated on an elongated panel, Uccello includes the many facets of the narrative such as David selecting the stones from the streambed and his return to Jerusalem. Lastly on the right, “the Philistines saw that their champion was dead and they fled” (I Samuel 17:51). Amidst a dream-like background with lush grass, flowing rivers, and delicate flowers, Uccello’s painting resembles that of a finely woven tapestry.

Antonio Pollaiuolo’s David (Figure 22) appears to resemble a sculpture of David and the head the Goliath translated into paint on panel. Pollaiuolo’s linear depiction of King David presents him as the victor although he is disconnected from the biblical setting of the scene. Dressed in a rich blue damask garment and burgundy overcoat, David is further separated from his native shepherd life. Pollaiuolo’s David is similar to the numerous anatomical and figure studies that the artist was known for, such as his engraving of The Battle of the Ten Nudes (c. 1465-70). With muscular legs and a
triumphant pose, David relates an air of consciousness that seemingly comes to fruition in Andrea del Verrocchio's *David* (Figure 23).

Unlike the relatively reserved statues of David by Donatello (Figures 11 and 13), Verrocchio's *David* relates a sense of assurance “if not smug satisfaction with the victory he has gained over the giant” (Covi 48). Standing in an active contrapposto position, David bears an intriguing smile which adds to an air of conceit. His sense-of-self figuratively radiates from head to toe as a knowing expression and brazen stance with tight-gripped sword creates a character with vitality (48-49). In Verrocchio’s sculpture, David's transformation into the leader of his people appears complete and he is no longer the meager shepherd from Bethlehem.
Accurate to the biblical narrative and similar to Donatello’s renditions, David is depicted as an adolescent. Commissioned by the Medici to stand in their Palazzo along with Donatello’s bronze *David*, Verrocchio’s sculpture can be seen to symbolize the endurance of the Medici family and of Florence (Kleiner and Mamiya 593-94). Aware of Donatello’s statue that stood in the courtyard of the Medici Palace, Verrocchio “was either inspired as artist or required by his patron to respect it as a model.” Verrocchio’s version can be interpreted as a “critical editing” of his predecessor’s (Covi 47). While both David’s stand in contrapposto, Donatello’s figure is distinctly more relaxed and quietly modeled. Donatello’s *David* is more compact when compared to Verrocchio’s whose spaced pose creates definite geometrical silhouettes. Verrocchio as if to exceed the earlier bronze sculpture, creates a far more nuanced depiction in both anatomy and detail. The confidence of Verrocchio’s *David* might be imbued with feelings of the artist himself (47-48).

Combining two-dimensional depictions and three-dimensional illusions, Andrea del Castagno and Andrea Mantegna’s figures of David are varying renditions of the David and Goliath theme. Castagno’s *David* (*Figure 24*), depicted on a leather ceremonial shield, portrays the young biblical hero with a sense of action and mobility and seems to prefigure Gianlorenzo Bernini’s marble *David* (*Figure 50*) from the Baroque period. The skewed foreshortening of the arm of Castango’s *David* is in part caused by the curve of the shield. David looks to the distance and is perhaps recalling his heroic deed while he swings his slingshot in his right hand and grasps the air with his left to add velocity to the swing. The gruesome head of Goliath lies between his legs connecting action and accomplishment. The rocky and dramatic landscape lends
Figure 24: Andrea del Castagno, *David*. ca. 1451. Ceremonial shield, tempera on leather on panel, 45 1/2 in. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

Figure 25: Andrea Mantegna, *David*. ca. 1490. Oil on canvas, 19 x 14 in. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

Figure 26: Andrea Mantegna, *Dead Christ*. ca. 1490. Tempera on canvas, 27 3/4 x 32 in. Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan.
an added level of interest that cannot be found in free-standing sculpture (Hartt and Wilkins 276-77). Painted in grisaille, Mantegna’s *David* (Figure 25) is reminiscent of sculptural reliefs from antiquity and David’s carefully toned physique recalls studies of classical nudes. The body of Goliath is severely foreshortened in space similar to Mantegna’s treatment of Christ’s body in his *Dead Christ* (Figure 26). David grips the head of Goliath by his hair and coolly peers at his victim who seems to have more emotion on his face in death than that of David in life.

Embodying a Gothic conception of idealized beauty, Hans Memling’s *Bathsheba at Her Bath* (Figure 28) delineates Bathsheba as an elegant nude. Located within a small room, a maid assists Bathsheba out of her covered bath and wraps her in a crisp
white garment whose pure hue matches that of Bathsheba’s skin (Wiemann). A dog ironically symbolizing fidelity, waits for Bathsheba whose loyalty to her husband Uriah is questioned by her affair with David. The gentle curve of Bathsheba’s stomach recalls “conventions for the nude female in Late Gothic art [that] exaggerated the child-bearing part of the body” (Snyder 103). Memling’s Bathsheba at Her Bath is believed to be part of a once larger painting that included his King David and a Young Boy (Figure 27) that has since been cut down. The distant scene of David on the balcony within Bathsheba at Her Bath was added in the seventeenth century (Wiemann). In their current state, the Memling fragments appear quite individual with David and Bathsheba seemingly unaware of the other’s presence.

Geertgen tot Sint Jans’ Tree of Jesse (Figure 29) provides a reimagined and fanciful interpretation of Christ’s lineage; a theme that was favored in Medieval art. Amidst a fertile garden, a most fruitful family tree sprouts from a slumbering Jesse. Following the figures upward, King David can be found as the first descendent and is suspended as if uncomfortably sitting on a tree limb and playing the harp (“The Tree of Jesse”). The characters wear extravagant garments that provide a window onto high Netherlandish fashion of the mid-fifteenth century (Snyder 182). Captivating fabrics like those of the black and white striped tights of Solomon who looks out to the viewer, and the indistinct spatial relationship creates a cacophony of images that does not cease to arrest one’s attention.

David’s harp and golden brocaded robe with fur-trim, hinting at his royalty, make him perhaps the most iconographically recognizable character within the composition. To the right of the painting stands a man that is presumably Isaiah who points to a
manuscript that contains his prophecy, “A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots” (Isaiah 11:1). Marian symbols abound and the garden location serves as a metaphor of Mary’s virginity and the peacock symbolizes Mary as Queen of Heaven. Rosary motifs are included such as delicate rosary beads that hang from a young woman’s arm as well as white and red roses that are draped on the figure with a falcon. This young woman who kneels in the pose of a donor figure is dressed as a nun and perhaps imagines the scene that unfolds while praying to the Virgin who serves as “the true flower of Jesse, holding her Child” (Snyder 182).
King David in Renaissance Art of the Sixteenth Century

As the Renaissance progressed, David continued to be used as a symbol of victory and strength while breaking free from previous composure and introspection. The High Renaissance, often characterized by exceptionality in artistic delineation and intellectual fervor, created its own “David” to serve an allegory for the times and political atmosphere. Perhaps it is Michelangelo Buonarroti who truly breathed fresh air into this character in his sculpture of David (Figure 30) that appears to be the most celebrated image of the biblical king. Michelangelo’s David is a monumental and mighty seventeen-foot marble man whose weight and breadth seems to transcend time and space. His body, chiseled to perfection, relates an idealized anatomical form. David’s eased contrapposto stance belies the action that will soon take place as he is presented like the calm before a storm. With a slingshot in his left hand and the fateful rock in his right, David looks to the side, presumably toward the giant Goliath, and seems to calculate his next move. Devoid of clothes and with limited iconographic symbols, quite possibly David has never looked more majestic.

Michelangelo’s David, begun in 1501, was carved from a ‘spoiled’ marble block quarried in Carrare in 1464. The sculpture was intended to be buttressed alongside the Cathedral of Florence, and the block was previously sculpted by Agostino di Duccio before Michelangelo completed the commission. As Frederick Hartt and David G. Wilkins suggest:

“It was hardly an ideal commission, for the piece of marble itself was tall but shallow and Michelangelo’s possibilities for designing a figure must have been somewhat compromised by the blocking out that Agostino di Duccio had completed before abandoning the project” (477).
Michelangelo, in essence, became a figurative David as he overcame his own Goliath with this colossal block of tainted stone. The mastery of Michelangelo’s artistry shines through this adversity as his vision comes to fruition in this remarkable work of art.

Figure 30: Michelangelo, *David*. 1501-04. Marble, height: approximately 17 ft. Accademia, Florence.
Completed in 1504, the location of Michelangelo’s *David* was moved to the front of the Palazzo dei Priori with Florentine approval. A copy of the sculpture still stands in the latter location as Michelangelo’s original creation is currently located in the Galleria dell’Accademia, Florence in a specially designed room for its display (Hartt and Wilkins 476-78). Until it was moved to the Accademia in 1873, Michelangelo’s *David* had been on display as public sculpture for over three-hundred and sixty years which led to considerable surface damage from atmospheric exposure. It is suggested that similar to Michelangelo’s *Pietà* (1498/99-1500), *David* had a glossy polish which has now but all been lost (Paoletti and Radke 388). One can imagine how such a sheen must have emphasized David’s musculely toned physique.

Following the Quattrocento depictions by Donatello and Verrocchio, King David was understood as a metaphor of Florentine strength and advancement. At this point in time, Michelangelo’s *David* might also be closely associated as a symbol of the triumph of the Florentine Republic over the “tyrannical” Medici family after their expulsion from power in 1494 (Partridge 116-17). Furthermore, *David* can be seen to represent Florence as the defender of civic liberty against the continued political and military threats of Milan, Siena, and Pisa (Stokstad, *Art History* 671).

Giorgio Vasari stated:

“'Without any doubt the figure has put in the shade every other statue, ancient or modern, Greek or Roman-- this was intended as a symbol of liberty for the Palace, signifying that just as David had protected his people and governed them justly, so whoever ruled Florence should vigorously defend the city and govern it with justice’” (qtd in Kleiner and Mamiya 622).

Michelangelo’s *David* was the first freestanding marble nude on this scale since antiquity and recalls classical forms, line, and physical perfection. With Michelangelo’s
David, “humanity [is] raised to a new power– a plane of superhuman grandeur and beauty” (Hartt and Wilkins 477). The viewer is left as if by a visual cliffhanger to surmise the victory won by this great man.

Contrary to previous sculptures of King David, Michelangelo’s marble David depicts the Bethlehem youth before the slaying of Goliath. Michelangelo later depicts King David in another approach in his fresco of David Slaying Goliath (Figure 31) from the Sistine Chapel ceiling. Rather than triumphantly standing with the head of Goliath in between his feet, here David is shown in full glory brandishing Goliath’s sword and about to deal the heavy blow. This mid-action portrayal relates a dynamic approach of retelling the biblical scene from I Samuel 17:41-58 rather than some Quattrocento works of art that depict a time after the action has taken place and thereby relate a sense of closure.

Michelangelo’s marble David seemingly serves as a precursor to the climactic scene on the Sistine Chapel ceiling. The over-head perspective in which the viewer is intended to see this painting should be imagined in order to fully appreciate Michelangelo’s illusionary techniques of depth and foreshortening. David’s slingshot lies in front of Goliath drawing the viewer’s eye into the composition. To the right of the Philistine tent, there are two soldiers looking on to the battle that add visual interest. Michelangelo’s David Slaying Goliath portrays the biblical hero as a staunch opponent against formidable odds.

Located in a spandrel between the entrance wall and right wall of the Sistine Chapel facing towards the altar, Michelangelo systematically and skillfully utilizes spatial boundaries as he had done previously with the block of marble for his David sculpture
Figure 31: Michelangelo, *David Slaying Goliath*. 1508-12. Ceiling fresco from the Sistine Chapel, Rome.

Figure 32: Michelangelo, *Judith and Holofernes*. 1508-12. Ceiling fresco, Sistine Chapel, Rome.
Michelangelo modified his composition “to shape the field, setting a triangle” in which David stands over Goliath who is set at the base. Across the vault in the opposite spandrel is Michelangelo’s *Judith and Holofernes* (Figure 32) that serves as a foil biblically and artistically. While the artist’s *David and Goliath* takes place mid-action, his *Judith and Holofernes* occurs after the fact when Judith and her maidservant are leaving the enemy tent with Holofernes’ head on a platter (Chastel 161-63).

While considerably anticlimactic as compared to Michelangelo’s renditions of David, Giovanni Battista Cima da Conegliano’s *David and Jonathan* (Figure 33) is uncommon in its subject matter regarding David’s friendship with Saul’s son. Taking place after David’s triumph, he carries the severed head of Goliath while talking to Jonathan; a scene that is not explicit within the Bible. Conegliano creates his own
storyline that is quite plausible as the I Samuel 17:54 text states that “David took the head of the Philistine and brought it to Jerusalem,” and is soon followed by David and Jonathan’s covenant from I Samuel 18:3. After his victory, David forms a profound bond with Jonathan who was fighting in Saul’s army. The two walk side by side within Conegliano’s painting as if within deep conversation. Jonathan appears older than David and holds a spear like that which Saul later used to threaten David’s life and even Jonathan’s life in I Samuel 20:33 when Jonathan tried to make a plea on David’s behalf (“David and Jonathan, Conegliano.”).

Lucas Cranach’s *David and Bathsheba* (Figure 34) from 1526 similar to Geertgen tot Sint Jans’ *Tree of Jesse* (Figure 29) showcases a Northern interest in precise detail including a historical record of fashion. Within what appears to be a garden surrounded by walls, perhaps on a roof like that described in II Samuel 11:2, a fully and elegantly clothed Bathsheba is joined by other lavish women while a maidservant cleans her feet. Featuring a decoration referred to as “slashing” the ladies’ garments feature intentional slits through which fabric from an undergarment was pulled (Laver 77). While more prevalent in male attire, this convention was adopted by style-conscious females who sought to wear this “extravagant fashion” (79). The history of this style dates to the victorious Battle of Grandson (1476) of the Swiss over Charles the Bold, Duke of Burgundy in which the winners used looted patches of expensive fabric to mend their tattered clothes. Most popular in the early 1500s in Germany, Cranach depicts a fashion that would soon be replaced with the development of the ruff (76-79).

In Venice, Titian (Tiziano Vecellio) relates another interpretation of the biblical narrative. His *David and Goliath* (Figure 35), originally commissioned as part of a set of
Figure 35: Titian, *David and Goliath*. 1542. Oil on canvas, 118 1/8 x 112 3/8 in. Sacristy of Sta. Maria della Salute, Venice.

Figure 36: Titian, *Cain Slaying Abel*. 1542. Oil on canvas, 117 3/4 x 111 1/8 in. Sacristy of Sta. Maria della Salute, Venice.

Figure 37: Titian, *Sacrifice of Isaac*. 1542. Oil on canvas, 129 1/4 x 112 3/8 in. Sacristy of Sta. María della Salute, Venice.
Old Testament themed paintings, was created for the Augustinian Church of Santo Spiritu in Isola and is currently located in the Sacristy of Sta. Maria della Salute, Venice. In a sea of vivid and sumptuous Venetian hues, this painting from the end of Titian’s life imparts a unique sense of spiritualism with a visual suggestion of divine intervention. David is depicted as a powerful young man and looks up to the parted clouds which seem to imply a Godly presence. Out of a misty sky comes a heavenly aura which casts a golden glow on the rest of the painting. In Titian’s depiction, David appears to clasp his hands in a gesture of prayer thanking God for His beneficent victory (Hope 21-22).

While offering a glorious image in his *David and Goliath*, Titian also provides a very graphic and grotesque depiction of Goliath’s corpse. The giant’s body lies lifeless on a ragged cliff while his head streams with blood and has a ghastly pallor. Goliath’s hand seemingly falls out of the painting and draws one’s eye into the scene. Titian’s *David and Goliath* was intended to be paired with the artist’s other Old Testament themed paintings to be viewed on the ceiling of the Church in Isola including *Cain Slaying Abel* (*Figure 36*) and the *Sacrifice of Isaac* (*Figure 37*) (Hartt and Wilkins 614-15). Such powerful scenes must be even more commanding when viewed as a group.

A competitor to Titian and also highly esteemed during his own time, Paolo Veronese (Paolo Caliari) is remembered for his vivid paintings that recount Venetian opulence in the sixteenth century (Salomon). Amidst a peaceful landscape with architectural ruins that seem to hint at the location’s age, Veronese’s *Anointing of David* (*Figure 38*) pictures the future king of Israel as he is sanctified by Samuel. Kneeling to receive the ritual libation as described in I Samuel 16:13, the figure of David though centrally placed within the composition is not the only aspect of the painting that catches
one’s eye. A statuesque female holding a child reminiscent to a putto is only one of several characters that are not discussed in the biblical text. The sophisticated garments of the figures are exquisitely rendered. Artist and writer Marco Boschini when describing Veronese’s works in 1660 pronounced: “He is the treasurer of the art and of the colors. This is not painting, it is magic that casts a spell on people who see it” (qtd. in Hartt and Wilkins 638). While his colors might excite the earthly senses, Veronese’s profound piety cultivates the scene (638-39).

Girolamo da Santacroce, also active in Venice, presents a different variation in his painting of King David (Figure 39). Besides being a fierce fighter, David was respected as a talented musician centuries after he had played. Santacroce’s David is a vision of opulence as he holds a luxurious gilded lyre, the accurate instrument according to the biblical narrative, and wears expensive fabrics. His seemingly Oriental turban and crown appears to refer to Venetian trade connections to the East (Paoletti and Radke 324). Behind David lies a moody and atmospheric landscape that recesses deeply into

Figure 38: Paolo Veronese, *The Anointing of David*. ca. 1555-60. Oil on canvas, 68 x 143 1/4 in. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.
space. As compared to Lucas van Leyden’s earlier elucidation on the theme (Figure 40), while Girolamo da Santacroce commemorates the biblical king in a rich array of Venetian colors, van Leyden’s monochrome engraving examines the narrative with greater breadth. A brooding Saul sits enthroned within his court while David plays a harp to calm his nerves. With a spear in hand, viewers learn that van Leyden is referring to the particular story from I Samuel 18:10-11 after David’s victory over Goliath in which Saul’s jealousy mounts and he makes an attempt on David’s life (Snyder 422-23).
King David and Mannerism

The period known as Mannerism derives from the Italian *maniera*, as referred to by Giorgio Vasari. This burgeoning style began in Italy and dates to the later part of the sixteenth century in which works of art were created that responded to artistic precedents like Michelangelo’s *Last Judgment* (1536-41) and late works by Raphael (L. Murray, *High Renaissance and Mannerism* 124-26). Depictions of King David during Mannerism developed narratives regarding Bathsheba and provided artists with a subject in which to depict the female nude that oftentimes included other female characters besides Bathsheba (Osborne 302). The impact of the Protestant Reformation on society is believed to have influenced the stylistic shift that seems to respond to “the unsettled political and religious conditions in Europe” (Stokstad, *Art History* 693). Combining theatricality, entangled compositions, and elongation in form, the art of Mannerism fashions intriguing visual relationships with saturated colors (Finocchio).

Francesco Salviati explored the character of King David through a series of frescos for the Palazzo Sacchetti in Rome known as *The Life of King David* (*Figure 41*). A close friend to Vasari, Salviati spent time with him in Rome where they admired works by Raphael. Salviati traveled further north where he was influenced by works by Parmigianino who was also practicing in this new *maniera*. Known for his “elaborate decorative style, involved imagery, and fantastic perspective,” Salviati’s fresco cycle of David uses these elements to present the biblical king in a curious light (L. Murray, *High Renaissance and Mannerism* 126).
Figure 41: Francesco Salviati, Fresco cycle of *The Life of King David*. 1552-54. Palazzo Sacchetti, Rome.

Figure 42: Francesco Salviati, *The Story of Bathsheba*, from the fresco cycle of *The Life of King David*. 1552-54. Palazzo Sacchetti, Rome.
Francesco Salviati’s *The Life of King David* is infused with allure and provocative imagery which relates to the Mannerist style that often exploited sensuality in form and subject matter. Gone is the rationality of the Renaissance in this Palazzo as Salviati’s frescos lack consistent proportion in relation to surrounding architectural elements and appear as though they are crowdedly hanging in ornate frames that are actually painted (Hartt and Wilkins 678-80). The architecture of the Palazzo Sacchetti itself by Antonio da Sangallo (the Younger) as described by Heinrich Wölflin, was also formally disjointed as “mezzanine windows were sometimes audaciously left floating in the air” and “all structural support was removed from whole storeys” (125-26).

Instead of extolling David in his battle with Goliath, Salviati focuses upon the biblical narrative concerning David’s affair with Bathsheba in his *The Story of Bathsheba* (Figure 42). In the center portion, the artist places David on a high balcony at the top right of the composition. Overlooking a suggestive scene of bathing women, sexuality is
surely a motivation and the viewer of this fresco as well as David might enjoy this salacious display. In *David and Bathsheba*, located to the right, Bathsheba is shown in a narrative format and is depicted four times. She surreptitiously climbs a tall and serpentine stone staircase and makes her way to the balcony where David is waiting. Another Palazzo Sacchetti vignette by Salviati of *David Dancing in Front of the Ark of the Covenant* (Figure 43) relates the story regarding the tensions between David and his wife Michal who admonishes David for associating with the lower members of society while celebrating (II Samuel 6:16). Michal peers out of her window to chide David who looks back while almost losing his footing out of Salviati’s painted frame. These themes relate a different embodiment of the seemingly righteous king who is perhaps more human than faithful tend to believe.

Jacopo Zucchi’s *Bathsheba at Her Bath* (Figure 44) transforms the simple biblical story that included “a woman bathing” to that multiple bathers at various stages of disrobe (II Samuel 11:2). A maidservant coyly looks out to the viewer in a scene that stretches the limits of Bathsheba’s bath. King David, a small figure on the left balcony is most certainly subsidiary to the painting’s foreground. Jan Massys, the son of Quentin Massys, traveled to Italy and France and practiced in the Mannerist style that started to grow in the North especially in his native Antwerp. “Based on an ideal of elegant artifice,” Massys’ *David and Bathsheba* (Figure 45) provides a brazen image that is distinct to the artist and to Northern Mannerism (“Jan Massys”). As compared to Hans Memling’s *Bathsheba at her Bath* (Figure 28), Massys’ Bathsheba who appears on display, also has a lengthy and even more disproportionate physique that recalls the Gothic precedent for the female nude. A messenger, presumably one that was sent by
Figure 44: Jacopo Zucchi, *Bathsheba at Her Bath*. Oil on panel, 42 3/8 x 57 1/8 in. Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica, Rome.
David, points to the balcony on which David stands (II Samuel 11:4). Massys’ continued attention to landscape and details as well as the Antwerp Mannerist use of “abrasive coloristic effects” combines older styles with that of the new (Wisse).

As if a visual response to David’s trespasses as delineated in the latter suggestive Mannerist paintings, *The Prophet Nathan Admonishes King David* (Figure 46) by the Venetian painter Jacopo Palma (Il Giovane) examines the repercussions of David’s actions (Paoletti and Radke 486). An enthroned King David wears a luxurious red velvet robe with ermine trim and appears considerably older than in previous depictions. He appears to be earnestly listening to Nathan who is sent by God to rebuke him for his misdeeds (II Samuel 12:1). Within this episode found in II Samuel 12:1-25, Nathan explains to David that his actions have “despised the word of the Lord” (II Samuel 12:9) and his illegitimate son with Bathsheba “shall die” (II Samuel 12:15). David’s downcast face that resembles that of the decorative grotesque on his throne
shows the king at a moment of great humiliation. Moreover, this narrative reminds viewers that all deeds are judged by God.

**King David in Baroque Art**

The Counter-Reformation and the subsequent reorganization of the Roman Catholic Church served as a backdrop for the Baroque period in the history of art (Stokstad, *Art History* 744). In a movement aimed to restore the Roman Catholic faith and importance of the “Mother Church” in society, works of art during the Counter-Reformation period often reflected concurrent values while instilling passion, sacredness, and a level of immediacy into religious images (Paoletti and Radke 513-14). Anthony Blunt affirms, “Art had, in the most literal sense… become once more the handmaid of religion” (131).

Initiated by Pope Paul III (papacy 1534-1549), the cardinals and bishops of the Roman Catholic Church convened at the Council of Trent which was held in three sessions (1545-47, 1551-52, and 1562-63). The Council redefined and revalidated Church doctrine and practices while addressing Protestant concerns towards religious art. Many Protestants were rejecting the use of images in worship and some were even resorting to iconoclasm in fear of idolatry and the violation the Second Commandment (Paoletti and Radke 513; Noll 202-03).

The Roman Catholic Church understood the value that religious art had in inspiring and educating the faithful, and subsequently rejected the Protestant abandonment of religious images (Paoletti and Radke 513-14). Fittingly, images of King David could be employed for its representations of strength and virtue at a time when
the Roman Catholic Church aimed to be associated with just those characteristics.

During the Baroque period, the emotion and pathos associated with David was explored in keeping with developing styles of this artistic movement. Baroque artists often “treated viewers as participants in the artwork, and the space of the work included the world beyond the frame” (Stokstad, *Art History* 744). The latter is explored in *David with the Head of Goliath* by Caravaggio (Michelangelo Merisi) (Figure 47) where a young David grasps Goliath’s bloody and severed head by its hair and seemingly offers it to the viewer. Set in a dark background marked with Caravaggio’s use of tenebrism, the scene appears immediate as though occurring before the viewer’s eyes. This visual
concept heightens the drama of the scene that portrays David as a contemplative victor (Fried 61).

The "scholarly consensus holds" that *David with the Head of Goliath* dates to the end of the artist's career from 1608-09 during the end of his stay in Naples. Some prominent art historians including Keith Christiansen and David Stone however, have dated this painting early to 1606, just months after the street fight in which Caravaggio slayed Ranuccio Tomassoni (Fried 61). The face of David can be understood as a self-portrait of a youthful Caravaggio and that the head of Goliath that of a self-portrait of an adult Caravaggio which creates a most complex relationship between the artist and his art. Conceivably "as a mirror of reality, it vicariously fulfills the threat of 'severing his own head to present it to a judge' for the capital punishment awarded Caravaggio over the murder of Tomassoni" whom he had slain in 1606 (Hunt, *Caravaggio* 132). The legal ramifications of murder were understandably severe and included beheading as a punishment (Fried 61). Caravaggio's *David with the Head of Goliath* imparts a tragic sense that is even more symbolic if the latter analogies are understood. When examined carefully, Caravaggio appears to sign his name with Goliath's blood (Hunt, *Caravaggio* 132). Considering that Tomassoni “bled to death from Caravaggio’s sword-thrust,” the latter detail is quite expressive (Fried 61).

Caravaggio’s painting invites the viewer to participate in the interpretation of the scene in which David (or a young Caravaggio) offers the head of Goliath (or that of the artist himself or possibly Tomassoni) to his audience. Goliath’s pitiable appearance and David’s introspective gaze calls upon one to consider and to question David’s gallantry that in previous works of art, such as Verrocchio’s bronze *David* (*Figure 23*), have been
thoroughly celebrated. As a deeply personal piece, perhaps Caravaggio like David is rethinking his actions (Hunt, *Caravaggio* 132-33).

Caravaggio’s *David Victorious Over Goliath* (Figure 48) is a quieter rendition of the narrative that was created before Caravaggio’s incident with Ranuccio Tomassoni. Amidst inky blackness, David appears as if clandestine and ties Goliath’s head to take as a trophy. David’s face is obscured in shadow while the head of Goliath is clearly discernible and marked with the wound from David’s fateful slingshot blow. The Museo del Prado in which the painting is located describes David “not as a hero but rather as a young man with a serene aspect who has vanquished Evil thanks to his cleverness and Divine Aid” (“Caravaggio: David Victorious Over Goliath”). Almost foreboding in nature,
Caravaggio’s *David Victorious Over Goliath* can be seen as a precursor to his *David with the Head of Goliath* that speaks more about the artist than the Bible alone (Fried 61).

The poignancy and innovation of Caravaggio’s art influenced other artists and helped to define what is stylistically considered to be Baroque. Cristofano Allori’s *Judith with the Head of Holofernes* (Figure 49) looks back and responds to Caravaggio’s *David with the Head of Goliath* (Figure 47) after Caravaggio’s death in 1610. “Keenly aware of Caravaggio’s realist precedent, “Allori’s head of Holofernes functions as a self-portrait of the artist while his alluring Judith is modeled after Allori’s mistress Maria di Giovanni Mazzafirri” (Fried 25). According to seventh century art historian Filippo Baldinucci, Mazzafirri had left Allori before *Judith with the Head of Holofernes* was completed making the painting even more symbolic (24-25).

Believed to be a “profoundly Christian man,” the art of Gianlorenzo Bernini was “conditioned by his religion” and can be seen to be completed by his love for God. James Lees-Milne elaborates further:

> As a monk dedicates his whole being to God, so Bernini devoted every moment of his life to his art. He would work for seven hours on end without pausing to take food or drink. Abstracted, he would refuse to talk, and when pressed to attend to some irrelevant business would reply brusquely: ‘Do not touch me! I am in love’ (150).

Commissioned to work extensively on the piazza and colonnade as well as the interior of Saint Peter’s Basilica, the importance of Bernini’s religious art was paramount. The revitalization and renovation of the city of Rome was a supreme aspect of the Roman Catholic Church’s efforts of placing the Church as the capital of the Western world (Stokstad, *Art History* 745). As the site of religious pilgrimages and the seat of Roman
Catholicism, the urban renewal of Rome by architects and artists placed Rome as the center of artistic creativity (Sorabella).

Unlike previous sculptures of David, Gianlorenzo Bernini’s *David* (Figure 50) relates a novel level of dynamic action that takes place before the viewer.

Commissioned by Cardinal Scipione Borghese whose likeness was used as a basis of David’s facial features, Bernini’s sculpture embodies the sense of vitality and movement further explored in Baroque art (Haskell 31). Bernini’s *David* appears as if from a theatrical performance in a mid-action portrayal of swinging his loaded slingshot recalling the biblical description. David’s contorted body relays a masterful anatomical delineation and liveliness to the event. With pursed lips and look of serious concentration, David is deeply focused on his enemy (Kleiner and Mamiya 695).

While distinctly animated and commanding attention from different angles in order to appreciate Bernini’s mastery of carving, *David* is perhaps most properly seen
from “the correct standpoint” of viewing from a frontward position as if it might be most
appropriate and effective to picture an athlete from the front (Wittkower 5-6). Rudolph
Wittkower believed that Bernini’s *David* “has only one principal view, and this insistence
on a single viewpoint remained a fundamental principle of Bernini” (5). Bernini’s *David*
was highly influenced by other works the artist had seen including the *Borghese Warrior*
(*Figure 51*) and Annibale Caracci’s *Polyphemus Attacking Acis and Galatea* (*Figure
52*) (5-7, 37). The former sculpture, based on a Hellenistic original, was found in the
early seventeenth century under the auspices of Cardinal Borghese which relates to its
appellation and accessibility to Bernini as it was on view in the Villa Borghese (“Fighting
Warrior”). The enormity of Polyphemus’ mythical form that would have been seen from
below is reconsidered and nuanced by Bernini whose careful attention to physical detail
creates a figure that looks as though it could step out of stone (Wittkower 5-6).

Artemisia Gentileschi painted her own version of *David and Bathsheba* (*Figure
53*) that serves as an exceptional occurrence of a Davidic themed work created by a
woman artist. Gentileschi’s intriguing interpretation of the biblical narrative from a
female perspective provides a unique insight “at a time when women painters were
rare” (“Artemisia Gentileschi’s David and Bathsheba”). The viewer is drawn to
Bathsheba with her extended leg as she is seated on a balcony as maidservants assist
with her toilette. While semi-nude and quite attractive, Bathsheba does not appear
promiscuous as found in the Mannerist renditions of the narrative such as Jacopo
Zucchi’s *Bathsheba at her Bath* (*Figure 44*). The poetic tranquility of Gentileschi’s *David
and Bathsheba* is perhaps the most pragmatic rendition thus far.
King David, a mere spot on the balcony in the far distance, takes a subsidiary role in Artemisia Gentileschi’s composition. This subject matter as well as the minimal focus on male figures in Gentileschi’s painting might be interpreted as a characteristic element of works of art by women artists from this period. As explained by Linda Nochlin, there was a “complete unavailability to aspiring women artists of any nude models at all” (24). Understanding human anatomy is integral in artistic growth and this limitation “deprived” women artists who were seeking greater knowledge of art. The choice of subjects with female characters is therefore understandable considering that women artists would be able to study their own physical form (24-25).
The Rape Trial of 1612 in which Orazio Gentileschi brought charges against painter Agostino Tassi for the rape of his daughter Artemisia Gentileschi was notable when it occurred as well as today. Scholars like Mary Garrard are reexamining the deliberations through an objective and contemporary lens (403-06). These proceedings often “color the interpretation of her entire body of work,” and might even be interpreted as a factor toward the iconography of her *David and Bathsheba* (Fortunati, Pomeroy, and Strinati 198-99). It is important however to remain objective when viewing works by this very talented artist.

Although the Dutch Republic had a growing population of those who abandoned Roman Catholicism in favor of Protestantism, patrons of art who kept their allegiance to the Church of Rome continued to commission works of art of religious subject matters. The Roman Catholic painter Hendrick ter Brugghen from Haarlem went to Florence and Rome and returned to his native Netherlands and spread the Italian Baroque style that
was typified by Caravaggio. *David Playing His Harp Surrounded by Angels* (Figure 54) by Hendrick ter Brugghen relies heavily on Caravaggio’s conventions of tenebrism and drama (Stokstad, *Art History* 779). On closer inspection however, there is little action taking place and ter Brugghen’s painting is essentially that which was found in Girolamo da Santacroce’s *David* (Figure 39) embellished with angels, luxurious fabrics, and objet d’art. The multi-figured composition by ter Brugghen is set on a shallow stage and recalls that of Caravaggio’s *The Musicians* (Figure 55). This earlier painting by Caravaggio “described by contemporaries as simply ‘una musica’ (a music piece)” can be seen to serve as an “allegory of music,” and ter Brugghen’s *David Playing His Harp Surrounded by Angels* might also serve as an elucidation on that theme (“Caravaggio: The Musicians”). While this painting may in fact be a portrayal of King David, his old age and the inclusion of extraneous figures creates a scene that is not solely biblical.

The Dutch master Rembrandt van Rijn explored Davidic themes within his art that can be keenly interpreted to reflect his life and times. Comprising some of the most
emotional renditions of the biblical narratives, King David is once again reconsidered.

Regarding the importance of David as a figure of spiritual and regal fame:

In the complex political mix of the Dutch Republic, with its stadhouder system and noble House of Orange, the biblical lessons of prideful rulers held lasting lessons (Perlove and Silver 115).

On the subject of David and Saul alone, Rembrandt created two renditions that date nearly twenty years apart which emphasize the artist’s stylistic changes. Rembrandt’s earlier *David Playing the Harp Before Saul* (Figure 56) provides an image of a troubled Saul and a young David who plays in shadow on the lower left of the composition. The dark interior and subtle lighting hint at the tense atmosphere of the meeting. With a spear gripped tightly in hand, Saul looks to David as if deciding whether or not to throw the weapon recalling Lucas van Leyden’s engraving (Figure 40) (115-17).
Rembrandt delineates an image that visualizes the contrast of the “evil spirit” from God that descends upon Saul and the guiding spirit that brings forth David’s music (I Samuel 16:14). A light falls on David in such as manner as if the hands that play the harp were those of God (Perlove and Silver 117). The second David Playing the Harp Before Saul (Figure 57) is a scene in which the darkness between the characters is deepened even more so and conveyed using chiaroscuro and loose brushstrokes that can be increasingly found in works by Rembrandt from this period. While still holding the spear, Saul’s grip has loosened and his mental state appears to have worsened as he holds his other hand to his face as if in pain (Hunt, Rembrandt 111). In this rendition, David is seen from the front while another intriguing detail is that of Saul’s Oriental robes which were introduced in Rembrandt’s earlier painting. As if in costume and recreating the biblical scene before an audience, Rembrandt’s scenes are reenacted at close proximity to the viewer.

Dating to 1642, Rembrandt’s David and Jonathan (Figure 58) was completed shortly after the death of his wife Saskia and conveys an image of grief (“David and Jonathan: Rembrandt”). Rembrandt provides a poignant rendition for the biblical text: “He bowed three times, and they kissed each other, and wept with each other; David wept the more” (I Samuel 20:41). A turbaned Jonathan embraces David whose back is to the viewer and weeps as if a mourner for their beloved. With spurs on his boots, David appears as though he is prepared to depart and wears a sword similar to the one Jonathan had given him earlier (I Samuel 18:4). A darkened sky completes the despairing mood and the rock feature to the right of the composition can be seen to allude to the stone at which Jonathan and David had planned to meet (I Samuel 20:19).
The temple in the distant background perhaps serves as a prophesy for the Temple of Jerusalem that would be built by David’s son Solomon; a detail that seemingly alludes to a chance of new life even after great loss (Perlove and Silver 118-20). Rembrandt’s *David and Jonathan* searches David’s “human, emotional capacity as the future king of Israel and his special role in Divine Providence” (120).

Considered to be “one of the most popular biblical subjects in Dutch art,” artists including Rembrandt, Jan Steen, and Peter Paul Rubens all painted works of art that interpret the David and Bathsheba narrative (Sutton, Vergara, and Jensen 44). Rembrandt’s Bathsheba (*Figure 59*) is not the self-indulgent temptress that could be found in the Mannerist period, rather is a character that appears to call upon one’s compassion. Within a dim chamber, a seated Bathsheba holds a letter and is deep in thought. In essence, it is the viewer that becomes voyeur and takes the part of an
absent David. Bathsheba’s face is pensive if not saddened perhaps foreshadowing the complications of her affair (Perlove and Silver 121).

Eric Jan Sluijter suggests that Rembrandt’s scene takes place just before Bathsheba “sent and told David” (II Samuel 11:5) that she was pregnant (43). Bathsheba appears nearly within an arm’s reach of the viewer which allows for close psychological and physical analysis (43-44). Sluijter further explains:

Here Bathsheba is no longer the ignoble seductress she was in earlier depictions, but rather the victim of her own beauty, a beauty that no one can resist, least of all the viewer of the painting (45).

Like David in Rembrandt’s *David and Jonathan*, the artist’s Bathsheba is most sympathetic as the mother of Solomon and an ancestor to Christ. Bathsheba’s “swelling belly and swollen breasts” prefigure conditions of child-bearing and might also refer to the pregnancy of Rembrandt’s mistress Hendrickje Stoffels during the year of the painting’s completion (Perlove and Silver 123). Stoffels was rebuked by the Church for her promiscuity and the letter in Bathsheba’s hand can serve as “a possible personal allusion” to Stoffels’ condemnation (Hunt, *Rembrandt* 98).

Marrying history and genre painting, Jan Steen’s *Bathsheba After the Bath* (Figure 60) conveys “the relevance of the biblical story to contemporary life,” and a focus on Bathsheba “as a married woman facing a moral dilemma” (Chapman, Kloek, and Wheelock 132). A seated Bathsheba looks out to the viewer while a maidservant appears to cut her toenails and she is seemingly unaware of the small dog and older woman who call for her attention. With a bold expression, exposed breast, kicked off shoe that “symbolizes lasciviousness,” and an ornate fountain that “alludes to female fecundity,” Steen’s Bathsheba is surely not the melancholic character delineated by
Rembrandt (“Jan Steen: Bathsheba After the Bath”). Steen’s painting could easily be mistaken for a secular “high-life genre painting, with its seventeenth-century interior setting and woman’s costume,” however Bathsheba’s letter indicates the subject matter that bears the inscription: “alder/Schonte/Bersabe/omdat” (Sutton, Vergara, and Jensen 44).

The biblical account does not indicate that David had sent Bathsheba a letter (II Samuel 11:2-4), but this convention was adopted by numerous Dutch artists that related an interest in the theme of love letters. The art of letter writing and reading was highly respected and often practiced in solitude, however the characters in Steen’s painting appear most deliberately placed (Chapman, Kloek, and Wheelock 132-34). The maidservant seems to hint at Bathsheba’s vanity while the old woman is depicted like
that of a procuress who might be offering advice regarding love. By ignoring the dog who serves a symbol of fidelity and the old woman who implies earthly pleasures, Bathsheba appears at the cusp of a decision that would ultimately cost the life of her husband and her unborn child (Sutton, Vergara, and Jensen 44-45).

Peter Paul Rubens’ *Bathsheba at the Fountain* (**Figure 61**) combines the elements previously found in Jan Steen’s painting through his own artistic vision. An expectedly ‘Rubenesque’ Bathsheba is found on a rooftop like that described in the Bible, while a maidservant grooms her long hair and a young African boy hands her a letter that is presumably David’s. Rubens catches the pivotal moment before Bathsheba learns of David’s request and the energetic dog in the foreground appears leery of the unexpected guest. With painterly brushstrokes and a vibrancy in color subdued by the tones of the natural looking stone architecture, *Bathsheba at the Fountain* is a rendition that is a distinctly Rubens creation. Working as a Roman Catholic artist with “international clientele” from London to Spain, Rubens’ paintings retain biblical themes among a broad spectrum of historical and mythological subjects (Liedtke).

The subject of David and Abigail, as interpreted by Rubens (**Figure 62**), provided an opportunity to showcase the “prosperous Netherlands which delighted in images of abundant food, rich clothing, fine animals, and the other good things of life” (Debray 149). The I Samuel 25 narrative occurs while David is still trying to avert Saul and comes into contact with Nabal, a wealthy landowner and husband to Abigail, who refuses to give to David and his men provisions. Fearing a confrontation, a very demonstrative Abigail went to David with sustenance and asks forgiveness of her husband whose very name she explains indicates that “folly is with him” (I Samuel
She supplied “two hundred loaves, two skins of wine, five sheep ready dressed, five measures of parched grain, one hundred clusters of raisins, and two hundred cakes of figs,” loaded on two donkeys (I Samuel 25:18). The plentiful bounty just hinted at in Rubens’ painting has remained fresh all these years.

Abigail, on bended knee, entreats David in Rubens’ *The Meeting of David and Abigail* and points to the loaves of bread that she has brought. The bearded soldiers of David outfitted in gear reminiscent to that of Roman warriors serve as a contrast to the silken fabrics worn by Abigail and the women. Art historian Michael Jaffé likens Rubens’ image to that of ancient mythology, as “Rubens’ vision warns us to savour the story of Abigail and David with the legend of Venus and Mars” (863). Separated into two segments with Abigail’s envoy to the left and David’s mighty men to the right, the center of the composition marks the joining of two parties with David attempting to assist Abigail to her feet who would later become his wife (I Samuel 25:42).
Embodying the gradual shift from biblical subjects and history paintings to landscape paintings at the end of the Baroque period, the *Landscape with David at the Cave of Adullam* by Claude Lorrain (Claude Gellée) (Figure 63) is a rendition in which the narrative from II Samuel 23:13-17 appears secondary to the nature on view. Amidst a seemingly endless horizon and lush landscape, the diminutive scale of the figures appears to intimate the smallness of humankind in the scope of the universe and God’s creations (“Claude Lorraine: Landscape with David”). David, located on the right of the composition and wearing a crimson cape and golden crown, stands with his followers and raises his hands as if to say, “O that someone would give me water to drink from the well of Bethlehem that is by the gate!” (II Samuel 23:15). Ashamed of having endangered the lives of the three servants seen standing before him who grant his request, David later offers the water to God and refuses to drink it. Claude Lorrain traveled to Italy and settled in Rome where he became a studio assistant to Agostino...
Tassi; the aforementioned offender in the case with Artemisia Gentileschi. Working alongside Poussin and influenced by Annibale Carracci and Domenichino, Turner’s cultured style “exerted considerable influence on landscape artists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries” such as J.M.W. Turner (“Claude Lorraine”).

**Conclusion: King David Reimagined**

After the Renaissance and Baroque periods, works of art regarding King David are relatively few in number compared to the growing secular tradition in subject matter. Those that do reflect on the biblical king, look back closely to the primary text to create images within new styles. Artist and poet William Blake looked to Psalm 18 for his *David Delivered Out of Many Waters* (*Figure 64*) that blends Old and New Testament themes. Psalm 18 addresses David’s thanksgiving to the Lord for delivering him from his enemies including Saul. This visionary depiction substitutes God’s deliverance with that of Christ who comes to rescue David from the waters below and rides upon seven cherubim. Blake’s original interpretations are sure to have influenced modern artists (“William Blake: David Delivered Out of Many Waters”).

Reminiscent to the art found in Medieval manuscripts, bibles reprinted during the nineteenth century included illustrations to supplement the text. Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld’s *Jonathan’s Covenant with David* (*Figure 65*) provides a sentimental image of the I Samuel 20:42 account that includes the biblical excerpt just below the scene. English Bibles in the Gilded Age like those illustrated by J. James Tissot and Gustave Doré brought biblical images to the homes of the faithful in both Europe and America. These illustrated bibles came out of an age of increased activity in biblical translation
Figure 64: William Blake, *David Delivered Out of Many Waters*. ca. 1805. Pen, ink, and watercolor on paper, 16 1/4 in x 13 3/4 in. Tate Modern, London.

Figure 65: Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld, *Jonathan’s Covenant with David*. 1860. Woodcut.

Figure 66: J. James Tissot, *Michal Despises David*. 1898. Watercolor.

Figure 67: Gustave Doré, *David with the Head of Goliath*. 1865. Engraving.
that marked “the first major revision of the standard Protestant English translation that have been created by King James’ scholars in 1611” (Lupas 7). Tissot’s Michal Despises David (Figure 66) provides a colorful rendition from the perspective of Michal of the narrative eluded to in Salviati’s David Dancing Before the Ark of the Covenant (Figure 43), and Doré’s black and white lithograph of David and the Head of Goliath is a dramatic reinterpretation of David’s victory.

Paul Cézanne created a progressive spin of the Bathsheba narrative (Figure 68). While the subject matter and Bathsheba’s nudity is not unlike that previously found by Memling (Figure 28) and Rembrandt (Figure 59), Cézanne’s impasto application of paint and perspectival experimentation is surely avant-garde. In this painting, Bathsheba languidly reclines and rests upon a rocky landscape that is reduced to blocks of saturated color. Picasso also elucidated on the Bathsheba theme in his David
and Bathsheba (Figure 69) that serves as a direct response to Lucas Cranach’s sixteenth century painting (Figure 34). Part of a series of thirteen states, Picasso’s lithograph dates from a period lasting from the late 1940s to the early 1960s in which he specifically looked to works by “past masters” and responded with his own creations (“Pablo Picasso: David and Bathsheba”).

The twentieth century marked a rise of Jewish artists who provided their own readings of David’s story. Jacques Lipchitz’s Study for David and Goliath (Figure 70) serves as a metaphor regarding World War II. A larger, completed version of this work was on view at the Paris Salon of 1934 where the artist placed a swastika on the chest.
of Goliath. The artist explains that this work exemplified his “hatred of fascism and [his] conviction that the David of freedom would triumph over the Goliath of oppression” (“Jacques Lipchitz: David and Goliath”). On a more poetic note, Marc Chagall's *David and Bathsheba* (Figure 71) visually unifies the two biblical figures into one profile while angel-like figures soar above their heads.

Most recently, King David has resurfaced in art and film. For the International Istanbul Biennial in 2005, contemporary conceptual artist Serkan Ozkaya fabricated a gold painted rendition of Michelangelo’s *David* that is roughly double the size of the original sculpture measuring 34 feet tall. Ozkaya’s *David Inspired by Michelangelo* (Figure 72) was created via computer model and was replicated twice after his original collapsed shortly before the Biennial opening. Brought to the streets of New York City on a flat-bed truck in March 2012 before returning to the 21c Museum in Louisville, Kentucky, Ozkaya’s *David* was on view in collaboration with the Storefront for Art and Architecture (“David: Inspired by Michelangelo”). The 2013 History Channel miniseries produced by Mark Burnett and Roma Downey aptly entitled *The Bible*, provided another retelling of David’s life during the fourth episode. Starring an ensemble cast with Jassa
Ahluwalia as a young David and Langley Kirkwood as an older David, the scene of David and Goliath (Figure 73) provided a visualization of the narrative in a video format. Comprised of five episodes that spanned Genesis to Revelation, Burnett and Downey’s *The Bible* served as a contemporary testament to the most influential book in western culture (“The Bible: Miniseries”).

Through works of art, viewers can embark on a visual journey of the life of King David that became most profuse and diverse during the Renaissance and Baroque periods. With changing interpretations and artistic conventions, David continues to serve as a mirror for the ages in which he was depicted. The allegorical and historical symbolisms applied to this biblical figure speak volumes for times past while revealing the artists who created them and inspiring viewers anew. Just as David bravely slayed Goliath despite great danger, so has David endured through his biblical legacy and the bountiful works of art in which he embodies. Perhaps David’s transcendence is his greatest victory.
Works Cited


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Image Citations


Figure 2: *Samuel Anointing David*. ca. 244-45 CE. Wall mural from the Synagogue at Dura Europos, now located in the National Museum of Damascus, Syria. *ARTstor*. Web. 12 Feb. 2013.

Figure 3: *Emperor Justinian and Attendants*, Mosaic on the north wall of the apse, Church of San Vitale, Ravenna, Italy. ca. 547 CE. 8 ft. 8 in. x 12 ft. *Texas Wesleyan University: Faculty Subject Pages*. Web. 12 Feb. 2013.


Figure 5: Detail of King David from the *Tree of Jesse* lancet stained glass window, west façade, Chartres Cathedral. 1150-70. *ARTstor*. Web. 20 Feb. 2013.


Figure 10: *King David*, Relief carving from Puerta de las Platerías, south transept, Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela, Spain. *ARTstor*. Web. 23 Mar. 2013.


Figure 17: Attributed to Jean Colombe, *David within the Pit of Misery*, from Psalm 40 of the *Très Riches Heures du Jean de France, Duc de Berry*. ca. 1411-16. Tempera, gold, and ink on parchment. Musée Condé, Chantilly. ARTstor. Web. 8 Mar. 2013.


Figure 19: Side view of Lorenzo Ghiberti’s *Battle Against the Philistines and David Slaying Goliath*, Panel from the Gates of Paradise, Florence Baptistry. ARTstor. Web. 20 Feb. 2013.


Figure 53: Gentileschi, Artemisia. *David and Bathsheba.* ca. 1636. Oil on canvas, 104 1/2 x 82 1/2 in. Columbus Museum of Art, Columbus, Ohio. ARTstor. Web. 9 Mar. 2013.


Figure 60: Steen, Jan. *Bathsheba After the Bath*. ca. 1665-70. Oil on panel, 22 7/8 x 17 11/16 in. The J. Paul Getty Museum at the Getty Center, Los Angeles, California. ARTstor. Web. 15 Apr. 2013.

Figure 61: Rubens, Peter Paul. *Bathsheba at the Fountain*. ca. 1635. Oil on panel, 69 x 49 1/2 in. Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Dresden. ARTstor. Web. 15 Apr. 2013.


