47. Goliath

Who killed him, and why? There are many versions of that story. Two of them are interwound in our text, but they can be separated.

1. It was David's idea (responding to the reward offered by Saul):

[**1Sam 17:20**]. And David . . . left the sheep with a keeper, and took, and went, as Jesse had commanded him . . . [22] and David . . . came and saluted his brethren. [23] And as he talked with them, behold, there came up the champion, the Philistine of Gath, Goliath by name . . . [25] And the men of Israel said, Have ye seen this man that is come up? . . . and it shall be, that the man who killeth nim, the king will enrich him with great riches, and will give him his daughter . . . [40] And [David] took his staff in his hand, and chose him five smooth stones out of the brook, and put them in the shepherd's bag which he had . . .and his sling was in his hand; and he drew near to the Philistine . . .[49] And David put his hand in his bag, and took thence a stone, and slang it, and smote the Philistine in his forehead; and the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell upon his face to the earth . . [55] And when Saul saw David go forth against the Philistine, he said unto Abner, the captain of the host, Abner, whose son is this youth? And Abner said, As thy soul liveth, O king, I cannot tell. [56] And the king said, Inquire thou whose son the stripling is. [57] And as David returned from the slaughter of the Philistine, Abner took him and brought him before Saul with the head of the Philistine in his hand. [58] And Saul said to him, Whose son art hou, thou young man? And David answered, I am the son of thy servant Jesse the Bethlehemite.

2. It was Saul's idea (he had summoned David *before* the fight):

[**1Sam 17:31**]. And when the words were heard which David spake, they rehearsed them before Saul; and he sent for him. [32] And David said to Saul, Let no man's heart fail because of him; thy servant will go and fight with this Philistine.[33] And Saul said to David, Thou art not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him . . . [34] And David said unto Saul, Thy servant was keeping his father's sheep, and when there came a lion, or a bear, and took a lamb of the flock, [35] I went out after him, and smote him . . .

3. It was Saul's idea (he had *previously* hired David as a musician):

[**1Sam 16:14**]. Now the spirit of Yahweh departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from Yahweh troubled him. [15] And Saul's servants said unto him . . . [16] Let our lord now command thy servants . . . to seek out a man who is a skilful player on the harp, and it shall come to pass, when the evil spirit from God is upon thee, that he shall play with his hand, and thou shalt be well . . . [18] Then answered one of the young men, and said, Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, that is skilful in playing, and a mighty man of war . . . [19] Wherefore Saul sent messengers unto Jesse, and said, Send me David thy son, who is with the sheep . . . [17:1] Now the Philistines gathered together their armies to battle . . . [4] And there went out a champion out of the camp of the Philistines, named Goliath of Gath . . .

Each of the three versions gives more initiative to Saul then the one before it. In this way, an old story of David becomes a detail in the biography of Saul.

The Septuagint Problem

The 03c Septuagint translation was made from an early version of the Hebrew text. Where our Hebrew text has extra material, it is naturally, and in most cases correctly, assumed that it was added later to the Hebrew text. It is also said that the LXX includes *only the third* Goliath story. That is not correct. Take a copy of 1 Samuel, and highlight every word present in the Septuagint. It turns out that the Septuagint includes elements of *all three* versions of the Goliath story. It has undertaken to improve on the confused text before it by editing out just enough of it that what remains can be read as consistent.[1]

The Deep Background

The oldest version of the Goliath story belongs to the popular hero tradition. So do these four exploits of the "mighty men" of David's personal army:

1. Abishai the son of Zeruiah, late in David's life.

[**2 Sam 21:15**]. And the Philistines had war again with Israel, and David went down, and his servants with him, and fought against the Philistines. And David waxed faint, [16] and Ishbibenob, who was of the **sons of the giant**, the **weight of whose spear was three hundred shekels of brass in weight**, he being girded with a new sword, thought to have slain David. [17] But Abishai the son of Zeruiah succored him, and smote the Philistine, and killed him.

2. Sibbecai the Hushathite.

[**2Sam 21:18**]. And it came to pass after this, that there was again war with the Philistines at Gob; then Sibbecai the Hushathite slew Saph, who was of the **sons of the giant**.

3. Elhanan. He brings us closest to our familiar story:

[**2Sam 21:19**]. And there was again war with the Philistines at Gob, and Elhanan the son of Ja-areoregim the Bethlehemite slew **Goliath the Gittite**, the **staff of whose spear was like a weaver's beam**.

4. Jonathan, David's nephew. The name of David occurs, if indirectly.

[**2 Sam 21:20**] And there was again war at Gath, where was a man of great stature, that had on every hand six fingers, and on every foot six toes, four and twenty in number; and he also was **born to the giant**. [21] And when he defied Israel, Jonathan, the son of Shimei, David's brother, slew him . . .

————————•··•·•··——————————

So who was the first to kill Goliath? Our suggestion would be Elhanan, an exploit of the subordinate being attributed to the superior. It is common, in both ancient and modern times, for a notable deed or saying by a little-known person to be reassigned, sooner or later, to someone more famous.

---

[1]For discussion, see Barthélemy **Story** and van der Kooij **Story** 129f. Lust notes, "The problem is that the material missing in the LXX and its Vorlage appears to be the oldest." It is perhaps best seen, not as the problem, but as the solution. As Lust remarks, "Its characteristics of a folk or fairy tale may offer a key to the problem." Just so.