



VID

VID SPECIALIZED UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF MISSION AND THEOLOGY

Saul Interacting With the Deceased Prophet in 1 Samuel 28, as Interpreted
in Light of the Veneration of Ancestors in Madagascar

by
NOMENANAHARY Blandin Emmanuel

Master in Theology
Parcours: Old Testament

Stavanger, Norway
May 2022

Abstract

Many Christians in the Bara area in Madagascar keep their traditional belief in ancestors. Despite the prohibition of the Christian leaders, they keep on respecting their *hazomanga* and venerating their ancestors. When I discussed with them I sometimes referred to the famous text in 1 Samuel 28, where Israelite king Saul interacts with Samuel, a recently deceased prophet. This text has some similarities with the veneration of ancestors in Madagascar. This leads me to the topic: “Saul interacting with the deceased prophet Samuel in 1 Samuel 28, as interpreted in light of the veneration of ancestors in Madagascar”.

Most Western interpreters lack background knowledge about ancestral beliefs. In addition, colonialism led to a demonization and even destruction of African culture, including Malagasy culture of ancestral beliefs. In this project, I use a more positive view on ancestors’ veneration, in order to bring a new light and a new understanding of the text. The purpose of this thesis is to find a Malagasy perspective to this confusing text, trying to find the role of the deceased Samuel in 1 Samuel 28, and the extent to which Malagasy traditional concept of ancestors can help us understand this role.

In such interpretation, I have to discuss, first, Malagasy traditional beliefs relating to the ancestors, and then give the analysis of the text in 1 Samuel 28 apart from the Malagasy context. After that, I put the two into dialogue and produce the interpretation of 1 Samuel 28. This interpretation leads me to know that the deceased Samuel in 1 Samuel 28 was a representative of God to tell Saul the truth about his fate. The ghost of Samuel was coming up to respond compassionately to the desperate Saul. Malagasy traditional concept of ancestors help us understand this intermediary role to the extent that it reaffirms and deepens it.

Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Table of Contents	ii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Observation..	1
1.2. Research question.....	4
1.3 Method.....	5
CHAPTER TWO: THEORY	8
2.1. Theory of theme and method: Historical-critical perspective	8
2.2. Africa and the Bible	9
2.3. Interpreting the Bible using African context.....	10
2.4. Conclusion.....	16
CHAPTER THREE: MALAGASY TRADITIONAL BELIEFS RELATING TO THE ANCESTORS.....	17
3.1. God.....	17
3.2. The supernatural beings	19
3.3. The ancestors.....	20
3.3.1.The holy ancestors and the unholy ones.....	22
3.3.2.Becoming a venerated ancestor	23
3.3.3. Ancestral veneration.....	23
3.4. Conclusion.....	25
CHAPTER FOUR: THE ROLE OF THE DECEASED SAMUEL IN 1 SAMUEL 28.....	26
4.1. An old man responding to the call of Saul	26
4.1.1. An old man	27
4.1.2. Coming up to respond to the call in place of God.....	29

4.2. An old man bringing a divine message	32
4.3.	
Conclusion.....	36
CHAPTER FIVE: THE ROLE OF THE DECEASED SAMUEL IN 1 SAMUEL 28, INTERPRETED IN LIGHT OF THE MALAGASY TRADITIONAL CONCEPT OF ANCESTORS.....	37
5.1. Does Samuel fulfill the criteria of being an ancestor/a venerated ancestor?.....	37
5.1.1. Does Samuel fulfill the criteria of being an ancestor?	37
5.1.2. The deceased Samuel, a holy and venerated ancestor.....	39
5.2. The role of the deceased Samuel, as seen as an ancestor in the Malagasy tradition.....	40
5.2.1. The deceased Samuel as an ancestor representative of God the <i>Zanahary</i>	41
5.2.2. The deceased Samuel as an ancestor messenger of God.....	44
5.2.3. The deceased Samuel as an ancestor who blesses and curses	46
5.3. Conclusion.....	49
CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION	50
BIBLIOGRAPHY	55

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Observation

I am a Malagasy, belonging to the Antanosy ethnic group in the Southern part of Madagascar. The Antanosy people originally came from Faradofay or Fort-Dauphin. But during the reign of the king Radama I (1793-1828) and Radama II (1829-1863), they fled westward to the Mahafaly and Bara areas to live with the Bara and Mahafaly ethnic groups. They fled because they were defeated by Merina troops, who used guns and powerful weapons and were helped by the Europeans, sent by the Merina king from Antananarivo. Bara, Mahafaly and Antanosy people have many things in common in all areas of life. One of the most common things between them is the veneration and respect of the *hazomanga*. It can be a sacred wood, a steel or a place where the power of the ancestors is believed to dwell. It is in the place where the *hazomanga* is placed that the priest or *lonaky* perform his religious practices, including sacrifice to the ancestors.

As I lived and worked in Betroka, one of the main Bara areas, I often visited my fellow Antanosy people in a place in the South of Betroka. I frequented many people in a village called Lavalila, because my wife is an Antanosy woman from that small village. Belief in the ancestors and the respect to the *hazomanga* is essential and basic in the life of the people there. The ancestors are believed to bless and to curse as well. During the traditional consecration of our marriage, we were brought to the *hazomanga* where the *lonaky* called the ancestors to consecrate and bless our marriage.

Some members of a family in that small village dreamed of a deceased woman. The deceased woman was a member of the family, a very devout Lutheran Christian and one of the first converted to Lutheran Christianity. She appeared to them in a dream, telling them that they have to love each other and to be kind to each other. She also told them in their dreams to attend the local church and to follow her in the Christian faith. It had an impact on the people in that village, because even the *lonaky* or priest of that village became a very devout Christian. In spite of his Christian faith, he thinks that the traditional culture should not be forsaken; the *hazomanga* should always be respected. He attends the local Lutheran church and supports the church, but he always keeps on performing traditional religious practices, invoking God and the ancestors in religious rituals.

Many Christians in the Bara area keep their traditional belief in the ancestors. Despite the prohibition of the Christian leaders, they keep on respecting their *hazomanga* and venerating their ancestors. They say: “we are good people and devout Christians, what is wrong if we respect our tradition and culture; what is wrong if we attend the *hazomanga* ritual and get the blessing from our ancestors?” When I discussed with them I sometimes referred to the famous text in 1 Samuel 28, where Israelite king Saul interacts with Samuel, a recently deceased prophet.

1 Samuel 28 talks about a surprising event, the interaction of Saul with the spirit of the deceased prophet Samuel. Even though Samuel at this stage of the narrative is dead, his soul still continues to interact with the living and it seems to have an authoritative position upon Saul and his kingdom. The text is difficult to explain. The death of Samuel the prophet appears two times in 1 Samuel (1 Samuel 25:1 and 1 Samuel 28:3), and the version told in 28:3 is not an independent announcement but merely a reminder, included as part of the preparations for the strange story that follows.¹ The text from verse 9 to verse 12 is surprising; it is Saul’s interview with a ghost. Samuel had been disturbed from his rest by Saul; the intermediary of a necromancer had effected this. The Lord did not answer Saul through dreams, nor Tumim and Urim, nor did he answer him through the prophets. But a dead, a ghostly figure, answered him. It is hard to find the meaning of the passage. The prophet who had died is speaking and interacting with Saul, bringing God’s message to him. It is hard to understand how the deceased Samuel can communicate with the living Saul, as told in the text.

Veneration of ancestors in Madagascar is related to many religious practices, such as sacrifice (a cow is slaughtered in order to feed the ancestors and to appease their wrath, and to get blessed by them) and many other religious practices. The ancestors are believed to be mediators between God and living human beings.² This belief has some similarities with the story about Saul consulting a female medium from Endor and interacting with the deceased prophet Samuel, told in 1 Samuel 28. This leads me to the topic of this thesis: “Saul interacting with the deceased prophet Samuel in 1 Samuel 28, as interpreted in light of the veneration of ancestors in Madagascar”.

¹ P. K. McCarter, Jr., *1 Samuel: A new translation with introduction, notes and commentary* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 388.

² Salomon Ramatoka, “Pensée Religieuse et Rituels Betsimisaraka”, in *Ny razana tsy mba maty: Cultures Traditionnelles Malgaches*, éd. Jean-Pierre Domenichini, Jean Poirier, Daniel Raheisoanjato (Antananarivo: Editions de la librairie de Madagascar, 1984), 47.

The purpose of this thesis is to find a Malagasy perspective to this confusing text, allowing Malagasy tradition to shed light on the biblical narrative. I think it can be rewarding to use Malagasy tradition in order to understand the text like this. Malagasy culture is rich in ideas and beliefs about the communication of the spirits of the dead with people who are still alive on earth. Malagasy people generally refer to deceased relatives as ‘ancestors’, and they think that they still have a relationship with them.³ Traditionally, it has been very important for the Malagasy people to communicate with the spirit of the dead or the ancestors, and for many it is still important for their daily lives. Everything they do depends on it; birth, marriage, social life, traditional system of laws, various social organizations, etc., to name a few are based on ancestral beliefs and relationship with the ancestors. So, it is fitting that we explain this text about Saul speaking to the spirit of Samuel in 1 Samuel 28, through the Malagasy belief in the dead and the ancestors.

Most Western interpreters of this text – and even most contemporary Malagasy interpreters – read it differently, as they lack background knowledge about ancestral beliefs. In addition, colonialism led to a demonization and even destruction of African culture, including Malagasy culture of ancestral beliefs. While there may be flaws in traditional beliefs, there are also many lessons to be learned from them. When we approach difficult texts in the Bible, particularly the Old Testament, through the glasses of African traditions and religions, some lights are shed for new understanding of the difficult texts. The purpose of this writing is to try to find a light for new understanding of 1 Samuel 28 through the glasses of Malagasy ancestral belief. The purpose is to interpret the text in 1 Samuel 28 by using Malagasy belief, in order to find new insights into it.

There is a related research to this, written by a Congolese biblical scholar, J. Kabamba Kiboko, *Divining the Woman of Endor*. Kiboko uses African culture, postcolonial hermeneutics and the politics of biblical translation. She remarks that the church labeled *divination* a “heathen practice,” evil, and attempted to attach great shame to it. She knew that converts to Christianity had to abandon their views of divination in favor of practices supported by Christian colonial ideology.⁴ At the end of her book, she concludes that the female medium from Endor is a

³ R. P. A. Rahajarizafy, *Filozofia Malagasy* (Fianarantsoa : Librairie Ambozontany, 1970), 117.

⁴ J. Kabamba Kiboko, *Divining the Woman of Endor: African Culture, Postcolonial Hermeneutics, and the Politics*

humble and secluded woman, seeking no one's harm. She thinks that thaumaturgy and spirit consultation is positive rather than negative.⁵ Kiboko's focus is on translation (which is one of inculturation method) and on the postcolonial retrieval of the Woman from Endor, whereas my focus is not on how to translate the passage nor on the Woman from Endor. I focus on how to use Malagasy context as a means to understand or to interpret the deceased Samuel; my focus is on Samuel, the prophet who became an ancestor speaking and interacting with Saul. I use a perspective and a more positive view on ancestors' veneration, in order to bring a new light and a new understanding of the text, being interpreted and explained through traditional culture of ancestral veneration in Madagascar.

1.2. Research question

As we said previously, 1 Samuel 28 is a difficult text. It tells about the interaction of Saul the king of Israel with the prophet Samuel who had just died. As the topic shows, the goal and the main thing here is to articulate the meaning of the text in 1 Samuel 28 as seen through the glasses of Malagasy ancestral belief. It means a detailed explanation of the text, out of the text itself, but using Malagasy context as an interpretive grid. Therefore, the general purpose of the thesis is to find out how to understand 1 Samuel 28 through the glasses of ancestral veneration in Madagascar. The research question is therefore: What is the role of the deceased Samuel in 1 Samuel 28, and to what extent can Malagasy traditional concept of ancestors help us understand this role?

First, to what extent can the deceased Samuel, as seen as an ancestor according to Malagasy ancestral belief, be in relation with Saul, since he had already died? It needs to show how the relationship or interaction of Saul with Samuel is as written in the text, using Malagasy concept of ancestors. Only the connection between Saul and Samuel is considered here, that is the connection between the living and the dead according to the text. Using the Malagasy traditional belief in the ancestors, how can we understand the relationship between the deceased prophet (Samuel) and the living Saul? Here we have two elements: the calling from the part of Saul, and the answer from the part of Samuel. To what extent can Saul, as told in the text, call the deceased prophet Samuel, being an ancestor in the Malagasy tradition? And according to

of Biblical Translation (London: T&T Clark, 2017), xxii.

⁵ *Ibid*, 222-223.

the text, to what extent can Samuel the ancestor answer to that call?

Second, to what extent can the deceased Samuel in the text be in place of God, when seen through ancestral belief? Here, the connection between the deceased prophet and God is taken into consideration. Saul disobeyed God, and God has departed from him. He cannot interact with God. The disobedient king, Saul, consults the deceased prophet. Using the Malagasy traditional belief in the ancestors as an interpretive grid, how can we understand the relationship between the deceased prophet (Samuel) and God, as told in the text? And what conclusion could we draw from that to answer the question: To what extent can the deceased Samuel act in place of God to bless and to curse the king of Israel? The main point is to interpret and explain the relationship between Saul and the deceased prophet Samuel and God as told in the text, with the help of Malagasy traditional belief. Why isn't Saul able to interact with God, and yet he interacts with Samuel? Here, two components enter into the question: listening and responding. The deceased Samuel listens to Saul in place of God; and the deceased Samuel answers Saul in place of God. According to 1 Samuel chapter 28, to what extent can the deceased Samuel as an ancestor in Malagasy tradition be in place of God?

According to the Malagasy tradition, God is not interested in the common necessities of earthly existence. He lives in the highest place; God is and always remains inaccessible to humans. No one can speak to nor meet with him. The ancestors are believed to be much closer to human being, seeing the life of the living, in order to protect them from danger. The ancestors somehow eclipse God. And according to the text, YHWH has departed from Saul. But Saul can indeed communicate with the deceased Samuel. Interpreted in that way, Samuel somehow eclipses YHWH to the extent that he himself is becoming a heavenly being. Saul cannot rely upon YHWH since He is unreachable. Only the deceased Samuel is the closest helper for Saul, only he can help him in his worries. Saul can rely upon the deceased prophet Samuel to the extent that he is a closer god or godly being to him.

1.3 Method

We have come now to the question of method, which is about the practical procedure that we are going to use in this research to find an answer to the research question. It is all about the systematic plan or the orderly arrangement that we are going to follow in interpreting the text in 1 Samuel 28 by the help of the Malagasy ancestral belief. How can we interpret 1 Samuel 28 in light of Malagasy ancestral belief? Briefly speaking, this is how we are going to do it.

Chapter 2 will discuss some relevant theories; it is a theoretical angle enabling us to explore the topic and the research question, and to interpret the text through a Malagasy interpretive grid. After the discussion of some theoretical perspectives, chapter 3 will discuss Malagasy traditional beliefs relating to the ancestors. Then follows the major bulk of the thesis, chapter 4 which will analyze the text itself, Chapter 5 will then put it into dialogue with the Malagasy context and produce the interpretation of 1 Samuel 28. And chapter 6 will offer a conclusion to the research question raised here in the introduction (chapter 1).

We have an exegetical topic here, and an exegetical question: What is the role of the deceased Samuel in 1 Samuel 28, and to what extent can Malagasy traditional concept of ancestors help us understand this role? The practical method help us to answer the question. We need then an exegetical method, a systematic procedure and exegetical process for attaining the answer to the research question.

As for the methods of data collection, I collected only existing data. For the Malagasy traditional beliefs relating to the ancestors, I collected some materials from Madagascar, particularly from the library of the SALT, the Lutheran Graduate School of Theology in Fianarantsoa. Malagasy authors, using Malagasy language and French language as well, have written most of the texts I have identified at SALT. I have also collected some material written by different students at SALT, who come from different places of Madagascar. Many of them possess knowledge about ancestral beliefs in their local places. They have access to those local Malagasy people and they are able to investigate the matter about Malagasy ancestral belief in depth. They even use qualitative data, by interviewing local people about their belief in ancestors.

I did not blindly follow the existing data I have collected. Since my original research objective is to interpret 1 Samuel chapter 28 in relation to ancestral belief in Madagascar. Only beliefs in God and ancestors were selected, because all data presented should be relevant and appropriate to the aim. In addition, I did not do a qualitative research myself, because I already collected qualitative materials from Malagasy authors, and doing qualitative research and interviews lie outside the practical possibilities I had for this thesis. In order to support the contextual theological position that I want to show in this thesis, I will analyze the materials from Madagascar by demonstrating in all areas a complete engagement and critical perspective, especially with regard to potential biases and sources of error. It is important that we acknowledge the limitations as well as the strengths of these materials.

When it comes to the analysis of the text in 1Samuel 28 independently from the Malagasy context, we are going to use books from traditional biblical studies, including books showing the historical and cultural background of 1 Samuel, and such books as commentaries on the books of Samuel and the like. These are in general theological and exegetical materials. These books and commentaries may also be biased, then we should thoroughly analyze them in order to support the contextual theological positions I wish to show in this thesis.

CHAPTER TWO: THEORY

It is now time to talk about the theoretical framework, in which theoretical reflection relevant for the investigation will be discussed. These theories are contextual theology theories, providing particular perspectives to look at the deceased prophet in 1 Samuel 28, as interpreted in light of the veneration of ancestors in Madagascar. Through the lens of some contextual theology theories, we are going to examine to what extent can Saul rely upon a deceased prophet in lieu of God, according to 1 Samuel 28 interpreted from traditional Malagasy concept of ancestors, and then explain why this research problem matters. This will show us where to place this research in the broader fields of theology. But before that, we have to see first the historical critical perspective.

2.1. Theory of theme and method: Historical-critical perspective

We are going to use historical-critical method when it comes to the analysis of the text in 1 Samuel 28 apart from the Malagasy traditional belief. So what is a historical critical way of interpreting a text? Historical critical method, also known as the historical criticism or higher criticism, is a branch of criticism that investigates the origins of ancient texts in order to understand the world behind the text. Historical-critical methods are those which take account of the fact that the biblical texts were written long ago, in a cultural matrix very different from our own, and that attempt to understand the texts first of all in the context of that ancient setting.¹ Historical criticism, in the study of biblical literature, method of criticism of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) and the New Testament that emphasizes the interpretation of biblical documents in the light of their contemporary environment.

The aim of historical-critical interpretation is to get an impression of how the first reader understood the text. So, this means that the reader using this method will look at the historical situation that the author of the text wrote in and about. It helps the reader to understand what the author was actually trying to say, by explaining things like date of the text, where it was written, the author's identity and why they wrote what they did. The method also looks at what relationship the author had with the audience. We must acknowledge that historical context is connected with biblical interpretation in an important way. Historical considerations are a

¹ John J. Collins, "Methods and Approaches", in *The Cambridge Companion to the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament*, ed. Stephen B. Chapman and Marvin A. Sweeney (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 129-146.

necessary part of this thesis because it requires at least an approximate idea of the time, place, and circumstances of composition. That's why we are going to use it to analyze 1 Samuel 28.

For instance, if we are to study a prophetic text, the historical-critical method seeks to place the facts about the prophet, which it discovers in relation to the surroundings of the prophet. It takes the prophet as primarily the preacher, teacher, and guide of his own day and generation.² Therefore, when we use a historical-critical perspective, we realize that texts are written in specific times and places. When we analyze words from 1 Samuel 28 or from the Old Testament in general, we are going to analyze these words as seen in light of its historical context. We are going to analyze the words in relation to their surroundings and their ancient settings, which can be the time, place, circumstances, culture and so on.

2.2. Africa and the Bible

When we talk about interpretation of texts, we talk about hermeneutics, because the art of interpretation is called hermeneutics.⁵ Since interpretation is considered as an 'art', it uses imagination to express ideas and feelings, and requires a creative spirit. Thus, the idea of inspiration is included in hermeneutics. Because it is an art, we are hereby not constructing a set of fixed and rigid guidelines for a valid interpretation of a text. Mechanical rules are hereby out of the question.⁶

Hermeneutics, which is the art of interpretation, belong to humanities, which consists of finding fair interpretation and avoiding fake and false understanding. Hermeneutics is important and play an essential part in Christianity. Biblical hermeneutics are interpretations related to the Bible, trying to find fair interpretations in relation to the Bible.

However, it is important to say that all interpretation is biased to the extent that all interpreter comes from a certain context and makes use of the hermeneutical experiences and concerns of that particular context in the act of interpretation.⁷ Therefore, all Biblical interpretation is biased by the interpreter's hermeneutical experiences and concerns. In other words, all Biblical interpretation (including Old Testament interpretation) is contextual. And

² W. Sanday, *Essays in biblical criticism and exegesis* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 25.

⁵ Romualdo E. Abulad, "What is Hermeneutics?," *Kritike 2* (2007): 11-23.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Knut Holter, *Contextualized Old Testament Scholarship in Africa* (Nairobi, Kenya: Acton Publisher, 2008) 14.

these ‘biased’ interpretations are done whether in a conscious way or in an unconscious way. In this research, we are going to try to use the bias or context (in our case here, a Malagasy context) in a conscious way possible.

African Old Testament interpretation is contextual and comparative. The contextuality of the African interpreter is from comparative perspectives, letting the two entities ‘Africa’ and the ‘Old Testament’ encounter each other and being explicitly compared.⁸ As an African Old Testament interpretation is comparative, there are two comparative perspectives related to it: the first is a comparison using the Old Testament as a tool to interpret African contexts; and the second is the inverse comparison using African contexts as tools to interpret the Old Testament.

The first comparison (using Old Testament as a tool to interpret African contexts) is not intended to give an exegetical exposition of the Old Testament texts, but to interpret Africa. An example of such interpretation can be seen in the western colonial milieu in Africa, where African peoples are interpreted as Canaanites, Philistines, uncivilized, in relation to the Old Testament. In colonial times, the European colonialists made use of the Old Testament to give their particular interpretation of Africa, and the colonial motifs of their interpretative strategies.⁹ In contemporary times, many African theologians are trying to give anti-colonial or postcolonial interpretive strategies to counter the European colonialists’ interpretation of Africa in the past. In doing so, they use the Old Testament to interpret society, culture and religion in contemporary Africa. Therefore the Old Testament is taken as an interpretive tool, or glasses through which African contemporary contexts are investigated. Central paradigms in contemporary interpretation of Africa are such words like inculturation, liberation, reconstruction, and translation. But the perspective we are going to use in this thesis is the second, the exegetical one: using African experiences and contexts as tools to interpret the Old Testament.

2.3. Interpreting the Bible using African context

Letting Africa to interpret the Old Testament:

Knut Holter has in his interpretation of African interpretive strategies vis-à-vis the Old Testament, argued that we can distinguish between an approach that “lets Africa interpret the

⁸ Knut Holter, *Contextualized Old Testament Scholarship in Africa* (Nairobi, Kenya: Acton Publisher, 2008), 14.

⁹ Ibid, 36.

Old Testament” and another approach that “lets the Old Testament interpret Africa”. My research question relates to the former one of the two and I will reflect a bit on it.

Letting Africa contribute to the interpretation of the Old Testament: this perspective is about establishing comparative material for the interpretation of Old Testament text, using African materials to shed light on the Old Testament, searching for how Africa can be used to interpret the Old Testament. Here the focus is to give an exegetical exposition of the Old Testament texts, admitting that African traditional contexts are the basic principles and the Old Testament is the passive element, being interpreted and receiving the act of interpretation.

William Robertson Smith is an early example of such an interpreter during the colonial times. He relates the religion of the Old Testament to a broader Semitic (in his case Arabian) religious context. Smith's approach does not take the truth of scripture for granted, resulting in strong reactions to the Free Church of Scotland. One of the articles earns him a trial for heresy, which brings him to public notice. In 1881, following the trial, he lost his job at the College and left to teach Arabic at Cambridge University.¹⁰ In a lengthy discussion of Old Testament concepts of sacrifice of domestic animals, he makes use of comparative material from East Africa, to shed light on the Israelite practices, referring to some nomads. Another early example is James George Frazer, it was during the colonial time. But the more interesting is the contemporary ones. So let us also hear some contemporary voices in that matter.

Nowadays, social sciences have developed many tools that can be helpful for biblical scholarship. The aim of social scientific criticism, as a subfield of biblical exegesis, is to study the biblical materials as a reflection of their cultural setting. The meaning and/or the social background of the text are thus more fully illuminated by the exercise of sociological, psychological, and anthropological methods and theories. And there is an increasing tendency within the global guild of biblical scholarship to make use of them.¹¹ Scholars from the global North use social sciences tools for their biblical study endeavor. The same tendency is also seen in the African segment of the guild, where interpretive approaches developed within the social sciences have proved capable of providing methodological bases for interpretation of Old Testament texts and motifs.¹² Such interpretive approaches can be anthropological, folkloristic,

¹⁰ John Sutherland Black and George Chrystal, *The Life of William Robertson Smith* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1912), xi-xii.

¹¹ Knut Holter, *Contextualized Old Testament Scholarship in Africa* (Nairobi, Kenya: Acton Publisher, 2008), 39.

¹² *Ibid.*

and even sociological and psychological.

Let us give some examples of African scholars who make use of tools developed by the social sciences for interpretation of Old Testament texts. Anthropology, Folkloristics, Sociology and Psychology are tools used by African scholars for interpretation of Old Testament texts. Aloo O. Mojola is an anthropologist and biblical exegete from Uganda (with a doctorate from Nairobi University), who for many years has been working with the United Bible Societies in East Africa and in Africa as a whole.¹³ He interprets the text in Leviticus 16 about the ritual for the Day of Atonement by using Chagga (Tanzania) purification ritual. We know that according to the book of Leviticus, during the Day of Atonement the High Priest performs sacrifices to purify himself in front of the Lord. He also performs sacrifices for the people of Israel. During the ritual, the second goat is left to run away in the desert, whose role is disputed. Mojola enters the debate and argues that the Chagga scapegoat ritual provides a parallel to Leviticus 16, supporting the Septuagint interpretation of the text. Mojola says that from a Chagga perspective (as also in other African communities) the idea of one of the goats being sent to the wilderness has much in common with a similar Chagga ritual. But he continues on that the idea of the goat being sent to a demon or being designated for a demon called Azazel does not make sense to the Chagga religio-cultural mind, seen within the perspective of his/her world view.¹⁴ During his reflection on that Old Testament text, Mojola thinks that African cultural traditions have a great potential as interpretive tools vis-à-vis the Old Testament. He is convinced that both the linguistic competence of the past and the socio-cultural competence of the present contribute to the discussion of the global guild of Old Testament interpretation.¹⁵

Another example is Johnson M. Kimuhu, who is a theological educator and bible translator originally coming from Kenya but currently working as a counselor in California. Kimuhu is interested in Leviticus 18, where many laws are found. Kimuhu analyzes various aspects of family laws from that texts from two perspectives: Ancient Near Eastern (Egyptian, Ugaritic, Hittite, Canaanite) and traditional African (in particular Kikuyu, Kenya).¹⁶ Kimuhu interprets the Leviticus dietary regulations and find various kinds of parallels in corresponding

¹³ Knut Holter, *Contextualized Old Testament Scholarship in Africa* (Nairobi, Kenya: Acton Publisher, 2008), 39.

¹⁴ Aloo Osotsi Mojola, *The Chagga Scapegoat Purification Ritual and Another Re-reading of the Goat of Azazel in Leviticus 16* (Norway: Congress of the IOSOT, 1998), 77.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 68-79.

¹⁶ Johnson M. Kimuhu, "The Priestly Laws and Prohibitions from the Perspective of Ancient Near East and Africa," *Journal of Law and Religion* 25 (2009-2010): 284.

Kikuyu regulations. Kimuhu argued that these Leviticus regulations do not attempt to ban non-Israelite practices, since the supposedly parallel Kikuyu material lacks such associations. She thinks that there are similarities between the Hebrew Bible and other tribal societies, but the Kikuyu is used as a case in point.¹⁷ This shows us how the anthropological material from Kikuyu can be used to interpret texts in the Old Testament (in this case the text is from the book of Leviticus).

Folklore material and models can also be used as interpretive tools vis-à-vis Old Testament texts. For example, Laurent Naré, who is a Roman Catholic priest and biblical scholar from Burkina Faso, makes use of African proverbial material to interpret Old Testament proverbs. Based on his Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome, Naré compares the so-called Solomonic proverbial collection in Proverbs 25-29 with a selection of proverbs of the Mossi of Burkina Faso. The two traditions are examined separately and in detail, and then a comparison is made.¹⁸ There are also another models, such as sociological materials and psychological ones, but these examples are enough to show that African experiences and concerns may be used as interpretive tools vis-à-vis the Old Testament texts.

In African popular interpretation of the Bible, we can see this use of one's contexts in the interpretation of the Bible. Religious encounters exist in Africa, and in every transcultural society even though they often remain hidden behind socio-cultural issues. There are African contextual perspectives on Bible texts, and it is fascinating to see how traditional Africans read the Bible, especially the Old Testament. That popular interpretation of the Bible (with the context of real and lived life), these lived facts and practical lives of the society inspired theologians to construct the so called contextual theology and even new theologies. They academicize it, they make and render it academic. Taking into consideration the contextuality and contextual theology are academic disciplines.

There are many African contexts that one can use for the interpretation of the Old Testament. Throughout this thesis, we are going to use the traditional cultures of Africa. To be more precise, we are going to use Malagasy traditional beliefs in ancestors to find out the role of the deceased Samuel in 1 Samuel chapter 28.

¹⁷ Johnson M. Kimuhu, "The Priestly Laws and Prohibitions from the Perspective of Ancient Near East and Africa", in *Journal of Law and Religion* 25 (2009-2010): 279.

¹⁸ Knut Holter, *Contextualized Old Testament Scholarship in Africa* (Nairobi, Kenya: Acton Publisher, 2008), 42.

Contextual biblical study:

We are going to follow the method that uses Malagasy context to interpret the biblical text. We are going to follow the model of contextual Bible study. According to Gerald O. West, Contextual Bible study is not a fixed formula or a set method; it is a process.¹⁹ Contextual Bible study is the product of people doing Bible study in African context. He says that there are at least two aspects of Bible study: to read the Bible contextually and to read the Bible in depth. And also, there are several components or elements of a contextual reading of the Bible. There are at least four central concerns or commitments of people doing contextual Bible study, indicating what they consider important. A commitment to read the Bible from the perspective of the African context, particularly from the perspective of the poor and oppressed; a commitment to read the Bible in community with others, particularly with those from contexts different from our own; a commitment to read the Bible critically; and a commitment to individual and social transformation through contextual Bible study.²⁰

When West explains the commitment to read the Bible from the perspective of the African context, he says that we all bring our contexts with us to our readings of the Bible. This has always been the case, but it has not always been acknowledged. These contexts and factors shape our reading of the Bible.²¹ Therefore, everybody has his own way of reading a particular text. If we are to analyze the text in 1 Samuel 28 about the interaction of the deceased Samuel with Saul, some may think about it negatively according to contexts and factors that shape them. And others may take it positively according to the contexts that influence their reading of that text. Contextual Bible study recognizes that we are all to some extent shaped by our contexts. Contextual Bible study also recognizes that our contexts influence our readings of the Bible. This has always been the case, but it has not always been acknowledged. A commitment of contextual Bible study is that we acknowledge and recognize the environment factors that have formed us.²²

After explaining that our contexts affect us and our readings of the Bible, West continues by affirming that this is wrong only if we do not acknowledge and recognize the influence our contexts have on our readings of the Bible. Those who are committed to the contextual Bible

¹⁹ Gerald O. West, *Contextual Bible Study* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 1993), 11.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid, 12.

²² Ibid.

study process have decided to choose to read the Bible from a particular perspective within the African context. For the case of South Africa, the context is that of the poor and oppressed, the perspective used is then the perspective of the poor and oppressed. The poor and oppressed are those who are socially, politically, economically, or culturally marginalized and exploited.²³ For our case here, the context is Malagasy traditional belief in the ancestors. As we have seen previously, colonialism has demonized and destroyed African culture. The Malagasy traditional belief in the ancestors and in the divine beings are taken as superstition and even demonic belief. It is good then to decide to choose to read the text in 1 Samuel 28 from the perspective of the Malagasy traditional belief in the ancestors. We need to choose to hear the concerns of the traditional culture and religion of Madagascar and God's concern for them. As West says in his South African context, when we choose to read the Bible from the perspective of the poor and oppressed in the South African context we choose to hear the concerns of the vulnerable and marginalized and God's concern for them.²⁴ But for our case here, the context is not that of the poor and the oppressed, it is not the context of the vulnerable and the marginalized but that of the Malagasy tradition. (African) context can be: religious, political, economic, social, cultural. And there are religiously poor people, politically oppressed people, economically poor people, socially marginalized ones, and culturally oppressed ones.

While talking about the commitment to read the Bible in community with others, particularly with those from contexts different from our own, West thinks that we must empower ordinary readers to discover and then to acknowledge and recognize their own identity and the value and significance of their own contributions and experiences. This is particularly important when we are reading the Bible with people from poor and oppressed communities. Readers of the Bible from these communities have usually had their interpretations silenced and suppressed by the dominant interpretations.²⁵ The Malagasy traditional belief in the ancestors and in the divine beings have been demonized and suppressed, being marginalized and even silenced, we ought to empower it and show the Malagasy identity as it is. We need to let it be!

²³ Gerald O. West, *Contextual Bible Study* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 1993), 13.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.

Some readers from these communities have even come to accept the dominant interpretations as their own.²⁶ And that is really true for the case in Madagascar, because even today's Malagasy people forsake their own religious and traditional identity, holding firmly Westerners interpretations of the Bible that are against Malagasy values and traditions. So if we are really going to read the Bible with ordinary readers we must work together to break the "culture of silence" and to recover the identity and experiences of the poor and oppressed. The poor and oppressed are not really silent, but they are often not heard and what they say is often the product of centuries of colonization. It is only by talking with and to each other, recognizing the unequal power relations between us, that we can begin to construct transforming discourse.²⁷ For ordinary readers being active subjects means that they must be able to speak with their own voice no matter how different this voice is from the dominant voices.²⁸

2.4. Conclusion:

The historical critical method of interpretation is the main method we are going to interpret 1 Samuel 28, because this helps us to understand what the person was originally writing about and why. When we analyze words from 1 Samuel 28, we are going to analyze these words as seen in light of their historical context, in relation to their surroundings and their ancient settings, which can be the time, place, circumstances, culture and so on. And this is because we need to understand the world behind the biblical words.

We have seen also that all Biblical interpretation is biased by the interpreter's hermeneutical experiences and concerns. Therefore, we are going to try to use the bias or context (in our case here, a Malagasy context) in a conscious way possible when we interpret 1 Samuel 28. We are going to use comparison that uses African contexts (for our case Malagasy contexts) as tools to interpret 1 Samuel 28, using African materials to shed light on that Old Testament text, searching for how Africa can be used to interpret the Old Testament. Malagasy traditional concepts of ancestors are the basic principles and the text in 1 Samuel 28 is the passive element, being interpreted and receiving the act of interpretation.

²⁶ Gerald O. West, *Contextual Bible Study* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 1993), 15.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid, 16.

CHAPTER THREE: MALAGASY TRADITIONAL BELIEFS RELATING TO THE ANCESTORS

Once the definitions of concepts and existing theories (that are relevant to the topic of our research), are well explained, we now know how to interpret 1 Samuel 28 by using Malagasy cultural context. According to our exegetical process for attaining the answer to the research question, we now come to the presentation of the Malagasy traditional beliefs, where the realm of the afterlife and Malagasy belief in God and the ancestors are presented. We start with the concept of God in the Malagasy tradition.

3.1. God

In general, the word “god” can be translated into *andriamanitra* or *zanahary* in the Malagasy language. Let us first talk about the word *andriamanitra*. The Malagasy word *andriamanitra* is composed of two words: *andriana* and *manitra*. Some people identify the Malagasy word *andriana* with the Sanskrit *adya*, which means first or primordial. The word *adya* was used by the ancient Indians to designate the great goddess Devi.¹ In Malagasy, *andriana* means: noble, prince, princess, king or queen. It is a relative participle taken from the root *andry* (frame, support, peace, security). So *andriana* or *andria-(na)* means the one through whom peace reigns, on whom one relies and puts one’s trust. The second member *manitra* has been assimilated to the Malay *manis* meaning fragrant, perfumed or supreme.² In Malagasy, *manitra* means a pleasing odor, a perfumed thing. Therefore, *Andriamanitra* is a "noble perfumed (by death)", an ancestor or (to be more precise) a king who once lived on earth. The kings of Imerina were declared *andriamanitra* sometimes even during their lifetime and they were “worshiped”. If a king of Imerina died and buried in a grave, it is prohibited to spit and to say: “it smells bad” (even though it has a disgusting smell coming out of the grave), because a deceased king is, as it is said, always “perfumed”! Under the influence of the missionaries, the term *Andriamanitra* imposed itself to designate the unique God, the Creator of the earth and the heavens.

We are now going to talk about the word *zanahary*. The Malagasy word *zanahary* is also composed of two words: *zana* and *hary*. It has its equivalent in Tiam: *yan-harei*, according

¹ Pierre Colin, *Aspects de l’Ame Malgache* (France : Editions de l’Orante, 1959), 56.

² Ibid, 57.

to Pierre Colin's *Aspects de l'Ame Malgache*.³ (Tiam is a Malay dialect). *Yan* is the current word by which god is designated in the dialects of the entire Malay group, with the exception of modern Malay who knows the word but hardly uses it, which is an obvious proof of its antiquity. The letter "y" of *yan* was changed to "z" according to the ordinary rule, to give *zan*. And the Tiam word *harei* is identified by some with the Sanskrit word *hari* meaning "sun", the sun god "Vishnu".⁴ Accordingly, *yan-harei* means the "sun-god". In Malagasy, the term *zana(ka)* placed before a complement word can also be understood in the sense of "child"; the *zanahary* (or *Zanakary*) are the souls of the deceased who, by virtue of their *hasina* (a Malagasy concept, which "may be" translated "holiness"), are now coated with the divine power of *hasina*.⁵ The name *zanahary* is applied to the deceased of quality. In some coastal regions, one distinguishes the "good" *zanahary* (*tsara zanahary*) from the "bad" (*ratsy zanahary*). These "bad" *zanahary* are considered evil who sometimes enter the human body and cause the *tromba* crisis there.

We thus have the impression of being faced not only with the same beliefs, but also with the exact equivalence of two terms *andriamanitra* and *zanahary*, which are even amalgamated in the expression: *Andriana-nahary*. (With a capital "A", because *Andriana-nahary* is never used to designate any deceased ancestor nor any supernatural being, but only to indicate the greatest One, who created everything). In addition, Malagasy tradition teaches the existence of the supreme God, of the great *Zanahary* whom they call *Zanahari-be* or *Zanaharibe*, sovereign Master of all things, the greatest of the *zanahary*.⁶ The Malagasy ancient ancestors did have the belief in the Creator. They believed in the God who knows everything, and that there is no one like Him. In the Malagasy tradition, there is only one and incomparable great God of life and omnipotence.

According to the Malagasy tradition, in spite of God's omnipotence, this one and incomparable great God is not interested in the common necessities of earthly existence.⁷ God is and always remains immutable in his superior domain. He is the God in the highest, in the most holy place. His mind and knowledge are incomprehensible. None can speak to nor meet

³ Pierre Colin, *Aspects de l'Ame Malgache* (France : Editions de l'Orante, 1959), 61.

⁴ Ibid, 56.

⁵ Ibid, 62.

⁶ Ibid, 63.

⁷ Ibid.

with Him. Although God and His mind and knowledge are incomprehensible, although none can reach Him, it is possible to communicate with Him through His creations. These natural creatures are messengers of God. These creations of God have special powers, even though they seem dead and immobile, they have the mysteries of Him.⁸ Only (skilled) magicians and people with special knowledge/wisdom can speak, question and talk to these creatures, in order to have the message (or advice, or mystery/truth) from God (and the ancestors). And it is these (skilled) magicians and people with special knowledge/wisdom who communicate, inform and teach human beings.

Power adverse:

This Great *Zanahary* or *Zanahari-be* that we spoke about previously can only be the source of good, He is without malice; He is not the source of evil. But there is a hostile power, quite distinct from God. This power belongs to the *angatra*. It is an army led by the Great *Angatra* called *angabe*, prince of all evil spirits.⁹ According to the Malagasy belief, two Spirits would have existed at all times: the good, the merciful, the holy (*zanahary*) and the wicked, the aggressor (*angatra*). They are totally different from each other and are in constant struggle with each other. The domain of the infinitely wise Lord whose sovereignty is unlimited extends into the higher spheres, while his powerful adversary reigns in the depths of the earth. The spirits of the dead who, during their lifetime, were already under the sway of this opposing force, are also called *angatra*.

3.2. The supernatural beings

According to the Malagasy tradition, there are supernatural beings around their environment, which are endowed with magical powers. They think that the universe is divided into three worlds. But there is no partitioning between these three worlds, they are related: the upper world is the world of the ancestors or seat of the God-*Zanahary*, Creator of the universe; there is also the world of the supernatural beings; and finally the world here below, the world where men live. Possession, illness, dreams are manifestations of the presence of ancestors and

⁸ L. Dahle, *Anganon'ny Ntaolo: Tantara mampiseho ny fomban-drazana sy ny finoana sasany nananany* (Antananarivo: TPLoterana, 1971), 207.

⁹ Pierre Colin, *Aspects de l'Âme Malgache* (France : Editions de l'Orante, 1959), 89.

supernatural beings in the world of men, interventions that make the invisible visible and feed the imagination.¹⁰

The supernatural beings are ancestors of the first men who populated the earth at the original time of the creation of the world. They, also called “spirits of life”, are considered masters (*tompo*) of nature (terrestrial or aquatic). They are part of the “*faha sivy*” (ninth dimension), of the supernature which brings together all the spiritual entities.¹¹ These beings are frequently represented as hypostases of the God-*Zanahary*. These spirits occupy land and sea territories. Therefore, we distinguish supernatural beings on the land and marine supernatural beings.

Another supernatural beings are called *ranakandriana*, but they are different because they are not men, nor animals: something unknown. They are invisible but alive, and only their voice is known to those who know them. According to the belief, they are sent by God to bring his message to the people, to show them God’s will. They live in caves, where people go to request, to pray, and donate.¹² The ancestors of the Antanosy are said to have been taught divination and writing on tablets (*sorabe*) by the *ranakandriana*. They influenced the ancestors of the Antanosy, so that they knew the scriptures and divination and all kinds of medicinal plants in the forest.¹³ Divination is used to bring forth things to heal and revive the sick and to observe the unseen; it is for the sake of good. Writing, on the other hand, is a memorial, a memorial of the message given by God.

Therefore, the *ranakandriana* are bringing messages from the God-*Zanahary*. Not only the *ranakandriana*, but also the ancestors are believed to be messengers of *Zagnahary*. So let us now move on to the explanation of the concept of ancestors in detail.

3.3. The ancestors

The Malagasy word for “ancestor” is *razana*. The word *razana* literally means grandfather and grandmother, “sources of life” (*loharano nipoirana*), whether they are still

¹⁰ Øyvind Dahl, *Signes et Significations à Madagascar : des Cas de Communication Interculturelle* (Paris : Présence Africaine, 1999), 35.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² R. P. A. Rahajarizafy, *Filozofia Malagasy* (Fianarantsoa : Librairie Ambozontany, 1970), 122.

¹³ Ibid, 121.

alive or already dead.¹⁴ In addition, the Malagasy call their dead relatives *razana*. According to the Malagasy philosophy about the afterlife, even if flesh and bones fall into the grave, people are still alive. Malagasy believe that the kinship and familial ties are not destroyed by death, the living respect the dead and the dead bless the living. Therefore, the Malagasy word *razana* have two different meanings: the living grandparents and the deceased relatives.

Razana, as a living grandparent shows that it is a word of respect and honor. The grandparents (or the eldest in general) are the most respected and the most important persons in the Malagasy society, and they are given the title *razana* (even though they are still alive). *Razana*, as a deceased relative shows that it is a word of power. The deceased relatives are believed to be more powerful than the living ones, and they are called *razana*, even though they are not elders. Even a little child is called *razana* when he or she dies. Even a little child, who died, is believed to have more power than the living.

The *razana* or "ancestors", in the meaning of deceased relatives, are mediators between human being and god. The place of a tomb is always on a high place, because the deceased ones are believed to be higher than the living. It shows the hierarchy God-ancestors-humans. The ancestors are placed between God and the living human beings. The level of ancestors is above the living humans, and under God.¹⁵

Comparison with the word *zanahary* and *andriamanitra*: *razana*, *andriamanitra* and *zanahary* are three words that are interrelated to each other. We have just seen that *razana* can have the meaning of a deceased one, and *andriamanitra* means a deceased king. Therefore, an *andriamanitra* is also a *razana*. But a *razana* cannot always be an *andriamanitra*, unless he or she was a king (*andriamanitra* is a special word for the deceased "king", *razana* is a more generic term).

When it comes to the word *zanahary*, it is applied to the deceased ones as well. In some coastal regions, one calls *zanahary* everyone who died, a king or not a king, child or parent. Therefore a *razana* is also a *zanahary*. But *zanahary* cannot always be a *razana*, since *Zanahary* is used also to designate the supreme God, whom the Malagasy call *Zanahari-be* or *Zanaharibe*.

¹⁴ Øyvind Dahl, *Signes et Significations à Madagascar : des Cas de Communication Interculturelle* (Paris : Présence Africaine, 1999), 58.

¹⁵ Mariane Rahanitriniony, "Ny asa diakonaly atrehina ao amin'ny FLM Fileovana Ankadinondry Sakay, faritra Bongolava," Master in Theology (Fianarantsoa, Madagascar : Sekoly Ambony Loterana momba ny Teolojia, 2019), 40.

3.3.1. The holy ancestors and the unholy ones

The hierarchy among the ancestors depends on the level of their *Hasina* or “holiness”.¹⁶

The word *masina* is a word used to describe the character of something as being associated with God, set apart, consecrated. Something related to the Most Powerful is called *masina*. *Zanahary* is *masina*, and *Hasina* (the character of being *masina*) comes from Him. He possesses to the highest degree the holy force (*Hasina*), which defeats the "evil force". All the dead are *masina*, except those associated with the evil force, like the *mpamosavy* (sorcerers). They are all in God's dwelling. Some of them (who have a higher degree of holiness) are very close to *Zanahary*. Others (having much more holiness), during their lifetime, have already partaken of the Divinity.¹⁷ They are believed, during their lifetime, to be very wise sages, having the deepest wisdom, praising truth and kindness, and hating lies and theft, etc...¹⁸ There are sanctified dead who emanate from God himself, since they are associated with Him. From these sanctified ancestors comes the beneficial power of *hasina*.¹⁹

The hierarchy among the ancestors is also related to the concept of dualism: the good and evil forces. The opposition between good and evil forces manifests itself in the domain of morality, ritual and religion; it even extends to all organic and inorganic, material and spiritual creation. The Malagasy dualism is religious and practical, separating good and evil, pure and impure.²⁰ Deceased ones are considered of low level, since, while alive, they were under the influence of the negative force and the hostile power. They cannot be with God in His seat. They are not sanctified but wander everywhere as *angatra*. They will never have the power to bless their living relatives.

¹⁶ Pierre Colin, *Aspects de l'Ame Malgache* (France : Editions de l'Orante, 1959), 87.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 69.

¹⁸ L. Dahle, *Anganon'ny Ntaolo: Tantara mampiseho ny fomban-drazana sy ny finoana sasany nananany* (Antananarivo: TPLoterana, 1971), i-ii.

¹⁹ Pierre Colin, *Aspects de l'Ame Malgache* (France : Editions de l'Orante, 1959), 87.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 88.

3.3.2. Becoming a venerated ancestor

A venerated ancestor (in Malagasy, *razana mitahy*) means, an ancestor who can bless, who has the power to bless his or her living relatives on earth. Not all the deceased ones can bless. Those who have higher level of holiness and honor have more power to bless the living. So it depends on the level of holiness and honor (*Hasina*) of the deceased that he or she can actually provide blessings and prosperity to the living. Besides, the living relatives have also the obligation to perform some rituals in order to level up the deceased ones, to render them more holy (*mitombo Hasina*) and more powerful. According to Rahanitriniony Mariane who has written a Master thesis on the diaconal work in the region of Bongolava, and who has done interviews on the people traditional belief there, there are ways in which the dead are cared for in order to bless and protect them, such as making a betrayal of the dead.²¹ There are ways in which a deceased person becomes a venerated and holy ancestor, to be able to bless and protect the living. They have to be cared for: there are rituals required to be a condition for fulfilling the demands of the living. It could be an animal sacrifice, it could also be a gift of alcohol, a gift of clothing, the practice of *famadihana* or exhumation, etc.

3.3.3. Ancestral veneration

According to the Malagasy tradition, God is not interested in the common necessities of earthly existence. He lives in the highest place; God is and always remains immutable in his superior domain. God's *Hasina* "dwells above" (*ambony*), "in the sky" (*any an-danitra*), at an inaccessible distance and height. It is the maintenance of his superiority. God becomes inaccessible, too far away for humans to enter into a direct relationship with Him. In the same way, men clothed with exceptional *Hasina* approach God, appear as distinct beings, by virtue of the superiority attributed to them, and reinforce the limit that separates them from other men.

As for the ancestors, they can never be separated from the life of the living but follow them. The ancestors are believed to see the life of the living, in order to bring their desires to God, they can protect the living from danger. Malagasy tradition teaches the Malagasy people that their ancestors can talk to them in a dream; they are still as familiar and friendly as they were still living together. The "divine ancestors" are the intermediaries or mediators between

²¹ Mariane Rahanitriniony, "Ny asa diakonaly atrehina ao amin'ny FLM Fileovana Ankadinondry Sakay, faritra Bongolava," Master in Theology (Fianarantsoa, Madagascar : Sekoly Ambony Loterana momba ny Teolojia, 2019), 40.

God and the living.

In addition, the simplest and deepest moral conduct in the Malagasy tradition is primarily respecting all parents and elders, and asking for their blessing. The parents and elders who were still in the flesh were asked for blessing, because they are believed to possess the power to bless or to curse. They are considered to be God's representatives on earth (*zagnahary faharoa gny raiamandreny*). Malagasy tradition even teaches that when the parents and elders die, they increase in *Hasina* (value and power). And it is evident that they treat them as "gods", partakers of the blessings of the great God. God is the Head of all venerated ancestors, and they are messengers of God.²² The Malagasy people are very afraid of being blamed by the deceased ones, and they want very much to be faultless in front of them.²³ We see the way Malagasy people respect their deceased parents or elders; the tomb is very expensive and beautifully built for the residence of the dead, a precious cloth to wrap the body (showing respect), a formal dress of betrayal, calling the dead "lord".²⁴

Malagasy tradition makes the Malagasy people not to equate the ancestors with God, even though they call them "gods". What they do is just a prayer of blessings. According to the Malagasy tradition, an ancestor is a "venerated" one (*razana mitahy*) if he has the power to bless his relatives living on earth. Not all the deceased ones can bless, but only those who have higher level of holiness and honor. None of that means to worship another "god" in place of *Zanahary*, they just implore the venerated ones to bless their life on earth. According to the Malagasy tradition, there is only one and incomparable "great God, the Lord of the universe." In all prayers that they do, the ancestors are always mentioned after Him, because He is the Greatest and incomparable God.

We have just seen that Malagasy tradition let the Malagasy people venerate their ancestors since they have the power to bless and to curse. They think they do not worship another "god" in place of *Zanahary*, they just implore the venerated ones to bless their life on earth. For them, there is only one and incomparable great Lord of the universe. They do not equate their ancestors with God. We have also seen that the virtue *Hasina* of *Zanahary* is the maintenance of His superiority, His distance from all creation. He is too far away and inaccessible to humans. Therefore, the ancestors stand as intermediates between God and the

²² R. P. A. Rahajarizafy, *Filozofia Malagasy* (Fianarantsoa : Librairie Ambozontany, 1970), 117.

²³ *Ibid*, 119.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 117.

living humans. They play an intermediary role between the living and God. The ancestors carried the blessing from God, but they also carried His anger.

So on the one hand, God is unreachable; His mind and knowledge are incomprehensible. Humans cannot communicate with God nor meet Him directly. There are always mediators conveying the divine message to humans. On the other hand, the ancestors have lived on earth, so they can be called and communicated more easily than God. Since God is at the highest, it is easier to communicate with the ancestors, than to communicate with Him. According to the Malagasy tradition, ancestors are closer to Malagasy people, and they are called more often than God, the *Zanahary*.

Therefore, the ancestors are considered to be the means by which the living can get the message from God. Through the ancestors, the Malagasy people believe to receive the divine blessing from above; but they can also bring divine wrath and curse to those who have done wrong in their life on earth. The venerated ancestors live close to God, because they are holy people, they can live in the sanctuary. So they know the mysteries of God, they know the ways of God, and they know the message of God.

3.4. Conclusion

We have come now to an end of this chapter on Malagasy traditional beliefs relating to the ancestors, where we have seen that, according to the Malagasy belief, there is a Great God called *Zanaharibe* (or simply *Zanahary*), and rendered *Andriamanitra* under the influence of the missionaries and the Merina ethnic group. This One and Great God communicate with the living human beings through supernatural beings and the ancestors. Among the ancestors, some are “venerated” since they have a higher degree of *Hasina*, and believed to be very close to *Zanahary*. Malagasy people implore the “venerated” ones to bless their life on earth. And it is time now to move on to the next chapter to see the text in 1 Samuel 28.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE ROLE OF THE DECEASED SAMUEL IN 1 SAMUEL 28

Samuel was the former leader of Israel. He was a very wise leader. Subsequently, when the people of Israel needed a king, Samuel became the counselor of the king of Israel. He gave advice and guided the king spiritually and mentally. He was the pillar of the kingdom of Israel. 1 Samuel chapter 28 shows us that even if he died, it seems that Samuel still holds a role in guiding and counseling the king of Israel. So, in this chapter, we will answer to the question: what is the role of the deceased Samuel as told in 1 Samuel chapter 28?

4.1. An old man responding to the call of Saul

The appearance and form of the ghost of Samuel in verses 13 and 14 already tell us in advance what the role of the deceased Samuel might be in 1 Samuel 28. Before moving on, I think it is important to look at some adverse ideas. Campbell says that it was not the real Samuel who appeared to Saul, he says that the text only substitutes the unnamed ghost for Samuel: “Substituting the unnamed figure for Samuel is possible but unnecessary; it does nothing to resolve the puzzles. We are left with a puzzling text, some parts more puzzling than others—the storyteller’s challenge.”¹ He thinks that the storyteller resolves a puzzle in telling this narrative, and thinks that is why he substitutes the ghost for Samuel. Whose ghost, then, it could be? Was it a devil in the appearance of Samuel. But I do not agree with Campbell saying it was just a puzzle solving. Many interpreters and authors agree it was indeed Samuel who appeared. The ghost emphasized the Lord’s words, and has no doubt about the Lord’s control of the events.

Compared to Saul’s single mention of God in 1 Samuel 28:15, Samuel refers to “the Lord” seven times in his reply. Who can use the name of the Lord except his own people. The devil would never accept that the Lord has control of events. Repeating the verb used by Saul in 1 Samuel 28:15, “The Lord has turned [away] from you”, the ghost cannot be the devil who uncompromisingly emphasizes the very words of the Lord of Israel.

As we said, the appearance and form of the ghost of Samuel in verses 13 and 14 already

¹ A. F. Campbell, *1 Samuel. The Forms of the Old Testament Literature*. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 283.

tell us in advance what the role of the deceased Samuel might be in 1 Samuel 28. So let us begin with it.

4.1.1. An old man

וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶל־תִּירְאִי כִּי מָה רָאִית (1 Sam. 28:13 BHS)

The king said to her, "Don't be afraid. What do you see?" (1 Sam. 28:13 NIV)

Here, it is the king who asks: “What do you see?” Willing to know the aesthetic quality of the apparition. In the Hebrew Bible, all uses of this ‘appearance’ occur along a spectrum of culturally situated “good-bad” appearances. Not every instance of appearance labels something as beautiful, but they all engage in some kind of distinction about where something rates on an aesthetic scale.² In 1 Samuel 28:13, Saul asks about the aesthetic appearance of the ghost, and as such, we will use “beauty” hereon to indicate the specific kind of appearance under question and the levels of attractiveness attached to this appearance. As the passage describes אֱלֹהִים ‘gods’, (in some cases the Hebrew term may, refer to “heavenly beings”, and I think that so is the case here, hence not God or god) or the “heavenly being” coming up from the ground (second part of verse 13), Saul associates the ghost with a divine heavenly being. Thus Saul might think the ghost should look like it is favoured of a god.³

Let us look now at the next verse (verse 14):

וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ מִה־תֵּאָרוּ וַתֹּאמֶר אִישׁ זָקֵן עֹלֶה וְהוּא עֹטָה מְעִיל וַיִּדַע שְׂאוּל כִּי־שְׂמוּאֵל הוּא וַיִּקַּד אַפָּיִם אֶרְצָה וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ:

(1 Sam. 28:14 BHS)

"What does he look like?" he asked. "An old man wearing a robe is coming up," she said. Then Saul knew it was Samuel, and he bowed down and prostrated himself with his face to the ground. (1 Sam. 28:14 NIV)

We see in this verse that the first description of the figure is an “old man”, followed by a second observation that he is “coming up.” The third is that the apparition is “covered,” and

² Ellena Lyell and Joseph Scales, “Uncovering the dead, dethroning the king: divine embodiment in 1 Samuel 28:14,” *Hebrew Studies* 62 (2021): 101.

³ *Ibid*: 102.

the fourth and final element is that he is wearing a “robe.” In the Masoretic Text, the medium describes the ghost as זָקֵן ‘old’, which is a specific response to Saul’s question about beauty and divine favour.⁴

This Hebrew word זָקֵן means aged, ancient, ancient man, elder, senator, eldest, old, old man. The LXX renders presbuteros. zāqēn is an adjective derived from zāqēn “to be old,” which is a denominative verb from zāqān “beard.” zāqēn, used either as an attributive adjective or as a substantive, describes the person (male or female) who, contrasting with the youth (na·ar; Gen 19:4; cf. Ps 37:25) has reached the stage in life called old age. The old man is to be honored (Lev 19:32; cf. Lam 5:12). The young wait to speak until the old have spoken (Job 32:4). Their value as advisors (cf. Ezk 7:26) is recognized in the account of Rehoboam’s rejecting their counsel in favor of that of the young men (I Kgs 12:6ff.). On the other hand, the advice of the elders saved Jeremiah’s life (Jer 26:17). The old man is adorned by his grey hair (Prov 20:29) and his children are his crown (Prov 17:6).⁵

The Hebrew word זָקֵן can refer to a state close to death (e.g., Gen 18:11; 25:8; 35:29; Job 42:17) but also is a symbol of beauty and wisdom (e.g., Prov 17:6; 20:29). Though Saul is no longer a young man when he visits Endor, he is not described as זָקֵן in the Hebrew Bible, he lacks wisdom. Samuel is זָקֵן, he is (close to) death, but beautiful and wise. Levels of beauty coincide with moral goodness and divine favour.⁶ Samuel is now old and dead, but still has divine favour. The medium perceives that the ghost has a physically impressive or distinguished appearance. The ghost being described as a venerable and upstanding persona.⁷ Therefore, the ghost is a wise divine being, bringing a message full of wisdom and good purpose for Saul and the kingdom of Israel.

These characters of the deceased Samuel are added to the words “wearing a robe,” to

⁴ Ellena Lyell and Joseph Scales, “Uncovering the dead, dethroning the king: divine embodiment in 1 Samuel 28:14,” *Hebrew Studies* 62 (2021): 104.

⁵ R. L. Harris, G. L. Archer and B. K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 249.

⁶ Ellena Lyell and Joseph Scales, “Uncovering the dead, dethroning the king: divine embodiment in 1 Samuel 28:14,” *Hebrew Studies* 62 (2021): 103.

⁷ *Ibid*, 104.

help us bring out the role of the deceased Samuel. The verb to wrap oneself or cover oneself with something is **עטה** in Hebrew. And we see in verse 14 that it is a verb in qal participle masculine singular absolute. As a participle, it has an adjectival use, describing the old man. Uses of **עטה** in the Hebrew Bible relate to shame and the dead on the one hand, and honour and the divine on the other. The use of **עטה** in 1 Samuel 28:14 carries similar connotations. The ghost of Samuel is the one described as “covered”: he is dead but divine, he is being shielded from a shameful view, yet honoured at the same time. Samuel is dead, covered and honoured.⁸ In addition, the robe represents the priesthood, prophets, temple and royalty.⁹ The robe and the manner in which it is worn are associated with ideas of honor.

The deceased Samuel is always a prophet of God, whether alive or dead. The deceased Samuel is presented as a honorable and god-like being, and that gives us a hint of what his role could be. We will see that role, but before that we will try to explain that the act of “coming up” (being explained along with “to bring up”) is an act of positive response of the deceased Samuel, an act of good response to the call of cry and help from the part of Saul.

4.1.2. Coming up to respond to the call in place of God

Coming up:

וַתֹּאמֶר הָאִשָּׁה אֶת־מִי אֶעֱלֶה־לָּךְ וַיֹּאמֶר אֶת־שְׂמוּאֵל הֶעֱלֵי־לִי: (1 Samuel 28:11 BHS)

Then the woman asked, "Whom shall I bring up for you?" "Bring up Samuel," he said. (1 Sam. 28:11 NIV)

The Masoretic text agrees with the LXX that the medium caused the ghost to ‘come up’.¹⁰ She makes the interaction with the deceased Samuel possible. She makes him to appear.

⁸ Ellena Lyell and Joseph Scales, “Uncovering the dead, dethroning the king: divine embodiment in 1 Samuel 28:14,” *Hebrew Studies* 62 (2021): 109.

⁹ Ibid: 114.

¹⁰ Ibid: 106.

Both אֶעֱלֶה and הֶעֱלִי are here in hiphil. The basic idea behind hiphil is causative meaning: therefore, it must be the medium who guides the ghost from where it is placed. But I do not agree with that idea that all the ghost has to do is but follow. It is not possible that the coming up is not the ghost's own; that the medium caused it, that it happens under the medium's power. It is as if the medium has control over the deceased Samuel, and that she ordered him to come up. Therefore, it likely suggests that the medium orders the deceased Samuel, that she is the chief that takes control of the spirits of the dead. But this is not true. I totally disagree that the deceased Samuel is submitted to her and follow her order even though he does not like to come up. Is the deceased Samuel really forced by the medium to appear?

In verse 8:

:קְסוּמֵי נָא לִי בְּאוֹב וְהֶעֱלִי לִי אֶת אֲשֶׁר-אָמַר אֱלֹדִי: (1 Sam. 28:8 BHS)

"Consult a spirit for me," he said, "and bring up for me the one I name." (1 Sam. 28:8 NIV),

The medium summons the ghost of Samuel out from 'Hades' and that the ghost simply appears. This term is regularly used in contexts where divine beings appear to mortals. Both the inclusion of Hades and contexts of the appearance of divine beings correspond to the Masoretic Text in 1 Samuel 28:13 where the medium initially describes the ghost as a divine-like being coming up from the earth.¹¹ Here, to summon means to give notice, to inform secretly to a danger or risk to come. It is used in the sense of asking (for help), calling or crying, or imploring to find support and help.

The medium consults, meaning that she asks the ghost of Samuel for information or advice, to get his permission for something, or to receive his help before making a decision. She cannot put an order so that the deceased Samuel come up under her control. Only those who are above can bring up. The height here does not mean the distance between the bottom and the top, rather it expresses the state of being honored, wise and holy. Only YHWH is the most wise, therefore the Highest. He is the only one who brings up because He is above all, He is from above, He is from heaven: the Holy One of Israel. As we stated above, the ghost

¹¹ Ellena Lyell and Joseph Scales, "Uncovering the dead, dethroning the king: divine embodiment in 1 Samuel 28:14," *Hebrew Studies* 62 (2021): 106.

appearing here is a wise divine being. The deceased Samuel is always a prophet of God, whether alive or dead. The deceased Samuel is presented as a honorable and god-like being.

Therefore, the deceased Samuel cannot be ordered by the medium to come up and to appear. The medium has no control over the deceased Samuel, she is not the chief that takes control of him. He is not submitted to her and does not follow her order. He comes up only because of his willingness to help and to answer to Saul's cry. He comes up without any pressure or control from the part of the medium or Saul. They implore him, and he has pity on them and accepted to appear and come up.

Being in place of God:

Samuel knew that God departed from Saul, and that he needed some advice before taking any action, before making any decision. The deceased Samuel knew that Saul was crying out loud for help. Saul is desperate, he and the whole Israel are in distress! "The Philistines are fighting against me," Saul says in verse 15. Saul inquired of the Lord. "He inquired of the LORD," (1 Sam. 28:6 NIV), he expected Him to answer by dreams, he inquired Him through Urim and prophets. In spite of the danger faced by Saul and Israel, the Lord did not answer. "The LORD did not answer him by dreams or Urim or prophets". (1 Sam. 28:6 NIV). The deceased Samuel says: "now that the LORD has departed from you and become your enemy" (1 Sam. 28:16 NIV). It is the Lord who should "come up" and gives guidance for the poor Saul!

The exact things he should do to God, he does it to the deceased Samuel. What he expects from the Lord, now he turns to the deceased Samuel expecting the same thing. The deceased Samuel is just another alternative, a divine alternative. Saul inquires the deceased Samuel for help and guidance in the same way he inquired of the Lord. "And he bowed down and prostrated himself with his face to the ground." (1 Sam. 28:14 NIV). Saul performs proskynesis to the ghost, as if it were a god. 1 Samuel 28:14 explicitly connects Saul's actions with worship. His collapse to the ground represents reverence and submission.¹²

1 Samuel 28:13-14 uses **עֲלֶה** once to refer to the "gods" or heavenly beings coming up, and once to Samuel himself coming up. These two entities, the divine and Samuel, and the

¹² Ellena Lyell and Joseph Scales, "Uncovering the dead, dethroning the king: divine embodiment in 1 Samuel 28:14," *Hebrew Studies* 62 (2021): 107.

action of “going up” are connected but reversed between these two pericopes.¹³ In the first half of verse 14, we read: "An old man ... is coming up," (1 Sam. 28:14 NIV), and the verb used for “come up” is עלה. The verb עלה is a denominative with a basic meaning indicating movement upward: “go up”.¹⁴ This going up is from low place to high; to sacred places; like going up to Jerusalem; going up, in personal relations: to meet or visit, (all with implication of ascent); go up unto God, on a height. It may also have the meaning of to heal mentally and to offer.¹⁵

The going up implies personal relations: to meet, to be together. It is YHWH, the Holy One of Israel, who wants to go up in the midst of Israel. It is He who wants to appear in order to be with them, and to dwell among them. YHWH wants to go up in the midst of His people. But here, it is the deceased Samuel who comes up to meet the needs of Saul, the king of Israel. It is the deceased Samuel who is willing to come up to respond to him. He listens, yes even though Saul did wrong. In contrast, God did not listen.

4.2. An old man bringing a divine message

The role of the deceased Samuel in 1 Samuel 28 can be drawn from his very words from verse 16 to verse 19: what he said to Saul?

¹⁶ Samuel said, "Why do you consult me, now that the LORD has departed from you and become your enemy?"

¹⁷ The LORD has done what he predicted through me. The LORD has torn the kingdom out of your hands and given it to one of your neighbors-- to David.

¹⁸ Because you did not obey the LORD or carry out his fierce wrath against the Amalekites, the LORD has done this to you today.

¹⁹ The LORD will deliver both Israel and you into the hands of the Philistines, and tomorrow you and your sons will be with me. The LORD will also give the army of Israel into the hands of the Philistines." (1 Sam. 28:16-19 NIV)

¹³ Ellena Lyell and Joseph Scales, “Uncovering the dead, dethroning the king: divine embodiment in 1 Samuel 28:14,” *Hebrew Studies* 62 (2021): 106.

¹⁴ G. Johannes Botterweck et al., *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, s.v. עלה.

¹⁵ Francis Brown et al., *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, s.v. עלה.

These words of the deceased Samuel can be grouped into two: first a warning, and second a revelation of the future.

Warning:

“You did not obey the Lord” (verse 18). This is an admonition, to make Saul think of his sins. Warning Saul about his behaviors. As we have seen above, the deceased Samuel is said to be an old man (coming up, covered in a robe), which declares that he is appearing as a wise divine being. The deceased Samuel is always a prophet of God, whether alive or dead, presented as an honorable and god-like being. He remains so even though he is already dead. Thus, he came to appear to Saul, to admonish and to warn him so that he may change his attitudes and repent.

We see in the words of the deceased Samuel that he uses the name of the ‘Lord’ יהוה seven times: he is reminding and bringing the words of the Lord, reinforcing God’s words. The divine name יהוה is significant for the faith of Israel. Old Testament traditions associate this name with Sinai and with Moses in Midianite territory. Its function was to elevate its bearer from the presupposed world of polytheistic powers. The Israelites used to say that all people walk each in the name of its god, but Israel walks in the name of יהוה. This divine name shows also the personal otherness of the God who interacts with his people, an active God. In addition, this name comes from the Hebrew verb meaning “to be, become, show oneself, act,” etc. The qal “he is, he shows himself to be active” can be practically considered. The proper understanding of the divine name is not a static understanding, it is rather a dynamic activity.¹⁶

Therefore, the deceased Samuel uses this divine name יהוה seven times, to show that he comes up in the name of the Lord of Israel. To show that he does not come up by himself, but he comes up to bring the divine message, he comes up for the Lord. The Lord of Israel is not a static god, but a dynamic One. And the deceased Samuel comes up to show that. He reinforces the words of the Lord, and affirms that the Lord says what He says. The deceased Samuel brings the message from the Lord, He is a messenger of God.

¹⁶ E. Jenni and C. Westermann, *Theological lexicon of the Old Testament*, s.v. יהוה.

Prediction of the future:

19 וַיִּתֵּן יְהוָה גַּם אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל עַמָּךְ בְּיַד־פְּלִשְׁתִּים וּמָחָר אַתָּה וּבָנֶיךָ עִמִּי גַם אֶת־מַחְנֵה יִשְׂרָאֵל

יָתֵן יְהוָה בְּיַד־פְּלִשְׁתִּים:

(1 Sam. 28:19 BHS)

"The LORD will deliver both Israel and you into the hands of the Philistines, and tomorrow you and your sons will be with me. The LORD will also give the army of Israel into the hands of the Philistines." (1 Sam. 28:19 NIV)

In this verse, the deceased Samuel tells Saul about his fate. We find here the use of the imperfect tense, which is to show a predictive future. It indicates that something will take place or come to pass: "it will happen." Since he is a divine being, prophecy proceeds of him, and he has knowledge of the future. So his role is to foretell things to come so as to make Saul prepare, to make him think of his disobedience, hoping that he may change and repent. The use of the word "tomorrow" shows that it is indeed a prediction of a future event: וּמָחָר אַתָּה וּבָנֶיךָ עִמִּי (and tomorrow you and your sons will be with me). The Hebrew word מָחָר is here rendered "tomorrow," but it does not necessarily signifies "the next day," but some near future time. Of theological interest is the use of this word to mean in future time, "When in time to come" in future days. It can be used in the sense of the following day, but can also be used in the sense of time that would come.¹⁷

Therefore, the deceased Samuel is foretelling an event that would come in future time. But what kind of event is it? The event predicted by the deceased prophet Samuel here is well said in details, consisting of three crushing judgments, which were to come directly upon Saul. These three judgments are summarizing the meaning of the whole verse. First is a total defeat of the army of Israel, there would be a utter defeat of the royal army. The deceased Samuel predicts that the Lord would deliver Israel, with Saul, into the hand of the Philistines. Second is the violent death of Saul himself and his two sons. Saul and his sons would fall in the

¹⁷ R. L. Harris, G. L. Archer and B. K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 500.

course of the fight between the Israel army and the Philistine army. The ghost of Samuel predicts that Saul and his sons (namely, the three that were with him in the camp) should be with him, that is, should, like him, be in the state of the dead, or another world, or the after life. Third is the sacking of the camp of Israel and its attendant horrors. The defeat of Israel would be followed by the sack of the camp of Israel, augmenting the horrors and disasters of the rout of the king's army. Samuel predicts that this should take place on the coming days.

It is all about the deceased Samuel denouncing God's judgments upon Saul. His day of grace was gone, and judgment was now to burst upon him without delay. It is the judgement of the Lord, said by Samuel. The guilt of the king involves the nation also in punishment. And all of these predictions are true, there is no lie in it. The deceased Samuel is able to foretell what will happen in the future. It was Samuel himself who foretold the fate of Saul and his house in this interview. The apparition came before the arts of the medium were put in practice; she herself was surprised and alarmed; the prediction of Saul's own death and the defeat of his forces was confidently made. All of this confirms that Samuel really appeared.

No evil spirit or impostor of any kind could know these particulars, which were all exactly accomplished. No evil spirit could know these future events with such a details. Only the spirit of the real prophet of the Lord, only Samuel can be divinely inspired with the knowledge of them, this appearance of Samuel was really Samuel; for it is evident it could only proceed from the omniscient God. This prediction could not be possible if there is no divine interposition in it. The deceased Samuel tells Saul that the kingdom should be taken from him soon; and names the very person to whom it should be given; showing by whom, and where, and how the sentence should be executed; and that the execution of it was instant, and should be deferred no longer.

The very reason why the deceased Samuel predicts all of that fate of Saul is to warn him, to admonish and exhort him, hoping that he may change and repent. In fact, the deceased Samuel in this verse shows tenderness and gentle expression. He says: "tomorrow you and your sons will be with me." In saying these words, Samuel does not pronounce Saul's final condemnation, but rather draws him by his tenderness to a better mind. "To be with me" refers here a like condition of death. It may be understood of a dead condition, but not necessarily an evil condition. This means to be with me in the Hades, the abode of departed spirits of righteous and wicked alike. He uses a mild and charitable expression, applicable to all, good and bad, "You will be as I am: no longer among the living." If Samuel had said to Saul, "you will be

among the wicked ones, you will be condemned forever”, then he would have crushed him with a big despair and have hardened him in his impenitence. Since the deceased Samuel wants to exhort Saul to repentance, he shows tenderness and uses expression that should not harden him in impenitence.

4.3. Conclusion:

The appearance and form of the ghost of Samuel in verses 13 and 14 already tell us in advance what the role of the deceased Samuel might be in 1 Samuel 28. Samuel is old and dead, but still has divine favour. The ghost being described as a venerable and a wise divine being, and presented as a honorable and god-like being. The act of “coming up” is an act of positive response of the deceased Samuel, an act of good response to the call of cry and help from the part of Saul. The words of the deceased Samuel shows that he comes to warn, he comes up in the name of the Lord of Israel, to show that he does not come up by himself. He comes up to bring the divine message, he comes to admonish Saul and makes him think of the bad deeds he has done and repent. The deceased Samuel comes up to show that the Lord of Israel is not a static god, but a dynamic One. He reinforces the words of the Lord, and reaffirms it. He also comes to reveal the future. Therefore, the deceased Samuel is foretelling an event that would come in future time, consisting of crushing judgments, which were to come directly upon Saul. These three judgments are about the total defeat of the army of Israel; about the defeat of Israel, with Saul, into the hand of the Philistines; and about the violent death of Saul himself and his two sons.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE ROLE OF THE DECEASED SAMUEL IN 1 SAMUEL 28, INTERPRETED IN LIGHT OF THE MALAGASY TRADITIONAL CONCEPT OF ANCESTORS

The previous chapter answers the question: what is the role of the deceased Samuel as told in 1 Samuel chapter 28? A similar question is going to be answered throughout this chapter, but with the use of the Malagasy traditional concept of ancestors, which we have found in chapter three. This chapter is the combination of chapter three and chapter four, and we will see first whether Samuel fulfills the criteria of being an ancestor or a venerated one according to the Malagasy tradition, and second we will see the role of the deceased Samuel as explained by means of that tradition.

5.1. Does Samuel fulfill the criteria of being an ancestor/a venerated ancestor?

Before applying the role of Malagasy ancestors to the deceased Samuel, it is important to see first whether Samuel fulfills the criteria of being an ancestor or not. It is important because if he does not fulfill all the criteria of being an ancestor or does not fulfill all the criteria of being a venerated ancestor, he can never be an ancestor able to bless, and the Malagasy concepts of ancestors cannot be applied to him. So let us ask the question: Does Samuel fulfill the criteria of being an ancestor?

5.1.1. Does Samuel fulfill the criteria of being an ancestor?

We have seen that the word ancestor is rendered *razana* in the Malagasy language, having two different meanings: the living grandparents and the deceased relatives. The word *razana* literally means grandfather and grandmother, “sources of life”, and they are so called even though they are still alive.¹⁸ Samuel was a judge and prophet of God who led Israel for over forty years. Samuel also anointed the first king of Israel, Saul, and his successor David. He had already been old when he had been called on to anoint Saul. In 1 Samuel 8:1 we can read: “When Samuel grew old, he appointed his sons as Israel's leaders,” and in 1 Samuel 8:5, “They said to him, “You are old, and your sons do not follow your ways; now appoint a king to

¹⁸ Øyvind Dahl, *Signes et Significations à Madagascar : des Cas de Communication Interculturelle* (Paris : Présence Africaine, 1999), 58.

lead us, such as all the other nations have.”” During his life, Samuel was one of the most respected and the most important persons in Israel society.

The description of the ghost of Samuel as זקן confirms that Samuel was indeed an aged, ancient man, elder, and old man. He has reached the stage in life called old age. The old Samuel was to be honored and valued as advisor, giving counsel to the people, even to the king of Israel. Samuel is זקן , he was very old, he was close to death, but beautiful and wise. His level of beauty coincides with moral goodness. The medium perceives that the ghost has a physically old but impressive and distinguished appearance. Samuel was an old prophet of God, and an old judge of Israel. During his life on earth, Samuel was indeed a grandfather, a source of wisdom and a source of life. Therefore he can be called an ancestor or a *razana* in the first meaning of the Malagasy term.

The second meaning of the Malagasy word *razana* is a dead relative. According to the Malagasy philosophy about the afterlife, even if flesh and bones fall into the grave, people are still alive, and they call those members of the family who have gone *razana*. There are ties bounding Samuel and Israel, Samuel was the ruler and the head of Israel, he is an Israelite. He was a beloved friend and relative to all Israel and to Saul. After quietly having retired to Ramah, Samuel died. 1 Samuel 25:1 records that Samuel died when David was still on the run from King Saul: “Now Samuel died, and all Israel assembled and mourned for him; and they buried him at his home in Ramah.” 1 Samuel 28:3 also says: “Now Samuel was dead, and all Israel had mourned for him and buried him in his own town of Ramah.” He was buried where he had been born and served as prophet, priest and judge, in the town of Ramah in the territory of Ephraim during the reign of Saul.

Samuel is a dead relative for Israel and for the King Saul also, the deceased Samuel is an ancestor or a *razana* in the second meaning of the Malagasy term. Therefore, Samuel was indeed an ancestor, or a *razana* while he was still alive. Now that he is dead, he is also called an ancestor or a *razana*. The two meanings of *razana* correspond to the case of Samuel. Therefore he is indeed an ancestor or a *razana* according to the Malagasy traditional concept of ancestor. But is he a holy ancestor or an unholy one?

5.1.2. The deceased Samuel, a holy and venerated ancestor

Being an ancestor is already something, but being a venerated one among all of them is really a very important thing according to the Malagasy traditional way of thinking. So we should not be content only of the deceased Samuel being an ancestor, but we have to ask a more deep question: Is the deceased Samuel a holy and a venerated ancestor?

All the deceased people are believed to have special power, they are all called *masina* except those associated with the evil force, like the *mpamosavy* (sorcerers) and all the wrongdoers (such as killers and the like). The handicapped people who have deceased are also considered by the Malagasy tradition as associated with evil force, and therefore unholy, deprived of the powerful force. During his lifetime, Samuel was a judge and prophet of God who led Israel. He was an advisor, giving counsel to the people, even to the king of Israel. He was very old, but beautiful and wise. His level of beauty coincides with moral goodness, a source of wisdom. Samuel (having much holiness), during his lifetime, have already partaken of the Divinity according to the Malagasy traditional belief.¹⁹ He is believed, during his lifetime, to be very wise sage, having the deepest wisdom, praising truth and kindness, and hating lies and theft. The deceased Samuel is a sanctified dead who emanates from God himself, since he is associated with Him. Therefore the deceased Samuel is a holy ancestor.

The hierarchy among the ancestors depends on the level of their *Hasina* or “holiness”.²⁰ The word *masina* is a word used to describe the character of something as being associated with God, set apart, consecrated. Something related to the Most Powerful is called *masina*. God is *masina*, and *Hasina* (the character of being *masina*) comes from Him. He possesses to the highest degree the force (*Hasina*). Since the deceased Samuel is a holy ancestor, since he has a high level of *Hasina*, he is associated with God. He has the character of God, the deceased Samuel has the character of being *masina*. The ghost of Samuel is divine, he is being shielded from a shameful view, yet honoured at the same time. Samuel is dead, covered and honoured.²¹ In addition, the robe the ghost wears represents the priesthood, prophets, temple and royalty.²²

The deceased Samuel can also be called a venerated ancestor. A venerated ancestor (in

¹⁹ Øyvind Dahl, *Signes et Significations à Madagascar : des Cas de Communication Interculturelle* (Paris : Présence Africaine, 1999), 69.

²⁰ Pierre Colin, *Aspects de l'Ame Malgache* (France : Editions de l'Orante, 1959), 87.

²¹ *Ibid*, 109.

²² *Ibid*, 114.

Malagasy, *razana mitahy*) means, an ancestor who can bless, who has the power to bless his or her living relatives on earth. Not all the deceased ones can bless. Those who have higher level of holiness and honor have more power to bless the living. So it depends on the level of holiness and honor (*Hasina*) of the deceased that he or she can actually provide blessings and prosperity to the living. There are ways in which a deceased person becomes a venerated and holy ancestor, to be able to bless and protect the living. They have to be cared for: there are rituals required to be a condition for fulfilling the demands of the living. It could be an animal sacrifice, it could also be a gift of alcohol, a gift of clothing, the practice of *famadihana* or exhumation, etc. There are ways in which the dead are cared for in order to bless and protect them, such as making a betrayal of the dead.²³

1 Samuel 28:3 says that “all Israel had mourned for Samuel and buried him in his own town of Ramah.” In ancient Israel, mourning for the dead takes many days, and even months. When Israelites mourn, they put on mourning clothes.²⁴ Weeping and mourning includes rending one’s garments and donning sackcloth. Ancient Israelites practiced mummification to important person, removing the corpse for separate preservation, packing the body with impregnated linen and entirely wrapping it with linen.²⁵ When Samuel died, such rituals might have been followed as an ancient Israelite way of burial of an important person who dies. Israel tradition of wrapping the corpse with a valuable linen is similar to the ritual done during the Malagasy practice of exhumation or *famadihana*. The deceased Samuel is a venerated and holy ancestor, he is able to bless and protect the King Saul from the hands of the Philistines. There is no doubt that the body of Samuel was cared during his burial, since all the rituals required have been done. Without the normal burial, the deceased Samuel would not have become a venerated ancestor. Since he was buried as an important person, he is indeed a venerated ancestor. According to the Malagasy tradition, there is no way to doubt that Samuel fulfills indeed all the criteria of being a venerated ancestor for Israel and for Saul their king.

5.2. The role of the deceased Samuel, as seen as an ancestor in the Malagasy tradition

Now we are sure that Samuel fulfills all the criteria of being a venerated ancestor, the role of a venerated ancestor (according to the Malagasy tradition) can be applied to him. Let us

²³ Mariane Rahanitriony, “Ny asa diakonaly atrehina ao amin'ny FLM Fileovana Ankadinondry Sakay, faritra Bongolava,” Master in Theology (Fianarantsoa, Madagascar : Sekoly Ambony Loterana momba ny Teolojia, 2019), 40.

²⁴ W. E. Vine et al., *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, s.v. “to mourn”.

²⁵ J. D. Douglas et al., *The New Bible Dictionary*, s.v. “Burial and mourning.”

then apply that role to the deceased Samuel, since he is now a venerated ancestor. Let us now apply the Malagasy concept relating to the ancestors to the deceased Samuel and to his relation to Saul and to God.

5.2.1. The deceased Samuel as an ancestor representative of God the *Zanahary*

The proper name of the God of Israel is Yahweh, as He says: “this is my name for ever” in Exodus 3:15. Since the original Hebrew text was not vocalized in time, the ‘tetragrammaton’ YHWH was considered too sacred to pronounce; so ‘my Lord’ was substituted in reading.²⁶ This confirms the Malagasy traditional belief that God is too Holy and Superior that it is impossible for men to communicate with Him. According to the Malagasy tradition He is not interested in the common necessities of earthly existence, He lives in the highest place. God is unreachable; His mind and knowledge are incomprehensible. Humans cannot communicate with God nor meet Him directly. The virtue *Hasina* of *Zanahary* is the maintenance of His superiority, His distance from all creation. He is too far away and inaccessible to humans.

In 1 Samuel 28:16, we see:

וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁמוּאֵל וְלָמָּה תִּשְׁאַלְנִי וַיְהוּהָ סָר מֵעֲלֶיךָ וַיְהִי עָרֶךְ: (1 Sam. 28:16 BHS)

“Samuel said, “Why do you consult me, now that the LORD has departed from you and become your enemy?” (1 Sam. 28:16 NIV)

Here the Hebrew word for enemy is עָר , which is a proper name of a location in Moab, south of Arnon; usually interpreted as capital city (עִיר = עָר) of Moab.²⁷ As we know, Moab is separated from Israel by the salt Sea of the Arabah (the Dead Sea). The idea behind the Hebrew word עָר is the idea of separation. So in 1 Samuel 28:16, when Samuel says that the Lord become your עָר, this means that the Lord is separated from Saul. Saul’s place and God’s place are not only separated from each other but are very distant from each other to the extent that God is unreachable to the King Saul. The religious state of the King Saul is very far away in comparison to the state of God.

In fact, according to 1 Samuel 13:1-14, Saul has done an unlawful sacrifice. He have

²⁶ *The New Bible Dictionary*, s.v. “Names of God.”

²⁷ Francis Brown et al., *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, s.v. עָר.

not kept the command the Lord gave him. And also in 1 Samuel 15, Saul defeats the Amalekites but spares their King, which is against God's instructions to Saul. He turned away from God and he has not carried out the instructions from God. Also, starting already from 1 Samuel 18, the King of Israel, Saul tries to kill a righteous man called David. The king Saul has also destroyed priests of the Lord, and has done many other evil things. Therefore, Saul is a sinner, a wicked King, in Hebrew he is רָשָׁע or wicked. This Hebrew term is used to denote the category of people who have done wrong, are still living in sin, and are intent on continuing with wrongdoing. This is the more general meaning of the word.²⁸ And this describes Saul very well, he is in the category of such people. The most characteristic feature of sin in all of its aspects is that it is directed against God. Law is the transcript of God's perfection; it is His holiness coming to expression for the regulation of thought and action consonant with that perfection. Therefore, transgression in its essence is the contradiction of God.²⁹ The virtue *Hasina* of *Zanahary* is the maintenance of His superiority and His category, His distance from the wicked and sinner King Saul. God is too far away from Saul. The distance between Saul and God is infinite, God is in the highest category while Saul is in the lowest.

Hence, Saul needs Samuel, the venerated ancestor, to bridge this infinite distance between him and the Lord. According to the Malagasy traditional concept, the model "God-ancestor-humans" is the model describing the relationship of God, the ancestors and the living human beings. The deceased Samuel is never separated from Saul and Israel in general. The deceased Samuel is always watching what happens to Saul and his kingdom. According to the Malagasy tradition, the deceased Samuel (as an ancestor) can be called and communicate more easily to the King Saul than to God. Since God is at the highest, it is easier for Saul to communicate with the deceased Samuel, than to communicate with God. According to the Malagasy tradition, ancestors are closer to Malagasy people, and they are called more often than God, the *Zanahary*. Therefore, the ghost of Samuel is closer to Saul and to Israel, and he should be called more often than the Lord.

This does not mean, however, that the two forces, the Godhead and the deceased Samuel, are in conflict. According to 1 Samuel 28: 6, "The LORD did not answer the King Saul by dreams or Urim or prophets" (1 Sam. 28:6 NIV). So these are the ways in which the living can communicate with God. Dreams, the Urim, and the prophets were the means by which Saul

²⁸ W. E. Vine et al., *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, s.v. "Wicked".

²⁹ J. D. Douglas et al., *The New Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Sin."

sought God's counsel. Not only that, but there are other ways God communicates with Saul, there are other ways for Saul to know God's will. This is none other than the ancestor, i.e. the deceased Samuel. He will not speak for himself, nor will he speak about his own truth, but he will speak for God and God's truth. There are natural creatures messengers of God. These creations of God have special powers, they have the mysteries of Him. The deceased Samuel is one of such special power, through which, the Lord can answer Saul. The ghost of Samuel is one way God communicates with King Saul. The deceased Samuel is one way through which the King Saul can know God's will.

The deceased Samuel is a mediator between Saul and the Lord, a kind of bridge connecting two different places. In fact, according to the Malagasy tradition, the *razana* or "ancestors", in the meaning of deceased relatives, are mediators between man and god. The deceased Samuel is leveled on the high, he is higher than Saul according to that tradition.³⁰ The deceased Samuel sees more than Saul, he knows more than Saul. It shows the hierarchy God-the deceased Samuel-Saul. The deceased Samuel is placed between God and the King Saul and all Israel. In the Malagasy tradition, the ancestors are considered to be God's representatives on earth (or second gods). That's why the deceased Samuel can be the representative of YHWH on earth for Saul and for the whole kingdom of Israel. Since Samuel has died, he increases in *Hasina*, the deceased Samuel increases in value and in power also. And it is normal that Saul, the King of Israel, treats the ghost of Samuel as "gods", partakers of the blessings of the great God. God is the Head of the ghost of Samuel, and he is representing God.

The word *masina* is a word used to describe the deceased Samuel as being associated with God. The deceased Samuel is set apart, and consecrated to God. The deceased Samuel, as a venerated ancestor lives close to God, because he is a holy person, he can live in the sanctuary with God. So the deceased Samuel knows the mysteries of God, he knows the ways of God, and he knows the message of God. All things from God pass through him, including the words and minds of God, the blessings and wrath/curses of God. Therefore, the deceased Samuel is considered to be the means by which the King Saul can get the message from the Lord. And that he blesses Saul or even curses him according to God's will only. In the following chapter, we are going to see in detail how the deceased Samuel can be an ancestor messenger of God, bringing the divine wrath and cursing the wicked King Saul.

³⁰ Mariane Rahanitrinony, "Ny asa diakonaly atrehina ao amin'ny FLM Fileovana Ankadinondry Sakay, faritra Bongolava," Master in Theology (Fianarantsoa, Madagascar : Sekoly Ambony Loterana momba ny Teolojia, 2019), 40.

5.2.2. The deceased Samuel as an ancestor messenger of God

We have seen the distance between God and Saul, between God's place and Saul's place, between God's category and Saul's category. The virtue *Hasina* of *Zanahary* and His category is too far away from Saul's. The distance between Saul and God is infinite, God is in the highest category while Saul is in the lowest. We have just also seen that there is a mediator conveying the divine message to Saul, who is the deceased Samuel. In accordance with the Malagasy traditional belief, the deceased Samuel lives close to God, because he is a holy person. So he knows the mysteries of God, he knows the ways of God, and he knows the message of God. The deceased Samuel stands as intermediate between the Lord and the living Saul. The deceased Samuel is considered to be the means by which the King Saul can get the message from the Lord.

As a mediator between the Lord and Saul, the deceased Samuel is also the mediator by words, that is: he says the words of the Lord. In 1 Samuel 28:16, we see:

וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁמוּאֵל (1 Sam. 28:16 BHS)

Samuel said (1 Sam. 28:16 NIV)

אמר is a verb occurring in all Semitic languages and in all periods of those languages. It means to say, to speak, to tell, command and to answer. However, it can also have the meaning of to see.³¹ This verb represents many words representing various aspects of spoken communication. It refers to the simple act of communicating with the spoken word, directly or indirectly.³² When verse 16 tells that the deceased Samuel said, this means he communicates with Saul directly without intermediary. The deceased Samuel, as an ancestor is not separated from Saul. The deceased Samuel is always watching what happens to Saul and can be called by him in anytime. Yes, the deceased Samuel communicates easily to the King Saul since he (as an ancestor) is close to him. Therefore, there is a direct/close connection and interaction between the deceased Samuel and Saul. Through the real and actual words of Samuel, the ancestor, the King Saul enters into a direct contact with the afterlife, receiving divine words through his ancestor Samuel.

³¹ W. E. Vine et al., *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, s.v. "To Say, Speak, Answer".

³² Ibid.

We see in the words of Samuel the venerated ancestor that he uses the name of the ‘Lord’ יהוה seven times. The divine name יהוה has a theological significance since it shows the personal otherness of the God who interacts with his people, an active God. It comes from a Hebrew verb, which in the qal means “he is, he shows himself to be active”. The proper understanding of the divine name is not a static understanding, it is rather a dynamic activity.³³ In contrast with Elohim, Yahweh is a proper noun, the name of a Person, though that Person is divine. As such, it has its own ideological setting it presents God as a Person, and so brings Him into relationship with other, human, personalities. It brings God near to man, and He speaks as one friend to another.³⁴ Samuel, as a venerated ancestor, brings God near to Saul; he brings the words of the Lord. He speaks so as to destroy the separation between Saul and the Lord. The Lord of Israel is not a static god, but a dynamic One, and the deceased Samuel (as a venerated ancestor) is the power of His dynamism.

The deceased Samuel, as a venerated ancestor of Israel, is one of the divine beings around them, bringing messages from God for Israel and his King Saul. Yes, the deceased Samuel is a messenger of *Zagnahary*, he has been sent by God to communicate with Saul, to bring his message to Saul, to show him God’s will, to reinforce all the words that God has already said long time before. An example of divine beings bringing divine message is the example of the Ranakandriana. The ancient Antanosy are said to have been taught how to write on tablets (*sorabe*) by the supernatural beings called Ranakandriana. They influenced the ancient Antanosy, so that they knew the scriptures. They made them remember the words of God, so that they have the memorial of the message given by God.³⁵ In the same way, the King of Israel, Saul encounters this wonderful supernatural being, this venerated ancestor called Samuel for the memorial of the words of the Lord. The deceased Samuel is a divine being trying to reinforce to Saul what God has already spoken long time ago, to teach Saul what he should do and how he should think.

Prediction of the future:

According to the Malagasy traditional belief, possession, illness, dreams are

³³ E. Jenni and C. Westermann, *Theological lexicon of the Old Testament*, s.v. יהוה.

³⁴ J. D. Douglas et al., *The New Bible Dictionary*, s.v. “Names of God.”

³⁵ R. P. A. Rahajarizafy, *Filozofia Malagasy* (Fianarantsoa : Librairie Ambozontany, 1970), 121.

manifestations of the presence of supernatural beings or ancestors in the world of men. These supernatural beings or ancestors intervene in making the invisible visible, and feed the imagination and the ability to predict the future.³⁶ The ancestors communicate to humans by dreams, possession and even spiritual vision. This appearance of the deceased Samuel to Saul is a kind of vision enabling him to enter into contact with the realm of the spirit, and to be in a different state. This encounter with a spiritual being enable Saul to be in a different state, and enable him to receive knowledge of the future, about the things to come. It is similar to the prophets, while receiving the divine prophetic words, they are in contact with God who tells them the things that are to come in the future. The prophets often look possessed with a specific state of mind variously called ecstasy, trance, or possession, as a prerequisite of the prophetic performance.³⁷ Here, Saul is not possessed nor in ecstasy, but he enters into contact with a supernatural being, a venerated ancestor telling him about what should come in the future. Prophecy proceeds from the deceased Samuel, because he is a venerated ancestor and a divine being. He has the power to know about what will happen the next days, the next months and even the next years. The King Saul knows about his fate thanks to Samuel, the great ancestor. Hence, the role of the deceased Samuel is to give to Saul the ability to know the future, just like the prophets knowing divine secret and knowing what will happen (hoping that Saul may change and repent.)

5.2.3. The deceased Samuel as an ancestor who blesses and curses

The deceased Samuel as an ancestor is not only an intermediate between God and Saul to bring the words of God. He also plays an intermediary role to act on behalf of Him. The ancestors carried divine activity, and causes what should be done on earth. The deceased Samuel, as a venerated ancestor is not only mediator by words but also by deeds, causing an event to happen, may it be good or bad. He has the power of the words and also the power to control the realm of the living on earth. The Malagasy tradition teaches us that there is a hierarchy among the ancestors, and that it depends on the level of their *Hasina* or “holiness”.³⁸ Since the deceased Samuel is a venerated ancestor, belonging to the high level of ancestors, he

³⁶ Øyvind Dahl, *Signes et Significations à Madagascar : des Cas de Communication Interculturelle* (Paris : Présence Africaine, 1999), 35.

³⁷ Martti Nissinen, *Prophecy and Ecstasy* (England: Oxford University Press, 2017), 172.

³⁸ Pierre Colin, *Aspects de l'Ame Malgache* (France : Editions de l'Orante, 1959), 87.

is related to the Most Powerful and can be called *masina*. The deceased Samuel has a divine power or *Hasina* (the character of being *masina*) that comes from Him. Samuel possesses to a high degree the holy force (*Hasina*), which defeats the evil force. According to Malagasy tradition all the dead are *masina*. But among the dead, the deceased Samuel is a sanctified dead, he emanates directly from God himself, since he is associated with Him. From the sanctified ancestors comes the beneficial power of *hasina*.³⁹

Therefore, it is possible for the deceased Samuel to protect Saul and Israel from their enemy, the Philistines. As a venerated ancestor, the deceased Samuel has the power to cease the fight, or to let the fight go and protect Israel and spare the life of the King Saul. The life of Israel and the life of Saul are under the control of supernatural beings, and the deceased Samuel, as an ancestor, is one of those supernatural beings controlling the life of Israel and Saul. The ghost of Samuel is around their environment, he is endowed with magical powers. He can never be separated from the life of the King Saul but follows him everywhere he is. Even in the afterlife, Samuel sees the life of the King Saul on earth, in order to bring his desires to God, he can protect him from danger. He is still as familiar as they were still living together. Samuel was a judge, a ruler, a king and a prophet of Israel during his lifetime. And he remains so because according to the Malagasy tradition, the death cannot break that position, it is even increasing it. The effects of that power of the venerated ancestor, Samuel, on Saul and Israel can be good or bad.

That is why the Malagasy people venerate their ancestors, because ancestors have the power to bless, through the ancestors, they believe to receive the divine blessing from above. They do prayers of blessings, imploring the venerated ones to bless their life on earth. The simplest and deepest moral conduct in the Malagasy tradition is primarily respecting all parents and more essentially the ancestors, and asking for their blessing. They treat them as "gods", partakers of the blessings of the great God.⁴⁰ Ancestors can actually provide blessings and prosperity to the living. Besides, the living relatives have also the obligation to perform some rituals and listen to the words from their ancestors, believing and following their instructions. Ancestors have to be cared for, and there are rituals required to be a condition for fulfilling the demands of the living. It could be an animal sacrifice, it could also be a gift of alcohol, a gift of clothing, the practice of *famadihana* or exhumation, etc. If Saul wants to be saved and to live a

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ R. P. A. Rahajarizafy, *Filozofia Malagasy* (Fianarantsoa : Librairie Ambozontany, 1970), 117.

happy life, he should respect the deceased Samuel, by believing his words and following his instructions. The exact things Saul should do to God, he does it to the deceased Samuel. What he expects from the Lord, now he turns to the deceased Samuel expecting the same thing. Saul inquires the deceased Samuel for help and guidance in the same way he inquired of the Lord. Saul bowed down and prostrated himself with his face to the ground, as if the ghost were a god. 1 Samuel 28:14 explicitly connects Saul's actions with worship. His collapse to the ground represents his reverence and submission.⁴¹ But Saul did not show true respect since he did not repent, he is wicked. He has done wrong, is still living in sin, and is intent on continuing with wrongdoing. He did not accept and did not believe the words of the deceased Samuel, his venerated ancestor.

Judgment and rule from God reach Israel and Saul through Samuel their ancestor, since he is their mediator and intermediary. Therefore, the deceased Samuel, as a venerated ancestor judges and rules in place of God, blessing those who follow the divine message, and cursing those who are against it. The injustice and impiety of men, for which they have no excuse, must be followed by manifestations of the divine wrath in the lives both of individuals and of nations.⁴² The impiety and wickedness of Saul must be followed by divine wrath. But this divine wrath is manifested through the deceased Samuel, since he is an ancestor and mediator. Saul should have venerated the deceased Samuel since he has the divine power to curse. As an ancestor, he can bring divine wrath and curse to Saul who has done wrong in his life on earth. The deceased Samuel carried the anger of God against Saul and Israel. In fact the first verses of 1 Samuel 31 say: "Now the Philistines fought against Israel; the Israelites fled before them, and many fell dead on Mount Gilboa. The Philistines were in hot pursuit of Saul and his sons, and they killed his sons Jonathan, Abinadab and Malki-Shua." Saul was surrounded by his enemies and was overtook by them, his enemies wounded him critically. And at last Saul took his own sword and fell on it, Saul was dead. And this is because, he did not believe the words and instructions of his ancestor, Samuel. Saul was not afraid of being blamed by the deceased Samuel, and he was not faultless in front of him. The way Saul respects the deceased Samuel was not enough, he did not follow his words. Samuel the ancestor cursed Saul to fail in front of his enemies and to die humiliated by his adversaries.

⁴¹ Ellena Lyell and Joseph Scales, "Uncovering the dead, dethroning the king: divine embodiment in 1 Samuel 28:14," *Hebrew Studies* 62 (2021): 107.

⁴² J. D. Douglas et al., *The New Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Wrath."

5.3. Conclusion:

We have just seen that Samuel was indeed an ancestor, or a *razana* while he was still alive. Now that he is dead, he is also called an ancestor or a *razana*. The two meanings of *razana* correspond to the case of Samuel. Therefore he is indeed an ancestor or a *razana* according to the Malagasy traditional concept of ancestors. There is no way to doubt that Samuel fulfills indeed all the criteria of being a venerated ancestor for Israel and for Saul.

Therefore, the role of a venerated ancestor in the Malagasy tradition can be applied to him. The distance between Saul and God is infinite, God is in the highest category while Saul is in the lowest. Hence, Saul needs Samuel, the venerated ancestor, to bridge this infinite distance between him and the Lord. He is a mediator between them.

The deceased Samuel, as a venerated ancestor and mediator between Saul and the Lord, is in direct/close connection and interaction with the living Saul. Through the real and actual words of Samuel, the ancestor, the King Saul enters into a direct contact with the afterlife, receiving divine words through his ancestor Samuel. The deceased Samuel gives to Saul the ability to know the future.

The deceased Samuel, as a venerated ancestor lives close to God, so he knows the mysteries of God, he knows the ways of God. All things from God pass through him, including the words and minds of God. The blessings and wrath/curses of God are accomplished by the power of the ancestor Samuel. Samuel the ancestor cursed Saul to fail in front of his enemies and cursed him to die humiliated by his adversaries, because he did not listen nor believe the words of his ancestor Samuel, because he did not respect him.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

To sum it all, we have to summarize everything from the beginning until the end. On the chapter concerning the Malagasy traditional beliefs relating to the ancestors, we have seen that, according to the Malagasy belief, there is a Great God called *Zanaharibe* (or simply *Zanahary*). This One and Great God communicate with the living human beings through supernatural beings and the ancestors. This Great God cannot get into contact with human beings apart from the intermediary of supernatural beings and most commonly the intermediary of the venerated ancestors. The Malagasy ancestors are not leveled in the same way, there are some less holy and some others more holy. Among the ancestors, some are “venerated” since they have a higher degree of *Hasina*, and believed to be very close to *Zanahary*. Malagasy people implore the “venerated” ones to bless their life on earth. The traditional Malagasy believers observe carefully all the words and instructions supposed to be from the words of the ancestors, they are afraid to be cursed by them when failing to obey and respects their venerated ancestors.

In the next chapter, we have seen the text in 1 Samuel 28 and analyzed it apart from the Malagasy traditional concepts of ancestors. We did not use the method called textual criticism, because I think that in 1 Samuel 28, the text-critical apparatus does not inform us about important alternative readings to the printed text. The alternative readings lead to unnecessary discussions, unnecessary for our research question, as far as I see it. I, then, choose the historical critical method of interpretation, which is the method we have mainly and greatly used while interpreting and analyzing texts in 1 Samuel 28. It helped us to understand what a given word originally mean. We have analyzed words from 1 Samuel 28 as seen in light of their historical context, in relation to their surroundings and their ancient settings.

During the analysis of the text, we have seen the appearance and form of the ghost of Samuel, as narrated in verses 13 and 14. These appearance and form tell us in advance, what the role of the deceased Samuel might be in 1 Samuel 28. Samuel is old and dead, but still has divine favour. The ghost being described as a venerable and a wise divine being, and presented as a honorable and god-like being. Such interpretations were drawn from the appearance and form of the ghost. As a good divine being, the ghost of Samuel was coming up to respond friendly and compassionately to the poor and desperate Saul. We have seen that the deceased

Samuel cannot be ordered by the medium to come up and to appear. The medium has no control over the deceased Samuel, she is not the chief that takes control of him. He is not submitted to her and does not follow her order. He comes up only because of his willingness to help and to answer to Saul's cry. He comes up without any pressure or control from the part of the medium or Saul. They implore him, and he has pity on them and accepted to appear and come up.

The words of the deceased Samuel show that he comes to warn Saul, to admonish him and to reveal the future to him so that he may believe and repent and be saved. Saul bowed down and prostrated himself with his face to the ground. 1 Samuel 28:14 explicitly connects Saul's actions with worship. His collapse to the ground represents his complete reverence and submission. And it was indeed his last hope for salvation and protection from the Philistines. The deceased Samuel knew that God departed from Saul, and that he needed some advice before taking any action, before making any decision. The deceased Samuel knew that Saul was crying out loud for help. Saul is desperate, he and the whole Israel are in distress! "The Philistines are fighting against me": Saul says in verse 15. That is why the compassionate "savior" of Saul appears to respond to him. Saul inquired of the Lord, and expected Him to answer by dreams, he inquired Him through Urim and prophets. In spite of the danger faced by Saul and Israel, the Lord did not answer. The ghost of Samuel is another alternative for him to get some advice about what he should do.

We have said that all Biblical interpretation is biased by the interpreter's hermeneutical experiences and concerns. We have used that bias or context, namely the Malagasy context, in a conscious way possible when we interpreted 1 Samuel 28. When we have moved forward to chapter four, we have proceeded by using a comparative approach that uses Malagasy contexts as tools to interpret 1 Samuel 28, using Malagasy materials to shed light on that Old Testament text, searching for how Malagasy context can be used to interpret the Old Testament. Malagasy traditional concepts of ancestors were the basic principles used in chapter four, used to interpret the encounter of Saul with the ghost of Samuel. And the text in 1 Samuel 28 was the passive element, being interpreted and receiving the act of interpretation. This method is almost common to African theologians, as we have already spoken about in chapter two. And this method comes from the observation of the popular way of reading and understanding the Bible.

In fact, in African popular interpretation of the Bible, we can see this use of one's contexts in the interpretation of the Bible. Religious encounters exist in Africa, and in every transcultural society even though they often remain hidden behind socio-cultural issues.

There are African contextual perspectives on Bible texts, and it is fascinating to see how traditional Africans read the Bible, especially the Old Testament. That popular interpretation of the Bible (with the context of real and lived life), these lived facts and practical lives of the society inspired theologians to construct the so-called contextual theology and even new theologies. Even West says that those who are committed to the contextual Bible study process have decided to choose to read the Bible from a particular perspective within the African context. Since West is from South Africa, he takes this African context as the South African context, that is the context of the poor and oppressed. But our case here is the context of the Malagasy tradition. We have seen that colonialism has demonized and destroyed African culture, including the Malagasy traditional culture. The Malagasy traditional belief in the ancestors and in the divine beings are taken as superstition and even demonic belief. We have then decided to choose to read the text in 1 Samuel 28 from the perspective of the Malagasy traditional belief in the ancestors. We need to choose to hear the concerns of the traditional culture and religion of Madagascar and God's concern for them.

I think it is good to remind about some examples that we have already talked about in chapter two. The one is Kimuhu, who analyzes various aspects of family laws from Leviticus 18 from two perspectives: Ancient Near Eastern (Egyptian, Ugaritic, Hittite, Canaanite) and traditional African (in particular Kikuyu, Kenya). Kimuhu interprets the Leviticus dietary regulations and find various kinds of parallels in corresponding Kikuyu regulations, using anthropological material from Kikuyu to interpret texts in the book of Leviticus. Another one is Laurent Naré, who makes use of African proverbial material to interpret Old Testament proverbs. Based on his Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome, Naré compares the so-called Solomonic proverbial collection in Proverbs 25-29 with a selection of proverbs of the Mossi of Burkina Faso. The two traditions are examined separately and in detail, and then a comparison is made. In the same way, we have examined first the context of the Malagasy traditional belief in ancestors, and after that we have examined the text in 1 Samuel 28 separately, and then we have tried to make a comparison in the last chapter.

When it comes to the last chapter, then, we have tried to demonstrate that Samuel fulfills the criteria of being an ancestor or a venerated ancestor according to the Malagasy traditional belief. And we have seen that the deceased Samuel is a dead relative for Israel and for the King Saul, that he is indeed an ancestor or a *razana* in the second meaning of the Malagasy term. He is also a *razana* in the first meaning of the Malagasy term. The two meanings of *razana* correspond to the case of Samuel. Therefore he is indeed an ancestor or a *razana* according to

the Malagasy traditional concept of ancestors. According to the Malagasy tradition, there is no way to doubt that Samuel fulfills indeed all the criteria of being a venerated ancestor for Israel and for Saul their king. Once he can be considered as an ancestor in the Malagasy way, the role of a venerated ancestor (according to the Malagasy tradition) can be applied to him.

The deceased Samuel is an ancestor, a mediator between Yahweh and Saul. The Lord is too far away from Saul. The distance between Saul and God is infinite, God is in the highest category while Saul is in the lowest. Hence, Saul needs Samuel, the venerated ancestor, to bridge this infinite distance between him and the Lord. The deceased Samuel communicates easily to the King Saul since he (as an ancestor) is much closer to him. Therefore, there is a direct/close connection and interaction between the deceased Samuel and Saul. Through the real and actual words of Samuel, the ancestor, the King Saul enters into a direct contact with the afterlife, receiving divine words through his ancestor Samuel. The deceased Samuel gives to Saul the ability to know the future. The deceased Samuel, as a venerated ancestor lives close to God, and therefore he knows the mysteries of God. All things from God pass through him, the blessings and wrath/curses of God are conveyed to Saul through him. The blessings and wrath/curses of God are accomplished by the power of the ancestor Samuel. Samuel the ancestor cursed Saul to fail in front of his enemies and cursed him to die humiliated by his adversaries, because he did not listen nor believe the words of his ancestor Samuel, because he did not respect him.

It is difficult to understand the text in 1 Samuel 28, which tells about the interaction of Saul the king of Israel with the prophet Samuel who had died. It is difficult because the king Saul has banned divination practices, and to go to the medium to ask advice from the spirit of the dead. But in this text, he comes to consult the spirit of the deceased prophet Samuel. When we tried to understand 1 Samuel 28 through the glasses of ancestral veneration in Madagascar, we have seen that it is necessary and indispensable for Saul to ask advice and to ask the truth to the spirit of the dead, especially to the venerated ancestor Samuel. The research question asked from the introduction of this thesis is: What is the role of the deceased Samuel in 1 Samuel 28, and to what extent can Malagasy traditional concept of ancestors help us understand this role?

What is the role of the deceased Samuel in 1 Samuel 28? The role of the deceased Samuel in 1 Samuel 28 was to be a representative of God to tell Saul and reinforce the truth about his fate. The ghost of Samuel was coming up to respond friendly and compassionately to

the poor and desperate Saul. They implore him, and he has pity on them and accepted to appear and come up. The words of the deceased Samuel shows that he comes to warn Saul, to admonish him and to reveal the future to him so that he may believe and repent and be saved. In one word, the deceased Samuel comes to Saul to save him. Saul would be saved if he had accepted the message from his ancestor Samuel, and if he had respected him. Malagasy traditional concept of ancestors help us understand this role to the extent that it reaffirms it, and even deepens it. The deceased Samuel, as a venerated ancestor, eclipses YHWH to the extent that he partakes in the nature and role of God. A more accessible savior for Saul in time of trouble, deserving much attention and much respect. He is a powerful supernatural being, having prophetic ability, giving Saul the power to know his fate. Only the deceased Samuel is the closest helper for Saul, only he can help him in his worries. Saul can rely upon the deceased prophet Samuel to the extent that he is closer to him. He is a source of life and a spirit of protection for Saul if he respects and follows his words. The deceased Samuel has the power to occupy Israel and its territories, and to protect Saul and Israel from their enemy in case where they accept him as such. But they did not believe their venerated ancestor Samuel, nor did they accept him as worthy to respect.

Bara, Mahafaly and Antanosy people have the veneration and respect of the *hazomanga*. The *hazomanga* is an ancestral heritage, respecting and venerating it equals respecting and venerating the ancestors. Antanosy people can venerate and honor their ancestors in this way. Belief in the ancestors and the respect to the *hazomanga* is essential and basic in their life. In failing to perform and observe it, curse will come against them. In failing to respect and follow the advices, words, messages and instructions of their venerated ancestors, the Antanosy people have not only be defeated by the Merina troops during the reign of Radama I and Radama II, they will be humiliated again and again until they truly recognize that their ancestors are their closest helpers and saviors.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abulad, Romualdo E. "What is Hermeneutics?" *Kritike* 2 (2007): 11-23.
- Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia with Westminster 4.0 Morphology* Edited by H. Van Dyke Parunak, Richard Whitaker, Emanuel Tov, Alan Groves. 2003.
- Black, John Sutherland and George Chrystal. *The Life of William Robertson Smith*. London: Adam & Charles Black, 1912.
- Botterweck, G. Johannes and Helmer Ringgren. *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. Germany: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974.
- Brown, Francis, Samuel Rolles Driver and Charles Augustus Briggs. *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. Electronic edition. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 2000.
- Campbell, A. F. *1 Samuel. The Forms of the Old Testament Literature*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003.
- Colin, Pierre. *Aspects de l'Ame Malgache*. France : Editions de l'Orante, 1959.
- Collins, John J. "Methods and Approaches." Pages 129-146 in *The Cambridge Companion to the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament*. Edited by Stephen B. Chapman and Marvin A. Sweeney. England: Cambridge University Press, 2016.
- Dahl, Øyvind. *Signes et Significations à Madagascar : des Cas de Communication Interculturelle*. Paris : Présence Africaine, 1999.
- Dahle, L. *Anganon'ny Ntaolo: Tantara mampiseho ny fomban-drazana sy ny finoana sasany nananany*. Antananarivo: TPLoterana, 1971.
- Damsma, Alinda. "Another royal encounter for the woman of Endor: 1 Samuel 28 as a proof text in King James VI's daemonologie." *Hebrew Studies* 62 (2021): 157-180.
- Harris, R. L., G. L. Archer and B. K. Waltke. *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1999.
- Henry, Matthew. *Commentary on 1 Samuel 28*. https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/mhc/1Sa/1Sa_028.cfm
- Holter, Knut. *Contextualized Old Testament Scholarship in Africa*. Nairobi, Kenya: Acton Publisher, 2008.
- J. D. Douglas, F. F. Bruce, J. I. Pacher et al. *The New Bible Dictionary*. 1st edition. England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1962.
- Jenni, E. and C. Westermann. *Theological lexicon of the Old Testament*. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997.
- Kiboko, J. Kabamba. *Divining the Woman of Endor: African Culture, Postcolonial Hermeneutics, and the Politics of Biblical Translation*. London: T&T Clark, 2017.
- Kimuhu, Johnson M. "The Priestly Laws and Prohibitions from the Perspective of Ancient Near East and Africa." *Journal of Law and Religion* 25 (2009-2010): 279-289.
- Lyell, Ellena and Joseph Scales. "Uncovering the dead, dethroning the king: divine embodiment in 1 Samuel 28:14." *Hebrew Studies* 62 (2021): 97-115.
- McCarter, P. K., Jr. *1 Samuel: A new translation with introduction, notes and commentary*.

- New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008.
- Mojola, Aloo Osotsi. *The Chagga Scapegoat Purification Ritual and Another Re-reading of the Goat of Azazel in Leviticus 16*. Norway: Congress of the IOSOT, 1998.
- New International Version Bible (NIV)*, 2011 ed.
- Nissinen, Martti. *Prophecy and Ecstasy*. England: Oxford University Press, 2017.
- Rahajarizafy, R. P. A. *Filozofia Malagasy*. Fianarantsoa : Librairie Ambozontany, 1970.
- Rahanitriniony, Mariane. “Ny asa diakonaly atrehina ao amin'ny FLM Fileovana Ankadinondry Sakay, faritra Bongolava.” Master in Theology. Sekoly Ambony Loterana momba ny Teolojia. 2019.
- Ramatoka, Salomon. “Pensée Religieuse et Rituels Betsimisaraka.” Pages 33-92 in *Ny razana tsy mba maty: Cultures Traditionnelles Malgaches*. Edité par Jean-Pierre Domenichini, Jean Poirier et Daniel Raheisoanjato. Antananarivo: Editions de la librairie de Madagascar, 1984.
- Sanday, W. *Essays in biblical criticism and exegesis*. Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001.
- Vine, W. E., Merrill F. Unger and William White. *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*. New York: Thamas Nelson Publishers, 1985.
- West, Gerald O. *Contextual Bible Study*. Republic of South Africa: Cluster Publications, 1993.