

Transjordan in Joshua 13: Some Aspects

Introduction

In the eyes of ancient Israelites parts of Transjordan must have appeared as a beautiful and important land. In Song of Songs (4: 1) is said, 'Behold you are beautiful my love, your hair is like a flock of goats, moving down the slopes of Gilead.'¹ This image of goats, sweeping down in waves against the background of the green Gilead hillside, reappears in the request of the Reubenites who eagerly desired a place in Gilead because it was a good and verdant land, 'a place for cattle' (Numb. 32: 1).²

Since other texts, however, speak of Transjordan as a land religiously unclean, there must have been extremely divergent relations between the states east and west of the Jordan.³ Historic and cultural factors illuminating these relations have recently become somewhat clearer, and especially through archaeological discoveries in the last few years it has become evident that the Transjordan region must primarily be understood from the perspective of its own sources and history.

Against this background a few aspects of the relations between Transjordan and the surrounding states can be described from the perspective of biblical texts. These texts by virtue of their Sitz-im-Leben west of the Jordan have their own presuppositions, and by no means may they be simply historicized. As an example of this perspective we shall now view the image of the Transjordan as depicted in Joshua 13.

The Transjordan occupies a remarkable position in the composition of the final form of Josh. 13ff. If we leave the different layers of the text out of consideration for a moment,⁴ the actual division of the land begins with Caleb and with Judah in the later chapters. This description of the land-division is preceded by two segments in chapter 13, one of an anticipatory and the other of a retrociprocity character. The final form of Josh. 13: 1, 7 and 2–6 looks to the future; also the land of

Philista and Phoenicia⁵, though not yet in the possession of the Israelites, must be allotted. From Josh. 13: 8ff. attention is focused upon the past. An appeal is made to the authority of Moses in order to include Transjordan within the land-division scheme. The texts suggest that it was Moses who had already indicated that this land was set aside for Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh. Thus, in the scenic entourage of Josh. 13ff. the division of Canaan is preceded on the one hand by an anticipation of the future, and on the other hand by a recollection of the past. This temporal distantiation already indicates that, even in the final form of the text, Canaan is still distinguished from Philistia and Phoenicia on the one side and Transjordan on the other.

Consideration of the way in which the Old Testament speaks about Transjordan reveals a much broader basis for that differentiation. A large number of Old Testament texts depict Transjordan as historically, geographically, and ideologically constituting a foreign country, despite the fact that these texts are finally incorporated into the land-division scheme of a twelve-tribe system. A few examples: Crossing of the river Jordan in a *westerly* direction marks the first footstep into the land. The Jordan thereby forms the Eastern border.⁶ The request of the Reubenites and Gadites for a place in Transjordan is not denied in Numb. 32, but their request is, *de facto*, judged negatively (Numb. 32: 7–15). From a cultic perspective the distantiation from Transjordan is demonstrated in the conflict concerning the building of an altar (Josh. 22). Much more striking is the priestly tradition of Numb. 34 which has the Eastern border of the *nḥlh* running from the sea of Chinnereth along the Jordan (Numb. 34: 11, 12), as does Ezek. 47: 18, in its blueprint of the new land.⁷ The text transplants the East Jordan tribes into the west, with Reuben being placed above Judah and Gad ending up in the Negev. In keeping with this tradition is the title 'The Other Side of the Jordan', which

¹ For glš see Pope, 1977, 458f.; Gerleman, ²1981, 146f. cf. Jer. 50: 19; Mic. 7: 14.

² Ottosson, 1969.

³ Weinfeld, 1983, 59ff.

⁴ Problems surveyed by Auld, 1980, 52ff.

⁵ Smend, 1983, 92.

⁶ The classic example is Josh. 3f.

⁷ Zimmerli, ²1979, 1205, 1216: 'Dabei wird ganz unmissverständlich Gilead aus dem Lande Israel ausgeklammert.'

Nelson Glueck borrowed from Old Testament usage to signify Transjordan. The phrase ‘the other side of the Jordan’ does indeed refer most frequently to the Transjordan.⁸

In the light of the Davidic kingdom which included Transjordan, it is striking that the tradition which viewed the Transjordan as a foreign country could be maintained. It would not have been surprising if this historic episode from the Davidic period had been extrapolated into the other historical perspectives. In some Deuteronomistic accounts that has indeed happened. In Deut. 2: 24f. the Arnon, rather than the Jordan, is the boundary river. In this view Transjordan belongs to the land west of the Jordan. Since, in contrast to this specific tradition, the primary emphasis of Transjordan and Canaan as separate territories can still be maintained in the Old Testament, the *ties* between Canaan and Transjordan can truly be termed ‘foreign relations’, a theme of this conference.

In Josh. 13 something of these foreign relations is visible in the framework of a land-division concept. Josh. 13, besides having a complex literary-historical background of its own, is also now part of an interweaving of traditions spanning Numbers, Deuteronomy and Judges. The following steps expose a few aspects of these foreign relations between Canaan and Transjordan: a) first, we shall very briefly summarize some models that have been adopted in an effort to trace the traditions, sources, and literary stages of Josh. 13; b) subsequently we pursue the question of the place occupied by the Og and Sihon traditions in this context; c) then it shall be apparent that the investigations have primarily concentrated upon the oldest fragmentary boundary lists, city lists, and itineraries, while those parts of the text which are legendary in form (*Gattung*), and developed at a rather late stage, have received less attention. With assistance from some Ugaritic texts we shall attempt to clarify this legendary material with respect to Og, and subsequently to sketch some aspects of the foreign relations between Transjordan and Canaan at that time.

Some models

The various methods of attempting to reach the oldest material in Josh. 13 can be exemplified in the models of Noth,⁹ Mittmann,¹⁰ and Wüst.¹¹ We concentrate thereby primarily on Josh. 13: 15–32 where the most detailed topographical and ‘historiosophical’ reflections upon Transjordan appear. Noth’s approach has the appeal of simplicity. He suggests that the principle of city lists and boundary descriptions found in Josh. 15ff. applies equally to Transjordan. Of these two components we limit ourselves in this paper to the boundary descriptions since it is in this area that the methodological differences are most clear.

According to Noth, the boundary description represents a line connected through fixed points (vs. 15–23).¹² Included on this line are Aroer, then ‘the city which is in the midst of the valley’ (Noth sought it by the Arnon not far from the Dead Sea),¹³ Medeba, Heshbon, and finally in vs. 23a^b, the Jordan bank. Thus is established an open-ended rectangle, with the Arnon in the south, the line of Aroer, Medeba, and Heshbon in the east, and the Dead Sea and Jordan in the west. In the ensuing section of vs. 24–28, according to Noth, the description of the boundary proceeds further with a repeated mention of Heshbon (vs. 26), followed by Ramath-mizpeh, Betonim, Mahanaim, to Lo-Debar (*lô dbr* 2 Sam. 9: 4–5; *l’dbr* 2 Sam. 17: 27; *l’dābār* Am. 6: 13). The western line is picked up in the repetition in vs. 27a^{db} of ‘the Jordan bank to the sea of Chinnereth’. Since the eastern boundary line angles from Heshbon in a north-westerly direction through the clearly identifiable locations of Betonim and Mahanaim, thereby approaching the western border formed by the Jordan, Noth concludes that separate mention of a northern boundary is unnecessary.¹⁴

By means of this boundary line system Noth achieves a single, inclusive territory, which secondarily was artificially divided in two sections to provide the tribal territory for Reuben and Gad. Since the material in vs. 29–31 is not original, the emphasis must rest on vs. 15–28. Mittman’s choice of material constituting the boundary list differs, in essence, very little from Noth’s, but his interpretation is in fact *totaliter aliter*.¹⁵ His boundary list too begins with ‘from Aroer’ (vs. 16b), but then extends to Heshbon (vs. 17a); Mittmann eliminates Medeba as a gloss. He emends the *’l* of vs. 16b to read *’d*, thus representing Heshbon. In short, ‘from Aroer to Heshbon’. According to Mittmann, the Jordan and its bank territory (vs. 23a^b) also belong to the boundary list, as does the reference in vs. 26, ‘from Heshbon to Lo-debar’. Also included is the difficult phrase in vs. 25b, ‘to Aroer, which is in front of Rabbah’, though it is only in the last stage of the text that this phrase has come to its present place. The boundary list is concluded in vs. 27a^{db} with reference to ‘the Jordan and its bank territory to the sea of Chinnereth’.

Mittmann asserts that the original document did not describe a boundary line, but rather, through use of the *mn-’d* formula, marked the extremities of the territory as viewed from a central point. The present state of the text is to be explained by a later redactional attempt to combine a city list and a boundary list. A key text in this respect is vs. 26 where mention of the *mn-’d* formula still permits a glimpse of the old boundary list: ‘from Mahanaim to Lo-debar’. Reconstruction gives the following overview: from Heshbon

⁸ Sometimes a specific distinction is even made more explicit between ‘Canaan’ and ‘the other side of the Jordan’ (Numb. 32: 32). When the phrase (*b*) *’br hyrdn* refers to the area west of the Jordan, that is often specified by an additional geographical notation (*b*) *’br hyrdn ymb* (Josh. 5: 1; 12: 7; 22: 7; 1 Chron. 26: 30).

⁹ Noth, 1935; 1940; 1941; 1944, 1946–51; 1953; ²1953.

¹⁰ Mittmann, 1970; 1975.

¹¹ Wüst, 1975.

¹² Noth, 1935, 230ff.; 1944, 48ff.; ²1953, 78f.

¹³ Noth, ²1953, 79; see Mittmann, 1970, 235 n. 82; and Wüst, 1975, 133ff. See too the attempt of H. Donner, 1965, 41, who was unable to complete a study of the terrain in a normal way: ‘Es überstieg die Möglichkeiten des Lehrkurses, der nicht mit einem Alpenverein verwechselt werden darf.’

¹⁴ Noth, ²1953, 83.

¹⁵ Mittmann, 1970, 232ff.

as central location to Aroer in the south, to Betonim in the north; and from Mahanaim to Lo-debar in the north and Aroer by Rabbah in the south(east). The actual boundary thus ran between Betonim and Aroer by Rabbah, and not via Heshbon as later redactors would have us believe. Mittmann's reconstruction has a number of advantages: 1. He has an explanation for the *mn-ʿd* formula. 2. He is able to explain Aroer by Rabbah. 3. He has a Sitz-im-Leben for his boundaries: the tax districts of Solomon in 1 Kings 4.

Mittmann's approach is advanced more radically by Wüst, who returns to an extremely strict literary-critical and redaction-critical methodology.¹⁶ Wüst concurs that one is justified in speaking of a territorial description rather than a boundary description. His original text is restricted to vs. 16, 'from Aroer to Medeba', vs. 26a, 'from Heshbon to Ramath-mizpeh', and secondarily vs. 26b, 'from Mahanaim to . . . Lo-debar'.¹⁷

The advantage of Wüst's methodology is that it is subject to literary controls, though one might draw conclusions which differ from his in various places. It may be added that Wüst's extremely difficult redaction history ultimately produces a text in which the last redactor divides an already divided territory. This *end result* is thus indicative of an inconsistency similar to that which at the *beginning* of the analytical process led to an absolute diachronic analysis.

Wüst also follows his own path with respect to the assumed city list.¹⁸ In distinction from his predecessors, he placed particular emphasis upon the south–north direction in which the cities are treated. So he reconstructed an itinerary which originally proceeded from Dibon running via Beth-baal-meon and Kiriathaim down to the Jordan valley where it proceeded from Beth-jeshimoth to Succoth and Zaphon. Termination of the itinerary at this point is explained by an advancement of the route along the west bank of the Jordan to Beth-shan.¹⁹ A digression inserted between Medeba and Heshbon, listing Sibmah, Zereth-hashahar, and Beth-peor is seen as a secondary attempt to extend northward, for which the regional name 'slopes of Pisgah' provides the necessary connection between the two sections.

However, Wüst's theory does not explain why an itinerary would be used here in Josh. 13, or in what Sitz-im-Leben a comparable list would be utilized. Noth can point to an extrapolation of the sources in Josh. 15ff., while for Mittmann the Solomonic tax district of 1 Kings 4 is a key to the back-

ground of the territorial description. In both instances the taking over and reworking of material to form the *Letzgestalt* of Josh. 13 is conceivable and possible. With a more or less arbitrary itinerary that is far more difficult, as is evident in Wüst's theory of secondary additions in vs. 20.

It is clear that every model which seeks to find the oldest literary level and its historical basis will have disadvantages. Noth attributed too little value to Josh. 13 in contrast to Josh. 15. Wüst runs into topographical difficulty with his itinerary. And Mittman probably forces the *mn-ʿd* formula to carry too much weight.

In all three models a possible historical-topographical localization is dependent upon a literary-critical judgment of Josh. 13. External evidence is not to be found; the topographical conclusions are based upon a literary judgment, and not vice versa.

Legendary sources

Foreign relations from a cultural perspective can be described not only in the light of the oldest attainable historical kernel, but also in the light of legendary material, albeit in a later literary stage of the text. Now, besides the tribal land-division scheme which lies as a network over Josh. 13, the earliest recognizable connection over the whole chapter is that of the two representatives of the Transjordan: Sihon of Heshbon and Og of Bashan. They provide the context for all the fragments of the older sources as city lists and boundary lists. Their names represent the entire area between Aroer and Hermon.²⁰ We may concur with Wüst that the first place where they occur *together* is in Josh. 12: 1–5, at which point the origin of the Og tradition is obscure.²¹ Not only is Sihon variously titled 'king of the Amorites' (Numb. 21; Deut. 1: 4; 2: 24; 3: 2; 4: 46; 31: 4), or 'king of Heshbon' (Deut. 2: 24, 26, 30; 3: 6; 29: 6; Josh. 9: 10; 12: 5; Judg. 11: 19), but also the borders of his kingdom show considerable variation, from the Arnon to the Jabbok (Numb. 21: 24; Josh. 12: 2; Judg. 11: 22), and from the Arnon to Gilead, by which the vagueness of Gilead leaves open the possibility of extension toward the north.²² The generally acknowledged priority of Numb. 21: 21ff. in contrast to Deut. 2: 26–37 and Judg. 11: 19–26 is rightly questioned by Van Seters,²³ all the more so in view of the arguments that can be adduced to demonstrate that the parallel of the Heshbon *Spottlied* in Jer. 48: 45–46 is not later, but precedes (or is contemporary with) Numb. 21: 27ff. If Numb. 21: 21ff. is literarily dependent upon Deut. 2: 26ff. and Judg. 11: 19ff., and the *Spottlied* of Heshbon cannot be assigned an early date, with Weippert's conclusion may be concurred: 'the account concerning the defeat of Sihon of Heshbon and the conquest of his kingdom by the Israelites

¹⁶ Wüst, 1975, 7.

¹⁷ Wüst, 1975, 119ff. He assumes Reuben was placed in the area from Aroer to Medeba (vs. 16), and Gad received the territory from Heshbon to Ramath-mizpeh (vs. 26a). It was the literary reworking of the texts that assigned Bashan to the half-tribe of Manasseh (vs. 30), by which the territorial gap between Bashan and Ramath-mizpeh/Betonim was filled. Gad subsequently received an extension to the north: from Mahanaim to Lo-debar. Consequently Wüst located Lo-debar far in the north. But that was not yet the end of the literary process. Once the genealogical relationship between Machir and Manasseh was established it was also necessary to provide a place for Machir. This was accomplished through a second division of the area between the rivers Jabbok and Jarmuk by means of adding 'from Mahanaim' in vs. 30a. Extensions to the north, from out of Ramath-mizpeh (Betonim), and to the south, from out of Aroer (*b'yr ʿsr btuk-hnhl*) represent more minor expansions of a similar character.

¹⁸ Wüst, 1975, 153ff.

¹⁹ Wüst, 1975, 156f.

²⁰ Wüst, 1975, 51.

²¹ Wüst, 1975, 50, 55: 'eine ausserhalb des Alten Testaments umlaufende Überlieferung von dem in Ashtarot residierenden König Og von Basan.'

²² Smelik 1984, 70.

²³ Van Seters 1972, 195. cf. Bartlett, 1969; 1978.

may no longer be considered to be authentic historical tradition. Rather, it is highly probable that this account is based on a fabrication or, to put it less harshly, that it was deduced from designation of Heshbon as *qryt syhn*.²⁴ If the Numbers version of the Sihon story represents a secularization, and behind the story stands *de facto* the same perspective as in Ezek. 47: 13–23, in which Transjordan is a foreign country, one must ask what was the motivation for taking over these traditions regarding Og and Sihon as the earliest rulers in Transjordan.

Location of Rephaim

In Josh. 13: 12; 12: 4, and Deut. 3: 11, Og is called the last of the Rephaim. A number of other texts locate these Rephaim primarily in Transjordan (Deut. 2: 11, 20; 3: 13). The Rephaim are there considered to be the ancient inhabitants of the land, and are described as giants. They share that pseudo-ethnic characteristic with other related groups, namely the Emim, Zamzummim, Zuzim, Nephilim, and Perrizzim. Actually in the Old Testament the Rephaim are also the spirits of the dead, the shades in the nether world, as witnessed in Ps. 88: 10, 11 'Dost Thou work wonders for the *dead*?' and then the parallelism: 'shall shades (Rephaim) rise up and praise Thee?' Is it possible to connect these two meanings for Rephaim? And what significance does that have for a view of Transjordan?

Ugaritic texts have contributed much towards an understanding of the connection between the two meanings.²⁵ In recent years it has become evident that in the celebration of the Canaanite New Year Festival not only Ba'al, but also a number of the dead (*Rp'um*) could be revived.²⁶ These *Rp'um* are the spirits of the deceased kings.²⁷ They participate in the cultic meal.²⁸ The connection between the *Rp'um* and the deceased kings is now confirmed by KTU 1: 161: 'Report on the sacrificial banquet of the shades. You invoked the *Rp'um* of the e[arth]. He invoked Ulken, the *Rp'[u]*, he invoked Tarmen, the *Rp'[u]* ... they invoked the *Rp'um* of old ... hail, hail to Ammura[pi] and hail to his house.'²⁹ All the forefathers of the Ugaritic dynasty are called up in this ritual, they are named *Rp'um*, and they are expected to bless and protect the present king. So the *Rp'um* as deified royal ancestors, who can be revived with Ba'al, have an important function for the living. As Spronk states, 'they possess healing power like the *Rp'u* par excellence, Ba'al, who healed, revived them.'³⁰

In the Ugaritic texts we have a number of indications that the location of the *Rp'um* is not restricted to Ugarit. From

the perspective of Ugarit it appears that particularly Transjordan, Bashan, and the territory surrounding the sea of Chinnereth was viewed as the location of the deified ancestors. Important *Rp'um* were localized in a ritual text of the New Year Festival, '[Lo], may Rapiu, the eternal king (= Ba'al) drink, and may [the god] Gathar-and-Yaqar drink, the god who is dwelling in *Athtarot*, the god who is judging in *Edrei*'.³¹ Yaqar is probably the founder of the dynasty of Ugarit. In his *Rapiu*-function, however, he is associated with the towns *Athtarot* and *Edrei*. In the same text we find Malik, who in two other Ugaritic texts also has his residency in *Athtarot*.³² His affiliation with the cult of the dead is incontrovertible.³³

Thus, from the perspective of Ugarit, the Transjordan appears to be the land of the *Rp'um*. Two cities are mentioned, *Athtarot*³⁴ and *Edrei*. The Old Testament, in turn, also recognizes Og of Bashan, 'as the last of the Rephaim', to have lived in *Athtarot* and *Edrei* (Josh. 12: 4; 13: 12). So, the double residency of Og clearly has a traditio-historical background.

If the Rephaim can be seen against a Ugaritic background as being not simply the feeble shades of the nether world, but as *Rp'um* who, with Ba'al, are revived and come to the world of the living as important saviours, then there is no longer such a great distinction between Rephaim as spirits of the dead and as ancient, giant rulers. They were honoured as deified ancestors.

We have additional indications from literary sources that Transjordan played an important role in the cult of the dead in Canaan. In the legend of Aqhatu, the king buries his dead son in Kinnereth. 'And he took Aqhatu from her. He yelled (but) he did not awake. He bewailed and buried (him). He buried him in a mausoleum in Kinnereth.'³⁵ Maybe traces of a Transjordan cult of the dead can be found in Gen. 50: 10, 11 where the bones of Jacob are transported from Egypt to Machpelah near Hebron. Twice the text states that they mourned *b'br hyrdn*, a reference which can only refer to Transjordan and contradicts the expected travel route. The seven day mourning ceremony takes place on a threshing floor, which according to Ugaritic texts was the preferred location for the appearance of the *Rp'um*.³⁶

If we may assume that some of the Ugaritic and Old Testament texts reflect a religious-cultural situation in which Transjordan functioned as a centre of contact with deified

²⁴KTU 1. 108. 2.

²⁵KTU 1. 100. 41; KTU 1. 107. 17.

²⁶Müller 1980, 13f.; Spronk 1986, 188 assumes that KTU 1. 108. 13 does not refer to an independent god of the nether world, but is an epithet for Ba'al and refers to the chthonic aspect of this god.

²⁷Kellermann 1981, 45ff.

²⁸KTU 1. 19. III, 1.

²⁹The text causes embarrassment for most commentators, as is indicated by Westermann 1982, 227: 'Da nun v. 7–10a and 10b–11 verschiedenen literarischen Schichten angehören, sind wahrscheinlich zwei verschiedene Traditionen über den Ort des Grabes Jakobs vorausgesetzt; die eine setzt ihn im Ostjordanland, die andere im westjordanischen Kanaan an.'

²⁴Weippert 1979, 22.

²⁵Spronk 1986, 161ff.

²⁶KTU 1.21: II. 5–6.

²⁷Spronk 1986, 163f.

²⁸Spronk 1986, 164.

²⁹Levine, de Tarragon 1984, 649ff.; Spronk 1986, 189ff.

³⁰Spronk 1986, 195.

ancestors,³⁷ we may conclude that in this field relations must have existed between Transjordan and Canaan.

Later developments are known to us only via the polemic texts of the Old Testament. In the deuteronomistic literature the Rephaim are retained as the ancient inhabitants only for the purpose of their defeat. The texts in which they appear as spirits of the dead portray them as weak and feeble. The original affiliation with *rp*' (to heal) is intentionally obscured.³⁸ Thus, the legendary Og is *historicized* in the Old Testament to be subsequently defeated in a YHWH-war scheme. In like manner the various other traditions regarding Sihon and Heshbon are placed in this framework. The deuteronomistic literature, in an emphasis comparable to what it does with the prohibition of necromancy (Deut. 18: 11),³⁹ has construed Og the *Rapiu* as a king who, along with Sihon of Heshbon, can be brought under the conquest tradition, and their territory east of the Jordan can subsequently be divided.

This tendency is partially visible in Josh. 13: 22, where Balaam the son of Beor is included among the slain. Unlike the parallel text in Numb. 13: 8, Josh. 13: 22 adds *hquwm*, the soothsayer. Precisely this soothsaying, along with necromancy, falls under the judgment of Deut. 18: 10f. where the deuteronomists draw the lines of opposition between the 'word-prophet' and all other attempts to surpass the bounds of time and space.

Summary

To summarize: in Josh. 13 we have the oldest material only in fragments with a historical-topographical basis. These fragments function initially within the framework of the Og and Sihon tradition, which in turn are part of a deuteronomistic land-division scheme.

Og is one of the *Rp'um*, deceased deified kings, who could be revived with Ba'al. Transjordan, Bashan and the surroundings of Chinnereth were connected with the cult of the dead Canaanite kings.

These legendary figures with their real cultural-historical background were used in the later, polemic, deuteronomistic texts to claim Transjordan religiously and politically. Despite the polemic setting, these texts make it clear that in the area of the cult of the dead the influence of the Transjordan radiated far into Canaan.

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³⁷ Spronk 1986, 229 suggests that place names such as Obot (spirit of the dead) and Abarim (those who have crossed [the river of death]) reflect a cult of the dead. See Numb. 21: 10–11; 33: 43–44.

³⁸ De Moor 1976, 340.

³⁹ The severity of the command reflects the tenacity of the praxis.

E. NOORT

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