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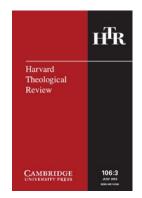
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# Conquest and Form: Narrativity in Joshua 5–11 and Historical Discourse in Ancient Judah

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# Conquest and Form:
# Narrativity in Joshua 5–11 and
# Historical Discourse in Ancient Judah[*]

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One goal of this essay is to offer an exploratory, historiographical analysis of the conquest account in the book of Joshua, an analysis that focuses upon the sociocultural milieu of ancient Judah. I propose to show how this narrative of conquest might have contributed to discourse(s) among the literate Judean community that perpetuated the text, and I will offer a few thoughts on the potential relationship between the narrative and the supposed cultic reforms of the late seventh century B.C.E. A number of biblical scholars have argued that the late monarchic period gave rise to the conquest story as recounted in Joshua. In this essay, I would like to pay special attention to precisely how this narrative might have functioned within the milieu of the late monarchic period, thus refining our understanding of the narrative's contribution to the discourses of this era and our knowledge of its relationship to other narratives that were probably extant at the same time. In other words, what particular features of the narrative might have had special import in this period? Specifically, I will argue that the narrative reveals certain discursive statements about Yahweh's cultic supremacy and about important cultic sites in late monarchic Judah, and that this is evident in particular narratival features that are present in the text.

However, I would also like to discuss the theory and method that informs and guides this type of analysis. This exploration, therefore, is as much about methods of reading the text as it is about the text itself. How should one approach such an endeavor? Can one even use a text like Joshua, with its seemingly complicated

history of composition, to access a particular historical community? There is widespread disagreement over the date of composition, contents, purpose, and almost all other aspects of Deuteronomistic literature, and so a forthright and careful discussion of one's theoretical and methodological underpinnings is apposite to this sort of exploration. In addition, in recent years biblical scholarship has shown an increased interest in bridging the gap between historical and literary approaches to the Hebrew Bible.[1] Therefore, in this essay I offer an approach to the text that attempts to integrate historical and literary concerns in order to probe the narrative as an artifact from ancient Judah. I hope to show that this type of approach can yield fruitful results. That said, given the lack of consensus concerning Deuteronomistic literature and the debates over methodology during the last few decades, my study begins with an extended discussion of these issues before turning to the narrative itself.

My starting point for this study is Mario Liverani's dictum, "Let us . . . try to view the document as *a source for the knowledge of itself*."[2] By this he means that we should view historical documents as sources for understanding the authors of the documents, and not as sources for the events depicted in them. However, one can take Liverani's suggestion a step further, making one minor modification. Michel Foucault (in)famously argued that an "author" is no more than a function of the discourses at play in his or her contemporary "episteme," the governing system of knowledge in the period.[3] In Foucault's view, to know the "author" of a document is really to know the discourses of the historical community or society in which the document was composed. Foucault probably overstates his case.[4] But his emphasis upon sociocultural discourses and their impact on an author is important, and it nicely supplements Liverani's emphasis on the actual authors of documents, who are extremely difficult to conjure up from ancient texts like those of the Hebrew Bible. Therefore, in this study I view the document as a source for the community that gave rise to and subsequently read the document, that is, as a source for knowledge of discourses in the document's primary milieu. The

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[1] E.g., at the 2010 Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in Atlanta, a session entitled "The Future of Biblical Studies"—sponsored by the National Association of Professors of Hebrew—featured talks by Joel S. Baden, William A. Tooman, Lauren A. S. Monroe, Serge Frolov, and Peter Machinist. A notable theme in the discussion was that, when it comes to historical and literary readings of the Hebrew Bible, biblical scholars should take a "both/and" approach instead of an "either/or" one. See also the essays in Parts 1 and 2 of *Literary Constructions of Identity in the Ancient World* (ed. Hanna Liss and Manfred Oeming; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2010).

[2] Mario Liverani, "Memorandum on the Approach to Historiographic Texts," *Or* 42 (1973) 178–94, at 179 [italics in original].

[3] See Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?" in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* (ed. Donald F. Bouchard; trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon; Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1977) 113–38; also idem, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith; London: Tavistock, 1972; repr., New York: Vintage Books, 2010).

[4] This is evident when he discusses the so-called "transdiscursive" authors such as Marx and Freud, whose works actually gave rise to new discourses. See Foucault, "What is an Author?" 131–36.

thought patterns and deep narrative structures of the text, to use Liverani's expressions, tell us something about the people who composed and read these texts, who made them an integral part of their intellectual repertoire.

This methodological starting point, when applied to the text of Joshua, raises at least two questions: 1) exactly which Judean community are we talking about? and 2) how does one go about reading a historical document as a source for the knowledge of itself; that is, precisely how does one analyze the "thought patterns and deep narrative structures" of the document?

## ◼ Reading Joshua in Late Monarchic Judah

In response to the first question, I read the conquest account as a source for the late monarchic period in Judah, nevertheless recognizing that the compositional history of the book of Joshua and that of the larger corpus of Deuteronomistic literature remains a significant point of scholarly debate.

Despite disagreement over the book of Joshua's literary history, there is a strong contingent of scholarship that places much of the conquest account within a monarchic-period context.[5] For instance, Ernst Axel Knauf, following Konrad

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[5] See, e.g., G. Ernest Wright, introduction to *Joshua*, by Robert G. Boling (AB 6; New York: Doubleday, 1982) 66–72; Richard D. Nelson, *Joshua* (OTL; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1997) 5–9; Antony F. Campbell and Mark A. O'Brien, *Unfolding the Deuteronomistic History: Origins, Upgrades, Present Text* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 2000) 101–6; Thomas Römer, *The So-Called Deuteronomistic History: A Sociological, Historical and Literary Introduction* (London: T&T Clark, 2007) 81–90; Konrad Schmid, *Literaturgeschichte des Alten Testaments* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2008) 86–89; Ernst Axel Knauf, *Josua* (ZBKAT 6; Zurich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2008) 17–18; see also the bibliographies in these works. For those who date the book's foundations to the monarchic period, there is no consensus regarding its place within a larger corpus of monarchic-era literature. There is the long-standing scholarly tradition of attaching Joshua to the Pentateuch, thus creating a Hexateuch that witnesses fulfillment of the divine promise of land made to the patriarchs; for discussion and critique see Hartmut N. Rösel, "The Book of Joshua and the Existence of a Hexateuch," in *Homeland and Exile: Studies in Honour of Bustenay Oded* (ed. Gershon Galil, Mark Geller, and Alan Millard; Leiden: Brill, 2009) 559–70. On the other hand, Martin Noth, rejecting the idea of a Hexateuch, argued that the conquest material of Joshua 2–11 stems from a 9th-cent. Benjaminite collection of old etiological legends and war stories, which the 6th-cent. Deuteronomist then incorporated into his history (*Das Buch Josua* [3rd ed.; HAT 1.7; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1971] 11–13). Noth's reconstruction has been particularly influential over the years (e.g., A. D. H. Mayes, *The Story of Israel between Settlement and Exile: A Redactional Study of the Deuteronomistic History* [London: SCM, 1983] 53; Nelson, *Joshua*, 7–8), although some have questioned Noth's 9th-cent. date (e.g., Martin Rose, *Deuteronomist und Jahwist* [ATANT 67; Zurich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1981] 163–69, who suggests a post-722 context). On the related and crucial question of Deuteronomy's date, see Juha Pakkala, "The Date of the Oldest Edition of Deuteronomy," *ZAW* 121 (2009) 388–401; the keen response from Nathan MacDonald, "Issues and Questions in the Dating of Deuteronomy," *ZAW* 122 (2010) 431–35; and Pakkala's rejoinder, "The Dating of Deuteronomy: A Response to Nathan MacDonald," *ZAW* 123 (2011) 431–36. These issues reflect the widespread disagreement over Pentateuchal and Deuteronomistic literature, as a whole. For a thorough history of scholarship on the "Deuteronomistic History," at least up to the mid-1990s, see Thomas Römer and Albert de Pury, "Deuteronomistic Historiography (DH): History of Research and Debated Issues," in *Israel Constructs Its History: Deuteronomistic Historiography in Recent Research* (ed. Albert de

Schmid, submits that the conquest account originally provided the conclusion to a monarchic-period exodus narrative.[6] This narrative, in Knauf's view, has its roots in the northern kingdom of Israel but was adapted for a Judean audience ca. 600 B.C.E. For Knauf, having an exodus narrative without an account of entrance into the promised land is unthinkable, and so the narrative, in its original Judean form, must have concluded with parts of Joshua 6–10, thus emphasizing Judah's claim to the economically important territory of Benjamin at the close of the seventh century. Thomas Römer, unlike Knauf, does not emphasize the connection between the books of Exodus and Joshua but nevertheless also places the conquest account in a late monarchic-period setting. He sees the original version as part of an early collection of Deuteronomistic literature that emerged as royal propaganda in Josiah's court. He argues that Joshua chapters 5–11, in particular, have a high concentration of late monarchic-period, Deuteronomistic material.[7] These chapters are among a number of Deuteronomistic narratives that have a decidedly optimistic view of Israel's unfolding history, and that do not foresee the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of Judah's monarchy.[8]

Furthermore, the conquest account in Joshua has strong literary parallels with conquest accounts found in Neo-Assyrian inscriptions, suggesting that the Deuteronomistic writer(s)/redactor(s) to some extent modeled the work after Assyrian accounts, which stand in a long tradition of ancient Near Eastern conquest literature.[9] These parallels lend additional credence to the idea of a late monarchic

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Pury, Thomas Römer, and Jean-Daniel Macchi; JSOTSup 306; Sheffield, U.K. Sheffield Academic Press, 2000) 24–141 (on Joshua, see esp. 112–16). See also Gary N. Knoppers, who offers a more recent appraisal of approaches to Deuteronomistic literature, focusing on scholarship on 1 and 2 Kings ("Theories of Redaction(s) in Kings," in *The Books of Kings: Sources, Composition, Historiography and Reception* [ed. André Lemaire and Baruch Halpern; VTSup 129; Leiden: Brill, 2010] 69–88).

[6] See Knauf, *Josua*, 17. Knauf, one should note, questions the very idea of an overarching "Deuteronomistic History"; see idem, "Does 'Deuteronomistic Historiography' (DtrH) Exist?" in *Israel Constructs Its History*, 388–98.

[7] See Römer, *So-Called Deuteronomistic History*, 81–90; also idem, "Book-Endings in Joshua and the Question of the So-Called Deuteronomistic History," in *Raising Up a Faithful Exegete: Essays in Honor of Richard D. Nelson* (ed. K. L. Noll and Brooks Schramm; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2010) 87–101.

[8] Römer states, "[T]he optimistic tone in some conquest stories, as well as the positive view of the Davidic dynasty, and the praise of kings Hezekiah and Josiah in particular . . . suggest that some parts of the Deuteronomistic History (DH) at least originated in a period when the Judean kingship had not yet come to an end" (*So-Called Deuteronomistic History*, 67). See also the foundational work of Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973) 278–85; compare Richard D. Nelson, *The Double Redaction of the Deuteronomistic History* (JSOTSup 18; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981). On Joshua in particular within this view, see Marvin Sweeney, *King Josiah of Judah: The Lost Messiah of Israel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) 125–36.

[9] See John Van Seters, "Joshua's Campaign of Canaan and Near Eastern Historiography," *SJOT* 4 (1990) 1–12; also K. Lawson Younger, Jr., who conducts a semiotic analysis of conquest literature from Egypt, Anatolia, Assyria, Babylon, and the book of Joshua, also citing the work of Liverani as a methodological starting point (*Ancient Conquest Accounts: A Study in Ancient Near Eastern and Biblical History Writing* [JSOTSup 98; Sheffield, U.K. Sheffield Academic Press, 1990] esp. 61–124 for his discussion of Assyrian accounts).

date for reading this portion of Joshua. The story of Joshua's conquest, indeed, has been understood as a sort of imperial mimesis, in which the vassal kingdom Judah adopts elements of its overlord's literary style in order to tout the goals and aspirations of its own leadership.[10] There is no doubt that Assyrian imperialism in the eighth and seventh centuries B.C.E. had considerable influence on the socio-cultural identity of the Judeans and the other people groups of the Levant.[11]

In this essay, following Römer's recent redaction-critical work, I focus on content in Joshua 5–11 that one can situate in the late monarchic-period milieu in Judah.[12] The text that I analyze is roughly as follows: 5:1; 5:13–6:27; [7:1–26?]; 8:1–29; 9:1–11:23.[13] Here I have relied on Römer as a redaction-critical guide, yet I occasionally differ with his suggestions. To be sure, placing layers of text within a particular historical time frame (and deciding what those layers are in the first place) is tricky. Unfortunately, in biblical studies we are often forced to make judgments on the dates of sources, redaction, etc., that are informed by the text itself, a process that lends itself to circular argumentation.[14] With this in mind, I agree with Römer and others who understand the conquest account as part of Josianic-era Deuteronomistic literature, but, like Knauf, I also see a strong

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[10] See Lori L. Rowlett, *Joshua and the Rhetoric of Violence: A New Historicist Analysis* (JSOTSup 226; Sheffield, U.K. Sheffield Academic Press, 1996). But see my comments on Rowlett below, n. 30. On Joshua as a royal figure, specifically as a "prototypical Josiah," see Richard Nelson, "Josiah in the Book of Joshua," *JBL* 100 (1981) 531–40. On the history and politics of Josiah's time, see Nadav Na'aman, "The Kingdom of Judah Under Josiah," in *Ancient Israel and Its Neighbors* (Collected Essays 1; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2005) 329–98.

[11] See, e.g., Peter Machinist, "The *Rab Šāqēh* at the Wall of Jerusalem: Israelite Identity in the Face of the Assyrian 'Other'," *HS* 41 (2000) 151–68; Ian D. Wilson, "Judean Pillar Figurines and Ethnic Identity in the Shadow of Assyria," *JSOT* 36 (2012) 259–78. As in many imperial or colonial contexts, Judah's culture was a complex hybrid of sociocultural elements, adopting and resisting ideologies and forms of cultural expression to forge its identity. Judean sociocultural identity exhibited a hybridity of sorts in the monarchic as well as post-monarchic periods.

[12] I have excluded chs. 1–4 from this analysis because critics tend to see a high concentration of post-monarchic additions in these texts, and because there is a definite transition in the narrative at the beginning of ch. 5: the Israelites have now entered the land as a nation to begin their conquest. I do not deny that chs. 1–4 are integral to the narrative as a whole, but I have restricted this discussion to the subunit of chs. 5–11.

[13] Not all of the content in Josh 5–11 can be attributed to the monarchic period. Major sections excluded from my analysis are the circumcision and Passover episode at Gilgal (5:2–12) and the sacrifices and reading of Torah on Mount Ebal (8:30–35), passages that critics have identified as redactional additions to the text. On Josh 5:2–12, see Boling (*Joshua*, 193) who, following Frank Moore Cross, suggests that Dtr 1 initially crafted these verses based on an old covenant festival, and then in the post-monarchic era Dtr 2 expanded the text to emphasize the rites of circumcision and Passover; on 8:30–35, see Nadav Na'aman, "The Law of the Altar in Deuteronomy and the Cultic Site near Shechem," in *Rethinking the Foundations: Essays in Honour of John Van Seters* (ed. Steven L. McKenzie and Thomas Römer; BZAW 294; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2000) 141–61. In addition to these larger sections, there are, of course, individual statements and verses that some critics attribute to later redactions (e.g., the cross references to the Rahab story in 6:17, 22–23, 25). Placing the Achan episode in the monarchic period is debatable (more below).

[14] See John Barton, *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Studies* (2nd ed.; London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1996) 52–55.

connection between the account and early stories of Moses and the exodus—in either case, there is good evidence for reading the majority of the account in a late monarchic-period setting.

The conquest account, even from the perspective of seventh-century Judean literati, depicts events from a distant past; it narrates the story of Israel's entrance into and subsequent dominance over the land of Canaan. As a narrative about a distant past—indeed, as a narrative about a distant past that informed aspects of Judah's identity—it offers a window into the historical consciousness of Judean society, how Judeans thought about history. If the primary sociocultural context of this narrative was indeed the late monarchic period, as many scholars submit, then one should be able to utilize it for exploring Judean historical discourse at that time.[15] As stated above, one goal of the textual exploration below is to refine our understanding of exactly how this narrative and its literary features contributed to the discourses of the historical period in which many scholars situate it.

## ■ Narrative and Historical Discourse in an Ancient Context

This brings us back to our second question regarding methodology: How does one go about reading a text in order to open a window into the historical consciousness of the society that produced and maintained it? In the last several decades the historical critic Hayden White has done much to increase our awareness of the interplay between historical consciousness and narrative in historiography. Embedded in a document's "narrativity" (i.e., how a document narrativizes events), White argues, is a discursive statement about historical consciousness. He states, "When the reader recognizes the story being told in a historical narrative as a specific kind of story—for example, as an epic, romance, tragedy, comedy, or farce—he can be said to have comprehended the meaning produced by the discourse. This comprehension is nothing other than the recognition of the form of the narrative."[16] The form (narrative) therefore has content (narrativity), which operates within and

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[15] At this point in the discussion, one might wonder why a story about the people of Israel conquering the promised land—a story in which the tribe of Judah does not play a prominent role—would have any import in the kingdom of Judah. On the question of Israel in Judean thought, see, e.g., Israel Finkelstein and Neil A. Silberman, who argue that a large influx of Israelites from the north permanently altered the demographics and identity of Judah in the late 8th cent. B.C.E. ("Temple and Dynasty: Hezekiah, the Remaking of Judah and the Rise of Pan-Israelite Ideology," *JSOT* 30 [2006] 259–85). For an opposing view, see, e.g., Philip R. Davies, who places these issues of identity in the post-monarchic period (*The Origins of Biblical Israel* [LHBOTS 485; London: T&T Clark, 2007]). See also my "Concluding Thoughts," below.

[16] Hayden White, "The Question of Narrative in Contemporary Historical Theory," in *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987) 26–57, at 43. See also his seminal work, "Introduction: The Poetics of History," in *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973) 1–42. See also Stuart D. Beeson, "Historiography Ancient and Modern: Fact and Fiction," in *Ancient and Modern Scriptural Historiography (L'historiographie biblique, ancienne et moderne)* (ed. George J. Brooke and Thomas Römer; BETL 207; Louvain: Peeters, 2007) 3–11.

reveals something of the document's historical discourse. To get at this discourse, White emphasizes the means by which the (hi)story is told: the structure of the plot, the modes of argumentation employed, and the worldviews embedded in the document. Like Foucault, White perhaps at times overstates his case.[17] His analysis of historiography nevertheless provides an excellent vantage point for viewing a document as a "source for the knowledge of itself." White's writings, of course, have focused mostly on historiography in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries of our own era, but much of his theory of narrativity, which arises out of his analysis of modern historiography, may be applied to the analysis of ancient texts and communities as well.

However, utilizing White's work to analyze ancient communities is not without its limitations. White's ultimate interest is the problem of historical knowledge as it relates to representations of historical reality.[18] In other words, he wants to analyze a historian's prefigured ideas concerning one's ability to represent the past. In his book *Metahistory*, White identifies four major tropes of historical representation, epistemologies of historical reality: Metaphor, Metonymy, Synecdoche, and Irony. The dominant trope of historical discourse in ancient Judah was not Irony (the most skeptical of the tropes) but was one of the three "naive" categories (Metaphor, Metonymy, or Synecdoche), which reflect belief in "language's capacity to grasp the nature of things in figurative terms."[19] For the purpose of studying ancient Judah, though, we lack rich source materials on historical philosophy like those White was able to analyze for nineteenth-century Europe, so one would have a hard time taking an analysis of the biblical texts as far as White took his study.[20]

In what follows, then, I offer a preliminary exploration of Joshua 5–11, drawing on White's concepts of narrativity and historiography, but also recognizing the limitations of this exploration, which fuses aspects of synchronic and diachronic analysis. One problem with this approach is how to understand the text's

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[17] See, e.g., the critical responses to White's early work in the volume, "*Metahistory*: Six Critiques," *History and Theory* Beiheft 19 (1980); also the collection of essays entitled "Hayden White: Twenty-Five Years On," in *History and Theory* 37 (1998) 143–93.

[18] It should be emphasized that, although White draws comparisons between factual representation and fictional representation, he does not deny our ability to uncover and to know certain things about the past. See, e.g., Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978) esp. 81–100 ("The Historical Text as Literary Artifact") and 121–34 ("The Fictions of Factual Representation").

[19] White, *Metahistory*, 36–37.

[20] The book of Qohelet (Ecclesiastes), which on the surface certainly appears to understand history in the mode of Irony, might be an interesting text for analysis along these lines, but even then it would provide only one possible viewpoint (and a rather idiosyncratic one) among many in the diverse collection of biblical literature. Perhaps a biblical scholar could trace developments in the biblical communities' epistemology of historical reality by analyzing different redactional layers in a given body of texts (e.g., one could explore possible differences in the Neo-Assyrian, Neo-Babylonian, and Persian period layers of Deuteronomistic literature). But this would require a complete and confident reconstruction of each layer, surely a difficult task.

narrativity within the larger discursive setting of a particular historical time frame. Obviously, those who disagree with a monarchic date for this text will disagree with my conclusions regarding the discourse(s) at play. Another problem is the attempt to offer a discursive analysis of a narrative that is potentially incomplete or fragmentary. To wed redaction criticism and a narratival approach is indeed problematic. Even if one is confident in constructing redactions of narratives from particular historical periods, there is no way to know what narratives (or parts of narratives) might not have survived, and lost narratives could have a dramatic effect on one's conclusions.[21] Moreover, this essay, for the most part, only deals with the Masoretic text, another problematic aspect of my exploration, since Joshua is known for its text-critical issues.[22] Nevertheless, it should be noted that these problems—whether one acknowledges them or not—plague any historical discussion of ancient Israel that utilizes the Hebrew Bible as its primary source; placing the text in the Persian and/or Hellenistic period(s), for instance, does not entirely remove text- and redaction-critical problems.[23] That said, I proceed with caution, with an awareness of the weaknesses in my approach, and I hope that those who disagree with the late monarchic setting of Joshua 5–11 will still find something useful in my analysis of the text itself.

One final comment, however, before proceeding: The following discussion is not interested per se in the historicity of the Joshua account, which purports to re-lay events from the Late Bronze/Early Iron Age, nor is it concerned with proving or disproving any proposed date of composition;[24] the discussion at hand is specifically interested in how the conquest account in Joshua might have contributed to particular sociocultural discourses in late monarchic Judah.

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[21] I.e., even if the proposed urtext of Josh 5–11 was in fact circulating in 7th-cent. Judah, there is no way to know what portions of the narrative later editors/redactors might have cut out in order to reshape or expand the older narrative. Compare White's comments on the historiographical process in *Metahistory*, 5–7. The crafting of any historical narrative involves privileging some historical data over others; the selected set of data and its emplotment thus help shape the narrative and the idea(s) of history inherent in its text. The editing, expansion, and standardization of the text of Joshua, one might argue, involved similar processes.

[22] E.g., see the discussion and bibliography in Leonard Greenspoon, "The Book of Joshua: Part 1: Text and Versions," *Currents in Biblical Research* 3 (2005) 229–61.

[23] The book of Jeremiah, with its divergent textual traditions, is a prime example; see any critical commentary on the book. In Joshua, one can point to 8:30–35: in the LXX this passage is located just prior to the Gibeon episode (Josh 9:2α–φ), whereas in 4QJosh[a] one reads it immediately after the crossing of the Jordan; see, e.g., Ed Noort, "4QJoshua[a] and the History of Tradition in the Book of Joshua," *JNSL* 24 (1998) 127–44. Joshua 6 has also long been a *crux interpretum* among text and redaction critics; see, e.g., Michaël N. van der Meer, "'Sound the Trumpet!' Redaction and Reception of Joshua 6:2–25," in *The Land of Israel in Bible, History, and Theology: Studies in Honor of Ed Noort* (ed. Jacques van Ruiten and J. Cornelius de Vos; VTSup 124; Leiden: Brill, 2009) 19–43. Obviously, these issues present problems for scholars attempting to explore biblical historical discourse in any ancient period.

[24] On these issues, see the extensive discussion by Nadav Na'aman, "The 'Conquest of Canaan' in the Book of Joshua and in History," in *Canaan in the Second Millennium B.C.E.* (Collected Essays 2; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2005) 317–92.

## ◼ Yahweh's Army

The opening verse of Joshua 5 sets the tone for the entire narrative that follows: it says that all the kings of the Amorites and Canaanites completely lost their spirit (ולא־היה בם עוד רוח) and their "heart" (i.e., courage) melted away (וימס לבבם; see Josh 2:11; 7:5; Isa 13:7; 19:1; Nah 2:11) when they heard about Yahweh's power, about how he dried up the Jordan so that the Israelites could cross the river.[25] This proclamation recalls the military laws of Deuteronomy 20.[26] In Deut 20:8, any Israelite soldier who is weak of heart is commanded to go home, lest he cause the hearts of his fellow soldiers to "melt" (ולא ימס את־לבב אחיו כלבבו). The Israelite army, accompanied and guided by Yahweh, shall have no fear (Deut 20:1). Therefore the fearful Amorites and Canaanites, whose courage has left them before the battles even start, stand no chance against Joshua, his men, and their god. The motif of the deity fighting for the people and empowering the people continually resurfaces throughout the conquest narrative.[27] The narrative, however, is keenly aware of the people's dependence upon Yahweh for their might (e.g., Josh 7:5; see below).

Thus, the success of the conquest, which is understood to be absolute in Joshua 5–11 ultimately hinges upon the people's connection with the all-powerful deity and upon their human leader Joshua's obedience to the deity. This motif falls in line with the Hebrew Bible's typical, organicist mode of argument—in other words, its tendency (especially in the historical narratives) to understand historical causality as a function of the people's relationship with Yahweh, their chief

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[25] Joshua 1–4, which recounts the story of Rahab and the spies at Jericho, as well as the crossing of the Jordan, functions as an introduction to the actual conquest—a first act, so to speak. The miraculous crossing of the Jordan has literary parallels in Assurbanipal's annals (7th cent. B.C.E.) (see Van Seters, "Joshua's Campaign," 7) and even in second-millennium texts (see James K. Hoffmeier, "The Structure of Joshua 1–11 and the Annals of Thutmose III," in *Faith, Tradition, and History: Old Testament Historiography in Its Near Eastern Context* [ed. Alan R. Millard et al.; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1994] 165–79). Of course, it is also strongly reminiscent of Israel's crossing of the Red Sea (Exod 14–15), thus highlighting Joshua's role as successor to Moses. Römer nevertheless sees the river-crossing episode as a creation of the Neo-Babylonian period (*So-Called Deuteronomistic History*, 134). Even if Joshua 3–4, the crossing of the Jordan, is a Neo-Babylonian or Persian-period text in its present form, a story of Yahweh drying up the waters of the river was likely circulating in the monarchic period. This is even more likely if, during the late monarchic period, the Joshua narrative functioned as a conclusion to the exodus story, as Schmid (*Literaturgeschichte*, 86–89) and Knauf (*Josua*, 17–18) suggest.

[26] Römer states, "The laws of warfare in ch. 20 probably did not belong to the first edition of Deuteronomy [in the 7th cent. B.C.E.], even if the prohibition of the destruction of fruit trees (20:19–20) may be understood as a polemic against Assyrian practice" (*So-Called Deuteronomistic History*, 80; see also his comments on p. 131). *Pace* Römer, the conquest account in Joshua and the military laws of Deut 20 certainly could have existed concurrently in the late monarchic period; they play off each other, and their perspectives on warfare are in sync with one another. See Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985) 206–7. On Deut 20:19–20 and its relation to Assyrian siege techniques, see Jacob L. Wright, who does not see these verses as anti-Assyrian polemic ("Warfare and Wanton Destruction," *JBL* 127 [2008] 423–58).

[27] E.g., Josh 6:2; 8:1–2; 10:8–11, 42; 11:6–9, 18–20; also Deut 20:4.

deity. Already, at the very beginning of the narrative, the text foreshadows the inevitable victory of the newcomer Israelites, who have the support of mighty Yahweh, over the incumbent Canaanites who dwell in the land. The conquest narrative thus helps to synthesize a worldview in ancient Judah in which historical events are integrated into a teleology centered upon the relationship between Judah and its primary deity.[28]

The narrative's organicist worldview, founded upon this special relationship, works together with a particular ideological outlook in the text.[29] The Joshua narrative—with its emphasis upon Yahweh's role as ultimate fighter and victor, and with its brief acknowledgments of Israel's potential lack of discernment (e.g., the Achan and Gibeon episodes; see below)—displays an outlook that is, in Hayden White's Mannheimian terminology, "liberally apocalyptic." The narrative understands the abrupt social change initiated by the conquest as a product of divine intervention (i.e., apocalypticism), yet there is also an understanding that human agency played a limited role in this revolutionary event in Israel's history (i.e., liberalism).[30] In other words, despite the strong sense of Yahweh's control over

[28] See Stephen C. Pepper, *World Hypotheses: A Study in Evidence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1948) 141–50; also White, *Metahistory*, 15.

[29] Regarding ideological outlook, I refer to the text's inherent understandings of social praxis and historical processes. Compare White, *Metahistory*, 22–25. White draws from the work of Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Harcourt, 1936). Whereas Mannheim follows Marx and sees ideology as deceptive (*Ideology and Utopia*, 61), White understands it as essentially value-neutral.

[30] Contra the Assyrian annals to which the Joshua narrative is often compared. The Assyrian texts place a pronounced emphasis on the human king's role in the endeavors of the empire. The Assyrian annals, thus, are more radical and less apocalyptic in their understanding of social praxis. This reflects the highly propagandistic nature of the annals—narratives that, in their primary contexts, explicitly dealt with contemporary events and issues, and which were inscribed upon palace monuments and artifacts to stand as bold messages from the king to his contemporary court and to the courts of his future successors. See Hayim Tadmor, "Propaganda, Literature, Historiography," in *Assyria 1995: Proceedings of the 10th Anniversary Symposium of the Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project* (ed. Simo Parpola and Robert M. Whiting; Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1997) 325–38; also Irene Winter, "Art *in* Empire," in *Assyria 1995*, 359–81. For a recent treatment of Assyrian art in relation to royal ideology, see Mehmet-Ali Ataç, *The Mythology of Kingship in Neo-Assyrian Art* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2010). Joshua, on the other hand, does not explicitly deal with issues contemporary to the late monarchic period, nor do we have any evidence that it was ever a monumental text. The Israelites certainly adopted elements of the Assyrian discourse, which stands within a larger ancient Near Eastern literary tradition (see Younger, *Ancient Conquest Accounts*), but the discourse of the Joshua narrative, in my analysis, has as much to say about theology as it does about politics or military expansion. Therefore, I must disagree with Rowlett, who argues for a common political rhetoric in both the Assyrian texts and the Joshua conquest account (*Rhetoric of Violence*, 119–20). I agree that the Judean literati used some Neo-Assyrian forms (and other common ancient Near Eastern motifs) to assert their identity, as Rowlett states in her concluding chapter, but I am not so sure about her assertion that the language of Joshua "is to serve as a warning to the people of Josiah's kingdom [in the late 7th cent. B.C.E.] that the post-imperial power of the central government could and would be unleashed upon any who resisted its assertion of control" (ibid., 183). First of all, we cannot assume that the narrative would have been widely known among the populace of ancient Judah. Further, if there is an element of warning to the Judean people, the warning is to not disobey Yahweh's

history in the narrative, there is still room for human action to affect the outcome of historical events and larger historical processes.

The strength of the relationship between the Israelites, their supreme deity, and their historical trajectory is reinforced by introducing "the commander of Yahweh's army" (שׂר־צבא־יהוה), a supernatural being who appears to Joshua outside of Jericho and whose arrival is meant to reassure Joshua prior to the siege of the city (Josh 5:13–14).[31] The revelation of the commander's identity prompts Joshua to drop to the ground in reverence, and the commander then tells Joshua to remove his sandals, evoking Moses's divine encounter on Horeb (Exod 3:5). Besides establishing continuity between the figures of Joshua and Moses in the mind of the reader, the encounter with שׂר־צבא־יהוה reassures Joshua that Yahweh and his army will take care of the fighting; after all, it is the heavenly commander who holds a drawn sword, not Joshua. This becomes even clearer when Israel "conquers" Jericho without doing any fighting at all. The beginning of Israel's conquest of Canaan is thus more ritualistic than it is militaristic (more below).

The appearance of this supernatural commander, and his title in particular, also brings to mind the divine epithet "Yahweh of (heavenly) armies" (יהוה צבאות).[32] This divine title occurs frequently in the prophetic books[33] but is relatively rare in Deuteronomy to 2 Kings, where it occurs only twelve times.[34] Significantly, in the earliest layers of Deuteronomistic literature,[35] the title appears exclusively in the stories of the young David, another extremely successful Israelite

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instructions; couched in a narrative about the distant past, such a warning would be relevant to the monarch as well as the common person.

[31] See Nelson, *Joshua*, 81. This visit by the heavenly commander is comparable to Joseph Campbell's "supernatural aid," which typically appears in mythological stories when the hero responds to the call to adventure; see Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (2nd ed.; Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1968) 69–77. On the potential for reading Joshua as a heroic story, see George W. Coats, "The Book of Joshua: Heroic Saga or Conquest Theme?" *JSOT* 38 (1987) 15–32. Note also the parallel in Assurbanipal's Prism B, in which Ishtar of Arbela appears to a "visionary" (*šabrû*) in a dream, holding a bow and a drawn sword, in order to encourage Assurbanipal in his battle against Elam; see Martti Nissinen, with C. L. Seow and Robert K. Ritner, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East* (SBLWAW 12; Atlanta, Ga.: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003) Text 101 (esp. 147–48); also Van Seters, "Joshua's Campaign," 9–11. On this particular literary image of Ishtar and its relationship to Ishtar's iconography, see Izak Cornelius, "Aspects of the Iconography of the Warrior Goddess Ištar and Ancient Near Eastern Prophecies," in *Images and Prophecy in the Ancient Eastern Mediterranean* (ed. Martti Nissinnen and Charles E. Carter; FRLANT 233; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009) 15–40.

[32] This epithet, which some understand to have been the official cultic name for Yahweh in Shiloh and Jerusalem, has attracted much scholarly attention. See, e.g., T. N. D. Mettinger, "Yahweh Zebaoth יהוה צבאות," in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (ed. Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. van der Horst; 2nd rev. ed.; Leiden: Brill, 1999) 920–24.

[33] The highest concentrations of the title appear in Proto-Isaiah, Jeremiah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

[34] Those being in 1 Sam 1:3, 11; 4:4; 15:2; 17:45; 2 Sam 6:2, 18; 7:8, 26–27; 1 Kgs 18:15; 2 Kgs 3:14.

[35] See Römer, *So-Called Deuteronomistic History*, 67–106, and the bibliography therein for a recent overview of the Deuteronomistic texts that were probably extant during the monarchic period.

warrior-conqueror who had the favor of Yahweh. David, before slaying Goliath, rebukes the Philistine giant for taunting יהוה צבאות, the god of Israel's army (1 Sam 17:45). And later, after David has defeated all his enemies and settled in Jerusalem, his new capital, it is יהוה צבאות who promises an everlasting throne for David's descendants (2 Sam 7:8, 26–27). In these memories of Joshua and David—two of ancient Israel's most prominent leaders from a distant past—there is a clear emphasis on the military strength of the god Yahweh, which manifests itself directly in his chosen people, in the conquering army of Joshua, and later in the fighting men of David.[36]

## ■ Victory and Failure, Romance and Tragedy

The narrative then launches into two lengthy accounts of how Israel conquered the cities of Jericho and Ai, respectively, promoting further the powerful partnership between Yahweh and the Israelites. As mentioned, Jericho, which shuts its gates in fear of the Israelites (Josh 6:1), is breached without a physical attack from Israel. Joshua and the people, following strict orders from Yahweh himself (Josh 6:2–5), ritualistically march around the city for seven days, and on the seventh day the city wall collapses as the people "shout a great shout" (ויריעו העם תרועה גדולה; Josh 6:20). The verbal root עור (shout a war cry) appears in the David narrative too, where it frames the story of David and Goliath. When David arrives at the army's encampment, the Israelites head out to face the Philistines with a "shout" (1 Sam 17:20), but when Goliath steps out to challenge Israel, the men flee in terror. After David kills Goliath and beheads the giant warrior, however, the Philistines flee and the Israelites pursue them with a "shout" (1 Sam 17:52). David's career begins with a triumphant victory, marked with a war cry from the people, as does the Israelites' entry into the land of Canaan. Hence the martial language in Joshua 5 and 6 helps establish discursive continuity between the figures of David and Joshua in Israel's social memory.

Israel's entry into the promised land of Canaan thus begins in highly romantic fashion (i.e., romantic in the sense of literary form). The people and their leader Joshua, obeying Yahweh's commands, conquer their initial foes at Jericho in a supernatural manner, without any need for an extended siege of the city. The capture of Ai, by contrast, involves military strategy and leadership from Joshua (Josh 8:10–21). But this story, too, presents itself in a romantic mode in which the hero, Joshua, transcends typical expectations and emerges victorious. Up to this point in the narrative, Yahweh has done all the work for Israel, but in preparation to

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[36] Baruch Halpern suggests that the biblical writers/editors have "Davidized" Joshua's achievements ("Gibeon: Israelite Diplomacy in the Conquest Era," *CBQ* 37 [1975] 303–16, esp. 315). Note also that in the post-monarchic book of 1 Chronicles, David is visited by מלאך יהוה (the angel/messenger of Yahweh), who holds an outstretched sword (1 Chr 21:16: וחרבו שלופה בידו [his sword was drawn in his hand]; compare Josh 5:13; also Num 22:23, 31). However, in 1 Chronicles, the heavenly visitor is not there to encourage; he has come to punish Jerusalem on account of David's census. The version of the story in 2 Samuel 24 does not mention the drawn sword.

conquer Ai, the deity commands Joshua to set up an ambush, allowing the Israelite leader and his warriors to conduct and accomplish the attack (Josh 8:2–8). Here, in an absolute (and brutal) victory at Ai, Joshua establishes some military prowess and no doubt furthers the fame of Yahweh, which begins to spread throughout Canaan after the destruction of Jericho (Josh 6:27).

Here I have skipped over Joshua 7. This chapter recounts a premature attack on Ai and the disobedience of Achan, lacing the romantic narrative of Israel's conquest with an element of tragedy.[37] Critics often see this chapter as a later, post-monarchic interpolation because of the emphasis upon disobedience and its consequences.[38] However, a post-monarchic date for this chapter is certainly not required.[39] Notice that the story is not critical of Israelite leadership; it is critical of those within the community who disobey Yahweh's commands. Moreover, it is set within a pre-monarchic historical time frame. In an organicist narrative about the distant past that understands historical causality in terms of interaction between deity and people, such a turn of events is not completely surprising. The narrative, on the whole, is not ignorant of Israelite mistakes (compare also the Gibeon episode; see below). Indeed, a moralizing text about obedience to Yahweh's covenant does not necessarily imply failure of the monarchy and Babylonian conquest and need not be placed in a post-monarchic context. The text is about the potential for disobedience and failure within one's own community, the enemy within. To be sure, this message resonates with the catastrophe of the exile, but it is also timeless. The lesson of Achan's failure would have had great import for a late monarchic-period community in which monolatrous worship of Yahweh was emerging as the norm and in which the cultic primacy of Jerusalem was a pressing issue (more below). Moreover, the tragedy of the episode fits well into the overarching emplotment of the narrative, as I will argue.

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[37] *Pace* L. Daniel Hawk, who states that the emplotment of the Achan episode is ironic (*Every Promise Fulfilled: Contesting Plots in Joshua* [Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1991] 75). Ch. 7 is indeed juxtaposed with Rahab's story in ch. 2, as Hawk shows (ibid., 79), and therefore presents an ironic understanding of חרם (ban, devote to destruction); see also idem, *Joshua* (Berit Olam; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2000) 107–10. However, following the highly romantic beginnings of the conquest in chs. 5 and 6, this turn of events highlights the failure of the protagonist(s) to continue the heroic success witnessed at Jericho, thus making the plot tragic from a conquest perspective. Only with the second major turn of events, the Gibeon episode, does the plot of the conquest fully evince irony, as I will argue below.

[38] E.g., Römer, *So-Called Deuteronomistic History*, 88 and 135; also Walter Dietrich, "Achans Diebstahl (Jos 7). Eine Kriminalgeschichte aus frühpersischer Zeit," in *'Sieben Augen auf einem Stein' (Sach 3,9). Studien zur Literatur des Zweiten Tempels. Festschrift für Ina Willi-Plein* (ed. F. Hartenstein; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2007) 57–67; and Knauf, *Josua*, 73.

[39] John Strange admits, "The date of the [entire Ai] story [7:1–8:29] is difficult to assess" ("The Book of Joshua: Origin and Dating," *SJOT* 16 [2002] 44–51, at 45–46). Nevertheless, he goes on to speculate that it is very late. Nelson, to the contrary, argues that the Achan story was added to the larger narrative of chs. 2–11 in a "pre-deuteronomistic" setting, viz., very early (*Joshua*, 98–99).

### ■ A Divine Comedy: Irony and the Gibeonites

After the destruction of Ai, word of Israel's strength spreads throughout the land, as the narrative reiterates in Josh 9:1–2, leading to the formation of a local alliance against Joshua and the Israelites.[40] At this point, however, the narrative takes a comic turn. The Gibeonites, upon learning about Joshua's violent conquest of Jericho and Ai, decide that they will deceive the Israelites into making an alliance with them, thereby protecting themselves from the seemingly unstoppable conquering force of Israel and its deity, Yahweh (Josh 9:3–15).[41] As a twist on the mode of romance—a deviation that tends towards irony—comedy typically introduces an absurd character or event that alters the hero's typical, romantic path to victory.[42] The Gibeonites certainly play the part of comic relief; dressed in worn-out clothes and carrying dry and crumbly bread, they come to Joshua claiming to be sojourners from a far-away land (Josh 9:4–6).[43] Not only have these apparent sojourners traveled a great distance, they also know of Yahweh's mighty deeds in Egypt and his victories on the other side of the Jordan (Josh 9:9–10). Notice that they do not mention the victories at Jericho and Ai, perhaps shrewdly.

As in any good comedy, this unexpected twist ends up enabling the ultimate success of the protagonist(s) and opens a path towards a "happy" ending. This comic moment, therefore, does not derail the narrative from its generally romantic track. The alliance with Gibeon, indeed, sets in motion a series of events that

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[40] Enemies allying with one another, increasing their power and resources, and thus increasing the impressiveness of the protagonist's eventual victory, is a common trope in ancient Near Eastern conquest accounts; e.g., the southern coalition that forms against Sennacherib. See Sennacherib's Prism Inscription, esp. col. V, in Daniel D. Luckenbill, *The Annals of Sennacherib* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1924; repr., Eugene, Oreg.: Wipf & Stock, 2005) 40–45.

[41] The biblical Gibeonites and the text of Joshua 9 have a long history of scholarly discussion. E.g., J. Liver, "The Literary History of Joshua IX," *JSS* 8 (1967) 227–43; Joseph Blenkinsopp, "Are There Traces of the Gibeonite Covenant in Deuteronomy?" *CBQ* 28 (1966) 207–19; Peter J. Kearney, "The Role of the Gibeonites in the Deuteronomic History," *CBQ* 35 (1973) 1–19; Halpern, "Gibeon"; Hartmut N. Rösel, "Anmerkungen zur Erzählung vom Bundesschluß mit den Gibeoniten," *BN* 28 (1985) 30–35; Ray K. Sutherland, "Israelite Political Theories in Joshua 9," *JSOT* 53 (1992) 65–74; Roland Boer, "Green Ants and Gibeonites," *Semeia* 75 (1996) 129–52; Diana Edelman, "Gibeon and the Gibeonites Revisited," in *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period* (ed. Oded Lipschits and Joseph Blenkinsopp; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2003) 153–67; Robert P. Gordon, "Gibeonite Ruse and Israelite Curse in Joshua 9," in *Covenant as Context: Essays in Honour of E. W. Nicholson* (ed. A. D. H. Mayes and R. B. Salters; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) 163–90; John Day, "Gibeon and the Gibeonites in the Old Testament," in *Reflection and Refraction: Studies in Biblical Historiography in Honour of A. Graeme Auld* (ed. Robert Rezetko et al.; VTSup 113; Leiden: Brill, 2007) 113–37; also Nadav Na'aman, "The Sanctuary of the Gibeonites Revisited," *JANER* 9 (2009) 101–24 (contrast this essay with Na'aman's earlier discussion in "Conquest of Canaan," 371–77, where he takes a slightly different position on the date of this text).

[42] On the plot structure and elements of comedy, see Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1957) 163–86.

[43] See Hawk, *Every Promise*, 89. Gordon, "Gibeonite Ruse," 174, notices the absurdity of the Gibeonite bread: if these sojourners had come so far, why would they still possess the provisions needed for their long journey!

enable Joshua and the Israelites to conquer all the remaining Canaanite powers. Israel captures all the land to the south and wipes out the armies and kings of Jerusalem, Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish, and Eglon, who disastrously attack Gibeon in an attempt to disrupt the newly formed alliance between the Israelites and Gibeonites (Joshua 10). The cities and kings to the north, moreover, meet the same fate when they attempt to join forces against Joshua and his divinely assisted army (Joshua 11). These events progress more or less programmatically, with Yahweh continuing his miraculous interventions (Josh 10:8–15)[44] and Joshua successfully annihilating the Canaanites from the land (with the notable exception of the Gibeonites; Josh 11:18–23). The conclusion of the narrative thus reinforces its organicist worldview and overarching romantic mode of emplotment.

However, from the perspective of the Gibeonites, one could also argue that the outcome of this comic moment is somewhat tragic.[45] Their conniving helps them avoid immediate annihilation at the hands of Joshua, but it also brings upon them a curse—on account of their trickery, they are to be eternally subservient to the people of Israel (Josh 9:22–27;1 Kgs 9:20–21). Taking into account the entire Deuteronomistic corpus, including later narratives, one could also argue that this event is tragic for Israel, as it ultimately permits an entire Canaanite group to remain in the land.

Nadav Na'aman has recently argued that this story in Joshua is meant to be a satirical polemic against a Gibeonite cultic site, which was probably active in the monarchic period, as the Hebrew Bible itself admits (1 Kgs 3:4), and which might have been shut down during Josiah's putative reforms.[46] He suggests, too, that Gibeon might have served as Judah's central sanctuary in the latter part of the Iron Age, until the Jerusalem temple eventually became primary.[47] His argument is that 1 Kgs 3:4 was part of a pre-Deuteronomistic text written in the late eighth or early seventh century B.C.E.; hence the text, which may be understood as a source for understanding its compositional milieu, reflects the cultic importance of the site in the late eighth and early seventh centuries, a time when we know Gibeon thrived. Even if Gibeon was never the central Judean sanctuary in the late Iron Age, it is likely that it was an active and important cult site until the late monarchic period, and the complex emplotment of the narrative in Joshua certainly reinforces Na'aman's thesis. The combination of both the Israelite and Gibeonite

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[44] On the sun at Gibeon and Yahweh's interventions, see Younger, *Ancient Conquest Accounts*, 208–20, with further bibliography.

[45] Boer suggests that, from the perspective of later Persian-period readers, the Gibeonites might be imagined both as a subjugated people and as a cipher for post-exilic Israel itself, contributing to the complex identity struggles that surely went on in Persian Yehud ("Green Ants and Gibeonites," 147–49).

[46] Na'aman, "Sanctuary of the Gibeonites." The archaeological record shows that Gibeon (el-Jib) flourished in the late monarchic period and then went into decline in the 6th cent. and subsequent Persian period (ibid., 102).

[47] Na'aman, "Sanctuary of the Gibeonites," 107–8.

perspectives in Joshua 9 creates a comically tragic (or tragically comic) plot in the mind of the reader. Tragedy and comedy represent two fundamentally different takes on the romantic ideal; their combination thus produces satire, an intentional and ironic juxtaposition of antithetical modes of thinking that wishes to express a particular attitude towards its subject.[48] In this case, the attitude of the narrative perpetuates the ideal of seventh-century cultic centralization in Jerusalem, the Judean capital (Deuteronomy 12).

The attitude of Joshua 9, of course, impacts how one reads other biblical texts that mention Gibeon and the Gibeonites. For example, in 1 Kings 3, mentioned above, Gibeon is an important cultic site where Solomon makes a large offering and encounters Yahweh in a dream. In this episode, after Solomon is granted supreme judicial wisdom from Yahweh, the king proceeds to Jerusalem to offer even more sacrifices and host a feast for his servants. Once Solomon has received divine wisdom, he relocates his cultic activity.[49] From the perspective of the late monarchic period, this memory reinforces the idea that Jerusalem, the seat of the Davidic monarchy, is the proper place for sacrificial worship, not any cultic center at Gibeon.

Clearly, the plot of the conquest account in Joshua is not entirely straightforward. The Achan and Gibeon episodes provide deviations in the plotline, ones that, to a certain extent, betray the highly romanticized, heroic success story that unfolds throughout much of the narrative.[50] These deviations emphasize the importance of obedience to Yahweh's commands. Piety is a central theme in the narrative. The modern-day debate over Josiah's reforms (2 Kings 22–23), Israelite aniconism, and the emergence of Yahwistic monolatry during the late monarchic period is (and perhaps always will be) ongoing, but there is good evidence suggesting that the late seventh century B.C.E. was an "axial age" in the history of Judean religion.[51] At the very least, one can argue that the latter days of the

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[48] See Frye, *Anatomy*, 226–28; also White, *Metahistory*, 9–10.

[49] On this text, see Helen A. Kenik, *Design for Kingship: The Deuteronomistic Narrative Technique in 1 Kings 3:4–15* (SBLDS 69; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1983); and C. L. Seow, "The Syro-Palestinian Context of Solomon's Dream," *HTR* 77 (1984) 141–52. Kenik comments on the transitional nature of this story, but she does not draw a parallel between the relocation to Jerusalem and Solomon's reception of divinely granted judicial wisdom (*Design for Kingship*, 182–97).

[50] See Hawk, *Every Promise*, 92–93.

[51] See Christoph Uehlinger, "Was There a Cult Reform under King Josiah?" in *Good Kings and Bad Kings: The Kingdom of Judah in the Seventh Century BCE* (ed. Lester L. Grabbe; London: T&T Clark, 2007) 279–316. On the supposed Josianic reforms and the biblical texts, see the various views and arguments of: Rainer Albertz, "Why a Reform like Josiah's Must Have Happened," in *Good Kings*, 27–46; Philip R. Davies, "Josiah and the Law Book," in *Good Kings*, 65–77; Christof Hardmeirer, "King Josiah in the Climax of the Deuteronomic History (2 Kings 22–23) and the Pre-Deuteronomic Document of a Cult Reform at the Place of Residence (23.4–15*)," in *Good Kings*, 123–63; Nadav Na'aman, "The King Leading Cult Reforms in His Kingdom: Josiah and Other Kings in the Ancient Near East," *ZABR* 12 (2006) 131–68; idem, "The 'Discovered Book' and the Legitimation of Josiah's Reform," *JBL* 130 (2011) 47–62; and bibliographies therein. On religious trends during the late monarchic period in particular, see, e.g., Rainer Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period* (trans. John Bowden; 2 vols.; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1994) 1:156–242;

monarchy saw an increased focus on Jerusalem's temple, as well as resistance against some outside influences, a shoring up of Judah and Jerusalem's socio-religious identity in the wake of widespread Assyrian imperialization in the region.[52] In the Joshua narrative Yahweh's instructions are nonnegotiable, and thus he, as the supreme Israelite deity, is to receive all the conquest's booty. It is not hard to imagine such a story circulating among the literati of late seventh-century Judah, reinforcing emergent monolatrous, Yahwistic ideals and an increased emphasis upon Jerusalem as the supreme cultic center. With that in mind, I now venture some concluding thoughts on the narrative and its specific import for the seventh-century, Jerusalem-centered Judean community.

## ■ The Content of the Conquest's Form: Some Concluding Historiographical Thoughts

First of all, we should consider the place of the Joshua narrative within the larger context of seventh-century historical discourse. As mentioned above, the narrative portrays events that happened long ago, even from a seventh-century B.C.E. point of view. How did it contribute to the broader historical discourse of the day, and what might this tell us about Judean historical consciousness? Within the Judean court, from a social memory perspective, this story would have functioned as an epic narrative, seeking to establish continuity within the minds of its readership between the seventh century and one of the "golden ages" of Israelite history.[53] The narrative is "epic" in that it centers upon heroes whose actions are intimately associated with divine action and whose stories inform the present identity of the group.[54] Since it informs present identity, moreover, it also looks forward to a future for the group, a future imagined within the realm of past heroes who acted on behalf of and with the power of

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and during the Iron Age in general, see, e.g., Ziony Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel: A Synthesis of Parallactic Approaches* (London: Continuum, 2001) 648–68.

[52] See, e.g., Juha Pakkala, who argues at length against the idea of the Hezekianic and Josianic reforms as the Hebrew Bible portrays them, but does leave open the possibility that Josiah restored the Jerusalem temple (2 Kgs 22:2–7, 9) and abolished any cultic symbols potentially associated with Assyria (2 Kgs 23:11) ("Why the Cult Reforms in Judah Probably Did Not Happen," in *One God—One Cult—One Nation: Archaeological and Biblical Perspectives* [ed. Reinhard G. Kratz and Hermann Spieckermann; BZAW 405; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010] 201–35).

[53] For helpful comments on continuity in social memory, see Eviatar Zerubavel, *Time Maps: Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003) 37–81. On epic frameworks in the Bible as a whole, see the thoughts of Frye, *Anatomy*, 315–17. On the issue of pan-Israelite thought in Judah, see above, n. 15.

[54] See *A Companion to Ancient Epic* (ed. John Miles Foley; Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2005). Compare the definition of Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, vii. Here I do not mean to imply that the narrative is "epic" in the sense of Homeric poetry. See, e.g., John Van Seters's critique of comparisons between Greek epic and biblical historiography, *In Search of History: Historiography in the Ancient World and the Origins of Biblical History* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1983; repr., Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1997) 18–31. For a more recent treatment of epic material in the Bible, see Susan Niditch, "The Challenge of Israelite Epic," in *Companion to Ancient Epic*, 277–87.

Yahweh, their primary deity. Other narratives about the distant past that were extant during the late monarchic period (e.g., those about Moses, David, and Solomon) would have made similar contributions to contemporary historical discourse. Indeed, in the preceding discussion I have tried to point out some of the discursive parallels between the figures of Joshua and David, while the connections between Joshua and Moses and the covenantal promise of land are well known.[55] The Joshua narrative, therefore, makes important historical and theological statements within ancient Judean discourse during the late monarchic period, at a crucial moment in ancient Israel's religious history.

Further, this is not a normal imperialistic conquest, in which populations and resources are exploited for political gain. The Canaanite population and its cities are to be completely annihilated, devoted to Yahweh (חרם; see Josh 6:17; 7:1, 11–13, 15).[56] The root חרם sometimes refers specifically to the militaristic destruction of enemies for the deity (Num 21:2; also the Mesha inscription, *KAI* 181),[57] but it also occurs in cultic contexts, in which property is devoted to Yahweh via the priestly class (Lev 27:21–29; Num 18:14; Ezek 44:29). In the Joshua narrative especially, one finds a convergence of the cultic and militaristic usages of the root (especially Joshua 7).[58] The conquest is thus a holy war, not a war for which political hegemony over the region is the primary purpose.[59] Again, the emphasis upon piety, and the ritualistic nature of the conquest (especially at Jericho), would have had great theological significance for a community trying to institute religious reforms.[60] Absolute obedience to Yahweh's commands is paramount in the story of conquest. Israel's military success, its continued presence in the promised land, and its status as Yahweh's chosen people were contingent upon the covenantal relationship between people and deity.[61] Contemplating this

[55] See Nelson, *Joshua*, 21–22.

[56] On the issue of the indigenous Canaanite population in pentateuchal literature, see Baruch J. Schwartz, "Reexamining the Fate of the 'Canaanites' in the Torah Traditions," in *Sefer Moshe: The Moshe Weinfeld Jubilee Volume* (ed. Chaim Cohen, Avi Hurvitz, and Shalom M. Paul; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2004) 151–70.

[57] The Mesha inscription reads, "[F]or I (Mesha) had put it (Nebo) to the ban (חרם) for Ashtar Kemosh. And from there, I took th[e ves]sels of YHWH, and I hauled them before the face of Kemosh." Trans. K. A. D. Smelik, in *The Context of Scripture* (ed. William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger; 3 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 2003) 2:138.

[58] See Christianus Brekelmans, "חרם," in *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament* (ed. Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann; 3 vols.; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1997) 2:476.

[59] Of course, from the perspective of the conquerors, all wars are holy. See, e.g., Bustenay Oded, *War, Peace, and Empire: Justifications for War in Assyrian Royal Inscriptions* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1992).

[60] See Nelson, "Josiah in the Book of Joshua," 537–40. If Josh 5:10–12 and 8:30–35 are indeed later additions, as some critics assert (see above, n. 13), then the textual parallels between Joshua and Josiah, at least from a 7th-cent. perspective, are less convincing. However, the thematic parallels noted by Nelson are certainly present.

[61] See Lauren A. S. Monroe, "Israelite, Moabite and Sabaean War-*ḥērem* Traditions and the Forging of National Identity: Reconsidering the Sabaean Text RES 3945 in Light of Biblical and Moabite Evidence," *VT* 57 (2007) 318–41.

narrative of an age long ago, seventh-century literati with reform in mind would have known that present-day success hinged upon supreme piety and ultimate obedience to the god for which they lobbied.

In the conquest account, the land, its indigenous Canaanite groups, and their possessions—all of which were non-Yahwistic and thus non-Israelite—were חרם (to be annihilated/devoted) to Yahweh. In the late monarchic period in Judah, therefore, in the minds of those reading the narrative, cultic sites and practices deemed to be anathema were devoted to destruction. The literati of Judah would have imagined non-Jerusalem, non-Yahwistic cultic centers as enemies in a holy war, as it were, enemies to be programmatically wiped out, dedicated to Yahweh. Continuing success in this holy war would have been contingent upon pious obedience to the god's commands.

This is especially interesting when one considers the places in which the majority of the narrative is situated. Although the narrative describes conquests against kings to the south (Joshua 10) and kings to the north (Joshua 11), the most detailed accounts focus on the conquests of Jericho and Ai (Joshua 6–8) and the relationship with Gibeon (Joshua 9). Significantly, each of these locations falls within or has an association with the territory of Benjamin. The liminality of Benjamin as a territory, in the space between South and North, Judah and Israel, was a recurring problem that had its roots in the earliest days of Judean and Israelite history. This, of course, is evident in the complicated and multivocal memories of the territory found throughout the Hebrew Bible's narratives. Benjamin's relationship with Judah, in particular, became increasingly complex in the post-monarchic period. Because Benjamin maintained a viable population after the Babylonian conquests, and because the Benjaminite city of Mizpah had become the major center of the region following the destruction of Jerusalem, tensions arose as the territory of Judah was resettled and Jerusalem reemerged as the center of Judean society and culture.[62]

But these tensions in the Neo-Babylonian and Persian periods did not emerge without precedent. Precisely when Benjamin became subsumed under the territory of Judah is unknown (1 Kings 12 attributes the relationship to the division of Solomon's kingdom).[63] Recent reevaluations of the archaeological data show that Benjaminite sites such as el-Jib (Gibeon) and Tell en-Naṣbeh (Mizpah) were an integral part of the Judean administration system in the late eighth century and first half of the seventh century B.C.E.[64] However, the evidence also suggests that,

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[62] See Ehud Ben Zvi, "The Concept of Prophetic Books and Its Historical Setting," in *The Production of Prophecy: Constructing Prophecy and Prophets in Yehud* (ed. Diana V. Edelman and Ehud Ben Zvi; London: Equinox, 2009) 83–84, with additional bibliography.

[63] See Philip R. Davies ("The Origin of Biblical Israel," *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 5 (2005) 1–14, at 1–2), who argues that the most likely time frame is during the reign of Manasseh. Davies, however, does not account for the Judean material culture present at Benjaminite sites in the late 8th cent., prior to Manasseh (see below).

[64] See Oded Lipschits, Omer Sergi, and Ido Koch, "Judahite Stamped and Incised Jar Handles," *TA* 38 (2011) 5–41, esp. 15–16. The amount of Judean jar handles at these sites reached its peak in the first

during the latter decades of the seventh century, the Benjaminite sites lost their status as important administrative centers within Judah; the general prosperity of Judah continued to grow throughout the century, but the Benjaminite sites nevertheless lost their administrative connection with the Judean capital.[65] As noted above, Gibeon was probably also an important cultic site in the late monarchic period; el-Jib was thriving during this period, and 1 Kgs 3:4—a text that may be attributed to the eighth or seventh century—refers to Gibeon as a major cult center.[66] It is perhaps significant that the decline in Gibeon's administrative importance coincided with the apparent changes in Judah's religious culture and the purported cultic centralization under Josiah. Thus, the tragicomic role of Gibeon and the Gibeonites would have reinforced the cultic and administrative diminution of the site within the minds of Jerusalem-based literati in the latter part of the seventh century and beyond.

Moreover, the ruins of Ai (et-Tell), which was not occupied in the late monarchic period, stood within three kilometers of Bethel, on the border between Benjamin and Ephraim, the dividing line between South and North. Bethel, of course, was another major cultic site in the monarchic period, one that has a direct connection in the biblical texts with Josiah and his reforms (1 Kgs 12:25–13:10; 2 Kgs 23:15).[67] Given the extremely close geographical proximity of Ai and Bethel, the annihilation of the Canaanites at Ai would undoubtedly have had a symbolic connection with the purging of certain cultic practices and sites in the minds of the Jerusalem court, and perhaps even with the geo-political aspirations of the Jerusalem elite. Bethel's actual connection to the South was never as pronounced as Gibeon's or Mizpah's, but there is evidence of Judean presence and influence at the site during the eighth and seventh centuries B.C.E., which attests to the liminality (and hence ideological importance) of its geographical location.[68] During the

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half of the 7th cent., supposedly under the reign of Manasseh. However, significant numbers of Judean handles (and other items of Judean material culture) are also present at the Benjaminite sites in the late 8th cent., prior to Sennacherib's campaigns.

[65] See Lipschits, Sergi, and Koch, "Judahite Stamped and Incised Jar Handles," 22–23.

[66] See Na'aman, "Sanctuary of the Gibeonites," 107–8; also above.

[67] On Bethel and its place in biblical discourse, see, e.g., Joseph Blenkinsopp, "Bethel in the Neo-Babylonian Period," in *Judah and the Judeans*, 93–107; also Francesca Stavrakopoulou, *Land of Our Fathers: The Roles of Ancestor Veneration in Biblical Land Claims* (LHBOTS 473; London: T&T Clark, 2010) 81–102. Bethel, in the liminal zone between South and North, is a complex site in the biblical landscape. The text of 2 Kings 23, likewise, apparently has a complicated history and reflects shifting ideas concerning the site; see Hardmeier, "King Josiah," for detailed discussion and bibliography. Critics frequently locate 23:16–20 in the post-monarchic period, but Hardmeier argues that the core of v. 15 was essential to a monarchic-period text that recounted Josiah's actual reforms (ibid., 145). On the archaeology of the site, see Israel Finkelstein and Lily Singer-Avitz, "Reevaluating Bethel," *ZDPV* 125 (2009) 33–48.

[68] See Finkelstein and Singer-Avitz, "Reevaluating Bethel," 40–41. The Iron IIB–C pottery assemblages from Bethel contain a number of items that are characteristically Judean, including folded rim bowls and kraters, a *lmlk* storage jar, a pillar figurine that is potentially of the Judean type, and the Judean-type inscribed weight. This is also true of Khirbet el-Mergame, which lies 12 km northeast of

late seventh century, the period of Josiah, Bethel was on the decline, suggesting that any actual Josianic reforms would have taken place in a relatively sparsely populated town,[69] but this does not diminish the importance of the site within theological and historical discourses of the day. The assault on Ai and its total annihilation functions as a veiled statement of dominance over an ideologically important Israelite site.

In the Joshua narrative, the unclean Canaanites of Ai and other cities were devoted to destruction for Yahweh, and the deceitful Gibeonites were devoted to slavery under the future Davidic monarchy (1 Kgs 9:21). During the latter days of Judah's monarchy, these memories became important discursive symbols of emerging religious trends. In other words, the narrative of Joshua 5–11, with its epic memories of holy war in the territory of Benjamin, contributed to discourse concerning important cultic sites in the late monarchic period and concerning the emergence of Yahwistic ideals during this same time.

To conclude, I return to Hayden White:

> Every mimetic text can be shown to have left something out of the description of its object or to have put something into it that is inessential to what *some* reader, with more or less authority, will regard as an adequate description. On analysis, every mimesis can be shown to be distorted and can serve, therefore, as an occasion for yet another description of the same phenomenon, one claiming to be more realistic, more "faithful to the facts."[70]

Thus, my own reading of this narrative is itself a product of a particular discursive milieu, namely, twenty-first-century academic biblical discourse. This essay, as I have stated, is preliminary and exploratory, and the analysis herein is meant to probe the biblical narrative in order to further our knowledge of ancient discursive themes and statements by highlighting the text's narrativity, and thus to refine our understanding of the narrative's place within its particular historical milieu. This analysis is one possible description. To be sure, there are others, which evinces the text's multivocality, its importance in academic and popular biblical discourse, and its rich worth for exploring historical discourse in ancient Judah as well as in our own contemporary setting.

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Bethel. However, other prominent northern sites such as Hazor, Megiddo, and Samaria do not evince this mixture of southern and northern styles. Judging by the material remains alone, one cannot tell precisely how pronounced Judean influence may have been at Bethel during the late Iron Age, but the mixture of Judean and Israelite pottery suggests a certain amount of sociocultural crossover at this liminal location. On Judean material culture and the supposed borders of Judah in the late Iron Age, see Raz Kletter, "Pots and Polities: Material Remains of Late Iron Age Judah in Relation to Its Political Borders," *BASOR* 314 (1999) 19–54.

[69] See Finkelstein and Singer-Avitz, "Reevaluating Bethel," 45.

[70] White, *Tropics of Discourse*, 3 [italics in original].