

A HISTORICAL APPROACH TO THE 'R'LM OF IS 33 : 7

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It is well known that the words אַרְאֵל in 2 Sa 23 : 20 and אַרְיֵאל of the parallel passage in 1 Chr 11 : 22 have posed a major crux to translators. The same is true of אַרְאֵל in Is 33 : 7. The RSV in fact left the word in the first two of the above mentioned texts untranslated, and made the marginal observation, "The meaning of the word 'ariël is unknown." It is the purpose of this paper to present considerations which favor taking the word as a proper noun, and then suggest the possible relation between this word and אַרְאֵל of Is 33 : 7.

S. R. Driver¹ in his excellent study of the books of Samuel favored reading 2 Sa 23 : 20 with a slight emendation drawn from the LXX as follows, אֶת שְׁנֵי בְנֵי אַרְאֵל "the two sons of Ariel."² Since אַרְאֵל מוֹאב is grammatically unsound, Driver further suggested the reading מִמוֹאב just as מִקְבְּצָאֵל in the same verse, or, in a less convincing way הַמוֹאבִּי.³ At any rate, Driver assumes אַרְאֵל to be a proper noun, and his position seems well taken.

On the other hand W. Rudolph in his commentary on the books of Chronicles⁴ expresses the opinion that 'ariël is not a proper name but means "warrior, war hero," and cites the Syriac and Targum for support.

¹ S. R. Driver, *Notes on the Hebrew Text of the Books of Samuel* (Oxford, 1913), p. 368.

² Driver, *loc. cit.*, dismisses the clever but fanciful emendation of Klostermann, אֶת שְׁנֵי בְנֵי הָאֲרִי אֶל מְחַבְאֵם "smote (and pursued) the two young lions into their hiding-place."

³ These suggestions are adopted by R. Kittel in the margin of his *BH*³.

⁴ W. Rudolph, *Chronikbücher* ("Handbuch zum Alten Testament"; Tübingen, 1955), pp. 98, 99.

The presence of אראל in the inscription of the Moabite Stone is no mere coincidence, and no effort to elucidate its meaning can exclude this important source. Albright takes the אראל of the Mesha Inscription, line 13, as a proper name. He reads the pertinent section as follows, "And I brought back from there Arel (or Oriel), its chieftain, dragging him before Chemosh." ⁵ As early as 1943 Albright suggested this reading, ⁶ calling attention to the possible relation between Arel here and the name of an eponymous ancestor of a clan of Gad, recorded both in Gen 46 : 16 and Num 26 : 15-17. It is true that in both texts the spelling is אראלי and not אראל as in the Moabite Stone. This poses a slight problem since, according to Cross and Freedman, in the Moabite Stone "matres lectionis are used consistently in the final position. With the exception of the word כח . . . all final vowels are represented." ⁷ Since five of the seven names in Gen 46 : 16 have the *nisbe* ending, it is possible that they are really gentilics denoting the clans of Gad, and not necessarily the original names of their respective progenitors.

While G. L. Harding ⁸ agrees substantially with Albright's translation of l. 13, A. H. van Zyl in his doctoral dissertation published in 1960 reverts to the translation of אראל "altar-hearth." ⁹ His only support for this is Eze 43 : 15, 16, where the pointing of the word poses problems of its own. The weakness of this view is made more evident when the same writer translates דודה by "his god," which he relates in a tortuous way to "beloved one" or "father's brother."

Now the reference to אראל in the Moabite Stone is certainly

⁵ W. F. Albright, *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel* (3rd ed.; Baltimore, 1953), p. 218, n. 86; and *ANET*, p. 320.

⁶ *BASOR*, No. 89 (February, 1943), p. 16.

⁷ Frank M. Cross and D. Noel Freedman, *Early Hebrew Orthography* (New Haven, Conn., 1952), p. 37, n. 8. On p. 40 the same authors follow Albright in translating 'רל *dwdh* by "Arel its commander."

⁸ G. L. Harding, *The Antiquities of Jordan* (New York, 1959), pp. 26, 27.

⁹ A. H. van Zyl, *The Moabites* (Leiden, 1960), p. 190.

bound to the mention of the tribe of Gad, with which the Moabites seemed to have been in constant warfare. The historical relationship between the tribe of Gad and the Moabites was the object of an intensive study by M. Noth.¹⁰ Mesha in his inscription knows nothing of the tribe of Reuben, which according to the evidence was either absorbed or dominated by the tribe of Gad. The reason for this is easy to see in the aggressiveness of Gad contrasted with the traditional instability of the Reubenites. Noth holds that not until the time of David did the tribe of Gad extend its territory southward to the Arnon at the expense of the Moabites (2 Sa 8 : 2 and 24 : 5).¹¹ What is certain is that the boundary line between Gad and Moab was a shifting one, and while the core of the Moabite territory was the region south of the Arnon, it undoubtedly extended with varying fortune as far north as Mount Nebo and adjacent areas.¹² According to Jugs 3 : 12-30 a Moabite king held territory opposite Jericho, and even crossed to the western bank of the Jordan in some plundering raid until checked by Ehud.

In Noth's opinion¹³ the different treatment given by Mesha to the "land of Medeba" and the city of Jahaz—which were simply incorporated into the territory of Moab, whereas Ataroth and Nebo suffered a much harder fate, their entire populations being slaughtered in a typical *hērem* sacrifice—shows that Ataroth and Nebo were considered foreign territory. But this again demonstrates that the Gadites had enclaves deep in Moabite territory, and that instead of speaking of the occupation of territory we should refer only to the occupation of cities.

Even more intriguing are the relations between Gad and the city of Dibon (modern *Dhiban*), capital of Moab in the

¹⁰ Martin Noth, "Israelitische Stämme zwischen Ammon und Moab," *ZAW*, LX (1944), 11-57.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 41, 42.

¹² Cf. Noth, *The History of Israel* (New York, 1958), pp. 156, 157.

¹³ Noth, *ZAW*, LX (1944), 46.

days of Mesha. It was at *Dhiban* that the Moabite Stone was found by Klein in 1868. Num 32 : 34 states that the sons of Gad built Dibon and other places usually regarded as Moabite cities. Num 33 : 45, 46 makes a double reference to Dibon-Gad as if harking back to an old tradition linking Dibon with the settlement of the tribe of Gad. The same tradition is reflected in Num 32 : 34-42, which distributes the Transjordanian tribes from south to north in the order: Gad, Reuben and Manasseh.

This digression on the relations between Gad and Moab is intended to corroborate the view that Arel of Mesha's inscription might well be the name of a clan of Gad which was particularly obnoxious to the Moabites, because of either its religious stance or its fierceness in battle. Their lion-like temper in war might be reflected in their name אֲרֵאל, "lion of God." This would explain why this clan should be singled out by Mesha for a particular punishment, *i.e.*, to be dragged before Chemosh, the chief god of the Moabites. If this view is correct, then the lacuna at the end of l. 17 should be rather read עֲבָדֵי, "worshippers," instead of כְּלֵי, "vessels," as proposed by van Zyl.¹⁴

That Gad and Moab were neighbors for centuries, retaining a rather fluid identity, is clear from the preceding considerations. It is quite likely that they intermarried to a great extent. What is often overlooked is the close relation between Gad and David. Even such a meticulous researcher as Noth missed a connecting link between the two when he stated on p. 14 of his article already quoted, "... im Anfang der Königszeit hat das südliche Ostjordanland, so viel wir aus der erhaltenen Überlieferung wissen, keine geschichtliche Rolle gespielt."¹⁵ Speaking of the warrior bands that joined David in his guerrilla warfare in the days when Saul put a price on his head, the Chronicler says that a group of Gadites "went over to David" (1 Chr 12 : 8-15). They are described

¹⁴ Van Zyl, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

¹⁵ Noth, *ZAW*, LX (1944), 14.

as "mighty and experienced warriors, expert with shield and spear, whose faces were like the faces of lions." This pointed characterization recalls the **אֲרָאִל** of Mesha's inscription and of Gen 46 : 16.

There must be some historical reason for this attachment of the Gadites to David. It would not be fanciful to seek a possible reason in the sojourn of the ancestors of David in Moabite territory.¹⁶ Apparently it was considered quite normal for inhabitants of Judah to cross over into Moabite territory in times of stress. Considering that the Dead Sea was fordable in the region of the Lisan peninsula as late as 1830, it is quite conceivable that the people of Judah crossed over into Moabite territory more often than is usually imagined.¹⁷ David sent his own parents into the safety of Mizpeh of Moab, while he himself seemed to be on friendly terms with the king of Moab in those early days.¹⁸ That David's parents should feel at home in Moab is only to be expected, considering their ancestry. The marriage of Boaz with Ruth might not be a single instance, but typical of many such occurrences. We must keep in mind, though, that Moab might designate a political unit as well as a territory which was occupied by the tribe of Gad to greater or lesser extent since the migration of the Israelites into Canaan. To sojourn in the land of Moab might mean no more than to sojourn among friendly Gadites who worshipped the same God.

With this background in mind we may turn to 2 Sa 23 : 20 and explore the possible implications of the text. The hero

¹⁶ On the historicity of the book of Ruth see G. S. Glanzman, "The Origin and Date of the Book of Ruth," *CBQ*, XXI (1959), 201-207, and H. H. Rowley, "The Marriage of Ruth" in *The Servant of the Lord and Other Essays On the Old Testament* (London, 1952), p. 164, n. 1.

¹⁷ See F.-M. Abel, *Géographie de la Palestine* (Paris, 1938), I, 504, who quotes Croisière for authority, saying that the Dead Sea ceased to be fordable after 1830. This is also the opinion of G. A. Smith, *The Historical Geography of Palestine* (New York, 1894), p. 500, who quotes in support Burckhardt's *Travels*.

¹⁸ 1 Sa 22 : 3, 4.

Benaiah was the son of Jehoiada who hailed from Kabzeel. Outside this text and the parallel one of 1 Chr 11 : 22, Kabzeel is mentioned only once, and that in Jos 15 : 21. This text places it in the extreme south, "toward the boundary of Edom." In Neh 11 : 25 we find a single reference to the village of Jekabzeel, which might or not be the same, likewise settled by people of the tribe of Judah. Simons in his *The Geographical and Topographical Texts of the Old Testament* equates Jekabzeel with Kabzeel.¹⁹ In the case of Jekabzeel there is the possibility that it was located in Moabite territory, since in the same list of Neh 11 it is mentioned next to Dibon. The OT knows no other Dibon than that of Moab, twice called Gad-Dibon as we have seen. In the light of the above considerations it would not be strange for migrants from Judah to settle in Dibon if its ancient affinities with the tribe were still remembered.

The point we are driving at is that Benaiah might well be of the tribe of Gad, living in territory which at some time or other had belonged to Moab. This would explain why he should have killed two בְּנֵי אֲרֵאֵל of Moab. He lived there and there he established his reputation for bravery. His prowess would then consist not in having killed two mighty lions of Moab, for the same verse singles out his killing a lion in a pit in a day of snow (2 Sa 23 : 20). His prowess would rather consist in having killed two representatives of the fierce Gadite clan of Arel. That the Gadites were particularly brave in war is specifically stressed in 1 Chr 12.

If we follow the story a little further, this Benaiah who was "renowned among the thirty" heroes of David, eventually became captain of his bodyguard (2 Sa 23 : 23). This bodyguard was composed mainly of the Cherethites and Pelethites, whom most students identify with foreign mercenaries,

¹⁹ J. Simons seems to think that Dibon of Neh 11 : 25 is a wrong transcription for Dimon (Dimonah) which is mentioned in Jos 15 : 22 (*The Geographical and Topographical Texts of the Old Testament* [Leiden, 1959], pp. 388, 389). Abel (*op. cit.*, I, 504) concurs. However, Abel rejects the equation of Dimon of Is 15 : 9 with Dibon (*op. cit.*, II, 305).

probably Philistines and their allies. At the accession of Solomon to the throne, Joab made the mistake of supporting the losing rival and was replaced in the command of the army by Benaiah, who had thrown his support behind Solomon. Benaiah's fierce disposition is further underlined by the fact that as commander of the army he struck down in quick succession, by royal command, Adonijah, Joab, and Shimei (1 Ki 2 : 25, 34, 46).

If Benaiah then was a Gadite, or a migrant from Judah to the territory of Gad (Moab), it should not be surprising that first as captain of David's bodyguard, and later as commander of the army under Solomon, he would have attached to the royal service those brave Gadites who had voluntarily joined David when his fortunes were at low ebb. And the record in 1 Chr 12 : 8-15 makes clear that these Gadites were without peer in the art of war; they were true אַרְי אֱלִים, *i.e.*, heirs of a martial tradition, fierce as lions.

A possible reference to these permanent members of the royal bodyguard might be found in Is 33 : 7. The pointing אַרְיָאֱלִים is evidently wrong. R. Kittel suggested in the critical apparatus of his *BH* the reading אַרְיָאֱלִים, which still leaves the word as a crux in the text. The LXX offers no help for this passage. The Targum of Isaiah²⁰ evidently took the word for a verb and paraphrased הָא כִּד תַּתְּגִיל לְהֶן, "Behold, when it is revealed to them . . ." The Vulgate, following the same lead, renders it by *videntes*. Commenting on the text in the *Interpreter's Bible*, R. B. Y. Scott says, "an obscure word, best connected to אַרְיָאֱלִים and translated 'the priests of the altar.'" However, this is evidently an *ad hoc* translation. Much closer to the point in our opinion is Cheyne,²¹ who renders it as "the Ariels, *i.e.*, 'God's lions,' picked warriors, each as a lion, and as invincible as his God." A perusal of

²⁰ J. F. Stenning, ed., *The Targum of Isaiah* (Oxford, 1949), p. 107.

²¹ T. K. Cheyne, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, I (New York, 1890), p. 190.

other commentaries on Isaiah shows a great variety of views on the interpretation of the word under consideration.²²

It is our suggestion that אַרְאֵלִים in Is 33 : 7 should be pointed אַרְיֵאֵלִים and understood as members of the royal bodyguard who traced their ancestry back to אַרְאֵל of the tribe of Gad. RSV's "valiant ones" makes good sense and goes as far as the translation of a proper name might go. It also makes a good parallel to "messengers" of the second hemistich. But historically the word is a gentile just as Cherethites and

²² R. Lowth in *Isaiah* (Boston, 1834), p. 61, favored the reading אַרְאֵלִים with the meaning "lions of God, or strong lions." H. Ewald in *Commentary on the Prophets of the Old Testament*, II (London 1876), p. 260, emended it to אַרְאֵלִים "fearful," from רֵעַל = רֵעַל, Arab. *ra'ila*, "to fear." T. R. Birks in *Commentary on the Book of Isaiah* (London, 1871), p. 172, understood the word as meaning "their Ariels, or valiant captains," making no attempt at derivation. C. W. E. Nägelbach in *The Prophet Isaiah* ("Lange's Commentary on the Holy Scriptures"; New York, 1878), p. 353, connected it with אַרְיֵאֵל of 1 Chr 11 : 22 and 2 Sa 23 : 20. He explained the pointing אַרְאֵלִים by analogy with אַבְיָסָף of 1 Chr 6 : 8, 22, obviously related to אַבְיָסָף of Ex 6 : 24. F. Delitzsch in *Commentar über das Buch Jesaja* (Leipzig, 1889), p. 352, translated it by *Rechen*, "heroes," connecting it with אַרְיֵאֵל in the parallel passages of 2 Sa 23 : 20 and 1 Chr 11 : 22. He regarded it as a composite of אַרְיֵ and אֵל meaning "lions of God," but adding the caveat that אֵל, here, only adds the connotation of "exceptional" and "wonderful." A. Dillmann in *Der Prophet Jesaja* (6th ed., reedited by R. Kittel; Leipzig, 1898), p. 294, considered the word corrupt and suggested the reading אַרְאֵלִים "heroes," or אַרְאֵלִים "their heroes." G. W. Wade in *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah* (2d ed.; London, 1929), p. 211, also emended the word to אַרְיֵאֵלִים "Ariels," i.e. "lions of God," "heroes," assuming that "lions of God" was an honorific designation of a warrior. J. Skinner in *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah* in "Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges" (Cambridge, 1930), p. 264, remarked wryly, "This word is hopelessly obscure." He mentions the suggestion that it is a gentile name, meaning "inhabitants of Ariel," probably in reference to Is 29 : 1. J. Fischer in *Das Buch Isaias* ("Die Heilige Schrift des Alten Testaments," VII; Bonn, 1937), p. 216, read "die von Ariel," relating it to Is 29 : 1. E. J. Kissane in *The Book of Isaiah*, I (Dublin, 1941), p. 374, favored the view that אַרְאֵלִים means "the men of Ariel."

Pelethites, which, by the way, disappeared from the record after David's days. Benaiah needed them no longer, since he could count on the valiant Arelites.