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A Significant Other:
Moab as Symbol in Biblical Literature

By

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A Significant Other: Moab as Symbol in Biblical Literature

By

Erika J. Fitz

M. Div., Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York, 2001

B. A., Haverford College, 1994

Advisor: Carol A. Newsom, Ph.D.

An abstract of

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Abstract

**A Significant Other: Moab as Symbol in Biblical Literature**

**By Erika J. Fitz**

The Bible's attitudes toward Moabites are more varied than those expressed toward any other group. By studying biblical portrayals of Moab, this study aims to describe 1) how biblical authors imagine encounters with foreignness, 2) how texts about foreigners construct in-group identity, and 3) what historical processes shaped the features specifically associated with Moab.

A historical survey (Chapter 1) suggests that Moab was weaker, smaller, and later to develop than Israel—a picture diametrically opposed to that presented by biblical texts. It also seems likely that no significant contingent of Moabites existed in Yehud by the time of Nehemiah. I conclude that the Moabites mentioned in Ezra 9 and Nehemiah 13 are purely literary references: they invoke Deut 23:4-7 to argue that "the peoples of the lands" are symbolically Moabite and subject to this law.

Literary analysis suggests that portrayals of Moab fall into two categories. Chapter 2 analyzes "State texts" in which Moab and Israel meet as political or military entities. I argue that these are modeled on competitive male-male contests in honor-shame societies. Outcomes establish hierarchical rank, which authors interpret in theological terms. Notions of cultural influence are absent from State Texts and in fact, confrontations reify group boundaries. By contrast, the "People texts" analyzed in Chapters 3 and 4 contemplate incorporation of Moab*ites* into Israel/Judah. I argue that these texts imagine group encounters on analogy with male-female relationships in honor-shame cultures. These stories feature female characters, situations of sex and/or intermarriage, and language about impurity and female sexual promiscuity. Most People texts portray encounters with Moabites as threatening (Chapter 3), but some argue that foreigners can be incorporated to strengthen Israel (Chapter 4).

Though both kinds of texts have pre-exilic roots, I conclude that the People texts strongly reflect post-exilic contexts. Using early Moab traditions such as tainted ancestry, hostile relations, and the law of exclusion, *golah* writers retell the stories using Moab as a cipher for contemporary opponents, especially Samarians. I thus conclude that some "Moab" texts reflect Persian- or Hellenistic-era conflicts with closely-related groups rather than with actual Moabites.

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# INTRODUCTION

"So that, to know her, or anyone, one must seek out the people that completed them, even the places…"

--Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*

To a casual reader of the Bible, Moab seems like one more enemy of Israel—obscure, long extinct, and meaningless. The texts about Moab, however, offer a window into a relationship that is surprisingly varied and complex. In one sense, Moab is indeed a traditional enemy. It is no surprise therefore that some Moab texts express sentiments typical of an enemy relationship: Israel fights against Moab in battle (1 Sam 12:9, 14:47; 2 Kings 3) and Judah's prophets inveigh against it (Isaiah 15-16, Jeremiah 48). In fact, Jeremiah's oracle against Moab is longer and more heated than those directed against every other nation save Babylon. At the same time however, the patriarchal narratives of Genesis claim Moabites as close relatives, while Deut 2:9 avers that Yhwh had deeded Moab its land and commands Israel to respect its borders. The law barring Moabites and Ammonites from the Israelite assembly in Deut 23:4-7 singles them out among the nations for unconditional and permanent exclusion. Yet the very existence of that law presumes that Moabites live in Israel and seek inclusion in its community. Even some of the "enemy" texts portray Moabite kings more as silly buffoons than as tyrants (Judges 3, Numbers 22-25). Numbers 25, Ezra 9 and Nehemiah 13 describe intermarriage with Moabites as a terrible sin, yet Ruth depicts a case of Moabite-Israelite marriage in glowing terms and attaches it to no less a lineage than David's.

What do these portrayals tell us about the relationship between the author's group and Moab or Moabites? How does the image of Moab that emerges from the text implicitly construct the group's own self-image? And how do these varied depictions of Moab correspond (or not) to the "facts on the ground"? Do the different kinds of images testify to the heterogeneity of public attitudes toward Moab in general, and thus nuance the ideology of Moabites as "enemies"? Or do different attitudes reflect different historical moments?

The present work is different from previous scholarly treatments of Moab in two ways. Most monograph-length works have aimed at reconstructing histories of Moab, the Iron Age state.[1] For scholars of those works, the biblical texts are historical sources, and the primary goal is to mine them for data about Moab itself. By contrast, I treat the biblical texts first and foremost as rhetorical constructions, and ask what they can tell us about their authors rather than their subject. As we will see, however, these "literary" analyses have implications for using the texts *as* historical sources. Literary scholarship, on the other hand, usually treats Moab in the course of discussing one of the texts in which it appears. Insofar as such studies ask what Moab "evokes," they usually derive a connotation from a composite portrait of Moab references. Such a composite glosses over differences and subtleties between separate traditions. Nor can it address how the image of Moab might have changed over time. In the current study, I have the luxury of being able to treat each part of the Moab tradition separately and in detail. I can thus compare

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[1]Most notably A. H. van Zyl, *The Moabites* (Pretoria Oriental 3; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1960); Edward Davis Grohman, "A History of Moab" (Ph.D. diss., The Johns Hopkins University, 1958); Bruce Routledge, *Moab in the Iron Age: Hegemony, Polity, Archaeology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Stefan Timm, *Moab: Zwischen den Mächten: Studien zu historischen Denkmälern und Texten* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1989); Erasmus Gaß, *Die Moabiter: Geschichte und Kultur eines ostjordanischen Volkes im 1. Jahrtausend v. Chr.* (Abhandlungen des Deutschen Palästinavereins 38; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, in Komission, 2009).

the depiction and function of Moab with its depiction and function in others. This method reveals patterns of portrayal that are not apparent in a composite portrait. At the same time, by attempting to assign dates to the different texts, I find what I believe to be a general trajectory of development in ideas about Moab.

# ORGANIZATION

I have organized this study to give due attention to both historical and literary concerns. In Chapter I compile as clear a picture as possible of historical Moab from archaeological and textual sources. Since I conclude that Persian-Period Yehud is the proper context for understanding some of the later Moab texts, I present a discussion of that history in the introduction to Chapter 3. In Chapters 2, 3, and 4, I analyze the texts themselves. Most of the chapters are dedicated to rhetorical analysis, but the analysis is prefaced with short sections on date of composition, critical issues, and description of the features that classify the text as a "State" or "People" text (more on this below).

## Historical Survey: Chapter 1

The first chapter draws together textual and material evidence about Iron Age Moab, its beginning and end as a state, and its relationship to Israel. Along the way, I highlight some of common misunderstandings about states, boundaries, and monarchies that result from readers' modern assumptions rather than the distortions of biblical writers. At the same time, there are some striking divergences between biblical narratives and historical realities. For example, the image of Moab as an early power that oppressed Israel during its infancy (e.g. Numbers 22-25, Judges 3) stands in contrast to the more likely scenario of a smaller, weaker, and less developed Moab, which seems to have

developed only after the time of Mesha, and probably in response to the "oppression" of Israel under the Omrides. On the other end of Moab's history, literary references to Moabites in Persian-period Yehud (Ezra 9, Nehemiah 13) occur in a context where we find no evidence of Moabites themselves. Absence of evidence is not conclusive, but in light of the growing body of ostraca and papyri attesting other groups, and the nature of the texts themselves, I am persuaded that the references are literary allusions rather than literal descriptions. In Chapter 3, I unpack why Moabites might still be appearing in biblical texts and how the term is transformed. These sample contrasts between literary impressions and on-the-ground history reinforce the importance of attending to the rhetorical tenor of texts, and to their functions *as* texts, even when we are unsure of the precise historical background.

Chapter 1's examination of history also serves to contextualize some of the animosity toward Moab that appears in biblical texts. The same region north of the Mujib was home to both Moabite and Israelite tribes, who competed for grazing rights, agricultural land, water sources, and perhaps above all, the right to collect "protection fees" from trade caravans. Those factors inevitably created tensions and rivalries, and the memories of these may well be preserved in stories like the Ehud tale. In addition, various kings from beyond the immediate area claimed the land for themselves, thus ostensibly placing the local populace under different monarchies. No doubt such conquests often played upon the rivalries between groups.

But there is also reason to think that rivalry was not the whole picture. Populations do not automatically change when a new king plants his flag, and the banal realities of peaceful exchange and coexistence are less likely to get recorded than are

dramatic and traumatic events like battles. For at least the early parts of their histories,

Israel and Moab share a very similar material culture: they build the same kinds of

houses, make the same kinds of vessels, bury their dead in similar ways, and leave similar

kinds of figurines. Though there are certainly regional variations, the broad similarities

suggest long-term, ongoing relationships among local tribes.[2] The Mesha Inscription is

further evidence of cultural interchange, both in its linguistic similarity to biblical

Hebrew and in the similarity of its script to that of the roughly contemporary Tel Dan

inscription.

Identity in any context is not a given; it must be asserted, defended and

reinforced. In the case of near neighbors like Moab and Israel, however, it is especially

fraught. Understanding the concrete conditions of coexistence thus alerts us to the

necessity of approaching assertions of identity critically. Even simple national labels may

be polemical claims rather than simple descriptions. Is "Moab" in a particular text is as

homogeneous and unified as it appears? (The Mesha Stele suggests not—at least in the

mid-ninth century.) Do biblical authors call a region "Israel" at a time when groups living

in that area would call it "Moab"? Such questions better prepare us to ask what is meant

by "Israel" when used by *gôlâ* authors of the Restoration period—and what is meant by

"Moab."

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[2]Randall Younker, "Moabite Social Structure," *BA* 60 (1997): 244-45. See also Piotr Bienkowski, "Tribes, Borders, Landscapes and Reciprocal Relations: The Wadi Arabah and its Meaning," *Journal of Mediterranean Archaeology* 20 (2007): 33-60. Bienkowski points to modern ethnographic parallels as well as archaeology to propose that a similar cultural overlap between Judah and Edom occurred in the Arabah region. The existence of general continuity in forms does not preclude the existence as well of local variations. Bienkowski describes variations in pottery details that he believes describe different tribal areas. He interprets these as evidence that even later in the Iron Age, the power of any centralized monarchy remained relatively weak ("'Tribalism' and 'Segmentary Society' in Iron Age Transjordan," in *Studies on Iron Age Moab and Neighbouring Areas in Honour of Michèle Daviau* [ed. Piotr Bienkowski; Ancient Near Eastern Studies Supp 29; Leuven: Peeters, 2009], 37).

## Literary Analysis: Chapters 2, 3, and 4

Chapters 2, 3, and 4 analyze most of the major texts in the Moab tradition. It is my intent here to identify why Moab matters to the author, to lay bare the underlying assumptions in the text, and to analyze the strategies used to appeal to readers' thoughts and emotions. In comparing the portrayals of Moab across these texts, I discern two different paradigms underlying the depiction of encounter between Israel/Judah and Moab. I thus divide the texts into two broad categories which I label "State texts" and "People texts." The first set of texts (Chapter 2) describes encounters between Israel and Moab as political or military entities. These are meetings of "Moab" and "Israel," their kings, and/or their armies. The second describes encounters between the people of the two groups: between Israel*ites* and Moab*ites* (Chapters 3 and 4). Often these encounters involve women, sex, and/or marriage across group lines. Whereas the outcome of encounters in State texts is usually treated as a measure of status, the meaning of encounter in People texts is treated as a measure of purity and virtue.

I argue that underlying these texts lie implicit metaphors of male-male and male-female relationships in honor-shame cultures as classically described by anthropologists like Julian Pitt-Rivers. In other words, authors analogize relationships between groups to simplified versions of relationships between humans, and such relationships are not gender-neutral. As Pitt-Rivers and others explain, the expectations for men and women are highly bifurcated in an honor-shame society. Appropriate behavior for men is often different and sometimes antithetical to what constitutes appropriate behavior for women.[3] It may be for precisely for that reason that biblical authors found gendered metaphors

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[3]Julian Pitt-Rivers, *The Fate of Shechem: Or, The Politics of Sex: Essays in the Anthropology of the Mediterranean* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 20.

useful for describing the different dynamics inherent in different kinds of group relationships.

In describing gendered relationships as metaphors, I use the ideas of Donald Schön, as well as George Lakoff and Mark Turner, who explain that metaphor is not merely a literary device, but a deep, often unconscious framework for thought.[4] Schön coined the term "generative metaphor" to express the way in which a metaphor automatically activates a web of attached associations and paradigms. For example, our culture frequently describes life as "a journey." Equating life with a journey structures ideas about it in particular ways: it emphasizes individual rather than corporate experience. It implies linearity rather than circularity; it suggests that life has (or should have) a purpose—a destination. Decisions in a life-as-journey represent "forks in the road," and this sub-metaphor implies that decisions that change "the route" irreversibly. A metaphor is thus a structure—a framing principle. It makes some associations utterly natural, including positive or negative evaluations and emotional responses. It also obscures other possibilities. Life-as-journey denies that life could be composed of a series of random, unrelated experiences. The metaphor demands that we connect various experiences into a linear trajectory—that our lives be amenable to coherent narratives. Metaphor understood in this way is not simply an explanatory device; it actively structures thought. For biblical authors to understand relations between states as male-male contests activates some values and assumptions, and obscures others. A metaphor of male-male contest conveys the importance of strength and the cost of showing

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[4]Donald A. Schön, "Generative Metaphor: A Perspective on Problem-Setting in Social Policy," in *Metaphor and Thought* (ed. Andrew Ortony; 2d ed.; Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993), 137-62; George Lakoff and Mark Turner, *More than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 1-56.

vulnerability. It casts other characters in the story as opponents, and orients the audience to focus on outcome—the win or loss—over process. It is not necessary that a metaphor be named or even made conscious in order to be active. What matters is that it evokes— that the system "understands" its presence and behaves in response to it.

Because metaphors occur within a network of associations, they may be activated in either direction. For example, if an author wishes to convey that Moab is manipulative in a certain text, and there is a cultural belief that women, too, are manipulative, he makes his point more compelling by symbolizing Moab in feminine terms. Or the subject of a text, perhaps feasting, may be the trigger for the association with women, which is attached to other cultural notions about women, including manipulation, and this leads to a scene in which women use a feast as a ploy. We cannot know, and it little matters, whether the metaphor suggests the feature of the narrative, or if some feature of the story suggests the metaphor.  Once it is present, the associations in the network reinforce each other, and it comes to seem natural that an interaction between Moabite and Judahite people threatens the same kind of defilement that a woman faces in losing her virginity.

I will speak throughout this work of "symbolization," and since this terminology treads on the terms of semioticians, I will pause a moment here to clarify my terms. In many ways, I understand symbols in much the same way I understand metaphors. Symbols are not merely signs, like word definitions, which can be substituted by another term or phrase and produce the same effect. They are not repositories of content, but rather nodes in networks of meaning—something more like touchstones or lightning rods

than like secret codes.[5] As with metaphors, the meanings they elicit are emotional as well as cognitive, unconscious as well as conscious.[6] Thus when I describe Moab as "symbolizing" I mean that it evokes, perhaps even provokes. Some of Moab's cultural associations we know from other Moab texts, though surely a native of ancient Judah would have brought others. In Chapter 3, I argue that Moab is *re*-symboled. Through the reinterpretation of Deut 23:4-7, some of the contemporary groups in fifth- and fourth-century Yehud become symbolically "Moabite." On one level, this could be understood as simple translation: Moab is a cipher for "the peoples of the lands" and so, with a wink and a nod, the audience is signaled to substitute "peoples of the lands" when they hear "Moabites." But more than simple translation is occurring here, for the Moab traditions come "fully loaded" with powerful emotional connotations. The audience is not only encouraged to view "the peoples of the lands" as subject to laws originally written for Moabites, but to apply to them all the associations that Moabiteness evokes: their clear foreignness, their arrogant hostility, their reputations for disgusting sex and brazen women.

Below I describe in a little more detail the features that classify a text as a "State" or "People" depiction, and the more specific function of each chapter. Chapter 2 contains the discussions of State texts whose features are as follows:

- Moab appears interacting with other "state" entities.

- The sphere of interaction is typically that of politics, war, and international diplomacy.

- The characters are official state representatives—kings, courtiers, armies, priests, and

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[5]Dan Sperber, *Rethinking Symbolism* (trans. Alice L. Morton; Cambridge Studies in Social Anthropology. Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1975), xi, 11.
[6]Ibid., 1-50. Part of Sperber's argument is that symbolism is not limited to fixed cognitive explanations in the manner of a code, as semioticians have often implied.

diplomats—rather than ordinary people.

- Moab is referred to as a unitary entity rather than an individual or a set of individuals who act separately.

- That Moab is conceived as a single entity is indicated grammatically: texts will speak of *môʾāb* even when the referent is a large group, rather than using the plural gentilic *môʾābîm.* This nuance is lost in many English translations, which frequently render *môʾāb* as "the Moabites."

- The texts do not envision Moabite participation in Israelite community, politics, or religious life.

The State texts are divided into three categories, according to the kind of power dynamic present in each text. In all of these, the implicit ideal is conquest of the Other. Each situation interprets meaning when the encounter either achieves, or falls short of conquest. In the first groups of texts—2 Samuel 8:2, 12 (//1 Chr 18:2, 11), Psalms 60 and 108 and 2 Kings 3—conquest occurs, or had occurred in the past. Defeat of Moab serves as a token of status, or in the last case, indicates its loss. A second category features Israel and Moab as near-peers and rivals for standing. This category contains most of the prophetic texts about Moab, of which I will treat Isaiah 15-16 and Jeremiah 48 in detail. The third category has stories in which Moab wields power over Israel. Here, too, status is at stake, but these "underdog stories" resort to a different set of rules and norms to evaluate the contests. In all of these encounters, Moab constructs Israel's identity through contrast: it is the loser required to make Israel a winner. The examples also demonstrate that contests for honor are not merely about prestige, but connect to deep-seated notions of worthiness. In many ways, the aspiration to achieve worthiness in the eyes of the world is a quest to prove that worth exists in fact.

The People texts described in Chapters 3 and 4 are a study in contrasts with the State texts:

- Action occurs outside the sphere of official state affairs and frequently contains potential for sexual interaction or intermarriage.

- Characters are usually lay people rather than state officials, with many, especially the Moabite ones, being women.

- Moabites are described as individuals or referred to with gentilic suffixes rather than called "Moab" or "all Moab."

- The identities of these characters and their national affiliations may be ambiguous.

- Conflicts center on cultural/religious influence rather than political or military dominance.

- Authors view encounters with the Other, not as battlegrounds for status or esteem by others, but as places that threaten to change the makeup of Israel's own body—its ethnic constituency or religious purity—and its evaluation by its own measures of Yahwistic fealty and homogeneity.

- Among texts that express anxiety about foreigners, the mode of engagement often includes—or is feared to entail—trickery or seduction rather than straightforward contests.

- The texts place a premium on purity, both religious and sexual. Interaction with the Other is described in terms evocative of pollution or contagion.

- Narratives feature female characters, especially foreign ones.

- The text appeals to norms and taboos of illicit sexuality.

- The text emphasizes "virtue"—the integrity of the Israelite social body and its need for purity and strong protections—over status.

- The text insists on separation from Moab, in contrast to the contests of State texts, in which engagement affords an opportunity for honor.

The People texts are divided in two categories according to whether the encounter is evaluated negatively or positively. Chapter 3 presents the negative cases in which Moab constitutes a threat. These constitute the majority of the People texts and include Deut 23:4-7; Nehemiah 13:1-3, 23-27; Ezra 9; Gen 19:30-38; and Numbers 25. The ideal in every case to remain completely separate from the Other—a situation that is longed for rather than achieved. These texts are strongly interrelated, for the authors of Nehemiah 13 and Ezra 9 exegete Deut 23:4-7 (barring Moabites from the assembly of Israel) to apply to their contemporary rivals, thus transforming "the peoples of the lands" into putative Moabites. The particular understanding of Moabites in Deuteronomy 23:4 seems to either derive from or underlie the writing of Genesis 19:30-38 (the story of Lot's daughters) as well. Once "Moabite" is a term applied to contemporary peoples, it also reframes older stories about Moabites. If the current version of the Baʿal Peʿor story was written with this understanding in mind, the "Moabites" in Numbers 25 do not refer to the historical people of Moab at all. Even if this text is too early to reflect Moab's shift in reference, it is certainly a powerful text for decrying the danger of intermarriage with "Moabites" in Yehud. I believe that the narrative of Numbers 22-24 (the Balaam-Balak story) may well be retelling the traditional story in light of Persian-era conflicts between Judah and Samaria, refigured there as "Moab." Whatever the chronological order of these texts, all address the possibility of Moabite influence within the social body of Israel. All cast the commingling that results—commingling that is genetic and not just cultural—as a horror to be avoided. They describe situations of intermarriage as compromises of Israel's fundamental character and its standing with God, demanding that it be avoided when possible and purified when necessary.

In Chapter 4, encounters with Moabites are either neutral or positive. These texts, which include several references in Chronicles and the book of Ruth, picture Moabites incorporated into Israel, and in several cases even playing heroic roles. In fact, the incorporation of Ruth is so exemplary and has so many points of contact with the arguments against intermarriage in Ezra 9, Nehemiah 13, and Numbers 25 that I conclude, like many before me, that it was composed to counter them. Ruth, like the texts in Chapter 3, connects with the symbolic power of female symbolism, but appeals to positive associations that the other texts ignore or deny. This author associates femininity with fertility, loyalty, and true investment in maintaining family lineage, and points for support not only to Ruth's example, but also to other venerated precedents in the tradition. It also offers alternative interpretations of Deuteronomy 23-25, and thus subtly takes issue with the way these texts have been selectively interpreted in Ezra and Nehemiah. All of the chapter 3 texts contemplate Moabites as a minority group that can be easily absorbed into Israel, and so perhaps it is easier for them to argue that they pose no threat. For her part, Ruth is a powerless widow who has cut all kin and cultural ties with her homeland. It may be that this text makes a quite limited argument for inclusion, and certainly it argues for conversion of the Other rather than an embrace of diversity. These texts nevertheless raise voices of protest and dialogue within the canon that prohibit any one text from having the absolute and final word on the subject. Taken together, they suggest that dialogue about the place of the Other in Israel should be the subject of ongoing dialogue, and that such dialogue is an act of faith.

# CHAPTER 1: THE MOAB OF HISTORY

## Introduction

This project is first and foremost a literary one, but readings of Moab texts inevitably encounter historical questions. What is at stake for biblical authors in Judah or Israel when they describe Moab? What kinds of relationships and power dynamics existed between the countries, and what events or general conditions might account for the attitudes toward Moab that we see in the texts? How does the image of Moab in each text compare to what a historian would conclude? And what ideological goals might be at work when the portrait skews far from the "facts on the ground"?

Historical reconstruction of a place about which so little is known requires major caveats. Our evidence remains fragmentary and tentative; new archaeological finds could potentially revise substantially the picture presented here. Even with more complete archaeological data, we could never possess full details of all that "Moab" would have entailed for ancient readers, and such detail is likely to be different for each text. Both Moab and the texts themselves were evolving entities: an audience in the tenth century would have known a completely different "Moab" from one in the seventh or the fourth, while versions of the stories and their literary frames would have differed vastly from earlier to later periods.

Nevertheless, a reconstruction is useful, for extrabiblical data provide insights that both illuminate and challenge the surface impressions of the texts. The picture that emerges provides important correctives to some of the typical assumptions that modern

readers bring with them. And it exposes repeated themes that seem likely to have informed or even motivated the writing of our texts. In fact, though composition history has not been my primary concern, the concerns expressed in the Moab texts do seem to suggest that Moab was playing a very different role for different biblical authors. I thus conclude by venturing that the "State" or "People" orientations of each text suggest original composition in either the monarchic or post-monarchic period, respectively. But first, some basics.

# What and Where is Moab?

The Iron Age kingdom of Moab lay on the eastern shore of the Dead Sea between Ammon and Edom, a strip of arable land only about 20 or 32 km miles wide.[7] Southern Moab was constituted by the Kerak Plateau rising about 8200 feet (2500 m) above the Dead Sea, or 3609 feet (1100 m) above sea level on average.[8] A. H. van Zyl called it "almost a natural fortress,"[9] for it is bounded on the south by the Wadi el-Hesa (the traditional border with Edom), and on the north by the deep gorge of the Wadi Mujib—the canyon/river the Bible calls the Arnon. Moab's western side is the steep escarpment of the Dead Sea, while its eastern flank is limited by the Syrian Desert, which became passable only after the water-conserving camel was domesticated. Many general introductions to Moab, guided by the claim in Numbers 21 that "the [northern] border of Moab is the Arnon," refer to the Kerak Plateau as the mainstay of Moab.[10] A closer

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[7]J. Maxwell Miller and John H. Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (2d ed.; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 21.

[8]J. Maxwell Miller, "The Survey," in *Archaeological Survey of the Kerak Plateau: Conducted during 1978-1982 under the direction of J. Maxwell Miller and Jack M. Pinkerton* (ed. J. Maxwell Miller; ASOR: Archaeological Reports 1; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), 1.

[9]A. H. van Zyl, *The Moabites* (Pretoria Oriental 3; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1960), 96.

[10]For example: "The first territoral state [in the Late Bronze-Early Iron period], Moab, was effectively isolated and protected by the two 'Grand Canyons,' Wadi Muji and Wadi Hasa." [Robert G.

examination of biblical texts, however, reveals that the particular towns and places

biblical authors usually call "Moab" are not on the Kerak at all, but the land (and towns)

*north* of the Arnon.[11] Though the Kerak seems to have become central later in the Iron

Age, every indication is that Moab's political development began, and perhaps remained

centered, in the north.[12] Numbers' claim that the Arnon is Moab's northern border thus

either represents a time in which Moabite territory had been greatly reduced, or, more

probably, is a polemical statement denying that land in the north was legitimately

"Moabite" at all.[13] That the Kerak plateau is so little mentioned in biblical texts suggests

that it lay beyond the reach or the interest of Israel and Judah. Already we begin to see

that Moab's significance for biblical authors owes much to Israel's claiming—or

coveting—the same territory.

Northern Moab, the region north of the Arnon, is referred to in the Bible as the

*mišor,* or "tableland," for its relative flatness. Unlike the Kerak, cut off by the deep

Arnon canyon, entry to the *mišor* from the north is unhindered. It was thus far more open

to invasion and occupation by different groups. Moab, Israel, Aram-Damascus and

Ammon all claimed this area at various times; biblical authors even ascribe some of the

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Boling, *The Early Biblical Community in Transjordan* (Sheffield: Almond, 1988), 52]. Ernest Nicholson's introduction to the OAN against Moab—in which most of the named cities are north of the Arnon, states that, "[Moab's] southern boundary was marked by the gorge of the Zered and its northern boundary by the river Arnon, though in some periods it was further north than this." [*The Book of the Prophet Jeremiah, Chapters 26-52* (CBC; Cambridge University Press, 1975), 180.]

[11]J. M. Miller, "The Survey," *Kerak Archaeological Survey*, 9. Piotr Bienkowski even questions whether the Kerak was part of Moab at all ["The Beginning of the Iron Age in Southern Jordan: A Framework," in *Early Edom and Moab: The Beginning of the Iron Age in Southern Jordan* (ed. Piotr Bienkowski; Sheffield Archaeological Monographs 7; Sheffield: J. R. Collis, 1992), 1.]

[12]Eveline J. van der Steen, "'String of Fortresses,' Revisited," in *Studies on Iron Age Moab and Neighbouring areas in Honour of Michèle Daviau* (ed. Piotr. Bienkowski; Ancient Near Eastern Studies Supp 29; Leuven: Peeters, 2009), 117-18.

[13]J. M. Miller argues that Numbers 21 was transparently propagandistic of legitimizing Israel's claim to northern Moab by arguing that Israel did not take the land from either Moabites or Ammonites ["The Israelite Journey Through (Around?) Moab and Moabite Toponymy," *JBL* 108 (1989): 577-595]. So also Baruch A. Levine, *Numbers 21-36: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 4A; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 39.

same towns alternately to Reuben *and* to Gad.[14] Because of this, Moab's effective

northern boundary fluctuated over time, though Zeljko Gregor concludes that during the

Iron Age it rested most frequently at the Wadi Hesban.[15] The frequent changes of

governance mean that the population of the *mišor* probably had mixed loyalties and

complicated national identities. This manifests in biblical texts not only in antagonism

toward Moab, but in traditions that cast suspicion on the legitimacy of the Transjordanian

tribes and that call attention to their Moabite ties (Numbers 25) and their questionable

Yahwism (Numbers 25; 32:7-15; Deuteronomy 22).

The *mišor* was contested not only because of its geographic openness but also

because it was more desirable land for both food production and strategic purposes.

Average rainfall is greater in the north of Transjordan and lessens toward the south,

though elevation modulates this rule somewhat. Thus the most reliable agricultural land

lies in Ammon (600 mm in a good year, 200mm in a dry one, or between 23.6 and 7.8

inches), the next most reliable in Moab (which ranges between 125mm and 400 mm [5-

15.7 in.] in Dibon to 500 mm [19.7 in.] on the Kerak, where elevation is higher), and the

most marginal in Edom (which has a maximum of 400 mm [15.7 in] in the north during a

good year, and as little 75 mm [3 in] in the south during a dry one; even during a good

year, Petra gets only about 200 mm [7.8 in]).[16] Because of this, settlement and political

development has historically tended to occur first in the northernmost part of the

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[14]Heshbon is assigned to Reuben in Josh 13:17 and Num 32:34, but to Gad in Josh 13:27 (it is also inhabited by Gadites in 1 Chr 6:66). Dibon is assigned to Reuben in Josh 13:17 and but Num 32:34 claims that the Gadites (re?)built Dibon.

[15]Zeljko Gregor, "Sociopolitical Structure of Transjordanian Societies during the Late Bronze and Iron I Ages (Ca. 1500-1000 B. C.)" (Ph.D. diss., Andrews University, 1996), 24.

[16]Gregor, "Sociopolitical Structure," 30.

Transjordan and to proceed southward.[17] The same order of prominence holds for

proximity to international traffic, both military and commercial. The Syrian Desert

restricted the passage of trade caravans and armies between the most powerful empires of

the ancient world: between Egypt and Asia Minor in the Bronze Age, Egypt and

Mesopotamia in the Iron. Trade, communication, and military movements all had to pass

through this narrow band, and, though Moab was mostly peripheral to this movement, its

northern edge was closest to it, and thus the most affected by struggles to control it.[18]

Moab prospered most when trade ran along its eastern flank. But that route could be

bypassed for others west of the Dead Sea. Though there is some sparse evidence for

international traffic there during the Late Bronze Age, the Moabite route seems to have

been used heavily only during the Assyrian and early Babylonian periods.[19]

Water availability has always played a large role in determining settlement

patterns. Early archaeologists like Nelson Glueck, noticing that most settlements were

perched on the edges of the steep wadis, took their locations to be defensive. In fact, well

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[17]Ernst Axel Knauf, "The Cultural Impact of Secondary State Formation: The Cases of the Edomites and Moabites," in *Early Edom and Moab: The Beginning of the Iron Age in Southern Jordan* (ed. Piotr Bienkowski; Sheffield Archaeological Monographs 7; Sheffield: J. R. Collis, 1992), 50.

[18]The market town of Deir ʿAlla seems to be the southernmost point at which there is evidence of trade, and this collapsed in the Late Bronze Age. Most of the trade in Transjordan passed farther north—first through Pella, later through Sahab. All of these sites are a bit north of Moab. Until recently, even evidence for an Iron Age route through Moab has been largely circumstantial, and mostly assumed on the basis of the so-called "King's Highway" mentioned in Num 20:17 and 21:22. In 2003, however, Amos Kloner and Chaim Ben-David published findings of a road across the Mujib that they date to the Iron Age and suggest may even be Mesha's ("*Mesillot* on the Arnon: An Iron Age (Pre-Roman) Road in Moab," *BASOR* 330 [2003]: 65-81). It provides a first glimpse of Iron Age construction techniques and proof that wide, well-constructed roads were built during the Iron Age. The investment of energy it would have required suggests that the builders expected significant traffic between northern and southern Moab.

[19]C. R. Krahmalkov ("Exodus Itinerary Confirmed by Egyptian Evidence," *BAR* 20 [1994]: 54-62) has argued for the existence of a route between Sinai and northern Palestine dating to the MBA, but few agree with him and one who does admits that the evidence is scant (Udo Worschech, "Egypt and Moab," *BA* 60 [1997]: 234). John S. Holladay, Jr. believes that camel caravaning became possible only around 890-884, when for the first time Assyrian tribute lists contain dromedaries and a number of new items that originate from Arabia ("Hezekiah's Tribute, Long-Distance Trade, and the Wealth of Nations ca. 1000-600 BC: A New Perspective," in *Confronting the Past: Archaeological and Historical Essays on Ancient Israel in Honor of William G. Dever* [ed. Seymour Gitin, J. Edward Wright and J. P. Dessel; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2006], 316).

after the Iron Age—right up to the twentieth century—settlement has tended to

concentrate on the western wadi edges.[20] The most likely explanation is that these are the

places where water is available year round, for even during the dry season shallow wells

yield moisture.[21] The interior of the Kerak, though it receives the most rain overall, is

historically more sparsely populated because the water there is only seasonally available.

After the rainy season, between November and May,[22] water goes so deep into the porous

rock that only cisterns or springs could support settlement. Thus the interior is usually

settled only in times of high population density.[23]

Moab's climate and soil are suitable for both grazing and agriculture. The

livestock-oriented tribes of Gad and Reuben are said to request land in the *mišor* because

"the land of Jazer…was a good place for cattle" (Num 32:1, cf. 32:4). J. Maxwell Miller

finds the image of Moab as a breadbasket in the book of Ruth to be highly plausible,

describing it as "good, fertile, rolling land which receives heavy rainfall in season."[24]

Forests and orchards are also tenable. A visitor in the tenth century C.E. said that forestry

trees, perhaps oaks,[25] grew well in the northern part of the Kerak and named almonds as

the chief local crop.[26] The "breadbasket" image, however, should not be overstated.

Gregor points out that several consecutive years of scarce or poorly timed rains would

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[20]Bruce Routledge, *Moab in the Iron Age: Hegemony, Polity, Archaeology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 96.

[21]Ibid.*,* 94.

[22]Ibid., 50.

[23]Ibid.

[24]J. Maxwell Miller, "Renewed Interest in Ancient Moab," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 8 (1981): 224.

[25]Øystein LaBianca maintains that many of the virgin forests of the Southern Levant were cut down during the Iron Age to clear land for farming and to replace oaks with orchard trees. He believes all the remaining virgin forests would have been eliminated in the region's next intensive period (ca. 150 BC-AD 650). See "A Forest that Refuses to Disappear: Cycles of Environmental Degradation and Regeneration in Jordan: Report to the National Geographic Society," n.p. (cited 30 January 2012). Online: http://www.casa.arizona.edu/MPP/ngs_report/ngs_rep.html.

[26]J. M. Miller, "The Survey," *Kerak Archaeological Survey*, 13.

devastate farming.[27] Archaeologists Øystein LaBianca and L. T. Geraty also stress the marginality of Moab's conditions, noting that while high intensity agriculture is possible, it can tax the region's thin soil and scarce water resources to the point of collapse—and seems to have done just that periodically over time.[28]

The kind of agriculture practiced in Moab depended a great deal on political stability. Higher-intensity agriculture correlates strongly with state development because crops of highest yield and greatest cash value require significant, long-term investments of labor. Only with conditions of high security do we see orchard crops and vineyards and the use of soil- and water-conserving, but labor-intensive, techniques like terracing.[29] Even at its peak at the end of the Iron Age, however, food production in Moab falls only into the medium-intensity category in LaBianca and Geraty's survey (compared to the high-intensity Byzantine period, for example).[30]

John S. Holladay argues persuasively that the Levantine states, especially in the Assyrian period, derived their income from trade rather than sale of commodities.[31] Most agricultural products simply cost more to transport than they were worth. Thus grain and livestock were primarily raised for internal consumption. Wine, wool, and oil, however, were sometimes excepted from that rule, and Moab produced some of each. Thus, as a state developed and trade increased, some production probably shifted toward cash crops like these. Wine and oil were among the few indigenous crops that Egypt imported from

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[27]Gregor, "Sociopolitical Structure," 33.

[28]Øystein LaBianca and Lawrence T. Geraty, "The Local Environment and Human Food-Procuring Strategies in Jordan: The Case of Tell Hesban and its Surrounding Region," in *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan* 2 (ed. Adnan Hadidi; Amman: Department of Antiquities, 1985), 329-30.

[29]Ibid., 329; David C. Hopkins, "Pastoralists in Late Bronze Age Palestine: Which Way did They Go?" *Biblical Archaeologist* 56 (1993): 208.

[30]LaBianca and Geraty, "Local Environment," 327.

[31]J. Holladay, "Hezekiah's Tribute," 309-31.

"Asia" in the Late Bronze Age (LBA).[32] Isaiah 16:7-10 (//Jer 48:32-33, cf. vv. 11 and 26)

describe Moab as a place famed for its viticulture, and grapes grow well in the region

today.[33] Assyrian kings regularly list sheep or dyed wool among other luxury items

collected as tribute or as booty, demonstrating that these items, like gold, were considered

"portable wealth." Apart from gold and building materials, however, those records are

vague about the specific contributions of Moab, but Kings 3:1 does specify sheep or wool

as the form in which Israel collected Moab's tribute.

# When Does Moab Begin to Exist?

What date marked the beginning of statehood in Moab is the question that has

most occupied scholars of historical Moab. What "statehood" means has not always been

well defined, however, so I will pause here to consider what that entails. I realize that

seeking a technical, political-science definition may be confusing since I use the term

"state" very non-technically in the rest of this project—to refer to texts in which biblical

authors treat Moab as a political entity. Such modern categories also have a whiff of

anachronism and artificiality about them. But in putting forth a picture of "historical

Moab" in this chapter, I am essentially asking how Moab compares to (and differs from)

a modern *reader's* notion of a "state." What I hope shall be clear by the end of the

discussion is that the ways in which historical Moab diverges from the impression given

by the biblical texts owe as much to the assumptions of modern readers as to the

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[32]John Strange, "The Late Bronze Age," in *The Archaeology of Jordan* (ed. Burton MacDonald, Russell Adams and Piotr Bienkowski; Levantine Archaeology 1; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001), 310.
[33]Hopkins, "Pastoralists in LBA Palestine," 324.

distortions of ancient writers and compilers.

An early monarchy in Moab is presumed by several biblical texts (Num 21:26; 22-24, 25; Judges 3 and 11:17), but ancient texts, including the Bible, use the term "king" rather loosely: often a king is no more than a ruler of a city and its agricultural lands. Shalmaneser III describes Hadad-ezer's allies as the "12 kings of the seacoast;"[34] another text from his reign makes clear that each king represents a single city.[35] The account of the "31 kings" that Joshua and the Israelites supposedly defeat in Canaan displays a similar sense of scale (Josh 12:7-24). The David traditions describe Geshur (2 Sam 3:3) and Maacah (2 Sam 10:6) as kingdoms in their own right—assertions for which there is also extrabiblical evidence.[36] These examples demonstrate that readers who imagine "kingdoms" as expansive realms with uniform, ethnic constituencies and well-guarded boundaries will be led astray. What is more, the written accounts presuppose the existence of a scribal bureaucracy and a reason for committing such stories to writing. Such a situation does not exist until at least the tenth century; most stories were probably written down much later. At the time Moab traditions were recorded, the authors would have related them using the terms and circumstances they saw in their own world. Even if they had seen it as their task to record sociological realities accurately—which they did not—we would not be able to rely upon the stories they told about a much earlier time to tell us whether a state, or even a monarchy, had existed then. Biblical memories of

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[34]Inscriptions on bull-collosi from Nimrud, §647 (Year 6 of Shalmaneser), §654 (Year 11), §659 (Year 14), (Daniel D. Luckenbill, trans. *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia, Vol. I: Historical Records of Assyria from the Earliest Times to Sargon* [New York: Greenwood Press, 1968], 238-41).

[35]Shalmaneser's Inscription at the source of the Tigris (§686 in Donald D. Luckenbill, *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia; Historical Records of Assyria. Volume I: From the Earliest Times to Sargon* [henceforth *ARAB* I] [New York: Greenwood Press, 1968], 247) lists Hadad-ezer's allies as "15 *cities* of the seacoast."

[36]See Wayne Pitard, *Ancient Damascus: A Historical Study of the Syrian City-State from Earliest Times until Its Fall to the Assyrians in 732 B.C.E.* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1987), 88.

"monarchy" in Moab are thus completely insufficient to declare that Moab was a "state" in the later or more technical sense.

The "technical" definition of statehood I employ here combines those of Bruce Routledge, who draws on Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony,[37] with ideas from those who propose tribal models of statehood.[38] Routledge suggests that the development of a true "state" requires the unification of several different regions or groups with distinct identities—forging them into a unity and subsuming them under a single, central authority.[39] It may be, as Routledge argues, that the sub-groups that form a state identify with geographical regions, or, as those who advocate a "tribal" model argue, that they are kin based. These two models need not be mutually exclusive: biblical examples portray kinship and territory as mutually reinforcing ideologies;[40] both are regarded as sacred and yet both also clearly adapt to changing realities.[41]

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[37]Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (ed and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith; New York: International Publishers, 1971), 53-59.

[38]For example, Younker, "Moabite Social Structure," 237-48; Øystein LaBianca, "Salient Features of Iron Age Tribal Kingdoms," in *Ancient Ammon* (ed. Burton MacDonald and Randall W. Younker; Studies in the History and Culture of the Ancient Near East 17; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 19-29; Randall W. Younker, "The Emergence of the Ammonites," in Ibid.*,* 189-218; Piotr Bienkowski and Eveline van der Steen, "Tribes, Trade, and Towns: A New Framework for the Late Iron Age in Southern Jordan and the Negev," *BASOR* 323 (2001): 21-47.

[39]Routledge, *Moab in the Iron Age*, 29-31.

[40]The relationship between place and kin names is so close that it is hard to discern which comes first. Places are sometimes personified in the narrative as characters—Moab, Ammon, Jacob and his sons are prime examples. Smaller places, too, may be represented as people in genealogical language: Nili S. Fox, noting that the names of five Manassite clans and two of Zelophahad's daughters are also place names, proposes that these are "geographical regions whose connection is expressed through genealogical language" (comment on Num 26:29-34 in *The Jewish Study Bible* [ed. Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler; trans. Jewish Publication Society; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004], 337). On the other hand, Num 32:41-42 boasts of certain Manassites naming the towns they conquered and settled in after themselves. John W. Wright demonstrates that peripherality and centrality in the Judean genealogy are reflected in proximity to Jerusalem ("Remapping Yehud: The Borders of Yehud in the Genealogies of Chronicles," *Judah and Judeans in the Persian Period* [ed. Oded Lipschits and Manfred Oeming; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2006], 81-82).

[41]There are accounts assigning the same towns to Reuben that are elsewhere assigned to Gad and vice versa. Some clans show a shift in lineage after they become associated with Israel (see Gary Knoppers, "Intermarriage, Social Complexity, and Ethnic Diversity in the Genealogy of Judah," *JBL* 120 [2001]: 24-27). The accommodation made for Caleb to have land among the Judahites (Josh 14:6-14; 15:13) seems to express addition of Calebites into Judahite lineage and territory to which they were not original.

Routledge's model points out that centralization implies a struggle: whether

through persuasion or force, the central power must assert its supremacy *over* local or

lower-order authorities. Those who advocate the tribal model argue that the hierarchy

envisioned here is anachronistic: that tribal groups like those of ancient Israel and Moab

would have had *heterarchical* political organization, in which power is held in multiple

places at once.[42] In some ways, this seems indeed to be the case in Mesha's Moab, since

he presupposes that "the land of Mahadeba," Dibon, ꜥAtarot and Jahaz are preexisting

units.[43] Presumably each would have had a degree of political autonomy, and those may

have continued to exert considerable influence. Nevertheless, in claiming to be "king of

Moab," Mesha asserts ultimate authority over the separate units. While he may not erase

the preexisting powers, he must either force their submission or win their cooperation.[44]

What we cannot settle is how strong or weak that centralized power was—and thus how

hegemonic it was in practice. The theorists of the tribal model are probably right in

asserting that hierarchical claims remained weak and highly subject to the power of local

forces even after a "state" had formed. Nevertheless, 1 Sam 8:9-20 demonstrates that

ancient Israelites, and not just modern scholars, understood that shifting from a tribal to a

monarchical system implied a qualitative shift—one in which some of the autonomies of

chieftains are lost. Kings, Samuel warns, can make demands of *all* subjects: this would

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[42]Bienkowski, "Tribes, Borders, Landscapes," 36. See also LaBianca, "Salient Features," 21-22.

[43]This according to Routledge's reading of the MI's syntactical structure (*Moab in the Iron Age,* 141-43). Echoed by Younker, "Moabite Social Structure," 242. Timothy P. Harrison finds support for the reading in the archaeological settlement pattern: clusters of small settlements surround the larger sites of Kh. ꜥAtaruz (ꜥAtarot), Tall Dhiban (Dibon), and Tall Madaba (Madeba). A fourth cluster surrounds Kh. al-Mudayna on the Wadi ath-Thamad, which is possibly Jahaz ("'The Land of Medeba' and Early Iron Age Madaba," in *Studies on Iron Age Moab and Neighbouring Areas in Honour of Michèle Daviau* [ed. Piotr Bienkowski; Ancient Near Eastern Studies Supp 29; Leuven: Peeters, 2009], 33-34). The remains at these sites seem to date to the period of Mesha and just before, though dating is not secure.

[44]Though Younker argues for heterarchical distribution of power in general, he concedes that "Mesha's ability to call upon 'men of Moab,' that is, individuals beyond his immediate kin circle…clearly elevated him beyond the level of a local Dibonite sheikh or chief" ("Moabite Social Structure," 243).

include tribal chieftains who had formerly exercised authority over their own groups. As Samuel points out, kings create bureaucracies and claim privileges beyond any that the previously ruling chieftains had been able to claim. Israel Finkelstein's definition of a state echoes Samuel in noting that a state is partly defined by the existence of a bureaucratic ruling class that extends beyond the monarch's own kin group.[45] Thus, though the advocates of the tribal model rightly call our attention to tribal features that continue on after Israel, Judah and Moab become states, a state built out of tribes, or tribes embedded within states, do not function in *exactly* the same ways as polities that are purely tribal.

Though statehood is determined by the presence of an ideology—ultimate authority invested in a central power—we are reliant for evidence of this on its material expression. Traditional archaeologists have not been wrong in looking for things such as monumental building projects and royal stelae. But these in themselves are insufficient.[46] As Routledge points out, we seek in archaeological objects or structures a particular *function:* the ability to *unite* a diversity of regions or peoples, and the ability to *signify* the authority of the central power. Thus fortifications would be significant *insofar as* they form part of a system protecting a whole region and not just a single town, or insofar as an object can be demonstrated to symbolize the central power, perhaps by repeating across several towns, or bearing key features emblematic of power that appear in a broader cultural context. For example, because they are used throughout the ancient Near

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[45]Israel Finkelstein, characterizing a mainstream definition ("State Formation in Israel and Judah: A Contrast in Context, a Contrast in Trajectory," *Near Eastern Archaeology* 62 (1999): 39.

[46]Younker points to a number of examples of New World cultures, such as the Olmec, who created monumental architecture of impressive proportions and skills, yet are not considered by most anthropologists to have attained the level of social complexity that would qualify them as "state" societies ("Moabite Social Structure," 241-42).

East to represent "kingliness,"[47] palaces, royal shrines, stelae and impressive gates communicate authority in new states as well. Such objects keep royal authority in constant awareness even when the royal figure is not physically present. A new state that uses them asserts that it, too, should be understood as such an entity—as a peer of other, nearby "states" which people know, and as a miniature of the distant, but familiar, powerhouses of Egypt or Mesopotamia.

Early archaeologists and biblical scholars mostly accepted the biblical picture of early monarchy in Moab as evidence that it developed into a state in the thirteenth century—about a hundred years earlier than the appearance of "Israel" in the Merenptah Stele.[48] The fact that *mw-i-b* appears in two Egyptian texts from the reign of Ramesses II (as early as 1285[49] and no later than 1225 B.C.E.) with the determinative for "country" or "land" seemed to confirm the biblical picture.[50] Some scholars identify two towns in these stelae as Moabite ones, and argue that they signify the region's importance to

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[47]Routledge, *Moab in the Iron Age,* 154-55.

[48]Glueck presumes more often than argues the early existence of Moab (see e.g. "Explorations in Eastern Palestine III," *AASOR* 18-19 [1937-39]: 242-43), and his dating is problematic, but because the archaeological work added solidity to the biblical portrayals, it was followed widely by such influential scholars as Albrecht Alt (*Kleine Schriften zur Geschichte des Volkes Israel I* [Munich: C. H. Beck, 1940], 207-215); Van Zyl (*The Moabites*, 110-11), Norman Gottwald (*The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel 250-1050 B.C.E.* [Maryknoll: Orbis, 1979], 426); Martin Noth (*The Old Testament World,* [Victor I. Gruhn, trans.; Philadelphia, Fortress Press 1966], 79-80); and Boling (*Early Biblical Community in Transjordan*, 51-52). Van Zyl's study was the standard resource on Moab for many years, and is still cited.

[49]Kenneth Kitchen ("Some New Light on the Asiatic Wars of Ramesses II," *JEA* 50 [1964]: 68) sees years 4 and 8 of Ramesses' reign as the most likely date of the campaigns and Manfred Weippert seems to be agreeing with him ("The Israelite 'Conquest' and the Evidence from Transjordan," in *Symposia Celebrating the 75th Anniversary of the Founding of the ASOR (1900-1975)* [ed. Frank M. Cross; Cambridge, Mass.: ASOR, 1979], 27).

[50]Both are from Luxor. One is inscribed on the Ramesses II statue in front of the Amun Temple, the other in Scene A on the East Wall of the temple court (Worschech, "Egypt and Moab," 231). These are published, respectively, in Jan Simons, *Handbook for the Study of Egyptian Topographical Lists Relating to Western Asia* (Leiden: Brill, 1937), 109-22, and Kitchen, "Some New Light," 47-70 (text p. 50). Gerald Mattingly describes these two occurrences as undisputed ("The Cultural-Historical Approach and Moabite Origins," in *Early Edom and Moab: The Beginning of the Iron Age in Southern Jordan* [ed. Piotr Bienkowski; Sheffield Archaeological Monographs 7; Sheffield: J. R. Collis, 1992], 58). There is another possible occurrence in a list of Amenhotep III (see Stefan Timm, *Moab: Zwischen den Mächten: Studien zu historischen Denkmälern und Texten* [Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1989], 9-14), but it has few supporters (Gregor, "Sociopolitical Structure," 207).

Egyptian interests and the strength of the people who opposed them there.[51] Glueck, whose surveys were foundational for Transjordan studies, argued for a state on the basis of a string of "border fortresses": he claimed that these lay within signaling distance of each other along Moab's eastern frontier and dated to Iron I or just before.[52] The Baluʿa Stele, dated to about the same time[53] and found on a southern spur of the Mujib in Moabite territory,[54] also seemed proof of early statehood.[55] Though the text is no longer legible, it uses Egyptian artistic conventions to depict a kingly figure receiving symbols of authority from a god and goddess.

Most scholars now believe that there was no centralized, complex state at this early stage, though there probably were some regional chiefs and chiefdoms. In retrospect we can suggest that biblical narratives probably unduly influenced the conclusions of earlier scholarship. Scholars of the current generation do not have the confidence in the historicity of biblical accounts that earlier scholars did—especially regarding accounts set in the premonarchic period. The pottery that Glueck and William F. Albright confidently called "Moabite" was called thus and dated "Early Iron Age" not on the basis of stratigraphy, but on the presumption that the Kerak plateau is where Moabites had been

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[51]Kenneth Kitchen, "The Egyptian Evidence on Ancient Jordan," in *Early Edom and Moab: The Beginning of the Iron Age in Southern Jordan* (ed. Piotr Bienkowski; Sheffield Archaeological Monographs 7; Sheffield: J. R. Collis, 1992), 28.

[52]Van Zyl, *The Moabites,* 112, citing Glueck's surveys broadly. For Glueck's own assertions about the border fortresses, see "Explorations," 61, 73-74, 79, 88-89, 242-51.

[53]There is general agreement about the thirteenth- to twelfth-century date range, but the written inscription is illegible, so no more precise date is possible. Based on iconography, Routledge widens the range slightly, saying that it should be placed in the nineteenth or twentieth Egyptian dynasty, i.e. between ca. 1296 and 1064 B.C.E. (*Moab in the Iron Age,* 85).

[54]G. Horsfield and H. L. Vincent, "Un Stèle égypto-moabite au Balouʿa," *RB* 41 (1932): 417-25.

[55]So Van Zyl, *The Moabites,* 110.

and that, based on the biblical text, they would have been present in the Early Iron Age.[56]

The pottery in question probably was "Moabite," but it is now thought to date between

the eighth and sixth centuries.[57] Some of the "border fortresses" Glueck found similarly

date to Iron II—a time when raids from the east by Arabian tribes are well attested—

while some of the fortresses were actually Nabataean.[58]

The primary evidence against there being a state in the thirteenth to twelfth

centuries is that settlement simply seems to have been too sparse and widely scattered to

support it. Most scholars believe that a centralized state requires permanent, well-

connected occupations, and would show evidence of trade, urbanization, and social

stratification.[59] For instance, foreign and luxury objects that might indicate trade

activities or elite classes fail to appear at the right places and times in the evidence we

have. Though a huge amount of such goods have been found in towns north of Moab, the

finds are mostly in Pella and Beth Shan, and no further south than Deir ʿAlla.[60] They also

date entirely to the early part of the Late Bronze Age. All such finds are associated with

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[56]Mattingly, "Cultural-Historical Approach," 60. Manfred Weippert critiques Glueck's similar assertions about Edom ("Remarks on the History of Settlement in Southern Jordan During the Early Iron Age," *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan* 1 [1982]: 153-54).

[57]J. H. Pace, "Al-Kerak Resources Project 1997: Excavations at Kh. al-Mudaybi," *ADAJ* 43 (1999): 127-44.

[58]J. Maxwell Miller, "Early Monarchy in Moab?" in *Early Edom and Moab: The Beginning of the Iron Age in Southern Jordan* (ed. Piotr Bienkowski; Sheffield Archaeological Monographs 7; Sheffield: J. R. Collis, 1992), 87-88. A recent publication by Eveline J. van der Steen concludes that there may indeed have been two "strings of fortresses" in Moab, but both would date to Iron II—the Assyrian and Babylonian periods. One is situated to guard the eastern frontier, probably from Arabian tribes, and the other on the border with Edom, perhaps as a point at which to regulate trade caravans. Van der Steen concludes that all would have been outposts constructed by the kingdom of Moab rather than the Assyrians ("'String of Fortresses,' Revisited," 125-26).

[59]Gregor, "Sociopolitical Structure," 95; Younker, "Moabite Social Structure," 240-41; B. Routledge, *Moab in the Iron Age,* 208-09; LaBianca, "Salient Features," 21.

[60]All the foreign goods that Rudolph H. Dornemann discusses from LBA Transjordan originate in Pella, Deir ʿAlla and the Amman airport structure, and from tombs both in these places and in Irbed and Tell es Saʿidiyeh (*The Archaeology of the Transjordan in the Bronze and Iron Ages* [Milwaukee: Milwaukee Public Museum, 1983], 20-21). Some Egyptian goods have also been found far south of Moab at Timna (later Edom), which were used as early as the reign of Seti I (1294-1279) (Ibid., 23).

sites that were part of Egypt's trade network; they cease abruptly around the time Egypt

withdraws from Palestine in the mid-12th century,[61] and are not found again until Iron II.

Miller and Pinkerton's survey on the Kerak plateau found no foreign sherds or foreign

imitation forms dating to any part of the LBA or Iron I. Compared to pottery assemblages

elsewhere in the Levant, the pottery that was found comprised "a narrow, utilitarian

repertoire," especially in the LBA.[62] Local trade, too, seems to have been minimal:

storage facilities in transition-period settlements appear large enough to meet the needs

only of the community itself, not to accommodate a surplus for trading.[63]

Evidence for urbanization is also lacking.[64] Most settlements in this period are

small and seem to function either as fortified outposts,[65] or as small, subsistence-oriented

villages. This is particularly true south of the Kerak rim, where the largest site would

have accommodated only about 500 people,[66] and most were large enough to house only

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[61]Dornemann sets the latest date for Egyptian finds in Transjordan as 1140 (*Archaeology of the Transjordan,* 26). Udo Worschech notes that the Transjordan is absent from Egyptian texts after the reign of Ramesses III (i.e. 1153 at latest) ("Environment and Settlements in the Ard al-Karak: Remarks on the Socio-Ecological and Socio-Economic Conditions in the Iron Age," in *Studies on Iron Age Moab and Neighbouring Areas in Honour of Michèle Daviau* [ed. Piotr Bienkowski; Ancient Near Eastern Studies Supp 29; Leuven: Peeters, 2009], 66). Eveline J. Van der Steen also suggests a date around 1150, and pinpoints specific events associated with Egyptian abandonment of Deir ᶜAlla: a "Governor's residence," which seems to have served as an Egyptian garrison and small administrative center, was locked, set on fire, and abandoned. This occurred about the same time that an earthquake halted repairs to the Temple, which had already been badly damaged in a previous earthquake. Not long afterward, the settlement itself was abandoned (*Tribes and Territories in Transition*: *The Central East Jordan Valley in the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Ages: A Study of the Sources* [OLA 130; Leuven: Peeters, 2004], 291).

[62]Robin M. Brown, "Ceramics from the Kerak Plateau," *Kerak Archaeological Survey*, 189-90; 193-97. Gregor describes the presence of Mycenaean and Cypriot ware as being "more than limited" for the entire region ("Sociopolitical Structure," 114-15). Worschech mentions one scarab found among Iron I sherds (but unstratified) at Lehun (Worschech, "Environment and Settlements," 55).

[63]Gregor, "Sociopolitical Structure," 115-16.

[64]Andrew Dearman, "Settlement Patterns and the Beginning of the Iron Age in Moab," in *Early Edom and Moab: The Beginning of the Iron Age in Southern Jordan* (ed. Piotr Bienkowski; Sheffield Archaeological Monographs 7; Sheffield: J. R. Collis, 1992), 69.

[65]Dearman, "Settlement Patterns," 70-72.

[66]That is, 1.53-2.5 ha (Gregor, "Sociopolitical Structure," 124).

a few families.[67] Some sites on the Kerak have Iron II fortifications built directly upon

Middle Bronze ruins,[68] confirming their disuse in the interim. They also appear widely

scattered rather than closely integrated.[69] There are a few sites on the Kerak that

sustained settlement throughout the "low point" of the Late Bronze period, and perhaps

these served as places for nomads to gather or replenish supplies—Udo Worschech sees

in them the seeds of later expansion.[70] They were not, however, "cities" that describe a

more complex and stratified society.[71]

The settlement picture in the *mišor* is less clear cut, but it, too, falls short of a

picture suggesting urban sites before late Iron I, at earliest. Van der Steen notes that

though settlements increased in Moab and the Amman plateau in the thirteenth century,

the kind of settlements—especially the number of fortified farmsteads—argues against

the presence of a centralized state. They suggest that security is a prominent concern and

that small groups had to defend themselves rather than rely on an institutional structure to

do it for them.[72] The strategically important sites of Madeba, Baluᶜa, ᶜAraᶜir (biblical

Aroer) and Lahun have each turned up a small number of Late Bronze sherds and the

remains from some kind of fortification system.[73] But occupation during that period is

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[67]Worschech puts the number of sites at 31 or more ("Environment and Settlements," 61), but Younker counts only 20 for the whole "region of Moab," and thinks that only eight of these would be actual settlements, the rest being farmsteads or fortifications ("Emergence of the Ammonites," 195).

[68]Strange, "Late Bronze Age," 297.

[69]Apart from two pairs of fortified sites, which seem closely related, the prevailing picture is of sites used only seasonally or in times of threat by otherwise transient groups (Dearman, "Settlement Patterns," 70-73).

[70]Worschech, "Environments and Settlements," 63.

[71]Gregor's review of all available archaeological surveys of northern and southern Moab in the transition period concludes that the nature (unfortified), density, and distribution of the settlement sites imply that "the region was far from urbanized" and lacked any centralized political structure ("Sociopolitical Structure," 96).

[72]Van der Steen, *Tribes and Territories,* 304.

[73]Though Worschech concludes that the wall at Lahun is too thin to have served as a defensive wall ("Environment and Settlements," 55). Bruce Routledge and Carolyn Routledge conclude that Baluᶜa was sparsely settled in LBA, began to be occupied in Iron I, and was only expanded in earnest in Iron II

still sparse, and there is no evidence of major buildings or urban planning apart from the

fortifications themselves. Andrew Dearman, describing the remotely located Mudayna

sites, notes that "neither site was densely packed with domestic architecture, nor designed

apparently to support much of a village economy."[74]

The settlements and fortresses that crop up in Iron I might seem to suggest the

beginnings of a state, but most archaeologists interpret them otherwise. Worschech

describes five sites that include a citadel-like structure,[75] but believes that, far from

describing a political unity, they were used by local sheikdoms that competed against

each other in the power vacuum left by Egypt's withdrawal.[76] Routledge's argument for

statehood inaugurated by Mesha in the ninth century is also based on a survey of Iron I

sites (including three of the sites Worschech had described).[77] He points out that many of

the sites that appeared so suddenly were abandoned after about a century of use.[78] They

do not therefore suggest a trajectory of progressively more intensive settlement and

complex political development. Madeba and Baluᶜa seem to have become cities of some

importance, but their growth, too, occurs in either late Iron I or early Iron II. Madeba had

monumental buildings, a necropolis, and was surrounded by a massive fortification wall.

In early Iron II, it measured some 13-16 ha—one of the largest cities of the

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("The Baluᶜa Stela Revisited," in *Studies on Iron Age Moab and Neighbouring Areas in Honour of Michèle Daviau* [ed. Piotr Bienkowski; Ancient Near Eastern Studies Supp 29; Leuven: Peeters, 2009], 74). Although Strange describes Madeba as "occupied" in the LBA ("Late Bronze Age," 297), Harrison argues that it has no "substantial settled presence" until Late Iron I or early Iron II ("'The Land of Medeba,'" 39-40).

[74]Dearman, "Settlement Patterns," 72.

[75]Lehun, Maᶜmarieh, ᶜAraᶜir, Khirbet al-Mudayna al-ᶜAliya, and Mudayna al-Muᶜarrajeh (Worschech, "Environment and Settlements," 55-59).

[76]Ibid., 66.

[77]In addition to the last three described by Worschech, Routledge also considers Baluᶜa, Kh. al-Mudayna ala al-Mujib and Abu al-Haraqah (*Moab in the Iron Age,* 94).

[78]Routledge, *Moab in the Iron Age,* 92. Dearman makes a similar observation about the two Mudaynas ("Settlement Patterns," 72).

Transjordan.[79] Baluʿa, where the stele was found, reached a similar size by Iron IIB-C

(ninth to sixth centuries).[80] Jalul, Madjalein and Tadun grew to about half that size

sometime in Iron I.[81] It is Randall Younker who describes the largest sites, but he

nevertheless concludes that, unlike parts of Canaan like Hazor and Lachish, the case for

urbanization in Moab is dubious at best.[82] Unfortunately, the pottery is not well enough

understood to isolate the dates of development more precisely. It is thus not clear whether

Moab already had some sizeable cities by the time the Omrides conquered it, if the

Omrides themselves stimulated that growth, if it dates to Mesha's reign,[83] or later still. In

any case, the time in which a more complex state seems plausible is closer to the era of

Mesha and Omri than to those of Balak or Eglon.

In light of the evidence arguing against the existence of a Moabite state dating to

the LB-IA transition period, the "country" determinative that marks Ramesses' *mw-i-b*

inscription should be interpreted as "land"—the name of the region.[84] This is significant,

for it means that the country of Moab and its kings took their identity from the traditional

name for the place, rather than originating as the name of an ethnic group. Perhaps the

biblical term *śadeh môʾāb* (Gen 36:35, Num 21:20, Ruth 1:1-2) also reflects an

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[79]Harrison, "'The Land of Medeba,'" 40.

[80]According to Larry G. Herr and Mohammed Najjar, Baluʿa is the largest settlement on the Kerak in Iron IIB-C ("The Iron Age," in *The Archaeology of Jordan* [ed. Burton MacDonald, Russell Adams and Piotr Bienkowski; London: Equinox, 2008], 332-33). According to B. Routledge, most of its expansion took place during the eighth century (*Moab in the Iron Age,* 191).

[81]7.2, 8.0 and 7.0 ha, respectively (Younker, "Moabite Social Structure," 241).

[82]Younker, "Moabite Social Structure," 241.

[83]Emilio Olaverri thought this was the case at ʿAraʿir, where he found a layer from Iron II built directly upon one that began ca. 1250. A destruction layer separated the two. He interpreted the earlier remains as a Reubenite fortress and the latter as the work on Aroer that Mesha describes in the MI (L. 26) ("Sondages a ʿArôʿer sur L'Arnon [Pl. I à IV]," *RB* 72 [1965]: 91). Mesha says that Omri, rather than one of his successors, "took possession of all the land of Mahadeba" (MI, Ll. 7-8), but that it returned to Moabite control ("Kemosh dwelt in it") during the reign of one of Omri's "sons" (L. 8). He also claims to have done building, or rebuilding work in Madeba himself (Ll. 29-30).

[84]So J. M. Miller, "Early Monarchy in Moab?" 77; Worschech, "Egypt and Moab," 230.

understanding of Moab as a region rather than a country. That there was not a "state" in

Iron I Moab does not contradict Kenneth Kitchen's observation that groups in the

Transjordan were powerful enough to command a powerful Pharaoh's attention: tribal

groups, even without permanent settlements, may be quite powerful. Though the

Ottomans officially ruled the Transjordan during the nineteenth century C.E., they were

utterly unable to interfere with the powerful Bedouin tribes that controlled the area in

reality.[85] For its part, the Baluᶜa stele should be interpreted not as evidence of a fully-

formed state but as the monument of a local chieftain—perhaps, because of its references

to Egyptian symbols of royalty—one who claimed authority from Egypt.[86]

## If Not a State, Then What?<br>Transition to the Iron Age<br>and a Tribal Paradigm of Socio-Political Organization

Even if there is not yet a monarchy in the Late Bronze-Early Iron Age period,

*something* is happening then that marks a sea change in political and social organization

from the models that had dominated the Bronze Age. What exactly that is is difficult to

reconstruct, for the cultures that later become dominant are at this stage poor and only

beginning to sedentarize. Thus, clues are sparse and nonliterary. But what can be gleaned

is instructive about Israel and Moab, for if the people that appear then are not the

ancestors of Israel and Moab themselves, they at least establish the paradigm of

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[85]e.g. Van der Steen, *Tribes and Territories,* 281-82.

[86]So Udo Worschech (*Die Beziehungen Moabs zu Israel und Ägypten in der Eisenzeit: Siedlungsarchäologische und siedlungshistorische Untersuchungen im Kernland Moabs [Ard el-Kerak]* [Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1990], 99-101), though he argues for a loose form of centralization, as does Burton MacDonald (Ammon, Moab and Edom: Early States/Nations of Jordan in the Biblical Period [End of the Second and During the First Millennium B.C.][Amman: Al Kutba Publishers, 1994], 15). Citing Egyptian correspondence that speaks of the danger of crossing the Mujib at Baluᶜa, van der Steen suggests that the monument might have marked the "turf" of the Shasu chieftain who claimed—or was granted by Egypt—exclusive rights to the "protection fees" for caravans that crossed the Mujib there (*Tribes and Territories,* 269).

settlement and governance that later shapes them.

The LBA is a time of diminished population and prosperity compared to Middle Bronze II,[87] but it nevertheless continues the pattern in which political power rests in a series of urban centers. There is a strong polarity between these cities, and the clusters of small satellite towns associated with them, and the large, open tracts of land used mostly by pastoral nomads or semi-nomads, in between. Lachish, Gezer, Megiddo, and especially Hazor maintain robust populations and economies. In the Transjordan, Pella, Irbid, and later Sahab, are the most important centers. Whereas in the MBA prosperity had been more shared between the "central place" and its satellites, the LBA sees settlement and prosperity constricting to the cities themselves.[88] All of the urban sites lie north or west of Moab, but the characteristics of the cities illustrate the form that political organization took just before the emergence of nation states.

"Urban" is a term that describes not just population but also cultural character. The Transjordan settlements are generally small—the largest, Pella and Irbid, measure 10 ha at most; Deir ʿAlla, the next largest, measures only five, while six others are 2 ha or less—large enough for perhaps just a few families. Yet most of these contain a palace, a temple, or both.[89] That monumental structures are built even in such small settlements underscores the importance that the inhabitants placed on architectural symbols of power.

Perhaps this value derives from the degree to which LBA cities model themselves on the world beyond the Levant, for they are strikingly international in character. From

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[87]MB II is approximately 1800 until the mid-sixteenth century, when Egypt conquered Canaan, wiping out many of its settlements (Rivkah Gonen, "Urban Canaan in the Late Bronze Age," *BASOR* 253 [1984]: 61). So far reaching was the destruction that the peak of LBA settlement reached only half what the settled population had been in MBII (Hopkins, "Pastoralists in LBA Palestine," 202, and drawing on Gonen).

[88]Hopkins, "Pastoralists in LBA Palestine," 203.

[89]Routledge, *Moab in the Iron Age,* Table 4.1, p. 65.

the mid-fifteenth century on, when Egypt began to control the Levant more

systematically,[90] the city-states that prospered the most were those that functioned as

nodes in the Egyptian trade network.[91] Egyptian kings allowed local rulers to hold their

posts, so long as they kept their tribute obligations and did their parts in conducting trade

caravans safely on their way. The Transjordan is mostly a peripheral area, but large

caches of foreign goods at cites like Pella and Amman in northern Transjordan testify to

the heavy traffic regionally of goods from Egypt, the Mediterranean, and to some degree

Arabia. Carved ivories,[92] jewelry, small weapons, cylinder seals, containers for

aromatics, and elaborate "presentation vessels,"[93] usually of foreign extraction, are

frequent in the tombs and shrines there. Rudolph Dornemann points out that foreign

objects at these sites comprise more of the pottery ensemble than at any other period save

the Hellenistic.[94] That some types of foreign goods were imitated locally bespeaks their

prestige.[95] Most of the tribute that Egypt required also took the form of goods that were

not indigenous to Palestine and had to be obtained through trade.[96] Egypt also took active

steps to promote cultural exchange: from at least the reign of Thutmoses III on, princes of

Canaanite ruling families were "educated" in Egypt—both as a form of collateral to

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[90]Starting with the reign of Thutmoses III, and renewed during that of Seti I, Canaan began to serve as a strategic buffer zone in the ongoing tensions with Hatti and Mitanni, and thus was more carefully controlled. Donald Redford dates the turning point to the battle of Megiddo ca. 1482, though degree of oversight waxed and waned under different pharaohs (See Redford, *Egypt, Canaan and Israel in Ancient Times* [Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1992], 148-49, 160, 168-69, 180-81).

[91]Piotr Bienkowski, "Prosperity and Decline in LBA Canaan: A Reply to Liebowitz and Knapp," *BASOR* 275 (1989): 60.

[92]Intricately carved LB II ivories have been recovered from Hazor, Yenoam, Megiddo, Beth-Shan, Tell Abu-Hawam, Lachish, Deir el-Balah and Timnah (Harold Liebowitz, "Late Bronze II Ivory Work in Palestine: Evidence of a Cultural High Point," *BASOR* 265 [1987]: 3-24).

[93]Routledge, *Moab in the Iron Age,* 63.

[94]Dornemann, *Archaeology of the Transjordan*, 21. He records Cypriote and Mycenaean pottery, as well as objects from Egypt, Crete and other parts of Palestine. They are found in greatest concentration at Pella, Deir ʿAlla, and the Amman airport "temple."

[95]Routledge, *Moab in the Iron Age,* 67-68. Liebowitz argues that some of the ivories described above are local imitations of Egyptian work ("LBII Ivory Work in Palestine," 5-6).

[96]Hopkins, "Pastoralists in LBA Palestine," 201-02.

ensure regular payment of tribute,[97] and as a way of acculturating the future rulers to

Egyptian values and life.[98] Egyptian administrative centers and garrisons at Gaza, Joppa,

Ashdod, Beth-shan and Yenoꜥam also introduced some degree of direct cultural

exposure. Egyptian temples were built at some of these sites, probably to collect taxes in

the form of "offerings."[99]

As the foreign luxury goods attest, the city-states reaped some benefit from the

relationship with Egypt, despite its political and economic burdens. The key role of trade

is emphasized by the fact that those cities that played the greatest role in Egyptian trade

were the largest and most prosperous.[100] Yet that benefit was not widely shared among

the populace. The imported luxury objects found in tombs and shrines at key LBA sites

were not available to everyone. Not only were they expensive, they represented

connections in the Egyptian-regulated trade routes, as well as the political power to offer

protection.[101] The foreign objects that appear in ritual contexts are absent from domestic

settings.[102] The types of vessels and objects also point to their "special" status: these were

ointment containers, fragile glass jars, pedestalled bowls and chalices—not cooking pots

or the kinds of ordinary bottles and flasks used in everyday life. For these reasons,

Carolyn R. Higginbothom concludes that "foreign-made" was a mark of status and

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[97]Van der Steen, *Tribes and Territories,* 299.
[98]Carolyn R. Higginbothom, "The Egyptianizing of Canaan," *BAR* 24 (1998): 39.
[99]That "receipts" for some commodity (grain?) found at Tel Sera were inscribed on bowls suggests that the commodities were "offered" rather than simply delivered (Orly Goldwasser, "Hieratic Inscriptions from Tel Sera' in Southern Canaan," *Tel Aviv* 11 [1984]: 84). Though only one temple has been excavated (Serâbît el-Khadem in Timna), Ramesses III is known to have constructed a temple in Gaza, there is reference to a Ptah temple in Ashkelon, and mention of 12 cities "belonging to Amun" (Ibid., 77-93).
[100]Bienkowski, "Prosperity and Decline," 59-63.
[101]See EA 255 in William L. Moran, ed. and trans., *The Amarna Letters* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992). Pointed out by Routledge, *Moab in the Iron Age,* 75.
[102]Higginbothom, "The Egyptianizing of Canaan," 36-43.

exclusivity among urban elites—especially from the Ramesside period on.[103]

The Amarna letters also attest a degree of social stratification.[104] Letters from

Byblos use discrete terms for different levels in the social hierarchy: one for the ruling

class (*ḫazannu*); another for an elite "chariot" class (*maryanu*[105])*,* and a third for a

dependent peasant class that formed the majority (*ḫupšu*). Some evidence suggests that

the *maryanu* owned large tracts of land worked by *ḫupšu* who had full- or part-time

obligations to do so.[106] It is also clear that some of the agricultural products and/or corvée

labor of the populace were exacted as taxes: an Egyptian granary at Jaffa is mentioned in

one of the Amarna letters,[107] and is probably only one of several, while several Egyptian

temples also received grain "offerings" from Canaan.[108] Oil and wine were also exported

to Egypt.[109] Though the exotic "gifts" expected in Egypt as tribute were probably funded

in part by trade revenues, any shortfall would need to have been paid for by selling

agricultural surplus.[110]Compared to the obligations of contemporary Hittite subjects, the

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[103]Higginbothom's hypothesis of "elite emulation" (Ibid.) is based upon an extensive survey of the pottery in her dissertation "The Egyptianization of Ramesside Palestine," The Johns Hopkins University, 1993. See also B. Routledge and C. Routledge ("The Baluᶜa Stela Revisited," 71-95), who conclude that the "Egyptianness" of the conventions in the Baluᶜa Stele are part of a region-wide "visual language of authority" (Ibid., 91).

[104]The charred human bones in the Amman airport structure attests that cremation was practiced by at least some segment of the population (J. Basil Hennessy, "Thirteenth Century Temple of Human Sacrifice at Amman," *Studia Phoenicia* 3 [1985]: 90).

[105]See e.g. EA 107 in Moran, *Amarna Letters*, 180-81.

[106]Routledge, *Moab in the Iron Age*, 75-76.

[107]EA 294, in Moran, *Amarna Letters*, 336-37. Pointed out by Higginbothom, "Egyptianizing of Canaan," 40.

[108]From the time of Tuthmoses III, three cities were required to send grain to the temple of Amun at Karnak, while under Ramesses III more Egyptian temples attest receipt of Canaanite grain (Bienkowski, "Prosperity and Decline," 60).

[109]Strange, "Late Bronze Age," 310.

[110]Hopkins points to the burden of trading for exotic goods ("Pastoralists in LBA Palestine," 201-02), but his assumption that these would have been funded entirely by agricultural commodities ("Pastoralists in LBA Palestine," 324) is probably overstated. Trade—in the form of protection fees—probably constituted far more of the revenue, as J. Holladay argues is the case for Iron Age Israel ("Hezekiah's Tribute," 309-31). As Holladay points out, agricultural commodities often cost more to ship than they were worth, they are perishable, and Egypt, the largest market, had no pressing need for cereals

Canaanite tribute obligations were heavy.[111] And though Egypt's main interests in Canaan were strategic rather than economic, the extraction of produce from already tenuous economies and marginal surpluses increasingly impoverished the Canaanite settlements, especially those that lacked benefits from trade routes.[112] Those who worked the land and saw their produce siphoned off to support small elites and a distant empire must have felt some resentment. During the Amarna period, the resentment was sufficient that one "Amurru" kingdom in Syria grew strong enough to unseat the king of Byblos.[113] The pseudo-egalitarian rhetoric of its leaders implies that a level of restiveness was endemic among the populace.[114]

Outside the client-patron system of the cities and their estates there were other groups who functioned in a completely different orbit. The Amarna letters uses the term *ʿapiru* for the unattached groups that act as plunderers and mercenaries,[115] and eventually simply as a negative term meaning "rebel."[116] Other Egyptian texts use the term *Shasu* for pastoral nomads—who were often also mercenaries or plunderers—especially for groups originating from the area of Moab and Edom. So long as Egypt backed the city-states and enforced rule of law, these groups were held at bay and operated in their own sphere, limited to marginal areas and occasional plundering. Though they certainly

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(Bienkowski, "Prosperity and Decline," 60). The selective occurrence of wealth in the cities key for the Egyptian trade network is more evidence that trade was the prime generator of wealth (Ibid.).

[111]Nadav Naʾaman, "Economic Aspects of the Egyptian Occupation of Canaan," *IEJ* 31(1981): 181-84.

[112]Bienkowski, "Prosperity and Decline," 60.

[113]Redford, *Egypt, Canaan and Israel,* 170-2.

[114]See the appeals made by Abdi-Ashirta, the Amurri leader, as reported by Rib-Addi, king of Byblos in EA 74. Point made by Gottwald in *Tribes of Yahweh,* 399-400.

[115]Anson Rainey, "Unruly Elements in Late Bronze Canaanite Society," in *Pomegranates and Golden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish, and Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom* (ed. David Wright, David Noel Freedman and Avi Hurvitz; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 481-96.

[116]Nadav Naʾaman, "Habiru and Hebrews: The Transfer of a Social Term to the Literary Sphere," *JNES* 45 (1986): 275-76.

developed tribal leadership systems,[117] they were forced to steer clear of the major

settlements.

In the post-Amarna period (ca. 1295-1186), starting with Seti I and continuing

with Ramesses II and Merenptah,[118] the Levant came under greater economic and

military pressure. These kings pursued aggressive military policies against northern

powers, and when their initiatives failed, created a permanent occupation in Palestine.[119]

James Weinstein finds more military inscriptions by Seti I, and Ramesses II and III than

from the previous eighteen dynasties combined.[120] Local garrisons of soldiers would have

increased the potential for confrontation but also, and more importantly, the cost of

Egyptian governance.[121] The provinces themselves had to shoulder that cost, increasing

the requirements to produce agricultural surplus. Votive bowls found at Tel Sera in

southern Palestine give a sense of the burden: they record the receipt of 33,500 and

145,000 liters of a commodity—probably grain.[122] The trained hand in which the receipts

are written hints at other kinds of administrative expenses, such as specialized staff.[123]

Whereas in earlier times grain had to be sent to Egypt for only one temple, under

Ramesses III a number of Egyptian temples are recorded receiving Canaanite grain

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[117]Egyptian texts acknowledge leadership among the Shasu but use different terms for them than for the city-state kings (Raphael Giveon, *Les bédouins Shosou des documents égyptiens* [Documenta et Monumenta Orientis Antiqui 18; Leiden: Brill, 1971], 257-58). See note 162 below.

[118]Hopkins, "Pastoralists in LBA Palestine," 203-04.

[119]Hopkins, "Pastoralists in LBA Palestine," 203.

[120]Weinstein, "The Egyptian Empire in Palestine," *BASOR* 241 (1981): 20.

[121]Hopkins, "Pastoralists in LBA Palestine," 204.

[122]Goldwasser, "Hieratic Inscriptions from Tel Seraᶜ," 77-93. The fact that the inscriptions are on bowls suggests that Egyptian temples were used to collect taxes (Ibid., 84). Ramesses III is known to have constructed a temple in Gaza; there is reference to a Ptah temple in Ashkelon and to 12 cities belonging to Amun (Ibid., 84). If the Egyptians ratcheted up tax collection through temples, this would have raised resentment on the part of local dynasts as well as the populace, for it represents an attempt to control the provinces more directly. The religious aspect, too, may have felt oppressive, though it is difficult to know how much the population had already adopted Egyptian religion for themselves, and how much the Egyptians presented such religion in indigenous terms.

[123]Hopkins, "Pastoralists in LBA Palestine," 204.

"offerings."[124]

The thirteenth-century Levant was ill equipped to shoulder this weight. Even at the peak of the Late Bronze age, settled populations were less than half of the maximum settlement of the Middle Bronze era,[125] and they continued to fall throughout LB I and II. Piotr Bienkowski concludes that Egypt's increased demands, coupled with the already weak economies of the Late-Bronze cities, were the key factor pushing the regional economy into a centuries-long decline.[126] In all likelihood, the diminished settlement bears witness to a "nomadization" of the populace: those who could no longer make a living from farming would turn to herding, giving up their permanent homes in the process.[127] The abandonment of settlements, however, worsened the plight of those left behind. As the tax bills were distributed among fewer and fewer people, those who remained faced ever greater pressure to flee.[128]

Sometime during the end of the Late Bronze Age (IIB: 1300-1200) and into Iron I (1200-1000), new settlements begin to emerge that are a study in contrasts with the Egyptian-linked city-states. Whereas the LBA city-states had occupied fertile valleys with good access to trade routes, the new settlements spring up in the highland areas that previously been trafficked only by nomads: they are inaccessible and harder to

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[124]From the time of Tuthmoses III, three cities were required to send grain to the temple of Amun at Karnak, while under Ramesses III more Egyptian temples attest receipt of Canaanite grain (Bienkowski, "Prosperity and Decline," 60).

[125]Gonen, "Urban Canaan in the LBA," 68.

[126]Bienkowski, "Prosperity and Decline," 61.

[127]We do not know whether the population united in a "revolt," as Mendenhall and Gottwald have proposed, or if individuals turned to herding in hopes that it could feed them better than farming had. Hopkins points out that although herds are subject to devastating declines in bad years, they also offer the potential of rapid growth in a way agriculture does not ("Pastoralists in LBA Palestine," 208). The mobility of nomadism also, of course, offered a means of escape from enforced taxation.

[128]Younker, "Emergence of the Ammonites," 202.

cultivate.[129] This includes the Transjordan in particular, which experiences an expansion

of new settlement while settlement in the Cisjordan continues to decline. Though an

individual highland settlement averages a larger footprint than the LBA city, most

contain no monumental structures—no obvious temples or palaces. Instead these

settlements invest all of their building materials and labor into simple living quarters. The

houses are equal in size,[130] with perhaps one of slightly larger dimensions.[131] Whereas an

LBA city might represent a large population living outside the city itself, village walls

here encompass the whole population.[132] Because of this, each site represents a smaller

population than the LBA cities, and there are far more of them: compared to the number

of LBA sites, they look like a "virtual explosion," in Bienkowski's words.[133] Yet in real

time, the settlement process was a gradual one that moved in fits and starts: many of the

settlements were not continuously expanded, but instead used for about a hundred years

and then abandoned.[134]

The features of these settlements express a shift toward values of independence

and egalitarianism. The Iron I towns in northern Moab that Routledge surveys seem to

have been founded and built in one fell swoop rather than developing gradually.[135] It was

intensive work: according to Routledge's estimates it would have taken one hundred

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[129]Tombs in the Baqʿah Valley, a little north of Moab, are used during LB I-IIA—a time when no settlements are nearby—attesting that nomads are using the area (Younker, "Emergence of the Ammonites," 194).

[130]Routledge, *Moab in the Iron Age,* 89.

[131]Ibid., 103.

[132]Walls were typical of the Iron I sites described by Routledge in *Moab in the Iron Age,* namely Kh. Al-Mudayna al-ʿAliya, Kh. Al-Mudayna al-Muʿarradja, Lehun, ʿAraʿir, Abu al-Haraqah, Baluʿa, Kh. Al-Mudayna ala al-Mujib.

[133]Bienkowski, "Beginning of the Iron Age," 6.

[134]Routledge, *Moab in the Iron Age,* 92.

[135]Routledge, *Moab in the Iron Age*, 100-101.

people ninety-six days to build just the outer wall at one such settlement.[136] Such labors,

he argues, manifest a shared ideology, and one that touts the value of cooperating for a

common purpose.

Like the settlements, the pottery profile is devoid of elements that had signified

status in elite LBA contexts. Gone are the foreign and decorated luxury objects. In their

place is pottery that is undecorated, utilitarian, and locally made.[137] All of these features

could express the poverty of the highland inhabitants, and probably do to a large extent.

But the simplicity may also reflect a deliberate rejection of aesthetics and norms that

signified power and prestige associated with city-state rulers emulating their Egyptian

overlords.

The identity of the new highland settlers is, of course, the burning question. Who

were they, and where did they come from? How were they related to Israel and Moab? It

has long been suggested that peasants from the hinterlands of the city-states settled in the

highlands after fleeing situations of forced labor or heavy taxation there.[138] Such refugees

probably did comprise some of the new settlers: those who left the LBA city-states had to

go somewhere. Yet it is increasingly thought that the core contingency of the Iron Age

settlements are the nomadic and semi-nomadic populations—and that it is they who

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[136]Ibid.

[137]Rudolph Dornemann sees a shift at the end of the twelfth century wherein the LBA assemblage is replaced by one with little or no painted decoration and fast wheel throwing is replaced by simpler forms ("The Beginning of the Iron Age in Transjordan," in *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan* 1 [Amman: Department of Antiquities, Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, 1982], 137). He concludes that the twelfth century begins a period of "introverted, parochial culture" in which there is little trade or other outside influence (Ibid., 139). Brown echoes a similar assessment of the Iron I assemblage of the Kerak Plateau ("Ceramics," *Kerak Archaeological Survey*, 193-94, 197).

[138]George Mendenhall, "The Hebrew Conquest of Palestine," *BA* 25 (1962) 66-87; Gottwald, *Tribes of Yahweh,* inter alia.

shape the emergent paradigm of social and political organization.[139]

The groups that Egyptians call Shasu are widely thought to be the forerunners of the Moabites.[140] Not only do those texts refer to the region as "Shasu land" (*t3 š3sw*),[141] but the Baluʿa stele's central figure is also depicted with a headdress that Egyptian artists sometimes use to depict Shasu.[142] Thus we have evidence for Shasu in Moab in the thirteenth or twelfth century. The texts in which Shasu begin to appear frequently date to this period, specifically to the reigns of Seti I (ca. 1290-1279), Ramesses II (1279-1213) and Ramesses III (1182-1151). Shasu, however, is a sociological rather than an ethnic term.[143] Like the ʿapiru (also a sociological designation), the Shasu are characterized as lawless and associated with plundering and mercenarism. Their banditry of trade caravans inspires descriptions as "rebellious, quarrelsome, unfriendly highwaymen" who

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[139]Douglas R. Clark describes the idea that tribal entities were the settlers of the hill country as "a growing consensus ("The Human Investment in Constructing a 'Four-room' House," *Near Eastern Archaeology* 66 [2003]: 35-36). Early proponents include Israel Finkelstein (*The Archaeology of Israelite Settlement* [Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1988], 336-351, esp. 337); Øystein S. LaBianca and Randall W. Younker ("The Kingdoms of Ammon, Moab and Edom: The Archaeology of Society in the Late Bronze/Iron Age Transjordan [ca. 1400-500 BCE]," in *The Archaeology of Society in the Holy Land* [ed. T. Levy; London: Leicester University Press, 1995], 406). In addition to outspoken proponents Bienkowski and van der Steen ("Tribes, Trade, and Towns," 21-47), prominent Moab archaeologists Weippert ("Israelite 'Conquest,'" 32) and Worschech ("Environment and Settlements," 51-52) have also adopted the model.

The idea that "Hebrews" take their name from the ʿapiru/habiru is an old one, but Younker ("Emergence of the Ammonites," 201-06) and van der Steen (*Tribes and Territories,* 272) propose that a version of it is still plausible—i.e. that some segment of Israel either adopted the term or brought it with them. See, however, Naʾaman, "Habiru and Hebrews," 272-73.

[140]Van Zyl, *The Moabites,* 110; J. M. Miller, "Early Monarchy in Moab?" 84; Routledge, *Moab in the Iron Age,* 77-78.

[141]See docs. 6a (Amenhotep III) (pp. 26-27) and 16a (Ramesses II) in Giveon, *Les bédouins Shosou.* A similar, but more general term—"the Shasu region" (ʿn š3sw [+det. "foreign people"]) appears twice in Doc. 36=Pap. Anastasi I, 19, 1-4 (*Les bédouins Shosou,* 125-127). Doc. 16a localizes the groups to places in "Shasu Land" named Seir, Laban, Yahwe and Arbel. Doc 38 (=Pap. Harris I, 76-9-11, Ramesses III) also associates the Shasu with Seir (pp. 135-37). With reason, then, Giveon believes that the Shasu originate in Transjordan (*Les bédouins Shosou,* 235). Though the term "Shasu" is attested as far back as Old Kingdom texts, it comes into common use only in the nineteenth dynasty (William A. Ward, "The Shasu 'Bedouin': Notes on a Recent Publication, *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 15 [1972]: 36-37, 59).

[142]Giveon, *Les bédouins Shosou,* 202-04.

[143]Ward, "The Shasu 'Bedouin,'" 50-56.

are "ignorant of the laws of the palace."[144] W. Helck concludes that, at least in the time of Ramesses II, *Shasu* refers to groups that originate in the Transjordan and are encountered south of the Dead Sea, while the analogous *ʿapiru* are encountered in the north.[145]

Perhaps because the Egyptian texts record military events, Shasu appear most regularly in military contexts.[146] Some Shasu worked as mercenaries—both for Hatti and for Egypt—but usually they appear as the enemy. The reliefs in which they are labeled depict them as prisoners of war.[147] It is this general tendency to avoid or resist prevailing authorities that makes them likely candidates for the founders of the remote highland settlements of the LB-IA transition period. Whereas marginal lands are usually only cultivated in prosperous times when the best lands are all in use, the early Iron Age settlers sought marginal areas while better land near the city-states was available. This suggests that those who settled in the highlands sought these areas *because* of their inaccessibility—that they were willing to put up with more difficult growing conditions because there, at least, they were safe.

Despite the martial contexts in which the Egyptians write of them, what is probably more basic to the term "Shasu" is a set of characteristics most would call "Bedouin." They are nomadic pastoralists; the term *Shasu* itself may derive from an Egyptian root for wandering.[148] One encounter with some Shasu that include Seirites seems to presume that their typical dwellings are tents and their primary wealth their

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[144]William Ward (trans.), "Shasu," *ABD* V:1166, drawing from Giveon (*Les bédouins Shosou*), docs. 36 (Ramesses II, =Pap. Anastasi I, 125-29) and 11 (=Inscription A from the Temple of Seti I, pp. 47-49), respectively.
[145]W. Helck, "Die Bedrohung palästinas durch einwandernde Gruppen am Ende der 18. und am Anfang der 19. Dynastie," *VT* 18 (1968): 479-80.
[146]Ward, "The Shasu 'Bedouin,'" 52.
[147]Van der Steen, *Tribes and Territories*, 21.
[148]Ward, "The Shasu 'Bedouin,'" 56-59, though cautiously.

livestock.[149] Papyrus Anastasi VI 51-61 confirms this picture by showing Shasu groups granted access to water for their flocks at the Temple of Amun.[150] Other archaeological clues also point to a nomadic people as the forerunners of the Iron Age Transjordan groups. Several archaeologists conclude that the plan of the four-room house is a modification of house plans derived from Bedouin tents.[151] Shrines[152] and cave burials[153] in isolated areas also suggest use by nomadic groups. Van der Steen concurs with H. J. Franken's proposal that Deir ʿAlla functioned primarily as a market town.[154] Thus, though its primary inhabitants were those who serviced the trade caravans, they would have offered goods and services to nomadic groups as well. Worschech, who points to about 31 small, but continuously inhabited, sites on the Kerak plateau, says that we need not "presume" that later Moab was founded by nomads—because these sites prove that it was. Such sites could have served as "bases of operation" to nomadic groups and thus allowed them to expand settlement more easily when conditions favored it.[155] Indeed, it is exaggerated to think of nomadic groups as either purely nomadic or purely pastoral. Ethnographers stress that pastoral nomadism is just one of several forms of subsistence

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[149]Giveon, *Les bédouins Shosou*, 261-63. Weippert notes that the Ramesses III text even uses a Semitic loan word (*ꜣw-h-3-î-r3*) for tent, even though an Egyptian word exists, suggesting that this kind of "tent" connoted concepts associated with Asiatic peoples. Weippert connects the Egyptian transliteration to the Semitic root *ꜣhr,* and that in turn to Hebrew *ʾōhel*. (Manfred Weippert, "Semitische Nomaden des zweiten Jahrtausends: Über die *Šꜣśw* der ägyptischen Quellen," 1 Teil, *Biblica* 55 [1974]: 275).

[150]Ward, "The Shasu 'Bedouin,'" 52.

[151]Among them, Finkelstein (*Archaeology of the Israelite Settlement*, 255-57), who combines the work of Aharon Kempinski ("Tel Masos," *Expedition* 20 [1978]: 36), Volkmar Fritz ("Bestimmung und Herkunft des Pfeilerhauses in Israel," *ZDPV* 93 [1977]: 43-44; *Tempel und Zelt* [Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1977], 60-64; "Die Kulturhistorische Bedeutung der früheisenzeitlichen Siedlung auf der Hirbet el-Mšaš und das Problem der Landnahme," *ZDPV* 96 [1980], 125; "The Israelite 'conquest' in the Light of Recent Excavations at Khirbet el-Meshâsh," *BASOR* 241 [1981]: 65, and Ze'ev Herzog (*Beer Sheba II: The Early Iron Age Settlements* [Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University and Ramot Publishing, 1984], 76-77).

[152]Bienkowski's interpretation ("'Tribalism' and 'Segmentary Society,'" 11) of a shrine (site 13) excavated by Michèle Daviau on the Wadi eth-Thamad.

[153]Younker, "Emergence of the Ammonites," 194.

[154]Van der Steen, *Tribes and Territories,* 274, see also 286-87; H. J. Franken, *Excavations at Tell Deir ʿAlla: The Late Bronze Age Sanctuary* (Leuven: Peeters, 1992), 175-76.

[155]Worschech, "Environment and Settlements," 61.

within a survival strategy whose primary principle is flexibility.[156] Groups in this area

have long displayed a mixture of sowing and herding activity, and often do both at once.

Settlement may be seasonal rather than either fully nomadic or fully settled.[157] Thus a

settled family may keep some animals along with tending agricultural lands, but turn to

pastoralism altogether when circumstances change.[158] Or a nomadic family may sow

crops in one area, pasture their animals elsewhere, and then return to the first area to reap

what they had sown.[159] Shifts toward full pastoralism become more likely in times of

political upheaval, for farming requires long-term security of the land, while herding

lends itself to quick flight.

It is hard to know what tipped the mostly nomadic groups to settle. It may be that

the continual defection from the cities put enough pressure on available rangelands that

some turned to farming instead.[160] Younker proposes a political-military catalyst: that a

lull in Egyptian control provided an opening for those who wished to settle down to do so

with less fear of taxation, corvée, or outright military repression. This may have occurred

during the twenty-five years following Merenptah's reign—that is, after 1203, and

especially between 1203-1182.[161] Egypt at this time was ruled by weaker kings and

preoccupied with other affairs. The Sea Peoples arrived in Canaan and invaded Egypt

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[156]Alexander Joffe emphasizes the importance of maintaining the capacity for "rapid downward reorganization in the event of collapse" (*Settlement and Society in the Early Bronze I and II Southern Levant: Complementarity and Contradiction in a Small-Scale Complex Society* [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993], 59). See also discussion in Van der Steen, *Tribes and Territories,* 260-62.

[157]Dearman, "Settlement Patterns," 73.

[158]Philip C. Salzman points to ethnographic observations of Sinai Bedouin in the 1970's as an example. The formerly nomadic families continued to keep flocks and vegetable gardens that operated at a loss, even though their cash income derived from wage labor. He interprets these actions as maintaining a "backup plan": keeping traditional forms of subsistence that could be expanded in the event that wage options should fail (Salzman, "Introduction: Processes of Sedentarization as Adaptation and Response" in *When Nomads Settle: Processes of Sedentarization as Adaptation and Response* (ed. Philip C. Salzman; New York: Praeger, 1980), 7.

[159]Hopkins, "Pastoralists in LBA Palestine," 205.

[160]Hopkins, "Pastoralists in LBA Palestine," 210; Younker, "Emergence of the Ammonites," 203.

[161]Younker, "Emergence of the Ammonites," 203, Redford, *Egypt, Canaan and Israel,* 249.

itself in 1197. Already it was becoming more trouble than it was worth to control the Levant: agriculture had been pushed beyond the point of profitability, and less stability meant more disruption of trade routes. Sometime before the reign of Ramesses III, Egypt withdrew its forces from Canaan, leaving the city-state kings to fend for themselves.[162] Though the highlanders may well have had the strength to defeat the city-state armies by then,[163] that they did not do so immediately is probably due to their correct belief that the Egyptians would return to seek reprisal.[164]

What makes the Shasu so compelling as a possible precursor to Moab (and perhaps Israel as well) is that, in contrast to the city-state rulers, their tribal structure looks more like what we see in later Israel and Moab. Egyptian texts describe the Shasu as organized into clans (*mhwt*),[165] and call their leaders "chiefs" (ꜥꜣ) rather than "great ones" (*wr*), as the leaders of Aram and Hatti were called.[166] Some texts acknowledge the variety of specific groups that fall under the label "Shasu" in listing them by name; it is here that we have our first attestations of Seirites.

When we say the Shasu are "tribal," we refer to affiliation of groups according to real and fictive kinship, the importance of claimed descent from a shared ancestor, and the assertion of land rights and political power on these bases. Social relationships are organized and power distributed quite differently in tribes from either the Canaanite city-

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[162]Younker, "Emergence of the Ammonites," 203.
[163]Ibid., 204.
[164]Ibid.
[165]Giveon, *Les bédouins Shosou,* 255-57.
[166]Shasu leaders are called ꜥꜣ, while Hittite and Amorite ones are denoted *wr* (king) within the same documents (Giveon, *Les bédouins Shosou,* docs. 11 and 14, pp. 257-58).

states or Egyptian nomes so central to LBA urban life.[167] Indeed, that contrast is probably

what made the groups noteworthy to the Egyptians who used distinct terminology to

describe their social organization, leadership, and way of life.

Alexander Joffe points out that tribalism shows such persistent presence in the

Levant because it is so well suited to the topography and climate conditions.[168] The

extreme variability of terrain creates a corresponding variability in microclimates: one

region may suffer drought while another, very nearby, has rain. Individually, it is

advantageous to have kin in a different region to whom the family can turn in times of

trouble. As a group, it bodes well for long-term survival to distribute members of a clan

or tribe over a variety of places. In addition to creating a safety net, the distribution also

creates a natural regional trade network: if a certain fruit or animal thrives in one area,

one segment might specialize in producing that and trade with kin in another area who

produce something well-adapted to *their* ecosystem.

Tribal structure is also adaptive in its ability to flex with changing political

configurations and needs.[169] Genealogies can both be invoked to demand loyalty, and be

restructured to describe loyalties that have shifted. With their multiple levels of vertical

and horizontal relationship, they can be made to expand or contract to express degrees of

authority, obligation, and relationship. For example, a genealogy may add a brother or

wife to reflect a new alliance; or it may omit or reconstrue the relationships of family

members with whom there is strife. Just as importantly, new levels of affiliation can be

created. Several clans may ally to form a new tribe, and several tribes to form—

temporarily or permanently—a new nation.

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[167]Joffe, *Settlement and Society,* 60-61.
[168]Ibid., 59-60; Younker, "Emergence of the Ammonites," 190.
[169]LaBianca, "Salient Features," 20-21.

Tribal structure is amply attested for Israel in biblical texts both early and late: ancestor stories describe Israel's beginnings, and genealogies define the participants of the founding exodus event and of "official" tribal land claims.[170] At the same time, the genealogies delineate levels of status and special functions, such as priestly and levitical privileges. Tribal affiliations play major roles in the calls to arms in Judges, the struggle for monarchy between the houses of David and Saul, the definition of "Israel" in post-exilic Yehud, and many struggles in between. No parallel text for Moab exists, but what sources we have suggest that Israel's tribal organization is not a bad analogy for understanding Moab's social structure. The Bible presumes that Moab is one of the neighboring groups to whom Israel was related through kinship. Genesis 19 depicts Moab not as a place, but as the child from whom future Moabites derive.

The Mesha Inscription (MI) also conveys that tribal and local identity remained important despite the assertion of a Moabite nation. The inscription uses a mixture of national and tribal labels. Mesha opens by identifying himself as both "king of Moab," and "the Dibonite" (Ll. 1-2).[171] He leads 200 men "from Moab" to take Yahaṣ (L. 20), but annexes it "to Dibon" rather than "to Moab." When he (re?)builds Beser, the 50 men he uses are again "from Dibon" (Ll 27-28). Eveline J. van der Steen and Klaas A. D. Smelik argue that Dibon is Mesha's tribal identity rather than his capital.[172] His

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[170]For discussion of the enduring kin-based character of Israel, see Yigal Levin, "Understanding Biblical Genealogies," *Currents in Research* 9 (2001): 11-46, esp. 32-33 and Shunya Bendor, *The Social Structure in Ancient Israel: The Institution of the Family (Beit ʾAb) From the Settlement to the End of the Monarchy* [Jerusalem Biblical Studies 7; Jerusalem: Simor Ltd., 1996], esp. 108-15).

[171]All transliteration and reconstructions of the MI taken from Kent P. Jackson, "The Language of the Mesha Inscription," in *Studies in the Mesha Inscription and Moab* (ed. Andrew Dearman; ASOR/SBL Archaeology and Biblical Studies 2; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 97.

[172]Van der Steen and Smelik, "King Mesha and the Tribe of Dibon," *JSOT* 32 (2007): 139-62.

Mesha calls the town Qarḥoh, and excavations suggest it was not much of a town before Mesha's time. His boast that "all Dibon was obedient" implies the loyalty of a people, though of course it is possible that he intends the place name as a metonym for its people.

statements about Dibon could as or more easily apply to people than to a place, especially the boast that "all Dibon was obedient" (L. 28). As for his capital city, he himself calls it *Qarḥoh* (Ll. 21, 24, 25). Thus, they reason, the town Dibon either lay elsewhere or was named as such afterward because Mesha "the Dibonite" had made it famous. Tribal identities are also important in the description of ᶜAtarot. There Mesha does not recount replacing Israelites with Moabites but rather removing "Gadites" and settling there "Men of Sharon" and "Men of Maharith" (Ll. 11-14). Though Mesha does use the national labels—and does so especially in parallel with "Israel" so that Moab might be seen as its peer—the lower-order, tribal identities clearly remain important and meaningful to Mesha and his constituents. [173]

## Implications of the Emergence Pattern

The environment and paradigms of social organization out of which Israel and Moab grew have profound implications for how the biblical texts should be understood. First, Israel and Moab emerge out of the same, pan-Levantine transformation. They differ in precise timing and pace of development due to factors such as terrain and proximity to Egypt and the main city-states, but the archaeological picture looks very similar on both sides of the Dead Sea. Both Cis- and Transjordan show the same pattern of small, highland settlements. Both contain the characteristic "collar-rim jars" and "four-room houses," once considered hallmarks of uniquely "Israelite" culture.[174] In fact, the best-

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[173]Dearman, "Settlement Patterns," 73.
[174]James A. Sauer, describing a find by E. Olávarri at Kh. el-Medeiyineh, says it is comparable to exemplars in Ai, Bethel, and elsewhere in Palestine ("Iron I Pillared House in Moab," *BA* 42 [1979]: 9). J. M. Miller reports similar findings 5 km south of here ("Renewed Interest," 224-25); Routledge reports that 20 out of 22 houses at a given site had the same basic "pillared house" layout (*Moab in the Iron Age,* 101).

preserved example of the latter is located in the area between later Ammon and Moab.[175]

Some regional variations do occur,[176] but the basic forms are the same.[177] Second, this is

an indigenous process. No markedly new forms or styles of decoration herald the arrival

of craftspeople from outside,[178] as happens where Sea Peoples enter the scene.[179] Nor do

we find destruction layers in those sites occupied in both Late Bronze and Early Iron to

suggest an outside conquest.[180] What are "new" in the IA are not the people themselves,

but the coalitions and identities that extant groups forge, and the fact that previously

dispossessed groups become, for the first time, the region's power players.

This picture corrects some distortions in the biblical accounts of origins. Genesis

portrays the ancestors of both Israel and Moab as arriving in Canaan from elsewhere. The

exodus-conquest narratives take this notion even farther, proposing that Israel arrives as a

fully formed people and displaces the culturally unrelated Canaanite groups. Though both

groups may have arisen from a non-urban segment of the population, the culture and

people out of which they grow is Canaanite. It is the Genesis narrative of Abraham and

Lot's relatedness that rings truest: whether or not Moab and Israel spring historically from

the same family is impossible to know, but the story is accurate in implying that Moab

and Israel are closely related peoples—culturally, and perhaps biologically as well.

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[175]From Field B At Tall al-ʿUmeiri, south of Amman. It is dated to the thirteen or early-twelfth century (Clark, "Human Investment," 36).

[176]Bienkowski stresses the intra-regional variations, interpreting them as evidence of distinct tribal traditions ("'Tribalism' and 'Segmentary Society,'" 11).

[177]Dornemann, "Beginning of the IA in Transjordan," 135. The similarities are especially marked between Transjordan and Palestine's hill country and prior to the eighth century (Dornemann, *Archaeology of Transjordan,* 170). In general the forms that are shared are those that lack the influence of either Syria (more prevalent in Transjordan) or Philistia (felt first in Cisjordan, and more in the urban areas). See Ibid., 166-175 and Brown, "Ceramics," *Kerak Archaeological Survey,* 193, 197.

[178]Younker, "Emergence of the Ammonites," 206.

[179]See e.g. Lawrence Stager, "The Impact of the Sea Peoples in Canaan (1185-1050 B.C.E.)," in *The Archaeology of Society in the Holy Land* (ed. T. Levy; London: Leicester University Press, 1995), 334-48.

[180]Gregor, "Sociopolitical Structure," 95-96.

The ascendance of kin-based social structures also has significant implications. If we are correct in supposing that the biblical texts describe a social structure analogous to that of Moab, then we have an example demonstrating that statehood does not necessarily displace tribal affiliations, but rather builds upon them.[181] Yet national identities are often in tension with other levels of affiliation. Though nation-level alliance is powerful because it can encompass a broad range of constituents, it is also the most distant and loosely held kind of identity. Most people live their day-to-day lives in function of their roles in a *bêt ʿāb* or a *mišpaḥâ*; the tribal and national identities mostly lie dormant except in times of crisis. The book of Judges, where tribes function as independent entities until they need to rally to confront a common enemy, probably illustrates very well the way such identity functioned. Because it is held more loosely, the superordinate level of affiliation was probably the most fluid, especially before permanent central monarchies were established. Biblical genealogies demonstrate that groups did, in fact, change national affiliations: those in Chronicles incorporate once distant groups such as Qenizzites, Calebites, and Jerahmeelites into the lineage of Judah, while also drawing closer relationships to Horites, Seirites, Edomites and Midianites through genealogical shifts at lower levels.[182] Though we lack comparable literary sources for Moab, it seems quite plausible that clans in the *mišor* alternated in being classified as "Moabite," "Israelite" or "Ammonite" depending on the prevailing political conditions. That national identity was but one—and the least important level—of individual identity complicates

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[181]e. g. Younker, "Moabite Social Structure," 246; Gregor, "Sociopolitical Structure," 216.

[182]Knoppers, "Intermarriage, Social Complexity, and Ethnic Diversity," 23-28, esp. 26-27; Juan Manuel Tebes, "'You Shall Not Abhor an Edomite, for He is Your Brother': The Tradition of Esau and the Edomite Genealogies from an Anthropological Perspective," *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 6 (2006): 13-16; Saul Olyan, *Rites and Rank: Hierarchy in Biblical Representations of Cult* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 73.

enormously the question of who is "Moabite" and who "Israelite."

The ways in which tribal groups control territory also complicates the classification of peoples by a national label. Distribution of tribal clans across a variety of microclimes produces a network of holdings rather than a solid block.[183] As the MI witnesses, that network could easily overlap the network of another group. Mesha describes the Gadites as a group that had dwelt in the *mišor* "*beʿolam.*" He sees them as affiliates of Israel, even while he acknowledges that they had lived for all that time in land he considers Moab, side-by-side with "Moabite" groups. In a similar manner, Numbers 25 may bear witness to a tradition about a shrine that Israelites and Moabites shared at Peor.[184] Though the biblical authors condemn such close relationships, they may be showing us, in the shared feasts, marriages, and worship they depict (see Chapter 2), a window into mechanisms that neighboring groups of different affiliations used to keep the peace between them.

The pastoral-agricultural mix of tribal occupations further complicates the definition of boundaries. Rangelands and farmlands can overlap in mutually beneficial ways: farmers sometimes allow grazing on fallow farmlands, which fertilizes it for future years. Nomadic groups might have dry and rainy-season territories, between which they presume the right to move freely. These examples illustrate that "boundaries" should not be thought of as solid lines, but rather as porous and highly variable entities, through

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[183]In fact, anthropologists Robert A. LeVine and Donald T. Campbell describe a "mosaic" pattern, in which distinct ethnic groups occupy interpenetrating areas, as very common, perhaps even normative. They speak not just of Palestine, but of a number of areas (especially in Asia) where distinctive cultures are found in close proximity (*Ethnocentrism: Theories of Conflict, Ethnic Attitudes and Group Behavior* [New York: Wiley, 1972], 85-86).

[184]J. Maxwell Miller, "Moab and the Moabites," in *Studies in the Mesha Inscription and Moab,* (ed. Andrew Dearman; ASOR/SBL Archaeology and Biblical Studies 2; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 19.

outside the orbit of the city.[187] National cultures do develop: Michèle Daviau believes

that there is enough distinction between Ammonite and Moabite material culture in Iron

II to distinguish a border at the Wadi ath-Thamad.[188]  But even toward the end of the Iron

Age, when Moab becomes more urbanized and stratified,[189] the bifurcation between

urban and rural, elite and non-elite never occurs to the same degree that it had in the

LBA, and certainly not to the extent of contemporary Mesopotamian or Egyptian society.

That kinship structures could thus remain important, even in the presence of state

bureaucracies, means that they could also be reactivated in force when those state

structures disappeared. Thus it happens that during the Persian period the genealogy takes

on unprecedented importance for determining community belonging.

It should be evident by now that the importance of kinship structures, their

inherent malleability, and the porousness of ancient boundaries combine to complicate

the ability to define who precisely was "Moabite" or "Israelite," especially in the

Transjordan. Though the ancient people themselves would certainly have had a clearer

notion of this identity than we do, the labels are probably artificially imposed or wrongly

placed in many cases. Modern readers would do well to remember that there is a certain

degree of arbitrariness in national labels, and these may mislead us into thinking that we

understand who people are and how they understand themselves based on where they

live.

## State Formation in Israel and Moab: Who Gets There First?

[187]LaBianca, "Salient Features," 21.
[188]See P. M. Michèle Daviau, "Moab's Northern Border: Khirbat al-Mudayna on the Wadi ath-Thamad," *BA* 60 (1997): 225-27. Followed by Herr and Najjar, "The Iron Age," 338.
[189]Routledge points to the emergence of elite burials in sixth-to-fifth-century century Transjordan as evidence of increased stratification (*Moab in the Iron Age,* 208).

Though Moab developed into a state later than biblical texts imply, so too did Israel. Who gets there first? Could there be anything to the notion that Moab had had state-based power earlier and wielded it over Israel? Moab did have certain advantages: it lay farther from the taxation and corvée systems of the city-states and farther from the areas most accessible to Egyptian armies and administrators. Younker believes that this peripherality, combined with its naturally forbidding terrain, would have made the Transjordan a more likely refuge for Shasu and others fleeing the city-state corvée system, and thus given it a head start in development.[190] Indeed, the upsurge in settlement does seem to occur a little earlier in Transjordan than in Canaan.[191] At the same time, however, we still lack evidence that these scattered settlements translate to a political unity. Apart from the reference to *mw-i-b,* which, as we have noted above, should be understood as a geographical designation, Moab does not appear in extrabiblical sources until the Mesha Stele.

Israel is a different story. Canaan's exposure to military assault from the East made it more vulnerable, but it also provided a more powerful impetus for the highland groups to organize for battle. It is Israel, not Moab, that is attested by Merenptah as a recognized group in the thirteenth century. Denoted as a "people" rather than a landed group, it is nevertheless strong enough to draw forth the Egyptian army and, despite Merenptah's boast of destroying "his seed," was apparently strong enough to recover and reestablish itself. Many scholars believe that the arrival of the Sea Peoples—whose arrival correlates with Egyptian withdrawal from Canaan[192]—provided the decisive

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[190]Younker, "Emergence of the Ammonites," 205.
[191]Gregor, "Sociopolitical Structure," 82.
[192]It is now clear that the Sea Peoples arrived as immigrants, bringing women, children, and oxcarts (Redford, *Egypt, Canaan and Israel,* 255) They were also, however, capable soldiers, bringing with

impetus for tipping the Israelite tribes toward a permanent alliance. It is an idea that

reconciles the archaeological record nicely with biblical memories of Israelite monarchy,

under Saul and David, emerging in the midst of battles with Philistines. Though Israel's

early monarchy is probably less developed than what modern readers tend to conjure,

Israel does seem to establish the beginnings of a state in the tenth or early-ninth century

when Moab as yet remains uncentralized.[193] It is not until the reign of the Omrides,

however, that Israel comes into its own. In fact, some believe that Israel's conquest of

Moab provides the impetus for its disparate groups to unite in opposition.[194] It is ironic

that the Bible features Moab as an early-developed monarchy, oppressing the still-tribal

Israelites, for the historical picture suggests that the roles were, in reality, completely

reversed.

There may yet be some historical kernel to the stories about Moab and Israel prior

to the Omrides, but the political structures they depict are likely to be anachronistic. They

may remember local struggles, involving particular segments or chieftains of each group,

but not a conquest of "Israel" by "Moab," or vice versa. Solomon's marriage of a Moabite

princess and supposed building of a Kemosh shrine in Jerusalem seems to be an

exegetical creation rather than a description of a historical situation, though alliances with

Moab are not unrealistic. It is not impossible that Judah could have formed an alliance

with a tribal group in Moab (indeed, see 1 Sam 22:3-4). We need only remember that

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them weapons that benefited from superior metallurgical technologies (Ibid., 247). Though there were several waves of immigration, the decisive victories of the Sea Peoples in the Levant occurred during the reign of Ramesses III (in 1172, 1175 and 1179). At this time they not only fought with Egypt, but also destroyed the seats of several Near Eastern powers; Hattusas, Tarsus, Enkomi (on Cyprus), Alalakh and Ugarit all fell to the onslaught (Ibid., 255).

[193]See John S. Holladay, Jr. "The Kingdoms of Israel and Judah: Political and Economic Centralization in the Iron IIA-B (ca. 1000-750 BCE)," *The Archaeology of Society in the Holy Land* (ed. Thomas E. Levy; New Approaches in Anthropological Archaeology; London: Leicester University Press, 1995), 371-72; Finkelstein, "State Formation," 35-44.

[194]Bienkowski, "Beginning of the Iron Age," 8; Knauf, "Cultural Impact," 49.

groups like the Qedarites, Midianites and Arabians, who never fully sedentarized, nevertheless developed powerful kingdoms, complete with "kings" and "queens" and armies that even Assyria found difficult to defeat. Why should it not behoove either Israel or Judah to have the cooperation of its Transjordan neighbor, whether to access its trade route, to serve as a refuge from the powerful Arameans in the north, to form cooperative agreements for sharing of rangeland, or to extract resources?

## Mesha as the Beginning of Statehood in Moab

The first solid evidence of statehood in Moab is that of the Mesha Stele, which dates to the mid-ninth century. By this time, the relative prominence of Israel and Moab is overwhelmingly clear: Israel and Aram are the only territorial states and Israel is the weaker of these by far.[195] Moab and Judah[196] are among the smaller, less powerful, and more loosely organized groups subjected to their rule (Israel conquering the *mišor* around 880[197]). Here the biblical account is accurate: 2 Kings 3 depicts Israel as the primary power, while Judah and Moab are merely its vassals. Extrabiblical sources show the differential most clearly. Israel appears in Assyrian records over a century earlier than Moab. Omri is a minor king in the biblical narrative, but Assyrian kings refer to *bit Humri* more often than to Israel. It is Omri, not David, that Mesha's stele remembers as the first Israelite king to conquer Moab (Ll. 4-5). Omri's son "Ahab of Israel" is named

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[195]Finkelstein, "State Formation," 35-52; Pitard, *Ancient Damascus*, 99. The prominence of Aram is evident from a survey of the ninth-century Assyrian texts, where Damascus/Aram appears frequently as the leader of a coalition of kings opposing Assyria. Israel, on the other hand, appears only a few times, and always as a secondary party.

[196]The biblical memory of David conquering all of Transjordan and southern Syria does not fit with the archaeological picture of Jerusalem as a small, locally oriented site (Israel Finkelstein, "The Rise of Jerusalem and Judah: The Missing Link," *Levant* 33 [2001]: 105-15). We need not doubt the historical basis of "the house of David" or even its origin in the tenth century, but biblical claims about its power, extent, and complexity are exaggerated (Routledge, *Moab in the Iron Age,* 137).

[197]Routledge, *Moab in the Iron Age,* 137.

among Aram's opponents in the 853 battle of Karkar against Shalmaneser III, where he is credited with an army of 2,000 chariots and 10,000 infantry.[198] Israel was sometimes Aram's ally and sometimes its opponent, but its standing it attested by a relationship with this regional power. Under Hazael, Damascus would emerge as a regional empire and hold off six different Assyrian campaigns between 853 and 838,[199] some with Israel's help. Moab, by contrast, does not appear in Assyrian records until around 732, and then not as a formidable foe, but as a minor vassal bringing tribute to Tiglath-Pileser III.[200]

When exactly Mesha rebelled is unclear, but what we know is that the general context is one in which far larger powers are jockeying for control of the entire Levant. Both Israel and Aram sought to control the Transjordan, while Assyria was asserting its own ambitions to push farther south in the Levant. Israel's interests in Moab were probably economic. The MI implies that Madeba was one of the first cities conquered, since it was taken by Omri, and not his "son" (MI, Ll. 7-8). The priority of taking a town with a long history as a trade crossroads,[201] combined with Omri's alliance with the royal house of Tyre through Ahab and Jezebel's marriage,[202] suggests that conquest of Moab was part of a broader strategy to maximize Israel's trade position. In a private communication, John Holladay suggests that the wool taken from Moab as tribute was

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[198]K. Lawson Younger, Jr., trans., "Kurkh Monolith (2.113A)," in *The Context of Scripture: Monumental Inscriptions from the Biblical World, Vol. II* (ed. William Hallo; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 261-64.

[199]Routledge, *Moab in the Iron Age*, 137.

[200]Nimrud tablet preserving a building inscription. rev. lines 56-63, §801 (*ARAB* I, 287-88). Also in James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (3d ed.; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 282 (henceforth *ANET*).

[201]Andrew Dearman, "Historical Reconstruction and the Meshaᶜ Inscription," in *Studies in the Mesha Inscription and Moab* (ed. Andrew Dearman; ASOR/SBL Archaeology and Biblical Studies 2; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 174. For continuous use from LBA through Iron II, see Herr and Najjar, "The Iron Age," 323-25, 330, 332.

[202]As Mark S. Smith argues, the Baal worship decried by the texts served to forge closer relations with Tyre, no doubt in service to goals that were primarily economic and political in nature (*The Early History of God,* [New York: Harper & Row, 1990], 44-5).

intended for Tyre's famous red-purple dye industry.[203] At the same time, Aram's own commercial interests probably lie in the fact that trade passing north from Madeba was headed to Damascus.[204] In conquering the Transjordan, Aram would have been able to control the route more fully, as well as gain a retreat zone from approaching Assyrians.

There are several clues to isolate an exact date for Mesha's revolt, though none is conclusive. Mesha claims that it occurred during the reign of one of Omri's "sons" (Ll. 6-7), which would place it during the reign of either his son (Ahab) or grandson (Ahaziah or Jehoram), and before the accession of Jehu, a non-Omride, in 839. Because it succeeded, and because Mesha boasts a fighting force of only 200 men (L. 20), the revolt probably occurred during a time of Israelite weakness, which would seem to rule out the militarily-strong reign of Ahab,[205] and thus place it after 854. The brief and weak rule of Ahaziah (between 854 and 853 or 852) is a likely time[206] and would echo the assertion of 2 Kgs 1:1 that Mesha began to rebel upon Ahab's death. It may be the case, however, that Ahaziah was unable to respond during his limited monarchy and that it was thus Jehoram who responded militarily (and unsuccessfully) to crush the revolt, as 2 Kings 3 claims.[207] Given the unreliability of 2 Kings 3 as a historical source,[208] however, we can only say that the revolt occurred between 854 and 839.

[203]Holladay adds that raw wool is reasonably valuable in itself—worth about 10 times the price of barley, by weight. Phoenician purple wool, however, fetches a price-per-weight unit somewhere between that of silver and gold! He also adds that the Phoenicians were ill positioned to produce the wool themselves, while sheep were something for which both Israel and Moab had good pasturage. E-mail communication, April 18, 2012.

[204]Van Zyl, *The Moabites,* 159.

[205]Klaas A. D. Smelik, "King Mesha's Inscription: Between History and Fiction," *Converting the Past: Studies in Ancient Israelite and Moabite Historiography* (ed. A. S. van der Woude; OtSt 28; Leiden: Brill, 1992), 81.

[206]Miller and Hayes, *History of Ancient Israel and Judah,* 320.

[207]Ibid. See also Winfried Thiel ("Ahaziah," *ABD* I:108) for a discussion of Moab's revolt as a cumulative process.

[208]See John Bartlett, "The 'United' Campaign against Moab in 2 Kings 3:4-27" in *Midian, Moab and Edom: The History and Archaeology of Late Bronze and Iron Age Jordan and North-West Arabia* (ed. John F. A. Sawyer and David J. A. Clines; JSOTSup 24; Sheffield, Eng.: JSOT Press, 1983), 139-42.

Though it has traditionally been assumed that Mesha gained independence for a Moabite state that already existed, both archaeological remains and a close reading of the MI suggest that statehood for Moab, in any modern sense, was a new phenomenon in Mesha's time, or that Mesha was the first to found a Moabite state at all.[209] Settlement density and specific structures do not begin to approach those associated with long-term, permanent settlements and more centralized organization until the time of Mesha *at earliest.* Though Mesha calls himself "son of Kemosh[yat], king of Moab," there does not seem to have been much to the "Moab" of Mesha's father. Mesha himself says that he "built" (*bnh*) Qarḥoh, his capital, and though *bnh* can mean "rebuilt," the details of the projects argue for the more literal meaning. He builds, rather than inheriting, a palace in Qarḥoh. There are no provisions for basic water storage, much less a siege, for he must tell the people[210]: "make yourselves each a cistern in his house" (Ll. 24-25). He orders ditches to be dug and a reservoir built for "the spring inside the city" (Ll 23-24). Mesha's construction of a reservoir for water at Baᶜal Meᶜon (L. 9) implies that it, too, is not an already-established urban site. Furthermore, Qarḥoh had apparently contained no shrine for Kemosh, for the MI itself is a dedicatory text for a *bamah.* In it, Mesha recounts having dragged his sacrifices before the god in Qiryat (L. 13).

It is possible, of course, that an older Moabite capital had existed—that what is new is the city of Qarḥoh *as* a capital. But it seems strange that if a central city already existed, Mesha would not have appropriated it. His father, too, would have been Dibonite

[209]The conclusion of J. M. Miller, "Early Monarchy in Moab?" 77-91; Bienkowski, "Beginning of the Iron Age," 8; Routledge, *Moab in the Iron Age,* inter alia.
[210]Most scholars refer to Qarḥoh as Dibon's "royal quarter," but van der Steen and Smelik propose that Qarḥoh is the name of the city itself and Dibon the name of Mesha's tribe, for which the city is later renamed ("King Mesha and the Tribe of Dibon," 139-62).

and the proximity to constituents would have dictated that he could not have had a base of operations far away. One might also posit that a Moabite kingdom could have existed under a different, competing king. But if there were such a king, one would expect that Mesha would either brag of besting him or that such a king would appear in an Israelite account.

The fact that Mesha designates groups by tribal and local identities rather than appealing to them as "Moabites" also argues that national consciousness is still in its infancy.[211] He annexes Jahaz not to Moab but to "Dibon." Miller takes this fact to mean that Mesha's Moab is nothing more than a city-state.[212] If Moab is not yet a state at the time of the stele's writing, then the monument takes on different meaning: it is not just a *re*-enforcement of state power, but an assertion of it—an *argument* to redefine Moab as more than a region and its people as a unified group.[213] The stele's physical form, for example, proclaims Mesha's similarity to other kings who erect royal stelae. For all who could not read, it nevertheless says, "Here is the monument of a king!"[214] Those who could read would see rhetoric that repeatedly positions Mesha's deeds opposite those of Omri or "his son," encouraging the view that Mesha is their peer or even their better. Whereas the Omrides "oppressed Moab for many days," Mesha "prevailed over him and over his house" (L. 7). Whereas during the time of the Israelite kings, "Kemosh was angry with his land," under Mesha Kemosh is actively present—"deliver[ing] me from all the kings and let[ting] me prevail over all my enemies" (L. 4). It is Mesha whom Kemosh

[211]Routledge, *Moab in the Iron Age,* 150. Previously also pointed out in Dearman, "Settlement Patterns," 73.
[212]J. M. Miller, "Early Monarchy in Moab?" 86.
[213]Routledge, *Moab in the Iron Age,* 140.
[214]Ibid., 141, 155.

apparently chooses as his agent: once Mesha offers "satiation"[215] (רית) to the deity (L. 12), he speaks directly to the king, signaling his chosenness by first commanding him to take Nebo (L. 14), and then driving the king of Israel "out before me" to take Jahaz (L. 19).

Functionally, Mesha does create a Moabite state. He builds a road across the Arnon, facilitating a unity between groups north and south of the Arnon canyon. That some of the towns he claims became "Dibonite" for the first time is implied in lines 28-29 of the MI where he states that he "ruled" or "became king" (מלכתי) "[over the] hundreds in the towns which I added to the country." Apparently those towns had previously either been independent, belonged to Israel, or been ruled by southern chieftains. This would be especially true of Horonaim, which, if the identification with el-Kerak is correct as most scholars think, lies well south of Mesha's other conquests. Routledge tentatively suggests that he had expanded southward farther still,[216] but most scholars are not convinced.[217] Furthermore, there is *some* level of national consciousness: Mesha appeals to a broader set of identifications in sacrificing the people of Atarot "for Kemosh and for Moab" (L. 12).

Yet Mesha's achievements must also be put into proper perspective. Descriptions

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[215]Jackson's translation, "Language of the MI," 97.

[216]Based on the grammatical structure in the foregoing text, the bottom of the inscription—precisely the part that is missing—would be expected to report further conquests and building projects south of the Arnon (Routledge, *Moab in the Iron Age,* 141-43).

[217]Van der Steen and Smelik, "King Mesha and the Tribe of Dibon," 140-41. Note that reports from the first Europeans who saw the MI before it was destroyed said that it was either 34 (F. A. Klein, "The Original Discovery of the Moabite Stone," *Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly Supplement* [1870]: 282) or 33 (H. Peterman, "Über die Auffindung der Moabitischen Inschrift des Königs Mesa," *ZDMG* 24 [1870]: 640) lines in length—about the same length as the reconstructed stele, or perhaps one line longer, although even the lacunae of the reconstructed text could contain information about further southern conquests. (For a discussion of the discovery and reconstruction of the MI see M. Patrick Graham, "The Discovery and Reconstruction of the Mesha͑ Inscription," in *Studies in the Mesha Inscription and Moab* [ed. Andrew Dearman; ASOR/SBL Archaeology and Biblical Studies 2; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989], 41-92.)

of activities in the Transjordan in the years following Mesha's revolt make no mention of

Moab. On the contrary, they imply that the Transjordan is controlled either by Israel or

by Damascus, between whom the region seems to have changed hands repeatedly.

Hazael, who ruled Damascus from about 842-806, is said to take from Jehu "all the land

of Gilead, the Gadites, and the Reubenites, and the Manassites from Aroer, which is by

the valley of the Arnon, that is, Gilead and Bashan" (2 Kgs 10:33). That statement

implies not only that Hazael controlled Mesha's region but that before he took it Jehu had

recaptured it for Israel. The Assyrians, having weakened but not toppled Hazael,

withdrew from the Levant and were mostly absent between 838 and 808. This left Hazael

to rule an empire that included Israel, Judah, and Philistia, probably Moab as well. When

Hazael finally died (806), and Damascus had become an Assyrian province (802 or 796),

it was Israel that rebounded. Jeroboam II (788-748[218]) "restored Israel's borders" (2 Kgs

14:25) by taking back much of what the Arameans had taken—including the territories of

the Transjordanian tribes (1 Chr 5:17). But this territory, as Mesha attests, was also

claimed by Moabites. The surviving reports cannot tell us what conquest actually looked

like. It may be that such victories were nominal—unenforceable on the ground—or that

Moab kept a degree of autonomy by cutting a treaty with the ascendant power. But it is

clear even when Moab asserts independence as a state that independence is always

qualified by the superior power of others—whether Israel, Aram, or Assyria.


# Moab after Mesha: The Assyrian Period

It is not clear what progression statehood took in the years following Mesha's

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[218]Miller and Hayes, *History of Ancient Israel and Judah,* 352.

revolt, but Moab's fortunes seem to correlate with Assyrian strength in the Levant, in part

because Assyria checked the power of Moab's enemies.[219] Damascus was finally

subjected to tribute in 802,[220] and was much weakened in the process. In 732, it was

reduced to an Assyrian province.[221] Most of Israel had suffered the same fate by 733,

when the Transjordan was turned into the province of Galʿazu.[222] It is around 733 that

Moab is finally autonomous enough to offer tribute in its own right,[223] though at this

point Tiglath-Pileser still refers to "the land of the Moabites" rather than to a country

called Moab.[224] Both Isaiah 15 and Jeremiah 48 presuppose that key cities in the northern

*mišor* like Nebo, Madeba, and Heshbon belong to Moab in the eighth and late-seventh to

early-sixth centuries. That situation might, however, capture a brief interlude of Moabite

expansion, if Daviau is correct in seeing the Wadi ath-Thamad as the more usual

Ammonite-Moabite border during Iron II.[225] Her proposal would mean that Ammon

rather than Moab would have controlled Heshbon, Madeba, Atarot, and Nebo for much of

the period.[226]

Even if Moab loses control over some of the *mišor* in the Assyrian period, it is

then—particularly toward the end of Assyrian rule—that the archaeological picture looks

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[219]MacDonald, *Ammon, Moab and Edom*, 18; Ephraim Stern, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible, Volume II: The Assyrian, Babylonian, and Persian Periods (732-332 B. C. E.)* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 237.

[220]Edward Davis Grohman, "A History of Moab" (Ph.D. diss., The Johns Hopkins University, 1958), 204.

[221] MacDonald, *Ammon, Moab and Edom,* 18.

[222]Grohman, "History of Moab," 209.

[223]K 3751, mentioned above (§801 in *ARAB* I, 287-88 and *ANET,* 282).

[224]Van Zyl, *The Moabites,* 46.

[225]Daviau, "Moab's Northern Border," 225-27.

[226]Herr and Najjar believe this is at least the case for Heshbon ("The Iron Age," 335), and ostraca found there display Ammonite, not Moabite, script (MacDonald, *Ammon, Moab and Edom,* 26). E. Stern, however, avers that Nebo, Madeba, Dibon, and Aroer are all Moabite during the Assyrian period (*Archaeology of the Land of the Bible,* 262).

most "state-like."[227] The references to Moab's fame as an exporter of wines (Isa 16:8//Jer

48:32)[228] presuppose an intensification of agriculture beyond subsistence. The

archaeological record describes a peak in both sedentarization and intensive farming in

this period.[229] Development also now extends to the Kerak plateau, where el-Baluᶜa,[230]

er-Rabba[231] and el-Kerak[232] seem to have been major sites. The luxury objects that appear

in sixth-to-fifth century Transjordan burials also bear witness to increased social

stratification and the emergence of a wealthy class.[233] Pottery at this time shows greater

refinement than the previous period, with more examples of fast-wheel construction,

more consistent fabrics and firings, and several new forms of decoration,[234] with painted

decoration becoming common.[235] Dornemann finds a marked continuity of form among

the vessels and sherds of the seventh and sixth centuries.[236]

There is also evidence of increased political complexity. Tribute shown in

Assyrian and Babylonian records is hefty enough to presuppose that a system of taxation

was in place.[237] That the most regular payments seem to have been in gold[238] implies that

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[227]Herr and Najjar, "The Iron Age," 334.

[228]Routledge also sees Isa 5:8 as support that wine-making was central to Moab's economy (*Moab in the Iron Age,* 209).

[229]LaBianca and Younker, "Kingdoms of Ammon, Moab and Edom," 409-10.

[230]Herr and Najjar ("The Iron Age," 332-33) declare el-Baluᶜa the largest site on the Kerak in Iron II, but do not distinguish between IIB and IIC. Excavations were conducted by Udo Worschech, U. Rosenthal and F. Zayadine ("The Fourth Survey Season in the North-west Ard el-Kerak, and Soundings at Baluᶜ 1986," *ADAJ* 30 [1985]: 285-309). J. M. Miller's team found sherds from all phases of the Iron Age, with an increase in Iron II (J. Maxwell Miller, "The Sites," *Kerak Archaeological Survey*, 43).

[231]Though modern settlement precludes knowing the exact scope (Younker, "Moabite Social Structure," 241). Younker does caution, however, that no Moabite site seems to have reached the scale of Cisjordan cities like Hazor, Megiddo or Lachish.

[232]J. M. Miller, "The Sites," *Kerak Archaeological Survey*, 89.

[233]Routledge, *Moab in the Iron Age,* 208.

[234]Brown, "Ceramics," *Kerak Archaeological Survey,* 196.

[235]Dornemann, "Beginning of the IA in Transjordan," 136.

[236]Dornemann, *Archaeology of the Transjordan,* 166.

[237]Even more indicative of central organization than the one mina of gold paid as tribute (see below) are the deliveries of horses (to Tiglath-Pileser III or Sargon II: Nimrud Letter 2765; W. F. Saggs, "The Nimrud Letters II: Relations with the West," *Iraq* 17 [1955]: 134-35) and building materials (Prism

Moab participated in an international system of weighted bullion currency.[239] Seals that

have been found with a *kmš* element, including one owned by a *mazkir* (scribe), further

indicate some level of political and economic infrastructure.[240] The kinds of gifts and

tribute other than gold that Moab sends to Assyria also indicate participation in an

international trade network, for most are goods not found in Moab.[241] A good portion of

the luxury objects found in private tombs is also foreign,[242] though the Kerak survey

cautions that there was still little evidence of foreign IA pottery in sherd scatters at

settlement sites.[243] Volute capitals found at Mudaybi[244] and el-Kerak[245] (both on the

Kerak) display awareness of and admiration for the symbols of power used by other

kingdoms in the region.[246] Assyrian records make clear that vassals were expected to

travel to Nineveh in person periodically—a practice that would, of course, increase

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B; *ANET,* 291) taken directly to Assyria and the sending of troops for an Assyrian campaign against Egypt (Cyl. C, *ANET,* 294).

[238]One mina of gold is paid to Sennacherib or Esarhaddon (British Museum K. 1295; *ANET,* 301); the same to Ashurbanipal (Cyl. B, *ANET,* 298). Gold is also listed among other metals and luxury objects paid by Moab and other nations to Tiglath Pileser III in British Museum 3751 (*ANET,* 282).

[239]Herr and Najjar take the use of gold as an indicator of a stable economy ("The Iron Age," 329). For a description of bullion-based economies, see J. Holladay, "Hezekiah's Tribute," *inter alia.*

[240]Herr and Najjar, "The Iron Age," 338. (Herr and Najjar do not specify provenance, and E. Stern declares that none of the Moabite seals he examines were found in context (*Archaeology of the Land of the Bible,* 60-61)—thus they are identified as Moabite only by script or their *kmš* element.

[241]Routledge, *Moab in the Iron Age*, 206. In addition to gold, the British Museum text K 3751 lists among the items that came from Moab and nearby nations: "silver, tin, iron, antimony, linen garments with multicolored trimmings, garment of their native (industries) (being made of) dark purple wool…all kinds of costly objects be they products of the sea or of the continent, the (choice) products of their regions, the treasures of (their) kings, horses, mules (trained for) the yoke…" (§801 in *ARAB* I, 287-88 and *ANET,* 282).

[242]In addition to the tomb goods described by Routledge (previous note), Herr and Najjar point to the Egyptian-made New Year's flask found at Lehun ("The Iron Age," 338).

[243]Brown, "Ceramics," *Kerak Archaeological Survey,* 197.

[244]Herr and Najjar, "The Iron Age," 334.

[245]Andrew Dearman, "Roads and Settlements in Moab," *BA* 60 (1997): 212.

[246]The earliest known examples of similar "proto-Ionic" capitals are Omride. They are found at Megiddo, Samaria, Dan and Hazor (Oded Lipschits, "The Origin and Date of the Volute Capitals from the Levant," *The Fire Signals of Lachish: Studies in the Archaeology and History of Israel in the Late Bronze Age, Iron Age, and Persian Period in Honor of David Usshishkin* [ed. Israel Finkelstein and Nadav Naʾaman; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2011], 204-05). As early as the eighth century, but probably in the seventh, they appear in Judah, Ammon and Moab as well (Ibid., 211-17). Lipschits proposes that this occurred because the Assyrians had appropriated the motif after destroying Samaria (Ibid., 219). This would mean that in installing such capitals Moab was paying homage to Assyrian tastes rather than Israelite ones.

Moab's exposure to and connection with the largest cities of Assyria.[247] Moabite kings

are now mentioned by name in Assyrian records.[248] The records specifically tell of two

occasions on which Moabite kings made this trip—one, an arduous journey to deliver

building materials for Esarhaddon's palace;[249] another to deliver a defeated Qedarite king

to Ashurbanipal for punishment.[250]

The sources also describe an organized military in the late Iron Age. Around 669-

667, Moab is among the kingdoms that Ashurbanipal orders to send soldiers to join his

campaign against Egypt.[251] Moab is repeatedly seen fighting invasions of different

Arabian groups, including the one in which its king Kemoshalta defeats the Qedarites and

brings their king to Nineveh.[252] Routledge sees the appearance in Iron IIC of more

isolated, unfortified homesteads as evidence that small groups could now rely upon an

institutional military for security.[253] Several biblical texts, too, presume that Moab has a

reputation for fierce warriors (2 Sam 23:20//1 Chr 11:22; Jer 48: 14, 41; Isa 15:4[?], Jdg

3:24 [?]) and strong fortifications (Isa 25:12; Jer 48:17-18; less certainly: Jer 48: 1, 7, 41;

Amos 2:2).

This period also seems to be one of relative political stability—perhaps provided

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[247]Routledge, *Moab in the Iron Age,* 203. In the Rassam Cylinder, for example (vii 82-x 5, *ANET,* 297-98) Ashurbanipal criticizes Uateʾ, king of Arabia, for failing to appear in Nineveh to "inquire about my health" and thereby "cast[ing] away the yoke of my rule."

[248]Salamanu in the reign of Tiglath-Pileser III (British Museum no. 3751, §801 in *ARAB* I, 287-88, and *ANET,* 282); Kamoshu-nadbi in the reign of Sennacherib (Oriental Institute prism/Taylor prism, §239, p. 287 in Daniel D. Luckenbill, trans., *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia, Volume II: Historical Records of Assyria from Sargon to the End* [New York: Greenwood Press, 1968][henceforth *ARAB* II] and *ANET,* 287); Musuri in the reign of Esarhaddon (Prism S, §690 in *ARAB* II, 265 and *ANET,* 291) and Ashurbanipal (Cyl. C, §876 in *ARAB* II, 340 and *ANET,* 294) and Kamashaltu in the reign of Ashurbanipal (Cyl. B, §870 in *ARAB* II, 338 and *ANET,* 298).

[249]Prism B, *ANET,* 291.

[250]Cyl. B, *ANET,* 298.

[251]Cyl. C, *ANET,* 294. Van Zyl dates the campaign 667-66 (*The Moabites,* 152); Burton believes it occurred either in 669 or 667 (*Ammon, Moab and Edom,* 20).

[252]Cylinder B of Ashurbanipal; §870 in *ARAB* II, 338-39 and *ANET,* 298.

[253]Routledge, *Moab in the Iron Age,* 200.

by occasional aid from Assyria.[254] Security has always played a critical role in the regional settlement. At every point in history, towns in the trans-Jordan that either lacked security or were too heavily taxed were eventually deserted.[255] Better security, on the other hand, encouraged long-term investments in agriculture, viticulture, and civic projects—the very sorts of development that appear in Moab during the seventh and sixth centuries.

Assyria's greatest contribution to Moab's development, however, was that it energized a broad and robust trade network, including traffic through Moab. The route may have provided a path for some of Moab's own exports, such as the wine for which it was apparently famous (Isaiah 15-16; Jeremiah 48). But the larger benefit would have taken the form of protection fees collected from caravans, as well as the variety of cottage industries that arise to provision the travelers. Of course, Assyria's role was hardly charitable: it was always the greatest beneficiary of the arrangement. And while Assyria ensured safe passage of many of the commodities it desired from Arabia and the horn of Africa, tribute payments ensured that those collecting the trade duties would not become too wealthy and powerful to oppose them.[256]

In general, Moab remained a loyal vassal to Assyria, and probably paid tribute for some sixty-five years before its armies ever set foot in Moabite territory.[257] After Tiglath-Pileser III, payments or gifts are recorded through the reigns of Sargon II, Sennacherib, Esarhaddon, and Ashurbanipal.[258] The single recorded instance of rebellion is the revolt

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[254]Bienkowski, "Beginning of the Iron Age," 8.

[255]J. M. Miller, "The Survey," *Kerak Archaeological Survey*, 6.

[256]Routledge, *Moab in the Iron Age*, 205.

[257]According to Bienkowski, Assyrians do not enter Moab until the reign of Ashurbanipal—668 at earliest ("Beginning of the Iron Age," 3).

[258]See J. M. Miller, "The Survey," *Kerak Archaeological Survey,* 10, and E. Stern, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible,* 259.

at Ashdod against Sargon II in 712.[259] Even Sargon himself, however, does not entirely

blame the rebels: he faults instead the "countless evil lies" and bribes that an ambitious

Greek instigator, *Ia-ma-ni,* used "to alienate from me" the rulers of Philistia, Judah,

Edom and Moab, who had been his vassals.[260] Moab seems to escape punishment—

perhaps by sending gifts[261]—and resumes tribute the following year.[262] In general then,

Moab was—and was probably perceived as—a generally reliable Assyrian client.[263]

Whereas Moab's chief enemies had come from the north in the ninth and first half

of the eighth century, from the late-eighth century onward the focus shifted to the

vulnerability of its eastern flank. Because the Arabians had mastered domestication of the

camel, they were able to traverse long stretches of the previously impassable Syrian

desert and carry out fast-moving, long-distance raids into Moab. These were no simple

raids for food or sport by rival tribes. The fact that we know of these raids from royal

Assyrian document demonstrates how high the stakes were. Reports of attacks on eastern

Moab around 734[264] reach Tiglath-Pileser III, to whom Moab appeals for help.[265] The

reports become more numerous in the reign of Ashurbanipal (668-627), at which time

Moab becomes a frontier in a fierce power struggle. The Assyrian king's brother (and

ruler of Babylon), Shamash-shumukin, sought to unseat him by sending his Arabian allies

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[259]Prism A of Sargon II, fragment, *ANET,* 287.

[260]Fragmentary prism Assur 16587 (=VA 8412) in *ANET*, 287.

[261]J. M. Miller, "The Survey," *Kerak Archaeological Survey*, 10.

[262]Routledge, *Moab in the Iron Age*, 202.

[263]Koot van Wyk proposes that Moab's tribute, which he considers modest, was a reflection of its loyalty and not simply its ability to pay (*Squatters in Moab: A Study in Iconography, History, Epigraphy, Orthography, Ethnography, Religion and Linguistics of the ANE* [Monograph in Cross-Cultural Issues; Berrien Springs, Mich.: Louis Hester Publications, 1993], 139).

[264]MacDonald, *Ammon, Moab and Edom,* 19.

[265]ND 2773 (Saggs, "Nimrud Letters II," 131-33). Van Zyl dates to the last third of the eighth century (*The Moabites,* 37).

against Ashurbanipal's Levantine vassals.[266] The various Arabian tribes seem to have been quite powerful themselves: they eluded Ashurbanipal's efforts a number of times before being subjugated. These groups doubtless had their own reasons for invading Moab, for they were the producers or brokers of most of the goods that relied on Moabite trade routes. By conquering Moab, they probably hoped to "cut out the middleman" and have direct control over the costs and profits of their trade. Of course, the trade routes were Moab's lifeblood, and they were not about to relinquish them easily, but ultimately they were also too weak to withstand the onslaught. The correspondence with Assyria makes plain that on various occasions, the Moabite kings were desperate for military help. Ashurbanipal's detailed description of the arduous campaign in which he finally pursued the Arabians himself also reveals that such trips were an anomaly.[267] The Arabians, on the other hand, were in their element and positioned to bide their time. Though Ashurbanipal reduced their numbers brutally, the Arabian groups—Qedarites, Nabateans, and others—would ultimately come to dominate the Transjordan.

## The Babylonian and Persian Periods and the End of Moab

Though some Assyrian power remained after the capture of Nineveh in 612, Moab rendered tribute to Babylon after Nebuchadnezzar's victory at Carchemish in 605.[268] By 603, Ashkelon and other former vassals of Assyria and Egypt had also submitted.[269] Though Judah, too, had submitted in 605 (2 Kgs 24:1, 7), Egypt's

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[266]Rassam Cyl. (§§817-31 in *ARAB* II, 313-20 and *ANET,* 298).
[267]See Cyl B (§870 in *ARAB* II, 338-39 and *ANET,* 298-300).
[268]Van Zyl, *The Moabites,* 154.
[269]Miller and Hayes, *History of Ancient Israel and Judah,* 449-50, 466.

temporarily successful challenge of Nebuchadnezzar in 601 or 600[270] seems to have

awakened Jehoiakim's hopes of a reversal, and he subsequently withheld tribute around

600.[271] Moab, along with Aram and Ammon, were apparently called upon to punish

Judah as a result (2 Kgs 24:2). These punitive raids on Judah may have inspired some of

the bitterness toward Moab that appears in some biblical passages.[272] Babylonian sources

mention none of the Transjordan states, but Moab's raids on Judah indicate that they

demonstrated loyalty to Babylon as they had to Assyria—or at least that their interests

coordinated with Babylonian ones on this score. Moab needed to be on the side of the

power that would both ensure stable functioning of the trade routes and put a check on

the Arabian tribes, both of which Babylon was positioned to do. Yet Moab may have

been tempted to side with Egypt instead. When Zedekiah, like his predecessor

Jehoiachim, bet on the power of Egypt to resist Nebuchadnezzar (589 B. C. E.), he

apparently called upon Moab to join the rebellion (Jer 3:27). That Moabite emissaries

came to Jerusalem indicates that they were at least willing to entertain the possibility,

even though they did not ultimately participate.

But whatever decisions or circumstances had kept Moab safe while Judah rebelled

and was destroyed did not hold. In either the early or mid-sixth century, the kingdom of

Moab—whose independence was already qualified—seems to dissolve. Though

circumstances are unclear, the absences are palpable. From the early or mid-sixth century

and until the Nabataean period archaeological traces of settlement become extremely

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[270]Ibid., 466-67; see the account in the Babylonian Chronicles from Year 4 in Chronicle 5 (A. Kirk Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles* [Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2000], 101 and *ANET,* 564).

[271]Miller and Hayes, *History of Ancient Israel and Judah,* 466.

[272]Van Zyl attributes the vitriole of Ezek 25:8-11; Zeph 2:8-11; Jer 48:1-47; Isa 25:10b-12; and Pss 60:10; 83:6-7; 108:9 (*The Moabites,* 155) all to this memory. I would argue that he is painting with too broad a brush here. Jeremiah 48 especially seems to expand upon Jeremiah's view (Jeremiah 25) that Moab and the other nations will be punished for *opposing* Babylon (Jer 27:3ff)—not for acting on its behalf.

sparse. [273] Distinctively Persian-era pottery is almost nonexistent;[274] other remains that might suggest continuation of trade in the fifth and fourth centuries are also missing.[275] There are no written references to Moab in either Persian or Hellenistic sources.[276] Written fragments from this period found in Transjordan itself originate either from Ammon or from Edom. [277] Though all of the Transjordan languages had by then been replaced by Aramaic,[278] the continuation of Ammonite and Edomite culture in some form is attested by the presence in these documents of theophoric names containing Qôs, ʾEl and Milkom elements. Epigraphic and archaeological data combine to attest the survival of Ammon into the fifth century and Edom—Busayra and Tawilan at least—into at least the fourth.[279] The persistence and diffusion of Qôs elements is especially striking: these appear not only in Edom,[280] which had already encroached into southern Judean territory during the eighth century, [281] but also in ostraca from Ammon,[282] in papyri from Samaria,[283] and even as the name of a king of Dedan, deep in Arabia.[284] Recent

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[273]Piotr Bienkowski, "The Persian Period," in *The Archaeology of Jordan* (ed. Burton MacDonald, Russell Adams and Piotr Bienkowski; Levantine Archaeology 1; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001), 352.

[274]Ibid., 351.

[275]Routledge, *Moab in the Iron Age*, 212.

[276]Ibid., 347.

[277]Bienkowski, "The Persian Period," 360.

[278]Andre Lemaire, "Epigraphie et numismatique palestiniennes," in *La Palestine à l'époque perse* (ed. E. M. Laperrousaz and A. Lemaire; Paris: Cerf, 1994), 262. Frank Cross and Lawrence Geraty conclude that Aramaic had replaced local languages by end of sixth century ("The Ammonite Ostraca from Tell Hesban," in *Hesban after 25 Years* [ed. D. Merling and L. T. Geraty; Berrien Springs, Mich.: Institute of Archaeology/Siegfried H. Horn Archaeological Museum, 1994], 172).

[279]Routledge, *Moab in the Iron Age*, 211.

[280]Business contract from Tawilan, near Petra, dated to reign of one of the Dariuses—521, 423 or 335 (Bienkowski, "Persian Period," 360).

[281]See E. Stern, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible,* 269-70, 276-78.

[282]At Hesban (Bienkowski, "The Persian Period," 360).

[283]Though subsequent building obliterated most evidence of pre-Hellenistic Samaria, a cache of legal documents found in a cave near the city (Wadi ed-Dâliyeh) displays names of a cross section of Samarian society in the late fourth century. One can be dated precisely to March 18, 335 B.C.E. (Frank Moore Cross, Jr., "The Discovery of the Samaria Papyri," *BA* 26 [1963]: 113). They contain two Qôs names along with 28 Yahwistic ones, but none with a Kemosh element (Frank Moore Cross, Jr. "Personal Names in the Samaria Papyri," *BASOR* 344 [2006]: 84).

publications of fourth-century ostraca attest the continued presence of people with Qôs names,[285] while the absorption of Edomites into Judean genealogies is even documented in some biblical genealogies.[286] Yet so far we have not found Persian-era ostraca, seals, or papyri bearing Kemosh elements.[287]

Pinpointing the date of Moab's demise relies on similarly tenuous evidence. Many scholars follow Josephus, who provides the only explicit reference to Moab's fate.[288] He reports that Nebuchadnezzar conducted a campaign against Ammon and Moab in 582 (*Ant.* X.181). The general's actions may have been prompted by the actions of Baalis, king of Ammon, who had plotted the assassination of Gedaliah (Jer 40:14), the governor Nebuchadnezzar had set up in Judah, and then sheltered the assassins (Jer 41:10, 15).[289] If Moab was included in the retaliation, as the pairing by Josephus suggests, then it may have colluded in the rebellion.[290] Ernst Axel Knauf concludes that this marks the point from which Moab was reduced to a neo-Babylonian province.[291] On the other hand, Routledge, citing archaeological remains from the eastern Kerak plateau, thinks that the

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[284]John Lindsay, "The Babylonian Kings and Edom. 605-550 B.C.," *PEQ* 108 (1976): 38.

[285]Bezazel Porten and Ada Yardeni describe a set of almost 1700 legible fourth-century Palestinian ostraca, now scattered among those who could purchase them from the antiquities ("Social, Economic and Onomastic Issues in the Aramaic Ostraca of the Fourth Century B.C.E.," *Judah and Judeans in the Persian Period* [Oded Lipschits and Manfred Oeming, eds; Winona Lake, Ind: Eisenbrauns, 2006], 457-88). The authors highlight four "dossiers"—a group of ostraca relating to a single person or small group—of 44 to 59 documents each. The corpora are rife with Qôs names, but contain not a single Kmš element. Though they lack precise provenance because of their source, they nevertheless demonstrate the continued flourishing of a Qôs people in the fourth century, while piling up the evidence against the continued existence of the people of Kemosh.

[286]Knoppers, "Intermarriage, Social Complexity, and Ethnic Diversity," 24-27; John Wright, "Remapping Yehud," 81-82.

[287]Lindsay, "Babylonian Kings," 38.

[288]e.g. André Lemaire, "Les Transformations politiques et culturelles de la Transjordanie au VIe Siècle av. J-C. *Transeu* 8 (1994): 9-27; Lindsay, "Babylonian Kings," 27-29.

[289]Lindsay, "Babylonian Kings," 27.

[290]Herr and Najjar, "The Iron Age," 329.

[291]Knauf, "Cultural Impact," 51, though he does not explain his reasoning. Perhaps he reads Josephus' statement that "[Nebuchadnezzar] brought all those nations under subjection" as evidence of a change of status. "Those nations" refers to what Josephus calls the nations of "Coele-Syria"—a somewhat obscure term, but it apparently includes "the Ammonites and Moabites," who are mentioned particularly.

death blow came a little later—probably from Nabonidus on his 552 campaign to Tayma, when he is known to have invaded Edom.[292]

These campaigns probably played only a partial role in Moab's demise. Routledge proposes that Moab was unable to recover from the military destructions because it was bypassed by Nabonidus' new trade route, thus cutting off its economic lifeblood.[293] This would explain the continued existence of Ammon and Edom, who had suffered similar military damages but retained their trade positions.[294] The progressive infiltration of Arabian tribes had certainly already weakened Moab, and some believe it was the decisive factor in Moab's fall[295]—an idea to which Ezek 25:8ff lends some support.[296] The Nabataeans became dominant by the fourth century,[297] and were perhaps the same as the Arabs called *Nabaitai* who had attacked the Transjordan in Ashurbanipal's time (668-626),[298] though some dispute a connection.[299] As a political power, they seem to have been displaced for certain by the time of Nehemiah, when Tobiah "the Ammonite" is paired with an Arab leader instead of a Moabite one, as in earlier traditions.[300] Though the Ptolemies revive the name Μωαβιτις in the second century[301] by creating a district of

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[292]Routledge, *Moab in the Iron Age,* 211; Paul-Alain Beaulieu, *The Reign of Nabonidus King of Babylon, 556-539 B.C.E.* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989), 171-74; Lindsay, "Babylonian Kings," 34-36.

[293]Routledge, *Moab in the Iron Age*, 212.

[294]Ammon into the fifth century; Busayra and Tawilan into at least the fourth (Ibid., 211).

[295]e.g. Grohman, "History of Moab," 219.

[296]Arab invasions at least weakened Moab (Lindsay, "Babylonian Kings," 31).

[297]Established at Petra by 312 B.C.E. where they fended off an attack by Antigonous the One-Eyed, a general who had served under Alexander (Hieronymus of Cardia *apud* Diodorus Siculus 19.95, cited by David F. Graf, "Nabateans," *ABD* IV:970).

[298]Allied to the "Arabs" in league with Assurbanipal's brother, Shamash-shum-ukin (See §817, in *ARAB* II, 313-14; §821-§823, in *ARAB* II, 315-17). §870 (*ARAB* II, 338-39) also mentions the land of Nabaiti.

[299]See basic arguments in Graf, "Nabateans," 970.

[300]John R. Bartlett, "The Moabites and Edomites," *Peoples of Old Testament Times* (ed. D. J. Wiseman; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 244.

[301]Ptolemaic reign begins in 301. It is unclear when the creation of this district would have occurred, though it is likely it was not the new regime's first priority.

this name (south of the Tobiad principality, in what had been northern Moab),[302] this

seems to be by then only a geographical term rather than an ethnic group.[303]

But what became of the people of Iron Age Moab between the campaign of

Nebuchadnezzar ca. 582 and the rise of the Nabataeans? This question matters, for

"Moabites" appear in Ezra and Nehemiah as peoples with whom Judeans are

intermarrying (Ezra 9:1-2, Neh 13:23-27) and who are to be barred from the *qĕhāl*

*ʾelohim* (Neh 13:1). Could real Moabites have still existed and been living in Yehud? The

material evidence is ambiguous. First, there are several possible interpretations of sparse

settlement evidence. While some of the residents of Moab surely fled or were killed,

others probably "nomadized"—turning to nomadic pastoralism, as peoples in the Levant

always had done in periods of instability. Though still present in Moab, they would have

left few archaeological traces. What pottery they left may be indistinguishable from that

of Iron II. That is, some "Iron II" pottery may actually date to the Persian period, but be

indistinguishable because it lacks the innovations introduced elsewhere.[304] A simple and

stagnant pottery repertoire is exactly what we would expect of an area that has lost its

cities and outside trade contacts and become oriented toward subsistence nomadism. That

interpretation does not change the basic picture of sparse settlement in Persian-period

Moab, but it does caution against viewing it as an altogether empty land.

Moabites that remained in the land, however, are very likely to have assimilated

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[302]Josephus, *Ant.* XIII.382, 397.
[303]Michael Avi-Yonah (*The Holy Land: From the Persian to the Arab Conquests (536 B.C. to A.D. 640): A Historical Geography* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1966], 41) describes the region as one disputed between the Ptolemies and the Nabataeans; any Moabite groups are absent from the picture.
[304]Though Bienkowski agrees that diagnostic Persian pottery is very rare ("Persian Period," 352), he also affirms William Albright's early assertion that the Iron Age in the Transjordan essentially continues through the Persian period (Ibid., 348-49). Only at sites that had slipped from Moab's grasp—Hesban, Madeba, Jalul—has distinctively Persian material surfaced (Ibid.).

into Arabian groups.[305] Josephus hints at such a fate: he mentions Moabites (and Gileadites) among the "Arabians" who fought against Alexander Jannaeus and were forced to offer him tribute in the first century (*Ant.* XIII.374). These Moabites are most likely not continuous with the peoples of the Iron Age—elsewhere it is used simply as a geographic term[306]—but it does make sense that survivors in Moab would have become a subgroup of Arabs. The tribal model of social organization predicts that those we call "Moabites" would never have understood themselves in primarily national terms. The clan and tribal identities, which were always more important, could have been retained by fitting them into the kin structures of the Arabian newcomers.

It is possible that some Moabites emigrated to Judah. Jeremiah 40:11 lists Moab as one of the places that Judeans fled during Babylonian campaigns, so there is no reason to dispute that Moabites could have done the same in reverse. If there were family ties between Moabites and Judahites, as Ruth and a few references in Chronicles (1 Chr 4:22, 8:8, 2 Chr 24:26) assume, Moabites with Judahite kin may have come to live with them when trouble came to the land. But I find a significant Moabite presence in Yehud unlikely. As mentioned above, the absence of Kemosh names in light of mounting finds of ostraca from Persian-period Palestine argues more and more against the cultural survival of Moab into this period. There are also the circumstances. In the late- or mid-sixth century, when Moabites would have been fleeing, Jerusalem lay in ruins. Its hinterland was severely impoverished. Its history had given it a reputation for rebelliousness that might have made the fear of future conflicts with Babylon a worry. If

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[305]J. M. Miller believes that the majority of the Moabite populace remained in place, and that their continued presence is attested in the region's chief cities of Rabbat Moab and Karak Moab (Miller, "Moab and the Moabites," 27).

[306]Josephus, *Ant.* XIII.382, 397; Ptolemy, *Geography:* 5: 16: 4; Eusebius, *Onomastica* 124: 15-17.

Moabites fled to other Yahwistic territories, Samaria would have been a far more logical choice. For one thing, it was closer. For another, it was much more prosperous. The Assyrian destruction and rebuilding lay well over a century in the past and in the interim Samaria had enjoyed a steady recovery. (For more on this, see Chapter 3). But evidence for a Moabite presence in Samaria after the Babylonian period is also lacking.

The fact is that Ezra and Nehemiah constitute the only pieces of evidence for a Moabite presence in Yehud. As I will argue in Chapter 3, the ways in which these texts refer to them has persuaded me that "Moabites" there are meant to invoke authoritative legal traditions rather than refer to ethnic Moabites in the historical situation. Ezra's and Nehemiah's emphases are squarely on the "peoples of the lands," a group that most recent scholarship now believes to be composed partly or mostly of other Yahwists.

# Characterizing the Relationship between Moab, Israel and Judah

Most of the biblical texts about Moab are negative; some even characterize Moab as Israel's oppressor. As should be clear by now, Moab probably had more reason to resent Israel than vice versa. That fact is a good reminder that texts do not always express objective realities. Yet the historical background remains critical for understanding the attitudes we find there. Much of the conflict is made understandable by the fact that both Israel and Moab claimed the *mišor* as their own. Both sides had sub-groups who had long resided in the region, and both had kings who sought to assert total hegemony and thus to control the land's resources and exploit its geographic position. Some of the biblical texts are thus polemical assertions of legitimacy. They state that the land belonged to Israel in earliest times—that it was won "fair and square" from the kings Sihon and Og (Num

21:21-32, Deut 2:24-36),[307] that Moab extended no farther north than the Arnon (Num 21:13, 26; Jdg 11:18), that God or Moses had granted the towns there to Reuben and Gad (Num 32:2-33; 34:16-16; Deut 3:12, 16; 29:6-7; Josh 1:12-8; 12:6; 13:15-28; 22:1-6), and that they were therefore "Israel" and not "Moab." Indeed, even Mesha recognizes that the Gadites had live in "the land of ʿAtarot *beʿolam*" (MI, L. 10). The fact that eight of the places mentioned in the Mesha stele are allotted to Reuben or Gad in biblical lists emphasizes the degree of overlap between Moabite and Israelite claims; Jeremiah 48 mentions as Moabite between 11 and 14 place names that other biblical texts claim for Israel.[308]

Both sides built structures in these places to substantiate their claims. By Mesha's own admission, Israel's king had "built" ʿAtarot and Yahas (Ll. 11, 18). We would probably find more projects if Omri or Ahab had written our inscription. But the Moabites, too, had structures. Before Mesha's revolt, there is already a shrine to Ashtar-Kemosh in Qiryat (MI, Ll. 13-14), and he builds one to Kemosh in Qarḥoh (L. 3). Part of Mesha's war against Israel is waged against these monuments and sacred symbols: he takes "vessels of Yhwh" from Nebo, indicating that the Israelites had built a shrine there. There may have been another in ʿAtarot, from which Mesha takes an "altar hearth of its *dwd*," and, like the vessels of Yhwh, presents them to his own god (Ll. 12-13). To build up his own legacy, he constructs a palace, gardens, and fortification complex in Qarḥoh,

[307]J. M. Miller, "Early Monarchy in Moab?" 84, and "Moabite Toponymy," 577-78.
[308]The definite ones are Nebo, Kiriathaim, Heshbon, Elealah, Aroer, Dibon, Jahzah (=Jahaz), Mephaath, Bet (Baal) Meon, Jazer, and Sibmah. Another three had also possibly been claimed as Israelite: Holon (a levitical city in Josh 15:51 and 21:15), Nimrim (=Nimrah, a possession of the Reubenites and Gadites in Num 32:2), and Horonaim (if this is the *Hwrnn* of the MI, which, according to Lemaire, was taken from *bt dwd*. See André Lemaire, "House of David Restored in the Moabite Inscription," *BAR* 20 (1994): 31-37.

his home base. He also conducts projects in at least eight other towns,[309] and builds a road across the Arnon canyon.

Even before there were kings, such close proximity and competition for resources probably made conflict inevitable. We should not be surprised that overlapping claims would occur hand in hand with strong rivalries, and that each would cheer the downfall of the other (see esp. Jer 48:7, 11-13, 17-18; Zeph 2:8-9). Some stories, like those about Balak and Eglon, may even bear witness to conflicts in pre-monarchic times. But the scale of such conflicts would have been smaller than it appears in the texts. Balak and Eglon would have been at most local chieftains. Their subjugation of some Israelite groups would no more amount to a conquest of "all Israel" than did Mesha's slaughter of the Gadites in Atarot and Nebo. The fact that there were repeated conquests throughout the Iron Age—of Moabites by Israelites, and of Israelites by Moabites—would not have been possible if one group had actually eliminated the other. Most of the time they must have coexisted more or less peacefully, albeit with a mixture of loyalties. [310]

In fact, read closely the stele itself reveals a picture of coexistence as much as of conflict. Those who had been living in Nebo when Mesha attacked it included "foreign men and "foreign women" as well as native ones (L. 16). That is, those Mesha considers "foreign" live in the same town as do "native" men and women of Nebo. The separate listing of people by gender also makes one suspect that native men and women were not paired, but rather that some native men were married to foreign women and vice-versa. Despite the grisly boast of having annihilated the entire populations of ʿAtarot (MI, Ll.

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[309]Baʿal maʿon and a reservoir there (L. 9); Qiryaten (L. 10), Aroer and the highway of the Arnon (L. 26); Bet Bamot (L. 27); Beser (L. 27), [Mahada]ba (L. 30), Bet Diblaten (L. 30), Bet Baʿal maʿon (L. 30—perhaps the same as the one in L. 9?), and at least one more whose name is lost.
[310]J. M. Miller, "Moabite Toponymy," 578.

11-12) and Nebo (Ll. 16-17), Mesha also boasts that he "became king over hundreds in the cities which I had annexed to the country" (Ll. 28-29). Evidently he did not purge those cities, else he would have had no subjects there. His report of using Israelite prisoners for building projects (L. 25-26) reveals that Israelites, too, continued on in Moab. Yahaṣ (Jahaz), the former Israelite stronghold, was not purged, but rather "annex[ed] to Dibon" (L. 21).

The picture of several different groups living in close proximity—the one that Mesha had encountered in Nebo—may indeed describe the norm in the *mišor*. This region changed hands so often that the population could not possibly have reflected the nationality of its rulers at all—or even most—times. The basic continuity in material culture at most sites also suggests that there were not drastic shifts of peoples or cultures. Dornemann finds a repertoire of painted motifs in pottery that continue in use from the twelfth to the tenth to the seventh centuries.[311] Most likely, neighboring peoples found ways to coexist. Biblical texts like Numbers 25 suggest some mechanisms by which this might have happened. There we see Moabites inviting Israelites to a shared feast and shared worship of the local gods, probably at the shrine in Peʿor that the story targets as illicit. As I will argue in Chapter 3, the passage also implies that the Moabites (then Midianites) propose intermarriage—another time-honored method for establishing peace between groups. Intermarriage not only forms alliances, it gives both groups a stake in the survival of the couples' children. The verisimilitude of these kinds of relationships is bolstered by the fact that the author is protesting against them. As mentioned above, intermarriage between Israelites and Moabites is also attested by 1 Chr 4:22, 8:8, and 2

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[311]Dornemann, *Archaeology of the Transjordan,* 167-68.

Chr 24:26. David's ties to Moab were supposedly so close that he entrusted his parents

into the safekeeping of a Moabite king (1 Sam 22:3-4) while on the lam from Saul. The

presumption that David would have done so only if he'd had Moabite relatives is

probably the basis for the story in Ruth. André Lemaire's reconstruction of *bt dwd* in the

Mesha stele[312] also supports the possibility that David had ties in Moab, whether by

conquest, by kinship, or both.

Some biblical traditions also describe positive relations in the political sphere.

Though 1 Kgs 11:1-9 is probably not historical, the practice of political marriages that it

criticizes is, and the protests implies that at least some Judahite leaders saw the practical

benefits of political marriage alliances in which the allies were honored by erecting

shrines to their gods. Isaiah 15-16 is another text that presumes standing diplomatic

relations with Moab. It presupposes that Judah might be called upon to shelter refugees in

case of military attack in Moab—that it might even risk its own political neck to do so,

since the refugees flee from a "Destroyer." Most convincingly, Jer 27:3 counts Moab

among the potential allies summoned as Zedekiah contemplates whether to rebel against

Babylon.

The picture of the relationship with Moab can also be deduced from what the

Bible does *not* say. My focus on the texts that treat Moab may obscure the fact that it

actually appears fairly rarely in the historical narratives. The Moabite kings remembered

as oppressors (Numbers 25 and Judges 3) are treated with mocking humor—more as

buffoons than as serious threats. As the historical survey makes clear, Israel and Judah

had larger and more serious threats to worry about: first the Philistines, then Damascus

and Assyria, later Babylon. All of the small rival nations come in for some kind of

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[312]Lemaire, "House of David Restored," 31-37.

judgment in the oracles against the nations, but the treatment of Moab is not nearly as harsh as that meted out to Edom, exemplified by the book of Obadiah. In fact, the longest treatment of a Moabite—the book of Ruth—is a positive one. That Edom is singled out while a Moabite heroine emerges from the book of Ruth both stem, I believe, from the same phenomenon: that both were probably written in the Persian period, when Edomites had encroached into southern Judah and retained a vivid cultural presence, while Moabites had either assimilated with Arabs or become so insignificant a group as to pose no threat. It probably became safe to describe intermarriage in such positive terms only because *real* intermarriage with Moabites had become a moot issue.

## A Proposal about Composition Dates

The dissertation will propose that Moab appears in two kinds of roles in biblical texts, which I have classified as "State" or "People" texts. In the first, authors are concerned with Moab as a geopolitical and military entity—with its kings, its claims to power, and its claims to land. In the second, the authors' primary concerns are with contact between Israelites and Moabites as peoples—with cultural and religious influence, and especially the possibility of intermarriage or participation of Moabites in the "congregation" of Israel. I would propose that these two kinds of portraits are informed by two different historical contexts.  Behind the State texts lie struggles over land and political power best understood by tracing the history of settlement, land claims, and political alliances during the Iron Age. The second is a struggle over community boundaries—over who may claim the heritage of "Israel." It is a struggle that begins with the fall of Israel and continues during Judah's exile, but which is expressed in sharpest terms during the Persian period. This does not mean that prior to the exile groups were

unconcerned about ethnic boundaries—of course they were. But the authors did not regard the presence of Moabites living in Judah or Israel then as a threat to their existence, as they did in the post-state period. At this time, a literary complex develops around the term "Moabite" that expands it beyond its historical ethnic meaning and makes it a shorthand for describing the "other" who falls outside the community boundary. Through the texts, the authors conduct a debate about whether the inclusion of that Other contaminates the community and threatens divine wrath, or builds it up and ensures its survival.

## Conclusion: The Other and the Self

As I hope to demonstrate in the following chapters, the guise in which Moab is treated depends a great deal on the writer's current concerns: on whether the burning question is that of Israel's (or Judah's) standing among other nations, or the composition of its own members. Is the Other an overt enemy, or a cunning pretender in the midst of the group? As it turns out, the metaphors for such struggles attach automatically to gendered social roles. Whether conscious or not, the struggle to assert oneself in comparison to others is imagined as a contest with other male entities. Close contact is martial in nature and sex is never a possibility. By contrast, the anxiety that the enemy is a near double, or lies within the group, conjures—for our male authors—the specter of the feminine: the threat of female-type impurities, the irretrievably damaged honor associated with sexual crimes, the wily seductiveness of the temptress, and the distrust of the wife who could take down the honor of the whole house with a single misstep. We hold up a picture of historical Moab in this chapter to show that the Moab of literature that we will examine next is as much a projection of Israel's own psyche as a reflection of

any concrete reality.

# CHAPTER 2: MOAB AS STATE

The texts I refer to in this chapter illustrate Moab's role as State in biblical imagination. "State" here is a literary trope, not the term as technically understood by political theorists. It refers to the Other encountered as an organized political power and an entity separate from Israel, rather than as a group or individuals who may participate in Israelite society, as in the "People" texts.

In this chapter, I argue that when Israel meets Moab as State, the authors construct the encounter analogous to the ways in which males encounter males in honor-shame societies. I will explain the values and "rules" I see as inherent to these struggles in more detail below, but in general what this means is that the encounter between Moab and Israel or Judah is a struggle to achieve hierarchical dominance and public recognition; the outcome is then interpreted theologically as a measure of divine favor. I do not mean to imply that the values of male-male contests are always explicit, or even conscious, in the text. Rather, I contend that when the authors write about nations *qua* nations, they write *as though* they were masculine entities, and presume values and rules of conduct that reflect those operative in interactions between males in a challenge-riposte system.

Rules of engagement, both at the level of the village and that of the nation, depend a great deal on the distribution of power between those involved. The varying power dynamic also results in different construals of Moab's significance in the biblical texts. I therefore divide the texts into three categories. In the first set of texts (**I**), Moab is Israel's or Judah's military conquest. Battle establishes a clear hierarchy in which Moab is subordinate—at least for some part of the story. In this first group, Moab functions as a token of worldly status and success, which is in turn interpreted theologically as a

measure of Israel's or Judah's standing with Yhwh. A second set of texts (**II**) features Moab as a closer peer, and thus a <u>rival</u> to Israel or Judah. Moab's status in these texts is attacked rhetorically as short-lived or illegitimate, in the manner of a verbal challenge, while military engagement is more cautious (or not mentioned). Yhwh may be invoked in these texts to "tip the balance" toward Israel or Judah, who may themselves be too weak to assert political or military dominance. A third set of texts (**III**) feature Moab as <u>oppressor</u>, wielding power superior to that of Israel or Judah. In these asymmetrical contests, Israelite characters disregard with impunity the rules that normally regiment contests for honor. Their status as victims justifies a wider range of tactics—the "trickster" strategies that normally would be considered dishonorable. As victims, they may also lay claim to the special protection or pity of Yhwh. The authors may use the instance of Israel's or Judah's own weakness to make a theological point that Yhwh, by contrast, is strong and utterly faithful.

## Features of State Texts

Each text will be discussed in two ways. First, the textual features that imply Moab's role as State will be pointed out. The criteria have been discussed in the Introduction, but are restated here briefly. Not every feature must be present in order for Moab to be in a "State" role, but the more these characteristics cluster together, the stronger the "State" paradigm seems to be.

- Moab appears interacting with other "state" entities.

- The sphere of interaction is typically that of politics, war, and international diplomacy.

- The characters are official state representatives—kings, courtiers, armies, priests, and diplomats—rather than ordinary people.

- Moab is referred to as a unitary entity rather than an individual or a set of individuals who act separately.

- That Moab is conceived as a single entity is indicated grammatically: texts will speak of *mōʾāb* even when the referent is a large group, rather than using the plural gentilic *mōʾābîm.* This nuance is lost in many English translations, which frequently render *mōʾāb* as "the Moabites."

- The texts do not envision Moabite participation in Israelite community, politics, or religious life.

After establishing Moab's role as State, each text will be analyzed rhetorically, asking how the text shapes the reader's conceptions of and emotions toward Moab. I will ask how Moab's status is interpreted theologically, and pay special attention to rhetoric that relies upon principles of masculine honor-shame contests.

## Honor-Shame Dynamics in State Conceptions of Others

The principles of honor-shame societies to which I refer are described primarily, but not only, by anthropologists studying traditional cultures around the Mediterranean.[313] They have been applied fruitfully in biblical studies, especially in New Testament, because scholars have recognized a good deal of correspondence between the principles described and those observed in the texts. Since the anthropological work began to be used, some have protested that formulations based on the classic works of

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[313]The essays in John Peristiany, ed. (*Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society,* [Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1966]) attest honor-shame characteristics among various Mediterranean peoples of the mid-twentieth century, ranging across Spain, Greece, Algeria and Egypt. See also Pitt-Rivers' classic study of rural Andalusia (*Fate of Shechem,* inter alia). To these areas J. Davis adds a case from Libya ("Family and State in the Mediterranean," in *Honor and Shame and the Unity of the Mediterranean,* [ed. David D. Gilmore; American Anthropological Association Special Publication 22; Washington, D.C.: American Anthropological Association: 1987], 22-34), while M. Asano-Tamanoi points to similar dynamics as far away as Japan ("Shame, Family and State in Catalonia and Japan," in Ibid*.,* 104-120).

Julian Pitt-Rivers, J. G. Peristiany, and others of "the Oxford school"[314] and advocated

most prominently in New Testament by Bruce J. Malina and Jerome Neyrey,[315] are

overly formulaic and crude compared to the richness of lived experience and the variety

within "Mediterranean" cultures.[316] Feminist scholars have demonstrated that the

traditional models are biased toward male and elite experiences of honor and shame, and

that the descriptions frequently essentialize gender and class—not recognizing that status

and rules are frequently being contested and negotiated.[317] Yet the great majority of

studies, either anthropological or those that apply the principles to biblical texts, have

reaffirmed rather than debunked the central notions that I will describe here.[318] Indeed,

the world of the biblical text *is* idealized and *does* refract the world through the biases of

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[314]The most oft-cited studies are Pitt-Rivers (*Fate of Shechem* and others), the studies collected in Peristiany, ed., *Honour and Shame*, and Gilmore, ed., *Honor and Shame and the Unity of the Mediterranean*.

Criticisms are voiced, for example, by Michael Herzfeld in "Honour and Shame: Problems in the Comparative Analysis of Moral Systems," *Man* 15 (1980): 339-351 and "Horns of the Mediterranean Dilemma," *American Ethnologist* 11 (1984): 439-54.

[315]See Bruce J. Malina and Jerome H. Neyrey, "Honor and Shame in Luke-Acts: Pivotal Values of the Mediterranean World," in *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation* (ed. Jerome H. Neyrey; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1991), 25-66; and Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (Rev. ed.; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1993).

[316]Halvor Moxnes, "Honor and Shame," in *The Social Sciences and New Testament Interpretation* (ed. Richard Rohrbaugh; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 26. See for example Unni Wikan, "Shame and Honour: A Contestable Pair," *Man* 19 (1984): 649.

[317]See for example Nancy Lindisfarne, "Variant Masculinities, Variant Virginities," in *Dislocating Masculinity: Comparative Ethnographies* (ed. Andrea Cornwall and Nancy Lindisfarne; London: Routledge, 1994), 82-96. Though Amanda J. Weidman shows that dominant discourses of honor and shame may be subversively challenged, her examples only underscore that the traditional values *do* dominate, and that resistance to them *must* be subversive ("Beyond Honor and Shame: Performing Gender in the Mediterranean," *Anthropological Quarterly* 76 [2003]: 519-530).

[318]Timothy S. Laniak, *Shame and Honor in the Book of Esther* (SBLDS 165; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 28; Maureen J. Giovannini, "Female Chastity Codes in the Circum-Mediterranean: Comparative Perspectives," in *Honor and Shame and the Unity of the Mediterranean* (ed. David D. Gilmore; American Anthropological Association Special Publication 22; Washington, D.C.: American Anthropological Association: 1987), 61; Zeba Crook, "Honor, Shame and Social Status Revisited," *JBL* 128 (2009): 591-92. Gilmore points out ways in which the model has glossed subtleties, but nevertheless affirms its basic features ("The Shame of Dishonor," 2-21). Like Weidman, Lindisfarne describes how the gender ideologies and honor-shame values are actively constructed and contested, but in doing so, reaffirms that these values predominate and that the descriptions of them as phenomena remain valid ("Variant Masculinities," 82-96). Moxnes discusses some nuances that have been added to the model in "Honor and Shame," 25-36.

male authors. If anything, the descriptions of honor and shame are *more* valid—that is

descriptive—of what we see here than they would be of life on the ground in ancient

Israel. Nancy Lindisfarne makes the point that political rhetoric that presents honor—or

its violation—is even more powerful than ordinary experience precisely *because* it is

presented in ideal terms.[319] Speeches praising the valor of Israel's armies, or declaring

that "such [violations of feminine honor] are not done in Israel!" elicit intense feelings of

pride or righteous indignation precisely because they can ignore all the messiness of real

life—the men who desert the battlefield in fear, the daughters raped behind closed doors.

But even as the honor-shame model remains valid, the critiques helpfully point

out their limits. They remind us that in reading biblical texts, we are seeing a very

particular vision of ancient Israel and Judah. It is male, it is literate, and it often idealizes

the world to make ideological points. Nor are the values of honor and shame ever hard-

and-fast rules—they are heuristics only. Still, describing them remains important when

we as readers are so culturally distant from the ancient authors, and especially since

assumptions that are deeply rooted in both author and audience are almost never

explicitly spoken.[320]

Several aspects of male honor, as described in the honor-shame literature, are

especially relevant to the discussion of "State" texts. First, male honor is a positive good,

unlike the virtue of women, which, technically speaking, is not honor at all but rather the

display of shame.[321] A woman's "shame" is her sensitivity to cultural mores of obedience

and sexual purity, which she expresses by maintaining sexual monogamy (if married) or

[319]Lindisfarne, "Variant Masculinities," 95.
[320]Ronald Simkins, *Creator and Creation: Nature in the Worldview of Ancient Israel* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 1994), 41-42. Simkins even contends that making the cultural assumptions explicit can be insulting, for it treats an audience as outsiders.
[321]Pitt-Rivers, *Fate of Shechem*, 29.

virginity (if not), and displaying proper modesty and submissiveness (see Chapter 3).[322]

Though a woman can be regarded as virtuous because she shows proper shame, her role

in the family's honor is strictly that of potential risk: she can do nothing to add to the

family honor, only bring it crashing down irreparably through sexual transgression.[323] By

contrast, a man can gain honor through his actions, though this occurs within certain

boundaries, for the family into which one is born determines, to a high degree, the

amount of honor one might acquire.[324] But he may increase status within those

boundaries by demonstrating traits valued in men, especially bravery and a refusal to

submit to humiliation.[325] Other qualities, such as honesty, generosity, and grace are also

important,[326] but possession of power is the quality most venerated in the State texts.

Qualities are not merely observed; they must be proven. As Pitt-Rivers puts it,

"The claim to excel is always relative. It is always implicitly the claim to excel over

others."[327] Contests of honor may be physical fights (especially among younger men[328]),

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[322]Pitt-Rivers, *Fate of Shechem,* 20.

[323]Pitt-Rivers, *Fate of Shechem,* 29. As Crook points out, there *are* examples of women acquiring honor, but most would consider these anomalous ("Honor, Shame and Social Status," 604-09). There is also the fact that many advantages—including greater honor—can be gained through strategic marriages, but as Routledge points out, the official ideology of patrilinearity asserts that men are the masters of their own houses and denies that their wives' families hold any sway there (*Moab in the Iron Age,* 119). The untruth of this ideology is, I believe, precisely what makes intermarriage so problematic for Ezra and Nehemiah (see Chapter 3).

[324]What Malina calls "ascribed" and Crook calls "attributed" honor (*New Testament World,* 34 and "Honor, Shame and Social Status," 610, respectively).

[325]Pitt-Rivers, *Fate of Shechem,* 22.

[326]In addition to shows of strength, Julian Pitt-Rivers also describes beneficence as a quality that brings honor ("Honour and Social Status" in *Honour and Shame* [ed. J. G. Peristiany; London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1966], 36). His later work adds "grace," defined as divine legitimation of a man's status, to the list of honorable male qualities ("Postscript: The Place of Grace in Anthropology," in *Honour and Grace in Anthropology,* [ed. J. G. Peristiany and J. Pitt-Rivers; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992], 215-46). Herzfeld stresses values such as generosity, honesty, and probity in "'As in Your Own House': Hospitality, Ethnography, and the Stereotype of Mediterranean Society," in *Honor and Shame and the Unity of the Mediterranean* (ed. David D. Gilmore; Special Publications of the American Anthropological Association 22; Washington, D.C.: American Anthropological Association, 1987), 75-89.

[327]Pitt-Rivers, "Honour and Social Status," 23.

[328]Moxnes, "Honor and Shame," 30.

verbal exchanges,[329] or public displays of wealth, power, piety, or generosity. But what is consistent in these contests is that the honor attainable is conceived as a limited commodity: only one will win the prize. Winning means not just displaying one's own mettle, but taking honor from one's opponent. One is judged as winner *because* there is a loser. Because the humiliation of the loser redounds to the winner's glory, gloating and public taunting of the loser are expected. The consequences of losing are thus doubly negative, for the defeated not only lose their honor, their humiliation is exaggerated in order to inflate the status of their opponents. The fact that the loser's humiliation converts to the winner's honor can, however, be turned to the benefit of weaker parties: they may win honor by humiliating their opponents, even when they cannot soundly beat them.

Each contest establishes—or reifies—rank among the community's males, as well as establishing individual reputations. And honor must be established or reinforced repeatedly in order to be believed.[330] This makes competition so pervasive that many honor-shame societies are characterized by scholars as "agonistic."[331] Yet contests are not always considered appropriate: men of sharply different rank are expected to treat others in accordance with already-established hierarchies, so most sparring occurs between men of similar social status.[332]

Yet such displays and boasts of power and other attributes are only claims: they

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[329]Moxnes, "Honor and Shame," 20.

[330]Diana Swancutt, "*Still* before Sexuality," in *Mapping Gender in Ancient Religious Discourses* (ed. Todd C. Penner and Caroline Vander Stichele; Leiden, Brill, 2007), 30.

[331]It is certainly true that competition permeates a society to different degrees. Emphasis on demonstrating masculine honor aggressively increases in the Hellenistic period, and more still under the Romans, for whom the phallus became a symbol not just of virility but of the power of the empire to conquer—to penetrate—all other peoples (see Swancutt, "*Still* before Sexuality," 31). It is with good reason that New Testament scholars have used honor-shame theories more than scholars in Hebrew Bible. But the competitive dynamics also appear in earlier texts and periods and this, as we shall see, is particularly true in the military and political arenas.

[332]Though in practice things do not always play out this way. See Crook ("Honor, Shame and Social Status," 599-609) and discussion below.

do not convert to honor until they are acknowledged by public consensus.[333] A man

whose claims are validated can legitimately express pride; a man who makes the same

claims but is considered unworthy of them is deemed a fool.[334] Thus, the contest itself is

not nearly as important as how it is evaluated by the "public court of reputation"

(henceforth, "the PCR").[335] The importance of the communal interpretation cannot be

overstated. In a kin-based society like that of ancient Israel or Moab, group belonging is

absolutely essential to well-being, and this belonging is contingent on demonstrating

awareness of and respect for the rules of the group.[336] Indeed, caring about public opinion

is the very measure of one's (positive) shame and on this both men's and women's social

worth depends.[337] One cannot, therefore, simply choose to disregard that opinion.

Furthermore, the PCR can actualize its judgments by ostracizing or elevating a person, by

closing or opening social and economic opportunities.[338] Thus does Stanley Brandes refer

to "the tyranny of public opinion,"[339] and Pitt-Rivers say that "against its judgments there

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[333]So does Pitt-Rivers define honor as "the value of a person in his own eyes, but also in the eyes of his society" ("Honour and Social Status," 21); Malina as "a claim to worth that is socially acknowledged" (*New Testament World*, 30).

[334]Malina, *New Testament World,* 33.

[335]"Public opinion forms…a tribunal before which the claimants to honour are brought,…'the court of reputation' as it has been called" (Pitt-Rivers, "Honour and Social Status," 27).

[336]Ronald E. Long makes a helpful analogy to describe the difference that individualism makes to identity. He likens people in a collectivistic society to conceiving themselves as cells of a body: they cannot simply choose not to identify with the group; if they separate from it, they themselves die. What they do— and what is done to them—affects the whole group, and in like manner, the group's will exerts an almost deterministic force. By contrast, group identity for Anglo-Americans, though important, is imagined as voluntary and peripheral. They tend to think of themselves as individuals who *join* groups rather than being born into them; individuals who *choose* how to respond to group norms rather than having their paths and actions circumscribed by them. Long astutely points out that even in our individualistic society, however, people of color are keenly aware that this is a fiction: their group membership—and the fact that it is ascribed to them by others rather than chosen—is made clear on a regular basis ("Introduction," *The Queer Bible Commentary* [Edited by Deryn Guest et. al; London: SCM Press, 2006], 6).

[337]Stanley Brandes, "Reflections on Honor and Shame in the Mediterranean," in *Honor and Shame and the Unity of the Mediterranean* (ed. David D. Gilmore; American Anthropological Association Special Publication 22; Washington, D.C.: American Anthropological Association: 1987), 130.

[338]In this respect, Malina compares the role that a credit rating plays in American society (*New Testament World,* 33).

[339]Brandes, "Reflections on Honor and Shame," 131.

is no redress."[340] Thus must a person court the favor of the PCR and fear its potentially

devastating negative judgments.

What judgments the PCR may make, however, are not altogether predetermined.

The society sometimes overrides the traditional rules, or reinterprets them, in particular

cases.[341] There is also not just one "public." As a number of scholars like Unni Wikan

and David DeSilva point out, one must know *for whom* a particular actor is performing in

order to understand his or her actions.[342] The situation of asymmetrical power, as in

trickster tales, provides a dramatic example of how different PCRs can interpret the same

situation in opposite ways. Officially, contests of honor are supposed to be limited to men

who are near peers.[343] It would be degrading, for example, for a man of great honor to

seriously engage a challenge or rebuke from a low-ranking man. Yet if the lower-status

man repeatedly slanders his better, the latter may be goaded into defending his reputation.

This would de facto recognize the challenge as legitimate, thus degrading the grandee and

granting his challenger a point.[344] Zeba Crook takes Malina to task for failing to

recognize that, despite the supposed rules limiting challenges to peers and public honor to

men, persons of lower status (including women) do, in fact, challenge persons of higher

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[340]Pitt-Rivers, "Honour and Social Status," 27.

[341]Crook rightly calls for modifying Malina's model to emphasize the judgment of the PCR as the *central* arbiter of honor—not the individual's claims to it ("Honor, Shame and Social Status," 609).

[342]A central critique that David DeSilva makes of Malina's and Neyrey's models is that they do not adequately consider to *which* public biblical authors are appealing, and the fact that a group may be defining *its* code of honor *against* that of the dominant culture (*Despising Shame: Honor Discourse and Community Maintainance in the Epistle to the Hebrews* [SBLDS 152; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995], 15). Similarly, Wikan makes a general appeal to discover, in studying a given culture, for whom each participant seeks to please, rather than assuming that a general set of values that apply to all ("Shame and Honour," 649).

[343]Malina, *New Testament World,* 35.

[344]The examples from Algerian Kabyle society in Pierre Bourdieu's "The Sentiment of Honour in Kabyle Society" (in *Honour and Shame* [ed. J. G. Peristiany; trans. Philip Sherrard; London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1966], 197-98) are particularly illustrative.

status—and sometimes win.[345] The PCR of the high status person may well regard such

challenges as illegitimate—as a "dirty trick." But for the disempowered group, it may be

cheered as delightful, vindicating, and just. That group may celebrate the challenger as

clever rather than shameless, and revel in how the trickster has been able to degrade the

powerful man in public view.

The specific qualities that constitute male honor will vary from one culture to

another, but there is consistently a high degree of overlap between honor and

masculinity.[346] It is not sufficient in most cultures to demonstrate masculinity in order to

have honor,[347] but it is absolutely essential as a primary condition.[348] And masculinity,

like honor, is not a given; it, too, must be proven publicly and often for a male person to

be counted a "man." [349] In general, higher levels of status require stronger demonstrations

of masculinity. This fact should give us to understand that having "honor" is not simply a

matter of attaining *high* status; it is the possession of *any* status—of being regarded and

treated as a worthy man by one's peers. It is why "honor"—or the threat of shame—is

such a powerful and fundamental motivator of behavior for men.

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[345]Crook, "Honor, Shame and Social Status," 599-609.

[346]David D. Gilmore, "Introduction: The Shame of Dishonor," in *Honor and Shame and the Unity of the Mediterranean* (ed. David D. Gilmore; AAA Special Publication 22; Washington, D.C.: American Anthropological Association, 1987), 10; Ken Stone, *Sex, Honor and Power in the Deuteronomistic History.* (JSOTSup 234; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996), 45.

[347]Pitt-Rivers describes masculinity—having *cojones* (literally, "testicles")—as a measure of bravery, but this is distinguished from manliness—*hombría—*which also requires that the man display proper shame, and use his strength for moral ends (*Fate of Shechem,* 22).

[348]Status for both genders is accorded in proportion to the degree one fulfills one's expected gender role, but for men this also requires distinguishing oneself from the feminine. The highest status is accorded to those behaviors most dissociated from femininity (See Sherry B. Ortner and Harriet Whitehead, "Introduction: Accounting for Sexual Meanings," in *Sexual Meanings: The Cultural Construction of Gender and Sexuality* [ed. Sherry B. Ortner and Harriet Whitehead; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981], 1-21; Gilmore, "The Shame of Dishonor," 8-16; and in Roman anthropology, Swancutt, *"Still* before Sexuality," 29). A text like Isa 3:12 presumes such a hierarchy. There Judah's leadership is described as inept by comparing it to "babes" and "women" in two parallel lines. That is, the status of women in the arena of kingship is no greater than that of infants.

[349]Carolyn Osiek and Jennifer Pouya, "Construction of Gender in the Roman Imperial World," in *Understanding the Social World of the New Testament* (ed. Dietmar Neufeld and Richard E. DeMaris; London: Routledge, 2010), 45; Swancutt, *"Still* before Sexuality," 28-31.

# Why Men?

It is my contention that nations in biblical stories generally operate predominantly by masculine honor-shame rules. In other words, biblical authors implicitly treat encounters between States as competitive contests for honor between human men. The direction of causation here is not clear: it may be that the male metaphor activates a set of rules about encounter, or that the nature of the encounter suggests a male personification of the group. Perhaps both are true. In either case, the use of the metaphor activates the web of associations that gender and competitive contests bring with them.

That States would be symbolized as male seems, in some ways, obvious. Interactions in public spheres—both historically and in literary texts—mostly *are* interactions between male actors.[350] Because both actors and authors are steeped in codes of masculine honor, the rules of political and military conduct often *are* those that regiment competitive contests between men. But there is more than realism at work here. The metaphors describe a deeper set of correspondences between the conceptual worlds of gender and politics.

Above all, as in village contests, contests between nations establish rank. Just as contests in the village order family and individual reputations, so too do military and political contests trumpet abroad the relative ranks of kings and their nations. Texts describing Israel or Judah encountering Moab as a State thus function to rank them relative to each other. Such hierarchical positioning is also simultaneously a demonstration of an aggressive kind of masculinity in which power over others is central.

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[350]The classic text that both demonstrates this across a variety of cultural contexts and nuances the public-private distinctions is *Woman, Culture, and Society,* edited by Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere (Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University Press, 1974).

The honor of nations, like that of men, is treated as a positive commodity that can be increased. Just as individuals can claim greater honor by demonstrating superior valor, wealth, power, or largesse, so too does a king or nation demand recognition through battle conquests (and the stelae that commemorate them), through display of impressive wealth (palaces, temples, statues, etc.), and through annexation of lands. Virtues of ideal kingliness, such as generosity and justice, also require public acknowledgement to translate to honor. So do kings construct public works and declare tax holidays to display their magnanimity; so does Hammurapi tout the justice of his rule by depicting himself on a stone stele receiving the law from Shamash. In collective societies, people participate in the prestige (or shame!) of the king, who is metaphorically its "head," to a far greater degree than in individualistic ones. This results in strong identification with the exploits of the king; his victories and defeats, his honor and disgrace, are felt as their own. In biblical texts, we see such identification in Lamentations and Psalm 137, where Judean civilians are taunted by their conquerors for the defeat of their king, their soldiers, and their god. They concede that they are indeed shamed by this defeat, for, since all the world knows that Judah is defeated, it also knows that its god has abandoned his people.

Just as the PCR establishes the meaning of a contest in a village, so too does a public narrative about a battle or political encounter become as important as the events themselves in determining the effective social positions of those involved. Thus the State texts often display a keen awareness of how a particular encounter is viewed by other nations. Texts that claim status must demonstrate that the status has been validated by other nations, and texts expressing the shame of defeat make clear that this defeat can never simply be experienced privately—the humiliation derives from the fact that it

occurs in full view of other nations.

Texts, however, have a slightly different relation to the PCR than do real-world actors. The ultimate PCR for biblical literature is the imagined audience. Though that audience will be swayed by hearing "what the world thinks," its assessment of an event is also shaped by the way that the event is conveyed—what details are selected, how they are framed, how the actors are characterized. That is, the author plays a strong and active role in determining the way that an outcome—a seemingly cut-and-dried win or loss— "means." And of course, the PCR is also a moving and changing entity. Its verdicts are not so permanent as in village life, since, as circumstances change, new audiences interpret the text differently.

Just as the verdict of the PCR over a contest is treated as a real measure of a man's honor, so too are military and political outcomes treated as indicators of deeper qualities: battles not only determine who will rule, but also who *intrinsically deserves* to rule.[351] In biblical texts, fitness to rule is treated as a direct correlative of a particular king's piety—his effectiveness in gaining the patronage of Yhwh. The authors thus treat battle outcomes and measures of worldly status as empirical evidence of Yhwh's favor on the king and his presence with the nation. As often as not, they emphasize the *absence* of such favor—or at least its diminishment from an earlier, more ideal, time.

The way that honor is conceived as a scarce resource implies a winner-takes-all result for any given contest. The demonstration of power by a nation is often implicitly a demonstration of that nation's "masculinity"—and of attacking the masculinity of the

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[351]Of this Malina says that social status is often interpreted as an indicator of moral goodness, and that a king, as arbiter of right and wrong, is considered above human criticism of morality (*New Testament World,* 48). While biblical authors do indeed criticize the kings of Israel, they do so partly by portraying them as failing in contests that impart status.

opposing side. The classic example of this is the description of the enemy soldiers as becoming "like women."[352] As remarked above, this means that humiliation of an opponent may be as useful as a full victory for gaining honor. This principle is as useful in political and military contests as in those at the village level. The fun of the Balak story in Numbers 22-24 is not that Moab is defeated—Balak retains his post and Moab is never challenged. But in being utterly foiled in his designs to destroy Israel, Balak is utterly humiliated—something close enough to a victory for the Israelite audience. Similarly, the rivalries with Moab expressed in the prophetic passages of section II (below) presuppose that Judah is in no position to *actually* defeat Moab, but its status can be lowered, which serves as a substitute.

The winner-takes-all nature of honor contests also makes them a good metaphor for struggles over land or power that are conceived as hegemonic. That is, narratives portray a battle as settling definitively whether a land will be "Israel" or "Moab." Just as there can be only one winner, a place can only be Israel *or* Moab—not both. Chapter 1 has pointed out that historically speaking, hegemony and full control of geographic territories was often an ideal rather than a reality. Nevertheless, biblical descriptions of battles assert the ideal, treating each entity as though it were clear and homogeneous. Thus the variety of smaller groups that we know from Mesha's stele to have coexisted in the *mišor* are simplified to the single entity "Moab" in 2 Kings 3—even as Gadites and Reubenites lived, or at least had claims, in the same area. So too are any tribal distinctions between those who fight for "Israel" disregarded in that passage. The monarchic history includes foreigners as a regular feature of Israelite life—even at high

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[352]Biblical examples in Isa 19:16, Jer 50:37, 51:30; Nah 3:13; a frequent boast in other ANE texts as well.

levels of the royal court[353]—a fact that shows clearly that Israel was never an ethnically homogenous group. Yet when a battle is won or territory ceded, the entities involved simplify to two discrete bodies, coherent and unified, and easily ranked relative to each other.

The presence of male metaphors underlying these encounters is made most clear by the contrasts we will see when we compare texts that envision contact between Israelites and Moabites as Peoples. Those contrasts point out several additional features that distinguish State from People texts—features that flow from the underlying distinction between gender expectations. One difference is symbolized in ideal anthropologies. Male bodies are assumed to be hard, self-contained, and impermeable. They are penetrators, not the penetrated. Translated to the field of battle, their encounters with other males are straightforward clashes of bodies that remain coherent and separate throughout the encounter. They may be beaten or wounded, but the contact with the other army—with the foreign body—does not tempt the soldier's heart, poison his insides, or infect him with disease. The absence of such threats distinguishes the texts in this chapter from those presented in Chapters 3 and 4, where Israel is conceived as penetrable: it is vulnerable to influence or violation and irrevocable pollution—in a word, it is feminized.

The emotional tenor in these sets of texts is also, therefore, different. The State texts have several different tones—some strident, some moralizing—but none seem particularly *anxious*. They do not fear trickery or subtle influence or contamination. Indeed, the tricksters play on the side of Israel in Numbers 22-24 and Judges 3, and the

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[353]An Edomite (1 Sam 21:7ff) and Amalekite (2 Sam 1:8) are reportedly part of Saul's army. David's entourage includes a Hittite (2 Sam 11:3ff), a Philistine (2 Sam 15:19-20), a Zoban (Aramean), an Ammonite and a Maacathite (2 Sam 23:20). The wife by whom Solomon sires Rehoboam is Ammonite (1 Kgs 14:21).

audience is unthreatened enough by Moab to enjoy some humor at its expense. By contrast, when Moab is an entity that threatens to draw Israel into apostasy—to somehow change its fundamental nature—there is no room for laughter.

The different gender metaphors also prescribe opposite kinds of reactions for Israel when encountering Moab. As we have said, male-male encounters are a necessary and even positive part of masculine identity and honor. They offer opportunities to publicly maintain or enhance standing—even if only by humiliating the opponent. Even when the outcome is negative, they provide valuable information about rank. In most of the encounters with Moab-as-People, as in the lives of women whose honor rests entirely on avoiding the predation of men, the only good encounter is no encounter. Israel is urged there to sequester itself in strong walls, to submit to its chosen authorities, and to stay far away from the threatening foreigner who wishes to enter.

# Part I
# Moab Defeated:
# Token of Israelite Status and Divine Favor

In the first set of texts, Moab is pictured as a subjugated State. Conquest of Moab is a public act that enhances Israel's status among other nations. Israel not only proves itself stronger than Moab, it also gains the status of a suzerain who can demand tribute and issue commands. The authors of the following texts interpret the conquest of Moab as a sign of divine favor, an affirmation that Yhwh is "with" Israel or Judah in battle. The inverse is also true: when Moab overturns a victory, Israel suffers worldly humiliation and its scribes read the defeat as a sign that Yhwh has withdrawn support.

# 2 SAMUEL 8:2, 12 // 1 CHRONICLES 18:2, 11

Brief as they are, these passages capture succinctly how conquest of Moab functions as a measure of Israel's status and divine favor. Second Samuel 8:1-15 is essentially a summary of the (mostly military) achievements of David's reign. The defeat of Moab appears here along with that of eight other nations. The timing of these conquests, placed in the narrative "some time after" (2 Sam 8:1) the extravagant promises to David in the preceding passage (2 Samuel 7), assures the reader that Yhwh continued to help David throughout his reign.[354] In fact, the narrator's comment on these victories— that "Yhwh gave David victory wherever he went" (2 Sam 8:6, 14)—frames them as confirmations of the Promise passage, in which Yhwh says to David, "I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut down all your enemies before you" (2 Sam 7:9a). Thus conquest of Moab is presented as a specific instance of the victories that verify Yhwh's favor of David.

Most scholars assume this text to be preexilic. Second Samuel 7 is an integral part of a preexilic version of the Deuteronomistic history, in which a view of the promise to David as unbreakable and eternal has not yet been sobered by exile.[355] This passage is intimately connected with the promise in chapter 7—it is given to demonstrate its veracity—and so would also seem to date to the pre-exilic period. P. Kyle McCarter is probably right in speculating that it is one of several "ancient fragments" gathered here

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[354]Or as Tony Cartledge puts it, "The narrator's clear intent is that the reader understand how Yahweh kept his promise by giving David rest from all his enemies" (*1 & 2 Samuel* [Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary; Macon, Ga.: Smyth & Helwys, 2001], 464). P. Kyle McCarter describes it as "a catalogue of victories...to show the pacification of the land and extension of its boundaries under David. The repeated refrain, 'Yahweh gave David victory wherever he went' attributes the success to divine favor" (*II Samuel* [AB 9; New York: Doubleday, 1984], 251).

[355]R. P. Gordon, *1 & 2 Samuel* (OTG; Sheffield, Eng.: JSOT Press, 1987), 19, 74. Perhaps it dates to the version of Josiah's time, as per F. W. Cross, Jr.'s theory of Dtr ("The Themes of the Book of Kings and the Structure of the Deuteronomistic History," in *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* [Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1973], 274-89).

around the theme of victory.[356] R. P. Gordon believes that the Samuel books in general

underwent little editing compared to the rest of DtrH,[357] which would mean that the

current text more or less reflects a pre-exilic memory.

The basic ingredients of a State depiction are present even in the single verse 2

Sam 8:2. The encounter is military. The only visible characters, David and the Moabite

soldiers made to lie on the ground, are representatives of their respective "states." (We

will set aside here the question of whether either Israel or Moab truly had "states" at this

point—the story presumes, or pretends, that they did.) Though the plurality of the

Moabite soldiers is signaled by masculine plural pronominal suffixes, it is actually

"Moab" and not "Moabites" whom David "smites" (2 Samuel 8:2, 12; 1 Chr 18:2, 11)

and who "became[358] tribute-bearing servants[359] to David" (2 Sam 8:2; 1 Chr 18:1).

Moab's significance is not in the action or fates of its individuals, but in what David does

to the single, collective entity.

The defeat of Moab is especially graphic in the Samuel version, and the treatment

of the soldiers emphasizes their humiliation. Being forced to lie on the ground, they are

symbolically placed "under David's feet" as in Ps 110:1, and helplessly made to await the

arbitrary decision of whether they will be part of the third who survive or the two-thirds

summarily executed. The Chronicler omits this detail—probably because it makes David

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[356]McCarter, *II Samuel,* 251.

[357]Gordon, 1 & 2 Samuel, 18.

[358]The verb (וַתְּהִי) is singular but also feminine. Rather than undercut the notion that military encounters are understood as masculine contests, this usage implies a shaming feminization of Moab in its defeat. Most references to Moab assume it is masculine (referred to as such in at least 114 cases), but some of the prophetic literature also treats it as feminine. In all thirteen instances in which this occurs, Moab is being subjected to defeat and humiliation (see also Jdg 3:30; Isa 15:5, 8; Jer 48:4, 9, 15, 18, 20, 38, 39; Amos 2:3; and Zeph 2:9).

[359]McCarter's translation (*II Samuel,* 242).

appear overly cruel[360]—and thus boils down the passage to what the authors apparently

consider essential in Moab's function: its military defeat and its subjection to tribute.

Tribute takes conquest one step further: it turns battle defeat into a permanent obligation,

a recurrent expression of submission by the weaker to the stronger party, which must

furthermore be enacted each year. When David dedicates the booty from Moab to Yhwh

(2 Sam 8:12//1 Chr 18:11), he not only builds up the status of Yhwh, he also emphasizes

to Moab the defeat of *its* god.[361] Every aspect of Moabite defeat is recounted to build up

the glory of David and of Yhwh—a classic illustration of the notion that honor is

conceived as the spoils of a zero-sum contest.

Moab's conquest as a token of honor is made more explicit in this passage than in

any other biblical text. In declaring Yhwh's promise to David, the author draws a clear

identification between worldly status and divine favor, for Yhwh blesses David by

promising fame: "I will give you great renown like that of the greatest men on earth" (2

Sam 7:9b). As the victories themselves are recounted, the importance of prestige is again

stated explicitly: David "made a name[362] [for himself[363]]" (2 Sam 8:13). David's fame is

established in part by the subject matter: 2 Sam 18:1-15 shifts focus from defensive to

offensive battles, touting David not just as defender, but as empire builder.[364] The

importance of establishing David's glory is also indicated by the bending of facts toward

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[360]Cartledge, *1 & 2 Samuel,* 465. He also notes the oddity of David's cruelty in light of the close relationships expressed by Ruth 4:21-22 and 1 Sam 23:3-4. I would propose, however, that it may be precisely because David had a reputation for being "overly cozy" with Moab that he—or his chronicler—was compelled to refute those charges with clear actions to the contrary.

[361]Cartledge states that the dedication of the booty casts the conquests as holy wars—that is, that David understood them as wars of Yhwh (*1 & 2 Samuel,* 469).

[362]McCarter thinks this refers to some kind of monument (*II Samuel,* 251). I find that proposal dubious, but even if it is correct, the statement would still convey the importance of worldly prestige—this time in the form of a public display of kingliness.

[363]RSV and NRSV translate the verb in וַיַּעַשׂ דָּוִד שֵׁם as "won a name for himself," while *NJPS* renders "gained fame" and *NIV* as "became famous."

[364]Cartledge, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 463.

that end: most scholars find the chronology, if not also the plausibility and attribution of victories recorded, questionable.[365] The one non-military achievement in the list also indicates a concern with "renown" extending beyond military achievement:

> When King Toi of Hamath heard that David had defeated the entire army of Hadadezer, Toi sent his son Joram to King David to greet him and to congratulate him on his military victory over Hadadezer—for Hadadezer had been at war with Toi. He brought with him objects of silver, gold, and copper. King David dedicated these to Yhwh…
> (2 Sam 8:9-11a, *NJPS*).

Gifts, like military conquests, signal the superiority of David over other kings, of his (Yhwh-sponsored army) over other armies. This gift is all the more remarkable for the fact that it comes, not coerced, but because the king of Hamath "heard" about David's exploits. That is, David's prowess is famous abroad, and kings tremble before him. Though biblical authors sometimes condemn kings for allying with foreigners, this apparent alliance only enhances David's "name."

The concern shown in 2 Sam 8:1-15 for Israel's standing among the nations is a thread that runs throughout the following depictions of Israel encountering State-Others, though it is nowhere else so plainly expressed. Israel's possession of the tokens of status and power that outsiders respect is an aspiration of every encounter—whether diplomatic or military—with Moab as a state. This quality of the State-texts is clarified especially by its contrast to the People-texts, in which Israel is urged to be different from "the nations" and instead measured by criteria about which other nations would care little.

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[365]For example, after discussing difficulties with each of the achievements listed, A. A. Anderson states, "It is highly questionable whether all the victories attributed to David were actually achieved by him personally" (*2 Samuel* [WBC 11; Dallas: Word Books, 1989], 131-34). Cartledge concludes that, "the collection is more concerned with theology and ideology than with chronology" (*1 & 2 Samuel,* 464). McCarter states, "the organizing principle here is theme, not chronology" (*II Samuel*, 251).

# PSALMS 60 AND 108

In the example above, Moab's conquest was a signal of divine favor in a rather generic way: conquest of a nation—any nation—equals worldly success, which enhances status and signals Yhwh's support in its undertakings. But it is one thing to say that conquest signals presence, and another to say that presence is not possible *without* the conquest of a nation—a *specific* nation. Yet precisely that is what Psalms 60 and 108 imply: if Moab is not subordinate, God cannot be counted present with Israel.

Psalm 108 is a composite of earlier sources, quoting nearly exactly from Psalms 60:7-14 and 57:8-12.[366] The references to Moab in Ps 60:8-10 and 108:8-10 are identical, so we will focus here primarily on Psalm 60, the earlier one. Despite the superscription in 60:1-2 placing the Psalm in the time of David's battles, the setting is clearly later, for the community laments the utter reversal of a time when Israel had an empire like the one depicted in vv. 8-10.[367] A pre-exilic date is likely for most of the Psalm, since verse 11 calls for a march against Edom and verse 12 decries Yhwh's abandonment of "our armies." Most scholars suggest a setting in Judah's last years as a kingdom,[368] perhaps preceding a campaign to the outpost at Horvat ʿUza, which Judah lost to Edomite

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[366]Han-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60-150: A Continental Commentary* (Trans. Hilton C. Oswald; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 333; Klaus Seybold, *Die Psalmen,* (HAT I/15; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1996), 431.  Verse numbers follow the Hebrew text.

[367]Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51-100* (WBC 20; Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 107.

[368]Ernst Axel Knauf dates the Psalm between 600 and 598, positing an attack on Edom by Jehoiakim ("Psalm LX und Psalm CVIII," *VT* 50 [2000]: 55-61). Ulrich Kellermann places the Psalm in the days just preceding the conquest of Jerusalem, when Nebuchadnezzar used Edomite troops to attack it ("Erwägungen zum historischen Ort von Psalm LX," *VT* 28 [1978]: 56-65). Seybold breaks the Psalm into several parts, but places most at the end of the exilic period (see following note) (*Die Psalmen*, 237) and Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger basically agree with him (*Psalms 2: A Commentary on Psalms 51-100.* [ed. Klaus Baltzer; trans. Linda M. Maloney; Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005], 97-98). Artur Weiser says simply that it is likely to be pre-exilic and originate in a campaign against Edom (*The Psalms: A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), 438-39. Kraus described "most recent commentaries" as advocating pre-exilic dates when he wrote his own commentary in 1978 (*Psalms 60-150,* 3).

expansion in the years before the destruction of Jerusalem.[369] The oracle of vv. 6-8, in

which Moab appears, is probably older still, though a few think it was composed for the

occasion.[370] Yet Psalm 108, which is almost certainly post-exilic,[371] indicates that

traditions about Moab as conquest continued to be used even when Moab was no longer a

state. Indeed, a few suggest that Psalm 60 is also post-exilic, expressing Jewish hopes of

a political-military state in the Persian or Hellenistic period.[372] Some commentators, who

see the conquests as symbolic expressions of spiritual hopes for a messianic age, also

date the psalm after the exile.[373] What meaning did Moab have for biblical authors that it

could continue to be invoked as a political power after the exile?

First we must examine Moab's function in the poem. Verses 8-11 convey an

oracle of Yhwh in the role of divine warrior. He speaks boldly and directly as He

partitions the lands west (Shechem) and east (Succoth) of the Jordan.[374] The nations are

likened to objects: Ephraim "my helmet" and Judah "my scepter." In contrast to their

[369]See the reports of Itzbaq Beit-Arieh and Bruce C. Cresson, "Horvat ʿUza: A Fortified Outpost on the Eastern Negev Border," *BA* 54 (1991): 126-35. Both Judean and Edomite ostraca were found at the site, which was apparently built in the time of Manasseh, Amon or Josiah, and fell a decade or so before Jerusalem's destruction (Seybold, *Die Psalmen,* 240). Seybold dates the oracle in vv. 8-10 to the time of Josiah, and thinks that the first verses (3-7) were added last, during the exilic period (Ibid., 238).

[370]Especially Alfons Deissler, *Die Psalmen,* Vol. 2 of 3 (Psalms 42-89), (Die Welt der Bibel: Kleinkommentare zur Heiligen Schrift; Dusseldorf: Patmos, 1964), 67-68. Erhard S. Gerstenberger seems to imply this in positing a setting in post-exilic synagogue worship (*Psalms, Part 1, with an Introduction to Cultic Poetry* [FOTL 14; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1988], 240).

[371]Seybold, *Die Psalmen,* 431; Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalms 3: A Commentary on Psalms 101-150* (ed. Klaus Baltzer; trans. Linda M. Maloney; Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011), 116-18. Knauf proposes a Maccabean composition ("Psalm LX und Psalm CVIII," 61-65).

[372]This was more true of scholarship earlier than the mid-twentieth century—which often posited a Maccabean composition of the Psalter. Kraus identifies Ferdinand Hitzig, Hermann Olshausen, Julius Wellhausen, Bernhard Duhm, Frants Buhl and D. W. Staerk as proponents of Hellenistic dates (*Psalms 60-150*, 3). But there are also proponents of a post-exilic date in more recent scholarship, usually holding less radical positions. Tate proposes a date just after the fall of Jerusalem (*Psalms 51-100,* 104). He points out that the animosity toward Edom accords with sentiments expressed in other post-exilic texts and that the lament of divine abandonment also fits a post-exilic setting.

[373] For example, Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 1*, 242. One suspects, however, that the tendency to spiritualize complaints against enemies, to see messianic hopes devoid of a political or military element, and to downplay implications of violence is sometimes reflecting biases derived from Christian interpretation more than ancient usage.

[374]John Goldingay, *Psalms, Volume 2: Psalms 42-89* (Baker Commentary on the Old Testament, Wisdom & Psalms; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2006), 230.

noble functions as symbols of power and authority, Moab's role is as a "washbasin"—the bowl in which feet, both physically and symbolically the body's lowest part, are washed.[375] It is a domestic object rather than a military one, a repository for filth rather than a symbol of power; certainly it is not a force to be reckoned with. Edom, too, is associated with feet—Yhwh "casts his shoe" at it, perhaps in derision, as in modern Islamic societies. For its part, Philistia is told to shout—either in acclamation of their new king, or in a futile attempt at resistance.[376] In sum, the surrounding nations are made subordinate to both Yhwh, who manipulates them as lowly objects, and Judah and Ephraim, who are designated as the diadems of Yhwh's power and placed in the center of the conceptual map.

Verses 6-8 have usually been interpreted as a depiction of David's empire, as it is drawn in 2 Samuel 8.[377] This seems to be the understanding of the author who used them for Psalm 108, for the promises of Yhwh there begin a trilogy (Psalms 108-110) that finds its resolution in Ps 110:1, where David praises Yhwh for placing his enemies "under his feet."[378] But the divine warrior imagery also evokes the Conquest—Yhwh's original partitioning of the land.[379] The fact that the oracle suggests both Israel's original conquest and David's empire underscores the intersection of these two traditions: both

[375]Goldingay, *Psalms 42-89,* 231. Hossfeld and Zenger suggest that it may even be a euphemism for a chamber pot (*Psalms 2,* 100).

[376]Though many emend 60:10 to "I will raise a shout against Philistia" (in conformity with Ps. 108:10), the more difficult reading in the MT is retained by Hossfeld and Zenger, who understand Philistia to be celebrating Yhwh's victory (*Psalms 2*, 93) and Goldingay, who interprets it as a kind of dare—Philistia is welcome to raise a battle shout against Yhwh, because they cannot prevail (*Psalms 42-89,* 225, 231).

[377]Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 1*, 239; Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 2,* 94; Duane L. Christensen, *Prophecy and War in Ancient Israel: Studies in the Oracles Against the Nations in Old Testament Prophecy* (Bibal Monograph Series 3; Berkeley: Bibal Press, 1975)*,* 121. Though he emphasizes the Divine Warrior imagery, Tate also remarks that, "The territories mentioned probably represent the major areas of the Davidic kingdom" (*Psalms 51-100,* 106), an idea he attributes to Weiser (*The Psalms,* 439).

[378]Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3,* 116-18; Knauf, "Psalm LX und Psalm CVIII," 61.

[379]Kellermann, "Erwägungen zum historischen Ort," 62-63; Goldingay, *Psalms 42-89,* 229; Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, 106.

represent a vision of ideal Israel. So, too, do the lamenters insist that vv. 8-10 describe the

world as it should be, as it *would* be if only Yhwh again "march[ed] with our armies." It

thus appears that one of Moab's functions in later times is to invoke Israel's glorious

past—the borderland enemies that Yhwh had promised would be subjugated and that

David actually conquered when Israel was settled in its place and the land had "rest."[380]

At the same time, however, the central enemy in the poem is clearly Edom: the military

action that the poem contemplates is a march against "the fortified city/ the city of

Edom." It may be, therefore, that Moab's role is somewhat incidental—a passive

character in a "surrounding nations" tradition whose real target is Edom.

The circumstances in which the community finds itself in vv. 3-6 are a reversal of

the ideal, and this seems to have occasioned a crisis of faith: "restore us!" it cries. But

"restoration" does not just mean that Israel or Judah would again be kingdoms and

possess their traditional lands. Restoration also means that Ephraim and Judah would be

elevated while its neighbors would be put in subordinate places. Nor does abandonment

merely signal absence: when Yhwh does not aid Israel, He is present—but actively

opposing his people. Because God does not accomplish the victories shown in the oracle,

the people declare that God has "rejected us," "made a breach in us," "made the land

quake," "made your people suffer hardship," given us wine that makes us reel" (*NJPS*,

vv. 3-5). The notion of divine presence seems to work on the same zero-sum principle as

honor. What the defeated loses does not disappear—his opponent snatches it up, is

elevated by it, and uses it against him. For Judah to be Yhwh's scepter, Moab must be

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[380]Brian Jones, however, points to a similar idea in Amos 9:11 and posits that the idea there to rebuild the "booth of David" by reestablishing control over neighboring nations is not necessarily late (*Howling over Moab: Irony and Rhetoric in Isaiah 15-16* [SBLDS 157; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996], 209).

His washbasin.

Now this dichotomy—this notion that if Yhwh is not with Israel He is against them—may be employed here as a rhetorical goad to the deity to honor himself by helping his people. Nevertheless, it exposes the vulnerabilities of an ideology equating worldly honor with divine favor. That it would subject a small nation like Judah, more often conquered than conqueror, to repeated crises of faith is obvious. But the zero-sum nature of Israel's status also reveals why regional shifts in status would prove so unsettling to Judah. If Moab emerges from its subjugation and gains in status, it does not simply inspire jealousy; it disturbs the proper order of the world. For Moab to rise threatens the notion that Yhwh will ensure Judah's place as supreme—either because He cannot or because He will not do so. And for Yhwh not to be on Judah's side means that Judah must prepare for Yhwh's wrath. Second Kings 3 may be suggesting that such a reversal is precisely what results from the disobedience of Israel's kings.

# 2 KINGS 3

Second Kings 3 also features Moab as a token of status, but this time as an indicator of loss. The shift in the story, which opens with Moab as vassal and closes with Moab sending Israel home in retreat, tracks the change in Israel's status from that of empire ascendant to empire-in-decline. That this episode negatively judges Israel requires some explanation, for right up to the last two verses Israel is trouncing Moab in one defeat after another. Its winning streak even appears to have divine sponsorship, as Yhwh gives oracles for miraculous provision of water (3:16-17) and for victory (3:18-19) through the reliable prophet Elisha. Yet suddenly in vv. 26-27, after the Moabite king

sacrifices his son,[381] we hear that "great wrath came upon Israel" (קֶצֶף־גָּדוֹל עַל־יִשְׂרָאֵל

וַיְהִי), and the Israelites and their allies retreat to their homelands. Even this does not

seem all that negative, since the armies retreat without major losses and the wrath seems

to respond to an action by Moab rather than a sin of Israel. Nor is Moab's "victory"

exactly rousing; it barely survives, and at great cost. How is it then, that the outcome of

the battle represents a clear negative for Israel?

There is no question that this text is fraught with problems whose solutions evade

a scholarly consensus. Resolving them thoroughly exceeds the scope of this work.

Nevertheless, nearly all scholars *do* agree that this episode reflects negatively on Israel.

The confusing impression that Israel is both victor and loser of the battle probably results

from the composite nature of the text.[382] The part of the story in which Israel appears

relentlessly routing Moab (vv. 6-25) probably *was* a victory tale—an originally Northern

account of Israel's defeat of Moab, backed by Yhwh and mediated by Elisha. A Southern

author, however, seems to have added vv. 26-27 (and perhaps some of Elisha's

mutterings against Jehoram as well), converting the story to the (historically attested) one

of Israel losing Moab's vassalage, thus tarnishing the overall portrayal of Israel and its

[381]The ambiguity of the antecedents in this verse allow alternative understandings: some have argued that Mesha sacrifices the son of the king of Edom: this was the interpretation of Kimchi and Gersonides, which is called "fanciful" by Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor (*II Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* [AB 11; New York: Doubleday, 1988], 48), but is advocated by Anson Rainey ("Mesha in Ninth Century Geopolitics: Syntax, Geography and History"[paper presented at the annual meeting of the national SBL, Washington, D.C., 19 November 2006). F. V. Reiterer assumes that the King of Edom sacrifices his own son ("קצף," *TDOT* 8:90).

[382]So Hans-Christoph Schmitt (*Elisa* [Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1972], 32-37); Harald Schweizer (*Elischa in den Kriegen* [SANT 37; Munich: Kösel, 1974], 17-210); Simon J. De Vries, *Prophet against Prophet: the Role of the Micaiah Narrative (1 Kings 22) in the Development of Early Prophetic Tradition* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1978), 56; Bartlett, "The 'United' Campaign against Moab," 144-45; Hermann-Josef Stipp (*Elischa—Propheten—Gottesmänner* [ATSAT 23; St. Ottilien: EOS, 1987], 63-151); Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings,* 48, 51), who cite a similar opinion by David Noel Freedman from personal correspondence. They are followed by Joe M. Sprinkle, "2 Kings 3: History or Historical Fiction?" *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 9 (1999): 261, and Marvin A. Sweeney, *I & II Kings: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 283.

Omride king, Jehoram.[383] The same redactor may also have written the Dtr. assessment of

Jehoram in 3:2-3, which reframes the narrative from the other end, anticipating the

battle's "almost-victory" with the "almost-piousness" of a king who was "displeasing to

Yhwh, yet not like his father and mother."[384] Even those scholars who view the text as a

unity conclude that the outcome judges Israel negatively.[385]

The wrath that sends Israel into retreat is also confusing, because it either seems

that Yhwh is punishing Israel for Mesha's action, or that an Israelite author is

acknowledging the power of a Moabite god. Yet for whatever reason, גָּדוֹל עַל־יִשְׂרָאֵל

וַיְהִי קֶצֶף means that Yhwh himself has turned against Israel. *Qeṣep gadol* in biblical

texts refers exclusively to divine emotion,[386] though admittedly *qeṣep* unmodified can

express human anger or resentment.[387] The preposition ʿ*al,* however, designates the target

of the anger, not its source,[388] so the passage could not mean that disgust or anger "came

over" the Israelites.[389] Nor is it likely to have issued from Kemosh, since biblical authors

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[383]J. Maxwell Miller and John Bartlett both ascribe the garbling of the chronology (Jehoram and Jehoshaphat were probably not contemporaries) to an anti-Northern redaction of an older account (Miller, "The Elisha Cycle and the Accounts of the Omride Wars," *JBL* 85 [1966], 447-48; Bartlett, "'United' Campaign against Moab," 136, 145).

[384]Gina Hens-Piazza (*1-2 Kings* [Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries; Nashville: Abingdon, 2006], 240) points out the similarity of characterization without making a contention about authorship.

[385]These scholars argue that either the conditions for Elisha's victory oracle had not been met or that it was a divine ruse from the beginning: Jesse C. Long, Jr. "Unfulfilled Prophecy or Divine Deception? A Literary Reading of 2 Kings 3," *Stone-Campbell Journal* 7 (2004): 101-117; Philip D. Stern, "Of Kings and Moabites: History and Theology in 2 Kings 3 and the Mesha Inscription," *HUCA* 64 (1993): 1-14; Raymond Westbrook, "Elisha's True Prophecy in 2 Kings 3," *JBL* 124 (2005): 530-32; Iain Provan, *1 and 2 Kings* (New Interpreter's Bible Commentary; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 184; John Gray, *I & II Kings: A Commentary* (2d. ed.; OTL; London: SCM, 1970), 485; Philip E. Satterthwaite, "The Elisha Narratives and the Coherence of 2 Kings 2-8," *Tyn Bul* 49 (1998): 1-28.

[386]Richard D. Nelson, *First and Second Kings* (IBC; Atlanta: John Knox, 1987), 168; Choon-Leong Seow, "The First and Second Books of Kings: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," in *NIB* (vol. 3; ed. Leander E. Keck et al.; Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 184-85.

[387]Reiterer, "קֶצֶף," *TDOT* 13:90, but he, too, stresses that most often Yhwh is its author and Israel its target. He further asserts that *qeṣef* is a kind of wrath over which Yhwh has full control (Ibid., 93).

[388] Ibid.*,* 90.

[389]As Sweeney (*I & II Kings*, 279-80, 284) and Hens-Piazza (*1-2 Kings*, 247) contend.

nowhere else attribute emotion or acknowledge the power of foreign gods.[390] There are a

number of theories that attempt to explain Yhwh's wrath. Some posit that it is simply the

author's theological explanation of a negative historical reality.[391] Others cite flaws in

Jehoram's faith and conduct,[392] or conclude that the final outcome is a partial fulfillment

of judgment on Ahab's line (viz. 1 Kgs 21:21-22, 29).[393] Others cite Israel's brutal battle

tactics, which violate its own rules of warfare (Deut 20:19-20)[394] and which are the

ultimate cause of Mesha's desperate sacrifice.[395] Whatever the logic, Yhwh's wrath

against his own nation is an attested phenomenon (as we saw above), and it implies

certain judgment on the nation and its king.

Several other negative features of the outcome are indisputable. Despite Israel's

thrashing of the Moabite towns, in failing to take Kir Hareseth it leaves the capital city

intact, and thus "wins the battles but loses the war." The bid for Moabite independence,

signaled by Mesha's withholding of tribute (2 Kgs 1:1, 3:1) has been successful. The

rebel king himself also survives—able to lead and rebuild a new Moab. Thus the *raisons*

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[390]The view of Baruch Margalit ("Why King Mesha of Moab Sacrificed His Oldest Son," *BAR* 12, 6 [1986]: 62-63); G. H. Jones (*1 & 2 Kings, Volume 2* [NCB; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984], 400); and John Gray (*I & II Kings: A Commentary* [1st. ed.; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963], 439). Walter Brueggemann (*1 & 2 Kings* [Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary; Macon, Ga.: Smyth & Helwys, 2000], 317) and Nelson (*First and Second Kings*, 168) insist that the text leaves ambiguous the identity of the god issuing forth the wrath.

[391]Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings,* 51. Also part of the explanation of P. Stern ("Of Kings and Moabites," 11), Robert L. Cohn (*2 Kings* [Berit Olam; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2000], 24); and Herbert Chanan Brichto (*Toward a Grammar of Biblical Poetics: Tales of the Prophets* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1992], 208).

[392]Some speak of a general faithlessness (Brichto, *Biblical Poetics,* 203, 205; P. Stern, "Of Kings and Moabites,"7-8), others point to a piety of convenience (Brueggemann, *1 & 2 Kings*, 307-09; Hens-Piazza, *1-2 Kings,* 247). Several point out that Jehoram's complaints echo those of the wilderness Israelites (Sweeney, *I & II Kings*, 282; Hens-Piazza, *1-2 Kings,* 243; Cohn, *2 Kings,* 21)—an idea supported by Bartlett's contention that the whole route of the campaign is written to evoke the murmuring episode in Numbers 20 ("'United' Campaign against Moab," 138).

[393]Bartlett, "'United' Campaign against Moab," 145; Sweeney, *I & II Kings*, 279; T. R. Hobbs, *2 Kings* (WBC 13; Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1985), 7; P. Stern, "Of Kings and Moabites," 8, J. Long, "Unfulfilled Prophecy?" 102, Satterthwaite, "Elisha Narratives," 11.

[394]Seow, "First and Second Books of Kings," 183-185; Brichto, *Biblical Poetics,* 207-08; Hens-Piazza, *1-2 Kings,* 244; Nelson, *First and Second Kings,* 167; Sprinkle, "2 Kings 3," 265.

[395]Hens-Piazza, *1-2 Kings,* 247; Brichto, *Biblical Poetics,* 208.

*d'être* of the mission—to quell the rebellion and punish its instigator—utterly fail.[396]

What's more, ancient readers may well have known that 2 Kings 3 vastly understated Israel's defeat. Mesha claimed to have slaughtered whole communities of Israelites in ʿAtarot (MI, L. 10-12) and Nebo (L. 14-17) and conquers the Israelite outpost of Yahaṣ as well (L. 18-20). Archaeological evidence upholds the general reliability of his claims—corroborating specific innovations, such as the reservoir and cisterns in Dibon, while producing a broader picture of his reign as one of Moab's most prosperous.[397] The towns described as Moabite in Jeremiah 48 and Isaiah 15-16 witness a country that expanded still further after Mesha's time—reaching into formerly-Israelite Gilead.[398] References to wealth, "pride," "strength," and "glory" in those oracles (see Isa 16:6-9, perhaps 15:7; Jer 48:2a, 7, 11, 17, 18a, 25, 29, 32) hint at Moab's having obtained a degree of international status that continued to smart in Israel's national consciousness. Even if knowledge of Mesha's victories, with their painful and humiliating connotations, were lost over time, the Kings saga implies that Israel never again reconquered Moab, and that its power in the Transjordan diminished from this point forward.[399] So 2 Kings 3 stands as the story of a watershed moment, marking the beginning of Israel's decline and Moab's rise.

## Moab's Role as State in 2 Kings 3

Moab is given a role as State partly by the text's genre: Moab is an actor in a royal history that recounts Israel's and Judah's acts as kingdoms engaging other

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[396]P. Stern, "Of Kings and Moabites," 9.

[397]P. Stern, "Of Kings and Moabites," 4.

[398]Yochanan Aharoni, *The Land of the Bible: A Historical Geography* (rev. ed.; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979), 340.

[399]Sweeney, *I & II Kings,* 279; Hobbs, *2 Kings,* 7; Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings,* 51; Brichto, *Biblical Poetics,* 201.

kingdoms. This episode is framed as an official regnal account of King Jehoram of Israel, initiated by stating his name, pedigree, years of office, and correspondence to the Judahite regnal chronology (2 Kgs 3:1). The story itself involves four different states (Israel, Judah, Edom and Moab), each represented by a king and an army. The Israelite king engages in typical state business: mustering troops (3:6), "sending" for and commanding the resources of other kings (3:7), and leading their armies into war (3:9, 3:24-25). Even Elisha, who presides over a miracle in the middle of the story, acts in the capacity of military advisor to the kings (3:11, 13, 18; cf. 1 Kgs 22:6).[400]

Moab, too, is depicted with trappings of a state. It is represented by a named king, Mesha, who brings tribute on behalf of his people to the Israelite court. He seems to have some kind of professional army, as he leads a charge of "700 swordsmen" (3:26), though part of the story describes Moab's army as quite amateurish (see below). Moab is also represented by its soldiers, who are said to hail from "all Moab" (3:21). They call to each other as members of a single entity when they say, "To the spoil, Moab!" (3:24). Israel's fight is never directed against *môʾābîm*; Jehoram proposes war against "Moab" (3:7), fears defeat "at the hand of Moab" (3:10, 13), and when promised victory, is told that Yhwh can "deliver Moab into your hand" (3:18). Thus Moab is treated as a single, military-political entity with a shared identity—not as a set individuals acting alone, and certainly not as people participating in Israelite communal activities.

## Moab's Meaning in 2 Kings 3

Moab's status shifts in the narrative from vassal to independent kingdom, and as it does, it measures the loss of status for Israel. Moab's initial vassalage affirms Israel's

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[400]Seow, "First and Second Books of Kings," 180.

superior position. The text specifies an enormous amount of tribute—the wool of 200,000

sheep annually to Israel (3:4). The number conveys Moab's total subordination[401] and

quantifies just how much Moab is impoverished and Israel enriched by the vassalage. In

contrast to Jehoram, who musters all Israel and then calls upon two other kings to fight

for him, Mesha relies on an army that seems to operate beyond his control. In the story,

they appear as a rag-tag militia composed of "every man old enough to bear arms" (3:21),

not called together by Mesha, but rather spontaneously rising up when "all Moab hear[s]"

(3:21) of the attack. They appear especially undisciplined and foolhardy when they

charge headlong into the enemy camp based on a silly misperception—mistaking sun-

reddened water for blood (3:21-22).[402] Ultimately, however, Moab's lower status only

sharpens Israel's humiliation. The amount of tribute becomes a reminder of what has

been lost. That this scrappy, minor kingdom turns back an Israel that is not only stronger

but also backed by two other armies, makes the defeat even more disgraceful.

Through the lens of honor-shame dynamics, Israel's loss of status is as important

as its loss of material benefits. Moab's subservience symbolizes Israel's ability to impose

its will; it serves as a public testament of Israel's power and honor. That Moab rebels

"after Ahab's death" (2 Kgs 1:1) issues a public-image challenge to Israel's new kings:

will Ahab's sons be able to enforce their fathers' conquest? Coming from an inferior, the

rebellion is an act of impudence that, if unpunished, makes Israel a laughingstock.[403] It

would become vulnerable to attacks—or to rebellion from its other vassal, Judah.[404] That

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[401]Cohn, *2 Kings*, 20.
[402]Brichto, *Biblical Poetics*, 206. Cohn characterizes the action as "impulsive" (*2 Kings*, 23); G. H. Jones calls the scenario "absurd," which makes more absurd still the fools who fall for it (*1 & 2 Kings*, 399).
[403]Crook points to a passage by Cassius Dio (58.5.3-4) in which he explains that it is folly to forgive the insults of inferiors, for this communicates weakness ("Honor, Shame, and Social Status," 600).
[404]Sweeney, *I & II Kings*, 281.

Judah and Edom bear witness to Israel's defeat is highly damaging: the very vassals

Israel had needed to impress into renewed allegiance observe its weakness with their own

eyes.

But the more important point for the author is not Israel's status *per se* but what it

portends about Yhwh's progressive removal of favor from Israel. What may originally

have been the account of Moab's conquest under an earlier king is remembered in the

text as the story of Israel losing control of its vassal. The choice to highlight the loss, but

not acknowledge that there was ever a conquest, is a telling editorial choice. It makes it

appear as though Moab had been part of Israel from the time of David—an impression

some scholars adopt as historical fact.[405] But it is highly unlikely that this was the case.

Mesha specifically speaks of subjugation by Omri (MI, L. 4-5), and lists himself and his

father, who "ruled over Moab thirty years" (L. 2), as Moab's only kings. Mesha's claims

in general seem borne out, and his statement that Moab had been continuously under

Israelite rule only from the time of Omri is more realistic. Why should Jerusalem have

gifted its vassal to the northern factions that had seceded from it? Even if Jeroboam had,

during the tumult of secession, also managed to wrest control of Moab, would possession

have been passed along to the successive dynasties of Baasha, Zimri and Omri, all of

whom ascended the throne in violent coups and killed off their predecessors' families? It

is far more likely that the Dtr author omits Omri's conquest of Moab in order to deny him

the kind of glory that David and Saul were ascribed for the same feat. And as argued

above, it may even be that the story we have *is* the story of the initial conquest, but that it

has been retooled to tell the story of eventual loss instead. Whatever the case, the final

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[405]For example, Sweeney, *I & II Kings,* 281; Hens-Piazza, *1-2 Kings,* 226; and perhaps Brichto, *Biblical Poetics,* 201.

form of the story remembers the initial glory only enough to point to its forfeit, and elevates Moab as a reminder of Israel's humiliation and sin.

# Part II.
# Moab as Rival:
# Rhetorical Contests for Public Image

This second set of texts derives from the prophetic corpus of texts known as "oracles against the nations" (OAN). Here the texts both assume that Moab has attained some worldly status and respond to a destruction that is either happening or imminent. Though the rhetoric here is more heated than in the texts describing military encounters, the authors never threaten direct attack by Israel or Judah. That is left to a third, unnamed party. The focus of the rhetoric is a verbal assault on Moab—an attempt to reduce its image in the eyes of the audience by *interpreting* its destruction. In addition to the texts explored below, Isa 11:14, Jeremiah 25 and 27 (where Moab is one of a group of nations addressed); Ezek 25:8-11; Amos 2:1-3 and Zeph 2:8-11 provide more abbreviated examples of the same phenomenon.

# ISAIAH 15-16

Isaiah 15-16 occurs among the OAN of chapters 13-23. It is unique among these in that it mixes the language of lament—even lament in the first person—with oracles of judgment. Whether the lament should be read ironically—and therefore as hostile rather than sympathetic toward Moab—is only one of the many critical issues that make interpretation of this poem difficult. Before we turn to those issues, however, we begin

with an overview of the passage's content and a discussion of how it portrays Moab as a State.

Most scholars divide the poem into three primary units: the first (15:1-9), describes destruction and national mourning in Moab (15:1-8), and ends with a cryptic oracle of judgment that "I will bring upon Dimon still more," and "a lion for the fugitives of Moab" (15:9). The second section (16:1-5) envisions Moab sending a delegation to Jerusalem to request asylum. Verse 16:6 issues an oracle of judgment on Moab's pride, serving as both a rejection of its asylum request, and an explanation of why the mourning recommences in the final section, where lament recommences (vv. 7-14). This last section ends with a statement about the futility of Moab's supplication (16:12). An addendum in vv. 13-14 asserts that the foregoing oracle originated long ago, and, as it apparently went unrealized, Yhwh will fulfill it within the next three years, reducing Moab to an insignificant remnant.

## Moab as State in Isaiah 15-16

Moab's role as State is largely assumed in First Isaiah, where Isaiah is portrayed as a political and military advisor to Jerusalem's kings in concrete events, especially the Syro-Ephraimite crisis. The prophetic oracles appear amid narratives of Isaiah's actions (see especially Isaiah 7-8, 20, 22:15ff) and thus are cast as speeches directly addressing *Realpolitik*. The superscriptions that precede the OAN also attempt to locate them in the eighth century: the first in the series is labeled "the *maśśa* that Isaiah, son of Amoz, saw" (13:1), and is probably meant to apply to the whole series.[406] Such notes tethering the oracles to historical events are sprinkled throughout the OAN (e.g. 14:28). The placement

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[406]Otto Kaiser, *Isaiah 13-39: A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), 1.

of the Moab poem in this series of "nations" further reinforces Moab's depiction as a state. The OAN may not historically issue from Isaiah of Jerusalem[407]—certainly they were at least redacted later—but their placement and framing insist on their grounding in patently political and military affairs.[408]

The poem itself gestures toward an act of statecraft in 16:1-5, the Moabites' plea for asylum. Many have seen vv. 4b-5 as an eschatological reference by a late author.[409] As Thomas Smothers argues, however, these lines are perfectly understandable as treaty language: Moab is agreeing to submit to vassalage "in the tent of David" in exchange for protection from "the Destroyer."[410] Even those who see a messianic reference, however, still understand the Moabite envoy to be requesting asylum, so the passage retains its political connotations.

The roles in which we see Moabite characters distinguishes this text from "People" texts, for the refugee situation (16:1-5) envisions Moabites potentially living among the Judahite populace, yet the author expresses no worry that these Moabites could contaminate Judean families, religion, or culture. Focus remains firmly fixed on the

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[407]Kaiser, for example, believes that the earliest stratum of Isaiah 13 (vv. 2-22) would be exilic, and that 14:24ff and 14:28ff are almost certainly Hellenistic (*Isaiah 13-39,* 2-3).

[408]Of the OAN in general, Peter Miscall says, "the Oracles address historical nations, accurately reflect their geography and probably represent historical events or series of events," though, because of their poetic form, they beg interpretation as "symbolic history and geography" (*Isaiah* [1st. ed.; Readings: A New Biblical Commentary; Sheffield, Eng.: JSOT Press, 1993], 52).

[409]Kaiser, *Isaiah 13-39,* 3; Georg Fohrer, *Das Buch Jesaja,* Vol. 1 of 3 (ZBAT 19; Zürich: Zwingli: 1960), 191; Hans Wildberger, *Isaiah 13-27: A Continental Commentary* (trans. Thomas H. Trapp; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 121, 141; ("perhaps") Walter Brueggemann, *Isaiah 1-39* (WC; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 142; Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 19; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 297; Edward J. Kissane, *The Book of Isaiah: Translated from the Critically Revised Hebrew Text with Commentary, Vol. 1: I-XXXIX* (Dublin: Richview Press/ Browne & Nolan, 1941), 184.

[410]Thomas G. Smothers, "Isaiah 15-16," in *Forming Prophetic Literature: Essays on Isaiah and the Twelve in Honor of John D. W. Watts* (ed. James W. Watts and Paul R. House; JSOTSup 235; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1996), 80-83. Christopher Seitz (*Isaiah 1-39* [IBC; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1993], 139) and Marvin A. Sweeney (*Isaiah 1-39, with an Introduction to Prophetic Literature* [FOTL 16; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1996], 248-49) also read this passage as original to an early, political setting.

political implications of offering protection or securing vassalage from Moab. It is true that the Moabite weepers and mourners are individuals, as in People texts. They function, however, as mere symbols of the destruction that ravages the country.

That the entity in view is "Moab" and not "Moabites" becomes clear as we see the imagery repeatedly envisage Moab as a coherent unit. The people are never referred to or addressed as *mōʾăbîm.* Instead, it is the personified Moab who "[goes] up to the temple to weep" and who "wails" over Nebo and Medeba (15:2). It is "Moab" that is guilty of pride (16:6), and "Moab" that is told to "wail" (16:7). So, too, does the author remind the reader that the people and places that bear witness to the destruction belong to Moab. It is on "her streets" and "her rooftops" that people are heard howling and weeping (15:3); it is "his shock troops" who shout (15:4b), "her fugitives" (15:5) who flee, and he whose "soul trembles within him" (15:4b).[411] The women[412] who are homeless like birds without a nest (16:2) and the "outcasts" who seek asylum in Jerusalem (16:4) are *Moab's* daughters and *Moab's* outcasts.

Moab's depiction as a state is also supported by its status as a geopolitical entity. It is not merely a people, but it holds territory, and has an economy and international trade. The poem is rife with place names that describe the span of Moab's borders: Dibon, Medeba, Heshbon, Elealah, Jahaz—all in the north where the destruction appears to originate—then Zoar, Eglath-shelishiyah, the ascent of Luhith, and Horonaim in the south, by which the refugees escape. The "raisin-cakes of Kir-hareseth," (16:7),[413]

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[411]The switching back and forth of Moab's gender is an even more prominent feature of Jeremiah 48, and will be discussed there.

[412]בְּנוֹת מוֹאָב could also be rendered "villagers."

[413]Citing 2 Sam 6:19 and Song 2:5, Kaiser (*Isaiah 13-39*, 73), John N. Oswalt (*The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1-39* [NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986], 345) and Blenkinsopp (*Isaiah 1-39*, 299) all describe raisin-cakes as a "delicacy" and presume it was a luxury crop. This is not a product that appears in

"vineyards of Heshbon" and "vines of Sibmah" (16:8) all herald a viticulture for which

Moab is apparently well known.[414] The metaphor of grapevines that "reached to

Jazer…strayed to the desert…spread out and crossed the sea" (16:8) implies that Moab

was involved in long-distance trade in all directions. Thus Moab is conceived in the

oracle as a State rather than a People entity.

## Critical Issues and Rhetoric in Isaiah 15-16

Isaiah 15-16 is a famously difficult composition,[415] and a few issues must be

addressed before the rhetoric can be analyzed. Rhetorical aims are clearest when one

understands the historical circumstances to which they respond. Unfortunately, the only

feature of the text's composition history on which scholars agree is that the last two

verses are not original.[416] Some see it as a mostly unified composition with one primary

context,[417] others as a pastiche[418] or a text that was repeatedly expanded.[419] Theories of

date range from the ninth[420] to the second[421] century, though most fall somewhere in

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other oracles against foreign nations and so seems to be a specialty of Moab, for which it seems to be famed in Judah.

[414]Kaiser, *Isaiah 13-39,* 72-73; Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39,* 299, and simply assumed in many other commentaries.

[415]Smothers declares that "virtually every aspect of the poem…remains in dispute" ("Isaiah 15-16," 70); Kaiser repeats the assessment of Procksch who "has rightly described this oracle on Moab as the problem child of exegesis" (*Isaiah 13-39*, 60).

[416]Kaiser, *Isaiah 13-39*, 61.

[417]John H. Hayes and Stuart A. Irvine, *Isaiah: The Eighth Century Prophet: His Times and His Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1987), 239-40; B. Jones, *Howling over Moab*, 89-110; Wilhelm Rudolph, "Jesaja XV-XVI" in *Hebrew and Semitic Studies Presented to Godfrey Rolles Driver in Celebration of his Seventieth Birthday 20 August 1962* (ed. D. Winton Thomas and W. D. McHardy; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 130-143, esp. 138; Smothers, "Isaiah 15-16," 83; Eduard König, *Das Buch Jesaja* (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1926), 192.

[418]Patricia K. Tull, *Isaiah 1-39* (Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary; Macon, Ga.: Smyth & Helwys, 2010), 288; Wildberger's theory of composition especially exemplifies this idea (*Isaiah 13-27*, 117-42).

[419]Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39*, 90-92, 279-72, 297-300; Wildberger, *Isaiah 13-27,* 117-20; Kaiser, *Isaiah 13-39*, 3, 61, 69-75.

[420]van Zyl, *The Moabites,* 20ff.; G.W. Wade, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah, with Introduction and Notes* (London: Methuen & Co., 1911), 106-07; König, *Das Buch Jesaja*, 193-94; Walther Eichrodt, *Der Herr der Geschichte: Jesaja 13-23 und 28-39* (Die Botschaft des alten Testaments 17/2; Stuttgart:

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between.[422] I believe there are good reasons to assign most of the composition to the Assyrian period.[423] Yet the fact that the poem continues to be amended means that Moab has meaning far beyond that of the oracle's original context. At minimum, the addition of the last two verses and the gathering together of the different OAN into a single collection changed original meanings. I therefore propose focusing upon an element that interpretations of every period would have relied upon, namely, the denigration of Moab. Despite the highly divergent dating proposals, most scholars seek the passage's meaning in Moab's destroyed status. Viewed as an oracle in a political context, they read the poem as an insult or threat to the country itself,[424] or as an attempt to portray it to Judah's king as an unreliable treaty partner.[425] Viewed from later vantage points, Moab's destruction may demonstrate Yhwh's might,[426] serve as an example of pride punished,[427] or act as a

Calwer, 1967), 42; Heinrich Ewald, *Die Propheten des alten Bundes, Vol. 1 of 3: Jesaja mit den übrigen älteren Propheten* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1867), 380; Rudolph, "Jesaja XV-XVI," 141-42; Smothers (following Rudolph), "Isaiah 15-16," 83; G. R. Hamborg, "Reasons for Judgment in the Oracles against the Nations of the Prophet Isaiah," *VT* 31 (1981): 150-51.

[421]Bernhard Duhm, *Das Buch Jesaia* (HKAT III, 1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1902), 99.

[422]Those who attribute the oracles to Isaiah's time include Hayes and Irvine (*Isaiah, Eighth-Century Prophet,* 239-46); Sweeney (*Isaiah 1-39,* 246-49); Hamborg, ("Reasons for Judgment," 151); and Kissane (*Book of Isaiah*, 184). Oswalt dates the text to the reign of Sargon II (*Book of Isaiah*, 335). Those opting for a more general, but still preexilic date include Seitz (*Isaiah 1-39*; 9, 138) and B. Jones (*Howling over Moab*, 107).

[423]The poem presupposes that Judah is in a position to offer protection. This requires first, that Judah be a country with enough strength and independence to offer asylum, and so would seem to date before Hezekiah had become a vassal of Assyria (so Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39,* 247). I agree with Rudolph, who reads the reference to "the tent of David" as a clue that a Davidic king still reigns in Jerusalem (though others read this as a late, messianic reference) ("Jesaja XV-XVI," 141). B. Jones points out that Moab in Isa 15-16 is presumed to control several northern cities that by the time Jeremiah 48 is written, are not mentioned as Moabite (*Howling over Moab,* 107-09). Peter Miscall points out that even the collection of the OAN seems to reflect a preexilic setting, since it describes Judah's political universe prior to the appearance of the Persians or Greeks (*Isaiah* [2d. ed.; Readings; Sheffield, Eng.: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2006], 67).

[424]Hayes and Irvine, *Isaiah, Eighth-Century Prophet,* 242-45; B. Jones, *Howling over Moab,* 57.

[425]Seitz, *Isaiah 1-39*; 139-40; Hamborg, "Reasons for Judgment,"155; Oswalt, *Book of Isaiah,* 35; Smothers, "Isaiah 15-16," 84.

[426]Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39,* 249; Seitz, *Isaiah 1-39*; 138; Hamborg, "Reasons for Judgment," 155.

[427]B. Jones, *Howling Over Moab,* 57, 75; Seitz, *Isaiah 1-39*, 138-140.

harbinger of Jerusalem's coming restoration.[428] Thus, knowing the precise context

matters less than it first seems, for the intent to degrade Moab remains constant.

The second critical issue is whether the lament material should be read as ironic

or sympathetic. Irony is difficult to identify, since, on the one hand, it is usually conveyed

by tone of voice, which is unavailable in a written text, and second, by intimate

knowledge of context, which, as we see above, we do not possess. It is therefore not

surprising that most early scholars, with a few notable exceptions,[429] simply took the

laments at face value.[430] After the publication of Brian Jones' dissertation, which argued

in great detail for an ironic reading, commentaries began to show more explicit

consideration of tone, though scholarly opinion remains divided.[431] The fact that ironic

texts mean the opposite of what they say further complicates identifying them, but also

makes recognition of the irony utterly essential, since missing it leads to precisely the

conclusions that are being criticized.

Jones, following D. C. Muecke, lays out several criteria that point toward ironic

intention: a known use of irony, a contrast between text and context, and a contrast

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[428]Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39,* 271-72; Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39,* 249; Kaiser, *Isaiah 13-39*, 3-5.

[429]B. Jones points out that both Martin Luther and John Calvin read deep sarcasm in the passage (Jones, *Howling over Moab,* 6). Van Zyl's monograph on Moab proposes that the older traditions within Isaiah 15-16 are taunts (*The Moabites,* 20ff.), and Blenkinsopp makes a similar suggestion (*Isaiah 1-39,* 298). The laments are also read ironically by Hayes and Irvine (*Isaiah, Eighth-Century Prophet,* 242-46) and Kaiser (*Isaiah 13-39,* 72-73). David Stacey understands mockery in the lament of ch. 16, while taking that of 15 to be genuine (*Isaiah 1-39,* [Epworth Commentaries; London: Epworth, 1993], 110-14).

[430]Not surprisingly, confessionally-oriented commentaries fall into this category (e.g. Ivan D. Friesen, *Isaiah* [Believers Church Bible Commentary; Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 2009], 120-23; Seitz, *Isaiah 1-39*, 138-40; Harry Bultema, *Commentary on Isaiah* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel Publications, 1981], 176, 182; A. S. Herbert, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah 1-39* [CBC; Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press], 109-11); but various scholarly commentaries also read the laments as sincere: John D. Watts, *Isaiah 1-33* (Rev. ed.; WBC 24; Nashville: Nelson Reference & Electronic, 2005), 232; R. E. Clements, *Isaiah 1-39* (NCB; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1980), 156; Wildberger, *Isaiah 13-27,* 120 (who therefore attributes them to a separate author); Miscall (*Isaiah,* 1st. ed., 54).

[431]Blenkinsopp (*Isaiah 1-39,* 298) accepts an ironic reading; Tull (*Isaiah 1-39*, 294) and John Goldingay (*Isaiah* [NIBCOT; Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 2001], 108-11) allow but do not commit to one. On the other hand, Clements (*Isaiah 1-39,* 151), Brueggemann (*Isaiah 1-39*, 145), Oswalt (*Book of Isaiah,* 336) and Sweeney all defend sympathetic readings (*Isaiah 1-39,* 246). Oswalt's reading is especially flawed, in that he cites Ruth as historical evidence of a harmonious relationship with Moab.

between text and text.[432] Some of those who do not see irony in the poem may not

recognize that some of these conditions have been fulfilled simply by the poem's context.

The first test, that the author is known to use irony, can be answered in the affirmative,

albeit with some qualification. We do not know who wrote Isaiah 15-16, but we can

compare literature of the same genre and in the corpus with which it has been grouped.

Irony is a device employed elsewhere in prophetic literature (Isa 44:12-17; Jer 2:27-28;

48; Amos 4:1 4-5; Hos 4:18, 13:10; Mic 2:6; 3:5, 9-11; 7:3-4; Nah 2:12; Hab 2:18-19;

Zeph 1:12b; 2:15a), and First Isaiah in particular shows masterful use of both irony and

inversion of genre conventions in "the Song of the Vineyard" (Isa 5:1-7).[433] Jeremiah 48,

which draws large portions from Isaiah 15-16,[434] expands the sarcastic tenor of the

laments still further. As Jones points out, this suggests either that Jeremiah saw irony in

the source laments, or, if one argues against direct dependency, that he at the very least

saw lament as a genre well-suited to mockery.[435]

　　　　Whether the second criterion of "contrast between text and context" is met

depends a great deal on which "context" one chooses. Most of those who claim a

"straight" reading seem to be using biblical laments as the context of comparison. There

are two problems with this. First, we must recognize that laments are not simply personal

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[432]My phrasing of the categories used by B. Jones (*Howling over Moab,* 115-16) and D. C. Muecke, "Irony Marker," *Poetics* 7 (1978): 363-75.

[433]Jack R. Lundbom, commenting on whether Jeremiah 48 is ironic where it quotes Isaiah 16, states, "One cannote be sure, although Isaiah, who crafted this poem originally, was a master of verbal irony" (*Jeremiah 37-52: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* [AB 21C; New York: Doubleday, 2004], 243-44, 287, 290-91, 295).

[434]So Wildberger (*Isaiah 13-27,* 124-25); whom Sweeney follows (*Isaiah 1-39,* 24); Tull (*Isaiah 1-39,* 298); Kaiser (*Isaiah 13-39*, 60); B. Jones (*Howling over Moab,* 99). Those who take other views include Hamborg ("Reasons for Judgment," 150), who follows William F. Albright's argument that "differences in phraseology" point to independent composition (*Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan: A Historical Analysis of Two Contrasting Faith* [New York: Doubleday, 1968], 21, n. 57). Blenkinsopp argues that either Isaiah is primary or that the two derive from a common source because Jeremiah uses fewer placenames (*Isaiah 1-39*, 298).

[435]B. Jones, Howling over Moab, 130.

expressions of pain, though of course they may capture real emotions; but rather are ritual performances. Vulnerable feelings are exposed to public view in the hope of securing divine aid (see e.g. Ps 43:1; Joel 2:12-14; Lam 3:56-59). The writer of 16:12 shares this understanding, for he mocks Moab for the fact that its laments do not *work*— "Moab… wearies himself upon the high place, [but] when he comes to his sanctuary to pray, he will not prevail."[436] Therefore, if the poem is a genuine lament, it is not merely an emotional expression of sympathy; it is trying to *do* something about the suffering. And indeed, the poet expresses no small effort in performing this lament—constructing line after poetic line to communicate the extent of Moab's suffering and dire situation. The question is, does he exert himself to prevail upon divine aid, or Judahite sympathies, *for Moab?*

That does not seem likely. And as we see in numerous biblical examples of lament—especially laments of national disgrace—the reactions of others to those who mourn can run in opposite directions. The lamenters, of course, hope to appeal to the sympathies of their god. But as they do, they reveal that those who see them mourning may pounce on their grief as an occasion for ridicule (See Pss 22:7-8; 42:3 [4], 10; 44:9-16; 69:10-12; 80:1-7; Joel 2:17, 19, 26-27; Job 9:23, 16:10, 17:2, 21:3; Lam 1:7). Some of these examples have the taunters mocking the act of mourning itself (Ps 69: 10-11 [11-12]). Other non-lament texts confirm that misfortune in general, and national tragedy in particular, is a source of ridicule from outsiders (1 Sam 1:6-7 [cf. Gen 16:4-5]; Mic 7:10; Prov 1:25-26; Isa 52:5; Jer 42:18; Dan 9:16; Ezek 34:29, 36:2-7; Zeph 2:15, 3:18b-19a; Nah 3:6-7). Therefore, to know what lament language intends it is critical to know what

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[436] לֹא יוּכָל. See usage of יכל to describe succeeding or not to gain divine help in Gen 32:29 [28], Hos 12:5 [4], Isa 47:11-12 (B. Jones, *Howling over Moab,* 214, n. 41).

the author's relationship is to the afflicted.

Though we do not know the author's precise background, the attitudes toward foreign nations in both prophetic literature in general and First Isaiah in particular are overwhelmingly negative.[437] The more specific comparison—First Isaiah's other depiction of Moab in Isa 15:20-12—is unequivocal in its condemnation. First Isaiah does contain a few instances of positive portrayal of foreign nations (18:7, 19:19-25), but these never express sympathy toward nations in the midst of disasters.[438] If the lament here expressed sympathy for Moab, it would be a sentiment unparalleled in biblical literature. Martin Luther based his ironic reading of this poem on the presumption that "After the Philistines the most hostile enemies of the Jews were the Moabites."[439] Though most modern commentators have been reluctant to attribute such attitudes to a prophet of "social justice," Luther's impulse was probably more clear-eyed.

Much of whether one reads Isaiah 15-16 as ironic or sympathetic hinges on how one interprets changes of tone in the text itself—what Jones calls the "contrasts between text and text." Unfortunately, most of the examples of such contrasts occur in the judgment statements of 15:9, 16:12, and 16:13-14 that are dismissed by most as interpolations.[440] Verse 16:6, which expounds on Moab's pride, however, is integral to its

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[437]B. Jones, Howling Over Moab, 57.

[438]B. Jones, Howling Over Moab, 136.

[439]Martin Luther, *Lectures on Isaiah: Chapters 1-39* (Vol. 16 of *Luther's Works*; ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Hilton C. Oswald; trans. Herbert J. A. Bouman; St. Louis: Concordia, 1969), 146.

[440]Including Hamborg, "Reasons for Judgment," 151; Clement, 153, 56; Franz Feldmann (*Das Buch Isaias* [EHAT 14; Münster: Verlag der Aschendorffschen, 1929], 201, 202, 2-5); Fohrer (of vv. 15:9 [*Das Buch Jesaja* 1, 207] and 16:13-14 [Ibid., 212]); Wildberger (*Isaiah 13-27,* 117-18, 121); and Kaiser (*Isaiah 13-39*, 69-70, 74). Rudolph argues 15:9, 16:2 and 16:12 are interpolations, but that the rest of the poem is a whole—and the Bible's oldest prophecy ("Jesaja XV-XVI," 130-143).

surroundings.[441] Without it, the asylum request has no response, and the "therefore's"

that follow have no logical antecedent. Most of the attempts to reconcile the unmistakable

condemnation in 16:6 with a lament of sympathy in the following verses fall short. The

most elegant and likely solution is that the judgment verse cues the reader that the

sympathy that follows is not genuine. Indeed, as Joseph Blenkinsopp suggests, it also

suggests that the opening laments be reread in the same tone, and that we should realize

that the author has only been holding back from the "sarcasm, hyperbole, and simulated

grief" in chapter 15 to which he will give full expression by the end.[442]

The last two verses of the oracle suggest irony in a different way. In promising

that this prophecy, spoken "long ago," *will be fulfilled* in three short years, they suddenly

frame the oracle as predictive speech, revising the reader's surface impression that the

author is responding to a catastrophe in progress. Of course, 16:13-14 are amended to the

text—they even announce themselves as additions. But at the least they determine how

one may read the final form, and very likely they also show that an ancient reader would

have presumed, based on the genre, that the oracle should be taken as predictive in the

first place.[443] Read as a projection into the future, the poet's laments cannot be

sympathetic. One simply does not offer condolences for hypothetical tragedies. Indeed, if

anything, the sentiment of the last lines expresses disappointment that Moab's destruction

has tarried so long. Viewed as prediction, the rhetoric is more clearly aggressive: the

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[441]So also Rudolph, "Jesaja XV-XVI," 142, but some deny this: Fohrer believes so strongly in the "menschlischen Mitgefühl" of the prophet that he has to attribute the judgment in 16:6 to a later follower of Isaiah (*Das Buch Jesaja* 1, 210-11.)

[442]Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39,* 298.

[443]I think the redactor is just specifying a time frame for an oracle that he *assumed,* based on its genre, should be understood as predictive. Were this not the case, he could not tout as reliable an oracle that had been spoken "long ago" and yet could be fulfilled three years in the future. As scholars who long ago posited a "prophetic perfect" realized, verbal aspect in prophetic poetry is not always meant to be taken literally.

author does not just interpret completed destruction, he *wills* it to occur, *fantasizes* about Moab wailing and mourning.

The nature of the poetic imagery, read with honor-shame dynamics in mind, also points to an ironic reading. The events of the poem occur at a remove from the audience, whether because they are in the future or far away. What happens to Moab is only as real as the author's account. What that author chooses to convey is a scene in which the sights and sounds of grief, destruction, and flight are repeated over and over.[444] In this way, the poet makes Moab's destruction a palpable event and an emotional experience: the Judahite audience bears direct witness to Moab's demise. At every turn, this imagery marshals assaults against another basis of Moab's national prestige. Viewed with honor-shame dynamics in mind, such attacks cannot be understood as sympathetic. I propose that the author presents a vivid picture of Moab's defeat to verbally "expose the nakedness" of the country. A country's honor, like that of a man, depends upon a public image of strength and dignity. Public exposure of defeat, weakness, and loss of the goods that signify prestige are deeply shaming. That countries feared such exposure, and that they conceptualized it as an experience akin to being publicly stripped, is apparent in the Joseph story, where the brothers who see Egypt during a time of famine are accused of spying on the country "in its nakedness" (Gen 42:9, 12). The defeat of countries is elsewhere likened to publicly exposing a woman—an experience that degrades the woman utterly and subjects her to revilement and public abuse (viz. Nah 3:5-7; Ezek 16:38-40 23:10, 23:29). That the country should be imagined as female in these images is no accident: the metaphor makes literal the emasculation that results from losing a

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[444]As Miscall puts it, "Much of the impassioned force of the poem is achieved by the familiar strategy of repetition and piling up words and images" (*Isaiah,* 1st. ed., 53).

contest of strength and drives home the humiliation that the author intends to press upon its subject. Poetic imagery in Isaiah 15-16 similarly seeks to persuade the audience that nothing now obliges them to acknowledge Moab's status.

The shameful connotations of this imagery are underscored by the fact that First Isaiah uses many of the same verbs and images in the other OAN in which humiliation is inarguably the intention. The kind of "wailing" (hif ילל) that Babylon, Philistia and Tyre are commanded to do (Isa 13:6, 14:31, 23:1, 6, 14) describes the wailing in which Moab is already engaged (15:2, 3; 16:7).[445] Moab's being "destroyed" or "ravaged" (שֻׁדַּד) in 15:1 is a fate also predicted for Tyre (Isa 23:1, 14) and the rapacious Destroyer of Isa 33:1. When Tyre is stripped of its commercial status and the Destroyer (probably Assyria) receives the treatment it had meted out to others, the speaker implies that these are utterly just punishments—disasters that invite satisfaction rather than sympathy. The same is true of Moab.

## Rhetoric of Shame in Isaiah 15-16

### 1. Military Defeat

Military conquest and defeat is a common arbiter of both individual male honor and national honor in most cultures;[446] Pierre Bourdieu found that it was so essential as an arena for demonstrating merit among the Kabyle of Algeria that they essentially prolonged non-lethal forms of warfare to maintain it.[447] Isaiah 15-16 draws heavily upon

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[445]The Moab examples are imperfects rather than imperatives but, as I will argue below, the one in 16:7 has the force of a jussive.

[446] An ideology that is exemplified by the Roman empire's emphasis on "'Glory,' 'honor,' and 'prestige' (*gloria, laus, fama;* Cicero, *Pro. Arch.* 12-32), says P. A. Brunt, "They could win no greater renown than by victories in war, renown in which the whole peoples shared." (Brunt, *Roman Imperial Themes* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1990], 292).

[447]Bourdieu, "Sentiment of Honour," 202.

the principle that defeat signifies Moab's loss of honor.[448] And since honor in a

competitive contest is a limited good that therefore accrues to Moab's opponent, Moab is

humiliated while its enemies exult.[449] The poet opens (15:1) by voicing, like a town crier,

the news that its military defenses have been breached: Moab is destroyed (נִדְמָה),

ravaged, (שֻׁדַּד) and destroyed (נִדְמָה) some more. That these words are grammatically

passive is no coincidence: the author emphasizes that Moab is the recipient rather than

the agent of its fate. Military defeat signals a deficiency of primary masculine values of

strength and bravery,[450] so it is not surprise to find hints of emasculation in the

description of Moab's overwhelmed military: when Moab's soldiers cry aloud and

tremble in fear (15:4),[451] we are reminded of the Egyptians in Isa 19:16 who, "trembling,

terrified" before Yhwh's power, are said to become "like women." For men of battle,

there is no greater insult.

For those who know the shared history of the two nations, there is also a barb in

the names of the towns where defeat is acknowledged. Many of these towns, though

presumed Moabite here, had been claimed by Israel or Judah. Dibon, Nebo, Heshbon,

Elealah, Jahaz and Sibmah are all named in biblical land allotment texts,[452] while the

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[448]Laniak's careful study of honor in biblical literature identifies "honor as substance," as kind of honor earned principally through military might and conquest. It is the kind of honor most associated with the term *kabod* and that which earns the right to treat others as subordinates (*Shame and Honor in Esther*, 17). Thus defeat both removes lordship and the prestige associated with it.

[449]And as Pitt-Rivers says of his context, "there is no conception of sportsmanship in which humiliation can be dignified" (*Fate of Shechem,* 32).

[450]Pitt-Rivers, *Fate of Shechem,* 22.

[451]Some (e.g. Kissane, *Book of Isaiah,* 185; NRSV) revocalize the line so that the tremblers are "the loins of Moab" (חֲלָצֵי מוֹאָב) rather than his "shocktroops" (חֲלֻצֵי מוֹאָב) (so, too, LXX). Though this would remove the explicit military reference, the implied insult to Moab as fearful and womanly would be similar.

[452]Dibon (Num 32:2-3, 22-23, 34; Josh 13:9, 16), Nebo (Num 32:2-3, 22-23, 38; MI); Heshbon (Num 21:25, Josh 13;17, 26; 1 Chr 6:61), Elealah (Num 32:2-3, 22-23), Jazer (Josh 21.39), Jahaz, (Num 21:23/Deut 2:32/Jdg 11:21; Josh 13:18; 1 Chr 6:63 [78]; MI, l.19-21), Sibmah (Num 32:37-38; Josh 13:15-19 and perhaps Num 32:3 if Sebam is an alternative for the same place).

Mesha stele attests Israelite control of Madeba and perhaps Horonaim as well.[453] If

Nimrim is the same as the Nimrah of Num 32:3, we are left with only three towns in the

poem that are both presumed Moabite by Isaiah and never claimed by Israel in extant

texts.[454] It is possible that even these three were contested, as they are simply unattested

anywhere. Thus simply naming towns in the midst of destruction functions as a taunt to

shame Moab: whatever Moab could boast in taking these towns from Moab it no longer

has. What Moab did to Israel is now visited back on him.[455]

## 2. Mourning Rituals as Concessions of Defeat

The images of mourning rituals, which many have read as tugging at the reader's

heartstrings, may similarly be viewed as attempts to humiliate Moab. First of all, they

testify to the scale of the losses. All of Moab seems to be enveloped in the rituals of

lament:

> Over Nebo and Madeba
> Moab is wailing;
> On every head is baldness,
> Every beard is shorn.
> In its streets, they are girt with sackcloth;
> On its roofs, in its squares,
> Everyone is wailing,
> streaming with tears.

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[453]Mesha relates that the whole "land of Madeba" was taken by Omri and controlled by Israel for a number of years (MI Ll. 7-8). If Horonaim is the same as the *Hwrnn* that Mesha conquers (Ll. 31-33) and if Lemaire's reconstruction of *bt dwd* is accepted, this city had once been claimed by the Davidic house ("House of David Restored," 31-37).

[454]I take Kir-Heres, Kir-Hareseth and Dimon as alternative names for Qarḥoh/Dibon (Smelik, "King Mesha's Inscription," 85-89). All are probably word plays, the first meaning something like "City of Silence" (Hayes and Irvine, *Isaiah, Eighth-Century Prophet*, 245), the second City of Potsherds (Nicholson, *Jeremiah 26-52*, 187) or (with irony) "City of Strength" (G. H. Jones, *1 & 2 Kings,* 399). Dimon fuses *Dibon* with the *dam* in which it is drenched in the same line (15:9) (Kaiser, *Isaiah 13-39*, 69, and many others).

[455]Though they do not point to the same biblical traditions, Hayes and Irvine also believe that the names of the towns are barbed references. They see Elealah, Heshbon, Jazer and Sibmah as allusions to the territory conquered by Jeroboam II (2 Kg 14:25; 1 Chr 5:1-22; *Isaiah, Eighth-Century Prophet,* 245). Stacey connects the towns in 16:8 to the era of David's empire—a fact he says would add "spice" to the oracle against them (*Isaiah 1-39,* 113).

Second, in describing the mourning rituals themselves, they allow the reader to picture

Moab physically *embodying* its humiliation. Concern for honor—especially male

honor—rests strongly upon the refusal to allow oneself to be humiliated.[456] But though

times of mourning exempt mourners from such requirements in real society, the fact

remains that mourning behaviors are all forms of self-abasement: people cast off the

garments and appearances that signify rank and instead, put on *śaq* (15:3). Shaving heads

and beards (15:2) was probably especially debasing. Since honor is often recognized by

crowning or touching the head, shame is often symbolized by slapping, uncovering, or

shaving it.[457] Shaving another man's beard is explicitly done to shame the men in 2 Sam

10:4-5 and Isa 7:20; shaving one's own beard may be an act of voluntarily relinquishing

this important symbol of masculinity.[458] Ordinarily, a competitive society strongly

discourages people from expressing emotions to others, for it can easily be exploited by

competitors and conveys a lack of self-control.[459] But mourning behaviors provide an

instance of strong emotion on display in the public sphere. Thus the Moabites in Isaiah

15-16 openly confess their helplessness and throw themselves at the mercy of their gods

on rooftops, in the streets (15:3), and at shrines (15:2, 16:12). They drop the careful

comportment and instead, weep (15:2, 5), "streaming in tears," and "wail" with cries so

piercing that they are imagined to reach the edges of Moab (15:4, 8). In a real society, a

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[456]Malina, *New Testament World,* 48.

[457]Malina (*New Testament World,* 40) describes this as a common feature of Mediterranean societies where honor and shame are prevalent values.

[458]Shaving or pulling hair from the beard seems to also have been a mourning rite for Israelites (Jer 41:5, Ezr 9:3). Leviticus 21:5 prohibits it for priests because it is considered an act of self-defilement—suggesting that beards, like the hair of the head, was attributed a quasi-sacral power.

[459]Laniak points out the prevalence of "foolishness" and lack of self-restraint as behaviors that biblical authors, especially in Proverbs, associate with shame (*Shame and Honor in Esther*, 20-21). Bourdieu talks about the foolishness of revealing emotion to outsiders among the Kabyle ("Sentiment of Honour," 210).

mourner's neighbors would regard such behaviors as appropriate; in the case of national emergency, fellow countrymen would regard it as dishonorable *not* to mourn. But the audience of the poem is neither neighbor nor countryman, nor the sympathetic deity for whom the laments are performed. Therefore it views these expressions and postures much as the enemy mockers of other psalms and laments do: as proofs of Moab's degraded state and cause for ridicule. The device is ingenious: far more effective than himself asserting that Moab is or will be destroyed, the poet shows Moab *itself confessing* its helplessness, *acting out* its own degradation. Bourdieu points out that it is always preferable in agonistic society to have one's opponent dishonor himself, for one incurs dishonor himself if the public views him as "going too far" in inflicting humiliation upon the other man. If the man dishonors himself, however, the damage to his reputation is unlimited, indisputable and permanent.[460]

### 3. "Pride" and the Loss of Political and Economic Power

The request for asylum in 16:1-5 is a further sign of humiliation. Moab appears groveling at the feet of its former overlord, begging for protection and pity, perhaps, if Smothers is correct, pawning away its very independence. At this moment of self-abasement, Judah does not offer sympathy. Instead, the poet chides Moab, holding forth on its sin:

> We have heard of Moab's pride (גְּאוֹן) –
> Most haughty is he (גֵּא מְאֹד) –
> Of his pride (גַּאֲוָתוֹ) and haughtiness (וּגְאוֹנוֹ) and arrogance (וְעֶבְרָתוֹ),
> his boasts are false (לֹא־כֵן בַּדָּיו[461]).

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[460]Bourdieu, "Sentiment of Honour," 199.
[461]Because of the double meaning of כֵן, this line has two possible meanings, or, as I believe, a double entendre: it means both "not thus (i.e., *real* status) does he have" (or colloquially, "he ain't got the goods"), *and* "No integrity is in him."

Placed where one expects a response to the request for asylum, this criticism of Moab's pride functions as a harsh rebuff.[462] True, it does not have the directness typical of the oracles of condemnation, and this has allowed some to conclude that these are not the sentiments of the prophet.[463] But indirectness is exactly the point: by refusing even to acknowledge Moab directly, the speaker delivers a stinging snub.

The references to Moab's pride seem to have a particular target, for they are paired with viticultural imagery.[464] This imagery begins at 16:7 and dominates the remainder of the lament section (vv. 8-10). The pairing implies that Moab's wealth and status had been based on an economy of wine and raisin-cakes, the trade in or reputation for which "spread abroad and crossed the sea" (16:8). "The lords of the nations" thus not only trample Moab's economic base, they destroy the basis of its prestige abroad. The imagery points out that without these vineyards Moab has no further claims to "pride." "Pride" has a special resonance in an honor-shame culture. Attitudes of superiority are not in themselves negative, but if a person asserts pride that the society judges baseless, he will be deemed a fool[465] and perhaps also as affronting the honor of those with legitimate stature.[466] When the poet muses aloud that, "We have heard of Moab's pride," he refers to public talk—Moab's demand that others recognize its status. But he does so precisely at the moment that Moabite emissaries are groveling in Judah, asking Judah's

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[462]Rudolph and Miscall refuse to believe that these could be the words of either the prophet or Yhwh, saying that they represent the judgment of Jerusalemites ("Jesaja XV-XVI," 142, and *Isaiah,* 1st. ed., 54, respectively). Though Wildberger and Kaiser insist that because it introduces the following verses, it cannot function as a response (*Isaiah 13-39,* 119-20 and *Isaiah 13-39,* 72-73, respectively), I disagree: it both rebuffs the request and explains why each of the laments that follow is preceded by *lakēn.* That Jeremiah borrows v. 6 but not 1-5 (Wildberger's reason for grouping it with vv. 6-12) is not surprising since Judah was in no position to offer asylum from 596 (or earlier) onward.

[463]Miscall views this as the statement of the people in Jerusalem, responding to the prophet, who advocates the Moabites' plea for asylum in 16:5 (*Isaiah,* 1st ed., 54).

[464]So also Fohrer (*Das Buch Jesaja* 1; 211) and Friesen (*Isaiah,* 121).

[465]Malina, *New Testament World,* 33.

[466]Pitt-Rivers, *Fate of Shechem,* 33.

aid and promising future submission. Such a sharp contrast between high claims and demonstrated humbling make the idea of Moab as "proud" utterly absurd. Indeed, it is a moment full of relish: Moab, the neighbor that had always "put on airs," had come begging at the door, and Judah, after viewing the satisfying spectacle, has the power to slam it in his face. It is a moment that, more than any other, seals the contest for honor in Judah's favor.

Moab's overreach represents, for Isaiah, not only laughable foolishness, or the sting of being disregarded, but also an egregious kind of arrogance. The word for pride (גָּאוֹן) is the same word Isaiah uses elsewhere for the Yhwh's "glory" (Isa 2:10, 19, 21; 4:2 and 24:14). The prophet is therefore accusing Moab of claiming a *particular* high status—one that rightfully belongs only to God. The accusation could more properly be called an indictment. Several laments immediately follow this accusation, each preceded by "therefore" (לָכֵן). This particle stresses that mourning—or the destruction that prompts it—is the direct consequence of Moab's hubris.[467]

What Moab's hubris entails depends a great deal on how one reads the verses of lament that follow 16:6. Most who deny an ironic reading assert that the judgment in 16:6 is part of the same formal unit as the lament in vv. 7-11,[468] yet fail to adequately account for how sympathy could follow so quickly on harsh judgment. John Goldingay, who views the speaker as Yhwh, simply states, "Apparently the pain is Yhwh's, but so is the intention to bring even more pain."[469] Perhaps he presumes that Yhwh here acts as a disciplinarian, who both punishes and loves his child (e.g. Hos 11:4-8, Ps 89:32 [31];

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[467]So also Friesen, *Isaiah,* 121.

[468]Goldingay, *Isaiah,* 110-11; Rudolph, "Jesaja XV-XVI," 130-143.

[469]Goldingay, *Isaiah*, 109. Watts similarly states that "Yahweh laments Moab's destruction, although he had occasioned it himself as judgment on her false worship (16:9-12)" (*Isaiah 1-33,* 232).

Prov. 13:24; 22:15, 23:13; 29:15). But the child to whom Yhwh relates in this way is always Israel or Judah, never a foreign nation.[470] There is simply no reason to think that the sentiment expressed by the laments is one of "rueful strictness." Another set of interpreters see 16:7ff more as statements of fact: having been denied asylum, Moab now *must* wail; it "will have to suffer its woes alone."[471] But if Moab must "suffer its woes alone," why does the prophet himself have to join in? The first-person laments take the expressions of grief beyond simple description; either they are deeply immersed in it, or they are mocking it. In short, the explanations that seek to preserve a sympathetic reading of the laments in the face of the poem's condemnation of Moab's pride are flawed and insufficient. The denouncement of Moab's pride signals the author's underlying attitude—one antithetical to sympathy—and thus signals that the words of lament should be read as derisive. Indeed, the imitation of lament intensifies the mockery from denunciation to parody.

I therefore translate the words following the denouncement of pride as a jussive— a *command* to Moab to wail:[472]

| | |
|---|---|
| Therefore Let Moab wail! | לָכֵן יְיֵלִיל מוֹאָב |
| Let all who belong to Moab wail! | לְמוֹאָב כֻּלֹּה יְיֵלִיל |

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[470]Katheryn Pfisterer Darr nicely explores the "rhetoric of rebellion" in Isaiah which offers examples of simultaneous judgment and concern. Simultaneously, she points out that this rhetoric grows out of a metaphor of kinship between Yhwh and Israel/Judah, which, by definition, is exclusive to them. See "Child Imagery and the Rhetoric of Rebellion," in *Isaiah's Vision and the Family of God* (Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 46-84.

[471]Smothers, "Isaiah 15-16," 83; These others also view the "therefore" as signaling simple consequence rather than moral judgment: Seitz, *Isaiah 1-39,* 140; Friesen, *Isaiah,* 121; Goldingay, *Isaiah,* 111; Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39,* 244; Wildberger, *Isaiah 13-27;* 146; Clements, *Isaiah 1-39,* 155-56.

[472]With B. Jones, *Howling over Moab,* 204; Clements, *Isaiah 1-39,*155; Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-39,* 59. Either translation would describe Moab's destruction as a necessary consequence of its pride, but the imperfect suggests that destruction follows as a *natural* consequence—allowing the possibility of sympathy—while the jussive portrays the sentence as a subjective statement by the speaker. He says something like, "*let* Moab howl! Why should we care?"—conveying judgment (Moab's sentence is just), disgust, and calculated indifference.

The lament culminates in 16:11, where it makes what are probably crude scatological references[473]:

| Therefore | עַל־כֵּן |
| my bowels will groan like a lyre for Moab; | מֵעַי לְמוֹאָב כַּכִּנּוֹר יֶהֱמוּ |
| My innards [groan] for Kir-Heres. | וְקִרְבִּי לְקִיר חָרֶשׂ |

Since 16:13 seems to be a later amendment, the poem originally would have ended here, finishing the taunt of Moab on a crescendo of crude ridicule. As the sarcasm builds, so too, does the audience's sense of empowerment over a Moab that, once proud, can be looked down upon as a laughingstock.

## 4. Flight and depopulation as impoverishment

Images of refugees in flight contribute to a sense of Moab's fallen status and are used throughout the poem (15:5, 7, 9; 16:2, 3, 4). The devastation of the agricultural base is symbolized by an eerie silencing of the human activities, and especially joy, that had surrounded the harvest and wine-making (viz. esp. 16:9-10).[474] In a time before overpopulation, being "rich in peoples" (Lam 1:1) connoted prosperity and divine blessing. The depopulated city, by contrast, is a stock image of defeat and divine curse (e.g. Isa 13:12, 20-21; Jer 4:7, 6:8). Such cities are shamed by their emptiness—their names "become a byword" (e.g. Zeph 2:15; Ezek 16:56-57; Jer 34:22; 44:22, 48:9; 51:37). In 16:14, Moab's fall of status is explicitly paralleled with its loss of population:

In three years, like the years of a hireling,

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[473]Hayes and Irvine, *Isaiah, Eighth-Century Prophet,* 204; William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 2: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah Chapters 26-52* (ed. Paul D. Hanson; Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 344. Blenkinsopp vaguely allows that there may be "an unsubtle and vulgar allusion to the poet's bowels" (*Isaiah 1-39,* 299).

[474]Made eerier still, as Kaiser and Stacey, point out, by its contrast to both joyful harvest shouts of yore and the victory shouts of the enemy now (*Isaiah 13-39,* 74, and *Isaiah 1-39,* 113, respectively).

The prestige of Moab (כְּבוֹד מוֹאָב),
(with all its tremendous abundance) (בְּכֹל הֶהָמוֹן הָרָב)
shall be humbled (וְנִקְלָה)
The remainder (וּשְׁאָר) [will be] small (מְעַט);
a trifling thing (מִזְעָר) of no consequence (לוֹא כַבִּיר).

All the words conveying both muchness and smallness can be translated as both terms of prestige and references to population. Both meanings point to the same idea: that a country's people are its strength, and that Moab is being cut down to size on both fronts, and thus shamed.

## 5. *Status of National Gods*

The desperation of the mourning also points to the impotence—or nonexistence—of Moab's god in protecting his people.[475] Appeal for asylum expresses that Moab has already conceded that prayer alone cannot save it. Though lament resumes when asylum is refused, such appeals are futile efforts, as the later author of 16:12[476] makes explicit:

And when Moab presents himself,
when he wearies himself upon the high place,
he shall come to his temple to pray
—but he will fail.

Kemosh's silence in the face of his people's cries only hints at the kind of shame associated with defeat of a national god,[477] which is also, of course, a symbol of the nation. Such symbolism will be expanded in Jeremiah 48's version. For ancient readers, however, the logical corollary of military conquest was divine defeat. Thus Kemosh's defeat—and his degradation—would have required little more than a gesture toward the god's absence in the face of his people's cries.

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[475]So Fohrer, *Das Buch Jesaja* 1, 211; Oswalt, *Book of Isaiah,* 347.

[476]Most scholars have seen the verse as a later insertion (B. Jones, *Howling over Moab,* 4).

[477]That the author does not make more of the conquest of Kemosh gives Brueggemann cause to dismiss the possibility of sarcasm in the lament: he thinks that a poet with mal intent would not have passed up such an opportunity (Brueggemann, *Isaiah 1-39,* 145).

Meanwhile, the poet points to the superiority of his own patron, Yhwh, and aligns himself with Him. It has already been noted that Yhwh's role, like that of Kemosh, is left ambiguous in all but the verses that are likely to be later (15:9, 16:13-14). But simply by delivering the oracle about Moab's fate, the prophet implies special knowledge about it. Read as a prediction, the oracle suggests that the prophet knows Moab's future because his god controls it. The accusation of hubris in 16:6 construes the destruction as divinely-ordained punishment—and thus implies that Yhwh, for whom he speaks, has the authority to exercise judgment over Moab and the power to deliver it. In announcing the sentence, the prophet himself takes on the authority of messenger for the High Judge. Thus, though Judah demonstrates only limited political and no military power against Moab, it is empowered by its special relationship to Yhwh—a power that Moab, with its impotent deity, lacks. This line of interpretation will become especially important in Jeremiah 48.

# JEREMIAH 48

Jeremiah 48 reads much like an expanded version of Isaiah 15-16, with several key differences. Similar, and in some case identical, images are used in oracles forecasting the doom of Moab:[478] destruction sweeps through Moab town by town (vv. 1-3, 8-10, 14-25, 41-45). It is depicted through the cries and warnings of its populace (vv. 3-6, 20, 34, 39), their useless laments (4, 5, 34, 35, 37-39) and their desperate flight (vv. 5-6, 19, 45), which empties the cities (v. 9, 28). Military destruction is figured in images of soldiers rendered helpless (v. 14-15, 41), strongholds overrun (vv. 1b, 18, 41) and

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[478]Verses 29-39 draw directly from Isaiah 15-16, parallels that Nicholson calls "so obvious that there is no need to cite them here" (*Jeremiah 26-52*, 187). Jeremiah 48:5-6 echoes the imagery, though not the wording, of Isa 15:5 (Leslie C. Allen, *Jeremiah: A Commentary* [OTL; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2008], 479).

targets pursued without mercy (vv. 8, 44). Moab's "treasures" (v. 7) are also destroyed,

and the vineyards and fields that had provided it devastated (vv. 32-33). This poem,

unlike Isaiah, also mentions explicitly Moab's prestige and political power (vv. 2, 11, 18,

25) as part of what is lost. And for each defeat and humiliation in this zero-sum game,

Moab's enemies are elevated.

To the tropes from Isaiah, Jeremiah 48 adds motifs and references from a number

of other scriptural passages, most notably the taunt song from Num 21:28-29 in vv. 45-

46.[479] In fact, most of the composition from vv. 29-47 hearkens to other textual

traditions.[480] Lament plays a less prominent role in this oracle: the destruction is

described, commanded, and threatened more than lamented, though first-person laments

do occur in three verses (vv. 31, 32 and 36).[481] The statements of denunciation are more

straightforward and frequent than in Isaiah 15-16 (see especially vv. 7-8, 10, 12-13, 26,

29-30, 35, 38, 42, 44), even cursing anyone who "does Yhwh's work slackly…who

withholds his sword from blood" (v. 10).[482] Because of the openly malevolent sentiment,

the lament portions are easier than in Isaiah 15-16 to recognize as sarcastic, though not all

scholars do so.[483] As in Isaiah 15-16, Moab is judged for pride, an offense elaborated here

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[479]These verses are also influenced by Num 24:17b*b* (Allen, *Jeremiah*, 487). In addition, vv. 43-44a are influenced by Isa 24:17-18 (Ibid., 487); v. 44 also uses an image from Amos 5:19 (Nicholson, *Jeremiah 26-52*, 189; Robert P. Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary* [OTL; London: SCM Press, 1986], 794). The image of birds in precarious nests (v. 28) is similar to that in Isa 16:2. Verse 10 may be an exegetical expansion of Ps 149:6b-9, as Julie Woods argues (*Jeremiah 48 as Christian Scripture,* [Princeton Theological Monograph Series; Eugene, Ore.: Pickwick Publications, 2011], 198). Woods provides the most comprehensive comparison of Jeremiah 48 with other possible text references (Ibid., 67-74).

[480]Douglas Rawlinson Jones, *Jeremiah, Based on the RSV* (NCB; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1992), 505.

[481]Isaiah 15-16 has the same amount (15:5, 16:9, 11), but it contains only 23 verses total; Jeremiah 48 has 47.

[482]Though the abrupt and anomalous flavor of this verse makes it an almost certain insertion, the curse does demonstrate the trajectory set by earlier negative statements—and the fever pitch these sentiments ultimately attained.

[483]Those who also read the lament ironically include Burke O. Long, "The Divine Funeral Lament," *JBL* 75 (1966): 86; Gunther Wanke, *Jeremia 2: 25:15-52:34* (ZBK, AT 20.2; Zürich:

as "aggrandizing himself against Yhwh" (vv. 26, 42). In addition, however, the speaker

complains about Moab's treatment of Israel (v. 27), and the unfairness of their different

fates. He warns that Moab's "ease" in never having suffered exile, as Israel (and

implicitly, Judah) had, will soon be rectified (vv. 7, 12, 46). Yhwh, who assumes the role

of the Ravager, will send Moab into captivity—punishing its pride, shaming its god, and

evening an old score between Moab and its neighbors.

## Critical issues in Jeremiah 48

Before turning to an analysis of the rhetoric, we will first treat some critical

questions about the text. The relationship between Jeremiah 48 and Isaiah 15-16, as well

as the text's compositional history, require some explanation. I follow the overwhelming

majority of scholars who see Jeremiah 48 as dependent on Isaiah 15-16[484] (some see the

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Theologischer Verlag, 1995), 411-12. Artur Weiser hints that he shares this view in referring to a barely hidden "satisfaction" underlying the lament portions, but does not say so explicitly (*Das Buch des Prophet Jeremia* [Alte Testament Deutsch, Neues Göttinger Bibelwerk 20/21; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1960], 401). Others however, insist that "the God of Israel takes no pleasure in the pain and defeat of Moab" (Louis Stulman, *Jeremiah* [Abingdon OT Commentary; Nashville: Abingdon, 2005]*, 364). Stulman's assertion seems particularly contradictory in that he notes on the same page that v. 30 "revels in the enemy's humiliation" and that "even Yhwh mocks [Moab]." Walter Brueggemann reconciles judgment with sincere sympathy by explaining that "*Arrogance* causes enormous *loss,* which evokes profound *grief"*—a claim that leads him to the outrageous conclusion that Yhwh punishes the nations for their own good: "Yahweh's hegemony over the nations is crucial to their well-being" (*To Build, To Plant: A Commentary on Jeremiah 26-52* [ITC; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1991], 247). Those who similarly read the laments sympathetically include Woods (*Jeremiah 48 as Christian Scripture,* 257-62); William McKane (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah, Volume 2: Commentary on Jeremiah XXVI-LII* [2 vols.; ITC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996]*, 1168); W. Holladay (*Jeremiah 2,* 349, 355) and Fretheim (*Jeremiah,* 601-02), though most of these see mockery or irony elsewhere in the poem. McKane takes the position that the lament is neither sympathetic nor ironic, but simply a form deployed to deepen the sense of foreboding in the announced judgment (*Jeremiah 2,* 1190, 1193).

[484]For example, W. Holladay, *Jeremiah 2,* 346-348; Kaiser, *Isaiah 13-39*, 60; Wildberger, *Isaiah 13-27*, 124-5; Watts, *Isaiah 1-33,* 284; Allen, *Jeremiah,* 477; Brueggemann, *To Build, To Plant,* 241; Carroll, *Jeremiah,* 792, 795; R. E. Clements, *Jeremiah* (IBC; Atlanta: John Knox, 1988)*, 252; D. Jones, *Jeremiah, Based on the RSV*, 499; Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37-52*, 243-44, 287, 290-91, 295; Gerald L. Keown, Pamela J. Scalise and Thomas G. Smothers, *Jeremiah 26-52* (WBC 27; Dallas: Word Books, 1995)*, 310; D. Paul Volz, *Der Prophet Jeremia* (KAT 10; Leipzig: Deichert, 1928), 409, 410, 412, 413; Weiser, *Buch des Prophet Jeremia*, 400; Nicholson, *Jeremiah 26-52*; 177.

two as drawing from a common source).[485] This view is strongly supported by the fact

that Jeremiah 48 also draws significantly from other biblical texts (see the first two notes

in the text summary above) as a general feature, while the only obvious intertext for

Isaiah 15-16 is Jeremiah 48.[486] Whereas Isaiah 15-16, if read ironically, can stand as a

more or less unified composition, the "pastiche"[487] quality of Jeremiah is evident in its

frequent alternation between poetry and prose and its tendency to draw on other sources.

The fact that parallel passages are not identical need not signal separate Vorlagen; it

simply suggests that the author or redactor exercised some freedom in reusing earlier

sources. The primacy of Isaiah 15-16 accords well with the fact that the rhetoric in

Jeremiah 48 amplifies the tendencies of the Isaiah version on every count.

There are good reasons both to see some part of the text as dating to the early

sixth century, and to ascribe much continued redactional activity to the Persian period or

later. Verse 11 in particular presumes a setting in which Moab had not yet been

destroyed, but some deportation had already occurred in Judah.[488] The punishments

visited on Moab's army and national god in vv. 13-15 also suggest that Moab was still

literally a state. Perhaps, as Ernest Nicholson suggests, the oracles were spurred by

Moab's participation in punishing Judah at Babylon's behest around 599-98 (2 Kgs 24:1-

2),[489] though we can do little more than speculate on this. What is likely, however, is that

some basic form of the oracle emerged between 597 and 582—the span between

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[485]Those who argue that the source material is traditional or independent of both Isaiah and Jeremiah include: John Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Isaiah I-XXVII* (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1969), 271-72; Oswalt, *Book of Isaiah,* 336; B. Long, "Divine Funeral Lament," 85.

[486]Woods, Jeremiah 48 as Christian Scripture, 76, 85; D. Jones, Jeremiah, Based on the RSV, 499.

[487]For example, Carroll, *Jeremiah,* 781; Terence E. Fretheim, *Jeremiah,* (Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary; Macon, Ga.: Smyth & Helwys, 2002)*,* 595; D. Jones, *Jeremiah, Based on the RSV,* 499; Stulman, *Jeremiah*, 361; John Bright, *Jeremiah.* (AB 21; New York: Doubleday, 1965), 322.

[488]D. Jones, *Jeremiah, Based on the RSV*, 503; Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 784.

[489]Nicholson, *Jeremiah 26-52,* 354.

Babylon's first deportation of Jerusalem's elites and its campaign against Moab, as reported by Josephus.[490]

At the same time, the reuse of scriptural traditions—especially toward the end of the chapter—suggests that the text was being significantly amended after the early sixth century. The way that other texts are used presupposes that now-canonical textual traditions had been gathered and accorded a measure of communal authority, yet that those traditions were fluid enough for the author to adapt them to his own purposes. That description of canonical formation fits best with the circumstances of the Persian period. In addition, Carolyn Sharp has mounted a persuasive argument that Jeremiah as a whole reflects a final redaction by authors whose ideologies are strikingly similar to those of Ezra and Nehemiah.[491] This too would suggest the late Persian or early Hellenistic period as a time of significant revision. Though Sharp does not specifically examine the OAN, the centrality of foreign nations in the ideologies she discerns makes likely that the OAN would have been redacted at this time.[492] The different text traditions for Jeremiah might suggest even later activity. Divergences between LXX and MT, together with finds from Qumran attesting at least two separate Jeremiah Vorlagen,[493] demonstrate that the text was fluid into the second century B.C.E. or even later. The OAN cycle is undoubtedly included in the activity, for LXX and MT order both the collection and the oracles within it differently. LXX, which is a much shorter text overall, lacks vv. 44:45-47 entirely. That such divergences are not merely scribal errors is evident in that many of the MT's

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[490]Among those who support a date during this period for at least portions of the text are Nicholson, *Jeremiah 26-52*, 178; Carroll, *Jeremiah,* 781; W. Holladay, *Jeremiah 2,* 354; D. Jones, *Jeremiah, Based on the RSV*, 508; Allen, *Jeremiah,* 478.

[491]That is, they limit Israel to the *gôlâ* community of Judah. See Carolyn J. Sharp, *Prophecy and Ideology in Jeremiah: Struggles for Authority in the Deutero-Jeremianic Prose* (OTS; London: T & T Clark, 2003), 157-66, esp. 163.

[492]Ibid., see especially 157-59.

[493]Woods, Jeremiah 48 as Christian Scripture, 10.

expansions have the character of exegesis.[494]

What this history demonstrates is that the Moab oracle continued to be expanded when the literal Moab no longer existed. Yet the later redactions leave intact the impression that Moab is a concrete, political entity. Indeed, the Moab oracle may have been expanded more than other OAN's, for it is exceeded in length only by the denunciation of Babylon. In fact, it is longer than all other biblical oracles against Moab combined.[495] I would suggest that the special focus on Moab owes much to Persian period circumstances. Among the nations that Jeremiah denounced and which had been destroyed by the Persian period, Moab was closer and more significant to Judah than any other. It thus provided a parade example of Yhwh's judgment as a reliable and powerful force in worldly affairs. It is also around this time that Ezra and Nehemiah resignify Moab as an analogy for the "people of the lands" (see Chapter 3). Both point in the direction of understanding Moab—not as a particular nation, but as a symbol for a kind of nation: one that Yhwh judges.

## Moab as State in Jeremiah 48

Moab is portrayed as a "state" in Jeremiah 48 by many of the same features that imply this role in Isaiah 15-16. As in Isaiah, the literary context of the OAN within a cycle of oracles against other foreign nations casts Moab as a nation like these others. In Jeremiah, however, that cycle is further contextualized within political and military events by linkages between Jeremiah 48 and Jeremiah 25. This linkage is even more

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[494]William McKane, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah, Volume 1: Introduction and Commentary on Jeremiah I-XXV (2 vols.; ITC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1986), li.

[495]Carroll points out that Jeremiah 48 is longer than all the other biblical oracles against Moab combined and that within the Jeremiah OAN cycle, only the Babylon oracle is longer (*Jeremiah,* 780). Others who comment on length include Nicholson, *Jeremiah 26-52,* 177; W. Holladay, *Jeremiah 2,* 364; Brueggemann, *To To Build, To Plant*, 236; and Woods, *Jeremiah 48 as Christian Scripture,* 77.

pronounced in LXX, which is regarded by many as more original. Both MT and LXX

contain "cup of wrath" imagery in Jeremiah 27 and 48. In LXX, however, the OAN cycle

ends with the oracle against Moab (which there ends at MT Jer 48:44//LXX 32:14), and

is *immediately* followed by Jeremiah's denunciation of the nations using cup of wrath

imagery (MT Jer 25:15-19//LXX 32:15).[496] Thus Jer 48:26's image of Moab being forced

to "drink and get drunk" occurs shortly before Yhwh commands many of these same

nations to drink "this cup of wine, of wrath," so that they "drink and retch and act crazy,

because of the sword that I am sending among them" (Jer 25:15-16, *NJPS* //LXX 32:27).

Even without this proximity, many scholars have suggested that the OAN expands upon

the position toward "these nations roundabout" in either Jeremiah 25 or 27.[497] Thus the

narrative context of the oracle, especially in the book's earliest versions, frames Jeremiah

48 as a prophetic pronouncement on sixth-century political affairs.

Like Isaiah 15-16, Jeremiah 48 portrays Moab as a territorial rather than ethnic

entity. Nearly all commentators mention the extraordinary number of place names in the

oracles,[498] which number from twenty-one to twenty-four, depending on whether Misgab,

Bozrah, and Kerioth are read as common or proper nouns. The names sketch a territory

that spans Moab's traditional holdings as far north as Heshbon and as far south as Zoar.

The coherence of Moab as an entity is emphasized by the references and direct

addresses to Moab in personified form, which occurs in at least 23 verses.[499] S/he is

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[496]The Babylon oracle is placed earlier in the series.

[497] Nicholson, *Jeremiah 26-52,* 185; Carroll, *Jeremiah,* 787; Woods, *Jeremiah 48 as Christian Scripture,* 44-46; Allen, *Jeremiah,* 482; Bright, *Jeremiah,* 321. W. Holladay and Keown, et. al., similarly propose that Zedekiah's conference in Jer 27:3 forms a possible setting for some part of Jeremiah 48 (*Jeremiah 2,* 353-54 and *Jeremiah 26-52*, 316-17, respectively).

[498]e.g. Nicholson, *Jeremiah*, 26-52, 178; Carroll, *Jeremiah,* 781; Fretheim, *Jeremiah,* 596; Woods, *Jeremiah 48 as Christian Scripture,* 83.

[499]Moab is personified in vv. 4, 7, 9, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 20, 25, 26, 27, 29, 31, 29, 30, 38, 39, 40, 42, 45, 46, and possibly vv. 2, 5, 14, 31, and 36 as well.

commanded to wail (v. 20), to leave her land (v. 9), and to get drunk (v. 26). He wags his

head in ridicule (v. 27) and becomes its object when he "turns his back in shame" (v. 39).

S/he is assigned personal attributes like complacency (v. 7, 11), arrogance (vv. 29-30,

42), shame and dismay (v. 13, 20); is envisaged with arms and horns (v. 25), neighbors

(v. 17), and sons and daughters (v. 46). In some cases, the personified entity is a town

instead of the state,[500] but because so many towns are named and so little time spent on

each, the towns themselves have no individual prominence but rather function as

representatives of the country, serving to indicate the thoroughness with which it is being

devastated.[501] Where the text refers to (or addresses) the people, gentilic suffixes are not

used (e.g. v. 6, 14, 20, 28, 31, 37, 41, 43, 45, 46), and sometimes the designations

emphasize their association with the polity of Moab, ("inhabitants of Moab," v.28, 43;

"warriors of Moab," v. 41), its capital ("men of Kir-Hares," v. 36) or its national god

("people of Kemosh," v. 46). The overall impression of the chapter is thus that the oracles

target a single, integrated entity acting and being acted upon at once—acting, in other

words, as a State.

## Rhetoric of Shame in Jeremiah 48

Jeremiah 48 never imagines a direct confrontation between Judah and Moab.

Instead, like Isaiah 15-16, it attacks Moab's status by picturing the country in situations

of disgrace. As the summary of the text suggests, the topoi of imagery are largely similar

to those in Isaiah. Towns are attacked and depopulated, the military is overcome, the

economic base ruined. Moabites appear in mourning and refugees in flight. In addition,

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[500]Verses 1, 2, 8, 18, 19, 32, and 41.
[501]McKane, Jeremiah 2, 1177; Woods, Jeremiah 48 as Christian Scripture, 83.

Moab's political power—its "strong rod/lordly staff" (מַטֵּה־עֹז מַקֵּל תִּפְאָרָה, v. 17),[502] its

strength (for which "horn" [קֶרֶן] and "arm" [זְרֹעוֹ] are metaphors, v. 25), its prestige

("glory" תְּהִלַּת מוֹאָב, v. 2) and "honor" (כָּבוֹד, v. 18) are also slated for destruction.

Shaming Moab is a rhetorical goal that in Jeremiah 48 becomes explicit as it was

not in Isaiah 15-16.[503] The terms for prestige and political power make clear that the

author has Moab's honor in view and is intent upon reversing it. At the same time, the

root בוש is used six times, two of these in the first verse. In half of these instances, it

appears in the stronger hifil form: Moab is not only ashamed, it has *been* shamed by

another actor. The poem also personifies Moab in postures of humiliation besides those

inherent in the images of destruction and mourning: Dibon is told to descend from

"glory" and sit on the ground (v. 18); Moab becomes a "laughingstock" (שְׂחֹק) after being

forced to drink until he falls[504] into his own vomit (v. 26), becomes a laughingstock and a

shock (לִשְׂחֹק וּמְחִתָּה) to all his neighbors (v. 39), and "turns his back in shame" (v.

39).

The oracle also targets the national god, Kemosh, in ways that Isaiah 15-16 had

not. There, though Moab is humiliated by fruitless lament, no aspersion is cast directly on

Moab's god. In Jeremiah 48, by contrast, Kemosh is named three times (vv. 7, 13, 46),

each time in association with exile. In fact, these are *the* three descriptions of exile in the

oracle (apart from v. 47, where it is reversed). Verse 7 states that "Kemosh will be taken

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[502]Nicholson sees in "staff of strength" the scepter that symbolized the king's power and which the army commander, as his proxy, carried in battle. He also describes the horn as an emblem of strength (*Jeremiah 26-52,* 184-85).

[503]Woods, Jeremiah 48 as Christian Scripture, 88.

[504]The verb here (וְסָפַק) is more dramatic than "fall." It is the word usually used for clapping or slapping a thigh, so probably landing with "splat" in a pool of vomit.

into exile, together with his priests and officials." "Kemosh" could just be a metonym for Moab, but it's possible that this line pictures a cult statue being taken as war booty by the conquering army.[505] This is an image capturing the irony that no doubt made cult symbols such attractive military targets:[506] the god viewed as the power behind the nation is publicly displayed as conquered and helpless. Verse 13 asserts that when Moab suffers exile, it will be like Israel, who became "ashamed of Bethel, its trust." In a similar way, Moab will be shamed by relying upon a god whose inability to save exposes it as powerless. Verse 46 designates Moabites as "the people of Kemosh" precisely in their moment of capture, referring to them also as Kemosh's "sons" and "daughters." Demonstrating just how impotent he has become, the speaker brazenly confronts the god with his failings in direct speech: "Your sons are carried off into captivity,/Your daughters into exile."

The threat of exile is a feature that does not appear in the Isaian oracle. Though Isaiah 15-16 shows refugees fleeing and abandoning Moabite cities, it does not portray them, as Jeremiah 48 does, taken away (לֻקָּחוּ, v. 46), or gone into exile (בַגּוֹלָה, vv. 7, 11; בַּשֶּׁבִי/בַּשִּׁבְיָה, v. 46). This is a critical difference, for it is exile to which the author attributes the entire difference between Moab's standing in the world and that of Judah and Israel. This view, and its attendant resentments, is most visibly on display in vv. 11-

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[505]So J. A. Thompson, who compares the passage to Amos 5.25 and Isa 46:1, 2 (*The Book of Jeremiah* [NICOT; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1980], 704).

[506]The destruction of cult symbols as a part of military conquest appears as the ideal of both biblical warfare (Ex 23:23-24, 34:13; Deut 7:1-5) and the ideology reflected by the MI. There Mesha's conquest of Israelite territory is demonstrated by his destruction of Yahwistic cult objects, which are "dragged before" Kemosh (ll. 12-13, 17-18). Titus's display of the menorah and table from the Jerusalem Temple in his 71 C.E. victory parade, memorialized on his commemorative arch (81 C.E.), provides another good example of the phenomenon. (See Philip F. Esler, "God's Honour and Rome's Triumph: Responses to the Fall of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. in Three Jewish Apocalypses" in *Modelling Early Christianity: Social-Scientific Studies of the New Testament in its Context* [ed. Philip F. Esler; London: Routledge, 1995], 242).

13, where Moab is compared to wine that has been allowed to mature undisturbed. The

privilege of non-disturbance is explicitly decoded to mean that Moab was spared the exile

that Israel suffered.

> [11]Moab has been at ease from his youth,
> settled like wine on its dregs;
> he has not been emptied from vessel to vessel,
> nor has he gone into exile;
> that is why his flavor has remained
> and his aroma is unspoiled.
> [12] Therefore, the time is surely coming, says Yhwh,
> when I shall send to him decanters to decant him,
> and empty his vessels,
> and break his jars in pieces.
> [13] Then Moab shall be ashamed of Kemosh,
> as the house of Israel was ashamed of Bethel, their confidence[507].

The poet argues that only the circumstance of exile separates Israel from Moab, which

owes its prestige—its "flavor" and "aroma"—not to its own merits, but to the

happenstance of a coddled existence. Moab had apparently felt license to mock Israel in

its downfall, for v. 27 complains that Moab had treated Israel as a "laughingstock."

Because Judah and Israel have themselves been exiled, they haven't the standing for their

attacks against Moab to garner any outside support. They can argue, however, that

Moab's current position—that which grants it the power to mock with immunity—will

presently change. When Moab is exiled, it will become an object of shame itself. Its

"vessels" will not only be emptied, but smashed—probably suggesting that any Moabites

who remain will have no Moab to which they might return. The exile of both its god and

its priests (v. 7) spells doom for its continuance as a culture.

The attack of Moab's status is only one prong of Jeremiah 48's rhetorical strategy.

The other approach is to bolster the status of the speaker's own side. It does this first by

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[507]Translation mine.

assuming a voice of authority. Of course, to give an oracle asserting Moab's doom is itself an aggressive act. Declarations that "Moab is broken" (v. 4) or "ravaged" (v. 15), and that "You, too, shall be captured" (v. 7) elevate the speaker above Moab. The speech takes that stance one step further by using imperatives—*enacting* authority by giving orders. Unspecified others are told to give Moab wings for exile (or salt for its fields)[508] (v. 9), sarcastically invited to "console him" (v. 17), to get him drunk until he falls into his vomit (v. 26). Moab itself is ordered to engage in humiliating behaviors: to descend from its place of honor and sit "in thirst" (v. 19)—a line that probably originally read, "sit in dung."[509] It is told to ask fleeing refugees to speak aloud the extent of the destruction (v. 19), then to rebroadcast the humiliating answer: "Howl! Cry aloud! Tell at the Arnon that Moab is ravaged!" (v. 20). Verse 39 similarly enjoins it to "Wail!" It is told in v. 28 to become homeless—"Desert the cities and dwell in the rock; Be like a dove that nests in the sides of a chasm." Each demand reasserts the speaker's presumption of authority *over* Moab.

The speaker also assumes a powerful position through rhetoric of taunting. After quoting Moab's boasts of being "warriors" (תֹּאמְרוּ גִּבּוֹרִים אֲנָחְנוּ) and "valiant men of battle" (אַנְשֵׁי־חַיִל לַמִּלְחָמָה), the speaker mocks the idea—

> "Moab is ravaged!
> his towns (f) have been mounted,
> His choice young men

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[508]The text here is difficult. William L. Moran proposes "salt" on analogy with Ugaritic glosses of Akkadian texts (Moran, "Ugaritic *ṣīṣūma* and Hebrew *ṣīṣ*, (Ecclus 43, 19; Jer 48, 9)," *Biblica* 39 (1958): 69-71) and is followed in this by *NRSV, NIV;* McKane (*Jeremiah 2,* 1155). W. Holladay (*Jeremiah 2,* 341) and Carroll (*Jeremiah,* 704) criticize a frequent translation of the word as "wings" (followed by *RSV, NJPS* and many scholars) as inappropriately drawn from Aramaic or late Hebrew, but see Allen (*Jeremiah,* 477) for a defense.

[509]Bright suggests that the *mem* is added intentionally to disguise the crude meaning of the original *baṣṣōʾah* (*Jeremiah,* 315). Followed by Thompson, *Book of Jeremiah,* 706; Fretheim, *Jeremiah,* 600; W. Holladay, *Jeremiah 2,* 342-343.

gone down to the slaughter. (vv. 14-15)

In v. 17, "all those who know his name" are invited to "console him," but such an invitation is really a chance to view the spectacle of "the strong rod broken"—and so to join in the poet's mockery. Verse 41 returns to mockery of Moab's soldiers, who are likened to "women in travail." The image pictures them as the opposite of the masculine ideal—not only female, but crying out in pain rather than valorous and in control of themselves. The taunt based on Num 21:28-29 is topped off by an image of Moab as a person whose hair has been singed off—an image that both describes the removal of territory and envisions an act of humiliation like the de-bearding of David's men in 2 Sam 10:4-5.[510]

Taunts are also probably contained, as in Isaiah 15-16, in the mention of specific towns, the extraordinary number of which commentators often mention. The great majority of these towns was claimed at one time by Israel or Judah,[511] and the MI testifies that Moab had boasted upon reclaiming at least some of them back.[512] By naming each

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[510]Jeremiah 48:45 states that fire from Heshbon "וַתֹּאכַל פְּאַת מוֹאָב / וְקָדְקֹד בְּנֵי שָׁאוֹן" Just as desecration of the head or crown (*qodqōd*) assaults a symbol of honor, the singeing of hair at the temples (*paʾah*) probably aims at a distinctive feature of Moabite identity (see Jer 9:26, where Jeremiah refers to Moabites as "קְצוּצֵי פֵאָה"—trimmers of the temples).

[511]Eleven towns were definitely claimed by Israel; another five probably were. The definites are Nebo, Kiriathaim, Heshbon, Elealah, Aroer, Dibon, Jahzah (=Jahaz), Mephaath, Beth (Baʿal) Meʿon, Sibmah, and Jazer. The six probables are Nimrim (if this is the Reubenite Nimrah of Num 32:3); Horonaim (if this is the *Hwrnn* of the MI, and if De Vaux's proposal to reconstruct *bt dwd* there is accepted); Holon (if this is the city in either Josh 15:51 or 21:15); Madmen (which seems to be a corruption of Dimon, that is, Dibon. So Bright [*Jeremiah,* 319], Weiser [*Buch des Prophet Jeremia*, 392, 396], and Thompson [*Book of Jeremiah,* 703]); and Kir-Heres (a variant of Kir-Hareseth [Nicholson, *Jeremiah 26-52,* 187] and another name for Dibon [Smelik, "King Mesha's Inscription," 85-89]). Some of the words treated as placenames may be common nouns: *misgab* (v. 1, unknown) might be "the fortress" (so *RSV, NJPS, NRSV*), *bōṣrâ* (48:24) might well mean "sheepfold" rather than the Edomite town. This would suggest translating the parallel *qerŷyôt* as "towns" rather than Kerioth, though this is a proper noun in Amos 2:2 and MI, L. 13. Luhith (v. 5), and Zoar (v. 34 and prb. v. 4) are probably not understood to belong to Moab but rather mark the passage of refugees beyond Moab's borders. The three certain Moabite placenames are Beth Gamul, Eglath-Shelishiyyah, both otherwise unknown, and Beth Diblathaim, known only from the MI.

[512]The following were taken from Israel: Nebo, Kiriathaim, Aroer, Yaḥaṣ (=Jahzah), Hwrnn=Horonaim), while Mesha boasted of (re?)building Dibon and Beth (Baʿal) Meʿon himself.

town as it is taken from Moab, the speaker essentially mocks Moab as it had mocked

Israel. A similar point is made when the author turns on Moab the taunt it had once

applied to Sihon the Amorite, the ancient king of Heshbon. Just as Israel had taken

Heshbon from Sihon, now someone else takes it from Moab. Attention drawn to the

frequent changes of territorial control, however, raises a hopeful possibility for Judah:

that the land once won from Sihon might again revert to Israel.[513] Even if it doesn't

however, Moab at the least has been "taken down a few pegs" by reversal of the

conquests on which its status was built.

Though the authority of the speaker's voice is important, still more effective in

invoking authority is the role he claims for Yhwh. Isaiah 15-16 had only subtly

insinuated that Moab's destruction was punishment for its pride. The authors of Jeremiah

48, however, assert Yhwh's role forcefully and often. In quoting Isaiah 16:6's accusation

of Moab's pride, Jeremiah 48:30a turns hearsay that "we have heard" (Jer 48:29) into an

indictment that has risen to the attention of the Almighty himself, "*I* know his insolence."

It is then Yhwh, not the prophet, as in Isaiah, who pronounces that "His boasting is false,

false are his deeds" (v. 30b, *NEB*). This statement of conviction enacts the idea that Moab

is on trial, with Yhwh as the ultimate judge of Moab's actions and determiner of its fate.

In vv. 21 and 47, Moab's plight is explicitly called *mišpaṭ.*[514] When Jeremiah 48 quotes

Isaiah 16:10, he changes an observation that "no treader treads out wine in the presses,"

into a boast by Yhwh: "*I* have put an end to wine in the presses" (v. 33). Elsewhere Yhwh

also takes credit for Moab's destruction: "I will send decanters to decant him" (v. 11),

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[513]Woods suggests that the invoking of Numbers 21 suggests that history is repeating itself (*Jeremiah 48 as Christian Scripture,* 50), but interprets this as an anticipation of Moab's restoration in v. 47, which she sees as a parallel to Israel's resurrection of the city of Heshbon after it was destroyed by fire.
    [514]Woods makes the case that *mišpaṭ* refers not just to the "sentence" but to the punishment itself (*Jeremiah 48 as Christian Scripture,* 205-06).

"make an end in Moab…of those who offer at a shrine" (v. 35). Verse 38 boasts, "I have broken Moab/ like a vessel no one wants," and v. 44 that, "I will bring upon Moab the year of their doom." The oracles are ascribed the authority of direct speech by Yhwh no fewer than 12 times (vv. 1, 8, 12, 15, 25, 30, 35, 38, 40, 43, 44, 47) in the MT.[515]

This emphasis on Yhwh's authority coincides with a shift of situation from Isaiah 15-16 to Jeremiah 48. The literary world in Isaiah 15-16 is one in which Moab comes groveling to Judah when attacked. By contrast, the Judah of Jeremiah is exiled—could not offer refuge if it wanted, while Moab remains intact and respected, "resting on its dregs." All the metaphors of destruction reveal the assets that, from Judah's perspective, Moab still enjoys—the wealth and rich viticulture, the strong military, the scepter of kingship. Whereas Isaiah could view Moab's pride as foolishness in light of its destruction, the Moab of Jeremiah 48 has pride that other nations validate as real prestige. And whereas the Judah of Isaiah's poem could look down on Moab with disdain, the speaker of Jeremiah 48 can only behold prosperous Moab with helpless outrage—and insist that it will soon be otherwise.[516]

# MOAB IN THE OAN

As the introduction explains, denigration of an opponent in a contest of honor is a coup even when the challenger does not actually win. That is the case in these oracles, where the speaker shames Moab by painting a convincing picture of its violent destruction—even though Judah itself is not the conqueror. By the end of each poem,

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[515]LXX lacks these statements at vv. 10, 25, 30, 43, 44, suggesting that affirmation of the agency of Yhwh became even more important in later times.

[516]Patrick Miller similarly asserts that "religious and nationalistic rivalry [lie] behind these words against Moab" ("Jeremiah," in *The New Interpreter's Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes; Vol. 6: Isaiah to Ezekiel* [12 vols.; ed. Leander E. Keck, et al.; Nashville: Abingdon, 2001], 891).

having "witnessed" the removal of Moab's population, territory, wealth, military strength, and composure, the reader can hardly imagine that Moab retains any basis of prestige. The descriptions of its wailing force it to confess its own defeat. The poet's mimicry of that mourning pounces on the vulnerable occasion, broadcasts and ridicules it. Jeremiah particularly exploits the gendered nature of shame language to portray Moab as emasculated by the attacks. Most of all, Moab is shown suffering the fates for which it mocked Israel: it will lose its territory and, in Jeremiah 48, be sent into exile.

At the same time, the shift in circumstances from Isaiah 15-16 to Jeremiah 48 changes how the rhetoric can function. Isaiah had begun to gesture toward Yhwh's role in the destruction, but there Moab's own groveling accomplished much of the work of denigration. Isaiah makes some use of Judah's alignment with Yhwh's power, but it is Jeremiah that runs with this line of argument. As the poem alternates between taunts exchanged between nations and the judgments of Yhwh, Jeremiah shifts the contest entirely from one pitting the honor of Moab against that of Judah, to one between their respective patron deities. On this score, the victory is Yhwh's, hands down. While Kemosh is defeated and exiled, Yhwh pronounces judgments and carries them out.

Any people will argue that its own god is superior, but "the proof is in the pudding." What truly makes the arguments of the oracles so compelling—especially that of Jeremiah 48—is that they are *not* just read from the perspective of their ostensible, early sixth-century setting. They are read—and significantly expanded—when Moab's destruction is a completed fact. Once Moab's status is *actually* dismantled and its strongholds *actually* breached, while Judah retains a surviving remnant, the author's case becomes far more persuasive. Readers then nod in agreement that Yhwh is indeed lord of

the nations, that Kemosh was indeed impotent against him. In tandem with Moab's ruined state, Yhwh's strength is demonstrated as potent not merely in private revelations to his people, but in concrete events. They are events that all the world had witnessed and acknowledged, and they make conceivable the destruction of powers that, like Moab, had been considered invulnerable. Most important, the "fulfillment" of the oracle argues that Yhwh uses his strength on behalf of his people. He vindicates them by snatching the territory of those who had snatched it from them; he punishes the arrogance of those who had mocked their plight. In the face of another theological supposition—that exile manifests Yhwh's judgment on Judah's sin—it offers the consolation that nevertheless he continues to act on their behalf. Moab's significance to Judah, in historical terms, was probably far less than what the length and heat of these oracles imply. Rather the symbolic resonance of Moab developed out of the fact that it became such a credible proof of Yhwh's potency, of his actions on behalf of his people, and of what he would do to those who abused them.

# PART III
## Moab as Oppressor:
## Bogeyman and Buffoon

Theoretically, contests for honor occur between near equals. This makes sense. Challenging someone far beneath your status suggests that you are too weak to compete at your own level, or are simply a dishonorable bully. A win against a weakling is either meaningless or degrading. For the weaker party, challenging a person of far greater status may be more foolhardy than heroic. And beating the steep odds usually requires either bending the rules, landing a miracle, or both. Cheating nullifies the honor that the match

was to have brought. From a critical perspective, however, what constitutes "cheating" is up to "the honorable" to declare—the very ones who create the rules, and who insist that *all* challenges by lesser parties are dishonorable. The underclass understands that playing by these rules could never radically change the status quo. After all, "respecting the rules," requires "respecting" the privilege of superiors to *be* superiors. To overturn a great power, having little power oneself, the rules *must* be subverted.

Point of view therefore makes all the difference in understanding what constitutes "honor" and how important the conventional—that is, elite—norms will be to the contest. Those norms value wealth, status, and power that the disempowered do not possess, and the scrupulous minding of rules that forbid challenging those of higher station. By contrast, underdogs value the cunning to discover loopholes, the pluck to face impossible odds, and most of all, the ability to triumph over the powerful—by whatever means.

In this set of Moab-as-State portrayals, Israel is dominated by a Moab that has greater power, either institutionally, militarily, or both. As we might expect, the confrontations with Moab are not straightforward: they are contests won through indirect means that "the honorable" might well condemn. Yet one observation about honor-shame societies remains constant: honor is still conceived as scarce, such that gaining it can be achieved by stealing it from one's opponent as much as by displaying one's own valor. Perhaps this negative method—stealing rather than earning—is more prevalent in situations where the dominant structures would not recognize honor earned anyway. What we do find is that, as with the texts in section II, the following stories are especially comic in tone. Mockery and humiliation of Moab are central to the celebration of Israel's victory. In addition to the texts explored here, though it lacks the comic elements, 2

Chronicles 20 would also fit well in this category.

# JUDGES 3:12-30

The clearest portrayal of Moab as a State in a situation of asymmetrical power is that of Jdg 3:12-30, the Ehud-Eglon story. This story portrays a Moabite king collecting tribute from Israelites who are not, as yet, a unified nation. It therefore raises the question of whether Moab might historically have had an early monarchy—and one strong enough to subjugate Israel. As chapter 1's discussion explains, no monarchy in any modern sense of the term existed in Moab until the time of Mesha, and even this was limited. Nor does evidence from either extrabiblical texts or archaeological surveys support the picture of a settled kingdom around Jericho (the "City of Palms" 3:13) in Iron I.[517] It is certainly possible that a settlement built of mud brick (or tents) could have existed without leaving archaeological traces, but we should not imagine a grand capital or a unified state. At most, a historical reading of the story would imply that a chieftain of Jericho, associated in some way with Moab, had extorted tribute from the tribe of Benjamin before the tenth century.

Revised to this more modest picture, and granting that some of the details may be retrojected from later times, it is certainly plausible that the story contains a historical kernel. But whether it is factual simply cannot be settled. Exaggeration is a central feature

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[517]Leslie Hoppe asserts that Jericho (the so-called "City of Palms") was not settled until the seventh century (*Joshua, Judges, with an Excursus on Charismatic Leadership in Israel* [Old Testament Message: A Biblical-Theological Commentary 5; Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1982], 122), while Gösta W. Ahlström argues that no Moabite kingdom would have existed this far north until much later (*The History of Ancient Palestine from the Paleolithic Period to Alexander's Conquest, With a Contribution by Gary O. Rollefson* [ed. Diana Edelman; JSOTSup 146; Sheffield, Eng.: JSOT Press, 1993], 39).

of the story's genre, whether that be "hero legend"[518] or, as Lowell Handy suggests,

"ethnic humor."[519] Those in oral societies who tell and preserve such tales generally care

less about historical accuracy than about telling a good story.[520] Some folkloric research

has suggested that names of people and places are especially unstable in oral

transmission,[521] such that we cannot be sure whether the oldest version of the story even

involves Israel and Moab, let alone Ehud and Eglon.[522] Even if the original story

preserved authentic history, it would be several hundred years before there would be a

monarchy—a setting with both the motivation and means to preserve the tale in writing.

In sum, we simply do not know how much an older story would have preserved of fact,

and how much the current version reflects the way in which such a story was reshaped

according to monarchic interests.

Unless it could be demonstrated that the pre-monarchic societies valued and

maintained written texts, I would argue that the earliest the story's written form could be

dated is the eleventh century. The Ehud-Eglon tale is older than DtrH, which expands and

theologizes the original story, and the prominence of tribal identities here and in other

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[518]For example, A.D.H. Mayes, *Judges* (OTG; Sheffield, Eng.: JSOT Press, 1985; repr., 1989), 20; J. Clinton McCann, *Judges* (IBC; Louisville, Ky.: John Knox, 2002), 6.

[519]Handy, "Uneasy Laughter: Ehud and Eglon as Ethnic Humor," *SJOT* 6 (1992): 233-246, followed by Victor Matthews (*Judges and Ruth* [New Cambridge Bible Commentary; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004], 59). Barry G. Webb (*The Book of Judges: An Integrated Reading* [JSOTSup 46; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987], 129) and Marc Zvi Brettler (*The Book of Judges* [Old Testament Readings; London: Routledge, 2002], 36-37) characterize the story as satire.

[520]The following argue that genre makes the story historically unreliable: J. M. Miller, "Early Monarchy in Moab?" 85; Brettler, *Book of Judges*, 6-7, 36-37; Ahlström, *History of Ancient Palestine*, 375; Niels Peter Lemche, *Early Israel: Anthropological and Historical Studies on the Israelite Society Before the Monarchy* (VTSup 37; Leiden: Brill, 1985), 379.

[521]Axel Olrik describes the adaptation of "geographical horizons," and sometimes also character names, when stories migrate from one location to another (*Principles for Oral Narrative Research* [trans. Kirsten Wolf and Jody Jensen; Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1992], §113, p. 77). Though Olrik's work is dated (see critiques of Sean M. Warner, "Primitive Saga Men," *VT* 29 [1979]: 325-335, esp. 332ff), this particular phenomenon is well attested in the biblical corpus. The presence of conflicting genealogies in different parts of the canon demonstrates that biblical authors were indeed willing to substitute place- and personal names in received traditions as it suited their needs and circumstances.

[522]Lemche, Early Israel, 83.

Judges stories incline me toward a date within the first few centuries of the monarchy. The centrality of Benjamin and the setting in Jericho and the Ephraimite hill country also suggest that it originated in the north.[523] A more likely setting is a bit later, during the reign of Omri, which I would tentatively suggest as a possible literary setting. It would have served then to justify Israel's subjugation of Moab. The image of Moab as oppressor argues that in conquering Moab, Omri was only doing to Moab what Moab had first done to Israel. The ineptitude with which the Moabite king and army are portrayed in the story argue that Moab is unfit to rule itself. The humor of the story would have been especially useful for a new regime, for ethnic humor often serves as a "shortcut to consensus"—transcending all the internal divisions of status and tribal affiliation by focusing on the group's shared enmity toward an Other. [524]

Omri's conquest of Moab was hardly unique, however, and the text not only could be dated later—it could later serve a similar function even if it were an early text. At any time, the audience would delight in the story and be united by laughter at its longtime rival-neighbor. Indeed, the later incorporation of the story into the DtrH only compounds the impression that Moab deserves to be subjugated. Since Judges 3 and Numbers 22-25 are the only stories about Moab in the narrative of early times, they imply that aggression was the sum total of Moab's stance toward Israel. They also argue—misleadingly—that it had always been the stronger, and always exploited Israel's weakness. The redaction also expands the scope of the original conflict. By reframing the

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[523]Benjamin was in a border region that affiliated with both Israel and Judah, but I find it likely that until the destruction of Samaria, Benjamin's primary affiliation was with the more prosperous north. That might explain some of the tensions in the literature between Benjamin and Judah. We may think here of the Saul-David rivalry, the story in Judges 19-21, the opposition Jeremiah faces in Jerusalem, and the tension between Mizpah and Jerusalem. Note that 1 Chr 7:8 lists Omri and Anathoth as members of the same Benjaminite clan.

[524]Joyce O. Hertzler, *Laughter: A Socio-Scientific Analysis* (New York: Exposition Press, 1970), 123, 126.

story, the redactor transforms an essentially local tale, involving only segments of each group, into one involving "all Israel." The slighting of Benjamin by a Moabite chieftain thus becomes a rallying cry for the nation of Israel against anything identified as Moab and a proof that conflict between their nations was ancient, intractable, and Moab's fault in the first place.

## Moab as State in Judges 3

The two parts of this story—the Ehud-Eglon tale (vv. 15b-25), and its Dtr. framing (vv. 12-15a, vv. 26-30)[525]—each portray Moab a little differently. In the Dtr. framing, Moab's role as State rather than People is made clear in that Yhwh "strengthens the hand" of Moab's king (3:12) to punish Israel for intermarrying with (3:6) and worshipping the gods of (3:6-7) *other* peoples (the "Philistines, Canaanites, Sidonians and Hivites" of 3:3, and the "Hittites, Amorites, Perrizites and Jebusites" of 3:5). It is these other groups who constitute the cultural-religious threat, while Moab is the punishing agent—a military and political power that repositions Israel hierarchically.[526] In keeping with these separate functions, the ethnic groups with whom Israel "dallies" are named using gentilic suffixes, while Moab is simply called "Moab" (3:28, 29, 30). It is interesting that this distinction is made, for Ehud's flight on foot demonstrates that Israel is no more distant from Moab than it is from these other people it had "settled among" (3:5). Despite this proximity, it is not counted as a "Canaanite" group, and not treated as

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[525]Mayes, *Judges,* 20; Hoppe, *Joshua, Judges,* 124.
[526]We thus have an author treating Canaanite groups in the manner of a "People text," while portraying the consequences in the sphere of State affairs. The categories are thus not hermetically sealed, but Moab is acting in only one capacity.

a cultural or religious threat.[527]

The tale that lies within this framing shows no consciousness of Eglon's (that is, Moab's) role as divine instrument; in fact, he is made to appear stupid and deserving of his fate. Meanwhile, the reader is expected to cheer on Ehud unreservedly as he brings the king down. [528] So while the Dtr framing scolds Israel and warns of Moab's power, the folktale is an unapologetically partisan contest for dominance.

Though Moab's role is evaluated differently in these two layers, that role nevertheless relies upon Moab functioning as a State. The difference is that in the Dtr portion, Moab's power to punish Israel is viewed as *justice,* while in the tale portion, that same power appears as *exploitation.* As the viewpoint shifts to sympathy for Israel as an oppressed group, Moab's power is depicted as something that needs a just punishment of its own.

Moab's role as State in the tale is conveyed by the royal court setting in which most of the action takes place. The king receives tribute—a demonstration of his "kingliness"—in a throne room. He sits in an elevated chamber—the ʿaliyyâ—that concretizes his higher status,[529] and is flanked by servants (3:29, 24). The king's authority is enacted in the short audience scene by his ability to command utter silence with a single word—*has!*—the equivalent of "Silence!"[530] The battle scene claims that he had

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[527]This distinction makes the rhetorical sleight of hand in Ezra 9:1, collapsing Moabites into the list of traditional Canaanite peoples, that much more striking (see Chapter 3).

[528]Webb comments that, "We are clearly meant to identify with the protagonist and to enjoy the sheer virtuosity of his performance" (*Book of Judges,* 131).

[529]Baruch Halpern, *The First Historians: The Hebrew Bible and History* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 50-51.

[530]Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 38.

commanded an army of 10,000 men (Jdg 3:29).[531]

## Rhetoric in Judges 3:

## Humiliating Moab and Valorizing Israel

The examination of the rhetoric will focus upon the tale portion in Jdg 3:15b-25. As in the prophetic material, the strategies for demonstrating Israel's winning of this contest are two-pronged. On the one hand, Moab is humiliated and mocked; on the other, Israel is elevated by celebrating its hero and championing its cause.

Though it is always difficult to discern humor at such a great historical distance, the story's absurdist elements are generally acknowledged as comic. Handy argues, in fact, that humor should be read as the story's central element.[532] Eglon is portrayed as so fat that when Ehud pierces him with a *gōmed*-long sword (3:16),[533] even the *handle* disappears so far into the king's fat that it "close[s] over the blade" and he cannot draw it out again (3:22)! This is fatness beyond the point of symbolizing opulence[534] or *kābōd*—a word for honor that uses weightiness as its primary metaphor; it is "grotesquely comic."[535] Eglon's fatness is especially funny in light of his name. The "little calf,"[536] is hardly little, and combined with his size appears as a "fatted calf" ripe for sacrifice. It is

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[531]Carolyn Pressler suggests that "10 contingents" might be a more accurate translation, but that this is meant to be an impressive number is not in dispute (*Joshua, Judges and Ruth* [Westminster Bible Companion; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2002], 150).

[532]Handy, "Uneasy Laughter," 233.

[533]The word גֹּמֶד is a *hapax*; most think it would be around a cubit, or according to BDB, "the length of a man's forearm from elbow to knuckles of clenched hand" (167). The fact that it is specified at all suggests that Ehud's knife is unusually long, since the measurement emphasizes the depth of Eglon's paunch.

[534]*Pace* David M. Gunn, *Judges* (Blackwell Bible Commentaries; Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 51.

[535]Webb, *Book of Judges,* 131. Implied in Brettler's treatment of the story as satire (*Book of Judges,* 36-37), according to Northrop Frye's definition, in which 'wit or humor founded on fantasy or a sense of the grotesque or absurd" is coupled with "an object of attack." [*Anatomy of Criticism*: *Four Essays* (New York: Atheneum, 1967), 224].

[536]J. Alberto Soggin, *Judges: A Commentary* (2d ed.; OTL; London: SCM Press, 1987)*,* 49.

the sweetest of ironies that, having grown fat on *minḥôt* (3:17, 18), Eglon becomes a

*minḥah* himself;[537] that the "hand" of the Israelite who'd been forced to bring these

"gifts" (3:15) is the same one that carves him up (3:21).[538] Thus the king's fatness sets up

a comedic reversal in which audiences would delight: the king's fat does not, after all,

signal his power to extract tribute from the poor Israelites, for apparently the "poor

Israelites" had all along been fattening up the hapless victim for his slaughter.

The story's scatological elements make its comedic tone even more obvious,[539]

and similarly serve to mock and humiliate the Moabite king. The guards tarry in checking

on the king because they believe that he is "covering his feet" (3:24), which all agree is a

euphemism for relieving himself.[540] Some conjecture that they conclude this because of

the putrid smell emanating from the king's chamber after Ehud stabs him and *yēṣē*

*happaršdonâ* (3:22).[541] This obscure phrase means either that "the filth came out"[542] or

more radically, as Baruch Halpern argues, that "his anal sphincter exploded."[543] Either

way, when at last the guards open the door, the scene before them is the spectacle of the

mighty king lying in a pool of his own feces. The words of discovery are multivalent.

When the guards open the door, the text expresses their shock: "Lo! There was their

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[537]E. John Hamlin, *At Risk in the Promised Land: A Commentary on the Book of Judges* (ITC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 71; Barnabas Lindars, *Judges 1-5: A New Translation and Commentary* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995), 138; McCann, *Judges,* 45; Ahlström, *History of Ancient Palestine,* 39; Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative,* 39.

[538]Webb makes a similar point in noting that the same "hand" that brings the tribute also crafts the sword (*Book of Judges,* 131). There are a number of plays on the "hand" motif (see, for example, Luis Alonso-Schökel, "Erzählkunst im Buche der Richter," *Biblica* 42 [1961]: 149-57), including, of course, Ehud's left-handedness, which marks him as someone who operates outside the norm (hinted at by McCann, *Judges,* 45; Robert G. Boling, *Judges: Introduction, Translation and Commentary* [AB 6A; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975], 86).

[539]Brettler, *Book of Judges*, 34.

[540]Cf. 1 Sam 24:4; Lindars, *Judges 1-5,* 149; McCann, *Judges,* 45; Halpern, *First Historians,* 44.

[541]Matthews, *Judges & Ruth,* 61. Robert Alter (*Art of Biblical Narrative,* 39) attributes the original insight to Yehezkel Kaufmann (*The Book of Judges* [Hebrew] [Jerusalem, 1968], 109).

[542]McCann, *Judges,* 45, and most published translations.

[543]Halpern, *First Historians,* 40, 69: followed by Matthews, *Judges and Ruth,* 61.

lord—fallen to earth! dead!" (3:25). The literal fall "to earth" is symbolic of his drop in status: from exalted king surrounded by luxury and forcing his will upon his subjects, he becomes the one upon whom will has been forced. He is rendered a neutral corpse, and smeared in filth rather than glory.

Parallels between Eglon's death and Sisera's (Jdg 5:27) point out further levels of implied shame. Verbs of downward motion express the fall from status of each (נפל for Eglon; כרע, נפל, and שכב for Sisera). The description of Sisera's death and the emasculation that he suffers by it suggest that Eglon's death, too, insults his manhood.[544] Sisera's and Eglon's deaths are everything a heroic death is not: one should die at the hand of a peer—not an inferior; in open confrontation—not by guile; and on a battlefield—not in a private chamber. Though Eglon is no warrior, these features of his end "unman" him just as they do Sisera. It is probably no coincidence that both of these men are shamed in being "penetrated" by a phallic object. As Robert Alter and Marc Zvi Brettler both show, the accumulation of sexual innuendo points to viewing Ehud's dagger-thrust as a rape-of-conquest.[545]

The scatological humor ridicules the guards as well as the king. The guards'

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[544]Alter, who does not note the parallel with Sisera, argues that Eglon's death represents a "grotesque feminization" based on other sexual innuendo in the passage (*Art of Biblical Narrative,* 39).

[545]Elements that hint at sexual encounter include Ehud's "going in to" the king, while promising a "secret thing," and the fact that the two are left alone together in the king's private chamber (Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative,* 39). After all, this chamber might be the royal bedroom, as the ʿaliyyâ in 1 Kgs 17:19 seems to be (Halpern, *First Historians,* 51-52). Alter comments that "there is something hideously sexual about the description of the dagger-thrust" (*Art of Biblical Narrative,* 39). Further phallic symbolism is implied by the fact that whereas knives were commonly curved, this one is specified as "double-edged," and thus one of the straight variety (Brettler, *Book of Judges*, 31). That the story uses "hand" as a *Leitmotif* might also suggest that Ehud's "hand" functions as a symbolic phallus (Ibid., 32). It may even be that when the guards conclude that the king is "covering his feet" that they imagine him to be "getting decent" after having "had his way" with Ehud. Their imagining an encounter in which Eglon had sexually used Ehud would make even more delicious the final revelation in which it is revealed who had *really* had his way with whom! Brettler points out that sexual innuendo is made more likely by the existence of other traditions that show fascination with Moabite sexuality (i.e. Genesis 19, Numbers 25) (Brettler, *Book of Judges,* 32-33).

comments that the king must be relieving himself in turn suggests them imagining the

king's private toileting. This is embarrassing to them as well as the king, for *wayyaḥîlû*

*ʿad bȏš*—"they waited to the point of embarrassment."[546] In fact, their "waiting" is

described by a word for "writhing,"[547] suggesting that part of the reader's pleasure is in

"watching them squirm." Observing the guards is not funny only because what they

imagine is embarrassing; it is also funny because the reader knows how wildly wrong—

how *trivial*—their imaginings are compared to the reality. While the guards imagine their

lord moving his bowels, he lies behind the door, *dis*emboweled.

 All of the Moabites in the story are ridiculed for their ineptitude and gullibility.[548]

Of all the divinely appointed punishers of Israel, only Moab requires Yhwh to *strengthen*

it in order to conquer Israel (3:12), and this it can apparently do only with the help of the

Ammonites and Amalekites (3:13).[549] Ehud's being "bound of the right hand" (יַד־יְמִינוֹ

אִטֵּר)—a phrase that some take to be a literal handicap[550]—may imply that Ehud could

defeat Moab "even with one hand tied behind his back." Certainly it is notable that

Ehud—the "loner"—defeats him singlehandedly. Eglon is portrayed as gullible. When

Ehud requests an audience, Eglon dismisses his guards, his own countrymen and loyal

subjects, in order to meet in private with a man whose group he is actively oppressing.

His eagerness to hear Ehud's "divine word" makes him, as Lillian R. Klein puts it, "more

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[546]*NRSV* translates this phrase, "until they were embarassed."

[547]Lindars, *Judges 1-5,* 150.

[548]The following scholars all argue that Eglon is being ridiculed as gullible: Hoppe, *Joshua, Judges,* 122; Webb, *Book of Judges,* 129; Hamlin, *At Risk,* 70.

[549]Handy, "Uneasy Laughter," 235.

[550]So Mayes, *Judges,* 20; Handy, "Uneasy Laughter," 236; Soggin, *Judges,* 48; McCann, *Judges,* 43, 45; Hamlin, *At Risk,* 70; but cf. Halpern, *First Historians,* 40-41, who argues the opposite.

curious than prudent."[551]  Certainly he misses any hint that Ehud's words bear more sinister meaning, but he is also too obtuse to understand that Ehud could mean him ill at all. As for the guards, they fail to check Ehud thoroughly for a weapon, fail to hear the assassination, and then allow the assassin to waltz out the front door, right under their noses![552] Afterward, they grant him extra time to muster his men by arguing indecisively (הִתְמַהְמְהָם, 3:26)[553] before taking action. The Moabite army is formidable—containing 10,000 men, "all of them stout and brave" (אִישׁ כָּל־שָׁמֵן וְכָל־אִישׁ חָיִל 3:29). Yet when they meet the hastily-mustered Israelites, every single one is slaughtered. Alter comments that the location suggests "that they allowed themselves to be drawn into an actual ambush, or at any rate, that they foolishly rushed into places where the entrenched Israelites could hold them at a terrific strategic disadvantage."[554]

At the same time that Moab's status is attacked, Israel's is elevated. One part of this strategy is that Eglon's assassination is portrayed as an act of justice rather than treason. Eglon's fatness not only makes him laughable (and thus less sympathetic), it also

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[551]Lillian R. Klein, *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges* (Bible and Literature 14; Sheffield: Almond Press, 1988), 39.

[552]Halpern points out that the guards would only suspect that the king were relieving himself if they believed that he was alone, and this they deduce because they must have seen Ehud leave, and because the chamber was locked *from the inside.* Ehud had managed this by slipping out through the *misdarôn.* As Halpern argues, this was probably the toilet chute that extended from the elevated chamber to the floor, where there must have been a service entry to access and empty the chamber pot. Since servants would need access, such a door would have no lock. Thus, having locked the door of the king's room from inside, Ehud lets himself down through the toilet's chute, into the closet below, where he opens the door into the throne room. The guards, having been excused, are in the other room and see none of this. When Ehud walks past them, they simply assume that he had been dismissed by the king, who subsequently locked the door to his chamber himself. Halpern deduces this scene by examining archaeological evidence of palaces of the Iron Age, and his explanation only requires that audiences would have known the basic elements of these in order to fill in the blanks implied by the text (*First Historians,* 51-53, 56-58.)

[553]Boling translates, "they argued amongst themselves," explaining that the *hithpalpel* implies that they were saying "What? What?" to each other (*Judges,* 70). *NRSV* and *NJPS* simply translate "they delayed."

[554]Alter, Art of Biblical Narrative, 40.

indicts him for exploitation.[555] The comment that "Eglon was a very fat man" (3:17)

comes immediately after Ehud presents the tribute to him. The two facts appear together

because they are linked: it is on the fruits of Israelite labors—produce that is not feeding

Israelite families—that Eglon grows so obscenely fat.[556] Ehud's action is a perfect

example of poetic justice: by puncturing his huge belly, he punishes the symbol of his

greed.[557] The construal of Ehud's action as divine justice is hinted at in the word play of

his ruse. Ehud approaches by telling the king that he has a *debār seter* (3:19) for him—

then qualifies this by calling it a *debār ʾelohîm* (3:20). In both cases, his words imply the

delivery of a secret or divine "word" when the "hidden thing" that they actually refer to is

the knife.[558] By calling his knife a divine thing, Ehud declares his action one of divine

justice. And while such a noble description may be merely that of a human character, the

inequities of the situation, and the audience's identification with the exploited Israelites,

make it likely that the readers would have little trouble agreeing with him.

In contrast to Eglon, Ehud has much to admire—especially from an Israelite

perspective. First, like David facing Goliath, Ehud is a model of pluck. His name

correctly implies that he acts alone,[559] for he separates from his comrades to return to the

palace (3:18-19) to carry out his plan. He takes a courageous risk by smuggling a knife

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[555]Webb describes the king's obesity as a symbol of greed (*Book of Judges,* 129), Klein as "unbridled appetite" (Klein, *Triumph of Irony*, 39).

[556]Hamlin points to the accusation inherent in the word used for fat by comparison to other biblical contexts. It indicts the invader (Hab 1:16) and the rich (Jer 5:26-28) who live at the expense of the poor (cf. also Ps 73:4, 7, 12, 18-19). Eglon's fat thus symbolizes not only his greed, but wealth and comfort gained at the expense of the exploited Israelites (*At Risk,* 70). Pressler (*Joshua, Judges and Ruth,* 148) and McCann (*Judges,* 44, 46) also see Eglon's obesity as a symbol of injustice. The idea was also picked up by early interpreters. Gunn's survey of historical interpretation finds Eglon being compared to the princes and clerics of Europe during the Peasant Wars (*Judges,* 38) and Matthew Henry essentializing Eglon as a rich, powerful ruler "tyrannizing over the People of God" (Ibid., 40).

[557]Hamlin calls assassination an exemplar of "poetic justice" (*At Risk,* 71). Similar conclusions by McCann (*Judges,* 44).

[558]McCann, Judges, 44; Pressler, Joshua, Judges and Ruth, 148-49; Webb, Book of Judges, 131.

[559]Boling, *Judges,* 85; McCann, *Judges,* 43-44; Pressler, *Joshua, Judges and Ruth,* 147.

that, were it discovered, would get him killed. He is also impressively level-headed: having carried out a dangerous and gory assassination, he exits in front of the guards without drawing a whiff of suspicion. He waits until after he has completed the assassination to call for reinforcements, yet musters his troops with confidence and authority, declaring that "Yhwh has given your enemies, Moab, into your hand!" (3:28).

His primary feature, however, is his cleverness, exemplified by the ingenuity of the wordplays in *debār seter* and *debār ʾĕlohîm*. His words keep him technically truthful while concealing his intentions as cleverly as his knife. His genius is also apparent in the ways he reverses the lopsided power dynamic. He both turns his disadvantages into benefits and reveals the vulnerabilities inherent in institutional power.[560] Moab has an army that is superior in size and fitness. Yet as soon as Eglon is killed, that formidable force dissolves into chaos. His move reveals the fragility of Moab's hierarchically-regimented power: without its head, strong men are rendered helpless.[561]

The victory also points out some of the advantages hidden in Israel's apparent weakness. The fact that the Israelites are the oppressed group makes them highly motivated to mobilize—and quickly. Their small numbers make them more flexible, and so more able to respond to what the situation requires. Lacking the strength for a frontal attack, they resort to guerrilla tactics—ambushing the Moabite soldiers at the river crossing. It is a tactic that turns out to be far smarter and more effective: Israel exterminates the entire Moabite army while seemingly suffering few or no casualties itself.

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[560]The cleverness of heroes and their ability to exploit the weaknesses of their enemies are a defining feature of trickster tales (James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1991)*,* 162).

[561]Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative,* 40; Tammi J. Schneider, *Judges* (Berit Olam; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press/Michael Glazier, 2000), 51-52.

These different models of power—massive and institutional versus small and agile—are represented in the body types of the story's main characters, who also demonstrate the inversions of apparent advantage and disadvantage. Eglon's tremendous girth, while signaling his privilege, renders him helpless in the one-on-one confrontation with the quick-moving Ehud.[562] Only a small and lithe person could escape as Ehud does—through the *misdarôn*—which, as Halpern argues,[563] and others agree,[564] is almost certainly a toilet chute. That he would drop through a hole where the king defecates points out that Ehud's advantage is also his *social* flexibility: a person of great importance would not dream of sullying himself in this way.

Ehud also exploits the weaknesses in the structures of privilege and power in the world of the palace. The height of the *ʿaliyyâ* in which the king receives courtiers impresses upon royal subjects their own subservience by forcing them to approach from below. Yet Ehud's escape, which entails dropping down from the *ʿaliyyâ* and exiting the unguarded door under it, reveals that the structure of *elevation* is in fact ideally suited to bring the king *down*. The room's privacy—an anomaly in the ancient world—marks Eglon's privilege by setting apart a room that is "for him alone" (3:20). Yet this privileged separation is precisely what shields Ehud from detection during the assassination.

Ehud also exposes the vulnerabilities in the palace's social structure. The guards do not enter the throne room during the murder because they dare not question the king's command for silence, nor violate the demand for privacy conveyed by the locked *ʿaliyyâ*

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[562]Mayes, Judges, 20; Alter, Art of Biblical Narrative, 39.
[563]Halpern, *First Historians,* 56-58.
[564]Matthews grants Halpern's architectural reconstruction the weight of "a general consensus" (*Judges and Ruth,* 60).

door. An even stronger code of privacy surrounds the king when it is assumed that he is "relieving himself," which causes the guards to wait before investigating further. Such delicacy turns out to seem absurd, for in restraining themselves, the guards allow Ehud time to escape and muster his troops, while the king's shame is exposed despite all the precautions.

Finally, the story elevates Israel's status according to traditional measures of contest outcomes. On the military front, Israel's army completely slaughters the far superior Moabite one, such that "not one man escaped." On the political front, Israel forces Moab to submit to tribute, completely reversing the former relationship: "Moab was humbled at that time beneath the hand of Israel." Thus Israel raises its own status from vassal to overlord, while simultaneously giving their former oppressors "a taste of their own medicine." That thereafter "the land had rest for eighty years" implies that Israel kept Moab in submission for more than four times the eighteen years it was subjugated itself. This ending lets Israel "have it both ways." As both victim and victor, it claims all the moral impunity and heroism of the dispossessed, while enjoying the glory and honor awarded to the victorious.

## NUMBERS 22-24

Numbers 22-24, set during the wilderness period, also portrays Moab as a State with power superior to Israel's, for it already possesses land and a monarchy while Israel still has neither of these things. Israel, however, has the advantage of numbers, and Balak, king of Moab, upon seeing the massive encampment, is intimidated. He fetches a famous sorcerer, Balaam ben Beor, to curse Israel so that he can defeat them militarily.

The Moabite king is utterly foiled in his intention. In a series of four oracles, Balaam moves progressively[565] from praising Israel, to blessing them, to cursing Israel's enemies—including Moab.

As in Judges 3, the pre-monarchic setting of the story raises the question of whether it preserves evidence for historical relations between Israel and Moab prior to the tenth century. Most scholars agree that the poems in this text—the oracles of Balaam— predate the narrative[566] and are genuinely old.[567] They reflect a Northern theology in which El is recognized as the region's chief deity[568] and a political situation in which Transjordan Israel can expound a confident nationalistic ideology.[569] The earliest strands therefore predate the Assyrian campaigns of the late-eighth century, and are probably a good deal older—possibly reflecting Transjordanian sentiment in the ninth century,

[565]Thomas W. Mann, *The Book of the Torah: The Narrative Integrity of the Pentateuch* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1988), 137; Dennis T. Olson, *Numbers* (IBC; Louisville, Ky.: John Knox, 1996), 148.

[566]George Buchanan Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Numbers* (ICC; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920), 313; Sigmund Mowinckel ("Der Ursprung der Bileamsage," *ZAW* 48 [1930]: 233-271) and Martin Noth (*Numbers: A Commentary* [trans. James D. Martin; OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968], 189) believed that the two in Numbers 24 were the oldest and that the narrative was based upon them. Primacy of the poems is called "generally acknowledged" by Philip J. Budd (*Numbers* [WBC; Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1984], 258) and is echoed in other recent commentaries by Timothy R. Ashley, *The Book of Numbers* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1993), 436; Eryl W. Davies, *Numbers: Based on the Revised Standard Version* (NCB; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1995), 238; B. Levine, *Numbers 21-36*, 208.

[567]The follow propose dating the poems as early as United Monarchy to 722 at latest: G. Gray, *Numbers*, 313-14; Budd, *Numbers*, 262-3; B. Levine, *Numbers 21-36,* 208.

[568]B. Levine, *Numbers 21-36,* 220-24. Martin Noth believed the story, like Numbers 25, grew out of traditions from the Baᶜal Peᶜor shrine, which he thinks was used by both Gad and Moab (*A History of Pentateuchal Traditions* (trans. Bernhard W. Anderson; Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1972), 74-76.

[569]G. Gray, *Numbers,* 314, though he does little to distinguish among Israelite groups. It is B. Levine who makes the most extensive case for distinctive Transjordanian traditions in the text, and even goes so far as to designate the Balaam poems part of a "T" source. Levine argues persuasively that some parts of the text date to a time when such traditions were not seen as problematic (e.g. Genesis 31, 32, Deut 2:31-3:16, Judges 5)—a situation that does not obtain for D (e.g. Num 12:10) and Dtr. (e.g. Deut 2:31-3:16) materials, still less texts such as Num 32:1-37 and probably 25, which both problematize what were likely to be Transjordan shrines (See also Noth, *History of Pentateuchal Traditions,* 74-75). Tensions are visible, too, in the conflicting allotments of land to the Transjordanian groups, and in the conflict over whether the Conquest begins with the victories over Sihon and Og, or at Jericho, when the Jordan has been crossed. See B. Levine, *Numbers 21-36,* 37-45.

before Mesha conquered some of the area for Moab.[570] The content of the poems does

not, however, establish that Moab actually ruled over the Israelites of the region, only

that it was powerful enough for them to fantasize or prophesy about ruling over *it*. What

is more, the Deir ʿAlla texts, in which a Balaʿam bar Beʿor likewise appears as a powerful

and well-known seer (*ḥzh*), provide external evidence that cautions against too early a

date. Scholars have dated the Deir ʿAlla texts between 900 and 600, but most think they

are likely to originate in the early ninth century (ca. 800). I find it unlikely that the

biblical Balaam traditions would originate more than a century distant from these.[571]

Even the proponents of earlier dates believe that the Israelite groups that developed them

were already settled, if not also ruled by a monarchy.[572]

Thus, the poems probably arose from an environment in which *both* Israelite and

Moabite groups are settled in the Transjordan and competing for land and resources.[573]

This makes the portrayal of Moab wielding already-established, institutional power

against a still-nomadic Israel not merely anachronistic, but thoroughly misleading. It

inflates the power differential between them, exaggerating both the power and reach of

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[570]So B. Levine, who cites the affinities between the biblical poems and the Balaam texts from Deir ʿAlla (*Numbers 21-36*, 44).

[571]A few scholars have seen the references to Agag (24:7) and the conquests of Edom and Moab (24:17-18) as signs that at least the two last poems should be dated to the United Monarchy (E. Davies, *Numbers,* 239; Walter J. Harrelson, "Guidance in the Wilderness: The Theology of Numbers," *Interpretation* 13 [1959]: 33; Olson, *Numbers*, 146). I have doubts that David traditions would be native to a primarily northern, Transjordan story. We have already seen that traditions about David—especially those describing his conquests of Edom and Moab—become a trope for ideal Israel and continue to be elaborated in the post-exilic period.

[572]The main proponent of a pre-monarchic date was William F. Albright, whose criteria and conclusion are now generally discredited ("The Oracles of Balaam," *JBL* 63 [1944]: 226ff). Though David Noel Freedman also argued that Numbers 23-24 was pre-monarchic, he assumed that Israel was a settled group ("Pottery, Poetry, and Prophecy: An Essay on Biblical Poetry," *JBL* 96 [1977]: 18-19). G. Gray, however, points out that the fourth poem (esp. 24:7, 17-18) presupposes a monarchy, and thus counts a premonarchic date "out of the question" (*Numbers*, 314). Using linguistic criteria more sophisticated than Albright's, David A. Robertson concludes against a date earlier than the tenth century (*Linguistic Evidence in Dating Early Hebrew Poetry* [SBLDS 3; Missoula: Society of Biblical Literature, 1972], 145).

[573]Noth, History of Pentateuchal Traditions, 75-79; B. Levine, Numbers 21-36, 208.

Moab and the vulnerability of Israel. If it contains a historical kernel, the original situation, like that in Judges 3, would have been a local conflict among partial segments of Israel and Moab. And yet, also like Judges 3, the current literary setting represents relations as though they were between "Israel" and "Moab"—the united, formed entities of later times.

We do not know precisely when the narrative is written around the ancient poems, but it is certain to be a good bit later than the poems. Deuteronomy 23:5 and Josh 24:9-10 testify to earlier versions of the story in which Balaam has the power and willingness to curse Yhwh, and does so.[574] That story presupposes that Yhwh was subject to the power of other deities—probably ʾEl in this case, since Balaam is a prophet of ʾEl in both the poems and the Deir ʿAlla texts. Numbers 22-24, in its current form, denies any such superior divine power, and portrays Balaam as a dolt for not understanding that Balaam can do nothing without Yhwh's consent. That is, as Baruch Levine points out, it asserts a strong—and late—monotheistic theology.[575] Levine also points out that the author of the narrative knows a well-integrated version of JE. He therefore proposes a tentative date of the sixth century for the narrative. I would argue, based on the function of the story, that it may well be later still.

The placement of this story into the foundation myth for Israel as a nation grants special potency to the image of Moab as aggressor. It implies that enmity with Moab

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[574]As James A. Wharton argues, the "Tale of the Jenny" reveals an earlier version of the tale in which Balaam immediately answered the king's summons and did indeed curse Israel. The dramatic tension derived entirely from what Yhwh would do when Balaam *after* he enacted his curse ("The Command to Bless: An Exposition of Numbers 22:41-23:25," *Interpretation* 13 [1959]: 39-41). That Yhwh either "turned the curse into a blessing" (Deut 23:5) or "refused to listen to Balaam" (Josh 24:10) presupposes that the curse was indeed spoken, and so is part of this earlier tradition. B. Levine suggests that the author of the narrative shows familiarity with a combined JE, though he states this tentatively (*Numbers 21-36,* 237).

[575]B. Levine, *Numbers 21-36,* 41.

began the moment Israel entered the land, was initiated by Moab, and was completely

unprovoked—Israel did nothing more than appear numerous. As we will see below, the

story's current placement in the Pentateuch as well as features of the story itself portray

Moab as a second Egypt, Balak as a pharaoh-figure. Together with Ex 1-14, Numbers 22-

24 encloses the events of the exodus and wandering periods. Though a detailed argument

for date lies beyond the scope of this project, I would tentatively suggest that we look for

the setting of the story's final form in the early Persian period—a time when much of the

current Pentateuch was being gathered and edited. A more important factor lies in the

way that exodus and Moab are also elaborated as literary tropes in this period. The

exodus becomes a primary metaphor in which the exiles identify themselves with the

Israelites—the legitimate possessors of the land—while they cast those who had been

living in the land, the *ꜥamê hāʾărṣôt,* as "Canaanite."[576] This paradigm informs the

patriarchal narratives as well, where Abraham, like the exiles, comes to Canaan from

Mesopotamia, and his legitimate heirs eschew Canaanite women to marry close

kinswomen from outside the land.[577] Ezra 9-10, as we will see in Chapter 3, also makes

use of this metaphor, grouping Moabites with traditional Canaanite groups as it does. If

the Balak-Balaam story is redacted around the same time, then Moab here is a cipher for

the *ꜥam hāʾāreṣ.* The story would argue that the *gôlâ*'s entry to the Promised Land was

met with unprovoked aggression (cf. Neh 13:2); that the people in the land had opposed

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[576]Harold C. Washington, "The Strange Woman of Proverbs 1-9 and Post-Exilic Judaean Society," in *Second Temple Studies: 2. Temple Community in the Persian Period* (ed. Tamara C. Eskenazi and Kent H. Richards; JSOTSup 175; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994), 232; Charles E. Carter, *The Emergence of Yehud in the Persian Period: A Social and Demographic Study* (JSOTSup 294; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999), 311. The abstract of a forthcoming book (Sept. 2012) treats this subject in more detail, but was not available for review at the time I was preparing this document: Casey A. Strine, *Sworn Enemies: The Divine Oath, the Book of Ezekiel, and the Polemics of Exile* (BZAW 436; Berlin: DeGruyter, 2012).

[577]Naomi Steinberg, *Kinship and Marriage in Genesis: A Household Economics Perspective* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1993), 5.

them just because they were "numerous," but that God had championed their cause over that of their enemies (cf. Neh 6:15-16).[578]

## Moab as State in Numbers 22-24

Following the Balaam-Balak episode, Moab's role in Numbers 25 will shift to that of People, but in chapters 22-24, the Moab that threatens Israel acts very much as a State—a singular entity with institutional power. This is signified first and foremost by Balak's role as king and his enactment of kingly functions. In opposing Israel, Balak acts as guardian of his people's resources and borders, for he resolves to act after observing that Israel's numbers will "lick clean all that is about us as an ox licks up the grass of the field" (22:4). That is, they compete for natural resources. That the Israelites "cover the 'eyes' of the land" (22:5) may imply that they also threaten water resources—"springs" being another meaning of *ʿēn*.[579] Despite his fear of scarcity, Balak seems not to want for wealth. Balaam alludes to the king's "house full of silver and gold" (22:18, 24:13), implying that the Moabite king is known to be rich. He displays the wealth himself by preparing large numbers of expensive animals—first butchering "oxen and sheep" to welcome Balaam and the delegation (22:40), later sacrificing no fewer than 42 bulls and rams for the rituals[580] (23:1-2; 23:14; 23:29-30).

Balak's kingly role is also emphasized by his exercise of authority over others.

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[578]Mary Douglas proposes that the portrait of Balak is a parody of Nehemiah (*In the Wilderness: The Doctrine of Defilement in the Book of Numbers* [JSOTSup 158; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993], 216-25). I would propose instead that it could be a portrait of Sanballat.

[579]The עֵין יַעֲקֹב in Deut 33:28 is perhaps a similar reference to competitive water rights, especially in light of the attention to water given as dew in the following line. I translate: *And Israel shall dwell secure/ Alone (i.e., unchallenged) the springs of Jacob/ upon a land of grain and new wine;/ Yea, his skies will drip (with) dew.* (Cf. similar rendering by RSV).

[580]The expense of these animals is confirmed by Leviticus 1-2, where bulls, then sheep or goats, head a list of possible offerings that proceeds from most to least costly. The hierarchy is confirmed by Lev 5:7, 11, which specifies that pigeons are offered for guilt offerings only by those who cannot afford a sheep or goat, and cereal by those who cannot afford pigeons.

Though no army is shown, Balak presumably commands one, given that he hopes to "defeat [Israel] and drive them out of the land" (22:6). A number of people answer to him, variously designated as "chieftains" (22:8, 13, 14, 15, 21, 35, 40; 23:6, 17), "courtiers" (22:18), "messengers" (22:5, 24:12), and "elders" (22:7). When a first group of "elders" fails to persuade Balaam, he is able to send a second delegation "more numerous and distinguished than the first" (22:15). So synonymous is Balak with Moabite power that *śārê bālāq* (22:13) are synonymous with *śārê mô'āb* (22:8). Balak's status is also signaled by his ability to "honor" (Pi. כבד 22:17) Balaam and pay him handsomely for effecting a curse (22:37; 24:11, 13).[581] As the Deir ʿAlla texts show, Balaam would have been understood by ancient readers as a powerful and famous seer. The story itself alludes to the distance Balaam must travel and the boundaries he must cross to arrive in Moab (22:5, 13, 36; 24:14), details that also imply the far reach of his fame.

More than the details of the story itself, however, the role of this episode in the larger wilderness-exodus drama is the strongest indicator that this passage conceives Moab as State. This parallel, and how this State role actually functions, will be discussed in the next section.

## The Image of Moab in Numbers 22-24

### 1. Moab as Yhwh's Opponent

There can hardly be a power more symbolic of State Power as Oppression than Egypt. The continued resonance of Egypt in the Jewish Passover bears witness to this:

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[581]Rolf P. Knierem and George W. Coats, *Numbers* (FOTL 4; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2005), 253; Mann, *Book of the Torah,* 137; David L. Stubbs, *Numbers* (SCM Theological Commentary on the Bible; London: SCM Press, 2009), 178.

modern Jews understand "Egypt" as a signifier of the many forces that have opposed the

Jewish people throughout its history. Moab's placement as the second "bookend" of the

wilderness hints that it will play a role parallel to that of Egypt. Just as Egypt had

threatened the long-awaited liberation from slavery, Moab stands as the final opposition

to fulfillment of the long-awaited promise of Land.[582] Within the story, Balak and

Balaam both call attention to Egypt's role, explicitly describing Israel as the people "who

has come out of Egypt" (Num 22:5, 11), or were "brought out of Egypt" by ʾEl (Num

23:22, 24:8).

The details of the stories bear out the parallel. Both Ex 1 and Numbers 22 begin

by highlighting Israel's numerousness. Exodus states that the Israelites "were fruitful"

(פרה, 1:7), "multiplied" (רבה, 1:7, 10, 12, 20; עצם 1:7, 20), and "swarmed" (שרץ, 1:7),

while Balak is alarmed before the many/great (מְאֹד) Israelites "because they were

numerous/ great (רַב)" (22:3).[583] This numerousness serves as a focus of the drama in

both stories. In Numbers 22-24, the vastness of the Israelite encampment is what propels

Balak to curse them, but also what persuades Balaam that they are divinely blessed and

cannot be cursed.[584] Balak takes the view that the curse against them might be effective if

some of their numbers were blocked out, and thus changes the venue so that "only a

portion of the people were visible" (22:41, 23:12).[585] The Israelites' numerousness also

serves as a sign of their blessing in Ex 1:7, where they have been "fruitful" (פָּרוּ),

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[582]A point also made by G. Gray, *Numbers*, 316.

[583]B. Levine (*Numbers 21-36*, 149) and Ashley (*Book of Numbers*, 446) point out the parallel between the Israelites "covering the 'eyes' of the land" like a plague that Balak is afraid will "lick the land clean" with the plague of locusts against Egypt in which the insects that "cover the face of the land" *do* devour it (Ex 10.5, 15).

[584]B. Levine, *Numbers 21-36,* 216.

[585]B. Levine, *Numbers 21-36,* 162.

"multiplied" (וַיִּרְבּוּ), and furthermore "increased very greatly" (וַיַּעַצְמוּ בִּמְאֹד מְאֹד)—

thus more than fulfilling the blessing-command of Gen 1:28.[586] Just as the Egyptians

worry that Israel, in its numerousness, has "spread out" (פרץ, 1:12), Moab frets that it

has "covered the 'eyes' of the land" (22:5, 11).[587] Perhaps most prominently, Pharaoh and

Balak respond to this numerousness in similar ways. Egypt "loathes" (קוץ, Ex 1:12)

Israel while Moab loathes (קוץ) and is "in dread" (גור III) of it (Num 22:3). The Egyptian

king says to his people, "Look, the Israelite people are *rab weʿāṣûm mimmennû*" (Ex

1:9), while Balak says to Balaam, "Come then, put a curse upon this people for me,

for *ʿāṣûm hûʾ mimmennî*" (22:6).[588] Both Pharaoh and Balak attempt to punish the people

for this numerousness—Pharaoh by "dealing shrewdly" and increasing harsh treatment

(Ex 1:9, 13), Moab by attempting to curse, so as to defeat, Israel (Num 22:5-6). Both also

call in religious specialists to defeat Israel—Pharaoh through "wise men, sorcerers" and

"magicians" (Ex 7:11), Balak by summoning Balaam, whom he asks to "curse me this

people" (Num 22:6).[589] Thus Balak is, as James S. Ackerman puts it, "Pharaoh

*redivivus.*"[590]

Though Egypt plays a more prominent role than Moab in Israel's *Heilsgeschichte,*

Moab's function is quite similar in kind.[591] Like the exodus,[592] Yhwh's defeat of Balak is

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[586]Note the use of verbs of abundance in Genesis 1 and Exodus 1: פרה in Gen 1:22, 28 and Ex 1:7; רבה in Gen 1:22, 28; Ex 1:7, 12, 12, 20, and שרץ (Gen 1:20, 21; Ex 1:7).

[587]Balaam's oracles touch on the same numerousness, saying, "Who can count the dust of Jacob?/ Number the dust cloud of Israel?' (23:10, *NJPS*).

[588]Also noted by Mann, *Book of the Torah*, 136.

[589]Ibid.

[590]James S. Ackerman, "Numbers," in *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (ed. Robert Alter and Frank Kermode; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), 86.

[591]That is, in most of biblical tradition. Moab serves as opposing force here, in Mic 6:5 and in Josh 24:9-10. Judges 11:25, however bears witness to a very different tradition: Jephthah points to Balak as an example of one who neither sought quarrel nor denied passage to Israel in its original settlement.

pointed to as a "sign" for future generations—used both to prove Yhwh's power and magnanimity and to demand Israel's grateful allegiance as His client. Micah references the event in recalling the people to renewed loyalty, describing it as one of "the gracious acts of Yhwh" (6:5). Joshua 24:9-10 mentions it among the deeds Yhwh had done on Israel's behalf since the time of Abraham. Together with other such salvific acts, the fact that "I saved you from Balak" culminates in a forceful demand for exclusive loyalty to Yhwh (Josh 24:14-16). Yhwh's opposition to Balak thus serves as a miracle for the wilderness generation, just as the generation that left Egypt had witnessed Yhwh's defeat of Pharaoh. In the same way, this new generation is reminded of the saving power of the god on whom they will have to rely—not, this time, for life in the desert, but as the force behind their army as they seek to occupy the land.

The function of this event as a "sign" of Yhwh's saving power on Israel's behalf points out something important: it is *useful* for Israel to be oppressed. Without Moab threatening Israel, there is no need for Yhwh's heroism; no stage on which to prove His mettle. Like the young men of villages that operate on values of honor and shame, contests can be welcome arenas for publicly establishing the standing of the winner. As befits a contest of honor, Yhwh's faceoff with Balak occurs publicly: Moab must acknowledge it, because Balak is flouted in front of all of his courtiers. The audience that really matters, however, is Israel. And though they may be ignorant of the events in the moment, the story is recorded and repeated as a key event of Israelite "history."

It is Balak's determination to see Israel cursed that provides the occasion by which Yhwh proves both power and fidelity. He sends out two different delegations to

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[592]For deliverance from Egypt as a "sign" see Deut 4:20, 37; 9:12; Josh 24: 5-7; Jdg 6:8; 1 Sam 8:8, 10:18; Jer 11:7; Hag 2:5.

overcome Balaam's resistance to cursing Israel. Despite Balaam's warnings that the

endeavor is futile, he makes three separate attempts, each with costly sacrifices, to try it

anyway. As in Moses' interactions with Pharaoh, this contest has multiple "rounds," and

here as there, the repetition demonstrates both the intransigence of the enemy and the

strength and faithfulness of Yhwh.[593] In each round, pressures or inducements are added

to sway Yhwh from his promise; each attempt fails—proving yet again that Yhwh will

not be moved. As scholars point out, Balaam himself makes the story's key message

explicit: that "God is not man to be untrue,/Or mortal to change His mind./ Is *He* one who

would say and not do? Who would speak and not make good on it? (23:19, my trans.)."[594]

In fact, far from weakening Yhwh's promise, the contest increases its strength.

First Balaam verifies that behind Yhwh's blessing stands the authorization of ultimate

divinity (23:8)[595] and speaks an ode to Israel, even expressing the wish that his fate would

be like theirs (23:10). Then he actively blesses them (23:24, 24:7-9), then finally curses

their enemies—starting with Moab, for whom he predicts subjugation at Israel's hand

(24:17-24). Yhwh not only deflects Balak's weapon, he turns it back on him! Though

most have pictured this story as a struggle between Yhwh and Balaam, it is clear that the

battle is between Yhwh and *Balak,* just as Yhwh's struggle in Exodus is with pharaoh

rather than his magicians. It is a testimony to Yhwh's power (and a dig at the venerated

Balaam) that, at the same time, Yhwh turns the great sorcerer into a mere "tool."

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[593]Gordon J. Wenham, *Numbers: An Introduction and Commentary* (Leicester, Eng.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1981), 165.

[594]Douglas, *In the Wilderness,* 216; E. Davies, *Numbers,* 261. Yhwh's immutability stands in contrast both to Balak's notion of divinity as a force to be manipulated (E. Davies, *Numbers,* 261; Stubbs, *Numbers,* 181) and to Israel's fickleness (Wenham, *Numbers,* 175).

[595]B. Levine makes the compelling case that the poems preserve a theology in which El is a separate deity—the head of the regional pantheon to whom Yhwh is subordinate. In affirming Israel's blessing, El shows Balaam that any attempt to curse will be futile, if not punished. As Levine points out, blessing and curse may invoke the power of the deities, but it cannot be done independent of them; it requires their approval and cooperation to be effective (*Numbers 21-36,* 220-24).

Yhwh's repeated faithfulness will stand in stark contrast to the instantaneous fickleness Israel itself will exhibit in the next episode at Baal Peor. Yet no action by Israel is required here for the blessing to stand firm,[596] and this is a critical element of the story. Just as Israel did not earn this blessing by its own merit, it will not be withdrawn for the missteps that are its wont. The reliability of Yhwh's blessing rests entirely in the nature of the deity himself.[597] The revelation of this steadfast nature, however, depends on Balak's determination to push so hard and so repeatedly against Yhwh's commitment.

## 2. Balak as Fool

The same interactions that demonstrate Yhwh's honor heap mockery on Moab. Each time Yhwh proves his fidelity and strength, Balak is humiliated. Honor, as we have said, is won by taking it away from others. The story's central message may be serious, but the vehicle is no less delightful and funny for all that:[598] Balak's attack on Israel blows up in his face;[599] the "big guns" he had called in turn out to be just as powerful as he had hoped—but for cursing Moab (Num 24:17), not Israel.

Balak is ridiculed by more than the simple fact of his defeats. As James A. Wharton puts it, Balak "emerges as a quasi-comic figure, whose impotent anger …turns to feverish activity to revoke the blessing, or at least succeed in cursing a portion of [Israel]."[600] The humor of the passage lies not just in seeing Balak defeated, but in seeing

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[596]Olson, *Numbers,* 141.

[597]Mann, Book of Torah, 138.

[598]Douglas finds broad enough discussion of the story as a satire to claim that it is "generally agreed" to be one (*In the Wilderness,* 216). She reads the portrait of Balak as a parody of one who "wrongly thinks he can control God" (Ibid*.,* 225).

[599]G. Gray, *Numbers*, 317; Wharton, "Command to Bless," 42; Budd, *Numbers*, 271; Mann, *Book of Torah,* 138; Olson, *Numbers,* 141.

[600]Wharton, "Command to Bless," 44.

him openly *frustrated* by his defeat and humbled in his presumptuousness. When Balak is told that Balaam will not come to him, he is reduced to begging: "Please do not refuse to come to me. I will reward you richly and I will do anything you ask of me" (22:17). When Balaam does come, Balak describes the rejection as an affront:[601] "When I first sent to invite you, why didn't you come to me? Am I really *unable to honor* (pi. כבד) you?" (22:37). After Balaam delivers the first oracle, Balak's indignation confesses his own humiliating defeat: "What have you done to me? Here I brought you to damn my enemies, and instead you have blessed them!" (23:11, *NJPS*). After the second oracle, which expands the praise for Israel, he concedes his helplessness by exclaiming, "Don't curse them and don't bless them!" (23:25, *NJPS*). After receiving the third oracle, he loses all composure—his "anger flares"—and he puts into words the story's central irony:[602] "I called you to curse my enemies, and look! You have blessed them these three times. Back with you at once to your own place!" (24:10-11). Balak reacts by clapping his hands in disgust, an action that Anthony J. Petrotta sees as ridiculing him for his total loss of kingly dignity.[603] The comedy of these scenes is similar to that of old cartoons that feature exaggeratedly evil villains who, foiled in their plans, turn red in the face, spout steam from their ears, and hop furiously from one foot to the other.[604] The audience delights in seeing an enemy so punished, all the more so because in this story, the enemy has acted wickedly and gotten what he deserved. At least in this story world, morality

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[601]So also Ashley, *Book of Numbers,* 461.

[602]Knierem and Coats, *Numbers,* 259. Budd, similarly, identifies the idea as one of the "rich ironies" of the story (*Numbers*, 271).

[603]Petrotta, "A Test of Balaam: Locating Humor in a Biblical Text" in *Probing the Frontiers of Biblical Studies* (ed. J. Harold Ellens and John T. Greene; Princeton Theological Monograph Series; Eugene, Ore.: Pickwick Publications, 2009), 281.

[604]Petrotta similarly comments on 24:10, "With each reading of this verse I picture 'Ollie' in Laurel and Hardy movies responding with his frustrated 'Ooh…' as the desired outcome of his words and actions are thwarted and undermined, often by Laurel, his partner" ("Test of Balaam," 297).

cleaves to the satisfying adage that "the wicked are snared in the work of their own hands" (Ps 9:17).

Balak's offer to "do anything [Balaam] asks" turns out to describe how power is actually distributed in this episode. Though Balak is the king who has hired the seer, it is Balaam who gives the orders. It is he who tells the king to "Build *for me* seven altars…and have seven bulls and seven rams ready *for me* here" (23:1), while Balak "did as Balaam said" (23:2). The same sequence of order and compliance is repeated using almost identical wording in 23:29-30. In between, though Balak chooses new locations, Balaam continues to instruct Balak to wait (23:3, 15), which he dutifully does (23:3, 6, 17).

The oracles themselves also undermine instead of empowering Balak. Not only do they praise instead of cursing Israel, as he had ordered, they also rebuke *him!* The first poem describes the cursing enterprise as a fool's errand and names Balak as its author. That Balaam "double-voices" Balak also suggests that he is mocking him:[605]

> From Aram has Balak brought me,
> Moab's king from the hills of Qedem:
> 'Come, curse me Jacob,
> Come, tell Israel's doom!'
> How can I damn whom God has not damned?
> How doom when Yhwh has not doomed? (23:7-8)

The second poem, in which Balaam asserts that God, unlike humans, does not change His mind, also functions as a rebuke of the king. The sermonette seems to target Balak's recent action of moving the ritual to a new location[606]—an action implying that divine

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[605]See similar examples in Isaiah 5:19 and 28:15 discussed by Edwin M. Good in *Irony in the Old Testament* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1981), 119-20.
[606]E. Davies, *Numbers,* 261.

will can be manipulated.[607] This time, however, the rebuke is prefaced with sharp

imperatives:

> Up, Balak, attend!
> Give ear unto me, son of Zippor!

The text twice notes that Balaam delivers these rebuffs to the king in the presence of "the

chieftains of Moab" (23:6, 17). His humiliation is thereby witnessed by the most

influential "public" in Moab.[608]

In all this, Balak's notions of religion and divinity make him a caricature that is at

once a parody of "foreign religion"[609] and a serious critique. Balak acts as though the

desired result is a matter of hiring the right seer, for the right price, providing the

requisite sacrifices and choosing the right location. His repeated attempts to wring a

different result from the ritual by changing its location seem especially tinged with

parody.[610] Balak's attitude toward the ritual is emblematic of his notion of divine power

in general: it is a force to be controlled rather than one to which he himself is subject.

This is the crux of the problem from the beginning, for his failure to recognize that a

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[607]Ashley, *Book of Numbers,* 475.

[608]Mann nicely sums up these reversals in a way that points out their humiliating implications: Balak is turned from "self-confident employer of an internationally famous sorcerer" into "a compromising and ultimately impotent pawn in a cosmic game, forced to stand by, outraged and helpless, as his hireling turns the curse upon him and his own people" (*Book of the Torah,* 137).

[609]Stubbs, *Numbers,* 181.

[610]Different scholars propose slightly different understandings of Balak's motivations, but all see his plan to change the ritual location as an expresion of folly. E. Davies (*Numbers,* 259-60) see the authors criticizing Balak for a theology in which deities can work only in particular locations. Stubbs (*Numbers,* 177) thinks Balak may be seriously trying to answer Balaam's rhetorical question, "Who can count the dust of Jacob/ Number the dust-cloud of Israel?" (Num 23:10, *NJPS*). Budd (*Numbers,* 267) and B. Levine (*Numbers 21-36,* 236) think that Balak is trying to counter the sense of overwhelming blessing Balaam had perceived in viewing the vastness of the Israelite encampment by limiting his sight to a small portion ("the edge," 23:13) of it. This is the reading that makes the best sense to me. There might be further ridicule in Balak's notion that Balaam's sorcery would apply only to what lies in his literal field of vision. What this satire may be ridiculing is the notion that Yhwh could be "captured" and conjured at the Gerizim Temple. This might be a reference to Sanballat's (Sanballat II?) building of that Temple and appointing his son-in-law, Manasseh as high priest, after Manasseh was expelled from the Jerusalem priesthood for marrying Sanballat's daughter Nikaso (Josephus, *Ant.*XI.302, 306-12). Josephus tells this story, but may have the timing wrong, as he sets it in a time later than archaeology suggests that the temple was built.

curse confronts a live deity leads to pressing for that curse, which not only fails, it stirs

the deity's power against him. Balak's actions make the serious point that those who fail

to take divine power seriously—who treat Yhwh as pet dog rather than a "wild ox"

(23:22, 24:8)—will learn the hard way what power they cross.

The portrait of Moab in this narrative has a dual character. On the one hand,

Balak is a bully and a mortal enemy for Israel. Having transplanted the story into the

wilderness narrative, the redactor heightens the aggressiveness of Balak's actions. Israel

does nothing to provoke Moab, and yet Balak attempts to attack it with all the power at

his command. Though the Moabite king enjoys the advantage of wealth and institutional

power, he resorts to a dirty trick—calling in a famous seer to weaken Israel through

sorcery. Striking at the blessing of Yhwh, Balak wishes not only to keep Israel controlled,

but to destroy its lifeblood. Thus his failure to enact the curse seems like nothing short of

justice. Because of Balak's aggression—because he himself presses for the curse that

results in a prediction of Israel's conquest of Moab—the narrative serves, even more than

Judges 3, to legitimize Israel's later possession of Moabite land.

At the same time, however, the threat posed by Moab, in the canonical version of

the story, is nearly laughable. The earlier version of the story presupposed by Deut 23:5

and Josh 24:9-10 had featured a true showdown between Yhwh and Balaam. When the

author of the current form, with his assertion of thoroughgoing monotheism, made

Balaam a character who could do nothing without Yhwh, he removed much of the

dramatic tension in the contest.[611] At the same time, however, it neutralizes Balaam as a

threat and assures the Israelite audience that their god is the only true divine power; that

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[611]Wharton, "The Command to Bless," 40.

Yhwh is nothing if not faithful, and that He is faithful not just if and when they are, but as a general rule.

The canonical story also diminishes the fearsomeness of Moab by depicting it in ways that highlight its vulnerabilities, and above all, invite ridicule. Balak's motives are attributed to his fear of Israel; the advantages of institutional power and wealth that he appears to have pale in comparison to Israel's advantage of great numbers and divine blessing. The characterization of Balak as more fool than tyrant defangs the beast and empowers the audience to laugh at him. In so doing, it provides a way to reframe his aggression. Rather than taking offense at the way he attacks Yhwh, he can be dismissed as a misguided bumbler. His lack of recognition of Yhwh's power is tied up with his simplistic notions of religion as crass manipulation, and his arrogance, which amounts to an unwillingness to recognize *any* superior power.

# MOAB AS STATE: CONCLUSIONS

When biblical authors describe Moab and Israel or Judah meeting as States, they presume the rules and values by which men compete for honor in the public sphere. We have seen how this metaphor structures the narratives of encounter between nations. Other nations are described as entities that *have* been conquered, that *should* have been conquered, that Judah or Israel *aspires* to conquer, or, in a few cases, that conquered or aspired to conquer Israel. This may seem natural to us, since history in our time is also largely cast in terms of conflicts between nations. But nations interact constantly in a myriad of other ways, and the authors tell us very little about those kinds of interactions.

The understanding that, in the political sphere, each entity is seeking to gain status (power, etc.) at the expense of the others determines *a priori* that other nations will be approached as potential conquests or threats, and that the only way Israel will avoid being dominated is through preemptive aggression.

In practice, Israel or Judah may not always have been strong enough to be *actually* aggressive, but the authors devise ways to win honor and assert the masculine ideal through rhetoric. This means that actions by Moab that *could* be viewed neutrally will instead be presumed aggressive; actions to which one *could* be sympathetic will instead be ridiculed. It is not obvious that Moab obtaining status through its wine-export economy should be construed as offending Judah. Yet Moab's prestige so galls the author of Isaiah 15-16 that he scorns its desperate plea for asylum and ridicules its status as baseless "pride." Moab was probably just as aggressive and suspicious of Israel. The rhetoric of scornful ridicule in Jeremiah 48 seems to respond to taunts issuing from Moab when Israel and Judah were defeated and exiled (Jer 48:27).

In addition to explaining *how* authors narrate interactions with Moab, the model of competitive honor might explain *why* they discuss Moab (and other nations) at all. Status, as Pitt-Rivers points out, is comparative in nature: one is honorable *relative to* another.[612] For Israel to claim the status of conqueror, it must have a conquest. It *needs* Moab—and Moab conquered—to prove its own worthiness. And the stakes of not winning are high: if it is not conqueror, it becomes itself the disgraced conquest; the one mocked who does not defend his honor.

Third, the fact that honor is established by the outcomes of *conflicts* helps to explain why the relationship with Moab appears so relentlessly negative. A few texts

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[612]Pitt-Rivers, "Honour and Social Status," 23.

remind us that Judah and Israel did have cooperative relationships with Moab as well. Though Balak is said to prevent Israelite passage in Jdg 11:17, Jephthah nevertheless contends that the Moabite king had refrained from quarreling or battling with them (Jdg 11:25). David is said to have had close enough ties (kinship?) to one Moabite king/chieftain to have entrusted his parents' safety to him (1 Sam 22:4). Jeremiah 27:3 describes Zedekiah inviting envoys from Moab and other surrounding nations to a meeting that proposes joining together to oppose Babylon. These are only glimpses, but they hint that the impression of a thoroughly conflicted relationship with Moab is something of a distortion. Perhaps we see so much animosity toward Moab simply because the authors regard conflict, with its clear positioning of winners and losers, as more *useful* than cooperation.

The authors' "ends" are not simply about enhancing Israel's prestige. Honor is far more than that. It signifies a deeper worthiness—a *right* to be held in high regard. Battle victories are viewed as proof of a king's fitness to rule, a nation's right to conquer, and a god's potency and presence with its client people. So though Moab's conquest is a token of status, its more important function is as a sign of Yhwh's presence and approval. In 2 Samuel 8, Moab's defeat proves Yhwh's special blessing on David, and in Psalm 60 and 108, his active sponsorship of Israel's army. Because of all that it signifies, the tradition of Moab conquered by Israel during both the Conquest (Numbers 21) and the reign of David (2 Samuel 8) is a cherished one. In the late-seventh to early-sixth-century oracle of Psalms 60/108, it becomes a frozen moment—a configuration of power relations for an "ideal Israel." The vision assembled there asserts that only with Moab as "washbasin" and Judah as scepter would Yhwh again be "march[ing] with [his] armies." In 2 Kings 3,

the inverse of the retribution principle is used to criticize the northern kings: Jehoram's failure to quell Mesha's rebellion is a sign that Yhwh has turned against him (2 Kings 3).

The retribution principle, however, works more often against Israel than for it, and particularly after the exile. Thus other interpretations and meanings must be found in defeat. Jeremiah 48 is representative of a shift in rhetorical tactics from arguing for the status of Judah as conqueror, to arguing for that of Yhwh as sovereign of all the nations. These texts still seek to salvage status for Judah, but they do so by appealing to its role as a client to a powerful patron god rather than as a winner of peer-peer contests. Even though Judah had no role whatsoever in Moab's demise, the authors of Jeremiah 48 nevertheless construe Moab's destruction as the result of a contest: in taunting Israel, Moab has thrown down the gauntlet to Yhwh, and is summarily judged and punished. Thus Judah may be harshly punished, but it nevertheless has a powerful champion, who continues to fight in its defense. The expansion of the Moab oracle also argues for the reliability of the prophetic word, and thus shifts hope to the future: Yhwh *can* and still *may* do great things for Israel, even if the current outlook is poor.

The third set of texts, picturing Israel as conquest, also offers alternatives to a paradigm of honor through victory. To some degree, they simply reinterpret defeat. Judges 3, for example, offers a typically Dtr explanation: Eglon defeats Israel not because he is strong—he needs the help of two other nations to do so—but because Yhwh prospers him. And as in the prophetic texts, these authors focus on denigrating Moab as a means of elevating Israelite status. But they also become critical of what the honor-shame system entails for the losers.

Instead of accepting that the weak have no honor and that the defeated must

accept the superiority of their conquerors, these stories ennoble the role of victim. They argue that just as the vulnerability of widows and orphans entitles them to special protections from the society, so, too, are those beleaguered by enemies entitled to sympathy and help. We have already seen how mourners strip themselves of status and voluntarily suffer in order to secure special consideration and help from the deity. It is likewise the helplessness of Israel against Balak's machinations in Numbers 22-24 that inspires Yhwh to step forth in their defense. The distressed "crying out" of Israel moves Yhwh to "raise up" a savior for them in Jdg 3:9, 15—even though the text explicitly states that they were oppressed in the first place as a punishment for their sin.

The roles of victim and oppressor imply moral valuations opposite those of retribution theory. The victimization of the weak exempts them from judgment, while nearly any action by the strong is construed as oppressive. The toppling of the strong will therefore be an act of justice, not of treason or tragedy. So while the weak will be excused for using "underhanded" methods, the strong will be evaluated as dishonorable—bullies who abuse their power against those who have no defense.

Both stories provide a strategy for empowerment by deconstructing the images of foreign kings through ridicule: Eglon is no valiant warrior, but a greedy and stupid man. Balak is no fearsome king, but a foolish coward. Indeed, the Balak story displays the cracks in institutional power that appears invincible. Balak's aggression is decoded as an expression of fear, and the Israelites, despite their lack of government, are shown as powerful by virtue of their numbers and their god's potency.[613] The ingenuity of Ehud

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[613]Moab's threat against Judah in 2 Chronicles 20 could well be functioning likewise as a story to instruct the people about how to respond to overwhelming threat. In this story, Moab is part of a coalition of enemies who well outnumber Judah. Knowing he would have no chance militarily, Jehoshaphat throws himself at Yhwh's mercy—praying in the Temple and calling the whole nation into lamentation and

demonstrates that superior wealth and military strength have their limits. Thus the stories of Moabite oppression offer parables for Israel to confront later incarnations of superior institutional power: they warn Israel to be neither gullible nor intimidated; they urge trust in Yhwh and argue that he *can* be trusted, and they offer a vision of human power as fragile, and ultimately undone by its own foolishness.

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petition. In doing so, he seems meant to model the ideal response to such a situation (Sara Japhet, *I & II Chronicles: A Commentary* [OTL; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1993], 792). Jehoshaphat's faithfulness results in one of the Bible's most dramatic examples of holy warfare: Yhwh fights Judah's battle so far in advance that the field is filled with corpses before its soldiers arrive, and it takes them three days to collect all the spoil. The victory is then appropriately celebrated with days of praise and thanksgiving. Though this story does not use humor to belittle the enemy, it shares the theme that in the face of overwhelming odds, Yhwh can be counted on to fight on Israel's/Judah's behalf. The difference between the two is that Yhwh's actions here are purely independent of the people's actions, whereas 2 Chronicles 20 portrays Yhwh's intervention as a response to the people's piety.

# CHAPTER 3
# MOAB AS PEOPLE, PART 1:
# A THREAT TO INTEGRITY
# AND PURITY

## INTRODUCTION

The texts in this chapter illustrate Moab's role as a People in biblical imagination. We meet Moab here not as a nation, but as individuals seeking to participate in the Israelite community. The setting of the texts shifts from the sphere of royal affairs to that of Israelite family and community life. The encounters make statements less about status than about constitution (who Israel is), and virtue (how well it is measuring up to its ideals). Moreover, just as texts about Moab as State help to construct the status of Israel as a nation, the texts about Moabites as a People help define the boundaries of Israel as a group, and to describe its values.

Most of the texts in this section were written or redacted in the Persian and Hellenistic periods. By this time, Moab is neither a state, nor, from what we can deduce, much of a people, so the relevant historical context is fifth- to late-fourth-century Yehud. It is in this context that Moab is invoked as part of a controversy over "mixed marriages" between the former exiles—the *gôlâ*—and the "peoples of the lands," the *ʿamê hāʾărṣôt*. In-group marriages had probably been preferred in earlier times, but only from the mid-

to-late-fifth century do we see texts *requiring* endogamy.[614] In texts like Nehemiah 13

and Ezra 9, we witness the interpretive moves by which the ʿamê hāʾărṣôt are identified

as Moabite, and thus turned into foreigners with whom intermarriage is prohibited. These

authors' reconstrual of Moabiteness—from ethnic term to legal category and literary

trope—makes it possible, in turn, to read (and write!) Moabites in other texts as symbols

of the peoples with whom the gôlâ must avoid contact. Thus the Moabites who appear

late in the literary corpus—and especially in the People texts—represent an amalgam of

Moab as both historical and symbolic entity.

## Identity Construction: From State to *ethnos*

The destruction of Jerusalem in 586 radically changed how Judahites could define

themselves. There was no longer a state to trumpet and "hold" a Judahite identity[615]—

nothing, in fact, to ensure the continued existence of Judah as a people. Those who were

exiled could no longer perform the practices connected to the land of Judah, the city of

Jerusalem, or the temple cult. The devastation had demanded a radical revision in both

their understandings of the deity and their role as Yhwh's protected people. Some of the

texts in the present canon were written during this time, born of the urgency to preserve

an identity now threatened with extinction.[616] Other, older writings, probably carried with

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[614]Claudia V. Camp contends that all the texts condemning mixed marriage are Persian or later, with the possible exceptions of 1 Kings 11 and Ahab's marriage to Jezebel, but she thinks even these two examples may be late (*Wise, Strange and Holy: The Strange Woman and the Making of the Bible* [JSOTSup 320; Gender, Culture, Theory 9; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000], 22-23).

[615]R. LeVine and D. Campbell argue that, based on ethnographic examples, ethnic identities are most likely to be clearly bounded when they occur in the context of a well-developed state. If a state collapses, the well-defined identity tends to remain only if it is replaced "by an equally demanding superordinate structure with equally salient ideology" (see *Ethnocentrism*, 99-102).

[616]A good discussion of some of these traditions and their precursors can be found in David Carr, *Formation of the Hebrew Bible: A New Reconstruction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 225-303.

the group into Babylon, were being collected together and edited as well.[617] But increasingly, scholarship is realizing the importance of the so-called Restoration period as a crucible for the development of Judahite identity and biblical traditions. It is in the land that the *gôlâ* must assert their identity against other Yahwists who claim some of the same history and traditions, but have competing interests, different practices, and contrasting visions of "Israel." Many of the texts produced during the Persian and Hellenistic periods thus define Israel *against* other groups, describing the struggle through the lens of *gôlâ* perspective.

Though I will dispense with quotation marks where possible, no references to "Israel" in this period should be taken literally. Historical Israel is long gone. What is left is a mythical entity tied to the land, history, and literary traditions of Israel and Judah. The idea that the historical kingdoms of Israel and Judah have a single, shared history is itself a myth that is still taking shape. In declaring themselves Israel, the Judean *gôlâ* are not stating a fact, but making a bold and controversial claim. So though the text skews toward their perspective, and though I use the term Israel, I use it in this very qualified sense—as a particular group's version of Israel, which is not automatically legitimate, and certainly not the only one.

## The Yehudian Context

To whom is the label "Moabite" being applied in Persian or early-Hellenistic

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[617]Carr emphasizes that though much literary activity takes place between the exilic and Hasmonean periods, most of the works we now have were drawing on older materials rather than created *ex nihilo*. Just how old the materials are and what they looked like previously becomes more uncertain as one penetrates beyond the top layer of the text, but there are clearly texts that reflect the Assyrian period, and possibly earlier. See discussion in *Formation of Hebrew Bible,* 252-351, esp. 341-43.

Yehud? Unfortunately, we are heavily reliant upon the books of Nehemiah and Ezra[618] to

reconstruct the Persian period context, and their value for doing so has been increasingly

challenged in recent years.[619] Scholars have become more aware of the active role

redactors play by exegeting, rearranging, and downright expanding the texts, while at the

same time seeing evidence that these processes continued into the Hellenistic period, and

thus at least partially reflect the concerns of a later time.[620] It is true, therefore, that Ezra-

Nehemiah is best read as a narrative; what it reflects most accurately is how early

Hellenistic scribes understood the characters, events, and significance of the previous

age.[621] However, in my estimation, parts of these books, if critically evaluated, can be

used nonetheless for historical reconstruction. I would argue that the Nehemiah "memoir"

contains passages that genuinely reflect mid-to-late fifth century circumstances.[622] The

Moab traditions are not among these, but I do place some confidence in Neh 1:1-7:4,

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[618]Though Ezra and Nehemiah were combined into a single work in ancient times, I will refer to them as separate books, since this is how they now appear in the canon.

[619]See the discussion of recent scholarship by Megan Bishop Moore and Brad E. Kelle, *Biblical History and Israel's Past: The Changing Study of the Bible and History* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2011), 407-14.

[620]Even H. G. M. Williamson's proposal that Ezra-Nehemiah was finalized around 300 B.C.E. now seems somewhat conservative, especially as he sees all but Ezra 1-6 having been redacted by ca. 400 (*Ezra, Nehemiah* [WBC 16; Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1985], xxxiii-xxxvi). Juha Pakkala likens the redactional process to a 'snowball' that accumulated material over two centuries, and so cannot be used easily for historical reconstruction ("The Disunity of Ezra-Nehemiah," in *Unity and Disunity in Ezra-Nehemiah: Redaction, Rhetoric, and Reader* [ed. Mark J. Boda and Paul L. Redditt; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2008], 200-15). Armin Siedlicki points out how much the literary impression can be changed by reordering even when the texts remain the same ("Contextualizations of Ezra-Nehemiah" in Ibid*.,* 263-76). Jacob L. Wright proposes that Nehemiah—usually seen as more reliable than Ezra—may be based on nothing more than a short building inscription (*Rebuilding Identity: The Nehemiah-Memoir and its Earliest Readers* [BZAW 348; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004], 414 cf. 256).

[621]Carr, *Formation of the Hebrew Bible,* 169; Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Israel in the Persian Period: The Fifth and Fourth Centuries B.C.E.* (trans. Siegfried S. Schatzmann; Biblical Encyclopedia 8; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 95-99. Nice examples of readings that treat it thus are Tamara Cohn Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose* (SBL Monographs; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 2 and *inter alia*, and G. F. Davies, *Ezra and Nehemiah* (Berit Olam; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1999).

[622]As Carr points out, some features, such as the emphasis on Persian sponsorship of both the Temple and the Law, make sense only in a pre-Hellenistic context (*Formation of the Hebrew Bible*, 208). Lester L. Grabbe describes the features of Nehemiah's narrative that make it more historically plausible than Ezra's (*Ezra-Nehemiah* [Old Testament Readings; London: Routledge, 1998], 160). For a bibliography of early arguments to place Ezra later than Nehemiah see Klaus Koch, "Ezra and the Origins of Judaism," *JSS* 19 (1974): 179, n. 3.

12:27-40, and parts of 13:4-31.[623] Most evidence points toward dating Nehemiah's first

mission to 445.[624] I agree with those who place Ezra later—ca. 398[625]—but see the

historicity of that narrative as far more dubious.[626]

With these caveats in mind, there are two primary candidates for the peoples that

Nehemiah 13 and Ezra 9 refer to as "Moabites." The first are the native Judahites who

had remained in the land when the elites "and the rest of the population of Jerusalem" (2

Kgs 25:11) were deported to Babylon. Though some texts imply that the *gôlâ* emigrated

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[623]After Carr, *Formation of the Hebrew Bible*, 207. I follow Christophe Pichon's more detailed analysis of the marriage crisis in 13:23-31, in which he concludes that only Neh 13:23aα, 24a, 25a, and possibly 28 are authentic ("La prohibition des mariages mixtes par Néhémie [XIII 23-31]," *VT* 47 [1997]: 176-99).

[624]This date is advocated by most, including A. R. W. Green ("Date of Nehemiah," *AUSS* 28 [1990]: 195-209), Sara Japhet (*From the Rivers of Babylon to the Highlands of Judah: Collected Studies on the Restoration Period* [Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2006], 253-59), Joseph Blenkinsopp (*Ezra-Nehemiah: A Commentary* [OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1988], 65), and H.G. M. Williamson (*Ezra and Nehemiah* [OTG; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987], 55). Most cite as corroborative evidence the Elephantine papyrus mentioning "Sanballat governor of Samaria" and dating to 408 or 407 (*AramP* 30:29, *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B.C.,* [ed. and trans. A. Cowley; Oxford: Clarendon, 1923], 108-19.

[625]In this I follow Japhet (*From the Rivers of Babylon,* 259), but there is no scholarly concensus and I am far more confident that the *literary* texts follow this chronology than that the historical figures do. David J. A. Clines summarizes the major arguments for 398/7 and for 458 in *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther Based on the RSV* (NCB; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1984), 17-20. H. H. Rowley also makes some good arguments in favor of the 398 date and gives a history of its proponents from 1890 to 1945 (*The Servant of the Lord and Other Essays on the Old Testament* [1st. ed.; Lutterworth: London, 1953], 131-59). Other recent advocates include André Lemaire, "Le fin de première période perse en Égypte et la chronologie judéenne vers 400 av.J.-C.," *Transeu* 9 (1995): 56-61 and "Administration in Fourth-Century B.C.E. Judah," in *Judah and Judeans in the Fourth Century* (ed. Oded Lipschits, Gary N. Knoppers, and Rainer Albertz; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 55; Rainer Albertz, "The Thwarted Restoration," in *Yahwism after the Exile* (ed. Rainer Albertz and Bob Becking; Studies in Theology and Religion 5; Assen, Neth.: Royal van Gorcum, 2003), 14; Bob Becking, "Ezra's Re-enactment of the Exile," in *Leading Captivity Captive: 'The Exile'as History and Ideology* (ed. Lester L. Grabbe; JSOTSup 278, European Seminary in Historical Methodology; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 53; Ahlström, *History of Ancient Palestine*, 880; S. Abbadie, "Esdras, prête et scribe," *Transeu* 28 (2004): 13-31 and Judson R. Shaver, *Torah and the Chronicler's History Work: An Inquiry into the Chronicler's References to Laws, Festivals, and Cultic Institutions in Relationship to Pentateuchal Legislation* [BJS 196; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 22-26.

The traditional 458 date is advocated by Clines (*Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther,* 15); Williamson (*Ezra, Nehemiah,* [WBC], 64-66); David Vanderhooft, "From Neo-Babylonian to Achaemenid Administration in Palestine," in *Yahwism after the Exile: Perspectives on Israelite Religion in the Persian Era* (Studies in Theology and Religion 5; Assen, Neth.: Royal Van Gorcum, 2003), 226; Blenkinsopp (*Ezra-Nehemiah*, 60, and "The Development of Jewish Sectarianism," in *Judah and Judeans in the Fourth Century* [ed. Oded Lipschits, Gary N. Knoppers, and Rainer Albertz; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2007], 393). Blenkinsopp adds, however, that "the book [of Ezra] itself is the product of a considerably later time" (Ibid.).

[626]See the discussion of Grabbe, *Ezra-Nehemiah,* 18-26.

from Babylon to an "empty land,"[627] even the report of 2 Kings 25 itself specifies that

only the population of Jerusalem was deported.[628] Certainly the region was traumatized

by the destructions: the settled area of Judah declined about 70% and even more in the

immediate environs of Jerusalem.[629] The whole area would have suffered economically

from the losses of important towns like Jerusalem, Lachish, and the settlements of the

Shephelah.[630] But the losses were less dramatic (around 55%) in Benjamin,[631] and enough

of the population remained to retain a fairly consistent pottery profile from the Assyrian

through the Persian periods.[632] Mizpah, Bethel, Gibeon, Jericho and En-gedi seem to

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[627]Especially implied in 2 Chr 36:17-21 (Robert P. Carroll, "Myth of the Empty Land," *Semeia* 59 [1992]: 79) and Zechariah (Dalit Rom-Shiloni, "From Ezekiel to Ezra-Nehemiah: Shifts of Group Identities within Babylonian Exilic Ideology" in *Judah and Judaeans in the Achaemenid Period: Negotiating Identity in an International Context* [ed. Oded Lipschits, Gary N. Knoppers and Manfred Oeming; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2011], 137-38), but the land is also described as "desolate" by Ezekiel (Ibid., 142-43). Japhet points out the tendency in both Ezra and Nehemiah to render the occupants of the land invisible (*From the Rivers of Babylon,* 109-110).

[628]Lipschits argues that the destruction of Jerusalem attempted to end once and for all its proclivity for rebellion by replacing both the capital city and Davidic line. Thus the destruction was a targeted attack on Jerusalem specifically (*The Fall and Rise of Jerusalem* [Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2005]*,* 68-69). Jeremiah 52:28-30 gives a figure around 4600. W. Stewart McCullough points out several of the reasons, apart from archaeological remains, that point to a significant continued presence of a Judahite population in Palestine. Babylon would have undercut its own potential revenue source had it deported the entire population, and their appointment of Gedaliah as "governor of the cities of Judah" (Jer 40:5-7, 2 Kgs 25:22) implies that there were both people to govern and taxes to be harvested. Judahites who had fled to Moab, Ammon and Edom are said to have returned after 587 (Jer 40:11-12). Ezekiel also testifies to an argument between Judeans who had remained and the Babylonian community (Ezek 11:15; 33:24). McCullough also points out that the survival of the book of Jeremiah implies either that some who had fled to Egypt returned to Palestine, or that the community in Egypt maintained contact with the one in Palestine (McCullough, *The History and Literature of the Palestinian Jews from Cyrus to Herod* [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975], 4-5).

[629]Oded Lipschits, "Demographic Changes in Judah between the Seventh and the Fifth Centuries B.C.E.," in *Judah and Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period* [ed. Oded Lipschits and Joseph Blenkinsopp; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2003], 332-33, 355.

[630]Miller and Hayes, *History of Ancient Israel and Judah,* 479-80; Oded Lipschits, "Judah, Jerusalem, and the Temple, 586-539 B.C." *Transeu* 22 (2001): 134. The Persians also actively invested in the coastal cities, but left the interior as an agricultural hinterland, thus severely curbing the recovery of cities (Oded Lipschits, "Achaemenid Imperial Policy, Settlement Processes in Palestine, and the Status of Jerusalem in the Middle of the Fifth Century B.C.E.," in *Judah and Judeans in the Persian Period* (ed. Oded Lipschits and Manfred Oeming; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 26-29). Gary Knoppers, "Revisiting the Samarian Question in the Persian Period," in *Judah and Judeans in the Persian Period* (ed. Oded Lipschits and Manfred Oeming; Winona Lake, Ind: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 271.

[631]Lipschits, "Demographic Changes," 357.

[632]Hans M. Barstad paints a picture of life basically returning to normal ("After the 'Myth of the Empty Land': Major Challenges in the Study of Neo-Babylonian Judah," in *Judah and Judeans in the Neo-*

have come through the Babylonian era intact.[633] Though the *gôlâ*-aligned authors assert

that these were only "the poorest of the land" (2 Kgs 24:14, Jer 39:10, 52:15), merely

"vinedressers and field hands" (2 Kgs 25:12), they may be exaggerating a bit to minimize

both their number and status.[634] There is evidence of some new elites who arose in the

absence of the Jerusalem *gôlâ,* especially at Mizpah (Tel en-Nasbeh).[635] Mizpah replaced

Jerusalem as the administrative center from the time of Zedekiah's rebellion (2 Kgs

25:22) and remained the center until the time of Nehemiah.[636] Here, at least, was a

wealthier group of people, who lived in spacious, well-built houses.[637] Most of the land's

people did not become rich, but they presumably were able to take over the estates of the

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*Babylonian Period* [ed. Oded Lipschits and Joseph Blenkinsopp; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2003], 3-20). Oded Lipschits, who upholds the continuity of material, argues that the devastation was more thorough than Barstad implies, especially in southern Judah. Northern Judah (the region of Benjamin) shows more continuity in settlement and lack of evidence for Babylonian-era destruction (*Fall and Rise of Jerusalem*, 192-258).

[633]Lipschits, *Fall and Rise of Jerusalem,* 113; Carter, *Emergence of Yehud,* 238. Pointing to the provisions Babylon made for local governance in Mizpah, Lipschits points out that total destruction would have undermined Babylon's goal for political stability by making the region ungovernable ("Judah, Jerusalem, and the Temple," 129-32, 135). Hans M. Barstad says something similar (*Myth of the Empty Land: A Study in the History and Archaeology of Judah during the 'Exilic' Period* [SO 28; Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1996], 22). Lipschits makes a good case that Nebuchadnezzar's primary goal was the destruction of Jerusalem, whose proclivity for rebellion had proven intractable, and was bolstered by an ideology that asserted divine protection of Yhwh's king and temple. He also notes that the destruction occurred, not just in the heat of battle, but when Nebuzaradan arrived a month after the battle to systematically raze the city ("Judah, Jerusalem, and the Temple," 129-32, 135). Blenkinsopp similarly concludes that life in Judah continued, albeit in diminished form, and points out how some archaeological interpretation has been overly influenced by "the myth of the empty land" ("The Bible, Archaeology and Politics, or The Empty Land Revisited," *JSOT* 27 [2002]: 169-87).

[634]Gale A. Yee, *Poor Banished Children of Eve: Woman as Evil in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 141. Grabbe also points out that the characterization of the ʿamê hāʾărṣôt as present only from the time of Esarhaddon (Ezra 4:2) is polemical (*Ezra-Nehemiah*, 18).

[635]Jeffrey Zorn identifies a stratum at Mizpah (Tel en-Nasbeh) that begins in the Babylonian period and, as attested by the *Yhwd* seals, continues in use during the Persian period. The houses in this layer are twice as large as the largest of the houses in the Iron II layer beneath. They are also spaced farther apart and use costlier materials. Several other findings also probably from this stratum attest its prosperity. A delicate onyx seal with a Yh name contains Babylonian-era script, while part of a bronze, cuneiform-inscribed circlet and a "Mesopotamian-style bathtub-shaped ceramic coffin" suggest close cultural connections with Babylonians, if not the actual presence of Babylonian officials at the site. (The sarcophagus was found inside the settlement rather than in the tombs outside it. Zorn thinks there may be fragments from two other sarcophagi as well.) See "Mizpah: Newly Discovered Stratum Reveals Judah's Other Capital," *BAR* 23 (1997): 34-38, 66.

[636]See discussion in Lipschits, *Fall and Rise of Jerusalem*, 84-97.

[637]Zorn, "Mizpah," 34-38, see note 635 above.

late, so it is hard to know which period they reflect. Nehemiah 10:32, probably also from a later time, describes those who bring wares to Jerusalem as *ʿamê hāʾărṣôt*. Since such vendors were likely to have come from the surrounding countryside, that verse also suggests that the problematic "peoples of the lands" are native Judahites. Thus the group that the authors view as opponents seem to be natives of the land rather than foreigners.

The rebuilding of the Temple is also likely to have caused tensions between the *gôlâ* and native Judahites, who would have had reasons to resent rather than celebrate this project. A sacrificial cult had continued in the temple ruins without *gôlâ* priests (Hag 1:14), probably under the supervision of non-Zadokite Levites (Ezek 44:10, 12-13 cf. 44:15ff). The Levites, at least, cannot have taken kindly to being demoted and their practices declared "abominations" (Ezek 44:6-16), or told that they did not know "what is sacred and what is profane" (Ezek 44:23). Their demotion almost certainly resulted in a loss of income as well as power and esteem. A passage in Haggai suggests that the *gôlâ* priests pronounced the people themselves—or at least the cult officiants—defiled. In Hag 2:11-14, the prophet requests an authoritative explanation from the priests on the nature of holiness and defilement. Their conversation goes as follows:

> "If a man is carrying sacrificial flesh in a fold of his garment, and with that fold touches bread, stew, wine, oil, or any other food, will the latter become holy?" In reply, the priests said, "No." Haggai went on, "If someone defiled by a corpse touches any of these, will it be defiled?" And the priests responded, "Yes." (Hag 2:12-13, *NJPS*)

The prophet uses the ruling to make the point that holy things can be defiled, but they cannot sacralize unclean ones. That is, defilement is contagious; holiness is not. Since the exiled priesthood believed that the sacrifices could not be rendered holy without a legitimate Jerusalemite priest officiating, what the people offered was not holy, and

contact with the (holy) Temple could not make it so. Furthermore, illicit offerings in a

holy place are not just inadequate, they are defiling, and since defilement is contagious, it

passes to the priests and worshippers themselves. The explanation of holiness is really

serving as a preface (and pretext) for the real point, given in the oracle that follows, in

which Yhwh Himself declares the people defiled:

> [14] Haggai then said, "So is it with this people, and with this nation before me, says Yhwh; and so with every work of their hands; and what they offer there—it is unclean."

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¹⁴וַיַּעַן חַגַּי וַיֹּאמֶר כֵּן הָעָם־הַזֶּה וְכֵן־הַגּוֹי הַזֶּה לְפָנַי
נְאֻם־יְהוָֹה וְכֵן כָּל־מַעֲשֵׂה יְדֵיהֶם וַאֲשֶׁר יַקְרִיבוּ שָׁם טָמֵא הוּא:

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This idea, that all were defiled who had sacrificed in the Jerusalem temple prior to the

arrival of the "proper priests," is probably what underlies Ezra 9's ascription of

"abominations" to the peoples of the lands, and his claims that the land is polluted

because of their uncleanness (9:11).

The theological idea that the non-*gôlâ* were unclean was doubtless also used as

ideological justification for the claims of *gôlâ* priests to the top posts in the reconstructed

Temple (Ezek 44:15ff, Hag 2:13, cf. Ezra 2). In actuality, it was probably Persia that

controlled these appointments: the *gôlâ* priests receive special privileges that only the

crown could have given—stipends and perhaps tax exemption,[641] in addition to the

official endorsement of their positions. Lisbeth Fried contends that the Persians did not

allot political positions to indigenous leaders, but rather to ethnic Babylonians, ethnic

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[641]Ezra (6:8-10), Nehemiah (Neh 5:18) and the Samarians (Ezra 4:14) are all said to receive royal rations. Ezra 7:24 claims that the priests and Levites are exempted from taxes. Two Demotic letters at Elephantine reveal something about the interaction between local temples and the imperium under Darius I. The college of priests of Khnum in Elephantine were allowed to nominate a *lesonis*—an adminstrator who oversees temple property—while their choice was clearly subject to the approval of the satrap. Persian concern with priestly appointments is evident in the satrap's letter to the priests, which reminds them of the social and moral duties of the post (Pierre Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Persian Empire,* [Trans. Peter T. Daniels; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2002], 474).

Persians, and Jews from Mesopotamia.[642] Though she overstates her case,[643] the

disproportionate participation of *gôlâ* Jews in upper echelons of Yehudian politics and

cult do suggest that Mesopotamian-born Jews stood a greater chance of receiving a royal

appointment. This means that for the local populace, the *gôlâ* priests were not only

outsiders to the local community, they were representatives of the empire as well. While

the priests and officials were paid by the crown, the local populace under Darius is

thought to have been taxed additionally.[644]

Though the peoples of the lands are called unclean in the Haggai text, they could

not have been excluded from the Temple altogether, for temples were used as

mechanisms for collecting taxes that everyone had to pay.[645] (My guess is that the native

Judahites were relegated to the less holy precincts, as were women and Gentiles in

Herod's temple). Joachim Schaper points out that temples had already been used by the

Babylonians for collecting taxes; the Persians merely adopted and refined the same

[642]Fried argues that Persia did not entrust real decision-making power to local natives; that local elders had power only to witness judicial proceedings. On this basis she argues that the *ʿam hāʾāreṣ* with whom Nehemiah and Ezra are in conflict are the landed aristocracy who, in the Persian period, would have been the government officials appointed by Persia ("The *ʿam hāʾāreṣ* in Ezra 4:4 and Persian Imperial Administration," in *Judah and Judeans in the Persian Period* [ed. Oded Lipschits and Manfred Oeming; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2006], 132-33). Fried's work points out the importance of considering the imperial context of the politics described in the texts, but her assumption that *only* Persian-appointed officials would have owned large tracts of land is unfounded. The Mizpah finds suggest a native aristocracy, and Tobiah, if not also Sanballat, seems to hail from Palestine. It is hard to explain how so many *gôlâ* families could have married into the *ʿamê hāʾărṣôt* if this group were limited to a very small number of foreign, Persian-appointed officials. Nor does it seem likely that those described as *ʿamê hāʾărṣôt* in Neh 10:42, selling wares in Jerusalem on the sabbath, fit the profile of "landed aristocrats." Fried's model presupposes a latifundia-style economy and social structure based on Babylonian models that may be more stratified than the more agrarian society of Palestine. Though she does not cite reasons, Japhet dismisses Fried's argument as unpersuasive (Japhet, *From the Rivers of Babylon,* 134).
[643]The demonstrated influence of "Tobiah the Ammonite" and "Geshem the Arab" shows that locals were given posts with real power. Though Sanballat's name may mean that he was Babylonian, his sons have Yahwistic names, so that seems unlikely. More likely is the idea that the Persians utilized local elites as proxies, just as the Ptolemies did in the case of the Tobiads.
[644]Yee, Poor Banished Children of Eve, 139, n. 26.
[645]Joachim Schaper, "The Jerusalem Temple as an Instrument of the Achaemenid Fiscal Administration," *VT* 45 (1995): 538.

system.[646] In the case of Jerusalem, Blenkinsopp points out that the requirements for sacrifices and prayers for the royal family signal the temple's role as "part of the apparatus of imperial control," and the roles of the Persian royals as its nominal patrons.[647] Records of Darius I funding local cults in other parts of the empire also suggest that the Jerusalem temple was rebuilt as part of a broader imperial policy. Thus many scholars conclude that Persia's sponsorship of the temple should be understood as a deliberate strategy to cultivate loyalty among a cadre of local functionaries on the one hand,[648] while on the other collecting tribute for the crown.[649]

The financial demands of the temple alone must have created tension between the native Judahites and the *gôlâ* who administered the rebuilding of the temple. Funds were demanded at a time when the people were already hungry (Hag 1:6), having suffered drought, blight and major crop failures (Hag 1:9-11, 2:17). And of course, demands for donations did not end when construction was completed. The large bureaucracy of priests and officials had to be maintained. And food shortages apparently were not infrequent, since they are mentioned again in Nehemiah 5 (v. 4), 70 years after the temple is built.

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[646]Ibid., 528-35.

[647]Blenkinsopp, "Temple and Society in Achaemenid Judah," in *Second Temple Studies, Vol. 1: The Persian Period* (ed. Philip R. Davies; JSOTSup 117; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1991), 39.

[648]Darius I, perhaps more than other Persian kings, uses religious idioms, symbols and building projects as a policy of cultivating loyalty and conveying his own power. This is especially apparent in Egypt, where he constructs or restores a number of temples and erects statues of himself, bearing inscriptions of blessing by Egyptian gods (Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 473-80). For example, an inscription in a temple at Saïs reads, "His Majesty did this…to preserve the names of all the gods, their temples, the income from their *wakf* properties, and the observance of their festivals, for all time" (Ibid., 473). Darius also styles himself a model of piety and protector of sacrality elsewhere. A letter from the king to an official in Anatolia named Gadatas scolds the man for subjecting "the sacred gardeners" of an important Apollo temple to tribute and corvée labor, which he describes as having "disregard[ed] the sentiments of my ancestors toward the god" (Ibid., 491-92). Briant regards the tax exemption of these *hierodules* as relatively rare, however.

[649]Schaper collects evidence of particular jobs within the temple that seem to represent revenue collection (an official who weighs and melts down silver, for example) from biblical and extrabiblical evidence. See "The Jerusalem Temple as an Instrument," 528-39 and "The Temple Treasury Committee in the Times of Nehemiah and Ezra," *VT* 47 (1997): 200-206. See also André Lemaire, "Administration in Fourth-Century B.C.E. Judah," 56-62.

The food situation would have been exacerbated if the "king's tax" had to be paid in the form of grain, as Kenneth Hoglund thinks.[650]

In sum, there are many reasons that the native Judahites would have resented the *gôlâ,* and perhaps have done things that made the *gôlâ* writers feel justified in resenting them back. They had been asked to fund a Temple that served as an instrument of their economic and political domination and as a symbol of imperial control. They were asked to fund a priesthood that had pushed out their own priests and defined them unclean as a people. They must have suffered as these outsiders, who had lived several generations in Babylon, declared themselves the true Judah, all the while serving as lackeys of the Persian crown, and denying that they, who had never left the land, were Judahites at all. If there were tensions between the *gôlâ* and the native population, as there certainly must have been, fighting words are the *least* we should expect.

Yet positing native Judahites as the *ʿamê hāʾărṣôt* does not tell the whole story. Texts from early phases of the *gôlâ* immigration do not view the native Judean population as a separate or opposed group. Sara Japhet argues that Haggai and Zechariah presume Judah to include both exiles and natives, and to know nothing of a distinct *gôlâ* community.[651] The same seems to be the case in Nehemiah's first term, for in his account of a dispute between the *ʿam* who work the land and their *gôlâ* creditors, each group refers to the other as "brothers" (Neh 5:1, 5). Clearly, there is tension (and inequality) between these two groups in Nehemiah 5, and it is entirely possible that relations worsen.

[650]Hoglund, *Achaemenid Imperial Administration in Syria-Palestine and the Missions of Ezra and Nehemiah* (SBLDiss 125; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 213.
[651]Japhet, *From the Rivers of Babylon,* 105-07.

On the other hand, the texts describe other opponents—more explicitly and venomously—than the rural Judahites.

In Nehemiah, the most prominent opposition comes from leaders of neighboring polities—Sanballat, whom we know from Elephantine papyri to have been the governor of Samaria,[652] and his allies Tobiah "the Ammonite," and "Geshem the Arab" (Neh 2:19; 6:1, 2, 6). Though the source is later, the redactor of Ezra 4:1-4 also presumes that the *ʿamê hāʾărṣôt* are northern Israelites.[653] Recent historical studies of the Persian period suggest that the role of Samaria in this chapter of history has been vastly underestimated. Archaeologists working on the ruins of the Gerizim temple now conclude that it was already built in the fifth century (Albertz suggests a date soon after 425[654]). That project was the result of a bitter struggle with Judah that had gone on since at least the time of Nehemiah, and it seemed only to worsen after the temple was built. The two form separate communities and their conflict is evident in New Testament texts as well (e.g. Luke 10:33ff, 17:16; John 4, 8:48). This means that antagonism toward the Samaria that Sanballat and Tobiah represent would have asserted a continuing influence on the scribes who copied and compiled Ezra-Nehemiah, and those scribes might well have expanded the texts as expressions of their own quarrels with Samaria.

Though Samaria's status is not directly addressed in the texts, it plays an

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[652]He and two of his sons appear in Elephantine papyri (*AramP* 30:29) dated to ca. 408 BCE; he is identified as *pḥt shmryn* (governor of Samaria) (Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri,* 108-19).

[653]The author polemically has them describe themselves as transplants brought to the land by Esarhaddon—a reference to 2 Kgs 17:24-41.

[654]Ranier Albertz, "The Controversy about Judean versus Israelite Identity and the Persian Government: A New Interpretation of the Bagoses Story (Jewish Antiquities *XI.297-301*)," in *Judah and the Judeans in the Achaemenid Period: Negotiating Identity in an International Context* (ed. Oded Lipschits, Gary N. Knoppers, and Manfred Oeming; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 490. Though note that the excavator, Yitzhak Magen, boldly proposes a date *during* the time of Nehemiah (mid-fifth century) ("The Dating of the First Phase of the Samaritan Temple on Mount Gerizim in Light of the Archaeological Evidence," in *Judah and Judeans in the Fourth Century* [ed. Oded Lipschits, Gary N. Knoppers and Rainer Albertz; Winona Lake, Ind., Eisenbrauns, 2007], 176-83).

enormous role in regional politics. Samaria was little affected by the destructions of the

Babylonian period and shows basic continuity in material culture from the sixth century

until the conquests of Alexander.[655] Development of and around the city had commenced

from the time it was rebuilt, shortly after its destruction in the eighth century, and

continued uninterrupted since then. Thus by the Persian period, the settlement in the

Manasseh hills was more extensive than at the end of Iron II.[656] Though archaeological

evidence from Samaria itself was erased by Hellenistic-period destruction and rebuilding,

the fact that over half of the sites in the region are found within 10 km of the city,[657]

many of these connected by an extensive road system,[658] suggests that Samaria in the

Persian period was a prosperous and important central place.[659] Taking together the

picture from Samarian coins, excavations at Shechem, and the Wadi ed-Daliya papyri

demonstrates that the region had social and economic elites, at least at the end of the fifth

and during the fourth centuries.[660]

Because of this longer history leadership was better established in Samaria than in

Judah. Extrabiblical evidence clarifies that Sanballat enjoyed a reign that far outlasted

Nehemiah's own, and was part of a dynasty that ruled in Samaria for several generations

more.[661] The Sanballats' ties to the Jewish community in Elephantine demonstrate a far

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[655]Adam Zertal, "The Province of Samaria in the Late Iron Age," in *Judah and Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period* (ed. Oded Lipschits and Joseph Blenkinsopp; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 385.

[656]Knoppers, "Revisiting the Samarian Question," 269.

[657]Adam Zertal, "The Pahwah of Samaria (Northern Israel) during the Persian Period: Types of Settlement, Economy, History and New Discoveries," *Transeu* 3 (1990): 14.

[658]Knoppers, "Revisiting the Samarian Question," 269-70.

[659]Knoppers, "Revisiting the Samarian Question," 272-73; Lipschits, "Achaemenid Imperial Policy," 27-29; Zertal, "The Pahwah of Samaria," 14; E. Stern, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible*, 424.

[660]Lipschits, "Achaemenid Imperial Policy," 31. See also a summary in E. Stern, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible,* 424-28.

[661]Sanballat himself is still governor in the Elephantine papyrus from 408/407, nearly 40 years after Nehemiah's first term. His sons, both of whom bear Yahwistic names, apparently succeed him, for they are addressed in official correspondence. (*AramP* 30.29 [Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri,* 113-14). In fact, it

and influential reach.[662] Tobiah "the Ammonite" also seems to have been quite powerful.

Called "the servant" in Neh 2:10 and 2:19, he was probably the governor of Ammon.[663]

Nehemiah describes him as having allies through marriage to the "nobles of Judah"

(חֹרֵי יְהוּדָה, Neh 6:17-18) and privileged access to storerooms (probably the warehouses

for tax income) inside the temple itself (Neh 13:4-5). Most scholars agree that he was a

member of the same Tobiad family that appears later, in the third to second centuries.[664]

Like the Tobiah of Nehemiah's time, the later Tobiads had high-level appointments from

the imperial government and close ties to the Jerusalem priesthood (one was brother-in-

law to the Jerusalem high priest Onias II).[665] Josephus's glowing accounts assume that

they were Jews (*Ant.* XII.158-236), and Lester L. Grabbe believes the same is true of the

earlier Tobiah.[666] "Geshem the Arab" (Neh 2:19: 6:1, 2, 6) would have been the

analogous leader of another city or group. Though Fried proposes that he was king of

Qedar,[667] I find it more likely that he represented the Edomite-Arabian groups south of

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is his son Delaiah who writes with Bagohi, governor of Yehud, in support of the request to rebuild the Yaho temple in Elephantine (*AramP* 32.1 [Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri,* 123-24). See Albertz, "Controversy," 495. A second Sanballat from the reign of Artaxerxes II (404-358) is known from the Wadi Daliyeh papyri, and there may have been a third during the reign of Darius III (336-331) (A. Green, "Date of Nehemiah," 200).

[662]Knoppers points out the significance of the Elephantine community having consulted Samaria to solicit support for the rebuilding of their temple, which demonstrates both an affinity between the Jews in Elephantine and Yahwists (Jews?) in Samaria, and the expectation that the Samarians could influence the outcome ("Revisiting the Samarian Question," 278).

[663]Fried, "The *ʿam hāʾāreṣ* in Ezra 4:4," 135.

[664]Tamara C. Eskenazi, "Tobiah," *ABD* VI:585.

[665]The Zeno papyri and Josephus both attest the position of "Toubias" as a sheik (*kleroukos*) in the service of Ptolemy between 275-250 (Bezalel Porten, *Archives from Elephantine: The Life of an Ancient Jewish Military Colony* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968], 117). His son Joseph, won the bid to collect taxes for the whole region, and apparently resided in Jerusalem. Joseph's son Hyrcanus, forced from Jerusalem by a feud with his brothers, fled to the family estate near Amman, where he built the enormous and luxurious "Palace of the Servant" (Qasr al Abd), which is described by Josephus (*Ant.* XII.222, 230-34). He seems to have functioned there as an unofficial ruler over the local Arabians (Ibid.; Grabbe, *Ezra-Nehemiah,* 181).

[666]Grabbe, *Ezra-Nehemiah,* 166.

[667]Fried, "The *ʿam hāʾāreṣ* in Ezra 4:4," 135.

Jerusalem.[668] In any case, it is with good reason that Nehemiah perceived these men as

competitors, and that *gôlâ* would have wished for marriages into their powerful families

(Neh 6:17-19; 13:4, 28). That both Nehemiah and Ezra criticize persons of high status in

the intermarriage debates (Ezra 9:2; Neh 6:17-18; 13:4, 28) is probably because they

were the ones who had the resources to be *able* to marry into these families. Alliances

with leaders whose local influence was great would have posed a direct challenge to Jews

sent from distant Persia to govern in Jerusalem.

In contrast to Samaria, Jerusalem was a city still in ruins when Nehemiah

arrived.[669] Though he rebuilt the city walls, there were too few people to populate it fully,

as both the narrative (Neh 11:1-2) and the paucity of archaeological remains attest.[670] All

of Yehud may have had no more than 30,000 residents, half of those in Benjamin,[671]

while the *gôlâ* themselves probably represented only a minority of these.[672] With the

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[668]Lipschits seems to presume the same (*Fall and Rise of Jerusalem,* 145-46). The encroachment of Edomites into southern Judah is well known. Alexander Fantalkin and Oren Tal debate whether Lachish, only 25 miles from Jerusalem, belonged in the Persian period to Judah or an Arabianized Edom (see "Redating Lachish Level I: Identifying Achaemenid Imperial Policy at the Southern Frontier of the Fifth Satrapy," in *Judah and Judeans in the Persian Period* [ed. Oded Lipschits and Manfred Oeming; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2006], 177-78.

[669]Lipschits describes it as a city that was "wretchedly poor, not just in the period after the destruction, but also at the height of the time of the return to Zion" ("Demographic Changes," 329).

[670]David Ussishkin argues that Nehemiah restored the wall to its Iron II size, but that development remained limited to the area around the City of David and Temple Mount ("The Borders and Size of Jerusalem in the Persian Period," in *Judah and Judeans in the Persian Period* [ed. Oded Lipschits and Manfred Oeming; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2006], 162-64).

[671]Carter thinks it was probably far lower, estimating a range of 13,350 people in the early Persian period to 20,650 by the end. Even these numbers assume what he thinks is a rather optimistic coefficient of 25 persons per inhabited dunam (*Emergence of Yehud*, 199-202). Lipchits estimates that the population would have been about 108,000 for the same area at the end of Iron II ("Demographic Changes," 364.

[672]Joel Weinberg estimates the total number of exiles as 20,000, which he calculates to represent about 10% of the total population of the land at the time. He arrives at this number by using the numbers given by Jeremiah, but assumes that they represent only of the extra-Jerusalemite exiled population. He then adds 10,000 for the population of the capital, assuming that it would have approximately doubled its normal size in the time of crisis. See *The Citizen-Temple Community* (Trans. Daniel L. Smith-Christopher; Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1992), 37. If population growth were similar in both exiled and native populations, but only a portion of the exiles returned, this would make them even more a minority in the Restoration period.

dispensation from the imperial center.[677] Lipschits argues persuasively that the

construction of the *birâ* signifies Jerusalem's becoming the official capital (also *birâ,* or

*birtâ* in Aramaic) of Yehud, effectively replacing Mizpah.[678] Nehemiah's actions thus

directly challenge the existing centers of power and their leaders;[679] a dynamic that

explains why Sanballat and Tobiah regard him with such hostility.

What this survey should make clear is that it is incorrect to either view the *gôlâ* as

threatened with extinction—as they contend—or as "the powerful" in any absolute sense.

The writers' group is a minority population in the only modestly populated region of

Yehud. Their city is poor and undeveloped even after their rebuilding efforts, while the

neighboring district is relatively prosperous and established. Though some of the *gôlâ*

come with cash wealth (viz. Nehemiah 5, perhaps Ezra 2:29, 69; 3:6-7; 7:15-18[680]), they

seem to lack access to land and/or influence among those better established in the area.

Those granted Persian endorsements must make their power effective in a local context

where they have many opponents and few friends.[681] Their peer political leaders seem to

be more powerful than they. Yet in receiving Persian endorsement, they possess a

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[677]Hoglund thinks that Jerusalem's permission to build the wall signals a status in that Persia had given it a special dispensation (*Achaemenid Imperial Administration,* 224).

[678]Lipschits, "Achaemenid Imperial Policy," 34-35; André Lemaire, "Nabonidus in Arabia and Judah in the Neo-Babylonian Period," in *Judah and Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period* (ed. Oded Lipschits and Joseph Blenkinsopp; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 292, 285-98. Hoglund similarly argues that Nehemiah's constructions represent an assertion of greater political power for Jerusalem (*Achaemenid Imperial Administration,* 217).

[679]Hoglund, *Achaemenid Imperial Administration,* 217. Grabbe finds it only natural that Nehemiah and Sanballat, as governors of farflung provinces, would be rivals, though he also points out the ways in which Nehemiah creates antagonism unnecessarily (*Ezra-Nehemiah*, 162).

[680]The donations of the *gôlâ* to the Temple project attest a degree of wealth in addition to the benefits some enjoyed through royal posts, stipends, and in some cases, tax exemptions (Ezra 7:24).

[681]Grabbe points out the many ways in which Nehemiah's narrative demonstrates his lack of support even among his own constituency—not least of which is that all of his reforms are disregarded in his absence (*Ezra-Nehemiah,* 161, 167). See also Grabbe, "Triumph of the Pious or Failure of the Xenophobes? The Ezra/Nehemiah Reforms and their *Nachgeschichte,*" in *Studies in Jewish Local Patriotism and Self-Identification in the Graeco-Roman Period* (ed. Siân Jones and Sarah Pearce; Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha Supplement 31; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 54-55.

tremendous privilege that few in their context could claim. The *gôlâ* is therefore a group

that is simultaneously advantaged and disadvantaged, both highly privileged and

extremely insecure. It remains unclear whether the threats they perceive come from

native Judahites, Samarians, other local groups, or all of the above. Perhaps the variety of

that constituency is what accounts for the use of the plural "people*s* of the land*s*," more

often than *ʿam hāʾāreṣ,*[682] the typical term for native citizenry.[683] What is clear is that the

*gôlâ* assert both power and identity by claiming exclusive rights to the mantle of Israel.

Drawing upon Israel's traditions, they cast their opponents in the roles of Israel's ancient

enemies—Moab among them.

## Features of People Texts

As identity becomes a primary group concern, the imagery of the texts begins to

feature female characters to a degree not seen in the State texts. Intermarriage debates

focus upon Israelites married to outsider women. As the concerns of the texts shift from

status to group constitution and practice, the underlying paradigms shift toward those of

male-female rather than male-male encounters.[684]

As in the previous chapter, I will discuss each text in two ways. First, I point out

the textual features that imply Moab's role as People. As outlined in the Introduction,

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[682]The singular term is used only once, in Ezra 4:4, and in Neh 9:10 as a reference to the Egyptian people. The plural appears in Ezra 3:3; 9:1, 2, 7, 11; 10:2, 11; Neh 9:30; 10:29. Neh 10:31, 32 have *ʿamê hāʾāreṣ.*

[683]See the examination of the usual term *ʿam hāʾāreṣ* by Fried in "The *ʿam hāʾāreṣ* in Ezra 4:4," 123-45.

[684]In reality, male-female relations never have male-male relations far from view; most relations of men with women have status implications in the male-male world, but for now, we simplify a bit by describing these as the dynamics that refer primarily to men's behaviors in relation to men, and to women's behaviors as a function of their roles in an honor-shame society.

these texts include several or all of the following features:

- Action occurs outside the sphere of official state affairs and frequently contains potential for sexual interaction or marriage.

- Characters are usually lay people rather than state officials, with many, especially the Moabite ones, being women.

- Moabites are described as individuals or referred to with gentilic suffixes rather than being called "Moab" or "all Moab."

- In contrast to State depictions in which characters clearly represent either Moab or Israel, the identities of these characters and their national affiliations may be ambiguous.

- Conflicts center on cultural/religious influence rather than political or military dominance.

- Authors view encounters with the Other, not as battlegrounds for status or esteem by others, but as places that threaten to change the makeup of Israel's own body—its ethnic constituency or religious purity—and its evaluation by its own measures of Yahwistic fealty and homogeneity.

- Among texts that express anxiety about foreigners, the mode of engagement often includes—or is feared to entail—trickery or seduction rather than straightforward contests.

After pointing out the features that characterize a text as a "People text," I will discuss the authors' rhetorical strategies. I will devote special attention to features suggesting that the Israelite social body is conceived as feminine, and that the author's rhetoric presumes principles of feminine codes of shame. I also expect the rhetoric to show that:

- The texts place a premium on purity, both religious and sexual. Interaction with the Other is described in terms evocative of pollution or contagion.

- Narratives feature female characters, especially foreign ones.

- The text appeals to norms and taboos of illicit sexuality.

- The text emphasizes "virtue"—the integrity of the Israelite social body and its

need for purity and strong protections—over status.

- The text insists on separation from Moab, in contrast to the contests of State texts, in which engagement affords an opportunity for honor.

- The text stresses the need for obedience to communal authorities combined with a portrait of the people as willful and rebellious. In honor-shame terms, the social body, conceived as feminine, requires close supervision and oversight.

## Why Women?

People texts draw heavily upon the symbolic potential of female characters and imagery. In this chapter, foreign women are construed as sources of danger and impurity for Israel; in the next, they appear as sources of fruitfulness and benefit. Despite their opposite conclusions, both of these arguments attribute to women a level of social power that they did not possess in practice. Of course, we may underestimate female power since, in a patriarchal society, it must be exerted in informal and indirect ways,[685] and so is largely invisible. And I concede that women of higher social stations and from more powerful families probably enjoyed greater freedoms and autonomy than other women and even than many men. But the indirect influence and exceptional cases do not negate the degree to which husbands, fathers, brothers, lawmakers, and priests set the parameters of women's lives and limited their real influence—especially in the public sphere. We must therefore examine why the authors blame women for the particular problems of cultural mixing—why it is that women are so aptly suited to signify group relationships, foreignness, and all the feelings associated with these things.

As I will argue below, feminine symbols draw from two overlapping spheres. On the one hand, they reflect women's roles in sociological reality. On the other, they reflect

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[685]Chris Weedon, *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 114; Yee, *Poor Banished Children of Eve,* 48-53; Carol Meyers, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 176. Scott, *Arts of Resistance,* xi.

associations attached to women by the culture, scriptural traditions, and the male psyche.

First, however, we must recognize that the use of women *as* symbols points to a prior

condition undergirding the rest: women are Other in both the real world and male

imagination.[686] It is this otherness that makes them supremely suited to symbolize "the

foreign." In most biblical texts, rather than being individuated subjects, women are either

flat characters in supporting roles,[687] metaphors for the community, city, or nation,[688] or

symbols of ideal and anti-ideal concepts.[689] It is because women are Other to the men

with decision-making power that they, and not their brothers, are the ones "given" and

"taken" in marriage. For the same reason, their worth is calculated in terms of their value

to men—their sexual fidelity, their submissiveness, and the number of male children they

bear—while their brothers are honored for personal qualities and achievements. In fact,

the power attributed to women, especially as agents of trouble, stems precisely from this

marginality: women's exclusion from scribal circles and public roles means that they

cannot contest the fears and fantasies projected onto them. By the same token, it is their

lack of social power that makes women and foreigners subject to scapegoating and

"witch-hunting" in anxious times.[690] We should thus be wary of interpreting too literally

a text that blames social ills on women, especially foreign ones, and look deeper for the

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[686]An idea that has become basic to feminist thought due largely to the influence of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (trans. H. M. Parshley; New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1953).

[687]Sharon Ringe, "When Women Interpret the Bible," *Women's Bible Commentary: Expanded Edition with Apocrypha* (ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 3.

[688]For example, Judges 19-21, Hosea 1-2, Ezekiel 16 and 23. See Yee, *Poor Banished Children of Eve,* (81-134); Alice Keefe, "Rapes of Women/ Wars of Men," *Semeia* 64 (1994): 85-89. Yee also describes woman as a signifier of the land or nation as "a well-known trope"(*Poor Banished Children of Eve,* 118).

[689]De Beauvoir was one of the first to explore the paradoxes and ambivalence in traditional portrayals of women in her "Myths" section of *The Second Sex* (vol. 1). Carol A. Newsom articulates some of the ways that the paradoxes play out in biblical literature in "Woman and the Discourse of Patriarchal Wisdom," in *Women in the Hebrew Bible: A Reader* (ed. Alice Bach; New York: Routledge, 1999), 95.

[690]David Janzen, *Witch-hunts, Purity and Social Boundaries*: *The Expulsion of the Foreign Women in Ezra 9-10* (JSOTSup 350; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2002), 19.

reasons that women figure so centrally in texts about group relationships.

### 1. Marriage in Patriarchal Society

The first and most important reason that women function as symbols of group relationships, and especially of intermarriage, is how marriage functions in a patriarchal, kin-based culture. Western notions of marriage as a private affair between two individuals and founded on emotional attachment are misplaced; in this context, marriages are mergers of families.[691] Biblical texts presume that matchmaking is the prerogative of parents (e.g. Ex 21:9, 34:16; Deut 7:3, 22:16; Ezra 9:12; Neh 10:31), and even when the couple have some say in the matter, they are expected to obtain the approval of their kin groups.[692] In fact, biblical authors several times portray relationships founded on "love at first sight" as disastrous.[693] Claude Levi-Strauss's model of "commodity-exchange" remains quite useful: it assumes that both families in the match bring something and seek something from their merger, whether in material goods, status, or political power.[694] He points out that marriage has all the features of a gift-exchange; it creates social bonds through reciprocal giving and receiving. But the relationship makes the social bonds permanent, and the reciprocity continuous, by turning the gift-givers into kin. Marriages thus have powerful economic and political dimensions, and are

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[691]Stone, *Sex, Honor and Power*, 18. An excellent example of analysis that both evaluates the individualistic bias and corrects for it is Alice A. Keefe, *Woman's Body and the Social Body in Hosea* (JSOTSup 338; Gender, Culture, Theory 10; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001).

[692]Helena Zlotnick points this out in her discussion of Numbers 25 in *Dinah's Daughters: Gender and Judaism from the Hebrew Bible to Late Antiquity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 50.

[693]For example, Genesis 34, Judges 16, 2 Sam 13:4, and 1 Kgs 11:1-7 (to which Neh 13:26 alludes) (Zlotnick, *Dinah's Daughters,* 255). Daniel Smith-Christopher sees Ezra-Nehemiah as making a similar point ("The Mixed Marriage Crisis in Ezra 9-10 and Nehemiah 13: A Study of the Sociology of the Post-Exilic Judaean Community," in *Second Temple Studies, Volume 2: Temple Community in the Persian Period* [ed. Tamara C. Eskenazi and Kent H. Richards; JSOTSup 175; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994], 255).

[694]Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1969).

undertaken quite strategically. In-laws may provide a new source of credit, capital (e.g. Jacob reaping the young of Laban's flocks), business connections, or influence among community leadership, who are also its judiciary. Dowries and bride prices require significant family resources, and the family expects returns on that "investment." Marriages within a clan can consolidate its identity, strengthen its numbers,[695] and keep property claims "in the family." Marriages with other groups, by contrast, can ensure nonaggression with tenuous neighbors, provide additional allies, or secure political and business contacts.[696]

But as Gayle Rubin points out, even when women accede to being "given" or "taken" in marriage, they are the media of exchange—the "gift"—rather than the agent, or the "gift giver." In Rubin's words, marriages form "conduits of relationship" between men, and the major benefits of the exchange accrue to the men who initiate the transactions.[697] This is a critical point, because the discussions of intermarriage focus upon foreign women, and pretend that *they* have initiated the marriages and brought the foreign influence into the Israelite house. Those accusations should not be accepted at face value. Women neither initiate their own exchange, nor provide the benefits for which the marriage is undertaken, nor enjoy its benefits (and in fact, often suffer much by it). These women become the focus of the rhetoric because they are *symbols* of the whole

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[695]Manar Hasan argues that the practice of marriage between close relatives in the modern Palestinian context is a direct result of the way that the Israeli government delegates power. Because they liaise with the sheiks from the largest and most stable *hama'il,* these clans have an incentive to consolidate the power of their own groups rather than forming alliances with other groups ("The Politics of Honor: Patriarchy, the State the Murder of Women in the Name of Family Honor," *Journal of Israeli History* 21 [2010]: 22)**.**

[696]In the "Rape of the Sabines" legend, the two groups are able to establish peaceful relations, even though the Sabines had not entered the alliance willingly, because of their shared concern for the children of the unions (Zlotnick, *Dinah's Daughters*, 67).

[697]Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex," in *Toward an Anthropology of Women* (ed. R. Reiter; New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), 157-210.

complex of favors and gifts, obligations and reciprocations that take place behind the scenes, out of view.[698]

The choice of a wife makes a strong public statement. In a virilocal society, it amounts to a decision about who may be admitted into the kin group, and by extension, the nation.[699] The freedom with which the group marries outsiders signals the overall strength and permeability of group boundaries. Choosing a wife from inside or outside those boundaries is also construed as a sign of loyalty, especially when a group's standing is insecure. When the group feels threatened, marriage choices become highly politicized, and marrying outside the group is interpreted as aligning with "them" and against "us." Because women are the ones that cross over the group boundary, rhetoric that perceives a threat to have entered the group often focuses upon and blames the woman herself. She is imagined as the portal through which danger, or pollutants, can pass to the group.

A few biblical texts admit that the power of women in a marriage actually comes from their families and not from the women themselves. In Gen 34, the Shechemites are portrayed as unfit marriage partners—an uncircumcised people (cf. Jdg 14:3; 15:18; 1 Sam 31:4; Isa 52:1). Yet when Jacob's sons avenge Dinah's rape by plundering the town, they employ the standard war practice of taking the women and children as booty. The text does not state that the women are intended as sexual objects and producers of Israelite children, but this is the obvious intention, as texts about war practices make

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[698]This is not to say that women in some marriages did not also wield power, or that some women were particularly attractive because of what they themselves offered. But authors who polemicize against intermarriage are not focused on whatever strengths individual women may have brought; they are debating the dangers or possibilities surrounding ethnic purity or worrying about the back-door influence granted through marriage alliances.

[699]The loss of daughters is also an issue, but it is not the issue in this set of texts, so we will not discuss it here.

clear. Numbers 31, discussed further below, features a similar situation in which formerly taboo women become marriageable by the slaughter of their families. There the intent to use the women as wives or concubines is better confirmed by the fact that only the virgins are spared. Deuteronomy 21:10-13 provides a procedure for this very practice of turning female war captives into Israelite wives. Whereas a normal marriage to this same woman would be considered a traitorous alliance, the woman isolated and removed from her people not only contains no threat, she offers benefit. Her cutting of ties with her family of origin is recognized in the rituals specifically requiring her to mourn her parents (Deut 21:13).[700] These cases demonstrate that the woman's foreignness is usually not the issue in texts about "foreign women." Foreignness is not something in the individual woman's essence or ability to impart her culture, but in the power and influence that her broader family can exert because of the marriage bond.

In these practices we find two underlying ideologies in tension with each other. On the one hand, the ideology of patriarchy asserts that the patriarch is the supreme authority of his household—and of his wife. She is viewed as a malleable token of exchange, who will act as men demand that she acts. Officially, it is presumed that she has no character of her own, and will assimilate into whatever family, whatever nation, she is transplanted. For most of Israel's history therefore, the legal status of foreign women married to Israelite men was a non-question: they became Israelite simply by being married into Israelite families.[701] Thus the original legislation in Deut 23:4-7 pertaining to the presence of a *mōʾābî* in the *qāhāl* means literally what it says: a Moabite

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[700]David Daube, *Ancient Jewish Law: Three Inaugural Lectures* (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 4.

[701]Ibid. Olyan points out that there is a direct correlation between low status and ease of integration: when belonging imparts few privileges, it is far less likely to be contested. Thus the status of foreigners who were male and free was problematic from a much earlier time than that of women. (*Rites and Rank,* 102).

*male* is barred from entry.[702] Membership in the *qāhāl* includes such benefits and duties

as having a voice in community decisions, being qualified to lead or judge the group, to

fight in war, and to own land.[703] They are *male* rights and obligations, and only the male

Moabite would be eligible to participate. Moabite *women* could be included in Israel at

little cost because with few exceptions, *no* women—Israelite or otherwise—could

participate in public political life.

On the other hand, *mariages de convenance* exist at all because there are

advantages to be had by allying oneself to the family of the woman. Those advantages,

however, lay obligations on the man that challenge his role as patriarch, which is to say

that, if they are acknowledged, they challenge his masculinity.[704] Authors who

disapprove of the alliances made through marriage may exploit this tension by implying

that the man's obligations emasculate him. Yet they do so not by describing the man as

subject to his father-in-law, as is probably the case, but as being dominated by a woman,

which is far more shaming. That is, what the image of a foreign woman's threatening

power really protests is the power of her family or group in Israelite affairs.

## 2. Being Female in an Honor-Shame Society

The other aspect of culture that strongly shapes female symbolism is the role of

women in the honor-shame value system. Though the imagery of the texts is often

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[702]Olyan, *Rites and Rank,* 78-79.
[703]Jeffrey Tigay deduces from its use in context that the *qāhāl,* in addition to cultic assembly, "also refers to the national governing body of the Israelites, that is, the entire people, or all the adult males, meeting in plenary session, and perhaps sometimes to their representatives acting as an executive committee. This assembly convenes to conduct public business such as war, crowning a king, adjudicating legal cases, distributing land, and worship. It is synonymous with *ʿedah,* 'community,' which likewise refers to the entire nation, to the adult males (especially those bearing arms), and perhaps to the tribal leaders acting as an executive on behalf of the nation" (*Deuteronomy: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation* [JPS Torah Commentary; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996], 210, see also n. 10, 385).
[704]Routledge, *Moab in the Iron Age,* 119.

sexualized, sex in this cultural symbol system denotes far more than sex. Sexual behaviors are gender performances in which men and women have distinct and highly prescribed roles.[705] Powerful emotions attach to both sexuality itself and to the honor-shame implications of behaviors that imply that a person is violating the gender-specific expectations of his or her role. The rhetorician can exploit those emotions to powerful effect.[706]

Women's social standing is narrowly calculated as a function of her sexual "purity."[707] In its minimal terms, this requires being virginal at marriage and monogamous following it. Sex with a man other than her husband defiles the woman (Gen 34:5, 13) and shames not just her but her entire family. These ideas help to explain why women—and objects coded as feminine—are frequently imagined as vessels. They are the fragile containers of honor that can be violated and broken with a single act of penetration. The violation, like the damage to honor, is irreversible and devastating. When women are used as metaphors for the social body, the speaker automatically conjures the importance of integrity, and the horror implied by brokenness or invasion.[708]

Maintaining a reputation for purity, however, requires more than just avoiding sex outside of marriage. Women are expected to display the various behaviors that tout their "positive shame": modest dress, shy demeanor, submissiveness to male authority, avoidance of unrelated men. These are the more subtle signs that convey the woman's

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[705]Pitt-Rivers, *Fate of Shechem,* 20.

[706]Stone, *Sex, Honor and Power*, 14.

[707]Pitt-Rivers, *Fate of Shechem,* 20; "Honour and Social Status," 43; Malina, *New Testament World,* 48-50.

[708]Obviously, the woman's body is also part of the metaphor, which invokes its features of being both the body penetrated during sex and the "container" of the womb. Gail Corrington Streete also points out that the Israelite social body is symbolized as feminine (in Numbers 25 in particular) because it is seen as more open to penetration by foreigners (*The Strange Woman: Power and Sex in the Bible* [Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1997], 51-52).

concern for her family's reputation. Should she violate these expectations, she may be

punished with the same approbation that actual sex, actual promiscuity, would earn.[709]

The public regards a woman who "shows some leg," or who simply speaks too boldly,  as

showing disregard for her family's honor and reputation; they label her "shameless."

Shamelessness is an insult worse than shame, for it likens a woman of an honorable

family to a prostitute, whose lack of *any* social standing means that she need have no care

for her reputation (see Jer 3:3).[710] Rhetoric that makes use of female characters plays to

male fears of being dishonored through the shameless behavior of their wives or

daughters (see the sections on Gen 19 and Numbers 25 below).

That a man's honor rests on the *woman's* behavior and its evaluation in the public

eye makes female behavior and sexuality a site of tremendous anxiety.[711] How is a man

to control someone else's actions and words? How is he to control what people think and

say about her? To minimize the risks, it is insisted that the woman be strictly controlled

and monitored, wandering as little as possible into "the public eye." It is rationalized that

she is enclosed and controlled "for her own good"—a protection from the predations of

men and the viciousness of gossip. Most men agree on the need for these controls over

women, and because of this, an author, simply by portraying Israel as female, can make a

persuasive case to his male audience that stronger authorities, stricter rules, or greater

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[709]Hasan shows how the charge of "sexual immorality" can be expanded, and how it encodes submission to the underlying value system. She recounts cases from present-day Palestine of women murdered by family members for having "dishonored" them. Increasingly, she says, the offenses are not sexual misdeeds, but acts that challenge male authority or roles. One woman's "offense" was having requested land for a project for which she had raised funds. Though it was her assertive, public behavior that embarrassed the family, they later explained her offense in terms of immodest dress and promiscuity. That is, by entering the public sphere and engaging in "male" behaviors, she was agreed to have "played the harlot" ("The Politics of Honor," 30-31).

[710]Pitt-Rivers, *Fate of Shechem,* 20-21.

[711]Ortner and Whitehead note that among the groups studied in their collection of essays, beliefs about female pollution, rituals to assert male autonomy and rituals to dispel female curses were more common in societies where men's status depended upon women's behaviors ("Sexual Meanings," 20).

protection from outsiders are needed. The need for those controls may also be bolstered by an ideology that regards women as lacking in self-control, and thus not capable of resisting temptations on their own.[712] As we will see in some of the People portrayals, Israel in contact with other foreign groups is portrayed as a kind of female caricature—fickle, faithless, and too easily influenced to be trusted.

One man's masculine honor can tolerate subordination within a ranking of men, but every man is expected to demonstrate his domination over women. That is, his masculinity depends upon the woman's expressed submission. It is supremely shaming, therefore, for a writer to imply that a woman has dominated *him.* The portrayals of foreign women often threaten precisely that: they portray foreign women as sexually aggressive, and thus play on fears of emasculation. Texts like Jdg 9:54, Isa 3:12 and Judges 4-5 demonstrate well the humiliation Israelite men experienced in being dominated by a woman. Seduction of an Israelite man by a foreign woman, however, inverts two norms at once: instead of the man conquering the woman and bringing her to live with his own people, it is she who conquers him, wooing him away from his group and into hers. The foreign woman thus represents not just the threat of a man being dominated by a woman, but also of the native being subsumed by the foreign.[713]

Some of the texts in this section also portray women as achieving domination

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[712]Admittedly, this idea does seem rare in the Hebrew Bible, where women are more frequently crafty than gullible (e.g. Delilah [Judges 16]; Abigail [1 Samuel 25]; wise woman of Tekoa [2 Samuel 14], of Abel [2 Sam 20:15-22]; Jer 2:33), though perhaps the motif of Judah's seduction by male lovers is an example (e.g. Jer 38:22). Certainly the idea of women as weak-minded and susceptible appears in the Roman period (see Diana Swancutt, "Sexy Stoics and the Rereading of Romans 1:18-2:16," in *A Feminist Companion to Paul* [ed. Amy-Jill Levine and Marianne Blickenstaff; Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 2004], 54-5) and it has a long history in the interpretations of Genesis 3 (e.g. 1 Tim 2:13-14).

[713]Ironically, the authors themselves increase the allure of foreign women by making them forbidden objects and portraying them as looser and more sexually assertive than Israelite women (viz. Delilah, Rahab, Potiphar's wife, Jael) (Zlotnick, *Dinah's Daughters,* 2-3). Such portrayals both express and nourish fantasies about foreign women, even if they are intended to demonstrate "what not to do," as Zlotnick argues.

through guile: the foreign women are tricksters, seducers, or ensnarers. The "Strange Woman" of Proverbs 1-9, who may well represent the foreign women forbidden by Ezra-Nehemiah and other proponents of endogamy,[714] is an embodiment of these fears.[715] Of course, the fear of feminine manipulation is not entirely without basis: the disempowered position of women *does* mean that they can exert influence only indirectly.[716] However, as James C. Scott explains, the awareness of indirect power creates in men a chronic suspicion of their subordinates and a tendency to regard them as *inherently* conniving:

> The dominants know, to some degree, that it *is* a social requirement that [women] obey their [husbands], and thus that some obedience can be 'faked.' They may therefore suspect that the [wife] is only pretending her loyalty and discount it…It is but a short step from such skepticism to the view, common among many dominant groups, that those beneath them are deceitful, shamming, and lying by nature."[717]

It thus takes only slight hints to make a picture of an "entrapping" woman convincing. Because of the importance of sexual purity to male honor in Mediterranean societies, male suspicion fixes with special intensity on hidden sexual motivations. The fear of marital infidelity is especially pronounced, for transgression cannot be verified (see Num 5:11-31). This means that just as it is "but a short step" from the fear of subversion in general to the notion that underlings are dishonest and scheming by nature, it is a similarly short step between chronic fears of adultery to notions of women as promiscuous by nature. That suspicion further reinforces the urgency of keeping women within tightly controlled bounds.

The rhetoric of foreignness also builds upon the association between women and

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[714]Washington, "The Strange Woman," 217-42; Joseph Blenkinsopp, "The Social Context of the 'Outsider Woman' in Proverbs 1-9," *Biblica* 72 (1991): 457-73.

[715] Newsom summarizes well how the hidden nature of the Strange Woman is marked as dangerous ("Woman and the Discourse of Patriarchal Wisdom," 95).

[716]Scott, *Arts of Resistance,* xi.

[717]Ibid., 2.

pollution. The fact that she can be "defiled" by sexual contact with any man other than her husband renders her much more susceptible to pollution. And she is already deemed more inherently prone to pollution by bodily discharges that men view with fear and disgust. According to Lev 12:2, menstruation makes a woman "unclean" for a minimum of seven days each month. By the same codes, male bodily pollutions defile only "till evening" (Lev 15:2-15; Deut 23:10-11; Lev 15:16-18). Menstruation transfers impurity to men, so that sex with a menstruating woman at minimum makes a man unclean for seven days (Lev 15:24). It carries a more severe penalty in Lev 20:18, which demands that both man and woman be "cut off from their people." Ezekiel compares such "unclean" sex to adultery (Ezek 18:6) or uncovering one's father's nakedness (incest? Ezek 22:10). The specifically female pollution of menstruation also seems to connote stronger visceral disgust than other forms of uncleanness. In violently rejecting silver and gold idols, Isaiah speaks of casting them away "like a menstruous woman" (Isa 30:22), while Ezekiel likens the sins by which Israel had defiled the very soil to "the uncleanness (*niddâ*) of a menstruous woman" (Ezek 36:17). Further links between women and intrinsic susceptibility to pollution are also apparent in the significantly longer periods of restriction placed on a woman who bears a girl compared to one who bears a boy (Lev 12:2-6). These regulations in particular stipulate that the woman must keep her distance from the sphere of the sacred—a prohibition that reaches its logical conclusion in the exclusion of women from the sanctuary. Thus it comes to seem natural that when the group, symbolized as female, encounters an outsider, it is threatened simultaneously by pollution and social disgrace.

This association between women and pollution can be played upon in emotionally

powerful ways. The notion of uncleanness, whether ritual or moral, produces reactions of visceral disgust that motivate people to rid themselves of its source as quickly as possible. One laboratory study, seeking to demonstrate the slippage between literal and metaphorical meanings,[718] offered subjects a choice between wet wipes and a pencil as a thank you gift after being asked to think about their own moral transgressions. The subjects were far more likely to choose the wipes, presumably because of a desire to physically clean their hands.[719] In the same way, a group that experiences disgust at a moral outrage is likely to be eager to eject those societal members identified as "polluting." The term "ethnic cleansing" is such a rhetorically powerful term because it promises that the group can be "clean" of its feelings of disgust and contamination by getting rid of those identified as the cause of the "dirty" feelings.

## DEUTERONOMY 23:4-7 [3-6]

Deuteronomy 23:4-7 is the most securely early of the texts in which Moab is encountered as a people. It states that "no Ammonite or Moabite may ever enter the *qāhāl Yhwh.*" Though the exact privileges and obligations of the *qāhāl* would have varied in different eras, both pre- and post-exilic incarnations of it comprised more than just cultic participation, so the term "assembly" is more appropriate than "congregation."[720] It is

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[718]Robert Sapolsky, "This is Your Brain on Metaphors," ("Opinionator, *New York Times,* 14 Nov 2010), n.p. Cited 7 November 2012. Online: http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/11/14/this-is-your-brain-on-metaphors/?src=me&ref=general

[719]Chen-Bo Zhong and Katie Liljenquist, "Washing Away Your Sins: Threatened Morality and Physical Cleansing," *Science* 313 (2006): 1451-1452.

[720]As argued by Tigay, (*Deuteronomy*, 210).

perhaps as close as ancient Israel comes to a notion of "citizenship."[721] The law is agreed

to be pre-exilic;[722] Jacob Milgrom even suggests that it is a northern polemic against

David and Rehoboam's Moabite and Ammonite ancestry,[723] but most demur in giving

any more specific date or compositional context. Both Ezra and Nehemiah invoke the law

as part of an argument to exclude certain peoples of their time from the Jewish

community.

In its current form, the rationale for Ammonite and Moabite exclusion is put in

terms of the wilderness experience: Ammon and Moab are said to have refused food and

water to Israel after they came out of Egypt, and to have hired Balaam ben Beor against

them (23:5-6). The literary context, however, suggests that the law originally excluded

Moabites and Ammonites as a class of *mamzērîm,*[724] a rare term that implies tainted

birth.[725] Deuteronomy 22:3 bars from the assembly any *mamzēr,* and since this law

follows the series that define illicit unions (22:13-23:1), the term would seem to denote

the children of such unions. Indeed, Talmudic tradition concludes that *mamzērim* are

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[721]It is treated as such by Lisbeth Fried, who compares it to Greek notions of citizenship in "From Xeno-Philia to –Phobia: Jewish Encounters with the Other," in *A Time of Change: Judah and its Neighbours in the Persian and Early Hellenistic Periods* (ed. Yigal Levin; Library of Second Temple Studies; London: T & T Clark, 2007), 179-204.

[722]Most commentaries, however, do not propose specific dates for these verses, but a schema for dating the earliest corpus of laws, which are probably contained in Deut 12:1-26:15. R. E. Clements calls the scholarly concensus on a seventh-century date, at least for these, as "a widely held verdict" (*Deuteronomy* [OTG; Sheffield; Sheffield, 1993] 69, 71). Richard D. Nelson points out that most of the laws presuppose a monarchic context (*Deuteronomy: A Commentary* [OTL; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2002], 6); 18-19. Carr reiterates that the treaty structure reflects a neo-Assyrian context, but points out that this structure seems to antedate the laws within it (*Formation of the Hebrew Bible,* 307-09).

[723]Milgrom, "Religious Conversion and the Revolt Model for the Formation of Israel," *JBL* 101 (1982): 173-74.

[724]So Milgrom ("Religious Conversion, 173); Nelson, *Deuteronomy*, 278; Michael Fishbane (*Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988], 120), who sees it as a move "from the general to the particular."

[725]Duane L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 21:10-34:12* [WBC 6B; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2002], 532. *BDB* (מַמְזֵר, 561) sees it as an Aramaic loanword (*mamzēraʾ*) and suggests that it derives from the Aramaic root meaning "to be bad," which is used of eggs. Arabic has a similar root meaning "to be foul, corrupt."

children of incest.[726] Despite the historical rationales added to the law, it is still easy to

construe Moabites as a class of *mamzērîm* in the text's current form, for first, the law

barring Moabites immediately follows the one barring the *mamzēr,* and second, it applies

nearly identical phrasing and consequences:

| Deut 23:3 | Deut 23:4 |
|---|---|
| A *mamzēr* | An Ammonite or Moabite |
| may not enter into the *qĕhāl Yhwh* | may not enter into the *qĕhāl Yhwh* |
| Even to the tenth generation | Even to the tenth generation |
| One belonging to him | One belonging to them |
| may not enter into the *qĕhāl Yhwh.* | may not enter into the *qĕhāl Yhwh* forever. |

As Milgrom points out, these are the *only* two groups to which permanent exclusion from

the *qāhāl* is applied.[727]

A connection between the *mamzēr* law and one barring Moabites seems to

presuppose some tradition of "tainted birth" such as we now have in Gen 19:30-38.[728]

The attribution of Moabite origins to incest both explains and justifies the law.[729]

Whether the law is dependent on or spawns the incest tradition, its proximity and

similarity to the *mamzēr* law certainly encourages linkage between Moabites, deviant

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[726]Tigay (*Deuteronomy,* 211) points out the following as rabbinic sources that define a *mamzēr* as a children of forbidden unions, especially incest: Talmud, *Sifrei* 248; *Mish Yev.* 49a; *Bekhor Shor*; cf. Rashbam at v. 1. Using Deut 23:1 as a hint to define *mamzēr* is slightly complicated by 23:2, which inserts between the incest and *mamzēr* laws one excluding men with compromised genitalia. But like the incest laws, this, too, may be describing a defect that prohibits marriage as well as *qāhāl* membership: one that cannot produce children. Indeed, Tigay sees marriage prohibition as an implicit corrollary of Deut 23:4-7 (*Deuteronomy,* 479).

[727]Milgrom, "Religious Conversion," 173.

[728]Milgrom, "Religious Conversion, 173; Calum M. Carmichael (*Law and Narrative in the Bible: The Evidence of the Deuteronomic Laws and the Decalogue* [Ithaca : Cornell University Press, 1985], 229). Christensen also sees genetic relationship between Deut 23:4 and Gen 19:30-38, but believes that the narrative grows out of the law (*Deuteronomy 21:10-34:12,* 534).

[729]Randall C. Bailey thinks the narrative were written to justify the law ("They're Nothing but Incestuous Bastards," in *Reading from This Place, Volume 1: Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in the United States* [ed. Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995], 129-31), Milgrom ("Religious Conversion, 173) and Fishbane (*Biblical Interpretation,* 120) that the law is based upon the incest tradition, and Christensen that the narrative exegetes the law (*Deuteronomy 21:10-34:12,* 534).

sexuality, and exclusion from the *qāhāl*. There are hints that the authors of Nehemiah 13,
and especially Ezra 9, have some awareness of these negative visceral associations when
they invoke the law (see below).[730]

With the addition of verses 5-7, the exclusion of Moabites is reframed as a result
of historic behaviors rather than tainted birth. The rationale is twofold: on the one hand,
Moab was inhospitable; on the other, it hired Balaam against Israel. One must wonder
whether one of these reasons is later than the other, for, as Jeffrey Tigay notes, only one
would be necessary.[731] When these reasons were added is not clear, but they may be pre-
exilic. As noted in Chapter 2, the Balaam tradition here is older than the one in Numbers
22-24, for it presupposes that Balaam had attempted to curse Yhwh—something that the
monotheistic theology of Numbers 22-24 disallows. The contents of verse 7—"You shall
not seek their peace or their well-being forever" may also point to a time in which Moab
and Ammon were still states, for *šĕlomām wĕṭobātām* mimics an Akkadian phrase—
*ṭūbtu u sulummû*—that was used in both Assyrian and Babylonian treaties to describe the
establishment of friendly relations between countries.[732]

Whether we understand the law's rationale as one derived from purity concerns or
historical grievances, the original law is not a blanket exclusion of foreigners; it targets
Moabites and Ammonites in particular.[733] Permanent exclusion from Israel's *qāhāl* is
applied to no other nation, and the behaviors of which Moab is accused limit the

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[730]Fishbane concludes that Ezra, at least, reads Deut 23 this way (*Biblical Interpretation,* 120).

[731]Perhaps reference to Balaam was added in light of the traditions in Deuteronomy 2, which
might nullify the law, because they testify that Moab *does* give Israel food and water (2.28-29), and that
Ammon is bypassed altogether (2:37) ("Variant traditions pointed out by Tigay, *Deuteronomy,* 211).

[732]See William L. Moran, "A Note on the Treaty Terminology of the Sefire Stelas,"*JNES* 22
(1963): 174; D. R. Hillers, "A Note on Some Treaty Terminology in the Old Testament," *BASOR* 176
(1964): 46-47. Accepted by Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans,
1976), 298; Christensen, *Deuteronomy 21:10-34:12*, 537.

[733]Tigay, Deuteronomy, 211. Also noted by Japhet, *From the Rivers of Babylon,* 149.

application to descendants of the people who had mistreated Israel in the wilderness. Even Egypt, the country that had enslaved and oppressed Israel in the first place, can assimilate after four generations (Deut 23:8).[734] As I pointed out above, the law is also restricted to foreign *males*.[735]

We will see below that Ezra and Nehemiah turn the "Moabites and Ammonites" to whom Deut 23:4-7 applies into symbolic entities. Expansion of this laws to groups other than the original Ammonites and Moabites has precedent in two earlier biblical texts. As Michael Fishbane points out, Lam 1:10 applies the law to Babylonians, and 1 Kgs 11:1-2 both excludes new foreign groups (Phoenicians and Hittites) and applies it to a novel situation—that of marriage to foreign women.[736] But Ezra's and Nehemiah's reinterpretations are radical and unprecedented on several scores.[737] Lamentations 1:10 and 1 Kings 11 expand the idea of exclusion to other groups, but their aim is still limited to people who would have been understood by all as unequivocally foreign. By contrast, Ezra 9:1-3 and Neh 13:1-3 use the law to *define* neighboring peoples as foreign who were not necessarily ethnically distinct. Ezra and Nehemiah also apply the law with unprecedented breadth. Lamentations 1:10 invokes the law to describe the one-time plundering the temple. The critique of intermarriage in 1 Kings 11 is specific to royal marriages of alliance. By contrast, Ezra and Nehemiah invoke the law, not as a response to specific events, but as a remedy for a long-term situation of antagonism between

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[734]The contrasting treatment between Moab and Egypt also makes plain that the stated reasons for the laws do not truly explain their origins. It makes no sense to argue that several hundred years of enslavement was a sin that can eventually be forgiven, while refusal of hospitality and an attempt to curse on one occasion merits eternal exclusion. Both rationales are merely providing ideological cover for rules that have other, probably far more concrete, motivations.

[735]Olyan, *Rites and Rank*, 78-79.

[736]Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation,* 125-26, followed by Tigay, *Deuteronomy,* 478-79.

[737]Tigay, Deuteronomy, 479; see Yehezkel Kaufmann, History of the Religion of Israel, Volume IV: From the Babylonian Captivity to the End of Prophecy (New York: Ktav Pub. House, 1977), 332-39; Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 116-18.

groups. They also use it as a basis for *future* relations between the groups. Their critiques

of intermarriage go far beyond those criticized in 1 Kings 11. Though both Ezra and

Nehemiah voice the sharpest criticism for intermarriage by the elites (Ezra 9:2; Neh 6:17-

18, 13:28),[738] they declare sinful *any* marriage between an Israelite man and a "Moabite

or Ammonite" woman, all the while redefining "Moabite or Ammonite" as a shorthand

for non-*golâ* persons. Whereas 1 Kings 11 had condemned foreign marriages because

they had led Solomon to worship other gods, neither Ezra nor Nehemiah ever accuse

foreign wives of introducing foreign religion. Probably these women were Yahwists and

no such accusations could be made. Finally, Ezra and Nehemiah are unprecedented in the

weight and prominence that they give the law. Lamentations 1:10 presumes the law as

part of a poetic image, while 1 Kings 11:1-9 invokes the law only secondarily. That

Solomon was led by his foreign wives into apostasy provides sufficient grounds for the

reader to condemn royal marriages-of-alliance and attribute to them Israel's subsequent

decline without any knowledge of Deut 23:4-8. By contrast, Ezra 9:1-3's particular

interpretation of Deut 23:4-8 is used as a platform for an "ethnic cleansing" of the

community and a litmus test of whether the *golâ* are obeying "Your commandments"

(Ezra 9:6-7, 10). Nehemiah similarly makes separation from foreignness critical to

becoming a *torâ*-abiding community (9:2; 10:29, 31; 13:1-3), and uses Deut 23:4-7 to

define what "foreign" looks like. In other words, Ezra and Nehemiah expand what

"Moabite" means in Deut 23:4-7 at the same time that they make the law foundational to

the community, its constitution, and its supposed obedience to Yhwh. These authors thus

endow the term "Moabite" with new urgency and importance, even as they seek to imbue

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[738]See Neh 6:17-18 and 13:28. The *qarob* of Tobiah in Neh 13:4 may also be a connection through marriage. The family of the wife of Barzillai the priest was so powerful that he had taken its name as his own! (Neh 6:63).

it with new meanings. That this resymboling occurred when the tradition was still actively taking shape  means that Ezra's and Nehemiah's reinterpretations of "Moabite" probably affected subsequent castings of the Moab traditions that were still being written down. And that the reinterpretations were so radical and so central to certain ideological programmes means that they were also contested—an idea to which I will return in Chapter 4. First, however, I will examine in greater detail how the law in Deuteronomy 23 came to be thus transformed.

# EZRA AND NEHEMIAH

## Critical Issues

Though Ezra and Nehemiah describe violations of "the law," there was no single, clear-cut interpretation of Torah that all Jews would have acknowledged. Their indictments reflect particular, and often quite creative, interpretations of biblical texts (not all of them "legal" texts), that other interpretations could have countered. Thus it is in a very qualified sense that we can speak of "mixed" marriages: these marriages are *defined* as mixed in Ezra 9, and would probably not have been understood as such by the people in them.[739] Even if they were, mixed marriage is *not* straightforwardly the sin that Ezra and Nehemiah claim. It becomes so only by accepting the Torah interpretation proposed in these texts, which is far from straightforward. Ezra 9's reference to laws from both Deuteronomy and Leviticus implies a rather late-Persian or even Hellenistic

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[739]As Kaufmann points out, the fact that many of those involved were priests and other "faithful" implies that they must not have understood their marriages as sinful (*History,* 334) Or, in Fishbane's words, that those accused by Ezra could have produced "counter-exegesis" demonstrating that their actions did *not* violate the law. (*Biblical Interpretation,* 124). See the possibly analogous case in the modern state of Israel described by Tamara C. Eskenazi and Eleanore P. Judd, "Marriage to a Stranger in Ezra 9-10," in *Second Temple Studies: 2. Temple Community in the Persian Period* (ed. Tamara C. Eskenazi and Kent H. Richards; JSOTSup 175; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994)*,* 266-285.

stage of Pentateuchal redaction.[740] Even if the date were not an issue, it cannot be

assumed, as it often has been, that these authors' descriptions of "crisis" are shared by all.

Much of the urgency, the sense that intermarriage causes a "crisis," results from the

rhetoric itself.

I turn to the Nehemiah materials first because they represent, in my view, an

earlier version of the argument that Ezra develops more fully. Ezra seems in every way to

represent a "cleaning up" of Nehemiah—an idealizing of the model of leadership, a

spiritualizing of political problems, and a development of Torah-based argumentation.[741]

## NEHEMIAH 13:1-3: REDEFINING "MOABITE"

These verses purport to describe a public reading of the Law to the community of

*gôlâ* gathered in Jerusalem. The portion of the Law read aloud is a version of Deut 23:4-6

[3-5], denying membership in the *qĕhāl ʾelohîm* to any Ammonite or Moabite. Upon

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[740]If Ezra's mission were in 398, as I think, the writings about him would date to the fourth century or later. I believe, as Juha Pakkala argues, that most of Ezra 9 is added later to the episode in Ezra 10 (*Ezra the Scribe,* [BZAW 347; New York: de Gruyter, 2004], 83-87; similarly, Yonina Dor, "The Composition of the Episode of the Foreign Women in Ezra IX-X," *VT* 53 [2003]: 26-47), and that it is formulated as an ideological, scripturally-based argument for a position against intermarriage. Not all agree on this order, but no one seriously disputes that the first- and third-person accounts in the two chapters are likely to have separate origins. The composition of Ezra 9 would probably have occurred after the promulgation of a five-book Torah as an authoritative collection—something that is increasingly thought to have happened in the fourth century (Konrad Schmid calls this a "broad concensus," ["The Late Persian Formation of the Torah: Observations on Deuteronomy 34," in *Judah and Judeans in the Fourth Century* {ed. Oded Lipschits, Gary N. Knoppers and Rainer Albertz; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2007}, 237]). Carr sees the Ezra source, which he calls "late Persian," as one of the first texts to refer to both P and non-P elements of Torah (*Formation of the Hebrew Bible,* 214).
[741]Long ago, Charles C. Torrey argued that Ezra in its entirety was a scribal construction (*Ezra Studies* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1910], ix and *inter alia*). That may be going too far, but Torrey was correct in seeing the highly exegetical nature of the current form of Ezra (viz. Gerstenberger's comment that "the figure of Ezra has so little flesh and blood that it could justifiably be construed as a literary product" [*Israel in the Persian Period,* 95.]) At any rate, most scholars see Ezra as far less historically reliable than Nehemiah (Carr, *Formation of the Hebrew Bible,* 208-09; Grabbe, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 194). Jacob Wright proposes that Ezra 9 may have been written to reinterpret Nehemiah's entire work (*Rebuilding Identity,* 268).

hearing this law read, the community spontaneously "separated all the admixture from Israel."

Even scholars who take much of Nehemiah to be excerpted from a genuine "Nehemiah memoir" understand 13:1-3 as a redactional insertion.[742] Its most obvious purpose is to ground in legal principles the actions of Nehemiah that follow—especially those against "Tobiah the Ammonite" in 13:4-5.[743] But the reinterpretation of the law has a broader aim than just the expulsion of Tobiah, for verse three claims that, following the reading of the law, "the people separated *all the admixture* (כָל־עֵרֶב) from Israel" (13:3). This verse implies that the community understood the law as applying, not just to Ammonites and Moabites, but to all foreigners, in direct contradiction of its original, narrow application.

Like other People texts, the concern here is with constitution of the community of Israel and the place of "Moabites" in it. Like other People texts, this one refers to the foreigners using gentilics: the Moabites are individuals, not nations. Since the law presumes that an individual "Moabite" desires membership in the *qĕhāl ʾelohîm,* it presumes that these individuals are foreigners resident in Israel. That those deemed "admixture" have to be "separated from Israel" indicates that the targeted groups are mixed among the populace. The act of separation thus attempts to clarify identity, and as

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[742]e.g Grabbe, *Ezra-Nehemiah,* 172; Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation,* 124; Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah,* 46-47; Williamson does not include the first three verses in the Nehemiah memoir (*Ezra, Nehemiah,* (WBC), xxiv), nor does Ulrich Kellermann (*Nehemia: Quellen, Überlieferung, und Geschichte* [BZAW 102; Berlin: Alfred Töpelmann, 1967] 47).

[743]Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah,* (WBC), 385; Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah,* 351; Fishbane assumes that the choice of scripture responds to the opposition of Tobiah and Sanballat throughout Nehemiah's tenure in Jerusalem (*Biblical Interpretation,* 126-27). Referring to Nehemiah's attitude toward Tobiah, Grabbe similarly says of Nehemiah's "zeal against intermarriage and intercourse with outsiders [in Neh 13:28] is difficult to distinguish from straightforward animosity towards an opponent" (*Ezra-Nehemiah*, 172).

a text, to insist that it *has* been clarified—that Israel is a group from which "all admixture" has been purged.

The law's focus on membership in the *qāhāl* specifies a particular arena of concern. This is not a blanket prohibition against contact with foreigners.[744] Elsewhere in the book, some forms of interaction with foreigners are tolerated and even, in a few cases, recognized as useful.[745] But defining membership in the *qāhāl* has real, as well as symbolic, consequences. On the one hand, it designates who can exercise decision-making power in the group, and so seeks to regulate ingress to the group's "inner circle" and access to political power. On the other, it makes a public statement about who "Israel" is. The focus on *qāhāl* membership and not contact with foreigners in general demonstrates that the issue in contention is not a concern about the polluting nature of foreignness, but about access to power.

The expansion of Deut 23:4-6 rests largely on the third verse of Nehemiah 13: the assertion that the community responded to the law with a complete, shared understanding that exclusion of any "Ammonite or Moabite" required the expulsion of *kol ʿereb.* Yet it is not obvious how the ambiguous word *ʿereb* would be interpreted clearly enough to

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[744]Perhaps the authors recognized that demanding full separation would have been akin to plugging a dam with one's finger, for as Christine Yoder points out, commerce and communication in the Persian empire were fluid, and the texts as well as material culture bear witness to this (*Wisdom as a Woman of Substance: A Socioeconomic Reading of Proverbs 1-9 and 31:10-31,* [BZAW 304; New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2001], 42-48). In her publication of the Wadi el-Daliyeh stamps, seals and coins, Mary Joan Winn Leith says, "a quick survey of the Wadi Daliyeh Bullai discloses the preponderance of images that could be categorized as Greek in style and/or subject matter." Leith discusses the diffusion of Greek styles throughout the Achaemenid empire and the probable diffusion to Samaria of these ideas and aesthetics through Phonecia in *Wadi Daliyeh I: The Wadi Daliyeh Seal Impressions* (DJD 24; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 10-12, 17, 21-13, 30-35.

[745]Nehemiah 13:16 mentions that Tyrians "lived in Jerusalem," and though Nehemiah insists on their adherence to bans on commerce during the sabbath, he presumes they may live in the city and sell there on other days (Neh 13:20-21). A similar coexistence with "the peoples of the land" is presumed by the covenant stipulation in Neh 10:31, from whom Jerusalemites are said to buy "food and other wares." The boast in Neh 5:17 that Nehemiah entertains officials "from the nations roundabout" at his own table uses the presence of foreigners as a sign of prestige, and also implies that shared table fellowship is not taboo.

know whom should be expelled. Does it refer to actual foreigners who had somehow

infiltrated the *qāhāl* of Jerusalem? To mixed marriages? To children of mixed marriages?

To people who had adopted a syncretized Judaism? Or simply to Judeans who were not

*gôlâ*? That ambiguity is one of the factors that casts doubt on the historicity of the event:

interpretation would have required some discussion, which the text denies to be

necessary, and the powerful families married into the house of Tobiah (Neh 6:17) would

surely have resisted such a proposal. By implying that the people swiftly and without

dissent *agreed* that Deuteronomy 23 required them to "[separate] all the admixture from

Israel," the authors argue that the law's application to all foreigners is *obvious and*

*unambiguous,* which it certainly is not.

On what grounds would the authors claim that the law applies to *kol ʿereb*? As we

noted in the discussion of Deuteronomy 23, the law's rationales clearly limit the

exclusion to Ammonites and Moabites specifically.[746] It should apply only to the

descendants of the groups who, during the conquest

> did not meet Israel with bread and water, and hired Balaam against them to curse
> them; but our God turned the curse into a blessing. (Neh 13:2)

Yet the authors include the very idea that *limits* the law to Moabites and Ammonites in

their quotation of the law. Given other parallels in the book between the actions of

Nehemiah's enemies and description of Moabites, it seems that the authors understand

the legal rationales not as restrictions, but as the very bases for expanding the law to

groups in the contemporary context. Though 13:2 is a close quotation of Deut 23:5, it

omits one key phrase—the one that clarifies that the withholding of food and water

occurred "on your journey after you left Egypt." The omission unyokes the grievance

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[746]Pointed out by Japhet, *From the Rivers of Babylon,* 149.

from the distant past and turns it into a timeless description. What described Moabites in the *past* now *defines* Moabites in the *present:* they are those who were inhospitable to "Israel," who hired a prophet to curse them, and whose curse was turned into a blessing by God. The description fits Nehemiah's story of his own enemies: they were not only inhospitable, they also actively sought to undermine his wall-building efforts and authority in Jerusalem.[747] The reference to hiring (שׂקר) Balaam resonates with Nehemiah's accusation that Sanballat had "hired" (6:12, 13) Shemaiah and others, including "Noadiah and the other prophets," to intimidate, defame, and entrap him (6:10-14). Nehemiah's description of the wall's success also echoes the idea that "our God turned the curse into a blessing": even they, he says, recognize "that this work had been accomplished by the help of our God" (6:16). The refusal of "bread and water" may refer to a specific situation in which the local population are remembered as having refused hospitality to the (recently arrived?) *gôlâ* immigrants. After all, there is mention of famine in both Haggai and Nehemiah 5. But if so, the text we now have gives no more information.

All of these parallels need not have been offered if the only target of the law were "Tobiah the Ammonite." So what does it serve to broaden Deuteronomy 23, and to whom is it broadened? And since this is a later insertion, what motivation do the later authors have for expanding the law to "all admixture"? I would suggest that the Ammonite Tobiah is given as an exemplar of all the various leaders and groups who, according to both Nehemiah and Ezra, assail the little community: the Samarians, the Arabs, men (see below) who marry "Ashdodite" women. To describe the separation from *kol ʿereb* as a

[747]Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah,* 351.

pious and logical response to the Deuteronomy 23 law is to make the law appropriate to

all of those who mistreat "the Jews." It turns "Moabite and Ammonite" into a shorthand

for "opponent of the Jews," whose expulsion from the *qāhāl* is called for by nothing less

than the "scroll of Moses."

# NEHEMIAH 13:23-27:
# APPLYING DEUTERONOMY 23 TO INTERMARRIAGE

In the brief anecdote in 13:23-27, Nehemiah intervenes in the lives of several

Judean men married to foreign women. Most take this scene to be part of the Nehemiah

memoir, but agree that the appearance of Moabites and Ammonites is a secondary

insertion.[748] Apart from the law quoted in 13:1-3, it is the only appearance of Moabites in

the book, and as in the Deuteronomy 23 law, they are paired with Ammonites. The

absence of any conjunctions between "Ashdodites" and "Ammonites, Moabites" in 13:23

is, as H. G. M. Williamson remarks, "as curious in Hebrew as it would be in English."[749]

Nehemiah's protest that "half their children spoke the language of Ashdod" also points to

a text that originally mentioned only Ashdodites: one would hardly expect children of

Ammonites and Moabites to speak Ashdodite! Thus the awkward and redundant "and so

with the language of those various people" is added to remedy the inconsistency.[750] The

reason for the insertion, most scholars agree, is to assert that Nehemiah's action is based

upon or legitimated by the Deuteronomy 23 law.

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[748]Sigmund Mowinckel, (*Studien zu dem Buche Ezra-Nehemia II: Die Nehemia-Denkschrift* [Videnskaps-Akademi Srifter II: Hist.-Filos. Klasse, 2/5; Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1964], 41) followed by Kellermann (*Nehemia Quellen,* 53); Williamson (*Ezra, Nehemiah,* [WBC], 397) and many others. For another opinion, see Wright, *Rebuilding Identity,* 245, 247.

[749]Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah,* (WBC), 397.

[750]Mowinckel (*Studien II,* 41-42), followed by Kellermann (*Nehemia Quellen,* 53-54) and Williamson (*Ezra, Nehemiah,* [WBC], 397).

The "People" orientation of this text also derives from its concern with community constitution, this time in the question of whether foreign women can be incorporated through marriage. Once again, the foreigners are designated by gentilics:

הֹשִׁיבוּ נָשִׁים֙ אַשְׁדּוֹדִיּוֹת עמוניּוֹת מוֹאֲבִיּֽוֹת:[751]

The feminine plural forms make clear that only the women are foreign: marriages between Israelite women and foreign men are not addressed. As in 13:1-3, these are individual foreigners mixed amid the Judahite populace, not Moabites in Moab or in a segregated bloc within Judah.

Whereas Neh 13:1-3 extends Deuteronomy 23 to exclude foreigners besides Moabites and Ammonites from the *qāhāl,* this pericope extends it from application to a male Moabite's participation in the official assembly, to the inclusion of a Moabite woman included in the congregation of Israel, more broadly understood. This application of the Deuteronomy 23 to women is achieved by citing the precedent of Solomon's marriages (1 Kgs 11:1-2). Solomon's wives in 1 Kings 11, as Fishbane points out, mirror the list of ethnic groups excluded from Israel in Deut 23:4-9. The writer of 1 Kings 11 thus alludes to that law, invoking its condemnation on inclusion of foreign Moabite (etc.) *women* in Israel, while adding Phoenicia, the country of Jezebel, to the list of nations.[752] 1 Kings 11 thus establishes a precedent for Deut 23:4-9 to exclude women as well as men.[753] The argument goes like this: though it is supposed that no provision for foreign women was necessary, because, as *tabulae rasae* they are absorbed into their husbands' families, the case of Solomon proves otherwise.  Not only is the foreignness of the

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[751]These are the *ketibs,* but the *qeres,* which are given for all three gentilics, vary only in spelling.
[752]Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 125-26.
[753]Note that this expansion to other foreigns is still post-exilic according to Fishbane (*Biblical Interpretation,* 126), followed by Carr (*Formation of the Hebrew Bible,* 369).

women not neutralized, but these women *dominate* their husband; instead of them

becoming Israelite, Solomon renders service his *wives'* gods! Similarly, Nehemiah argues

to the Judean men with foreign wives:

> Did not King Solomon of Israel sin on account of such women? Among the many nations there was no king like him, and he was beloved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel; nevertheless, foreign women made even him to sin. (Neh 13:26)

Though 1 Kings 11 blames Solomon's wives for idolatry, the Nehemiah text never

mentions "other gods." There may be a good reason for that. At least some of the

marriages to which the authors of this text object are contracted with non-*gôlâ* Yahwist

women, to whom the rationale would not apply.[754] Instead of describing the wives as a

gateway to apostasy, Nehemiah makes the case that the foreign women caused to sin *even*

*a man as great and beloved by God as Solomon.* This is essentially a *qal va homer*

argument: if Solomon was helpless before the sway of foreign women, then no other man

stands a chance. Thus foreign women are a category of women who *cannot* be married,

because *all* men are susceptible to being led into sin by them. In conjunction with

Deuteronomy 23, the Solomon tradition argues that Moabite women must be just as

excluded from Israel as Moabite men (and since 13:1-3 also establishes that "Moabite"

refers to *all* admixture, *no* marriage with an outsider woman is permissible). Thus

Nehemiah forces the men to swear, "You shall not give your daughters to their sons, or

take their daughters for your sons or for yourselves."

Such is the drive to secure absolute prohibition that the text reverses all the

traditional gender roles. Foreign women are imagined as strong and powerful, while

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[754]As with the insertion of Moabites and Ammonites, the scripture-based argument in vv. 25b-27 seems to originate with a later editor (see Pichon, "La prohibition des mariages mixtes," 181), and so pertain to a debate broader than the original one over marriages to "Ashdodite women."

Israelite men are susceptible and easily swayed—a vulnerability that justifies protecting

them from the dangers of the women. But these reversals apply only to the *taking* of

daughters. Nehemiah's oath also forbids the *giving* of daughters. But here a double

standard applies. No additional proof is necessary for marriages between Israelite women

and "Moabite" men because it is assumed that those marriages are *already* discouraged

by Deuteronomy 23, which bars Moabite husbands from Israel. Those Israelite women

become non-Israelite because they, unlike the foreign woman, *are* assumed to take on

their husbands' identities. But the authors seem less concerned with the prospect of losing

Israelite daughters than with having foreign women (and thus the influence of these

women's cultures and families!) infiltrate the community.

# EZRA 9-10

Chapters 9-10 are what have traditionally been called "the intermarriage crisis."

Chapter 9 opens with a group of officials informing Ezra that many community members

have married "the daughters of the peoples of the land." Ezra responds with rituals of

mourning (9:3-5) and a lengthy prayer of repentance, which also lays out an argument for

a torah-based prohibition of intermarriage (9:6-15). Chapter ten describes the discussion

and implementation of a solution (10:5-17), though the actual purge is curiously vague

(10:17). The chapter concludes by naming the offenders (10:18-44). Because of the

complex exegetical understandings presupposed by both the accusers and Ezra's speech, I

take these chapters to be a scribal creation rather than a historical depiction. Thus, my

references to "Ezra" refer to the viewpoints expressed by the book or the character, rather

than by a historical figure.

## Ezra 9-10 as a People Text

Ezra 9-10 is a People text primarily because of its subject matter. Rather than "Israel" confronting "Moab," the foreign threat is mixed amongst the population—*married* into Israel. As in Nehemiah 13, this text attempts to consciously delineate and shape the constituency of this "Israel." In particular, it vigorously protests the practice of marriage between *gôlâ* men and "the daughters of the peoples of the lands" (9:1). Moabites—as characters in the Deuteronomy 23 law—are invoked to substantiate a boundary excluding these people from *gôlâ* marriages and community life.

In contrast to State texts, where leaders represent the whole group, this text distributes sin and the responsibility for action among the entire people. Though the leadership is held especially culpable (9:2b), the crisis is repeatedly said to encompass "all Israel" (10:5), "all the children of the exile" (10:7), "all the people" 10:9; and "the whole assembly" (כָּל־הַקָּהָל) (10:12, 10:14). Even women and children are said to gather around Ezra as he mourns (10:1).[755] The remedy in chapter 10 is also comprehensive, requiring a house-by-house census in which "all the men of Judah and Benjamin" (10:9) are called in to give account, each threatened with losing property and membership in the *qehal haggôlâ* if they do not (10:8). So whereas criticism of mixed marriages in Samuel and Kings is limited to royal marriages of alliance (1 Kgs 11:1-10, 16:30-33), Ezra's critique scrutinizes the marriage choices of every *gôlâ* household, insisting that *all* are governed by this particular "commandment." (9:10, 14).

As in Nehemiah, formulation of the problem settles on foreign women. The marriages of which the leaders complain is that *gôlâ* men have "taken the *daughters* of

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[755]Blenkinsopp takes the inclusion of women and children in Neh 8:2 (=Ezra narrative) as a literary signal reinforcing that "all the people" are present (*Ezra-Nehemiah,* 287).

the people of the land *for themselves* and for their *sons*" (9:2). Marriages between

Israelite women and the sons of the peoples of the land are not mentioned, although Ezra

does reference a law prohibiting intermarriage for both genders (9:2). When action is

taken, those sent away are specifically "foreign women" (*nashîm nŏkriyyôt,* 10:2, 14).

Along with female characters, the text displays strong concern with purity, and envisions

full separation—prohibition of future marriages and forcible break-ups of families

already formed—as the only hope for remedying and preventing "this great sin."

## The Rhetoric of Crisis

Jacob Myers' 1965 commentary is typical of those that read the situation as an

objective crisis.[756] Myers explains that Ezra needed to respond in a way that seems

extreme because,

> "he clearly saw the danger of contaminating the pure religion of Yahweh, for
> intermarriage led to compromise and idolatry…The maintenance of the true
> relationship between Yahweh and his people could be achieved only through
> purity of race."[757]

Indeed, Ezra argues that if the sin of intermarriage is not dealt with properly, "Will You

not rage against us till we are destroyed, and have neither remnant nor survivor?" (9:14).

Stressing that the community's record of sin is too great and its strength too weak to

withstand further punishment, he points to the fragility of the *gôlâ,* describing it as a

small "remnant" (9:8, 15) who remain "slaves" to imperial lords (9:7b, 9a) and still have

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[756]Myers, *Ezra-Nehemiah: Introduction, Translation and Notes,* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1965).

[757]Myers, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 77. Notice how Myers supplies the allegations of idolatry, which Ezra does not raise. F. Charles Fensham similarly presumes that the objections spring from threat of cultic contamination and have an objective basis: "Contamination of their religion with foreign elements, which could alter considerably the orthodox conceptions, was regarded as such a danger that everything possible was done to combat it" (*The Books of Ezra and Nehemiahm* [NICOT; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1982], 18).

only a tenuous "stake"[758] in Jerusalem. As Helena Zlotnick points out, his actions of public mourning also convey extreme urgency.[759] That he addresses God rather than the community implies that no less than a direct appeal by a priestly intercessor is required to save the people from doom.[760] Yet there is no empirical proof that the community is threatened in any concrete way. Ezra himself cites the gains that have manifest "grace": the favor of the Persian king, "sustenance" that probably refers to royal rations provided for political service, the reconstruction of the temple, and perhaps also Nehemiah's "wall" (גָּדֵר) (9:10). By characterizing the current moment as a "reprieve" (תְחִנָּה) that has existed for only "a brief moment," he emphasizes fragility. But in so doing, he also recognizes that there *is* a reprieve rather than a crisis—he simply fears that the calm will be interpreted as a sign of permanent improvement and so become complacent. In other words, some of the community sees the same events and perceives no "crisis" (9:8). The particularity of Ezra's perspective is also hinted at in the description of the community response to his appalled reaction to the mixed marriages. Those who gather around Ezra, and whom the text seems to regard as manifesting the proper remorse, are called not "all the *gôlâ*," but "all who trembled at the words of the God of Israel because of the exiles' transgression" (9:4). The singling out of those who "tremble" indicts those who supposedly do not; it subtly alleges that any who fail to support Ezra's interpretation of intermarriage lack respect for "the words of God."[761]

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[758]Blenkinsopp suggests that the image is of a tent peg "staking" a claim, but a tenuous, impermanent one (*Ezra-Nehemiah,* 184).

[759]Zlotnick, *Dinah's Daughters,* 62.

[760]Ibid.

[761]Fishbane also sees here a reference to "a pious subgroup among the returnees" and thinks they are also referenced in a number of Trito-Isaiah traditions as well, esp. 66:2, 5 (*Biblical Interpretation,* n. 27, 114-15). The idea is developed by Blenkinsopp (*Ezra-Nehemiah,* 187-88), who sees Ezra 10:12-14 as an initiative to build support against the opponents of this group of *haredim* (Ibid., 193). Unlike Fishbane and

In the final analysis, the dire threat to the community—one of divine retribution—is something that cannot be proven, even if disaster were to befall it. David Janzen compares the threat in Ezra to allegations of witchcraft; both kinds of claims are socially constructed and socially validated.[762] Even if one takes Ezra 9-10 to describe a historical event, it is clear that Ezra's arguments ended neither the debate about community boundaries and identity, nor the practice of intermarriage. The group represented by Ezra was but one of the various groups that shaped what Judaism would become. Even though pressure to marry "within the group" remained a factor, different segments on the Jewish continuum had different definitions of "the group" and its extent. Thus what Ezra would have called "intermarriage" continued, and, whether because of that or despite it, the Jews survived, albeit in a form Ezra might have deemed impure. This is not to say that we should dismiss Ezra 9-10 or its concerns: endogamy is a mechanism of self-defense for groups that perceive themselves threatened with extinction, and sometimes rightly so. What I wish to point out, however, is that rhetoric is playing a powerful role in persuading readers that there *is* a crisis, and in *creating* the urgency that makes the drastic solutions seem necessary.

## Creating New Moabites

At the beginning of Ezra 9, the problem is framed as one of marriage with "the daughters of the peoples of the lands." By chapter 10 when they are implementing the divorces, the offending women are called *nŏkriyyôt* (vv. 2, 10, 11, 14, 17, 18, 44): they have been transformed fully into foreigners. Of course, these are probably different

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Blenkinsopp, however, I see the opponents as a group in the setting of the authors—perhaps in the late-fourth century—rather than that of Ezra in the mid-fifth.

[762]See Janzen, *Witch-hunts, Purity and Social Boundaries,* 19-20.

sources,[763] but the change of terminology is symbolic, for Ezra's speech effectively does transform women from the surrounding area—some of whom are probably just non-*gôlâ* Judeans—into complete "foreigners." The transformation is effected through a complex rhetorical and exegetical process that construes the women as a category of Canaanite-Moabite, subject to laws in Deuteronomy 7 and 23, and Leviticus 18. Ezra does not act alone. Nearly every element of his exegetical arguments is proposed by the community officials, who present the problem in a carefully-crafted, two-verse formulation of the issue (9:1-2). Their wording presupposes an erudite knowledge of scripture—alluding to at least four different traditions and drawing complex connections between them. Ezra picks up each allusion, expands their implications, and weaves them into a masterful prayer-argument. The complexity of both the terms of accusation and the response are part of what persuades me that this event lacks historical basis and is purely an argument that scribes are constructing through the text.

## *1. Proposed Analogies*

The first element of the argument is a proposed analogy between "the peoples of the lands" and Canaanites. The officials tell Ezra:

לֹא־נִבְדְּלוּ הָעָם יִשְׂרָאֵל וְהַכֹּהֲנִים וְהַלְוִיִּם מֵעַמֵּי הָאֲרָצוֹת
כְּתוֹעֲבֹתֵיהֶם לַכְּנַעֲנִי הַחִתִּי הַפְּרִזִּי הַיְבוּסִי
הָעַמֹּנִי הַמֹּאָבִי הַמִּצְרִי וְהָאֱמֹרִי:

The distinction between "the peoples of the lands" and the other groups is so subtle that the ethnic labels are often taken as appositives (e.g. *RSV, NRSV*). But translations like those of *NJPS* and *NIV,* following the division suggested by the *atnaḥ,* read the line that follows it as an independent clause. I similarly translate:

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[763]Pakkala, *Ezra the Scribe,* 83-87.

"The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands; *their abominations are like* (כְּ) those *pertaining to* (לְ) the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Perizzite, the Jebusite, the Ammonite, the Moabite, the Egyptian and the Amorite [Edomite[764]]." (Ezra 9:1)

In other words, Moabites are not one of the "peoples of the lands" any more than are the long-extinct Canaanites.[765] They are a group of foreigners who supposedly commit "abominations" attributed to the ʿamê hāʾărṣôt. But the distinction is meant to be subtle, eliding historical distance between the Canaanites of old and the contemporary ʿamê hāʾărṣôt.

## 2. The Metaphor of Conquest

The applicability of Deuteronomy 7 depends upon the gôlâ viewing themselves as the Israel of a second Conquest.[766] The officials encourage this notion simply by suggesting that the ʿamê hāʾărṣôt are nearly identical to Canaanites. The identification is not just an intellectual proposition; it attaches to deep emotions and generates a framing worldview. If the gôlâ view themselves as the Israel of the Conquest, the ʿamê hāʾărṣôt cannot be recognized as Judahites with whom there is any shared relationship and tradition. One group comes in an "exodus" out of captivity in Babylon to a land promised to them. The other is the constituency of heathen inhabitants from whom God had said

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[764]Like most scholars, I believe that "Amorites" is an error for "Edomites." See e.g. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation,* 116*;* Japhet, *From the Rivers of Babylon,* 112.

[765]Grabbe asserts that the people on the list represent a "literary fiction" ("Triumph of the Pious," 57).

[766]Sara Japhet proposes that metaphors of Exodus and Conquest are actually the organizing principle for the compilation of Ezra-Nehemiah as a work. She points out that the book is structured into two periods, the generation of Zerubbabel-Sheshbazzar, and that of Ezra-Nehemiah. Each has a priestly leader and a political one. The first corresponds to the generation of the Exodus, the second to the generation of the Conquest. In this way, the Restoration narrative is patterned after that of the Exodus itself, under the dual leadership of Moses and Aaron ("Periodization between History and Ideology II: Chronology and Ideology in Ezra-Nehemiah," in *Judah and Judeans in the Persian Period* [ed. Oded Lipschits and Manfred Oeming; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2006], 491-508, esp. 502-04).

the land was to be taken. One is the guardian of the scriptures and "commandments" of Yhwh for Israel, the other is a "people of abominations" (9:14). The metaphor and the situation form a mutually-reinforcing feedback loop: the more one looks like the other, the more the two seem interchangeable.

The identification of the peoples of the lands with Canaanites is made to seem natural by allusions to the *gôlâ* as a new Exodus both earlier in the book and in other scriptural traditions.[767] Second Isaiah, of course, envisions a mass reverse exodus returning from Babylon through "a highway in the desert" (Isa 40:3). Ezra 2 combines lists of returnees from different time periods (Zerubbabel is a contemporary of Nehemiah, for example) into a single group to give the impression of one great horde "brought up from Babylon to Jerusalem" (Ezra 1:11), like the Israelites out of Egypt.[768] Like the Exodus Israelites leaving Egypt with their neighbors' treasures, the *gôlâ* leave "strengthened" by their neighbors, who "aided them with silver vessels, with gold, with goods, with animals, and with valuable gifts, besides all that was freely offered" (Ezra 1:6).[769] It is they alone who are credited with funding the rebuilding of the temple, and their generous donations (2:68-69) invite comparisons to the model generosity of Israel in the wilderness, pooling all their resources to build the Tabernacle (Ex 35). Upon the dedication of the temple, the group celebrates Passover (Ezra 6:19), just as Moses does at Sinai (Num 9:4-5) and Joshua does when the Israelites transition from the wilderness into the land (Josh 5:10). Thus when Ezra begins to quote the law saying, "the land you are about to possess…," the community is primed to be transported to the threshold of the

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[767]Koch, "Ezra and the Origins of Judaism," 184-89.

[768]Pointing out a number of parallels between Ezra and the exodus/wilderness narrative, Williamson states that these "make the event available to successive generations of exiles" (*Ezra and Nehemiah,* [OTG], 85-86). See also Koch, "Ezra and the Origins of Judaism," 184-89.

[769]Williamson, *Ezra and Nehemiah,* (OTG), 85.

Promised Land. When he gives God's commandments in their direct, imperative forms—

"Do not give your daughters in marriage!" (9:12)—the people *become* Israel; Ezra

*becomes* Moses, and they ignore his words at their own peril.

### 3. The Legal Argument

The list of peoples to whom the officials compare the peoples of the lands is

precise: the first four are a traditional roster of Canaanite peoples, the second four are the

groups treated by Deut 23:4-8. That the latter refers to a specific law makes clear that the

leaders are proposing a legal, text-based formulation of both the problem and the

solution.[770] They are implying that the basis for the sin and the solution lies, on the one

hand, in laws pertaining to Canaanites and their "abominations," and, on the other, to

Deut 23:4-8.

The officials' equations of both the *ʿamê hāʾărṣôt* and Moabites with Canaanites

are extremely contentious. The line before Deuteronomy 7's prohibition marriage to

Canaanites commands, "you must doom them to destruction: grant them no terms and

give them no quarter" (Deut 7:2). The one directly following states that, "you shall tear

down their altars, smash their pillars, cut down their sacred posts, and consign their

images to fire." Such commandments are what convince most scholars that the laws

pertaining to Canaanites are unique to the particular circumstances of the Conquest and

were written as an *ex post facto* explanation rather than a prescription to be repeated.[771] It

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[770]Also recognized by Fishbane (*Biblical Interpretation,* 116) and Zlotnick (who states that the categories of prohibited women are "deliberately manipulated" by selective excerpting of Torah [*Dinah's Daughters,* 60]). Japhet (*From the Rivers of Babylon,* 112) credits Kaufmann with being the first to recognize Ezra's speech overall as a piece of "early midrash." Kaufmann saw in Ezra 9:10-12 a combination of Deut 23 with ideas from Leviticus18 and 20 (*History,* 337-39).

[771]Moshe Weinfeld describes the *ḥerem* of Deut 7 as "wishful thinking," "an attempt to adjust reality to the ideal norm" rather than an articulation of laws actually intended for application (*Deuteronomy*

is thus radical to claim that they are applicable again. Second, the nations in Deut 23:4-8 are never placed among the "Canaanite" groups in any other scriptural tradition.[772] Furthermore, Ezra's exegesis implies that the absolute exclusion applied to the Ammonite and Moabite applies as well to Egyptians and Edomites. This directly contravenes Deut 23:8, which explicitly grants entry to Egyptians and Edomites after four generations.

Yet Ezra's response to the leaders combines into a single commandment quotations from Deut 7:3, pertaining to Canaanites, with a phrase from Deut 23:7, pertaining to the last four groups. In fact, he does this as a "quotation" of "the law that you gave us through your servants the prophets." This makes it appear as though the hybrid category that the officials create in their charge of the people had already existed in scripture, and that "the Law" with which Ezra answers them simply flows from it. That appearance is a great sleight of hand, for in fact, what Ezra "quotes" does not appear in any law book, but is a creative and unprecedented hybrid.[773]

The reason that the hybrid category must be created is that Deuteronomy 7, which contains the clearest prohibition of intermarriage, is not wholly sufficient to address the situation at hand. First, it deals only with intermarriage as a preventive measure. The situation in Ezra 9 is that community members have *already* intermarried with the daughters of the peoples of the lands. By their juxtaposition, the leaders propose that Deuteronomy 23, which requires exclusion from the community of certain ethnic groups, offers the solution. The second reason is that Deut 7:3 prohibits intermarriage on the

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*1-11: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* [AB 5; New York: Doubleday, 1991], 365, 384). The discomfort of rabbinic interpreters with such harsh commandments is evident in their insistence that the Canaanites were given the option to leave or "make peace," in direct contradition to Deut 7:2 and 20:16-17 (*Lev. Rab.* [Margalot, 1957, 387-88]; *y. Šeb.* 6:5, 36c) (Pointed out by Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1-11*, 384).
    [772]Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation,* 116.
    [773]Zlotnick similarly notes Ezra's formulation appears traditional and yet is a radical makeover of traditional ideas (*Dinah's Daughters,* 64).

premise that it leads to apostasy (Deut 7:4). Conspicuously, Ezra says nothing of

apostasy, as Yehezkel Kaufmann noted years ago. Kaufmann corrected the conclusion

typical to scholars of his era by pointing out, "It is inconceivable that those involved,

among them the family of the high priests and others who were faithful to God, would

have permitted idols in their homes and their cities, including Jerusalem."[774] What has

since become clear to most scholars is that the "foreign" women practiced the same

religion as the *gôlâ* Jews; indeed, many were not only not foreign women converted to

Judaism, as Kaufmann thought, but simply *non-gôlâ* Yahwists. Intermarriage cannot be

linked to apostasy, or its inapplicability would become apparent.  For the same reason, 1

Kings 11 is also insufficient. What Deuteronomy 23 provides is an exclusion that is

unconditional: no Moabites, no matter what their practice or ancestry, may be admitted

into the *qāhāl* of Israel. [775]

## 4. Invoking Pollution

One final element binds the two traditions together and makes the exclusion of the

peoples of the lands total and unconditional: the attribution to them of *tōʿēbôt,* or

"abominations." The officials who approach Ezra imply that the marriages are unlawful

because the *tōʿēbôt* of the *ʿamê hāʾărṣôt* classify them as Canaanites and Moabites. By

this they point to legal traditions in which *tōʿēbôt* are associated with both groups of

peoples—traditions that explain why intermarriage cannot be tolerated. This tradition for

the Canaanites is found in Leviticus 18,[776] where *tōʿēbôt* appears five times (Lev 18:22,

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[774]Kaufmann, *History*, 337.
[775]Ibid., 339.
[776]*Pace* Blenkinsopp, who calls this a "typically Deuteronomic term for false gods and their cults." The word does occurs in Deut 7:25, but it is, as Blenkinsopp notes, a prohibition of idol worship

27, 29, 30). The term refers to a series of offenses by which the Canaanites had defiled

the land—made it *tāmēʾ*—and because of which it "vomited" them out. There can be no

doubt that Ezra has the full context of those laws in mind as he quotes 'Your

commandments,'

> [11]'The land that you are about to possess (lit. 'that you are entering to possess it')
> is a land that is polluted through the pollutions of the peoples of the lands,
> through their abominations,
> with which they have, in their defiled state,
> have filled it
> from one end to the other.
>
> [12]'Now then: your daughters—
> do not give them to their sons
> and their daughters—do not take them as wives for your sons;
> do not seek their well-being
> or their good—not ever.
> Then you will be strong
> and you will eat the good (things) of the land
> and bequeath it to your children—forever.'

Ezra brackets the prohibition against intermarriage on both sides with another concern:

possession of the land. It is preparation to "enter the land to possess it" that prompts the

commandment, and the assurance that land can be passed on to future generations that

rewards compliance *if* the prohibition is kept. It is land that hangs in the balance if the

people intermarry.

More than the unconditionality of Moabite exclusion from the congregation in

Deuteronomy 23, it is defilement that marks the peoples of the lands as ineligible for

marriage. The *tōʿēbôt* said to characterize the ʿ*amê hāʾărṣôt* and to liken them to

Canaanites and Moabites forms the crux of the argument. The actions that constitute

"abominations" in Leviticus 18 are nearly all forms of *sexual* deviance (save 18:21,

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(Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah,* 176). As I have said, however, Ezra avoids pairing intermarriage with idolatry because it would void his argument.

which describes child sacrifice), and the majority specify forms of incest (18:6-18). In other words, they define who may be married to whom, and what kinds of unions are considered *tōʿēbôt* rather than legitimate unions. This brings into sharp focus the parallel between Canaanites and Moabites: both are connected to traditions of incest. That *tōʿēbôt* are ascribed to all the peoples on the list—to Moabites as well as Canaanites—implies that the authors understand Deut 23:4-8 as an instance of the *mamzēr* legislation. In fact, they understand not only Moabites, but even Egyptians and Edomites to be barred as products of impure birth. The fact that Leviticus 18 (18:8) is a direct parallel to Deut 23:1 supplies an encouragement to read the two sets of laws together: both forbid marrying the father's wife. Deuteronomy 23:1, we will remember, is what prefaces and explains *mamzēr* as a product of incest, and Ezra may understand it as an allusion to the fuller set of incest laws in Leviticus 18. Because of their connection to incest, Moabites become a kind of Canaanite. They are thus a potent symbol of the peoples of the lands, for they are doubly tainted: first by their own associations with incest, and second because such practices associate them with Canaanites. For the first offense they are barred, unconditionally and permanently, from the *qāhāl* of Israel; for the second, an explicit prohibition of intermarriage (via Deut 7:3) applies.[777] Thus by turning the peoples of the land into Moabites, Ezra makes the case not only that intermarriage is prohibited, but that those already "married in" must be removed—unconditionally—and that the same applies to their children, "even to the tenth generation, forever."

Like the conquest metaphor and the legal traditions, it is the officials who set up impurity as the basis of exclusion in their formulation of the problem. Not only do they

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[777]Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 120.

allude to the legal traditions of *tōʿēbôt* linking Moabites to Canaanite, they also claim that

the *gôlâ* possess "the holy seed," and describe intermarriage as an "admixture" of that

seed (9:2) with peoples implied to practice "abominations." These terms on their own

determine strong lines of interpretation. "Holy seed" claims the status of Israel in Deut

7:6—that the *gôlâ* are set apart as a people "holy to Yhwh"—a tradition that serves as

further basis for the intermarriage prohibition in Deut 7:3.[778] The attributed holiness both

claims a higher status than the peoples of the lands and demands strict separation from

them. Even what is "clean"—mundane—is not permitted in the sphere of the holy; here

are peoples who are more than unclean, they are defiled. Incest and other forms of sexual

deviance results in *tainted birth;* it is a corruption of *seed* like a DNA mutation: once

introduced, it is passed on to every successive generation. Thus "abominations" are not

just what the peoples of the lands *do,* it is what they *are.* Ezra actually says this: at the

climax of his speech, he refers to the "peoples of the lands" as "peoples of abominations"

(עַמֵּי הַתֹּעֵבוֹת, 9:14). For this kind of impurity there is no remedy, and certainly there can

be no "admixture." Peoples of the lands and the *gôlâ* are ontologically distinct and

intrinsically incompatible groups. They *dare not* mix. For this reason Ezra not only

trembles, but mourns: the deity's wrath, in the priestly worldview, is awakened by just

such unholy contacts. The implication is clear: the defilement must be expelled in the

present and avoided in the future.

The power of pollution imagery is that its associations are visceral and

instantaneous. Sexual taboos like incest are especially evocative. The urgency to be rid of

the feelings of disgust is heightened by the implication that the pollution is contagious,

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[778]Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 121.

that the defilement is so powerful as to have infected the land itself; it has already

become "intermingled" with the holy seed. Ezra's description of the peoples' of the

lands also seems intended to evoke revulsion. Though he borrows Leviticus 18's idea that

the peoples have made the land unclean, he calls the land not *tamēʾ* as in Leviticus 18*,* but

*niddâ.* In fact, he does so twice: "the land is *niddâ* through the *niddat* of the peoples of

the land." Most often associated with menstruation,[779] *niddâ* is a form of pollution that

for biblical authors connotes extreme disgust (see discussion of female pollution above).

Its use in Ezra is suggested by Lev 18:19, where sex with a menstruous woman forms one

of the offenses collectively referred to as *tōʿēbôt.* The term *niddâ* might also be

associated particularly with Samaria in post-exilic priestly circles, for Ezek 36:17 has

God pronouncing that the ways of "the house of Israel" "were like the defilement of a

menstruous woman (כְּטֻמְאַת֙ הַנִּדָּ֔ה) in my sight." It is in this context suggestive of

menstruation that Ezra describes the thoroughness of the pollution with an idiom

evocative of bodily orifices: the land is polluted "from mouth to [the other] mouth."

There, too, he seems to intend the somatic connotations to be heard along with the

idiomatic meaning, and to elicit yet another shiver of disgust. It takes little to transfer the

disgust of *niddâ* from the feminized land to the women who belong to it.[780] Thus intimate

relationships with these women are made repulsive as well as illegal.

## Why Women?

Why does the intermarriage debate in Ezra focus only on women? I suspect two

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[779]Blenkinsopp (*Ezra-Nehemiah,* 185), who also points out that the term does not appear in Deuteronomy.

[780]According to Regina M. Schwartz, Ezra implies that the land itself as a menstruating woman (*The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997], 86).

factors. The first is suggested by the situations we see in Nehemiah, where marriage gave

non-*gôlâ* persons like Sanballat "back-door" access to Judean politics and cultic affairs.

The second factor is that the legal status of men was clear-cut, whereas that of outsider

women was not. There was probably full agreement among the *gôlâ* that their *qāhāl*

should exclude non-*gôlâ* men. But it was a different matter to argue that these men

should be restricted to *gôlâ* wives, or that children should be required to have a *gôlâ*

mother as well as father. But the rivalry between Jerusalem and Samaria makes the

indirect influence exerted through alliances of marriage a critical issue. We also see an

ideology emerging that views *gôlâ* status as a precious resource not to be shared with

outsiders—perhaps something that granted access to Persian trust and official posts.[781] It

is not that the "holy seed" is contaminated by the peoples of the land. If it were, the men

themselves would have to be ejected from the community. It is rather that this seed can

be dissipated, and that the privileges of the *gôlâ* might thereby be claimed by those who,

in their view, have no right to them. Fried draws compelling comparisons between the

"holy seed" ideology in Ezra and mid-fifth century Athenian concepts and practices of

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[781]We do not fully understand the precise relationship between ethnicity and power in this context. Hoglund proposes that the endogamy policies in Ezra-Nehemiah reflect the contingency of *gôlâ* land rights on maintaining clear lines of descent (*Achaemenid Imperial Administration,* 236-40). There are several problems with this theory. One is that it presupposes that Ezra 9-10 represents a policy that was historically enacted, and that this occurred in the Persian period. It may well be that Ezra 9-10 is a scribal creation and/or that it dates to the Hellenistic period. Hoglund's theory also assumes that the Persians would have understood "the Jews" in the same way Ezra does, yet the Elephantine correspondence, in which the priests in Egypt require permission from Jews in Jerusalem, and perhaps Samaria as well, to rebuild their temple, presumes that the Persians understood "the Jews" to include a much broader group (Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander,* 511). Imperial policy probably does play a role, but perhaps it is a more subtle one. Hasan's description of endogamy in modern occupied Palestine demonstrates that endogamy can be the by-product of a policy in which the colonial power grants the most autonomy to the largest, most stable groups ("Politics of Honor," 22). Families from dominant groups pressure their members to marry close relatives so as to preserve the overall strength of the clan and the clarity of its identity, thus maximizing the chances that the imperial power delegate decisions to its authority. The Israeli's advocate such an approach because it both appeases the occupied groups, ostensibly demonstrating respect for their traditional norms, and minimizes costs of administration compared to liaising with many smaller families. In a similar way, ruling elites in Yehud may have exhorted their members to maintain the "purity" of their families and ethnic groups to maximize their strength *as* a group in the eyes of the imperial authorities.

citizenship.[782] The legal codes of Solon, ca. 594, instituted in Athens a tiered system that

granted certain rights only to citizens, including rights of land ownership, protection from

slavery, rights to participate in the assembly, and rights to conduct commerce in the

Agora. Citizenship could not be earned; it was granted only to those born of Athenian

fathers. Other rulers followed Solon in defining legal and social privileges in terms of

lineage-based citizenship. In 450 or 451, Pericles restricted citizenship to those whose

parents were *both* Athenian citizens. His action had practical consequences: according to

C. B. Patterson, 5,000 Athenians were struck from the citizenship rolls and thus excluded

from a public apportioning of grain rations. Some of those denaturalized were also

executed, exiled, or stripped of all legal rights, frequently losing their property in the

process. Legal prohibitions of marriage between Athenians and non-Athenians soon

followed.[783] The parallels with Ezra 9-10 are striking, and Fried proposes that the Judean

ideas directly reflect Greek influence. She may be correct. We know from stamps and

seal impressions that Greek influence was felt in Palestine well before Alexander: Mary

Joan Winn Leith's survey of stamps and bullae from early-to-mid-fourth century Samaria

states that Greek-style impressions outnumber Near-Eastern ones nearly two-to-one.[784] At

the same time, however, the presence of certain ideas is not determinative. Even if Green

ideas gained influence, we do not know to what degree they dominated public opinion

and official policy. As I will argue in Chapter 4, I believe that some biblical authors

asserted far more universalist views, even though they were writing late enough for

Greek ideas may have been present.

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[782]"From Xeno-Philia to –Phobia," 200-04.
[783]Ibid., 199-201; C. B. Patterson, *Pericles' Citizenship Law of 451/50 B. C.* (New York: Arno Press, 1981), 96.
[784]Leith, *Wadi Daliyeh I,* 21.

If the idea of excluding outsiders can be blamed on Greek ideas (which is not certain), the symbolic packaging in which it is sold is certainly Israelite. Ezra draws on associations between Moabites, promiscuous women, incest, and defilement to create not only a legal precedent for exclusion, but also a sense of revulsion and pollution so that the people are motivated to apply his version of the law. The blending of texts both stigmatizes the ʿamê hāʾărṣôt, and develops further the literary trope of Moabiteness. The image of Moab is no longer drawn from real world interactions with Moabites, but it does still very much reflect the world—the world of the authors and their anxieties and concerns. Though Fishbane describes the reinterpretation of Deuteronomy 7 as an "adaptation" of the old law to the new environment, it seems clear that adaptation is too neutral a term. What we see in Ezra is no innocent search for relevance, but rather a mission to create authoritative exclusions that are *not* mandated by a straightforward reading of the laws. The exegetes choose some of the most severely exclusive statutes in the legal corpus, and interpret away their specific applications to Canaanites and Moabites. When they extend a principle to all the groups that originally referred to a specific one, they choose Deut 23:6's call to "do nothing for their benefit or well-being," rather than 23:7's admonishment not to "abhor" an Edomite or an Egyptian "for they are your brothers." This is interpretation in a single, clear direction: to, as Japhet puts it, "[straighten] the line [of the law] at its most extreme edge."[785] And it demonstrates just how much texts can be hybridized and reinterpreted to create the "Moab" that is needed for a given situation.

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[785]Japhet, *From the Rivers of Babylon,* 112.

# GENESIS 19

It is difficult to place the story of Moab's origins in the cave (Gen 19:30-38) in the history of traditions. On the one hand, the earliest version of the Deuteronomy 23 exclusion of Moabites from the assembly seems to presume a "tainted" birth tradition. Deut 23:4-7 is a pre-exilic text, and perhaps, as Jacob Milgrom believes, even an eighth-century northern one. Perhaps the juxtaposition of laws was even based upon the Gen 19:30-38 story. On the other hand, it seems more likely that the story grows from the law: that it explains the exclusion of Ammonites and Moabites in Deut 23:4 by demonstrating the origins of the "tainted birth" in incest. Such an interpretive story could therefore date any time after the Deuteronomy 23 law—theoretically. However, the most likely time in which scribes would have reason to write down such a story as *the* story of Moab and Ammon is in a context where the status of Moabites and Ammonites as *mamzērîm* would have some consequence for Israelites. Since both Nehemiah 13 and Ezra 9 make Ammonites and Moabites emblematic of the intermarriage "problem," the late Persian period makes the most sense as a compositional date, though of course, this is only a circumstantial basis. However, most scholars argue on other grounds that 19:30-38 is separate from the rest of the Abraham-Lot cycle,[786] and the Abraham cycle to which it is

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[786]So Klaus Westermann, *Genesis 12-36: A Commentary* (trans. John J. Scullion; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985), 311; Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis* (IBC; Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), 176; E. A. Speiser, *Genesis* (AB 1; Garden City, N.Y. Doubleday, 1964), 145-46; Reinhard G. Kratz, *The Composition of the Narrative Books of the Old Testament* [trans. John Bowdon. London: T & T Clark, 2000], 270-71). Most commonly it is regarded as an etiological tale, and some have argued that it originally had more positive connotations (e.g. Speiser, Westermann, Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* [rev. ed.; trans. J.H. Marks; OTL; London: SCM Press, 1972], 223-34; Nahum Sarna, *Genesis: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation* [JPS Torah Commentary; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989], 139). I find it improbable that biblical writers would have included the story if they understood it as such, especially as the other Genesis stories serve to explain why all the potential heirs of Abraham do not eventually inherit the promise or the land (see R. Christopher Heard, *The*

attached has few precursors in other biblical literature prior to the Persian period, when it

seems to have been thoroughly redacted.[787] If verses 30-38 were added to the patriarchal

narrative after the Abraham-Lot cycle had been incorporated, that, too, would point to a

Persian period date.

Whether or not the story was written *for* the purposes of the intermarriage

prohibitions in Ezra-Nehemiah, it certainly bolsters them. If the cave story were early, it

would explain rather easily why Moab became such a useful symbol for the peoples of

the lands: no other Israelite relative is portrayed in the patriarchal narratives so

negatively, and certainly none is ascribed the same level of sexualized pollution. If

Nehemiah's or Ezra's audience knew this story, it would be far easier for them to explain

why marriage to Ammonites or Moabites was sinful, or why those groups should be

viewed as "peoples of abominations." Once the story is present in the environment,

whether from ancient times or recently, it reinforces endogamy arguments, especially

those of Ezra. The only question that remains is whether the story was *first* applied to the

"peoples of the lands," or originally referred to actual Moabites and Ammonites and was

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*Dynamics of Diselection: Ambiguity in Genesis 12-36 and Ethnic Boundaries in Post-Exilic Judah* [Semeia Studies 39; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 2001] and Steinberg, *Kinship and Marriage in Genesis*).

[787]Carr notes apart from Ezek 33:24-29, there are no firmly early references to an Abraham tradition (he implies that the references in Deuteronomy are likely to be post-exilic), and that the current materials as so thoroughly worked into their current literary context that the chronology remains elusive (*Formation of the Hebrew Bible,* 484-85). Kratz similarly comments that the Abraham stories have "no specially broad basis in the tradition" (*Composition of the Narrative Books*, 270). Lateness is not a settled question, however. Ronald Hendel points to several possible indicators of a genuinely ancient Abraham tradition: an inscription by Sheshonq I (ca. 925 BCE) describes conquest of a fortress in the Negeb called Abiram, and Genesis genealogies contain ʾEl rather than Yh names. Hendel also cites the authenticity of Mesopotamian placenames in the Terahite lineage as evidence for the survival of second-millenium traditions, but that argument seems to me less credible (*Remembering Abraham: Culture, Memory, and History in the Hebrew Bible.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2005). The Lot stories have also been touted as some of the earliest parts of the tradition, partly because of the way that Genesis 13 has been separated from its logical resolution in Genesis 19 by other materials (e.g. von Rad, *Genesis,* 220). One must wonder, however, why Lot traditions would have been preserved by Judahites if they were not connected to Abraham.

only reapplied to others secondarily.

## Genesis 19 as a People Text

This text is atypical of People texts in that there is no encounter between Moabites and Israelites *per se.* All references to Israel and Moab are accomplished through the portrayal of their traditional ancestors as characters in a drama of divine promises and their inheritance by successive generations. This drama, however, lays out a vision of both geographical distribution and proper relationships (and non-relationships) between Israel and its near neighbors. Much of that drama also serves to demonstrate which peoples are and which are not entitled to the inheritance of Abraham. The tale of Lot, who early on appears to be a candidate to inherit from Abram, establishes that Lot cannot share in Abram's promise. This part of the story (vv. 30-38), the birth of Moab and Ammon to Lot and his daughters, affirms the earlier separation between Lot and Abraham and proscribes any mixing between their progeny.

As in other People texts, Gen 19:30-38 contains strong elements of pollution and prominent female characters. The women conform to the role of the aggressive seductress that also appears in Numbers 25 and in the metaphor of the "Strange Woman" in Proverbs 1-9. Like them, Lot's daughters are sexualized, underhanded, and shameless.

## Feminizing Moab

In the ancient world, the honor of a group is vested heavily in the image of its patriarch. A patriarch's primary job is to ensure the continuation of his line, and in this Lot is absolutely remiss. A man who seemingly has no sons, he offers both of his virginal daughters to the men of Sodom who threaten to rape his guests (19:8). Though this action

has been defended by some commentators, Carol Smith is correct that the ancients would have been as horrified by this image as we are.[788] Indeed, in this culture where women who lose their virginity outside of marriage even through rape are labeled "whores" (Gen 34:31), the scandal would be greater. It is Lot's daughter who expresses the concern proper to a patriarch—to "preserve seed from our father" (וּנְחַיֶּה מֵאָבִינוּ זָרַע) (19:32). It is only in the weakest sense that Lot can be called a "father" of his children. He is so passive in their conception that he is literally unconscious, and "does now know" when his daughters, the ones who both initiate and act, "get up and lie down" (19: 33). His passivity may exonerate his complicity in the incest,[789] but the fact that he is both easily overcome by his daughters and passive in this most quintessential of masculine actions— the exercise of virility—scoffs at his manhood. This characterization is the culmination of his behavior in the rest of the Sodom episode, where scholars describe it with terms like "vacillating," "ineffectual," and "foolish."[790] Here his daughters dupe him not just once, but twice (19:33, 35). Thus when the author comments a second time that he "does not know" what the daughters are doing, the repetition points not just to his innocence, but to his unworthiness—and his unmanliness. The story thus effectively calls Moabites "sons

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[788]Carol Smith, "Challenged by the Text: Interpreting Two Stories of Incest in the Hebrew Bible," in *A Feminist Companion to Reading the Bible: Approaches, Methods and Strategies* (ed. Athalya Brenner and Carol Fontaine; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997), 32-33.

[789]Bailey, "They're Nothing but Incestuous Bastards," 131; Clare Amos, *The Book of Genesis* (Epworth Commentaries; Peterborough, Eng.: Epworth, 2004), 111; David Lieberman, *The Eternal Torah: A New Commentary Utilizing Ancient and Modern Sources in a Grammatical, Historical and Traditional Explanation of the Text* (River Vale, N. J.: Twin Pines Press, 1979), 53.

[790]e.g. Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2001), 282; von Rad, *Genesis*, 223. Lot's character appears especially lacking because he is the negative parallel to Abraham in several scenes/actions. George W. Coats describes him as a foil and characterizes him as "ineffective" ("Lot: A Foil in the Abraham Saga," in *Understanding the Word: Essays in Honor of Bernhard W. Anderson* [ed. James T. Butler et al.; JSOTSup 37; Sheffield: JSOT, 1985], 123-26). David W. Cotter contrasts Abraham's "vitality in service for others" to Lot's "vacillating buffoonery" (*Genesis* [Berit Olam; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2003], 125).

of a bitch" rather than "sons of Lot" (Deut 2:9, 19, Ps 83:9).[791]

The taint of incest works on several levels. First, it associates Moabites with other kinds of deeply repulsive sins. The biblical legal texts describe the connotations of incest by what kinds of infractions they group with illicit unions between too-close kin. Most of the incest laws appear in Leviticus 18 (vv. 6-18) and 20 (vv. 2-6, 27); one in Deut 23:1. Placed alongside laws prohibiting bestiality, "lying with a man as with a woman" and child sacrifice, the reader is meant to understand such behaviors as unnatural and deeply taboo. Idolatry, too, is included, though the prohibition of it may rely upon it being likened to the deeper revulsions already attached to incest and child sacrifice. In Leviticus 18, various forms of incest constitute the majority of behaviors called *tōʿēbôt*— "abominations"—that are ascribed to Canaanites (or "the nation that was before you," Lev 18:3, 27-28, 30). These *tōʿēbôt* are so heinous that by them both the people and the land itself are defiled (*tāmēʾ*)—to the point that the land vomits them out (Lev 18:24-5). The laws' associations with Canaanites declare them *a*typical of Israelites; that is, by pointing at practices considered abhorrent and labeling them Canaanite, the authors declare that "such things are not done in Israel."

It may seem problematic that an explicit prohibition of father-daughter incest does not appear in the biblical corpus. As Tikvah Frymer-Kensky points out, however, such a taboo is implicit in the expectation that daughters be virginal upon marriage.[792] Indeed, the fact that a daughter's virginity was publicly regarded as a reflection of her father's honor (Deut 22:19, 21, 29) gave fathers vested interest in preserving their daughters'

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[791]To insult a person by denigrating his mother, especially her sexual purity, is not a new idea. Saul insults Jonathan by calling him "You son of a perverse, rebellious woman!" saying that his loyalty to David is "to your shame, and to the shame of your mother's nakedness" (1 Sam 20:30).

[792]Frymer-Kensky, "Sex and Sexuality," *ABD* V:1145.

virginity. Ilona Rashkow makes the case that the forms of incest specified in biblical laws reflect configurations that were considered incest in Israel, but *were* permitted by other societies. That is, they are a mechanism for stressing cultural distinctiveness and holding up Israel as an example of more rigorous sexual mores.[793] Thus a law against father-daughter incest would not be necessary because it describes a taboo that is universal. What Rashkow's argument implies is that father-daughter incest was probably *more* defiling and repulsive than the forms of incest that *are* spelled out. Perhaps there is no explicit law because the existence of a prohibition would imply that Israelites even *contemplated* such things.

That incest defiles is clear. What is less obvious is that this type of defilement is thought to transmit from generation to generation. According to Deut 23:3 at least, a person of "tainted birth" may *never* be part of the Israelite assembly, "even in the tenth generation." If one understands Moabites and Ammonites as *mamzērîm* in the manner of Deut 23:3, then this taint of "essence" would apply to women as well as men, and would be passed on to their children. Thus Deut 23:4 can be interpreted as a prohibition of marriage. If *qāhāl* is understood in the less technical sense of "the whole people," as in Ezra 10:1, then the "Moabite" who may not "enter the congregation" in Deut 23:4 could be understood in a generic sense as well: no Moabite woman may be part of Israel. If the more technical sense of *qāhāl* is retained, Deut 23:4 would still amount to a ban of intermarriage by excluding from the *qāhāl* any male sons of the mixed marriage, who would be considered "Moabite" by the tained essence of their mothers.

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[793]Rashkow, "Sexuality in the Hebrew Bible: Freud's Lens," in *Psychology and the Bible: From Freud to Kohut* (vol. 1 in *Psychology and the Bible: A New Way to Read the Scriptures*; ed. J. Harold Ellens and Wayne G. Rollins; Praeger Perspectives: Psychology, Religion, and Spirituality; Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2004), 37, 41-42.

The incest argues against intermarriage on the basis of taboos and purity notions. But the characterization of Lot's daughters discourages intermarriage on another front: these women are a patriarch's nightmare. A man's honor rests on the sexual purity and display of proper "shame" by his daughters. Lot's daughters not only do not display modesty and passivity, they do the very opposite by initiating sex. A virgin should be mortified at the prospect of losing her virginity to a man other than her husband. Deuteronomy 22:20-21 prescribes death to a woman found to be without her virginity upon marriage. Dinah is said to have been made a "whore" (*zōnâ,* Gen 34:31) by this, even though her virginity is lost through rape. Yet Lot's daughters boldly arrange for their own, out-of-wedlock deflorations! Of course, things are still worse in that the sex partner is their father. That this brings on the taint of incest has already been discussed. But their action is yet more disturbing because it also overturns the hierarchies of both gender and age. A patriarch is supposed to be the authority of both sons and daughters, but especially of his daughters (e.g. Deut 22:21 prescribes stoning for a woman found not to be a virgin while "under her father's authority"). Instead of ruling over his daughters, however, here it is Lot's daughters who dominate him. Thus Lot is shamed as both a man and a father. That the women use a ruse to do so—"making him drink wine"—confirms the stereotypical suspicion that both women and foreigners are always "up to something." As the crowning sign of their depravity, the daughters are shameless about what they do. Rather than abashment at their horrific deeds, they name their children "from the father" and "son of my people" to commemorate them publicly and eternally! The implication of this portrayal is that, even if you could marry your children to Moabite women, there is no reason on earth you should want to.

Though Lot and Abraham separate in Genesis 11 for other reasons, this story affirms that the geographic separation was well and good—and that it must continue in the future. It adds to that idea of geographic separation the need to maintain distance between the peoples. Though it might have seemed that Lot's children would be candidates for cousin-marriage, the story explains why neither Isaac, nor any children of Abraham can ever marry a Moabite.

# NUMBERS 25: THE SIN OF BAᶜAL PEᶜOR

Baal Peor is so evocative of "great sin" that it has no fewer than five biblical traditions associated with it (Hos 9:10, Josh 22:17; Ps 106:28-31; Num 25:1-5; 6-18). In northern tradition it is cited as the apostasy through which Israel broke its formerly idyllic relationship with Yhwh (Hos 9:10)—i.e., it is the original "golden calf" story. In the current narrative, it immediately follows Yhwh's dramatic display of loyalty in Numbers 22-24 (see Chapter 2), portraying Israel as incurably prone to sin. The canonical story contains two distinct traditions. The first and earlier non-P strand (vv. 1-5)[794] lays out the situation of Israel responding to invitations by "the daughters of Moab" and subsequently "attach[ing] itself to Baal of Peor" (24:3), a local form of Baal.[795] The ensuing wrath is

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[794]I prefer to call this segment simply "non-P." Budd also sees a division as possible at that point (*Numbers*, 275). Most scholars consider it JE (e.g. Budd, *Numbers*, 275; B. Levine, *Numbers 21-36,* 279). I think the concern with intermarriage in vv. 1-2 dates to the Persian period or later, but B. Levine argues that the underlying tradition is an older E or T (Transjordan) tradition (*Numbers 21-36*, 291-94). Knierem and Coats attribute it to J (*Numbers*, 264).

[795]As B. Levine points out, the fact that the Israelites "yoke themselves to" Baal Peor suggests that it is a deity rather than a place. Probably the deity is named after the place Peᶜor (Num 23:28 cf. Num 25:18) or is called Beth Peᶜor (Deut 34:6) (*Numbers 21-36*, 284). So also Budd, *Numbers*, 279; Katherine

mediated by Moses and a group of *šopĕtîm* who execute the offenders. A P writer adds to this tradition (vv. 6-18) and portrays the offending women as Midianite, shows wrath taking the form of a "plague" (מַגֵּפָה), and has the conflict mediated by Phinehas, whose ritualized killing of an Israelite-Midianite couple stops the plague.

Despite the shift from Moabite to Midianite women, I will treat the whole episode as a construal of Moabites. Both groups are identified with the same problem and the reader is encouraged to conflate them into a single category. Midianite elders appear as collaborators with Balak, king of Moab in Num 22:3 and 22:7; they were probably inserted there to make their appearance in Numbers 25 seem more natural.[796] Similarly, actions attributed to Moabite women in 25:1 are blamed on Midianite ones in 31:16. The fact that Moabites are used interchangeably with "Midianites" suggests that Moabites are being used in a symbolic way rather than referring to the specific historical group—at least at the time of the P expansion.[797] Rather than invoking associations that readers might know from life encounters with Moabites, it invokes literary associations. Here, it is used as a signifier of a group that is simultaneously proximate and alien, with whom integration is desired by the people but protested by their leaders.

## Numbers 25 as People Text

Doob Sakenfeld; *Journeying with God: A Commentary on the Book of Numbers*; (ITC; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1995), 136.

[796]So B. Levine, who calls the references interpolations by P (*Numbers 21-36*, 144-45). and Noth (*Numbers,* 176), who says they reflect a secondary association of Balaam with the Midianites. Knierem and Coats imply that the references are interpolations by stating that the shift from Moabites to Midianites reflects the same "traditio-historical problem as the one reflected in the identity of the elders who called Balaam to curse Israel" (*Numbers,* 264).

[797]I would tentatively suggest that the reference to Midianites could have a Hellenistic setting, perhaps correlated with the Midianite traders in the Joseph story. That story may well be a novelistic conflation of the adventures of Joseph and Hyrcanus, two sons of the Tobiad household who won favor in the Ptolemaic court in Egypt, the second in a fierce rivalry with his seven brothers (*Ant.* XII.190-222, 228-29).

In many ways, Numbers 25 is a People text *par excellence.*[798] Despite the

ostensible setting in the wilderness, the account begins with the Israelites *settling* (ישׁב) at

Shittim. As Levine points out, the verb used here indicates more than temporary

residence.[799] In many ways, the story is a cautionary tale about the dangers of living in

such close proximity.  Martin Noth and J. M. Miller presumed that the Peˤor shrine was

respected and used by Israelite tribes in Transjordan,[800] and Levine believes that the story

capitalizes on the fact that the proximity to Moab made Transjordanians more prone to

suspicion (cf. Josh 22:10-11).[801] The nature of the encounter is decidedly un-official: that

it is "daughters of Moab" extending the invitation suggests that it is a community event, a

meeting of ordinary people rather than a formal initiative by Moab. The Israelite

participants are described as "the people" [25:1, 2 (twice)], "Israel" (25:1, 3) or "the men

who bound themselves to Baˤal of Peˤor" (25:4). The "local color" in the story also takes

it out of the realm of country-to-country diplomacy: the setting is a town—Shittim—

rather than "Moab." The deity is a local manifestation of Baˤal rather than Kemosh. The

absence of clear signals of State encounter however, are what signal for the authors the

problematic nature of this kind of encounter with the Other. Without a king and army,

Moab is not a clear enemy. Israelite vigilance relaxes. The invitation to a feast seems like

a gesture of goodwill. And that, imply the authors, is precisely what makes the situation

so dangerous: the path to apostasy is seductive rather than openly aggressive; the most

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[798]Blenkinsopp describes Numbers 25 as "the parade example" of texts describing marriage to "outsider women" ("Social Context of the 'Outsider Woman,'" 463).

[799]B. Levine, *Numbers 21-36,* 282.

[800]Noth also presumes that Peor was a "boundary shrine" used by both Israelites and Moabites, and held in high esteem in Israel at an earlier time (*A History of Pentateuchal Traditions,* 74-75). Similarly J. M. Miller, "Moab and the Moabites," 19.

[801]B. Levine sees the polemic as directed against the series of Transjordanian pretenders to the Samarian throne (Shallum, Menahem and Pekahiah) in the mid-eighth century (*Numbers 21-36*, 293-94).

dangerous threat is one that is not recognized *as* a threat. Indeed, Num 25:18 and 31:16

allege that the women's invitations are a military stratagem, their innocent appearance a

ploy from the beginning. Intentional or not, Moabite women turn out to be more

dangerous than Moabite armies, for they lead the Israelites to destroy *themselves*.[802]

The role played by "the daughters of Moab" is made more conspicuous by the

rarity of female characters in the Conquest narratives. The degree of agency they are

granted is more apparent in Hebrew, where feminine verbs and pronouns emphasize that

the Israelite men accept *women's* invitations, eat the sacrifices of *women's* gods, and bow

to what are, again, the *women's* gods (25:2). The women are made to appear brazen. We

are primed to see them as such by the description that summarizes Israelite behavior with

"the daughters of Moab" as *znh*—a verb whose base meaning is sex outside of

marriage.[803] Since monogamy is incumbent only on women, *znh* connotes the kind of

feminine promiscuity that permanently destroys family honor. Though *znh* is not

automatically "whoring," women who have sex outside of marriage draw accusations of

the same shamelessness that characterizes prostitution; the actions of the adulterous wife

are said to show her flagrant disregard for her family's honor.[804] Thus when the Moabite

women initiate invitations to men, we are primed to see their actions as provocative. In a

gender-segregated culture where women are charged to act modestly and keep away from

unrelated men, such actions are scandalous (cf. Jer 31:22; Ezek 16:34).

What most defines this text as one with People concerns is that the "sin of Baʿal

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[802]Mann, *Book of the Torah,* 136.
[803]Phyllis Bird, "'To Play the Harlot': An Inquiry into an Old Testament Metaphor," in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel* (ed. Peggy L. Day; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 76.
[804]Ibid., 77.

Peʿor"—in Numbers 25 at least—is intermarriage.[805] This is never clearly stated, and the

sexualized imagery has often led to conclusions about promiscuity or wild, orgiastic

pagan rites, especially in scholarship of a generation ago.[806] Sex is definitely involved:

Num 31:15-16 presumes this by identifying Moabite/Midianite *virgins* as the only ones

that could not have taken part in the apostasy (31:15-16). But the Moabite-Midianite

women are threatening precisely because not *only* sex is involved. Israel's sin is

described as "yoking" or "binding itself" (Nif צמד) to Baʿal of Peʿor (Num 25:3, 5). This

verb connotes commitment; Levine surmises that in a religious context, it similar to דבק:

"adherence" or "loyalty."[807] If the Israelites are committing to the local deity, their

relationships to the local women are not casual dalliances, or reprisals by the women's

kin would surely follow. But allegiance to the local deity makes perfect sense as an

accompaniment to marriage, if both treaties and marriage are understood properly. In Gen

34:9-10, Hamor makes clear that marriage between the Shechemites and Jacob's clan is

the gateway to a set of other privileges:

> "Make marriages with us; give your daughters to us, and take our daughter for
> yourselves. You shall live with us; and the land shall be open to you; live and
> trade in it, and get property in it."

Marriage is part of a "package" that includes permission to settle in and buy land and to

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[805]So also B. Levine (*Numbers 21-36*, 295), Budd *(Numbers,* 280, 282), though he thinks intermarriage is a secondary issue, Olson (*Numbers*, 154), and Jacob Milgrom (*Numbers: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation* [JPS Torah Commentary; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1990], 480).

[806]John Sturdy is a typical example. He suggests that "'yoked themselves to' may well imply taking part in sexual rites of fertility, seen as pleasing to the god concerned; and this would be why it is so objectionable to the Israelites, for whom the association of fertility rites with the deity was one of the great faults of Canaanite religion" (*Numbers* [CBC; Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1976], 184). Mann similarly muses that the men "join in some kind of sexual ritual" (*Book of the Torah*, 139). Milgrom discusses but rejects most of the more fanciful interpretations (*Numbers,* 479-80).

Those who describe literal sex usually fail to examine either the ideological coloring given by the text (e.g. Ackerman translates "the people began to commit whoredom" ["Numbers," 88]).

[807]B. Levine, *Numbers 21-36,* 284.

set up a business.

Allegiance to a deity can play a similar role when forming a treaty. Swearing loyalty to the local god would function as a show of good faith to the deity by whom oaths are sworn and contracts sealed. As Alice Keefe points out, some notions of treaty understand the oaths sworn to the deity—or to a common set of principles—functioning primarily to bind the *group* together, rather than to secure allegiance to the deity *per se* (viz. Deuteronomy 24).[808] Keefe contends that these kinds of treaties would have been entered into and periodically affirmed through the kinds of obligatory feasts we see in 1 Sam 20:6, 29.[809] I would suggest that the "sacrifices of their gods" which the men "consumed" and the "bowing" in Num 25:2 imply some formal binding of the men to their adopted families in a similar manner.[810]

We see more evidence of marriage as the passage's underlying issue in the way that P elaborates the original story. There the sin is embodied by a couple: a Midianite woman identified in 25:15, 18 as a Midianite princess named Cozbi is paired with a Simeonite chieftain named Zimri (25:14). No sooner does Moses give orders to execute and impale every man who had attached himself to Baʿal of Peʿor (25:5), than *hinnê*— precisely *then*—"an Israelite man came and brought near to his brothers a Midianitess: in the sight of Moses, and in the sights of the whole assembly of Israelites, for they were weeping at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting" (25:6). This must be a married couple, for a princess is not permitted to walk alone with a strange man into his people's

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[808]Keefe, *Woman's Body and the Social Body*, 109.

[809]Ibid., 116. Keefe, following Elizabeth Bloch-Smith, thinks that veneration of shared ancestors would have played a central role, which could account for the reference to "sacrifices for the dead" in the Ps 106:28 version of the event. See Bloch-Smith, *Israelite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead* (JSOTSup 123; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 124.

[810]Budd likewise concludes that some formal recognition of the cult at Peʿor is implied (*Numbers,* 279).

encampment. Still less would she be presented to his family (25:6) and enter "the tent" (25:8) with him unless she were his wife. That the man brings the woman to his "brothers" signals the kin group's approval of the union;[811] that the couple parades before Moses and the whole assembly displays the relationship publicly. In the author's view, it is an act of flagrant rebellion, like the worship of Baʿal of Peʿor, for Zimri's fellow Israelites are still pleading that God spare the community after having unleashed wrath for just such an offense as this. Despite these circumstances, Zimri blithely approaches the very Tent of Meeting—epicenter of Yhwh's presence in the camp—to boast of it![812]

That Phinehas' killing of Zimri and Cozbi halts the "plague" of Yhwh's wrath makes clear that they are emblematic of Israel's sin.[813] The manner in which he punishes them further affirms that the sin in question is intermarriage. Phinehas spears through both the man and woman with a single thrust of his spear (25:8). Like many traditional commentators, I conclude that the couple is killed in the act of intercourse,[814] but I further suggest that they are killed in the act of consummating their marriage. The text states that Phinehas "went into the *qubbâ* after the Israelite man." The meaning of the hapax *qubbâ* is uncertain, but most agree that it is some kind of tent, and because the location is noted, its function would seem to have something to do with the crime.[815] That the couple are

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[811]Zlotnick, *Dinah's Daughters*, 50; E. Davies, *Numbers,* 288. Blenkinsopp counts this detail as proof that what is described is marriage and not a liaison with a prostitute, "cultic or otherwise" ("Social Context of the 'Outsider Woman,'" 463).

[812]So also Milgrom, *Numbers,* 478.

[813]Elaborated by Zlotnick, who notes that the symbolism of her death "has often been observed" (*Dinah's Daughters,* 52).

[814]Thus Bab. Tal. (*Sanh.* 82b) and Rashi (see Michael Carasik, ed., trans., and annot., *The Commentators' Bible: The JPS Miqra'ot Gedolot, Numbers* [Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2011], 192) interpret ʾel qŏbātāh as genitals. So also Milgrom, *Numbers*, 211; Noth, *Numbers,* 198.

[815]The meaning is deduced from the versions and from cognates. LXX and Peshitta render "the chamber," while Targums translate "tent." Arabic *al-qubbat* means domed tent, and it is similarly understood in rabbinic Hebrew (Milgrom, who cites *Taʿan.* 8b BB 25b [*Numbers,* 324]). Julius Morgenstern proposed that it was a Bedouin-type tent shrine, attested by use of pre-Islamic Arab tribes

speared together insinuates intercourse, so marriage is a logical deduction. But more than this, Phinehas' spear impales them *'el qŏbātāh* (אֶל־קֻבָתָהּ). Zlotnick correctly notes that this should be translated "in her womb," not "in her belly" (*NRSV, NJPS*)[816], for the site symbolizes the objection that mixed marriages produce *children* of impurity.[817] That the word for womb/belly is so rare (attested only here and in Deut 18:3) is probably due to it being chosen to mimic the sound of *qubbâ,*[818] and to signal the relationship between them. So Phinehas' spearing of the couple—together, through her womb, in the marriage tent[819]—symbolically punishes the sin itself, just as Ehud's dagger punctures the belly that symbolizes Eglon's greed. Phinehas' action is also a kind of rape: he "goes in" to a marriage tent, he penetrates a woman's womb with phallic object, and so supplants the groom. But this is not a sexual exploit; it is a demonstration of total domination, a reversal of the helplessness the leaders feel when any given Israelite can bring the whole community down by introducing a foreign wife into the sacred precincts. To those like

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("The Ark, the Ephod, and 'Tent of Meeting,'" *HUCA* 17 (1942/43): 153-265). A similar idea is proposed by Stefan C. Reif, "What Enraged Phineas?: A Study of Numbers 25.8," *JBL* 90 (1971) 200-206) and these interpretations are adopted by Levine (*Numbers 21-36,* 287-88) and Budd (*Numbers*, 280). B. Levine, however, brooks with the fact that such a tent would not be large enough for the couple to enter, and so proposes that *'el* here must mean "to" rather than "into." But this explanation fails to account for the fact that Zimri and Cozbi are speared *simultaneously.* It also ignores the other clues that imply the couple's marriage—a context in which use of *bw'* + *'el* is especially significant, and *pointedly* refers to "going *in*" to the tent/chamber.

[816]As in Budd, *Numbers*, 280; B. Levine, *Numbers 21-36*, 287.

[817]Zlotnick, *Dinah's Daughters,* 52.

[818]That the author does not use the specific word for womb (רֶחֶם) is not troubling given that BH regularly uses the more general terms for "middle, innards" to describe the womb. These terms have the added benefit of referring to both male and female reproductive parts. The most common term besides *rehem* is בֶּטֶן, which appears in every genre: tales [Genesis (4x), Judges (3x)]; law (Deuteronomy 5x) prophecy [Isaiah (7x), Jer 1:5, Hosea (3x), Mic 6:7]; Psalms (7x), and Wisdom literature [Prov 31:2, Job (8x), Ecclesiastes (2x)]. The word קֶרֶב is used in Gen 25:22*,* and perhaps Isa 4:4; מֵעֶה in Gen 25:23, Ruth 1:11, Ps 71:6, and Isa 49:1. Ancient interpreters presumed the symbolic importance of the site pierced, as the rabbis and Vulgate render "genitals" (*Sifre* Num, 131; Bab. Tal., *Sanh* 87b, Vg. *in locis genitalibus*) and several of the versions translate with the equivalent of "womb" (מעהא, in Targum Onqelos, μήτρας in LXX, *krsh* in Peshitta. References from Reif, "What Enraged Phinehas?," 202). Milgrom allows the translation "womb" as one possibility (though he prefers another), noting that it would represent a 'measure for measure' punishment" (*Numbers,* 213).

[819]Milgrom (*Numbers,* 213) and Noth (*Numbers,* 198) similarly conclude that the *qubbâ* is a "marriage canopy."

Zimri who thumb their noses at the threat of wrath, it sends the message that intermarriage is an act of rebellion against God and will not be tolerated.

## Gendering Cultural Domination and the Response

The initiative of the foreign women in this story is so threatening that it is construed as aggression. Different redactional layers result in a narrative in which their aggression intensifies. It is already shocking when 25:2 describes the women propositioning Israelite men, but in 25:18 they are further blamed for "assail[ing] you by the trickery they practiced against you" (*NJPS*). By 31:16, they have "*made* the Israelites act treacherously against Yhwh." As Gail C. Streete puts it, these women

> act like men, making sexual conquests and using sex to extend their power to dominate. The men become 'women,' passive objects who are used and often destroyed by the women's sexual aggression. Foreign women, as the text constantly demonstrates, are the source of a lethal social disease; avoid them as you would the plagues that they cause (Num 25:1-9).[820]

What Streete picks up is that the text uses the threat of female domination to shame the male audience away from the "sin" with which they are being associated. It shames them, too, for colluding in their own domination. The men in the story are shown accepting invitations to the feast without protest. They not only indulge their appetites by "eating" the sacrifices, they also submit their wills by "attaching themselves" to another god. That Israel's actions with Moab are described as *znh* compares them to wayward *women*, who, unlike men, are required to be monogamous.[821] This is paradoxical, of course, for at the same time, Israel is sexually lured *by* women.[822] But portraying Israel as a promiscuous woman has as many benefits as portraying Moab as an aggressive one,

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[820]Streete, *The Strange Woman,* 57.
[821]FIRST NAME Erlandsson, "זָנָה," *TDOT* 4:100.
[822]Streete, *The Strange Woman,* 51.

and the metaphorical universe, like a dreamscape, does not demand absolute coherence.[823] In calling the actions of Israel *znh,* it emasculates Israel and indicts it for a faithlessness assigned to the "loose woman." And it provides good reason to require strong oversight over the community and strict separation from its exposure to the temptations of other gods and peoples.

Within the story, each source uses the fabled Baʿal Peʿor apostasy as a proving ground for its own model of leadership.[824] Moses and his *šōpĕtîm* punish the guilty. But despite his actions, P contends that a plague ravages the camp. Only through Phinehas' action—a single, but effective symbolic sacrifice—is there atonement (כפר) for the collective sin. Only then does the plague cease. The P author implies that the threat cannot be checked by punishing the guilty. The threat is a diffuse miasma that kills indiscriminately. Once God's wrath is awakened, it "rains on the just and the unjust." P thus argues that such wrath must, on the one hand, be prevented, and, when awakened, be contained by *priestly* intervention—the ability to *kpr* for the sin in a way that meets divine approval.

But though the P and non-P authors disagree about how the problem should be addressed, they compete in the same text because *both* agree that intermarriage is a sin that demands strong and strict leadership. The people pictured in the episode are utterly without moral compass when left to themselves. Perhaps P overrides the Mosaic solution less because of priestly rivalries than because a solution like Moses'—that of executing

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[823]Howard Eilberg-Schwartz explains the paradox as an attempt to resolve the contradiction between Israelite males' erotically-charged relationship with a male god with their aversion to homoeroticism. Unable to accept either a same-sex erotic relationship or a feminine god, they feminize the Israelite social body (Eilberg-Schwartz, *God's Phallus and Other Problems for Men and Monotheism* [Boston: Beacon Press, 1994], 84).
[824]Budd, *Numbers,* 282; Ackerman, "Numbers," 88.

every offender—is simply impracticable in the later context. Whatever its motivation, it argues that without priestly intervention, the community—especially if it sins through intermarriage again—would be annihilated by the wrath of Yhwh.

## Women as Boundary Markers

There is no doubt that women are prominent symbols and that the text itself draws attention to their sexuality. But it is not mere sex. In fact, portraying the women as shameless and refusing to acknowledge their unions as marriages is a deliberate snub: it *reduces* the relationships to sex. On the other hand, sexuality is invoked because the authors are drawing an analogy between sexual attraction and the allure of marriage to outsiders.

The setting of this story is one posing the temptations of assimilation: marriage and fealty to the local god provide the tools one needs to "settle" (ישב) in an area, as the Israelites are said to be doing at the story's outset (25:1). In Rubin's terms, women provide the "conduit of relationship" between the group seeking integration and the one offering it. They are therefore used to symbolize the relationships to which they provide access, the obligations included in those relationships (allegiance to the local gods), and the evaluative judgment attached to both (shameless behavior). But there is nothing inherent in foreign women themselves that leads to apostasy, as becomes clear in Numbers 31. In that text, Israel avenges Midian for its supposed entrapment of Israel. There Moses orders his soldiers to "spare for yourselves" the Midianite virgins (31:18). There can be no mistaking the implication: the women with whom marriage had incited divine wrath are suddenly cleared for marriage to Israelites, by no less an authority than Moses! By being severed from their families, the women are neutralized as threats. They

can neither entice with the promise of cultural belonging, nor threaten with the obligations their families demand in exchange for those privileges. Women themselves never could threaten these things—they only symbolized them.

## Assimilation as Apostasy

Women are also symbols of apostasy, but not, as some commentators have argued, because a woman imparts her religion to her husband.[825] Rather, his marriage toward her symbolizes the orientation of his loyalties toward her group—which are little distinguished from the loyalties toward its deity. In effect, since Yhwh is the patron of Israel, blows to Israel's public status and honor *are* blows to Yhwh's status and honor. The defection of Israelites to other groups diminishes Yhwh's earthly representation. When Israel loses land, status, or wealth, the acknowledgement of Yhwh by others as a powerful god also diminishes. Conversely, shifting one's weight to another group increases the status of that group, and its patron god, at Israel's and Yhwh's expense. Such a shift of resources expresses allegiance far more strongly than any confession of faith. Thus it is understandable that assimilation into or alliance with an outside group are treated as tantamount to apostasy. That women are used to symbolize the betrayal of Yhwh owes partly to their role as the tokens of exchange between men—the vehicles through which group allegiances shift.

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[825]In fact, many of the commentators on Numbers *presume* that religious conversion follows naturally from sexual intercourse, even in the absence of marriage! Sakenfeld states, "Quite possibly engaging in ordinary sexual activity with foreign women led the Israelite men to participate in non-Israelite worship" (*Journeying with God*, 136). Ashley states that "after sexual relationships had led to participation in the pagan sacrifical feasts, the next step was a formal association with a particular god." Ashley does not posit that the unions are marriages, and in fact translates 25:1 to say that "The Israelites began to commit fornication" (*Book of Numbers,* 515-16) Yet he avers that "Once the sexual union was consummated, it was natural for interests to be shared, and one of these interests was faith" (Ibid.*,* 516-17). Does Ashley really think that it would be "natural" for men to assume the religion of the prostitutes they had hired?

## Letting the Wrong One In: The Foreign Wife as Invader

The non-P and P sources imply two different contexts in which intermarriage is being contemplated. The situation in vv. 1-5 sees intermarriage posing the threat of defection and thus, diminishment of the group, its resources, and its hope for cultural survival. In the P account, the problem arises when a foreign woman is brought *into* the Israelite camp. Now the fear is not a defection of Israelites but an invasion of outsiders. This portrays the foreigner as a different kind of problem. She now functions as a contaminant, threatening Israelite's notions of purity—especially priestly ones.[826] The marriage also creates conflicts of interest. In allying himself with a Midianite chieftain, Zimri gains a powerful ally outside the community, and thereby potentially compromises his loyalty to Israel, as well as making himself a competitor to its other leaders. And since the privileges that go with marriage demand reciprocation, he is, at the same time, extending Israelite privileges to Midian. The marriage of a royal Midianite daughter into Israel gives Midian an "in." This second set of concerns appears in Ezra 9 as well.[827]

Whether the threat of intermarriage lies in assimilation or admission of outsiders, there is tension between what families would choose to maximize their own interests and what the national leaders see as necessary for the whole group. In arguing that God

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[826]Pollution is certainly the reason for prohibiting intermarriage with the people of the lands in Ezra 9 (viz. Fishbane: who sees the reference to "holy seed" as an allusion to Deut 7:6's statement that "you are a people holy to Yhwh your god" and so incompatible with the Canaanitish "abominations" of the peoples of the lands (Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation,* 115).

[827]There are strong parallels between the issues here and Ezra-Nehemiah. Nehemiah is clearly frustrated by the access that Tobiah and Sanballat gain to Jerusalem politics through marriage (Neh 6:17-19), but given the power that they exert in Jerusalem politics, it likely that Tobiah and Sanballat had power and status of their own, and that the *gôlâ* families were the greater beneficiaries of the arrangements. The situation in the P text resonates with the accusation in Ezra 9:2 that, through marriage, the *gôlâ* have mixed "the holy seed" among the peoples of the lands. This suggests that Ezra's writers viewed the threat as *invasion* of the community and dissipation of its sacred prerogatives to outsiders. It may well be, as Yee argues, that the *gôlâ* used intermarriage to gain access to land or power when they were first in the land, and later, when imperial backing had strengthened their political position, sought to protect it by prohibiting outsiders from marrying in (*Poor Banished Children of Eve,* 144).

demands endogamy, the writers are essentially insisting that the wishes and needs of

individual families must submit to the priorities of the nation (as defined by those leaders,

of course).[828] Yet the desire to do otherwise is strong. Herein lies the power of the foreign

woman as a symbol of erotic allure: she is both the means through which upward

mobility is attained, and the symbol of the powerful temptation to do so.[829]

## Numbers 25: Conclusion

Numbers 25 sets up the tropes of Moabites as seducers and Israelites as prone to

seduction. It envisions the Israelite social body as a woman who has failed in her primary

obligation of obedience to her lord and who is as untrustworthy as a wayward woman.

According to this story, no amount of contact with foreigners is safe. Even gestures of

hospitality hide deadly traps.  There can be no winning of these kinds of "battles."

Conceived as a promiscuous woman, Israel's laity is both too weak and too undiscerning

to realize this. The story thus calls for her strict isolation, and for strong leaders to

enforce it. Claiming to have her well-being and even her survival at heart, they severely

punish any instance of connection with foreigners. The writers claim that the Israelite

leadership alone possesses the wisdom to recognize the dangers of foreign influence as

the people do not; that they alone are single-minded in their commitment to Yhwh, while

the people are fickle and easily distracted. Thus Israelite judges and priests appear as the

heroes not because they do battle against foreign armies, but because they are said to

safeguard the purity of the Israelite body, purging from Israel any who would

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[828]Zlotnick points out the competition between the prerogative of fathers to choose marriages in the interests of their families and the demands of national leaders like Ezra, who argue that choice of marriage partners is regimented by the needs of the larger group, and so becomes a litmus test of patriotism (*Dinah's Daughters,* 57, 68-75).
[829]So similarly Streete of the Strange Woman in Proverbs (*The Strange Woman*, 51, 56-57).

compromise it.

# MOAB AS PEOPLE (PART 1): CONCLUSIONS

Setting aside for a moment the question of whom Moab really signifies, we can see in this exploration that *what* it signifies shifts qualitatively when the arena of encounter is marriage rather than war and when the dominant metaphor is female rather than male. Moab here cannot be conquered through frontal assault, and conquest is not even a goal. Women are apt symbols for the Other not only because of the role that marriage played in politics, but also because women symbolize for the authors the nature of the enemy and of the threat. The enemy is cunning rather than openly aggressive— indeed, in Numbers 25, dominance begins with hospitality. Rather than Moab damaging Israel with weapons, it leads Israelites to commit the sins *themselves* (Neh 13:26, Numbers 25). This places them in a different kind of danger than battle. Destruction never comes from the weapons of the Moabite women directly, but from what happens— and what God does—as a result of their presence. But danger it is. Nehemiah argues that Moabite women lead their husbands into "great evil," causing them to "break faith with our God" (Neh 13:27). He observes that half of the children of mixed marriages had already lost "Judean" as a language. At this pace it would not be long before Judah were swallowed by the culture of these foreign women. Ezra argues that marriage with foreigners was the very sin that had incited Yhwh's wrath and led to the exile in the first place. For Judah to repeat the offense after having been given a second chance would surely finish off the tenuous remnant that remained. Numbers 25 too, describes divine wrath as the response that marriage to Moabites had evoked, and shows the slim margin

by which Israel escaped its destruction at that time.

Implied in Gen 19 and Ezra's construal of Deut 23:4-7 is the idea that Moabites are inherently polluted—a species of *mamzēr*. The notion of Moabites as polluted are absent from the State texts, though perhaps the strange ending of 2 Kings 3 is an exception. Pollution, together with the fact that the "opponent" is a woman, reinforces the notion that success consists of absolute avoidance—not conquest. Ezra 9 probably does not invent the idea that the "peoples of the lands" were polluted; this seems to date back at least to the writing of Haggai or Ezekiel. But Ezra uses the idea of pollution to argue that this pollution requires treating the *amê hāʾărṣot* according to the laws prescribed for Canaanites and Moabites. Thus the pollution becomes an incurable variety, and the specific implications demand permanent exclusion from the assembly and the prohibition of marriage. The characterization of the pollution as "like the abominations…of the Moabite" implies that it is like incest, and therefore transmissible to every successive generation.

Ascribing the pollution to foreign *women* reinforces the intrinsic or permanent nature of it: there is no male parallel for the defilement of a woman that results from rape or adultery (Gen 34:5, 13, 27; Num 5:20, 27, 28, 29). Whereas a man's sexual defilement is akin to a temporary illness, a woman's is analogous to her loss of virginity (see Genesis 34, also Deut 24:4). Thus Ezra's description compounds negative associations from several sources: the wives of the "daughters of the peoples of the lands" are defiled by the "abominations," the illicit offerings of the *ʿamê hāʾărṣot*, by a likeness to Canaanite and Moabite abominations that transmit across generations, and by simply being women. Thus even a man who has "holy seed" cannot by marriage assimilate such

a woman or render her clean. *Nothing* can render her clean. This means that she, a woman who remains defiled, has been brought near to—"intermingled with"—the holy seed. The holy and the defiled are fundamentally incompatible, and not in the manner of oil and water, but of saltpeter and sulfur, or ammonia and bleach. They are a combination that is explosive or toxic; one that may awaken the volatile wrath of god.

The framing of foreigners as polluted makes a case for their expulsion, but it also works to shape and affirm Israel's image of itself as a "holy nation." The Ammonites and Moabites can be snickered at in Genesis 19 because such a blatant form of incest declares plainly, "Whatever sins we might have committed, we are not like *them.*" The "abominations" in Leviticus 18 to which Ezra alludes are a list of laws that describe the behavior of *other* nations—what was done in Egypt, or by the Canaanites (19:3), and by which "the nations I am casting out before you defiled themselves" (19:24). They define Israelite conduct by contrast: Israelites *do not* do things as they are done by Canaanites, nor as Ezra applies the idea, as they are done by "the peoples of the lands." And just as the contrast with these other peoples defines proper Israelite conduct, their defilement is what marks Israel's status as holy. Thus Israel's holiness is predicated on maintaining distinction between itself and other nations, on holding a higher standard of morality and purity than those of "the nations." And the group from whom it is most critical to maintain distance is that of "the nations who came before you."

The consequences for maintaining distinctiveness are not trivial. In Leviticus 19, the "abominations" of the Canaanites justify their expulsion from the land, and Israel is threatened with similar consequences if they behave similarly. Ezra turns Deut 23:7 into a commandment with the same consequence: "Never seek their well-being or their

welfare" becomes the requirement to "enjoy the good of the land and bequeath it to your children." Labeling the peoples of the lands as polluted thus accomplishes several things at once. 1) It warns of the potentially lethal wrath that would follow from mixture between them and "the holy seed;" 2) it denigrates the other group and makes marriage undesirable as well as illegal, and 3) it affirms the holiness of the in-group, recalling it to its vocation of *behaving* as a holy people (esp. Deut 7:6, but also e.g. Ex 19:6; Lev 19:2, 20:7; Num 15:40; Deut 26:19, 28:9). Furthermore, by boiling down all the commandments into the single requirement to avoid foreign marriages, Ezra makes holiness *attainable*. He makes no mention of the extensive requirements elsewhere—the demands in Leviticus 19, for example, of proper sacrifices, care for the poor (vv. 9-10), and humane treatment of the deaf and blind. Holiness now becomes a requirement whose cost is relatively trivial, and for which rewards are great: "you will enjoy the good of the land." So though a family might sacrifice individually in foregoing advantageous marriages with Samarians or Ammonites, it can be comforted that in marrying within the community it both attains greater holiness and secures the divine conferral of the land.

Perhaps this notion of being a holy people was especially important to the *gôlâ* because Jerusalem's one real claim to power was its temple. Even Samarians acknowledged its importance and wished to worship there. Were it not so, they would not have married their own children into the power circles associated with it. Controlling the temple meant also being able to dictate the status of various groups, imparting a caste system with the stamp of divine will. It meant controlling who would serve in offices that liaised with Persian authority. It was, in other words, the trump card of the Jerusalem leadership. And surely a *rhetoric* about their superior fitness to possess and control this

privilege would not have been sufficient. In order for others to recognize *gôlâ* status, they

would have needed to demonstrate a more rigorous level of purity. In Ezra and

Nehemiah, the attention to purity focused on purity of lineage, touted in practical terms

by a purge, rhetorical if not also actual, of those defined as foreigners (Neh 9:2, 13:1-3,

13:23-28, Ezra 9-10).

Were these ideologies of purity constructed cynically, a mere pretext to exclude

political enemies and maintain the privileges of certain families? This was most likely the

desired outcome, but it is probably simplistic to imagine that they were consciously only

that. While wars can usually be traced to struggles over resources and power, soldiers and

constituencies need better reasons to fight and sacrifice; publicly at least, the state must

formulate loftier rationales for such costly policies. And even though there are surely

some who formulate propaganda knowing it is sheer manipulation, most who both speak

and fight for a cause believe earnestly in its ideals. Most people want to believe that they

are good people, and are on the side of right. So even though Nehemiah may well have

banned intermarriage because of the back-door access that it gave his opponents, he

probably believed that he was justified in such measures because *he* was more

trustworthy to lead Jerusalem, and *he* had the *gôlâ's* interest truly at heart. His hegemony

was a win for "the good," and whatever means made it possible for the good to triumph

were not simply cynical machinations, they were moral necessities.

The most significant finding of this survey was the suggestion that Moabiteness

was historically reconfigured to apply to the "peoples of the lands," and perhaps in the

latter part of the Persian period, to the Samarians especially. The texts in this chapter

seem to be linked not just by common themes, but by a shared gene: the law of Deut

23:4-7. This finding took me by surprise. Though I had seen that the Deuteronomy 23 law was being used in Neh 13:1-3 and Ezra 9, I had not imagined that it could also lie behind Genesis 19 (and probably other late texts as well). Nor did I originally comprehend the connotations the law bore of impurity via the *mamzēr* interpretation and the way that this would link together the Deuteronomic and Levitical corpora. Because the pattern of portrayal owes to a shared variable, it is specific to Moab, so perhaps this pattern of feminized portrayal applies to no other foreign group. But what the Moab case does provide is a description of the *process* whereby a literary symbol is applied to a real-world group.

The notion that biblical writers refer to groups in their own settings by recycling biblical characters and stories should come as no surprise. The clearest examples come from the Hellenistic period, when tales about traditional kingdoms are most obviously referring to situations in their own contexts (Babylon and Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel, Persia in Esther, the *Kittim* in Pesher Habakkuk). This kind of identity transfer is also evident in the *gôlâ's* identification of themselves with the Exodus and Conquest generations, which dates back to the time of Second Isaiah. In that case, however, the author is reconstruing his own group, not relabeling others. The work here raises the question, "How far back does this kind of relabeling go in the interpretation of biblical traditions, and how much is reflected in the current text we have?"

The more we see the interaction between "Moab" and "Israel" in the People texts, the more appropriate it seems that Moab should have become a symbol for the close neighbor-rivals of the *gôlâ*. The closeness between the groups make the rivalry that much more bitter. And perhaps it is precisely because the boundary between the *gôlâ* and the

"peoples of the lands" is so ambiguous that they must draw such a stark distinction—that they must insist that the two are fundamentally incompatible, that no amount of ethnic blending could turn one into the other. They must insist—because there is no evidence of this truth based on appearances alone.

# CHAPTER 4
# MOAB AS PEOPLE, PART 2:
# BUILDING UP THE HOUSE OF
# ISRAEL

In Chronicles and Ruth, Israelites encounter Moabites as People, but find them unthreatening. In some cases, the encounters are reported simply as facts of history; in others, Moabites are presented as assets—even heroes—who "build up the house of Israel." As in chapter 3, the Moabites encountered are often women married to Israelites, but now, especially in the book of Ruth, the emphasis is on female fertility rather than sin and pollution.

There is not, as previous generations of scholars contended, a simple polarity between the "narrow exclusivism" of Ezra-Nehemiah and the "broad universalism" of Ruth or Chronicles. Foreigners here are positive when they are coopted and their foreignness disavowed. But the texts here do challenge, or at least nuance, the views of the texts described in chapter 3, and suggest both the presence of alternative views of foreigners in post-exilic times, and a process of composition that allows both sets of voices to be heard. Even if the reader disagrees that Ruth is a late book, she will find that the coexistence of these texts in the final form of the canon nevertheless creates a "virtual dialogue" between perspectives.

## CHRONICLES

Chronicles, like the Samuel-Kings saga it retells, mostly assumes the genre of

royal history (theologically interpreted, of course). It therefore frequently treats foreign-

Israelite interactions like a State text. This is true of 2 Chronicles 20 (mentioned in

Chapter 2), which is a parade example of a holy war in which Moab and Judah both

appear as states, waging war and taking booty, the zero-sum outcome issuing a clear

verdict about Judah's status. Yet in many respects, Chronicles reflects the circumstances

of its post-state compositional context, and the settings of royal courts serve only as

scaffolding for "People" concerns. Thus, though Chronicles has a fairly typical notion of

foreign *states* as enemies of Judah, it reveals a different attitude toward *individual*

foreigners who become part of Judah. This attitude bears striking similarity to the

assumptions underlying Ruth and contrasts strongly with the views of Ezra and

Nehemiah. In fact, Japhet has even argued that Chronicles represents a "vigorous

antithesis" to Ezra-Nehemiah. Thanks in large part to Japhet's work,[830] most scholars no

longer see Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah as a unity, and in fact recognize the

divergences in terminology and ideology that argue that the same person or persons could

not have authored—or even put the final touches on—both.[831]

One of the most prominent contrasts lies in their respective definitions of

"Israel."[832] Though Chronicles focuses on Judah and Jerusalem as Israel's rightful heirs,

it allows that both Northern Israelites and foreigners can be part of Israel. Foreign kings,

[830]While she published the idea as early as 1968 (Japhet, "The Supposed Common Authorship of Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah Investigated Anew," *VT 18* [1968]: 330-71) it appears in updated form in "The Relationship between Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah," in *Congress Volume: Leuven, 1989* (ed. John A. Emerton; VTSup 43; Leiden: Brill, 1991), 298-313, esp. 312-13. Gary N. Knoppers also gives a great deal of credit to the work of H. G. M. Williamson, and especially to his thorough examination of the question in *Israel in the Book of Chronicles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 5-70.

[831]Knoppers describes this as the majority view in the field and his own view as well (*I Chronicles 1-9: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* [AB 12; New York: Doubleday, 2003], 72-73). A few, however, remain unconvinced (e.g. Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah,* 47-54; Shaver, *Torah and the Chronicler's History Work*, 41-70).

[832]Japhet, "People and Land in the Restoration Period," in *Das Land Israel in biblischer Zeit* (ed. G. Strecker; GTA 25; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983), 103-25; Knoppers, *1 Chronicles 1-9,* 85; Williamson, *Israel in the Book of Chronicles,* 97-140.

though not assimilated to Israel, recognize the greatness of Yhwh and of Davidic kings,

and are frequently, in Ehud ben Zvi's words, "Israelitized."[833] Chronicles' view of

intermarriage is likewise a function of this vision:

> If in Ezra (9:10-15) the people's fragile existence in the land is threatened by the
> phenomenon of intermarriage, in Chronicles the phenomenon of intermarriage is
> one means by which Judah expands and develops within the land.[834]

This inclusiveness should not however, be mistaken for equality. As Gary N. Knoppers

points out, only Judah, Levi and Benjamin play key roles in achieving Israel's main

goals. It is Judah that carries forth the legacy of "Israel" and the Jerusalem Temple alone

that is divinely sanctioned. Any understanding of Chronicles as "inclusive" must take

these caveats strongly into consideration.

The date of Chronicles is undoubtedly post-exilic (albeit preserving some older

texts no longer found in the MT),[835] but it is not clear whether it is earlier or later than the

"Moabite" portions of Nehemiah and Ezra. Japhet's argument presumes that Chronicles

would be later, but as Fried notes, a positive attitude toward foreigners could just as

easily suggest a date prior to Nehemiah. Highly universalistic expressions of Israel and

the temple can be found in late-sixth or early-fifth century texts like Hag 2:7, Zech 2:14-

15, 8:20-23, and Isa 45:14.[836] Such an early time is eliminated for Chronicles on other

bases, however. David Carr sees "the very late Persian period" as the earliest possible

date on the basis of Persian loan words, including a mention of Persian coinage (1 Chr

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[833]Ehud Ben Zvi, *History, Literature and Theology in the Book of Chronicles* (Bible World; London: Equinox, 2006), 280, 282.

[834]Knoppers, *I Chronicles 1-9,* 85.

[835]Carr, *Formation of the Hebrew Bible,* 75; Hugh Williamson, "The Death of Josiah and the Continuing Development of the Deuteronomistic History," *VT* 26 (1982): 251-61 and "Reliving the Death of Josiah: A Reply to C. T. Begg," *VT* 37 (1987): 9-15.

[836]Fried, "From Xeno-Philia to -Phobia," 184-85. The set of "early-Persian" texts also probably includes Trito-Isaiah, since Isa 60:10 implies that the walls of Jerusalem had not yet been built (Ibid., 187-88).

29:7),[837] and thinks that the first one and a half centures of the Hellenistic period is a more likely setting.[838] He specifically argues that 2 Chr 36:22-23 relies upon Ezra 1:1-3a and thus must post-date, or at most be contemporaneous with the narrative of rebuilding in Ezra, which he places in the very late Persian period. Some scholars also see 1 Chr 9:2-17 as a borrowing from Neh 11:3-19,[839] but variants between these parallels makes dependency far from certain.[840] Knoppers proposes a date no earlier than the late fifth and no later than the mid-third century, and inclines toward a date in the latter part of that range (late fourth to mid-third centuries).[841] All told, the evidence inclines toward seeing Chronicles as later than Ezra-Nehemiah, but it is not definitive. As Knoppers points out, Chronicles' attitude toward foreigners does not necessarily express a commitment to inclusivity per se. Rather, inclusivity may be the the byproduct of the authors' overarching agenda to promote a restored Israel which, because it is modeled on the United Monarchy, must necessarily include non-Judahites.[842] Nevertheless, for the author to argue that foreigners strengthen rather than weaken Israel points to a conceptual paradigm quite different from that of Ezra 9. Even if foreigners are relegated to lower status than Judahites, they are not fundamentally different in kind, nor incompatible by nature.

## Intermarriage in Chronicles: 1 Chr 4:22; 8:8, 2 Chr 24:26

Chronicles' more liberal attitude toward foreigners is demonstrated in part by its

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[837]Darius I issued the daric in 515 B.C.E.—a fact that has sometimes been used to argue for an earlier date, but Knoppers cautions that it would not have been widely disseminated in Palestine till a good bit after this (Knoppers, *I Chronicles 1-9,* 115).

[838]Carr, *Formation of the Hebrew Bible,* 196.

[839]Japhet, *I & II Chronicles*, 18; Joel Weinberg, *Der Chronist in seiner Mitwelt* (BZAW 239; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1996), 281-84.

[840]Knoppers, *1 Chronicles 1-9,* 116.

[841]Ibid., 116.

[842]Ibid., 84-85.

lack of judgment on mixed marriages. The extensive genealogies that open Chronicles,

and which define the constituency of Israel, mention relations to Moabites in the lineages

of both Judah (1 Chr 4:22) and Benjamin (1 Chr 8:8). The precise meaning of 1 Chr 4:22

is difficult, describing a family of Judah who בָּעֲלוּ לְמוֹאָב וְיָשֻׁבִי לָחֶם. Scholars are

evenly divided over whether these families "ruled over"[843] or "married into"[844] Moab.

There is too little information to make a firm determination, but both meanings imply a

close relationship with Moab and make it a defining feature of the Judahite clan's

identity. The vocalization of the second half of the text implies a second place name,

Yashubi Lehem, in addition to Moab. The MT here should probably be emended to read

that the family either "returned to" (וְיָשֻׁבוּ) or "resided in" (וְיֵשְׁבוּ) [Bêt Leḥem] as

presupposed by the Vulgate and Septuagint, respectively.[845] This small emendation is

advocated by many commentators and several published translations. No place called

Yashubi Lehem is otherwise attested, and some scholars see it as an unlikely name for a

town.[846] If the emended text is accepted, it would add to Ruth a further connection

between Judahites and Bethlehem.[847] That the text further adds "the records are ancient"

(וְהַדְּבָרִים עַתִּיקִים) conveys the author's insistence that the basis of a link with Moab is

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[843]So Vg., *RSV, NIV,* Japhet (*I & II Chronicles*, 117), and H. G. M. Williamson (*1 and 2 Chronicles* [NCB; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1982], 25).

[844]So Targum, *NJPS, NRSV,* and Knoppers, *I Chronicles 1-9*, 352.

[845]Knoppers prefers "resided in Bethlehem," (*I Chronicles 1-9*, 352). Roddy Braun calls the emendation "returned to Lehem" "commonly accepted" (*1 Chronicles* [WBC 14; Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1986], 57), though he gives it only tepid endorsement. It is emended thus in RSV and NRSV, as well as by Japhet (*I & II Chronicles*, 117).

[846]Peter B. Dirksen, *1 Chronicles* (Historical Commentary on the Old Testament; Leuven: Peeters, 2005), 73, but nevertheless is left as Yashubi Lehem by *NJPS* and *NIV*, as well as Williamson (*1 and 2 Chronicles*, 61).

[847]The question of independence is not insignificant. Some Targum traditions link this verse with Ruth, so the verse may provide the impetus for Ruth 1:1, or vice-versa (Knoppers, *I Chronicles 1-9,* 352). See J. Stanley McIvor, *The Targum of Chronicles: Translated, with Introduction, Apparatus, and Notes* (The Aramaic Bible 19; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1987), 61.

longstanding and authentic.[848]

First Chronicles 8:8 describes connections between Moab and the tribe of Benjamin. Shaharaim, a man whose status is elevated by descent from the hero Ehud, is said to father sons in Moab after divorcing two Israelite wives—a chronology that even implies a preference for Moabite women! The genealogy goes on to list the seven clans that derive from his sons. These are children of his wife Hodesh, who seems to be the Moabite wife presumed by v. 8, though the text is ambiguous on this point. However, one of the sons, Mesha, has a Moabite name.[849] If I read correctly here, the line of Shaharaim proceeds through a Moabite wife. Thus, even if 4:22 suggests only that ruling over Moab is acceptable, 8:8 provides an example of an Israelite-Moabite marriage recounted without judgment.

The prevalence of other foreigners in the genealogies confirms what the Moabite cases suggest about Chronicles' attitude toward intermarriage. The genealogies include at least one woman each of Moabite, Canaanite, Egyptian, Ammonite and Aramean heritage. It includes, in other words, members of the specific groups that Ezra 9:1 names as forbidden for marriage. In addition, groups that had been treated as outsiders or distant relatives in other biblical texts—Edomites, Calebites, Jerahmeelites, Maacathites, Qenizzites and Qenites—are named among the other tribal ancestors of Israel.[850] These groups, which certainly could not have been included in Israel by Ezra's definition, are here incorporated into Israel's own tribes.

As Japhet argues, there are also signs that such inclusion of foreigners is done

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[848]Though some commentators, noting the need to emend and the general befuddlement in translating these verses, suggest that the Chronicler is here confessing his own confusion about his sources. (so Dirksen, *1 Chronicles*, 73).
[849]Braun, *1 Chronicles*, 125.
[850]Knoppers, *I Chronicles 1-9,* 85, 356-57.

pointedly. For example, though all of Jacob's sons had wives, the only three women

listed in the genealogies are foreign (1 Chr 2:3; 7:14).[851] That two of these women bear

children to Judah, the Chronicler's tribe of primary focus, argues that intermarriage is not

a marginal or disapproved phenomenon. Though Tamar's ethnicity is not explicit, Steven

S. Tuell argues that various details allude to the Genesis 38 story, in which she is

specified as Canaanite.[852] Meanwhile, the foreignness of Judah's first wife is underscored

by departing from the conventional formulae to note that "Bath-Shua the Canaanitess,

bore to him [his first three sons]" (1 Chr 2:3).[853] The third foreign woman—an Aramean

concubine of Manasseh—is not known from any biblical source.[854] Clearly status does

not account for the selective mention of these matriarchs alone: one is a concubine, and

Tamar is not even a full wife! Their mention seems to owe exclusively to their

foreignness. Something similar could be said of 1 Chr 2:17, which notes that David's

sister "Abigail bore Amasa, and the father of Amasa was Jether the Ishmaelite." The

oddness and awkward phrasing of Amasa's parentage suggests that the author included

Jether to make a point: even David's family contained foreigners.[855]

A final case in 2 Chr 24:26, which appears in the narrative section of Chronicles,

deserves special attention. Though this story is set in a royal court and might qualify as a

"State" text, I examine it here for how it construes children of a Moabite-Israelite union.

One of the significant changes that the Chronicler makes to this story from its Kings

parallel (2 Kgs 12:20-21) is that the conspirators are sons of an Ammonite and a Moabite

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[851]Sara Japhet, *The Ideology of the Book of Chronicles and Its Place in Biblical Thought* (Trans. Anna Barber; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 271.

[852]Tuell, *First and Second Chronicles* (IBC*;* Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 22-23.

[853]Japhet, *Ideology of Chronicles,* 272.

[854]Ibid.

[855]Ibid.

woman. In adding this detail, the Chronicler conveys that children of Ammonite or

Moabite women are perfectly qualified to serve even in sensitive posts within the Judean

royal court. And though the linkage between their ethnicity and the assassination appears

on the surface as an accusation of foreigners or intermarriage, the Chronicles account

actually makes these characters highly positive. In contrast to Kings, Joash's death in

Chronicles represents a well-merited punishment, for he is blamed for sins not found in

the Kings account. Only in Chronicles is Joash shown committing apostasy—setting up

ʾašērîm and ʿaṣabbîm (2 Chr 24:18)—and then murdering the righteous prophet

Zechariah who denounces him for doing so (2 Chr 24:20-21). His orders to have

Zechariah stoned in the Temple itself show further contempt for Yhwh's holy place.[856]

His sin is compounded by the fact that Zechariah was the son of Jehoiada, to whom Joash

owed his life, his reign, and wise guidance during his early monarchy.[857]

The Chronicler also makes clear that Joash's death is a *divine* punishment.

Zechariah had prophesied against Joash while enveloped by "the Spirit of God" (2 Chr

24:20). When he is attacked, he invokes Yhwh's vengeance for the sin against him and

the Temple: "may Yhwh see and requite it." That Joash's wounding by the Arameans and

assassination *are* requitals by Yhwh is confirmed by a sequence of events typical of the

Chronicler's formula for divine retribution. The events that follow the accounts of

Joash's sins express his punishments. First Yhwh aids the Arameans to punish Joash and

his śarîm for the apostasy they had committed together. Next he is assassinated for the sin

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[856]Tuell points out that stoning is a particularly defiling form of death commanded to be done outside the walls of even ordinary cities. Here it occurs within not just a city, but the epicenter of holiness (*First and Second Chronicles,* 196).

[857]Ralph Klein, "The Ironic Ending of Joash in Chronicles," in *For a Later Generation: The Transformation of Tradition in Israel, Early Judaism, and Early Christianity (Festschrift for George W. E. Nickelsburg)* (ed. Randal A. Argall, Beverly A. Bow and Rodney Werline; Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 2000), 116-127.

that is his alone—the murder of Zechariah. Thus the Ammonite and Moabite conspirators serve as Yhwh's agents, fulfilling Zechariah's imprecation to "requite." But they do more than this, for unlike the Kings author, who gives no motive to the king's conspirators, the Chronicler's version reveals conscious, righteous motives for the men: they kill Joash "*because of* the bloodguilt of Jehoiada's sons." In other words, these "foreign" men are more loyal to Yhwh, his prophets, and his Temple than the Davidic king, who ought to have been their greatest champion! Thus, just as Uriah the Hittite serves as a foil that indicts the behavior of David in 2 Samuel 11, the Moabite and Ammonite servants convict Joash for his betrayal of Yhwh and His cultus in Jerusalem.

The Chronicler completely changes both the identities and the evaluation of the assassins from the 2 Kings 12 story. Whereas in Kings, they appear as simple criminals, in Chronicles, they are made heroic. That characterization shifts *in conjunction* with attribution of mixed ethnic identity. Though the men's foreignness might reflect primarily on Joash, it also implies that children of mixed marriages—of Moab and Ammon no less—can be Israelite heroes. That they suffer death for their act of conscience (2 Chr 25:3) only heightens their heroism.

## Foreign Men Within Israel

The above sections argue that both Moabite women married to Israelite men *and* their children are treated as Israelite in Chronicles. The Chronicler also, however, grants positive roles and Israelite status to foreign *men.* In the genealogies, 1 Chr 2:34-35 has an Egyptian man, together with his Israelite wife, as co-founders of a lineage.[858] Other foreign men, including at least one Moabite, appear in the list of David's elite fighters in

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[858]Japhet, *Ideology of Chronicles,* 272.

1 Chr 11:11-46. The context could not be more laudatory. The men in this group are introduced as those who support David's initial crowning—those who, "together with all Israel, gave his kingship strong support to extend it over the whole land, as Yhwh had promised" (1 Chr 11:10). This framing assigns high honor to those on the list and aligns them unequivocally with "all Israel." The group is elevated above the list of men in chapter 12, who join David only later.[859] The prestige of appearing here is enhanced by the exclusive, competitive nature of membership: Joab gains top rank by accepting David's challenge to be the first to attack the Jebusites (1 Chr 11:6). The next-highest ranking group, "the three," is so exclusive that even Joab's own brother, who kills 300 men singlehandedly and even commands the other three, is not admitted (1 Chr 11:20-21). It is in this illustrious company that the Chronicler places a Moabite and other foreigners. They appear at a third level of status—below both Joab and "the three," but still within an elite corps called "the thirty," who actually number more than thirty. These men are listed along with their provenances—a set of details that together delineate the geographical and ethnic range of David's constituency. The list up to v. 41 derives from 2 Sam 23:24-38, so that the inclusion of an Ammonite, Hittite and Hagrite derive from the Chronicler's main source. To these, however, Chronicles adds fifteen more names from an unknown source (vv. 42-47),[860] significantly broadening the Transjordan representation on the list.[861] The Chronicler adds not only a Reubenite chieftain and *his* thirty men, but also non-Israelite Transjordanians such as a "son of Maacah" (from the same kingdom as Absalom's mother), Ithmah the Moabite, and two men from Aroer, who

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[859]Simon J. De Vries, *1 and 2 Chronicles* (FOTL 11; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1989), 130.
[860]Ibid., 129.
[861]Peter R. Ackroyd, *I & II Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah: Introduction and Commentary* (Torch Bible Commentaries; London: SCM, 1973), 54.

might also be categorized as "Moabites."[862] The effect is to paint a picture of a coalition drawn from both north and south, the Cis- and Transjordan, united under the banner of David. Moabites and other foreigners are part of this vision of a pan-Levantine unity, and insofar as they fight under the authority of David, they achieve honor and membership in Israel.

## CONCLUSIONS

Chronicles proposes that foreigners loyal to Israel are assets rather than threats. Mixed marriages in Chronicles are recounted as an integral part of Israelite lineage. The genealogies describe them frequently, without judgment, and sometimes even with additional emphasis. It is not just northerners who marry foreign women, but the men of Judah and Benjamin, in whom the Chronicler vests the greatest hopes for Israel. Judah's genealogies, in fact, are more ethnically diverse than those of any other tribe.[863] Second Chronicles 24 treats the children of mixed marriages as Israelite heroes whose loyalty stands in damning contrast to that of Joash, the Davidic king, while the list of David's heroes includes men who have no Israelite lineage at all.

One might expect that foreigners would be persons of high status whose acknowledgement of Judah would serve to enhance its prestige. This is true in some instances. But the foreigners included in Israel are a hodgepodge of peoples with specific local and literary meanings. The inclusion of Edomites, Calebites, Jerahmeelites, Maacathites, Qenizzites and Qenites into Judah seems to reflect historical circumstances

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[862]"Uzziah the Ashterathite" (1 Chr 11:44) is also a Transjordanian, but could be Israelite or foreign. Ashtarot is given as the seat of Transjordan Bashan under Og (Deut 1:4, Josh 9:10, 12:4, 13:12), which is assigned to "Machir, son of Manasseh" in Josh 13:31 and to Gershomites and half-Manasseh in 1 Chr 6:71. Ashtarot and Aroer were border towns claimed by both sides at various times. Numbers 32:34 claims specifically these two towns for Gad; Jer 48:19 seems to assume that Aroer is Moabite.

[863]Knoppers, *I Chronicles 1-9,* 358.

rather than ideological desires. Does the mention of Transjordanites likewise reflect the participation of these peoples in part of the community? Are references to Ammonites and Moabites attempting to stress the importance of families like Tobiah's, who had become important to some part of the *gôlâ* community? I can do no more than speculate on the question here. However, both Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah acknowledge the presence of a mixed constituency in Israel. But whereas Ezra-Nehemiah seek to "purify" that constituency and "separate all admixture," the Chronicler chooses to emphasize it, demonstrate that it is integral and ancient to Israel's fabric, and point out the ways in which it has—and could continue to—strengthen the corporate body of Israel.

# RUTH

The book of Ruth is the longest and most detailed portrayal of a Moabite character in biblical literature. It is also, by far, the most sympathetic.[864] Whereas the People encounters in texts described in Chapter 3 lead to pollution, divine wrath, and loss of land, this one leads to fertility, blessing and the maintenance of a family's *naḥalâ.* The contrasts between Ruth and the other images of Moab and of foreign women are so strong that I conclude, like many before me, that the book was written to intentionally counter those images. For this to be true, however, Ruth must have been written later than the texts it seems to reference—Genesis 19 and 34, Numbers 25, Nehemiah 13, and Ezra 9. Unfortunately, most of the suggestions of lateness are not definitive.

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[864]Agnethe Siquans notes that Ruth is the *only* positive image of a Moabite woman ("Foreignness and Poverty in the Book of Ruth: A Legal Way for a Poor Foreign Woman to Be Integrated into Israel," *JBL* 128 [2009]: 447).

## Date, Function and Relationship to Other "People" Texts

It is not a new idea to suggest that Ruth reflects issues from the Persian, or even Hellenistic period, and that it might specifically speak to the controversy over intermarriage.[865] But nor is it a foregone conclusion. Function alone is a shaky basis for date, and many scholars, seeing different functions, have arrived at different conclusions. Most of those who advocate a pre-exilic date see the story as supportive of the Davidic dynasty—functioning either as an *apologia* for David's Moabite lineage (and thus dating as early as the tenth century), or as proof of the divine providence that worked to engineer his birth.[866] A few have argued that it was written to fill a gap in the

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[865]By 1816, at latest, the idea that Ruth responded to the policies of Ezra and Nehemiah had been proposed by Leonhard Bertholdt in *Historisch-kritische Einleitung in sämmtlichen kanonischen und apokryphischen Schriften des Alten und Neuen Testaments* (6 vols.; Erlangen: Johann Jacob Palms, 1812-19), 2356 ff.). It was a view popular in scholarship until the late 1960's: see e.g. Artur Weiser, *The Old Testament, its Formation and Development* (trans. Dorothea Barton; New York: Association Press, 1964), 304; Samuel Sandmel, *The Hebrew Scriptures: An Introduction to their Literature and Religious Ideas* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963), 489-91; Jean-Luc Vesco, "La date du livre de Ruth," *Revue Biblique* 74 (1967): 246-47.

Though the idea fell out of favor for the next decade or two (partly because of the anti-Jewish sentiments that sometimes accompanied it), it has been revived and is especially championed by André Lacocque (*Ruth: A Continental Commentary* [Trans. K. C. Hanson; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004], 91, 113-14). Katrina J. A. Larkin characterizes it a "majority view" in her summary of "the state of the question" as of 1996 (*Ruth and Esther,* [OTG; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996], 19). In the last two decades its advocates include Victor Matthews (*Judges and Ruth* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004], 209-11), John Briggs Curtis ("Second Thoughts on the Purpose of the Book of Ruth," *Proceedings: Eastern Great Lakes and Midwestern Biblical Society* 16 [1996]: 141-49); Siquans ("Foreignness and Poverty," 443-452). Sakenfeld argues that the book would have served well as a response to Ezra-Nehemiah, but need not have been written for that purpose (*Ruth,* [IBC; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1999], 5). She also points out that earliest commentators, both Jewish and Christian, have seen the book as a teaching on the inclusion of outsiders, thus acknowledging the centrality of ethnicity to the book's purpose.

[866]So G. Gerleman (*Rut, Das Hohelied* [BKAT; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1965], 4-11); Kirsten Nielsen (*Ruth* [OTL; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1997], vii, 28-29).

E. F. Campbell, Jr. argues that it was written rather to fill a gap in the Deuteronomistic history (*Ruth* [AB 7; New York: Doubleday, 1975], 28), and his view is adopted by Tod Linafelt (*Ruth and Esther* [Berit Olam; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1999] xviii-xx).

The following also propose early dates: D. R. G. Beattie ("The Book of Ruth as Evidence for Israelite Legal Practice," *VT* 24 [1974]: 252); Ronald M. Hals (*The Theology of the Book of Ruth* [Facet Books, Biblical Series 23; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969], 54-75); Robert L. Hubbard, Jr. (*The Book of Ruth* [NICOT; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1988], 41-46); E. John Hamlin (*Ruth: Surely There is a Future* [ITC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996], 2); Jack M. Sasson (*Ruth: A New Translation with a Philological Commentary and a Formalist-Folklorist Interpretation* [JHNES; Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979], 251); Wilhelm Hertzberg (*Die Bücher Josua, Richter, Ruth.* [ATD 9; Göttingen:

Deuteronomistic history.[867] And some deny that a book as charming and folkloric as Ruth could have a polemical function at all.[868]

I will reserve the specific point-counterpoints between Ruth and Ezra-Nehemiah for the discussion below, but there are some additional reasons to hold the book to be a post-exilic composition. As André Lacocque argues, it is Ruth the Moabite, not David, who is the controversial figure in the book.[869] If David were on shaky political ground, as the defenses of him in Samuel imply,[870] it seems unlikely that he would call attention to his foreign heritage.[871] Nor, as Katherine Doob Sakenfeld points out, is it convincing that a story about his great-grandmother's impeccable character would satisfy critics who opposed him based on ethnicity.[872] Then again, there is slim evidence that David *was* opposed based on ethnicity.[873] The most obviously propagandistic texts about David protest his innocence on different fronts—primarily his treatment of Saul and Saul's heirs.[874] Only 2 Sam 8:2 might be viewed as a defense of David's Moabite connections (see Chapter 2), and it would be an effort to disavow those loyalties, not valorize them. It simply makes better sense to view the book as relying upon David's status to enhance Ruth's, not vice-versa.[875]

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Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1969], 259); Wilhelm Rudolph (*Das Buch Ruth, Das Hohe Lied, Die Klagelieder* [KAT 17/1; Gütersloh: Mohn, 1962], 26-29); Ernst Würthwein ("Ruth," in *Die fünf Megilloth* [HAT 18/1; Tübingen: Mohr, 1969], 6).

[867]Sasson, *Ruth*, 246-47; E. Campbell, *Ruth*, 28; Linafelt, *Ruth and Esther*, xviii-xx.

[868]Sasson, *Ruth*, 246-47; also E. Campbell (*Ruth*, 27) and Leila Bronner ("A Thematic Approach to Ruth in Rabbinic Literature," in *A Feminist Companion to Ruth* [ed. Athalya Brenner; FCB 3; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993], 153).

[869]Lacocque, *Ruth*, 14.

[870]See for example Steven L. McKenzie, *King David: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 32-35. McKenzie argues that some of these implicit charges have to do with David himself, (i.e. not with his successors or name), and must therefore date to his reign or shortly thereafter (Ibid., 35).

[871]Lacocque, *Ruth*, 20.

[872]Sakenfeld, *Ruth*, 3.

[873]Sakenfeld, *Ruth*, 3.

[874]McKenzie, *King David*, 32-34.

[875]Lacocque, *Ruth*, 14.

There are other "hints of lateness" that, as Katrina J. A. Larkin puts it, "are hard to ignore."[876] For example, David's genealogy is traced to Perez rather than Judah[877]—an ancestor who appears a number of times in Chronicles, but never in Samuel-Kings. He thus seems to be an ancestor important for *gôlâ* but not pre-exilic Jews. Michael D. Goulder argues that the genre of Ruth strongly suggests a late, perhaps Hellenistic date: as a "*family Novelle*," it is similar to Tobit, Susanna, and Joseph and Asenath; as an "edifying tale," like Esther and Job, and as a novella with a female protagonist, like Esther, Judith and Susanna. Indeed, these examples suggest a Hellenistic setting. Goulder also sees evidence of lateness in the canonical placement of Ruth with the Writings despite subject matter that would suggest a place in the Former Prophets.[878] There is also the fact that no other text refers to Ruth, its characters, or events. It seems likely that if the tradition were truly four hundred years old or more, and authentically associated with David, that we would see *something* about it elsewhere. Based on linguistic analysis, Frederic Bush's careful study concludes that a late, probably post-exilic date best describes the combination of classical and late BH found in the book.[879] He is cited by Carolyn Pressler, Tod Linafelt and Victor Matthews, who all argue for later dates in their commentaries.[880] In addition to the classical Hebrew, the author employs other "archaizing" techniques that suggest he is self-consciously evoking an "Israel of yore."

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[876]Larkin, *Ruth and Esther,* 25.
[877]Sakenfeld, *Ruth,* 4.
[878]Goulder, "Ruth: A Homily on Deuteronomy 22-25?" in *Of Prophets' Visions and the Wisdom of the Sages: Essays in Honour of R. Norman Whybray on his Seventieth Birthday* (ed. Heather A. McKay and David. J. A. Clines; JSOTSup 162; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 313.
[879]Frederic W. Bush, *Ruth, Esther* (WBC 9; Dallas: Word, 1996), 18-30.
[880]Linafelt, *Ruth and Esther*, xviii-xx; Pressler, *Joshua, Judges, and Ruth*, 262; Matthews, *Judges and Ruth,* 208-11.

We see this in the aside to the audience explaining the sandal exchange (Ruth 4:7),[881] and

the use of the phrase, "in the days when the judges ruled." On the basis of the latter

phrase, Robert Pfeiffer proposes, and Marjo Korpel's study agrees, that the book must

date after the final redaction of the Deuteronomistic history. [882] Both authors think that a

Persian-period date is the most likely setting for this, though they agree that a pre-exilic

date would still be possible. Rainer Albertz proposes that Persian-era *gôlâ* leadership

actively refuted attempts to restore a Davidic monarchy and instead promoted pre-

monarchic forms of leadership such as the "men of X" (cf. Jdg 8:1; 15:10f) as an

alternative.[883] For all of these reasons, a number of scholarly texts, and even student

textbooks, assign a post-exilic date even when they disavow the text's function as

polemic.[884]

It remains difficult to establish that the date, even if post-exilic, is late *enough* to

respond to Ezra. But Ezra 9 itself suggests that its ideas faced opposition from sectors of

the society that were capable of writing a book like Ruth and powerful enough to

disseminate it. The original accusation charges people in official positions—"officials

(*śarîm*)[885] and prefects (*sĕganîm*)"—with having "led the people in the transgression [of

intermarriage]" (9:2). "The priests and the Levites," who are also accused of failing to

"separate themselves from the peoples of the lands" (9:1), would have been just as

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[881]Though Rudolph correctly points out that this criterion is limited (*Das Buch Ruth,* 27-28). There could be a need to explain a custom even 100 years later. I would add that there are also other periods in which it would be useful to cast a Davidic story as ancient.

[882]Robert H. Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament,* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1948), 718; Marjo Korpel, *The Structure of the Book of Ruth* (Assen, Neth: Koninklijke van Gorcum, 2001), 224-27.

[883]Albertz, "Thwarted Restoration," 13-14.

[884]So Robert Gordis, "Love, Marriage and Business in the Book of Ruth: A Chapter in Hebrew Customary Law," in *A Light Unto My Path: Old Testament Studies in Honor of Jacob M. Myers* (ed. Howard N. Bream et. al.; Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1974), 246; Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction* (trans. Peter Ackroyd; Oxford: Blackwell, 1966), 483; Ernst Sellin and Georg Fohrer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (trans. David E. Green; Nashville: Abingdon, 1968), 251-52.

[885]According to Blenkinsopp, a *śar* designates an official assigned to each of the satrapy's ten *pelakim* who reported to the satrap (*Ezra-Nehemiah,* 64).

equipped as the writer to mount exegetical arguments of their own, as Fishbane points

out. [886] That those who gather to Ezra in the account are a subgroup of *gôlâ* —"those who

trembled (*hared*) over the words of the God of Israel" (9:4)—implies that others in the

community do not "tremble." That is, others do not share the Ezra 9 definition of "mixed

marriage," its gravity as a sin, or both, and among them are people with power to make

their voices heard.

Rainer Albertz reads an account in Josephus (*Ant.* XI.297-301) as evidence of a

moment at which exclusivist views became so problematic for regional politics that

Persian officials forced a change of stance.[887] In events Albertz dates to about 408, the

Persian governor of Yehud, Bagoses/Bagohi, seeks to replace the high priest Johanan

with his brother Joshua. When Johanan learns of Bagohi's plans, he murders in brother in

the Temple, prompting Bagohi to force his way into the temple and to punish the

populace with a heavy tax for the next seven years. The tax was structured to be

especially costly to the priesthood.[888] Combining Josephus' account with the Elephantine

letters, Albertz surmises that what made Johanan problematic were his "exclusivist"

views. The letters reveal that he had opposed the rebuilding of the Elephantine temple,

probably because he believed that all Yahwist worship should take place in Jerusalem.[889]

That may imply that he also regarded non-*gôlâ* Yahwists as impure, or at least second-

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[886]Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 124.
[887]Albertz, "Controversy," 483-504.
[888]Ibid., 495.
[889]A letter from Elephantine, dated 407, reveals that the priest there had written to Johanan three years earlier, requesting permission to rebuild the Yaho temple, which had been destroyed by Egyptian rioting. Johanan never responds to this letter, thus signaling his opposition. He could not openly oppose the project, however, because Bagohi supported it. The original temple had been destroyed as an Egyptian protest against Persia's imperial presence. From Persia's perspective, it would have been important to demonstrate to the Egyptians that such displays would not be tolerated. At the same time, the restiveness of Egypt made it especially important for Persia to preserve morale among its loyal troops there—especially since these particular troops had "taken a hit" on Persia's behalf (Albertz, "Controversy," 495).

class citizens. Joshua was probably preferred because he promised a more conciliatory approach with both Elephantine and Samaria.[890]

The ideology of Jerusalem's leaders, as Nehemiah demonstrates, made relations with Yehud's other neighbors, especially Samaria, highly factious. Meanwhile, events would have turned Persian scrutiny increasingly toward interregional relationships. Whereas the Levant had been a neglected rural backwater, it was fast becoming the southwestern border of the empire as Egypt showed increasing signs of revolt.[891] Archaeologists now think that the military and administrative buildup witnessed at Lachish, in the Negev, and at Tell Jemmeh, Tel Haror, Tel Seraᶜ, Tel Halif, Bet-Zur and Ramat Rahel, should be dated to this late fifth-century period.[892] Between 404 and 400, Egypt succeeded in breaking away from Persia, but the empire continued to cherish hopes of reconquest (which it attempted unsuccessfully in 383).[893] The Levant would have thus come under stricter control, such that the long-running feud between Yehud and Samaria would have become an imperial, and not just a local problem.[894] Persian authorities needed stable polities that could mobilize quickly for conflict—and local governments that would take on their delegated tasks without argument. Bagohi's direct intervention in the Johanan-Joshua affair, Albertz concludes, is meant to send a message to the priesthood that their religious ideas would not again be allowed to interfere with Persian policies. That Bagohi institutes Jaddua, the son of the slain Joshua, may therefore indicate a shift in the official stances of the Jerusalem priesthood toward more conciliatory views.

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[890]Ibid., 493-95.

[891]Lipschits, "Achaemenid Imperial Policy," 38; Albertz, "Controversy," 488-89.

[892]Albertz, "Controversy," 488; Lipschits, "Achaemenid Imperial Policy," 38; Fantalkin and Tal, "Redating Lachish Level I," 186.

[893]Albertz, "Controversy," 489.

[894]Ibid., 488-89, 498.

Such views had existed all along; what happened with the appointment of Jaddua is that more inclusive views became ascendant.[895]

Albertz's reconstruction is compelling, but it does rely on several unprovable assumptions. We cannot be certain that the conflict that results in Joshua's death was the dispute over permission for the Elephantine temple; the letters are just the only evidence we have for *a* conflict. And we cannot be certain that objections to a non-Jerusalem temple translate into more exclusive notions of peoplehood, even though they are likely to do so. Nor can we be certain why Bagohi preferred Joshua, even if harmony between Samaria and Yehud seems like a logical goal for the Persians, given what we know of the historical situation. And even if we could demonstrate that Albertz's reconstruction is correct, we do not know whether Yaddua's tenure marked the beginning of a long-term shift, or just a momentary one. What the incident does tell us is that the highest echelons of the *gôlâ* community, the circles where texts were likely to be produced, were not of one mind. It suggests that the question of how Israel should be defined, and how exclusive the Jerusalem temple should be, or could *afford* to be, were probably matters of debate. And Albertz's reconstruction reminds us why consideration of the imperial context is so important, and that "theologies" often result in or spring from concrete political and economic, as well as religious, consequences.

The Bagohi affair does not settle the date for Ruth. In that regard, nothing is finally definitive. If my readers conclude, as I have, that the correspondences between Ruth and other texts are too many and too pointed to attribute to chance, this will be the surest argument possible for direct literary dependence. If they do not, they should at least agree that the coexistence of these texts within the canon implies a rich intertextual

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[895]Ibid., 495.

dialogue.

## Ruth as People Text

Ruth unites most of the features that have described other People encounters and elaborates them in even greater detail. The setting is one completely divorced from political centers and royal courts; there is no mention of kings or capitals in the crossing of borders or settling of legal affairs. Instead, the setting is that of village and family life. Scenes of unparalleled intimacy occur between Naomi and her daughters-in-law (1:8-18, 2:20-22; 3:1-5) and Ruth and Boaz (3:7-15). Neil Glover calls the narrative "dense with household relationships," and points out that the term "daughter-in-law" occurs seven times and "mother-in-law" ten,[896] even though both relationships are rarely featured anywhere else in biblical literature. Even in its most public scene (Ruth 4), the legal case is handled by local village elders and involves local matters of kinship and land ownership.

The characters, too, are individual citizens rather than official representatives of either Israel or Moab. The lack of official boundaries is especially striking in the freedom that both Elimelech's family and Ruth experience in crossing between Moab and Judah. Elimelech's family settles and marries in Moab without any apparent hostility from their neighbors. Ruth is nevertheless recognized as a "woman of *ḥayil*" (3:11) and praised for the loyalty she had shown to her mother-in-law (2:11, 4:14). The lack of any official interference in these movements has led some scholars to regard the book as evidence for

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[896]Neil Glover, "Your People, My People: An Exploration of Ethnicity in Ruth," *JSOT* 33 (2009): 305.

a period of relative peace and openness between Israel and Moab.[897]

As in the other People texts, the interaction with Moab occurs in the context of marriage. Obviously, Ruth the Moabite becomes the wife of the Judahite Boaz. In addition, Elimelech's sons had both married Moabite women. The text also draws attention to the mixed union of Judah and Tamar in two different ways. Tamar's Canaanite ethnicity is not mentioned, but it probably would have been known to the audience. Tamar is mentioned explicitly and implied to be a model for Ruth when the village elders bless Boaz saying, "May your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah" (4:12). Her role is emphasized again by the genealogy tracing David's lineage to Perez (4:18), who as 4:12 reminds the reader, is her son with Judah. That the book centers on a Moabite woman and mentions a Canaanite one, and that both of these are married to Israelite men, seems more than coincidentally linked to the symbolic "Canaanite-Moabite woman" that Ezra 9 constructs as a symbol of "the daughters of the peoples of the land." In other words, marriage is not only the context in which the encounter with Ruth occurs, it is a theme of the book.

## Rhetorical Strategies

### 1. Character and Story

Ruth's "mild tone" has been cited by a number of scholars as an argument against its function as polemic.[898] Unlike Ezra, this text uses no speeches or strident language to

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[897]e.g. Oswalt, *Book of Isaiah*, 336; Grohman, "History of Moab," 150. I think these scholars grant too much historical weight to the fictional context, but their conclusions demonstrate that the impression of "peace between Moab and Israel" is effectively conveyed.

[898]H. H. Rowley sums up the conclusions of scholars reaching back to Gunkel and Eissfeldt, and including Gordis, and Bronner, when he calls the book "utterly devoid of factious discord" (Rowley, *The Servant of the Lord and Other Essays on the Old Testament* [2d. ed.; Oxford: Blackwell, 1965], 173). See also Hermann Gunkel, "Ruth," in *Reden und Aufsätze* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1913), 88-89; Eissfeldt, *Introduction*, 480-81; Gordis, "Love, Marriage," 243-44; Bronner, "A Thematic Approach,"

address the issues directly. There are no threats or quotations that invoke the authority of

"Your commandments" (Ezra 9:10) and many of the issues never even become explicit.

But Ruth's effectiveness lies precisely in the fact that it *is* subtle.[899] If the audience knew

that the story aimed to change their minds, they would bristle, feel manipulated, and

dismiss what came next. Instead, like Nathan telling David the story of the ewe lamb (2

Sam 12:1-4), the author comes at the issue sideways—draws the audience in emotionally,

and lays out a plot that purports to have nothing to do with the heated issues of the day.

He makes the characters compelling, the scenes believable, and the subtext strong enough

to imply parallels, but subtle enough that the audience stays put for the entire piece. This

form of persuasion is, in many ways, more effective than frontal argument, for though the

storyteller has laid a trail of bread crumbs, he does not need to utter the final conclusion;

the audience reaches it for themselves.

If Ruth's goal is inclusiveness, then the story is a superior form to the debate

because it allows a Moabite to become a full-fleshed human being. To use the

terminology of Emmanuel Levinas, a story can confront the "totalization" of Moabites as

a group with the "Face" of an individual. The women in Ezra 9-10, Neh 13:23-27 and

Numbers 25 are mere abstractions. To sympathize would require a good deal of effort

and an investment in doing so. By contrast, Ruth speaks directly to the audience—she has

a voice. She does meaningful things, and is made likable by qualities that would

recommend any Israelite—loyalty, *ḥesed,* and *ḥayil.* And she is the great-grandmother of

a familiar figure, a beloved national hero. Thus the audience responds to her

emotionally—and with sympathy and warmth.

153). E. Campbell cites the mild tone to assert that "the entire proposal [that the book responds to Ezra-Nehemiah] has far too modern a ring" (*Ruth,* 27).
    [899]Similarly, Goulder, "Ruth: A Homily?" 314.

The book also encourages sympathy by pointing out the disadvantages and risks that Ruth faces as both a widow and a foreigner. No other text demonstrates this degree of empathy for the situation faced by an immigrant to Israel. Boaz's praise of Ruth's "cleaving" to Naomi is rare in the insight it expresses, recognizing that for Ruth to come to Judah had meant that "you left your mother and father and the land of your birth and came to a people you had not known before" (2:11). The story also points out that Ruth's status as both unattached woman and foreigner puts her at risk physically as well as economically. A foreign woman without male relatives is more likely to be the victim of assault because she has no one to threaten reprisal or bring a suit for justice in her behalf. The book hints that assault is a real possibility, for Boaz tells her to stay with his female servants (2:8) and has to warn his male servants not to "molest"/ "touch" (נגע) her (2:9).[900] Naomi, too, hints at the possibility of being assaulted were she to glean in another field (2:8). Ruth's vulnerability makes it easier to sympathize with her, and displays her courage in setting out to provide for herself and her mother-in-law. It gives Boaz an opportunity to display his generosity. But it also makes a very important point: contrary to depictions of foreign women as ensnaring seductresses (as in Numbers 25, Proverbs 1-9, or Gen 19:30-38), the foreign woman is not the threat, but the threatened. By drawing attention to the risks of her situation, the author encourages its audience to view the foreign woman, painted so dangerous in other texts, with compassion, admiration and protectiveness rather than suspicion and aversion.

The methodology of storytelling is to "show" rather than "tell." Ruth presents a world in which character outweighs ethnicity in determining how a person is treated; in

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[900]Danna Nolan Fewell and David Miller Gunn, *Compromising Redemption* (Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1990), 76.

which people remain faithful to Yhwh without heavy-handed overseers, and village justice delivers righteousness. Without recourse to written law, Boaz acts more generously than even Torah requires (see below). Israelites and Moabites can belong to the same family and its members care for, aid and be loyal to each other like the best of Israelite families. Rather than *telling* us that intermarriage should be allowed, the author/s *show* us an Israel in which it is—and in which life functions well not despite, but *because* of this. By presenting this world as plausible, the story persuades the audience that this world is possible—and that it can be translated into their own reality.

## 2. The Spectacular Reversals

The primary method by which Ruth's arguments proceed is what I call the "spectacular reversal." Some features of the text recall negative images from other biblical texts about Moabites, especially Moabite women. Sometimes the text even appears, at first, to corroborate those negative images. But the expectations not only remain unfulfilled, they are violated in the most dramatic way, thus also challenging the stereotypes themselves.

### a. Not Seduced into Death or Idolatry, but Led to Yhwh

The most negative biblical image of Moabite women is that of seductress. It is embodied by the women of Baal Peor (Numbers 25), the daughter of Lot and mother of Moab (Gen 19:30-38), and the Moabite wife of Solomon (1 Kgs 11:1-8), whose ability to "lead [her husband] into sin" is characterized by Neh 13:26 as irresistible. There is good reason to think that Ruth might also allude to the seductive "Strange Woman" of Proverbs 1-9. This character is called a *nŏkriyyâ* four times (Prov 2:16, 5:20, 6:24 and

7:5)—the same term Ruth uses to refer to herself.[901] Joseph Blenkinsopp, Harold Washington, and Christine Yoder have argued that the Strange Woman is a symbol of the forbidden foreign woman, and that this text dates to the same intermarriage debates described in Ezra-Nehemiah.[902] And though Ezra 9 does not make use of foreign seductress imagery directly, his rhetoric stigmatizing foreign women as polluted is reinforced by it.

The scene of seduction in Ruth 3 suggests that the book is responding to the foreign seductress trope. Rather than portraying Ruth as a pure woman who would never do such things, the author *deliberately* invokes the stereotype, depicting Ruth's words and actions as seductive right up to the last moment. Where the Ruth image diverges from the stereotype is in the result, for Ruth leads Boaz, not to death, but to greater righteousness.

Ruth's use of speech especially suggests comparisons with Proverbs (Prov 2:16; 5:3; 7:5, 14-20), for, as Ilona Rashkow demonstrates, it is her skillful deployment of language that prods Boaz toward ever greater commitment. [903] At their first meeting, Ruth plants the notion that she has already "found favor in his eyes" (2:10). When she comes to him in the darkness, lies beside him and uncovers his legs, she identifies herself as "Ruth, your handmaid" (אֲמָתֶךָ) (3:9). The submissive term expresses the deference propriety requires, but it also coyly places herself at his disposal in a highly sexualized situation. Yet the term is not submissive, for compared to the *šipḥâ* that she had earlier

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[901]Siquans, "Foreignness and Poverty," 448.
[902]Blenkinsopp, "Social Context of the 'Outsider Woman,'" 457-73; Washington, "The Strange Woman," 217-42. Yoder does not address the connection to Ezra-Nehemiah, but rather argues in depth to read Proverbs 1-9 and 31:10-31 as reflections of the Persian period context (*Wisdom as a Woman of Substance,* inter alia).
[903]Rashkow, "Ruth: The Discourse of Power and the Power of Discourse," in *The Feminist Companion to Ruth* (ed. Athalya Brenner; FCB 3; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993), 29, 38-39.

termed herself (2:13), presenting herself as Boaz's *ʿāmâ* is an assertion of *greater*

status—one that makes her eligible to join Boaz's household—eligible for marriage. [904] In

this she seems to be ensnaring him and indeed, as we will see below, her words result in

Boaz doing "all that you ask." Thus the warnings about "smooth speech" of the Strange

Woman seem to apply to Ruth:

> The mouth of the strange woman (זָרוֹת) is a deep pit;
> He who is doomed by Yhwh falls into it" (Prov 22:14, *NJPS*).

> For the lips of a forbidden woman drip honey;
> Her mouth is smoother than oil;
> But in the end she is as bitter as wormwood,
> Sharp as a two-edged sword.
> Her feet (vagina?) go down to Death;
> Her steps take hold of Sheol. (Prov 5:3-5, *NJPS*)

Because she is Moabite, Ruth's actions more easily arouse suspicion than if she

were Israelite, and this is especially true of actions showing premeditation. That Ruth

goes to the fields seeking out "someone in whose eyes I might find favor" (2:1) hints at a

prowl from early in the story. The suspicions seem confirmed by the seduction that she

and Naomi plot in advance. Of course Naomi is implicated here, too, but Ruth is sent to

spring the trap. We cannot doubt that the intent of "wash and anoint yourself, and put on

your best clothes" (3:3) is to make her sexually attractive. These actions require

significant effort in a climate where water must be carried in jars, oil pressed from olives,

and clothes spun and woven by hand. Female beautification is acknowledged in the Bible

as something that women do for their lovers, but it is almost universally scorned,

associated with foreignness (2 Kgs 9:30) and/or whorishness (Ezek 23:40). The Strange

Woman in Prov 7:10 is recognized by her "harlot dress" (שִׁית זוֹנָה).

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[904]Rashkow, "Discourse of Power," 39; Sasson, *Ruth,* 53-54; Hamlin, *Ruth,* 44-45; Bush, *Ruth, Esther,* 124; Linafelt, *Ruth and Esther,* 37.

The timing of the scene reinforces the impression of trickery. The threshing floor at harvest is a place associated with drunken revelry. Hosea 9:1 mentions that harlots do their business in such places.[905] Ruth takes advantage of the occasion, the implied presence of alcohol, and the cover of darkness in approaching Boaz. Naomi instructs her not to reveal herself until the man "has eaten and drunk" (3:3), and indeed, she approaches only after observing that "his heart was merry" (3:7). The tipsiness suggested by the idiom and the setting conjure the scene in Gen 19:30-38, in which Lot's daughters also use alcohol to rape their father. Just as they wait for nightfall to do their deed (Gen 19:33, 35), Ruth, too, approaches Boaz when it is too dark to see where he lies (she must observe it earlier, [3:4]). This darkness also recalls the Strange Woman, who summons her prey "in the dusk of evening,/ In the dark hours of night" (Prov 7:9). Ruth also takes advantage of Boaz's sleepy disorientation, for the fact that she lies beside him means that he is already lying down; that she can uncover him means he is already asleep. Thus, when she "came to him stealthily (בַלָּט), uncovered his 'legs'/genitals, and lay down" (3:7), the unmistakable sexual invitation and initiative in her actions are shocking. This is a culture, after all, where women's honor requires shyness—display of "proper shame."

Boldness and initiative are themselves the marks of the temptress, and here is where Naomi is no longer responsible for the seduction. Naomi had told Ruth to wait "and he will tell you what to do" (3:4). But Ruth does not wait; it is she who tells Boaz "what to do:"[906] "Spread your wing/cloak (כְּנָפֶךָ) over your handmaid," she says. In a certain way, Ruth does dominate Boaz, for it is she who prods him to actions he had not

[905]Fewell and Gunn, *Compromising Redemption,* 77.

[906]Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Overtures to Biblical Theology; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978)*,*183-84; Sasson, *Ruth,* 71.

taken of his own initiative.[907] Ruth had been gleaning in Boaz's field throughout the

harvest season, yet he had never moved to propose, for "Ruth remained with her mother-

in-law" (2:23).[908] Whether because he thought himself too old (3:10) or too high in

station,[909] we do not know, but by the end of their encounter, he promises to do "all that

you say" (3:11).[910] Yet no "arrow pierces his liver;" and he not "like a bird rushing into a

trap" as is the seduced man in Prov 7:23. And rather than being led to apostasy, his action

is viewed as righteousness.

By following her request to "spread your wing," with, "for you are a 'kinsman-

redeemer' (גֹּאֵל)," Ruth removes it from the realm of simple sexual allure and

recontextualizes the proposition as a matter of kin fealty. Her request that he "spread [his]

wing/cloak" is a request for both marriage (cf. Ezek 16:8)[911] and the protection inherent

in the image of an outspread cloak or wing. Ruth's request not only sidesteps

impropriety, it exemplifies nobility of character. In referring to Boaz as *goʾēl*, what she

asks is that Boaz act for the sake of *Naomi,* his kinswoman—not just for her. Boaz

realizes that Ruth offers herself to him because his kinship with Naomi would oblige him

to care for her as well as Ruth. He presumes that Ruth had other choices, for he blesses

her for not "go[ing] after young men, whether poor or rich" (3:10). She chooses Boaz so

that Naomi not be sent away. This is why Boaz praises Ruth as an *ʾēšet ḥayil* and calls

her deed an act of *ḥesed* rather than whorishness—one even greater than "the first." By

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[907]Johanna Bos, *Ruth and Esther: Women in Alien Lands* (New York: Mission Education & Cultivation Program Department for The Women's Division, General Board of Global Ministries, United Methodist Church, 1988), 19.

[908]Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality,* 178.

[909]Marriage to a barren Moabite widow—"used goods" after all—may have been dishonorable for a *gibbor ḥayil* such as Boaz (2:1). Maybe only by casting "a dubious marriage" as levirate duty is the match rendered acceptable—indeed, a "public triumph" (Fewell and Gunn, *Compromising Redemption,* 79, 91).

[910]Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality,* 183-84.

[911]John J. Collins, *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), 532.

"the first," Boaz refers to Ruth's accompaniment of Naomi,[912] an act he had praised at their first meeting. Indeed, the whole village apparently spoke of it, for Boaz "was told about all that you did for your mother-in-law" (2:11). Thus, at the moment Ruth could appear the most dubious, she is held up as a paragon of righteousness.[913]

But Ruth also induces (*se*duces!) Boaz to act more righteously himself. Taking care of "the widow and the orphan" is the standard idiom for the righteous king; by agreeing to marry Ruth, Boaz provides for two widows at once. Ruth might also be regarded as an "orphan" in a loose sense: she had "left [her] father and mother and the land of [her] birth." As a *nŏkriyyâ,* she has even fewer protections than a *gēr.*[914] Deuteronomy 26:12-15 describes the sacred obligations to these charity classes: tithes from one's produce are to be given every three years "to the Levite, the *gēr,* the orphan, and the widow, that they may eat their fill in your settlements." Boaz provides for several of these classes at once, and not just occasional charity, but lifelong security. Just as nobly, in doing so, he rescues a family line from extinction, just as the levirate law (Deut 25:5-10) intends. Thus, though Ruth does "seduce" Boaz, the result is not apostasy but even greater moral action than the generosity already demonstrated.

Describing Ruth as a seductress challenges the stereotype in another way as well. Ruth is explicitly compared to Tamar, Rachel and Leah (4:11-12). As Mieke Bal notes, all three of these women are not only foremothers of Israel, they had also used some form

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[912]Mieke Bal, "Heroism and Proper Names, or the Fruits of Analogy," in *A Feminist Companion to Ruth* (ed. Athalya Brenner; FCB 3; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993), 47.

[913]Streete also notes the implied contrast, saying that Ruth is never called a *zōnâ* because, unlike the other "seductress" types of her study (*The Strange Woman,* 71), the Israelite man in this case is not led into apostasy.

[914]Siquans points out that biblical laws provide only for male *gērîm* and *nŏkrîm.* A woman like Ruth, who has no male relative, whether Israelite, *gēr,* or *nŏkrî,* and thus no official protections or rights. ("Foreignness and Poverty," 446-49).

of deception to achieve maternity. [915] The only biblical story about Tamar tells how she

tricks Judah into sex after he withholds his son as a husband (Genesis 38). Yet he himself

exonerates her action, even after calling her a whore for turning up pregnant (Gen 38:24).

The soundness of her motives forces him to confess publicly that, "She is more righteous

than I" (Gen 38:26). It is through Perez, one of the children of this deception, that the

genealogy of both David (Ruth 4:18-22) and some of the *gôlâ* (1 Chr 2:5, 9:4, 27:3) are

traced. Deceptions also appear in the stories of Rachel and Leah. Jacob must be tricked

into marrying Leah (Gen 29:16-25), whom he had passed over because she was

unattractive.[916] Had he not married her, however, there would have been eight fewer

tribes in Israel. Rachel might not have conceived without the mandrakes—apparently a

kind of love charm—provided by Leah's son (Gen cf. 30:14-16 cf. 30:22-23). When the

elders compare these particular women to Ruth, who had approached Boaz "in stealth"

the previous night, they "speak truer than they know."[917] Together, the examples of

female deception argue that *when* they are used to "build up the house of Israel," the ends

justify the means. That the women are linked in a blessing is also appropriate, for it is

through the clever but "dubious" actions of these matriarchs that the numerousness

promised by the patriarchal blessing was actually achieved (e.g. Gen 13:16; 15:5; 18:18;

22:17; 26:4, 24; 28:3, 13-14).

In fact, the above are cases in which women accomplish the patriarch's goal better

than the patriarch himself. Tamar is especially praised for concerning herself with the

lineage of the house when the patriarch himself had been careless of it. Mention of Tamar

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[915]Bal, "Heroism and Proper Names," 62-63.
[916]Fewell and Gunn see Jacob's wedding night as one of the allusions in the night scene in Ruth
(*Compromising Redemption,* 62, 78).
[917]Bal, "Heroism and Proper Names," 62-63.

in this story also encourages us to reconsider the story of Lot's daughters.[918] As Fewell and Gunn point out, Ruth's Moabiteness and her seduction of Boaz in darkness evoke the seduction scene in Genesis 19.[919] And yet, given the fresh memory of Tamar's actions, the express intention of the daughters to "preserve seed from our father" (Gen 19:32, 34) suggests that their action has the proper intent, if not the proper object.[920] Thus the examples also suggest that the criticism of foreign women should be directed, not to the women, who are blamed as seductresses, but at men who neglect their patriarchal and patriotic duty to "build up the house of Israel." Men forced to divorce their "foreign wives," as Ezra 10 proposes, would tear down both households and the nation as a whole.

Of course, the ethnicity of the women in this group is one of the key reasons that scholars have long seen Ruth as an argument against Ezra. Ruth the Moabite and Tamar the Canaanite together signify the two major categories that Ezra 9:1 combines to represent "the peoples of the lands" with whom marriage is a great sin. By invoking these figures from the past *and* grouping them in the same category as Israel's matriarchs Rachel and Leah, the author both evaluates them positively for their contribution to Judah-Israel and makes the point that Judah's—even David's—lineage has been ethnically mixed from the start. The premise in Ezra 9:2 that intermarriage dilutes "the holy seed" is flawed, for from the founding of Judah's line, the people has been an "admixture," and not a pure race. Just like purity of means, purity of "seed" is something that should matter little when Israel as a whole is built up.

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[918]Brenner, "Naomi and Ruth," in *A Feminist Companion to Ruth* (ed. Athalya Brenner; FCB 3; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993), 81.
[919]Fewell and Gunn, *Compromising Redemption*, 78.
[920]This narrative also reframes the actions of Lot's daughters more positively. Ruth's action of approaching Boaz in darkness recalls their seduction of their father (*Compromising Redemption*, 78). But by evoking their story alongside that of Tamar, their intention to "preserve seed from our father" (Gen 19:32, 34) is cast in a different light: both Moab's mother and Tamar rightly concern themselves with the preservation of lineage when the patriarchs themselves are careless of it.

### b. Challenging Deuteronomy 23

*1) Invoking the subject of the law*

The book of Ruth also dialogues with Deuteronomy 23 as the foundation of

Ezra's and Nehemiah's argument. This argument begins simply with the fact that Ruth is

a Moabite, and that her ethnicity is made a prominent feature of the book. She is called

"the Moabitess" no fewer than seven times (1:4, 22; 2;2, 6, 21; 4:5, 10), and often at key

points.[921] That her ethnicity responds to Ezra 9's argument is further suggested by the

story's mention of Tamar, as mentioned above. If the book does appear suddenly in the

fourth century, as I think, then there is little reason besides the intermarriage controversy

to tell a story about the by-then extinct group. The fact that historical Moab had

disappeared allows the author to construct a character unattached to active prejudices, as

an Ammonite woman might be. It is thus more possible for the author to persuade his

audience that "Moabite" means something different than what they had supposed.

*2) Countering the Characterization of Moabites in the Law*

As argued in chapter 3, Neh 13:1-3 reads the historical rationales for excluding

Moabites as criteria for those who must be excluded from Israel. Moabites become those

in the current environment who did not offer bread and water, who attempted to curse

them, and whose curse was turned into a blessing by God. The story of Ruth answers

these charges by portraying Moab as a source of both hospitality/provision and blessing.

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[921]Vesco, "La date," 242.

The deaths at the beginning of the story at first make it appear that Moab *is* a source of curse. After their names, Elimelech's death is the first thing reported about the family after its move to Moab (1:3). That the man's two sons also die after marrying Moabite women makes one suspect, as Judah does Tamar,[922] that the Moabite women might be the problem.[923] Some rabbinic interpreters conclude precisely this: they conclude that Mahlon and Chilion die as a divine punishment for marrying Moabite women (*Ruth Rabbah* 1:4).[924] That there are no children in ten years of marriage might also suggest divine punishment or curse.[925] But by the end of the story, Ruth's sterling character banishes suspicions of her or of Moab as sources of curse. On the contrary, Moab is a source of shelter to a Judahite family during a famine. In other words, when this particular family faces its own "wilderness experience," Moab does provide—and not only food, but also wives.[926] And unlike the wives of Baʿal of Peʿor that had led the Israelites of the wilderness to doom, the Moabite wife here proves to be a source of blessing, as we will see below. Perhaps the fertility of Moab is the very reason it is called *śadeh*-Moab seven times (1:1, 2, 6 (2), 22; 2:6; 4:3);[927] for the same word is used several more times in the story referring to fields as agricultural land.

The image of Moabites in Deut 23:4 as people who "did not meet you with bread and with water" is countered not only by Moab as a place of refuge, but also by Ruth

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[922]Bal, "Heroism and Proper Names," 64.

[923]Fewell and Gunn conclude that Naomi's speech to her daughters in law carries a hint of blame (*Compromising Redemption,* 72).

[924]D. R. G. Beattie, *The Targum of Ruth: Translated, with Introduction, Apparatus, and Notes* (The Aramaic Bible 19; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1987), 19.

[925]God's control over fertility is especially apparent in interventions or blessings where the deity is credited with opening the womb: Gen 29:31, 49:25; Ex 23:26; Deut 7:13; 28:11.

[926]Goulder, "Ruth: A Homily?" 315.

[927]Hamlin, *Ruth*, 8. The term *śadeh* seems to have a generally agricultural meaning in Ruth. It occurs 16 times in all, usually to refer to the fields where harvest is occurring, but also to family lands whose presumed purpose is subsistence farming.

herself, who acts as provisioner for her Israelite mother-in-law. Twice in the story she is

shown bringing grain to Naomi (2:17-18; 3:16-17), as she does throughout the harvest

season. But Ruth's character takes "hospitality" and "provisioning" to a new level. It

would be one thing for Ruth to host Naomi in her own land, but she *follows* Naomi back

to the "House of Bread" to be able to care for her! There the reversal of host-guest roles

continues to play out, as the foreigner Ruth takes the initiative to go in search of food,

even though it is Naomi who has kin in the village (2:1). Her industriousness in procuring

food is commented upon by Boaz's foreman, who tells him that, "She has been on her

feet ever since she came this morning. She has rested but little in the hut" (2:7). This

depiction of Ruth as industrious, combined with Boaz's remark that the people recognize

her as an *ʾēšet ḥayil* (3:11), may gesture to the portrait of the *ʾēšet ḥayil* in Proverbs 31,

suggesting that Ruth is far more like the "ideal wife" than she is the *ʾiššâ zarâ,* the

*nŏkriyyâ* of Proverbs 1-9.[928]

As discussed above, Ruth's proposal to Boaz demonstrates the extent of her

willingness to provide for Naomi. Her generosity is a study in contrasts to the famous

stinginess of the Deut 23:4 Moabites. What makes her laudable character especially

significant is that Naomi, the Israelite character to whom she is so generous, exudes

nothing but bitterness and ingratitude throughout much of the story. The contrast between

them makes an important point: that the character imputed to Moabites in Deuteronomy

23, on which their permanent and unconditional exclusion is based, is neither eternal nor

generalizeable. Meanness is not true of all Moabites any more than *ḥesed* is true of all

Israelites. And even if it is true that Moab had wronged Israel in the wilderness, it had

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[928]So also Hamlin, *Ruth,* 47.

provided for them at times, too.

Deuteronomy 23:5's second accusation against Moab is that it had hired Balaam in an attempt to curse Israel. In Ruth, the theme of blessing is so prominent as to suggest an intentional rejoinder to the idea of Moab as a source of curse: eight explicit blessings are packed into four short chapters (1:8-9; 2:4; 2:12; 2:19, 2:20; 3:10; 4:11-12; 4:14-15), all invoke the name of Yhwh,[929] and most are neatly fulfilled within the story itself. All but one of these blessings (that of Boaz to his workers) either blesses Ruth, or blesses another character based on actions she had initiated.

The story treats blessing several different ways. First, it refutes the idea that Moab is a *source* of curse, as in Deut 23:4. What comes out of Moab in the story—Ruth herself—is a source of blessing for both the Israelite characters and Israel as a nation. For Naomi, Ruth provides sustenance, long-term security, and the child who renews her life and her family line in old age. At the end of the story, the village women explicitly bless Naomi, hailing Ruth's child as her own ("A son is born to Naomi!) and telling her that with Ruth, she is better off than if she had seven sons (Ruth 4:15-16). "Seven sons" represent not only a cultural ideal, but seem to be a sign of divine blessing, for this is the number of sons Job has at the beginning of his story, before God removes his blessing (Job 1:20), and at the end, when it is restored (Job 42:13).

Boaz, too, is blessed through the Moabite woman, for he gains a wife regarded in the community as an *ʾēšet ḥayil* and a child late in life. "The people at the gate and the elders" explicitly bless Boaz along with Ruth because of the marriage that *she* had suggested (4:11-12).

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[929]Though 2:19 does not, the blessing there is elaborated in 2:20, which does invoke Yhwh.

The villagers' blessings on both Boaz and Naomi express hope that their "names" will be kept alive: that Boaz will have "a name spoken (קרע) in Bethlehem" (4:12), that Naomi will have "a name spoken (קרע) in Israel" (4:15). Both blessings are already fulfilled within the story: Naomi and Boaz both gain local fame through the miraculous birth of Ruth's child (see below), and their "names" are remembered because they are written into the story. But the real greatness of "name" to which the authors refer is David's. The fulfillment of a great "name" at that level describes a blessing visited on the whole nation, not just on Boaz and Naomi. Second Samuel 7:9 and 8:13 speak of the greatness of David's "name" as a confirmation of his divine election—his blessing by Yhwh (2 Sam 7:27-29). That David's name can ultimately be "spoken" so many centuries later, despite the near-death of exile, confirms that the blessing continues into the audience's present. And to what does that survival owe? To this tenuous chain of events in Bethlehem, initiated by the good deeds of a Moabite woman and blessed by Providence.[930]

The second way in which Ruth challenges Deuteronomy 23's notion of curse is that it makes "Ruth the Moabite" a recipient of Yhwh's blessing as well as an agent. Naomi blesses her by Yhwh, and presumes that He will reward with *ḥesed* the *ḥesed* that she had shown "to the dead and to me" (1:8). Boaz, too, praises Ruth's *ḥesed* and blesses her by Yhwh (2:12, 3:10). His blessings also presuppose that a Moabite could "have a

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[930]I have not dwelt long on the theme of Providence, but interpreters both ancient and modern have seen the union of Boaz and Ruth as one guided invisibly by Providence. Judah J. Slotki conveys a traditional Jewish understanding of Ruth 2:3 as an expression of Providence ("Ruth," in *The Five Megilloth: Hebrew Text, English Translation and Commentary* [ed. A. Cohen; Hinhead, Eng.: Soncino Press, 1946], 50), while Jane Richardson Jensen describes the early Christian interpreter Ephrem the Syrian, who sees Ruth's and Boaz's union as one orchestrated by God to eventuate in the birth of Christ ("Ruth According to Ephrem the Syrian," in *The Feminist Companion to Ruth* [ed. Athalya Brenner; FCB 3; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993], 174). Hubbard also notes the theme (*Book of Ruth*, 38).

full recompense from Yhwh, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have sought refuge" (2:12). The elders include a blessing for Ruth in the one for Boaz: "May Yhwh make the woman who is coming into your house like Rachel and Leah, both of whom built up the house of Israel!" (4:11). They too, assume that Yhwh would do his work on a Moabite woman, and that she, just as much as Rachel and Leah, could "build up the house of Israel." These statements are extraordinary in their picture of Yhwh as an "equal opportunity god." Their implicit theology challenges that of Ezra 9, in which Yhwh's care is limited to the *gôlâ* alone and all others are called "peoples of abominations." What is more, Ezra describes Yhwh's favor as founded on one thing: the group's refusal to marry outsider women (Ezra 9:6-12). The characters in Ruth assume that Yhwh rewards *ḥesed* wherever it is found and by whomever enacts it.

The story affirms that Ruth deserves the blessings pronounced over her, for they are repeatedly fulfilled. She is "recompensed" for "all she has done," just as Boaz prays (2:12) through generous gleanings and a marriage that grants her long-term security. But more pointedly, "Yhwh gave her conception, and she bore a son" (Ruth 4:13). This is the only action in the book that the narrator explicitly attributes to God. Even without a statement making Yhwh's role explicit, the couple's immediate conception would seem miraculous, for Ruth had been childless after ten years of marriage (1:4) and Boaz was not one of the "younger men" (3:10).[931] Thus Yhwh grants unequivocal blessing to the fruit of a mixed marriage, precisely the kind of union that Ezra claims would elicit Yhwh's most ardent wrath (Ezra 9:14). What is more, the birth of a son to a barren woman and aging man through Yhwh's intervention affirms the elders' comparison of

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[931]Hamlin, *Ruth*, 64, 68; Bronner, "A Thematic Approach," 162.·

Ruth to the matriarchs. Indeed, since Ruth is the ancestress of David, the blessing Yhwh

speaks for Sarah could apply better to Ruth:

> 'I will bless her;
> indeed, I will give you [Abraham] a son by her.
> I will bless her so that she shall give rise to nations;
> rulers of peoples shall issue from her."  (Gen 17:16, *NJPS*)

So where Deuteronomy 23 and Nehemiah 13 exclude Moabites from the

assembly of Yhwh, the story has a Moabite included in Israel, blessed by other Israelites,

and blessed by Yhwh Himself.

### c.   Challenging Ezra's Principles of Interpretation

Though Neh 13:1-3 cites the ideas that Moabites were inhospitable and cursed

Israel, Ezra 9 uses the law in another way. He cites the commandment, "Do not seek their

well-being or prosperity—ever" (Ezra 9:12// Deut 23:6). This he presents as the condition

upon which the community can receive Yhwh's blessing—can "eat the good of the land

and bequeath it to your children." Ezra's paradigm for blessing is one of scarcity; he

warns the *gôlâ* that sharing with outsiders impoverishes them, strips them of inheritance.

The notion that "intermingling" of "holy seed" represents a great sin expresses the same

sentiment: intermarriage lends the privilege of "holy seed" to those who have no right to

it. The principle of Deut 23:4-5 is similar: since Moab did not extend hospitality to Israel,

Israel will shut Moabites out of its congregation. Tit-for-tat.

The paradigm in Ruth is quite different. Its theology of blessing is expressed

nicely in the law that commands gleaning:

> When you reap the harvest in your field and overlook a sheaf in the field, do not
> turn back to get it; it shall go to the *gēr*, the fatherless, and the widow—*in order
> that Yhwh your God may bless you in all your undertakings.* (Deut 24:19)

According to this law, blessing follows as a reward from God for sharing with those who

have nothing—those who could not possibly reciprocate. A similar idea is expressed by Boaz, who blesses Ruth on account of her loyalty toward Naomi, saying, "May Yhwh reward your deeds! May you have a full recompense from Yhwh, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have sought refuge!" (Ruth 2:12, *NJPS*). The theology is played out through the plot in which generosity begets blessing, stimulating further generosity and more blessing. It is not merely Ruth's neediness, but her loyalty toward Naomi that inspires Boaz to treat Ruth so generously (2:11-12). In other words, she brings blessing upon herself by first acting righteously toward someone else. Ruth, however, does not keep the fruit of blessing for herself, but shares it with Naomi. She then takes her generosity further, securing long-term security for Naomi by marrying Boaz. Once again, it is Boaz's admiration for the character she demonstrates that rewards her request with success. But if bestowing marriage is an act of generosity, Boaz loses nothing and gains everything by it: a noble wife, a miraculous child, and an unparalleled "name" in Israel. In other words, had Boaz treated Ruth as Ezra tells his community to do, Naomi would have died hungry and bitter, Boaz would been forgotten by history, and David would not have been born. Ezra's principle of refusing benefit to the Other denies blessing to Israel as well.

That the principle in Ruth can be seen in Deuteronomy 24 is no accident. Many of Ruth's plot elements also appear in Deuteronomy—and precisely in the chapters near the law barring Moabites. For this reason Goulder concludes that Ruth is a "counterblast" to Deut 23:4-7, and that it draws its plot elements from Deuteronomy 23-25.[932] In addition to the law for gleaning (Deut 24:19), which is not described by any other biblical story,

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[932]Goulder also sees a reference to Deut 22:30 [Eng. 23:1] ("Ruth: A Homily?" 316-17), but I find this the weakest of his arguments and will not be treating it here.

Ruth also features the practice of levirate marriage (Deut 25:5-10).[933] This, too, is a rare

plot element in biblical stories (found only in Ruth and Genesis 38), and this

Deuteronomy law is especially apparent in the wording of Ruth. Deuteronomy 23-25 also

features commandments instructing Israelites to care for the vulnerable, naming widows,

orphans, and *gērîm* among them. The laws require both positive contributions (Deut

24:19-22; 26) and restraint from abuses (Deut 24:14, 17). We also find exhortations for

attitudes of compassion and empathy: "Remember that you were slaves in the land of

Egypt" (Deut 23:8; 24:17-18). If Goulder is right that Ruth alludes to laws in

Deuteronomy 23-25, then the point is clear: the same laws can be read to very different

effect. The author of Ezra 9 can read this same corpus and yet speak of the prohibition of

intermarriage and denial of benefit to "the peoples of the lands" as *the* commandment

upon which Yhwh's favor depends. The author of Ruth finds laws that are both far

broader in scope and far different in spirit: commands to care for the vulnerable, among

whom may well be foreign women.

The problem with the idea that Ruth interacts with Deuteronomy 23-25 is that the

laws are not applied in Ruth as they are described in the current version of Deuteronomy.

Some have seen this as evidence that the book is earlier than Deuteronomy; others have

seen it as a reflection of the author's confusion. I follow those who, like Danna Nolan

Fewell and David Miller Gunn, see this as a case of creative exegesis rather than

misunderstanding. One reason for the deviations from the written legal codes is that the

characters, especially Boaz, are meant to act more generously than the laws require. Boaz

does not merely leave the corners of the field for gleaners as Deut 24:19 (and Lev 19:9,

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[933]Goulder, "Ruth: A Homily?" 307-19.

23:22) require, he gives Ruth permission to glean among the sheaves (Ruth 2:7-8),[934] then further instructs his workers to pull out extra grain from what they had already gathered (Ruth 2:15-16). Though the laws warn against "oppressing" hired workers (Deut 24:14) or subverting justice for the *gēr* (Deut 24:17), Boaz actively offers protection, instructing Ruth to stay in his fields, among his female servants, for the duration of the season, and warning his male servants not to "molest" her (Ruth 2:9, 15, 16). That he treats her with hospitality, inviting her to drink and eat "until she was sated" (2:14), also goes beyond basic duty. His assumption of the role of levir also exceeds the law (see below). Not only does Boaz not deny justice to a stranger, he pursues it on her behalf, as we see in the final scene at the gate. The "justice" here is not just legal redress, but the "recompense" (2:12) of which her goodness had made her worthy. Thus the book implies that "the Law" contains only the *minimum* requirements, but point in the direction of generosity. To do more is better, and as the story demonstrates, reaps greater blessings.

The most explanation is needed for what occurs at the gate in the combining of laws for levirate marriage and redemption of land. What I propose is happening here is that the author is drawing upon the same two corpora of laws that Ezra 9 does: Deuteronomy and the Holiness Code in Leviticus.[935] The contrast in outcome is obvious, and this again makes the point that the same sets of laws—and the same kinds of cut-and-paste exegesis—may lead to very different results, depending upon the exegete's motivations. Whereas Ezra seeks the most restrictive limit, Boaz seeks the laws and

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[934]Ruth's request might be seen as bold, since it is more than what gleaners were traditionally entitled to, but it may be, as Sasson suggests, that she asks for this permission in order to meet the owner of the field and thus "find someone in whose eyes I might find favor" (2:2) (Sasson, *Ruth,* 47).

[935]Fewell and Gunn's depiction of Boaz may be a bit cynical, but the ingenuity and creativity that they ascribe to his application of the laws is in my view correct (see *Compromising Redemption,* 55, 59-60).

interpretation that will have the most benevolent outcome.

The argument is as follows. In calling Boaz a *gōʾēl,* Ruth alludes to the general idea of redemption: the rescue of those who are impoverished or enslaved. Deut 24:18 describes Yhwh playing this role by redeeming Israel out of Egypt. The notion of *gōʾēl* as "rescuer" is apparent in the laws dealing with redemption from debt slavery (Lev 25:35-44). Since Naomi had told Ruth that he was a *gōʾēl* to them (Ruth 2:20), Ruth appeals to Boaz to play this role. But Boaz raises the lawsuit under the specific redemption duties for *land*. He is thus not talking about redemption in general, but the laws of Lev 25:23-34, which describe procedures for land that an impoverished family member is forced to sell. It is Lev 25:25 that dictates the duty of redemption as that of "the redeemer closest to him [i.e., to the kinsman selling the land]" (גְאָלוֹ הַקָּרֹב אֵלָיו). The relationship of "nearest kinsman" that dictates his approach to the other *gōʾēl* is not found in the levirate marriage law and has nothing to do with it. And indeed, Boaz first approaches the kinsman as though the matter pertained strictly to redemption of land.[936] He does not reveal until later that he intends to act as levir in a way that would affect a sale of family property.

What makes sense of this scene is the understanding that sale of land is a rare occurrence, and has a very different implication as "duty" than does levirate marriage. Land was apparently not put up for sale unless its owner was forced by debt to do so (Neh 5:3; Lev 25:25). This is apparent in the redemption laws if we recognize that sellers are given every opportunity to buy their land back: it is assumed that if they can, they will

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[936]Fewell and Gunn think that the land sale is a ruse (*Compromising Redemption,* 59). It would seem strange, however, if Boaz could pull off such a fiction in a small town where everyone knows everyone else's business.

do so. Debt being an inevitability, however, the redemption laws propose a safety mechanism: that "the land shall not be sold permanently" (Lev 25:23), but rather can be repurchased by those who lose it, or at least by their families. Thus an impoverished person forced to sell can either sell the land to a relative (Lev 25:25), or, if he comes into money, buy it back himself (Lev 25:26-27). Even if the person is not able to buy the land, it must be returned to him in the Jubilee year (Lev 25:28). So *only* if land is purchased from a person with no heirs could the purchase be free and clear. This means that the kind of purchase Boaz proposes, in which there appears to be no heir to repurchase the property, is a rare opportunity rather than a heavy burden.[937] With good reason the other *gōʾēl* jumps at it—agreeing without Boaz ever naming a price (Ruth 4:4).

The laws of levirate marriage, on the other hand, clearly describe duties that no man wanted. Most of the law describes consequences for the brothers-in-law who refuse this duty, and these make clear that coercion was often necessary. The man might have to be taken aside by the village elders, and if their scolding could not persuade him, publicly shamed by allowing the widow to pull off his sandal and spit in his face (Deut 25:7-10). As Goulder points out, Ruth's use of a lawsuit settled at the "gate," by "elders," and involving the removal of the other person's sandal as acknowledgement of refusal to do a duty all allude to the Deuteronomy 25 law, though the Ruth author changes some of the meanings.[938] According to Deut 25:5-10, the levirate duties are incumbent on neither Boaz nor the other *gōʾēl,* for only "brothers living together" must serve as surrogates for a dead brother. That is, the law applies to men who are *literally* brothers. But this is

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[937]Bal points this out, though her reasoning is slightly different ("Heroism and Proper Names," 56-57).

[938]"Ruth: A Homily," 312-13.

precisely why Boaz takes the duty on: he is a "brother" in the broad sense of the term, and so *can* serve as a levir for Mahlon. By acting as levir, Boaz's child would count as Mahlon's, and thus a new *gōʾēl* for the land could be created—one closer to the original seller of the land (Naomi). (Note that the village women apply the term *gōʾēl* to Ruth and Boaz's child [4:14-15].) As Naomi's grandson, the child would have the right to repurchase the land from the other *gōʾēl*. This is what land sold under the principles of "redemption" imply: if land *can* be resold to the original owners, it must be. What the *gōʾēl* first thinks is an outright land acquisition land turns out instead to be a long-term loan at no interest. The cost is too high. Thus, he withdraws his offer to redeem.

Boaz's combination of the levirate law with the law of redemption is not a mistake.[939] By waiting to reveal his intent to act as levir, he forces the other *gōʾēl* to admit that he is not willing to redeem in the true sense of the word.[940] The clear intent of redemption laws is to keep land as close to its original owners as possible, and to have family act as "brothers" by rescuing their impoverished kinsmen. Israelites are addressed as "brothers" precisely because what the law asks is difficult: those of greater means are asked to sacrifice for the sake of family bonds. Boaz exposes the other *gōʾēl* unwillingness to make a sacrifice for the sake of family. He is *able* to redeem, as his willingness to buy the land attests, but he is not willing to do so unless it profits him. Thus the law meant to legislate *ḥesed* has become merely a pretext for accumulating the

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[939]Fewell and Gunn see the combination of the laws as a clever innovation by Boaz rather than a mistake of the storyteller (*Compromising Redemption,* 89, 91).
[940]Ibid., 59-60.

property of unfortunate relatives. The barb at the "so-and-so"[941] who shirks his duty is probably the writer's critique of a practice occurring in his own time. But it points out as well that people may fulfill the letter of the Law while acting completely contrary to its spirit.[942] Implicitly, this critique is also leveled at Ezra, who selects from the body of laws demanding care for the widow, a law that demands divorces—that *creates* "widows." It may keep the letter of some laws, but certainly violates the spirit of generosity that according to the author, is the more predominant theme of "the Law."

The guiding principle of Boaz's "selective" interpretation of the law is to err on the side of generosity; to do more than is absolutely required. What would happen if this principle were applied to Ezra's application of Deut 23:4-8? Ezra treats Edomites and Egyptians according to the law for Ammonites and Moabites. This directly violates Deut 23:8, which allows for inclusion after the fourth generation and furthermore commands, "You shall not abhor any of the Edomites, for they are your kin. You shall not abhor any of the Egyptians, because you were an alien residing in their land." In deriving a single principle, Ezra finds the most restrictive rule and draws the line there. If there should be a single rule that applies to all foreigners, why not privilege the more generous one? Does

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[941]Describing this man as *peloni ʿalmoni* (Ruth 4:1) when other characters are named is odd. Perhaps "so-and-so" is a locution for a person that the audience would immediately recognize, another way of saying "you-know-who."

[942]Now, there is still a problem with this understanding, for Boaz seems not follow through with his promise to raise up an heir for Elimelech: the child is reckoned as his in the genealogy, not Mahlon's. Perhaps we are to conclude that the preservation of the individual house matters less than building up "the house of Israel." For that goal, the replacement of men named "Sickly" with one named "In Him is Strength" would be counted an improvement. This seems to be the view of Daube, who refers to the characters by their translated names, and thus paraphrases, "At [Ruth's] first meeting in Judah with Sickly's and Weakly's sturdier relation Boaz, Pillar, he congratulates her…" (*Ancient Jewish Law,* 6).

Bronner's contention that the names are symbolic and points out that the rabbis also comment on their meanings. The name meanings above are her translations ("A Thematic Approach," 154). Sasson's observation that Maḥlon and Chilion rhyme supports their usage as literary devices. He also suggests that Maḥlon's name might be a pun on *naḥalâ* (*Ruth,* 18-19). At the same time, Boaz's name might have drawn meaning as well from the temple pillar by that name (1 Kgs 7:21//2 Chr 3:17)—an association that might have signaled the character's role as a "strong support," or invoked some other, unknown tradition.

the exhortation to treat Edomites as "kin" and to remember the experience of slavery not

have more similarity to the other commandments in The Law? Why not make Moabites

eligible at the fourth generation? Goulder suggests that Ruth asks precisely this question,

for it places David exactly three generations away from his Moabite great-

grandmother.[943] According to Ezra's interpretation of the Law, David should be reckoned

Moabite, for Ezra had further argued that the taint of Moabiteness inhered in Moabite

blood from mother or father, and that the law of Deuteronomy 23 applied to children with

*any* Moabite lineage. Ruth presses these interpretations to their logical conclusions:

should David, the founder of Jerusalem's great monarchic dynasty, be forever banned

from the assembly of Israel? If the question is preposterous, then so is the interpretation

of the law.

### d. Fertility Rather than Purity: A Different Paradigm

Like other People texts, Ruth argues about intermarriage on the bodies of women.

But the tropes of female purity, restraint, and threats of pollution so typical of the People

texts in Chapter 3 are conspicuous by their absence. The comment of Rabbi Zeʿira in

*Ruth Rabbah* shows awareness that purity is not only absent, but that Ruth proposes an

alternative to the purity paradigm:

> "this scroll tells nothing either of cleanliness or of uncleanness, neither of
> prohibition or permission. For what purpose then was it written? To teach how
> great is the reward of those who do deeds of kindness" *(Ruth Rabbah 2.13).*[944]

In framing foreign women as polluted, Ezra had marked foreignness with visceral

disgust and a connection to "abominations" that made them irredeemable. But what could

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[943]"Ruth: A Homily?" 316.
[944]Pointed out by Bronner, "A Thematic Approach," 147.

a person point to in the story of Ruth that could make such a characterization anything but absurd? By showing Yhwh himself rewarding Ruth with conception, the author denies that Yhwh's demands are as singular and narrow as Ezra claims. I doubt that the author means to discard purity requirements, but he does suggest they are secondary: he asserts that God cares more about righteous action and "building up the house of Israel" than about the "intermingling of seed."

As an alternative to women-as-source-of-impurity, the book of Ruth elevates women as symbols of fertility; it points out the critical role female fertility plays in realizing Yhwh's Promises to the patriarchs. I have already described the ways in which Ruth is aligned with the matriarchs to emphasize her role in fulfilling the Promise and realizing blessing. The author supplements that more subtle point with the explicit claim that "Yhwh gave her conception," officially framing the mixed union as a site of blessing and fertility rather than curse and pollution-induced wrath.

The fertility of Ruth and the other matriarchs is reinforced by parallel imagery of the land's fertility. The courtship takes place during the harvest, in a field of grain, and on a threshing floor. Boaz presents Ruth with grain on two different occasions—a symbol of the "seed" that he will plant in Ruth herself.[945] The threshing floor scene features food and drink in plentiful supply, as the "merry heart" and contented sleep of the men attest. The "heap of grain" that provides cover for Ruth and Boaz's tryst recalls the image used for the voluptuous belly of the female lover in Song of Songs (7:3 [2]).[946] Naomi, who describes herself as empty, finds herself full at the end—celebrated and literally blessed by her peers, who describe the baby she "held to her bosom" as a "redeemer" (4:14) and

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[945]Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative,* 58.
[946]Hamlin, *Ruth,* 41.

"a restorer of life and a nourisher in your old age" (4:15). The abundance of the story stands in counterpoint to the paradigm of scarcity and anxiety that there will not be enough if the people "seek the benefit" of the outsider. Having acted for the benefit of Ruth, this community is only blessed the more. The deity intervenes directly to enable the birth of David's forefather and a family's land is saved from vulturous relatives. If the fertility of the harvest was because "God had considered his people and given them food" (Ruth 1:6), then the best way to ensure future abundance is to do the opposite of what Ezra suggests: to seek the benefit of the outsider, and to celebrate the possibilities by which the fertility of "foreign women" has and can continue to "build up the house of Israel."

The contrast between what foreign women connote in the People texts of Chapter 3 and what they connote in Ruth is paralleled by contrasts in the way these texts differently envision the Israelite social body. Numbers describes a rebellious Israel, easily led into idolatry and in need of strict leadership. Nehemiah 13 expresses exasperation with a community that lapses into sin as soon as the good governor leaves; whose people must be confronted and cursed and have their hair torn out to be made to behave. Ezra cries in dismay that Israel's sin reaches back to its beginnings and up to the heavens. He makes the case for a unified, centralized policy against intermarriage. In each case, the language of purity and sexual shame correlate with distrust of the Israelite populace and the assertion of a need for centralized control. The social body is implicitly viewed as a thing that must be contained—purified and sealed off from outsiders. On some level, the metaphor of the woman's body, the vessel with a vulnerable opening, seems also to be informing the authors' notions of social boundaries. They focus on the opening, feel its

vulnerability, and brace to seal it from attack. They treat Israel like a daughter or little sister, jealously guarding her honor from suitors they presume to be aggressively trying to break in. Ruth, on the other hand, portrays a society with highly porous boundaries between countries and flexible rules on marriage. The people are empowered to carry out justice and marriage decisions locally, and they do so responsibly. In fact, they behave with more righteousness than the Law would require. Yet none of the feared consequences result from these lax rules and open boundaries, for the author insists that both Israelites as a people and local systems of justice can be trusted. The more open boundaries in the text correspond to the text's celebration of opened wombs—the need for the collective womb to *be* open in order to be filled.

## Conclusions

This study of Ruth points out a number of paradigmatic contrasts with other People texts, and especially with Ezra 9. The form of Ruth differs from the speeches of Ezra and Nehemiah: it brings a Moabite woman to life rather than describing her as an abstraction; it shows more than tells. Ruth reverses the expectations of the dangerous seductress that appears in Numbers 25, Genesis 19, 1 Kings 11/Neh 13:26 and Proverbs 1-9 in that Ruth uses her wiles to lead an Israelite man to greater righteousness rather than sin or death. It even points out that seduction as a feminine strategy can sometimes lead to a better outcome, and that it had been used by Israel's own matriarchs.

In relation to Deuteronomy 23, Ruth both counters the specific descriptions of Moabites in the law and takes issue with the way Ezra 9 and Nehemiah 13 use it. Ruth the Moabite goes to extraordinary lengths to provision her Israelite mother-in-law, thus

overturning the image of inhospitable Moabites on which the law is predicated. She is portrayed a source of blessing rather than curse for Naomi, for Boaz, and for Israel as a whole. To Ezra's emphasis on pure lineage as the central commandment of the Law, Ruth reminds the reader of other commandments that focus on provision for the poor, the importance of preserving family lines, and God's preference for acts of *ḥesed*. Ezra's use of the law to convey that divine blessing is contingent on withholding benefit from "Moabites" is countered by Ruth's enactment of an ethic in which blessing, both human and divine, follows from generosity to a foreigner and righteous deeds by any person. To Ezra's "creative exegesis," Ruth proposes its own combination of laws from the same corpora, and demonstrates how different the result can be when the principle of selection and interpretation seek the most generous rather than the most restrictive outcome. By placing David at the fourth generation of descent from Ruth, the book challenges advocates of an Ezra-like reading whether they would really exclude David himself from the congregation of Israel.

In symbolizing Ruth as a source of fertility rather than pollution and positing a society that is trustworthy rather than wayward, the book also proposes different meanings for women, and for a society often symbolized as feminine. In the society envisioned by Ruth, people do not need strict oversight to behave—in fact, they behave more generously than required. Law need not be centralized for justice to be done—in fact, Boaz prevents use of a commandment that is technically legal but morally objectionable. The borders do not need to be sealed to foreigners—in fact, a foreigner here behaves more admirably than some of the Israelites.

Nor are foreign wives the dangerous influences the other People texts paint them

to be. Ruth's example implies that they can be precious resources on whom the community's realization of "blessing" depends. If anything, foreign women themselves are the ones endangered. Boaz's description of Ruth as one who had sought "refuge" under Yhwh's "wings" subtly reminds the community that an unattached foreign woman is a refugee whose care would be Yhwh's concern, and thus is their responsibility as well. A programme of enforced divorces, far from showing concern for the vulnerable, would create a whole new set of "widows." It would also violate the patriarchal duty to "build up the house" that the law of the levir expresses with such urgency.

In many ways the book of Ruth takes only the easiest case in which to argue against prevailing stereotypes about intermarriage and foreign women.[947] Ruth is a paradigm of virtue and the great-grandmother of David. She is removed from her homeland and any possible influence by her family or culture. Boaz's marriage to her is justified as an act of charity to a defenseless widow, who furthermore has ties to an Israelite family. In other words, her case is so specific that perhaps it is of little help to most of the women deemed "foreign" in the Restoration-era intermarriage controversy. Then again, it is precisely because Ruth represents an easier case and an unthreatening figure that intermarriage becomes an "easier pill to swallow."[948] It is because Ruth is so unassailable on moral grounds that her case exposes Ezra's use of the law as contentious rather than natural, his advocacy of purity as extreme, and his neglect of other Torah principles egregious. That is, the story not only demands some exceptions in the objections to intermarriage, it also questions the methods of interpretation used to justify

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[947]Carol Newsom, private communication.
[948]Ibid.

the intermarriage prohibitions.

Ruth has often been hailed as a model of human relations, but from a modern perspective, it implies some troubling things, especially for women and immigrants. Ruth must marry in order to survive, and had she chosen someone other than the aged Boaz, her mother-in-law would have been cast off without support. Ruth's being celebrated as a model woman requires her to display humility and loyalty beyond anything required of a native. Meanwhile, those who judge her and are praised for their largesse enjoy their social and economic privileges simply because they were born men. The price that Ruth pays for the praise she receives is also quite heavy: she has forsaken her own culture, religion, family and homeland. And even though she does give up all her ties and swear allegiance to the family, god and land of Naomi, she is always called "the Moabitess." That ethnic label forces the reader to challenge negative stereotypes about Moabites, but it also makes clear that she will never cease to be seen as a member of her original ethnic group. The low expectations of Moabites and the extra scrutiny cast on her mean that Ruth shines. But if she were to misstep, it is almost certain that her actions would be chalked up to "the way Moabites are." [949] The tragic experience of Jews in Nazi Europe was that even when they had been careful to assimilate and counted themselves more German than Jewish, it was the definitions of the dominant group, not their own behaviors, that determined their fates. Setting aside the problematics of assimilation as a goal, the case of Ruth points out the dilemma that minorities, especially ethnically distinct ones, face when they choose assimilation: sacrifice of one's cultural identity is

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[949]The exaggeration of Ruth's modesty in *Ruth Rabbah* suggests that, for the rabbis, her modesty had to exceed that of her Israelite peers to escape criticism. In the one point at which they perceive immodesty—where Ruth reports that she has been granted permission to remain among "the (male) servants"—they attribute her impure thoughts to her Moabite background (*Ruth R.* 5.11, discussed by Bronner, "A Thematic Approach," 160).

the price of admission, and yet no amount of sacrifice ever removes the original identity or assures a place in the dominant group.

# MOAB AS PEOPLE (PART 2): CONCLUSIONS

I argue above that there is some reason to view both Ruth and Chronicles as books later than and somewhat responsive to the views of foreigners in Ezra-Nehemiah. Yet definitive evidence for Ruth's lateness remains elusive and the differences between Chronicles' views of foreigners and those of Ezra-Nehemiah are more likely to be an outgrowth of its broader agenda than a direct response. Nevertheless, the contrast between the views of foreigners in Chronicles and especially in Ruth pose such strong contrasts with the other canonical portrayals of Moabites, and especially with those of Ezra-Nehemiah, that at the very least the group represents a dialogue about integration of Others into Israel.

While Ezra 9 presumes that the *gôlâ* possesses "holy seed" that must be kept pure, these books point out that Judah was a people mixed in blood from its very inception. Had "the Law" been applied as Ezra or Nehemiah interpreted it, they argue, Judah would have been a fraction of its size, there would have been no David, and if there had, his base would have been narrow and small. The Chronicler actually seems to point to the participation of foreigners in Israel as a tribute to Yhwh, to Israel, and to the Jerusalem cult. Outsiders legitimate that Yhwh is indeed the greatest god and David the greatest king. Ruth points out that foreigners had contributed both quality—the lineage of David, the courage of Tamar, the moral example of Ruth—and quantity in building up Israel. Thus both books argue that including foreigners in Israel is not only acceptable, but is furthermore a pragmatic strategy for Israel's future. Perhaps the lines of certain

families of Judah would not even survive without it.

Dialogue among different parts of the canon is one of the most valuable contributions these texts make, and this is especially true of Ruth. Its retention in the same corpus of texts as Ezra not only suggests dialogue as an important article of faithfulness, it also nudges the reader toward specific conversations about interpretation and a hierarchy of values. Ezra asserts that purity is a requirement that trumps all others. Ruth asserts that generosity matters more. Both could point to Torah for support. But how does each interpret the given commandments? What principles matter most? If a reader prefers the worldview of Ruth to Ezra, why is this? One is not more canonical than the other. If one is more "original," then the other has "the last word." What determines who is right? By juxtaposing two texts with such starkly different views, we might stimulate a new conversation—one about how we draw the boundaries of our own communities, and by what values we read and affirm or disavow the meanings of certain textual traditions.

# CONCLUSION

## Moab Texts and History: Gleanings

The historical survey in Chapter 1 draws conclusions that would probably be unsurprising to an archaeologist working on Moab. But seldom has the work in material culture and the theories that help to make sense of it been brought fully to bear on the literary representations of Moab. Material culture points out major ways in which the biblical narrative, straightforwardly read, distorts the historical picture. It especially misrepresents the power dynamic between Moab and Israel. The narrative would have us believe that Moab already possesses a monarchy and uses its institutional power to oppress the still-tribal, still-wandering Israelites. In reality, it was probably Israel that attained statehood first, and Israel whose power exceeded that of either Moab or Judah. Whereas Israel's identity is founded on escaping from the oppression of Egypt only to confront the oppression of Moab, the more likely story is that Moab coalesces into a state for the first time because it is "oppressed" (MI, L. 5). by the Omrides of Israel.

Research into the formation of statehood in the Levant problematizes the very terms in which we have tended to speak about Moab. Since Moab was a geographical region long before it was a state, what are "Moabites" really? Since Israelites lived in the same towns as Moabites, and in proximate and overlapping territories, to what extent were "Moab" and "Israel" self-evident entities, especially when the region kept changing hands? If the people of the region referred to themselves primarily as Gadites, Dibonites, "men of Sharon" and the like, to what extent did they think of themselves as either Moabites or Israelites? If the groups shared shrines like the one at Peor; if they feasted together and intermarried as Numbers 25 claims, then was ethnic distinctiveness the goal

of people on the ground as much as it was the leaders who wished to claim hegemony under a national banner? These questions point out that nationalities, ethnicities, and land boundaries are all far less clear-cut phenomena than they appear on the page. Sometimes the rhetoric is actively seeking to draw a clearer distinction between Moab and Israel than actually existed. Sometimes the distinction is a retrojection of a later time, and sometimes simply a heuristic. Unless we can recognize that such terms are not givens, we cannot be awake to the possibilities that they can be rhetorically manipulated—and that sometimes they assert rather than represent the reality they describe. In other words, the extrabiblical materials remind us of the need for rhetorical readings of the biblical texts.

The literature on tribal societies proves useful not only to understand more realistically how state formation probably occurred, but also why Moabite and Israelite societies held the ideologies of otherness that they did. In such societies, people rely upon their kin groups for protection, for enforcement of their rights, for access to economic capital and business connections, for retribution if they were injured, and for rescue in hard times. All of that means that loyalty to one's group has a whole different urgency and meaning than it does in our culture. In a competitive society, it is only realistic to presume that other groups might wish to harm yours. Even when the other group turns out not to be malevolent, the cost of misjudging this dictates caution as a prudent general response. Inclusion as a general value would seem foolhardy in such a context. Even when an outsider is harmless, he has little to offer in the currency of gifts, protections, and opportunities reciprocated among kin. In an environment where resources are scarce, it makes little sense to cut short food for one's own children to share with an outsider, who benefits you little. Chronicles and Ruth demonstrate an alternative to the more

suspicious approach; both view outsiders as potential assets. But in these cases the outsider's position remains firmly subordinate. The outsiders there are welcomed only they have proven their loyalty and usefulness to the dominant group beyond all doubt. Not all kinship societies function the same way, of course, and I am far from expert in understanding the different possible subtleties. But it seems clear that greater understanding of these values would benefit both biblical scholars and citizens of our global society. Deeper study might not only help Westerners to better understand the kin-oriented Muslim societies in they are politically involved, but also shed light on the West's own values and assumptions.

My historical survey of Moab's history also suggested that by the Persian Period, Moab had ceased to exist as a people. At the same time, my analysis of Nehemiah 13 and Ezra 9 showed that every mention of Moabites can be attributed to the way these authors are using Deut 23:4-7. Chapter 3 proposes a process whereby the *gôlâ* interpreters drew on Deuteronomy 23 to turn "the peoples of the lands" into putative Moabites, or Moabite-Canaanites. Perhaps by coincidence, the label turns out to be quite apt, for these were culturally similar people living in close proximity, like the Moabites and Israelites of old. All of these "peoples of the lands" were Yahwists like the *gôlâ* some were probably Judahites who had never left the land, others descendants of the original northern Israelites, and some the descendants of Assyrian transplants who had assimilated to Yahwism several centuries hence.[950] It would have been far more natural to see those groups as the natives, and as having the more natural claim on the land, the traditions of

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[950]Zertal asserts that the archaeological evidence supports the picture in Jer 41:5 of Samaria's remaining primarily Yahwistic. He believes that the foreigners imported by Assyria constituted no more than 20-25% of the population ("Province of Samaria," 385). I am becoming persuaded that toward the latter part of the Persian period, "Moab" began to refer primarily or exclusively to Samarians, but have not yet tested the idea more rigorously.

Israel, and worship in Jerusalem than the *gôlâ*, who had been living in Babylon for several generations. For the *gôlâ* to characterize them as foreign is ironic to say the least! But it accomplishes rhetorically what the *gôlâ* authors strive for: their neighbors are turned into "foreigners" and the similarities between them denied. A testament to the effectiveness of that rhetoric is that up until recently, most commentators on Ezra and Nehemiah tended to accept at face value that those described in the texts were "foreigners."

The Ezra-Nehemiah authors cast the peoples of the lands as Canaanites as well as Moabites, and indeed, seem to make more use of the exodus-conquest metaphor than of Moab as symbol. Nevertheless, other Moab texts, especially Numbers 25, reflect some concerns common to Ezra-Nehemiah and were probably expanded with the understanding that "Moabites" there referred to the peoples of the lands. Thus several of the "Moab texts" that we now have do not refer to Iron Age Moab at all, or they reflect a hybrid of older Moab traditions redacted to reflect a situation in post-exilic Yehud. This seems especially true of Numbers 25, and I am increasingly persuaded that the narrative portion of Numbers 22-24 is using Moab as a cipher for Samaria, though that idea needs further testing. Ruth may be an unusual example of a text invented out of whole cloth, though the tradition of David's Moabite ancestry is not new. The idea that many texts in the canonical corpus are polemics against Persian-era Samaria was a new insight for me, and I now begin to wonder what other stories might be criticizing Samaria symbolically. The fact that Lot is depicted as a foil for Abraham[951] raises the tantalizing possibility that Lot is depicted to represent the patriarch of (Persian-era) Samaria-plus-Ammon rather than (Iron Age) Moab and Ammon. I also wonder now whether the denunciation of Moab

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[951]Coats, "Lot: A Foil in the Abraham Saga," 113-132.

in Jeremiah 48 expanded as a function of Moab's destruction, or as a veiled threat to Jerusalem's northern neighbors. Establishing any of these would require a more sustained redactional argument and more precise dating of the various texts. My work attempts some first passes at dating and chronology, but I hope that scholars with more comprehensive theories of redaction might engage and test some of these ideas from other angles.

The tracing of Moab as a motif through different traditions has also illuminated some of the processes by which textual traditions seem to have been interpreted and expanded in the late Persian period, when the corpus was still fluid. The arguments in both Ezra and Ruth are dizzying in the degree to which they reference other textual traditions. And yet as familiar as those traditions are to the writers, the source texts can still be both critiqued and amended, yet left intact. Laws are creatively combined. The relative weights of laws are debated. And traditions about old-time Others are recycled to describe contemporary Others. The nature of expansion has an ethical implication: it reveals how deeply dialogical and intertextual the tradition is. But it also sounds a cautionary note for historical reconstructions, for it suggests that what we see is often a literary development based on interpretations of older traditions than a description of a historical event.

# Moab in Rhetoric: Contours

This project set out originally to trace the contours of Israel's attitudes toward Moab and to describe how those portrayals describe the various ways Israelite authors construct identity for their own group. Because I had the luxury of examining each text individually and comparing them side-by-side rather than combining them into a

composite, I could see patterns that might not have been evident otherwise. The underlying metaphors for encounter, I proposed, were male-male and male-female encounters.

The metaphor of masculine contests turns out to be especially apt for way State-State encounters are envisioned. The chief value in these texts is domination—proof of masculine strength. The paradigmatic Moab text here is 2 Sam 8:2, which touts the uncomplicated conquest of Moab as an empirical sign of Israel's superiority and Yhwh's favor on David. Psalm 60 similarly remembers conquest of Moab as a reassuring sign of Yhwh's presence, and laments its loss, yearns for its return. Conquest bolsters Israel's standing in the world, its confidence in itself, and its faith that Yhwh is truly present. It defines the ideal, and when success is not forthcoming, one witnesses the authors scrambling for other means to approximate that ideal as nearly as possible. The prophetic texts assert superior status by virtue of their relationship with Yhwh, while reducing Moab's status through denigration. The underdog texts empower Israel through ridicule and claim that Yhwh directly intercedes when his people are threatened. In each of these texts, the authors seek to sharpen the distinction between Israel and Moab as much as possible, to define Israel *against* and *above* the negative example of Moab.

The metaphor of masculine contests that the texts presuppose also structures the relationship between Israel and Moab as one of conflict *a priori*. Contests contain within them the goal of clear-cult outcomes, the establishment of winners and losers, and the stark separation of the two opposing sides. So the metaphor of the contest also excludes the possibilities of other kinds of relationships—cooperative endeavors or interactions of

give-and-take. To give is to give up; to cooperate is to blur the line between parties. No vulnerability is allowed in this sphere.

Though State-type encounters are regimented by the requirement of invulnerability, the comparison with the People texts reveals that they are also thereby liberated of certain worries. When Israel and Moab meet as states, both are imagined as discreet bodies, each coherent and impermeable. Though there is contact, there is never the threat of influence, of pollution, of seduction or love. The bodies may get bruised or be subordinated, but they are not interpenetrated by the Other. There is never any risk that Israel will become Moabite-like. In fact, to encounter in war is to define the identity of each party even more strongly: one is a winner, one a loser. Each side strengthens solidarity within its group, whose members demonstrate their willingness to die for their brothers, and to take up arms against the common enemy.

What distinguishes the People texts is that they describe situations in the authors see Israel's corporate body as permeable. It is perhaps that quality that makes authors conceive these encounters as feminine. As in human sex and sexual relationships, penetration can have opposite kinds of outcomes: it can be vulnerability exploited or openness that leads to fruitfulness and intimacy. The texts in Chapter 3 fear the worst and respond to the sense of vulnerability with extreme anxiety. Some of the texts imagine "disordered sex" of the kind in which women dominate men. In Numbers 25 and Genesis 19, the foreign woman is a seductress who dominates, and thus emasculates, men. This kind of female threat can be subtle and have trickster qualities: the women in Numbers 25, Genesis 19, as well as Solomon's wives and the Strange Woman, cause men to betray themselves. Alternatively, disordered sex is imagined from the perspective of the male

guardian, and Israel is analogized to the wayward daughter, committing *znh* and bringing pollution and disgrace into the house (Numbers 25, Nehemiah 13, Ezra 9), insensitive to the disaster she causes. The sense of vulnerability, with the attendant threats of domination, pollution and shame, provokes calls for stricter, more centralized controls. It infuses the texts with a sense of palpable urgency: when Moses' executions are not strong enough, the priestly redactor insists that his ancestor is still more "zealous for Yhwh." If the intermingling of those who marry women of "abominations" does not stop, Yhwh's wrath will surely wipe out the tenuous remnant that remains in the land (Ezra 9). In other words, these authors regret that the Israelite body is not male. Why can it not be invulnerable and impermeable, immune to threat rather than so damnably prone to invasion, so unable to fight back? From that perspective, the openness of the female body is a defect for which the leadership must compensate.

Ruth and Chronicles present a different possibility for female metaphors and the permeability they presuppose. They argue that openness can be rewarded with fruitfulness: that is, sex with the foreign woman as *wife* is ordered sex and poses no threat. These texts do not ignore the openness of the boundaries: if anything, they are there on display, especially in Ruth. The difference here is that the foreign woman is never a threat. She cannot dominate the Israelite man, and in fact, she benefits him— builds up his house with both children and industry. It is perhaps with good reason that Ruth is called an *'eshet hayil,* for the Prov 31 makes a similar argument about the usefulness of a wife well-chosen. This positive function is predicated on the assumption that the good wife, whether foreign or native, can never be the equal or better of her husband. In like manner, Judah and Jerusalem remain at the center of the Chronicles

vision of a restored Israel, while foreigners play supporting roles, "building up the house" for Israel. As the Chronicler realizes, foreign participation can be appropriated as a token of status rather than threat, for it testifies to the supremacy of the god, the king, and the temple which that foreigner serves. In a way, the Ruth-Chronicles texts are a small version of the Moab-as-conquest texts, for if they have anxiety about the Other, they tame it by colonizing her. Israel can feel secure in his relationship with the Foreign Woman because his relationship preserves his superior position and her inferior one. In fact, if Ruth is a symbol of Samaria, then the ideology in Chronicles forms a perfect parallel, for Jerusalem willingly greets the inclusion of Samaria as a part of "the house," but only as part of a hierarchical relationship in which Jerusalem, its Davidic scion and its temple, remain firmly at the head of the household.

How much of what we see in biblical depictions of Moab shows us anything about Moab itself? While there is no definitive answer, it seems that less and less in the biblical portraits can be anchored to the historical entity of the Iron Age. Even if biblical writers had taken down their accounts at the very moments they were happening, their stories would still reflect Israel's needs—to be distinct, to be superior and blessed, to avoid being inferior and abandoned—as much as a description of Moab in itself. And since Moab later came to refer to wholly different groups than the Iron Age entity, what we read in the later texts might preserve only traces of genuinely early traditions (the Balaam poems are an exception). For those curious to know more about Moab, this will surely be a disappointment. But for those curious to know more about Israel, we have uncovered new dimensions, for some of what the Moab traditions reveal is the identity

struggles of post-exilic Jews to define the breadth that "Israel" could include. Thus what we learn from the Moab texts is not only how Israel viewed Moab as Other, but also how the authors describe a part of "Israel" itself as Moab, and so *make* it Other.

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