

An anti-Judean manifesto in Judges 1 ?

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Shaking the yoke of Deuteronomist History (DH)

Research on Judges has been dominated by the DH theory invented by Martin Noth in 1943, Koenigsberg, under allied forces bombs. Koenigsberg has since been rebuilt, but exegesis is still using this World War II weapon. The DH theory turned Judges into a transitional period between Conquest and Monarchy. Transition became, from there on, the key concept to understand Judges. The older stories of Judges and Saviors had to be introduced by the outright condemnation of Israel and a second mention of the death of Joshua in chapter 2. Then, at a later period, chapter 1 would have been added in order to provide a new transition when the addition of Joshua 24 had disturbed the smooth passage between the two periods. A few attempts have been made to escape the hypnotic fascination of Noth's heritage. But they haven't managed to free themselves from the transition model¹.

The present contribution will read Judges 1 as the first part of the Book of Judges rather than as a secondary hinge between Joshua and Judges. This doesn't deny the fact that the books of the Former Prophets were finally organised along a chronological sequence. Judges 1,1a and 2,6-10 labor the point in order to link two books which were not meant to be read in sequence. As the aim of historical critical exegesis is to discover the diachronical process of growth of the final text, it is not satisfied with the last redactional stages but tries to go back as far as the available historical data allows it to go. The first part of Judges 1 will be read in the light of a period in the history of the Kingdom of Juda for which we have the rare privilege to have not only biblical sources but also the Assyrian records, namely the reign of Manasseh in the first half of the VIIth century B.C.

Juda, eternal master of Jerusalem: Judges 1,1-7

Apart from the mention of the death of Joshua in verse 1, Judges 1,1-18 is a conquest account of the land (2) of Canaanites and Perizzites (4) by Juda. This general statement is exemplified by the episode of the defeat of Adoni-Bezeq (5-7). It is unnecessary here to decide whether this character is identical with Adoni-Sedeq, king of Jerusalem in Jos 10 as Judges 1 uses a different name and sets the encounter in Bezeq. The least we can say is that, if Judges 1 knew of this king of Jerusalem, it carefully removes him from there to transfer him in a purposefully unidentifiable Bezeq. In fact, this transfer seems to be the unique aim of this little story which ends on the bringing of the maimed prisoner in Jerusalem (7). If a certain Adoni-Sedeq was familiar to the audience of Judges 1, this King was turned into a

¹See Rofé, A., «Ephraimite Versus Deuteronomistic History», in *Storia e Tradizioni di Israele. Scritti in Onore di J. Alberto Soggin*, Garrone, D. et Israel, F. (éd.), Brescia, 1991, pp. 221-235. His efforts to escape DH end up in the creation a new historiography.

King of anywhere in order to be defeated and brought back where everyone knew he belonged. Adoni-Bezeq is no more the cruel despot of Jerusalem but the rightly punished slave of Juda (and thankful to the justice of his victors 7!). The origin of this Juda isn't touched upon. Juda simply goes to Bezeq and brings Adoni-Bezeq to Jerusalem. As the conquest of Jerusalem isn't mentioned, the simplest answer is that Juda was at home in Jerusalem before the campaign and brought its prisoner back to its home base.

The objection to this reading is based on the next verses relating the attack of Jerusalem.

The sons of Juda raid Jerusalem, the Judean Mountain, Desert and Plain (8-9)

Commentators usually claim that the imprisonment of Adoni-Bezeq in Jerusalem is explained by the subsequent conquest of Jerusalem, related only one verse too late for the normal unfolding of the narrative². This is an elegant way to save the coherence of Judges 1 with the Joshua and Samuel conquest reports. But one needs to explain away the change of subject: down to this point, Juda is the main character. But in verses 8-9, the sons of Juda appear. Naturally, one can always claim that «Juda» and «sons of Juda» are one and the same thing³. But then one is left with the awkward repetition of a new conquest narrative in verses 10-18 dealing with the same zone as verses 8-9 but attributed to Juda.

Taken at face value, the text informs us that the sons of Juda attacked and seized Jerusalem, slaughtered its population and burned the town (8). Of course, nothing is said of the identity of the victims, but one cannot exclude the possibility that the sons of Juda butchered the Juda which had brought Adoni-Bezeq back to Jerusalem. In fact the narrative doesn't give the reader any time to pause and think about the implications of such a possibility. It is too eager to see the back of the raiders and to send them away. "But after" וַאֲחֵרֵי "they had gone down" וַיִּרְדּוּ "to wage war against the Canaanites living in the Mountain, the Desert and the Plain" the three natural districts of the kingdom of Juda (cf. Joshua 10,40). Then the sons of Juda vanish until verse 16. After this brief and unfortunate break, we meet Juda again.

Juda conquers the Judean centers (10-15)

By contrast to the preceding verse, this passage attributes the conquest of two Judean towns, Hebron and Devir to Juda. The Devir episode (// Joshua 15,16-19) is probably used to reinforce the Hebron take over and to introduce a Calebite tradition. Hence the legitimacy of Juda's (and Jerusalem's?) rule over the traditional center of the Judeans⁴ is clearly affirmed, while other non-Judeans clans are hailed for their courage and firmly enrolled on Juda's side.

²See Soggin, J.-A., *Judges*, SCM, London, 1981, p. 223.

³See Becker, U., *Richterzeit und Koenigtum*, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin, 1990, p. 39.

⁴Hebron is the first capital of the Judean David (2 Samuel 2).

Moreover, Juda's dealing with the Judean capital (10) is set against Jerusalem's fate in the hands of the sons of Juda (8). Juda liberates Hebron by simply striking its three traditional tyrants⁵. No bloodbath, no bonfire!

Sinking the son's of Juda in the Amaleqite sands (16)

This verse has suffered a great deal in the process of transmission⁶. This is hardly surprising considering the best attested variant reading that turns the meaningless אַתְּ־הַדֵּעַם at the end of the verse into an all too clear אַתְּ־הַעֲמִלְקִי. The last appearance of the sons of Juda seems to push them away even further south from Jerusalem to link them up with the abhorred Amaleqites. The probable Qenite conquest tradition behind verses 16-17⁷ has been turned against the sons of Juda. After their raids against Jerusalem and the Judean countryside (excluding the towns), they end up settling alongside the Amaleqites, way down near Tamar⁸ in a small portion of the Negev while Juda extends its domination in the next verses.

Juda settles Simeon in the Negev and conquers three Philistine cities (17-18)

Faithful to its promise in verse 3, Juda goes with Simeon (17) to accomplish its unique destructive action against Horma, a clear etiological note. Juda goes on alone to take control of Gaza, Ashqelon and Eqron and their countryside. This feat may sound as a wishful expansionist note parallel to some passages in Joshua⁹. But the mention of only three Philistine cities out of the regular list of five could point out to a more concrete reality. It may reflect the historical situation between 705 and 701 B.C. when king Ezekiah joined Ashqelon in the rebellion against Assyria and forced reluctant Eqron and Gaza into the scheme by locking up Eqron's king in Jerusalem¹⁰ and invading the territory of Gaza¹¹. The two others, Gath and Ashdod are not specified, as Gath was part of the Ashdodite domain¹² and Ashdod didn't rebel. Mitinti of Ashdod was the only Philistine king present in 701 near Tyre to pay his homage to Sennakerib¹³.

⁵Jos 15:14; Num 13:22.

⁶See Mittmann, S., "Ri. 1,16f u.d. Siedlungsgebiet d. kenitischen Sippe Hobab", Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins 93 (1977), pp. 213-235.

⁷*Idem*, p. 220.

⁸*Idem*, p. 220-232.

⁹See Joshua 13:3.

¹⁰Oriental Institute Prism, col II, 1.37 à col III, l. 49. Luckenbill, D.D., *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia*, II §240 ANET pp. 287-88.

¹¹Na'aman, N., "Sennacherib's «letter to God» on his campaign to Judah". This letter mentions: "... a royal [city] of the Philistines which H[ezek]iah had captured and strengthened for himself" (line 11). Naaman considers this city to be Gath, but on the basis of 2 Kings 18:8 one can argue that it was Gaza.

¹²In 711, Sargon II had claimed the conquest of Gath during his campaign against Azuri of Ashdod. Luckenbill, D.D. *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia*, II §30.

¹³*Idem*, II §239. Ashdod was then one step ahead in its integration in the Empire after its rebellion in 713 and its consequent punishment. *Idem*, II §30.

We have now reached the end of the first part of Judges 1. The next verses (19-21) are corrigenda harmonizing the information of Judges 1,1-18 with Joshua 15:14.63; 17:16.18. The second part deals with the capture of Bethel (22-26) and the so-called *Negatives Besitzverzeichnis* (27-36). We'll restrict ourselves to the first part in order to analyse the results.

Juda and sons of Juda in historical perspective

Considering the expressions «Juda» and «sons of Juda» as two separate entities, leads the reader to understand Judges 1,1-18 as a polemic by a group «Juda» which claims Jerusalem as its ancestral basis, directed against «sons of Juda». Juda recognizes that the sons of Juda have once been in Jerusalem, but it seems to stress that this passage was brief and murderous. The sons of Juda are authors of raids in all the Judean countryside¹⁴ while Juda controls not only the Judean centers but also some of the rich Philistine cities and their surroundings. The last verse could even refer to the political events preceding Sennakerib's campaign in 701 which resulted in the capture of the rebellious king of Ashqelon, the defeat of a small Nubian force, the reestablishment of the Eqrone king locked up in Jerusalem, the taking over of 46 west judean town and the probable exile of their population¹⁵. The siege of Jerusalem was lifted after payment of a substantial tribute¹⁶. Before leaving, the Assyrians probably made sure to install a more docile team at the head of Judean affairs. Hence a coregency between Ezekiah and his son Manasseh very soon after 701¹⁷. From then on, the long reign of Manasseh corresponds to a time of peace and prosperity thanks to a policy of strict loyalty towards Niniveh. This policy didn't seem to be unanimously appreciated in Juda. In fact, the biblical records for this period aren't favorable to Manasseh, to say the least. He is accused of burning his son and practicing every kind of abominations (2 Kings 21:6). Worst, Manasseh supposedly "filled Jerusalem with innocent blood (2 Kings 21:16; 24:24; Jer 15,4). His loyalty to the Assyrians required the pitiless quenching of an internal opposition which considered it as a disobedience towards Yhwh¹⁸. The growth of anti-Assyrian feelings after 701 is best attested by the murder of Manasseh's son Amon in 640, which signaled the

¹⁴Note the parallels with David's activities in 1 Samuel 27:8-12.

¹⁵200150 persons according to the assyrian sources. Luckenbill, D.D., *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia*, II §240). This number is probably too high. Cf. Ungnad, A., «Die Zahl der von Sanherib deportierten Judäer», *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 59, 1941, pp. 199-202. See also Stohlmann, S., «The Judean Exile After 701 B.C.E.», in *Scripture in Context II, More Essays on the Comparative Method*, Hallo, W.W., Moyer, J.C. et Perdue, L.G. (éd.), Winona Lake, 1983, pp. 147-175.

¹⁶2 Kings 18:15-16.

¹⁷2 Kings 20:1-11 and Bulbach, S., *Judah in the Reign of Manasseh as Evidenced in Texts During the Neo-Assyrian Period and in the Archeology of the Iron Age* (PhD dissertation, University of New York), Ann Harbor, 1981, p. 128.

¹⁸See the role of Isaiah in the theological version of the lifting of the assyrian siege in 2 Kings 19,35-37. The legend of the miraculous deliverance is created in order to counter the prosaic paiement of the tribute and to fire the faith in the invincibility of Zion.

replacement of the pro-Assyrian party by the "people of the land" (2 Kings 21,24). This coup intervened as soon as the Assyrian grip loosened in that part of the Empire.

The עַמְּהָאָרֶץ seems to have represented the interests of the tribal aristocracy of the Judean country, traditionally based in Hebron¹⁹. These, or at least some of these big families suffered from the integration of the Judean economy into the Assyrian common market, in spite of the general increase of wealth resulting from the intensification of international commerce. In fact, in the first stages of the integration of a new kingdom, the Assyrian administration relied on the elite of the capital. This urban aristocracy was given privileges in order to buy its faithfulness. It had then more to lose than to gain in a rebellion²⁰. The benefits of the scrupulous vassality of Manasseh went to the urban elite of Jerusalem instead of profiting the Judean עַמְּהָאָרֶץ. A conflict of interest was therefore inevitable, the murder of Amon coming as yet another episode of the people of the land's interventions in the Jerusalem affairs²¹.

The rivalry between the urban elite of Jerusalem and the tribal elite of Hebron provides a historical background for the polemic of Juda against the sons of Juda in Judges 1. The Jerusalemites, members of the ruling class after 701, derived their privileged positions from the regular payment of the tribute. Their interests clashed with those of the anti-Assyrian party which had encouraged the rebellion of Ezekiah but which had not been deported by Sennakerib. This party, supported by the Judean עַמְּהָאָרֶץ continued to be a threat to the collaborationists as it developed a «religious» justification to its resistance motivated primarily on economical matters. Josiah became the darling king of the deuteronomist party whose propaganda had developed during Manasseh's reign. The texts of the former and latter Prophets have all been edited and transmitted in order to serve deuteronomist nationalism. But these texts contained much older material.

¹⁹Knauf, E.A., *Die Umwelt des Alten Testaments*, Vol. 29 (Neuer Stuttgarter Kommentar Altes Testament), Stuttgart, 1994, p. 236. Talmon, S., «The Judean 'am ha'ares in Historical Perspective» In: *4th World Congress of Jewish Studies I in Jerusalem*, 1967, 71-76.

²⁰Ben Zvi, E., «Prelude to a Reconstruction of the Historical Manassic Judah», *Biblische Notizen* 81, 1996, pp. 31-44, p. 33. Gane, R., «The Role of Assyria in the Ancient Near East during the Reign of Manasseh», in *Judah in the Late Bronze Age*, Edelman, D. (éd.), Chicago, forthcoming.

²¹Acclamation of Joash after the murder of Athaliah (2 Kings 11:17-20), crowning of Azariah after the murder of Amasias (2 Kings 14:19-21) and the replacement of the same Amasias by Yotam (2 Kings 15:5).

Judges 1,1-18 as a Manassite libel against pre-Josianite Deuteronomists

Judges 1,1-18 could be one of these pretr texts. It would have been produced by the Assyrian party at the court of Manasseh in the course of the fight with the anti-Assyrians. It established the legitimacy of the growing control of Jerusalem in Judean affairs as a result of Assyrian policy of centralisation by calling upon primeval times. In those days, Juda became Juda when it managed to overthrow Adoni-Bezeq and bring him in Jerusalem. The control of Hebron and the Judean towns came after the raids of the Judeans who belong to the Neguev. The עַם־הָאָרֶץ has therefore no ancestral rights over Hebron or Jerusalem. Therefore the politics of the kingdom of Juda should be left in the hands of the Jerusalem elite, the only one capable of avoiding the bloody consequences of the military adventures of the sons of Juda. In order to stress their point, the Manassites even recalled the dealings of Ezekiah in Philistia. Of course Ezekiah didn't actually conquer Philistia, but we are dealing with propaganda not with history.

After the deuteronomist take over in 640, the Manassite traditions received the addition of chapter 2 in order to bring them in line with the new ideology. The story of the conquest of Bethel (22-26) was also added at a later time. And what about the incomplete conquest of the Israelite tribes in verses 27ff? The discussion of these passages will require separate treatment in another issue. It is enough here to suggest that Judges 1 could have served to introduce the Israelite stories of the Saviors (*Retterbuch*) into the folklore of the Kingdom of Juda during the long and prosperous reign of Manasseh.