

*History, Memory, Hebrew Scriptures*

*A Festschrift for Ehud Ben Zvi*

edited by

IAN DOUGLAS WILSON and DIANA V. EDELMAN

Winona Lake, Indiana

EISENBRAUNS

2015

© 2015 by Eisenbrauns Inc.  
All rights reserved.  
Printed in the United States of America.

www.eisenbrauns.com

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

History, memory, Hebrew scriptures : a festschrift for Ehud Ben Zvi / edited by Ian Douglas Wilson and Diana V. Edelman.

pages cm

Bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-57506-391-1 (hardback : alk. paper)

1. Bible. Old Testament—Criticism, interpretation, etc. 2. Ben Zvi, Ehud, 1951– honoree. I. Wilson, Ian Douglas, 1981– editor. II. Edelman, Diana Vikander, 1954– editor.

BS1171.3.H587 2015

221.6—dc23

2015023079

The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of the American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48–1984. ©™

# Contents

Preface . . . . .	ix
A Note about Abbreviations . . . . .	xiv

## I

### *History and Historiography*

Shechem in Deuteronomy: A Seemingly Hidden Polemic . . . . .	3
YAIRAH AMIT	
Menachem's Massacre of Tiphshah: At the Crossroads of Grammar and Memory (2 Kings 15:16) . . . . .	15
BOB BECKING	
Male Royals and their Ethnically Foreign Mothers: The Implications for Textual Politics . . . . .	25
ATHALYA BRENNER-IDAN	
Images of Tranquility in the Book of Judges . . . . .	35
SUSANNE GILLMAYR-BUCHER	
When the Foreign Monarch Speaks about the Israelite Tabernacle . . . .	49
GARY N. KNOPPERS	
Putting the Neighbors in their Place: Memory and Mindscape in Deuteronomy 2:10–12, 20–23 . . . .	65
WILLIAM MORROW	
Righteous Kings, Evil Kings, and Israel's Non-Monarchic Identity: Different Voices on the Failure of Israelite Kingship in the Book of Kings . . . . .	77
REINHARD MÜLLER	
A Request for Blessing and Prosperity in an Inscription from Samaria . .	91
NADAV NA'AMAN	
Solomon's Administrative Districts: A Scholarly Illusion . . . . .	103
RICHARD D. NELSON	
Conceptions of the Past and Sociocultural Grounding in the Books of Samuel . . . . .	117
FRANK H. POLAK	

- “In the House of Judah, My Father’s House”:  
The Character of Joab in the Book of Chronicles . . . . . 133  
KENNETH A. RISTAU
- Chronicles and Utopia: Likely Bedfellows? . . . . . 151  
IAN DOUGLAS WILSON

## II

### *Prophecy and Prophetic Books*

- When God’s Voice Breaks Through:  
Shifts in Revelatory Rhetoric in Zechariah 1–8 . . . . . 169  
MARK J. BODA
- The Chronological Limits of Reshaping Social Memory in the  
Presence of Written Sources: The Case of Ezekiel in  
Late Persian and Early Hellenistic Yehud . . . . . 187  
PHILIPPE GUILLAUME
- Who’s Speaking? On Whose Behalf? The Book of Haggai  
from the Perspective of Identity Formation  
in the Persian Period . . . . . 197  
LOUIS JONKER
- Mind the Gap: Reading Isa 39:8–Isa 40:1  
within Early Second Temple Judah . . . . . 215  
SONYA K. KOSTAMO
- The *nāšî’* and the Future of Royalty in Ezekiel . . . . . 229  
CHRISTOPHE NIHAN
- These Seventy Years: Intertextual Observations and Postulations  
on Jeremiah and the Twelve . . . . . 247  
JAMES NOGALSKI
- The Metaphraphic God of Jonah . . . . . 259  
CAREY WALSH

## III

### *Methods, Observations, (Re)Readings*

- Some Sort of “Chronistic” Additions to the Torah?  
New Perspectives in the Formation of Exod 19–20 . . . . . 275  
RAINER ALBERTZ
- Sites of Memory and the Presence of the Past in  
Ehud Ben Zvi’s “Social Memory” . . . . . 287  
KÅRE BERGE

---

The Jerusalem Literary Circle . . . . .	301
PHILIP R. DAVIES	
The Metaphor of Torah as a Life-Giving Well in the Book of Deuteronomy . . . . .	317
DIANA V. EDELMAN	
The Ritual of Reading and the Dissemination of Prophetic and Other Authoritative Texts in Second Temple Judaism . . . .	335
MICHAEL H. FLOYD	
History and the Nature of Cultural Memory: The Alamo and the “Masada Complex” . . . . .	347
LESTER L. GRABBE	
Between the Words I Write . . . . .	361
FRANCIS LANDY	
Hybrids, Purification, and Multidirectional Memory in Ezra-Nehemiah . . . . .	375
TIM LANGILLE	
Is Ehud also among the Prophets? Prophecy in the Book of Judges . . . .	387
CHRISTOPH LEVIN	
Mythoprophetics: Some Thoughts . . . . .	403
JAMES R. LINVILLE	
More Geminate Ballast and Clustering in Biblical Hebrew . . . . .	417
SCOTT B. NOEGEL	
Blurred Boundaries in the Lot Story . . . . .	433
P. J. SABO	
Index of Authors . . . . .	445
Index of Scripture . . . . .	454
Index of Other Ancient Literature . . . . .	474





EISENBRAUNS

Offprint from:

Ian Douglas Wilson and Diana V. Edelman (eds.),  
*History, Memory, Hebrew Scriptures: A Festschrift for Ehud Ben Zvi*  
© Copyright 2015 Eisenbrauns. All rights reserved.

## *Images of Tranquility in the Book of Judges*

SUSANNE GILLMAYR-BUCHER

*Catholic Theological Private University Linz*

Images of tranquility play an essential role in biblical images of a hoped for future, pointing out a central desire for stability, wholeness and the absence of fear. When biblical texts envision a period of rest and stability, it is most frequently as a hoped for future. It is a desirable state that cannot be guaranteed unless God provides it. It is thus no surprise that the interest in this motive is widespread; it can be found in deuteronomistic and chronistic texts but also in the prophetic books and the psalms. However, memories of times when people and land were actually able to enjoy rest are scarce.

The (almost) uncontested climax of rest and peace in the literary presentation of Israel's history unfolds under king Solomon. After YHWH had already provided rest for David (2 Sam 7:1, 11), this condition fully develops under his son (1 Kgs 5:18).<sup>1</sup> The reign of king Solomon is one of the very rare instances when a time of rest and peace is not only mentioned but unfolded as a story. The depiction of Solomon in the books of Chronicles further elaborates on the image of Solomon as a king of tranquility, culminating in his portrait as a man of rest (אִישׁ מְנוּחָה) (1 Chr 22:9). While such a detailed description is singular, short references to times of rest occur more frequently. From the time of Joshua to David's reign, summaries imply that the land and the people experienced limited time spans of rest and peace.

The effect of putting hopeful visions side by side with short summaries of remembrances allows for these images to blend. Accordingly, the summaries can be filled with images from the visions. While the splendid portrait of Solomon's reign encourages such a blend, the idealisation of times of rest is challenged in the book of Judges. Although the motive of rest is repeatedly used, the impression that this is only a fleeting condition is strengthened. The image of rest and stability is distorted, thus provoking the question as to how stability and rest could be obtained.

---

1. After Solomon, Chronicles mentions a time of peace under only the reigns of king Asa (2 Chr 13:23; 14:4) and king Jehoshaphat (2 Chr 20:30).

### Variations on the Theme

In the books of Joshua and Judges, summaries of a time of rest are presented as a result of the conquest of the land or the overpowering of assaulting enemies. It is a period of tranquility after the enemies are defeated and expelled. It is explicitly mentioned that the land had rest from war (Josh 11:23; 14:15).<sup>2</sup> This kind of tranquility is closely related to the extraordinary acts of Joshua as a military leader. His exemplary leadership brings forth rest for the land and Israel thus reaches the hoped for existence in the promised land (Preuß 1986: 301). The book of Judges picks up this line of thought, referring to a number of times of rest. The explicitly mentioned periods of tranquility even outweigh the times of subjugation, in spite of the Israelites' continuous wrong doing (cf. Polzin 1980: 198). When the book of Judges repeats the motive of a time of rest after war, a pattern becomes visible. The judges Othniel (3:11), Ehud (3:30), Deborah (5:31) and Gideon (8:28) are able to establish rest (שָׁלוֹם) for a considerable period of time.<sup>3</sup> However, the compilation of the stories makes sure that these years appear as a temporary condition. Even though the summaries of a time of rest conclude the stories, they are not formulated as final conclusions, but rather point to a continuation of the story<sup>4</sup> and thus indicate a transition to the next episode. Furthermore, the references to a time of rest for the land are a specific element found only in the descriptions of the reigns of four judges, but they are neither part of the framework (2:11–23) nor are they included in the stories of Jephthah and Samson. Thus the summaries put special emphasis on the selected times of quietude as something special that not every leader is able to establish, and furthermore, a state that could only be temporarily set up.<sup>5</sup> A permanent establishment of stability and rest fails because Israel is not able to live according to God's commandments. Once Samson, the last judge, has turned the ideal image of a judge upside down and challenged the common world view and values (cf. Gillmayr-Bucher 2013: 183–94; Polzin 1980: 194–95), the stories turn away from leaders and focus on exemplary individuals and single tribes (Judges 17–19). Hence, in the end, the endeavor of finding tranquility for all Israel is superseded by efforts to establish rest and security for selected individuals and groups, as paradigmatically elaborated in Judges 17–18.

### Establishing and Maintaining Stability

In Judges 17–18, the central motive of finding a place to live and leading a life of stability in the land is unfolded in three interlinked stories: Micah's effort to

2. These statements are formulated as a conclusion to the preceding narrative (w-x-qatal).

3. The reigns of Othniel, Deborah and Gideon bring 40 years of rest, and Ehud's reign brings 80 years.

4. This is already indicated by the use of the wayyiqtol verb form.

5. A reference to these times can be found in Neh 9:28. However, the times of rest are put into a negative perspective, emphasizing that the Israelites did not welcome the rest but continued their evil deeds.



consolidate his existence in the land, an anonymous Levite looking for a sanctuary to serve at, and the tribe of Dan who still has to conquer land before it might think of rest. The compilation of these stories recalls “a classic foundation myth, dealing with the conquest of land and the establishment of a tribal holding” (Niditch 2008: 180). However, there is more to these stories than just the frame narrative. All episodes revolve around the theme of stability and rest. Thus the way in which stability is established and the concepts related to these attempts are equally relevant. The tale of Micah is thus not only a prelude to the Danites’ conquest, but a first variation on the theme of stability and rest. Micah’s efforts to establish a sanctuary and to guarantee well being for himself already foreshadow the Danites’ later attempts.

### Micah Has a בית אלהים

When first looking at the story of Micah, it is a straightforward tale without ambiguity; at a second glance, however, it becomes obvious that the events presented challenge common images of suitable activities. In particular, Micah’s seemingly innocent yet ignorant attempts to establish a sanctuary allude to ideas and ideals of spatial constructions in general. The tension between uncritically told events and general values held by the readers thus creates a second arc of suspense in the story, leading the readers to the question of how to establish security and rest, and furthermore, encouraging them to reflect on the requirements and function of a sanctuary in this context.

The story starts with a short introduction of Micah, the main protagonist (v. 1), mentioning his name and place of residence.<sup>6</sup> The next verse, however, brings the reader into the middle of a dialogue between Micah and his mother, without providing any background information. Micah is returning a considerable amount of silver to his mother,<sup>7</sup> who declares him the beneficiary of this money. However, Micah refuses to keep the money,<sup>8</sup> so the mother dedicates the money to YHWH and instructs a goldsmith to make an image (פסל ומסכה), which is placed in Micah’s house (v. 4).<sup>9</sup> Before the narrative voice continues the story, a summary

6. Cf. Judg 13:2; 19:1; 1 Sam 1:1; 9:1.

7. Why his mother is entitled to this large amount of money is never told. The phrase ליקח מן as a passive occurs only here; it cannot be translated as “take away from” (ליקח מן). Rather, the money has been taken for the mother—money she has protected with an oath—and this money is now with Micah (cf. Willi-Plein 1993: 9–11). Although we never know for sure why Micah came into the possession of the money, the mother positively evaluates this act. The phrase ליהיה . . . ברוך usually is used to express gratitude for solidarity (cf. Ruth 2:20; 3:10; 1 Sam 23:21; 2 Sam 2:5). From the mother’s point of view—and this is the only point of view presented—Micah acts in her interest and shows loyalty to the family.

8. The narrative voice as well as Micah’s own words repeatedly tell us that Micah is returning the money, thus emphasizing this action.

9. These objects probably represented YHWH in an anthropomorphic or theriomorphic shape. However, both objects must have been relatively small because they were manufactured for only 200 shekels (Groß 2012: 83).

is added pointing out the effect for Micah: “and the man Micah, for him (was) a house of God(s) [בית אלהים]” (v. 5).<sup>10</sup> This comment introduces the image of a sanctuary,<sup>11</sup> albeit almost randomly. Considering the construction of this significant space, it is noticeable that its only identification as a sanctuary is initiated by a reference to how this space is experienced within the narrated world of the text.

Thus only in retrospect can the activities be (re)interpreted as the construction of a sanctuary. The conception of a sanctuary and the requirements of its construction, however, are not mentioned.<sup>12</sup> As the story continues, Micah carries on in the ways of his mother, adding further cultic objects,<sup>13</sup> a teraphim and an ephod,<sup>14</sup> and appointing his son as a priest. These activities continue the construction of the sanctuary. Now Micah is shown to deliberately create this space by arranging artifacts and people.<sup>15</sup>

While in the first scene Micah only continues the initiative of his mother, he becomes more active in the second scene (vv. 7–13). When a young Levite from Bethlehem passes his house looking for a place to live, he seizes the opportunity to further improve his sanctuary and acts accordingly. In the encounter with the Levite, Micah takes the chance and persuades the Levite to stay with him as a priest (vv. 9–10). In this way, the two stories are connected: the wandering Levite finds a place in the story of Micah’s sanctuary. Now that the house of God is established, Micah’s evaluation of the new situation is revealed. He sees the Levite as a wandering holy man who brings good luck with him and thus Micah takes the presence of the Levite as a sure sign that YHWH will allow him to prosper (v. 13). As a Levite, the young man is considered to be a mediator between God and humans and to have divinatory abilities. From this perspective, it is great luck for Micah to find a Levite (Niditch 2008: 182).<sup>16</sup> The space introduced in v. 5, with its associated images and symbols,<sup>17</sup> is further described from Micah’s point of view.

Although Micah is not given the most active role in the story, he is shown as someone who knows how to respond adequately to chances presented to him, and is portrayed as a successful man who is able to establish security for himself and is thus able to enjoy a quiet life.

10. Verse 5 is the only time a בית אלהים is mentioned for Micah; all other references to the idols place them in the house of Micah or the house of the Levite.

11. Cf. Judg 18:31, the only other mentioning of a בית אלהים in this story.

12. In H. Lefebvre’s concept of space this would be “conceived space” (Lefebvre 1991: 38–39).

13. Only Hos 3:4 also mentions ephod and teraphim together as legitimate cultic objects (cf. Groß 2012: 83).

14. An ephod is a cultic object of unknown shape. For a detailed discussion see C. Bender (2008: 211–42).

15. M. Löw (2008: 64) calls such a process “spacing.”

16. The (later) idea that all priests have to be Levites also is alluded to in the story. Micah’s joy in finding a Levite might point to this concept.

17. Lefebvre (1991: 39) calls this aspect of space “lived space.”

## Contradictions

From the beginning of the story, critical questions might be asked by the readers. It starts with the ambiguous relationship between Micah and his mother, the mother's role in the process of making the cult statues, and continues with Micah's exploiting every opportunity presenting itself and the aimlessly wandering Levite. Hence, the state of security reached at the end suspiciously lacks any firm basis.

The cult statues Micah and his mother have made carry negative connotations, although the *פסל ומסכה* in this story probably are cultic representations of YHWH (Groß 2012: 77) and are not a sign of idolatry.<sup>18</sup> Two further cultic objects are mentioned, *תרפים* and *אפד*, which both can be used for divination.<sup>19</sup> While the ephod mostly is mentioned as a legitimate cultic object,<sup>20</sup> the teraphim, probably a representation of a family's deceased ancestors (Cox and Ackerman 2012: 15), are evaluated more critically. Considering the evaluation of the mentioned cult objects in other texts, the installations in Micah's sanctuary are ambivalent at best. It is also noticeable that the space of Micah's sanctuary is not elaborated upon and the spatial relation between *בית מיכה* and *בית אלהים* is not explained. It is usually assumed that Micah's household is constituted of several buildings, one of them being a shrine.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, the text does not make it clear whether Micah established the shrine or if it already existed before and Micah only added further cultic objects (Cox and Ackerman 2012: 23). Seen in the context of the cultic requirements formulated in Deuteronomy, Micah's sanctuary does not meet the given expectations. The prohibition of idols and also the repeated direction to use only the place God will choose for cultic purposes are violated. Like the judges in the chapters before, Micah is in the dark on how to understand YHWH (Polzin 1980: 173).<sup>22</sup>

Micah's efforts further allude to other stories dealing with the construction of a sanctuary: they refer to 1 Kgs 12:28–29, the implementation of Jeroboam's sanctuaries in Dan and Bethel (cf. Na'aman 2005: 51), albeit on an individual level, and they present a travesty of Solomon's building of the temple in Jerusalem. Like

18. Cf. Deut 27:15; Nah 1:14; Isa 42:17; Hab 2:18. A strict rejection focuses especially on the *מסכה*, a term often used for images of other deities (cf. M. Groß 2009: 759). The *מסכה* par excellence is the golden calf (Exod 32), and this story is often remembered as a pejorative example (cf. Deut 9:16; 2 Kgs 17:16; Neh 9:18). A prohibition is expressed in Exod 34:17 and Lev 19:4. A strict rejection of a *פסל* is expressed in Exod 20:4; Deut 4:16, 23, 25; 5:8; 27:15; Lev 26:1; cf. also Isa 44:9, 10, 15, 17; for a negative example of erecting a *פסל* cf. 2 Kgs 21:7; 2 Chr 33:7.

19. Cf. 1 Sam 23:9–12; 30:7–8; Ezek 21:26, Zech 10:2.

20. An exception is Judg 8:27.

21. Micah's house of God could have been a "cult corner" or 'cult niche,' a 'part of a room or courtyard' within a house that was designated for religious purposes and that thus contained a constellation of religious objects and furnishings" (Cox and Ackerman 2012: 19).

22. Cf. Deut 12:5, 11, 14, 18, 21, 26; 14:24, 25; 15:20; 16:2, 6, 7, 11, 15, 16; 17:8; 18:6; 26:2; 31:11; cf. also Neh 1:9; 2 Chr 7:12.

Jeroboam, Micah establishes a sanctuary with his own idols, which provide representations of YHWH (cf. Niditch 2008: 181), and he also appoints any priest at hand (cf. 1 Kgs 12:31; 13:33) (cf. Naʾaman 2005: 50). Unlike Solomon's temple, Micah's sanctuary is neither carefully planned nor approved by YHWH; rather, it just happens to come into existence. In contrast to 2 Sam 7:9–13, Micah establishes a sanctuary according to his own discretion and interprets the successful completion as a sign that God will allow him to prosper (v. 13).

### Critical Comments

The readers might have been puzzled by the neutral narration of how Micah came to have a house of God. Only after Micah's sanctuary is established does the narrative voice explicitly point out the social context of the narrated word: "A man did what was right in his own eyes" (v. 6). As a generalized statement, such an appraisal of the era is suspicious at best. Self-determined actions are usually not consistent with the ideals found in other biblical texts. In the book of Proverbs, for example, an individual evaluation is seen quite critically (cf. Prov 12:15; 21:2), and especially in the context of the cult and ritual acts, self-determined actions are highly problematic (e.g. Deut 12:8). The decision as to what is right or wrong is typically not an individual choice.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, the story of Micah does not fit into a pattern of wrongdoing and retribution. Rather, the chain of events makes it obvious "that the fate of all the story's main characters does not depend upon their being 'right' or 'wrong': success or failure comes mysteriously to whomever it will" (Polzin 1980:198).

Yet another commentary by the narrative voice, also expressed in v. 6, points out the lack of a king. As an observation on the current story, this statement makes it obvious that the duties of a king are not carried out. Many commentators interpret this as a pro-monarchical statement lamenting the lack of a king and simultaneously looking forward to the period of the monarchy. They understand it as a critical commentary on a polemical story pointing out what happens when there is no king. Looking at the history of the monarchy, however, it soon becomes obvious that a king does not necessarily offer a solution to the described problems. If it is a king this comment is hoping for, it has to be an ideal king fulfilling many expectations (Deut 17:14–20). It alludes to the (deuteronomic) "ideal of the king as a holy warrior, executor of inter-tribal covenant loyalty, supreme patron of the cult and arbiter of covenant justice" (Mayes 2001: 246).

Like a travesty, Micah's attempts mimic the building of the temple. What Micah wishes for but is not yet able to do, Solomon accomplishes. In this way the figure Micah can point out the desire that only a rightful king might fulfil. In

23. This comment refers to the regular evaluation in the framework of the book of Judges: "They did what was evil in the eyes of YHWH," pointing out that it is not for the people to decide what is right or wrong (cf. McMillion 1999: 235).

retrospect, after the collapse of the monarchy, this ideal could encourage the hope for a restoration of an Israelite/Davidic kingdom. An ideal kingdom might appear as a solution to all problems. Nonetheless, the statement “there was no king in Israel” remains ambiguous. It can also be a genuine part of the distorted world presented in this story. “The explicit, sympathetic position, that sees the monarchy as an overall solution, a kind of wonderdrug for all the ills of society, is part of a polemic” (Amit 2000: 102). Thus the hope that a king might change everything can just as well be a typical attitude of such chaotic times.<sup>24</sup>

### **Transferring the Sanctuary**

Although Micah is portrayed quite favorably, his own decisions and his self-made security in the form of his self-made house of God do not hold out against a hostile reality, and he subsequently loses everything. In contrast to the people of Dan, Micah is not brave and he is not willing to take risks. When he pulls back from the people of Dan he acts like the spies in Num 13:31, who crumble in the face of strong adversaries. Hence, Micah is not transformed into a hero. Compared to the judges in the stories before (e.g., Gideon), Micah has no stronghold that enables him to fight a superior enemy. Once the Danites take away the gods he had made (18:24), there is no deity with him. Although Micah’s worship is directed towards YHWH, it is only self-made and lacks YHWH’s approval. However, Micah is not punished by God, and he is not given into the hands of oppressors; rather, another tribe of the Israelites desires his achievement of stability and rest and deprives him of the symbols of his confidence.<sup>25</sup>

In the eyes of the Danites, Micah has obtained something very valuable that fits their own purposes. That is why Micah’s ideas of how to establish security and rest are taken up by the Danites. The lack of spatial conception noticed in the establishing of Micah’s sanctuary is overcome, as the “lived space” of Micah’s sanctuary is transferred to the new sanctuary in Dan. Thus Micah’s established sanctuary becomes the model and in this way the conception for the new sanctuary. For the readers, however, it is obvious that a valid conception is still lacking. The image of a sanctuary that is not only established with randomly available objects and persons but also carried along by whomever happens to be stronger, forms an obvious contrast to the stability of a central sanctuary.

---

24. Such an attitude corresponds with a critical perspective on the whole era. E. Ben Zvi (2011: 127–28) points out that “the Deuteronomistic historical collection evoked a long narrative about the failure of all types of political, human leadership to provide a stable, socio-political foundation for the establishment of the Israel that should be.”

25. B. D. Cox and S. Ackerman (2012: 27) point out that especially the teraphim could not be replaced easily. These figurines represent the deceased ancestors who “participate in the safeguarding of the familial patrimony through their presence in their descendants’ homes or extended household compounds.” Thus they have a special role in the well-being of a family.

The portrait of the Levite further complements this upside down image of a sanctuary. He is not able to provide a necessary guideline in the name of YHWH. The later image that the Levites protect the tradition of the Torah and encourage the keeping of the commandments is desirable but still lacking (Achenbach 1999: 285).

### A נחלה for the Danites

When the Danites are introduced in Judg 18:1 as a tribe looking for a land to live in, another arc of suspense is opened. This description refers to the events told at the beginning of the book of Judges, as all Israelite tribes had to conquer their territory. While in Judges 1 the reports of the other tribes' settlements are mere summaries, Judges 18 unfolds the conquest at great length. The Danites are not only shown to conquer a land, but they also try to acquire a place of tranquility. What is new is that the Danites construct their own space by depriving others of their achievements and taking over their acquisitions. Thus the Danites try to take possession of other peoples' rest. When they take away Micah's cult objects and persuade the Levite to join them, they do not conceptualize a sanctuary of their own, but rather transfer an already well-functioning shrine. In a similar way, their conquest of Laish aims at the acquisition of a land full of rest and peace.

Hence the story twice presents a portrait of people living a quiet and peaceful life which is destroyed by the Danites so they can establish such an existence for themselves. Those who are bereft are not only other nations, whom YHWH promised to drive off, but also Israelites. In this way, the ideal that Israel as a whole may live a life of rest and security is reduced to the interests of one tribe.

### Constructing a New Space

The first portrait of the Danites focuses on their attempt to find an inheritance for themselves (18:1).<sup>26</sup> The idea that every tribe will receive its inheritance is prominent in Deuteronomy and it was already implemented in the book of Joshua. Thus the readers might remember that the tribe of Dan lost their inheritance (Josh 19:40, 47); a similar fate is also confirmed in Judg 1:34, where the Danites failed to capture the land. Withholding such information gives this tribe a much more positive evaluation as a starting point. The Danites are shown as a neglected tribe, but not as a people not able to hold on to their inheritance. Also contrary to their portrayal in the book of Joshua and in Judges 1, the people of Dan are now characterized as strong, single-minded, and (extremely) successful, but also as self-centered, aggressive and ruthless. Furthermore, they do not have any guideline on

26. A נחלה is the secure place of a family or clan. It is the place where everybody returns to and where the members of a family are buried. It is the place where this family should find security and rest (cf. Butler 2009: 391).

how to use their strength; they take whatever they want and exploit every vulnerability for their own advantage.<sup>27</sup> Like the Levite, the Danites appear to be aimless, looking for a place to live wherever they might find it. Like Micah, they take advantage of the circumstances they encounter (Amit 1999: 332).

From the whole tribe of Dan, five men who are selected to scout a new land (18:1–2) are presented in more detail. These men are explicitly evaluated as בני־חיל, and they are portrayed to live up to this appraisal and also to their task. Traveling through the land, the five scouts gain a precise overview of their options, paying close attention to every detail. First, they not only discover Micah's sanctuary but are also able to estimate its value and its vulnerability. Later, when they come to Laish, they immediately recognize that this land meets the Danites' desire and similarly, they also realize that the city and its inhabitants are defenseless. Once they return, they encourage their people to take advantage of their discoveries.<sup>28</sup> They not only report the fertility of the land and weakness of its inhabitants, but they also assure the people of God's support and emphasize that the deity has given the land into their hands. Thus they offer a theological interpretation of their trip as well.<sup>29</sup> The portrait of the scouts is continued within the next set of events. They take the lead and the Danites successfully conquer Laish. On their way they also encourage the warriors to deprive Micah of his cult objects and they persuade the Levite of Micah's sanctuary to join them.

At the end of the story, the Danites thus achieve what they were looking for: they conquer a land full of promise of tranquility, and they acquire a Levite and cult objects in order to establish their own sanctuary in Dan.

### Contradictions

One of the most noticeable changes in this story is the inverted characterization of an Israelite tribe and the inhabitants of the land. Deviating from previous descriptions in the book of Judges, not the Israelites but other people are idealized. The inhabitants of Laish are the exact opposite of the people of Dan: they live peacefully in their city and land, without conflict but also without protection.<sup>30</sup>

27. The aggressive approach of the Danites could also reflect their fear of not finding their place and being homeless. Cf. also Jer 30:10; 46:27 (Schenker 2004: 186).

28. The portrait of the Danite scouts clearly is constructed in contrast to the scouts in Num 13. These five Danites are presented as exemplary scouts.

29. נתן ביד is a typical phrase within the book of Judges. If YHWH has already given somebody into the hands of Israel, this phrase firmly encourages the audience to assess a given situation as advantageous. However, the Danites never call upon the name of YHWH, they use אלהים. Whether they refer to YHWH or whether they just (quite pragmatically) respect the local deity (אלהים) we are not told.

30. The description of these people is first given from the spies' point of view (v. 7) and it is then repeated by the narrative voice (v. 27), emphasizing that the people of Laish and their land really promise well being and wealth. Furthermore, the phrase ואין מציל (v. 28) usually refers to



They live in security (בטחה), quiet (שקט) and unsuspecting, thus they already enjoy what Israel has been promised (cf. Lev 25:18, 19; 26:5), has experienced temporarily (cf. Judg 3:11, 30; 5:31; 8:28) and is still hoping for (cf. Isa 32:16–20). Thus the description of the people of Laish does not match the description of other foreign people in the book of Judges; they are neither presented as a threat nor a test.<sup>31</sup> The situation of the people of Laish rather corresponds with Israel's own hopes. The elaborate and benevolent description of the inhabitants of Laish also changes the portrait of the Danites. They are not depicted as heroes but rather as ruthless conquerors who overwhelm peaceful people. Thus, likeable foreigners are set in contrast to a despicable Israelite tribe.

With this twist, the textual world established in the previous stories of the book of Judges is challenged. The tranquility the land enjoyed after each deliverance by a judge now is the cause for the downfall of Laish in Judges 18. Because its inhabitants lived quietly, they have been conquered by the Danites. Thus the “tranquility promised by the saviours is deceitful, it turns out to be a false security leading those who rely on it to utter destruction.” (Guillaume 2004: 137)

Nevertheless, at the end of the story, the Danites not only successfully appropriated a place for themselves to live in but they also erected a sanctuary as a signal and an assurance of the permanence of their presence. Hence, the already proven schema of rest after a war is still valid. The reference to the duration of the sanctuary even adds the image of a certain durability.

### A Question without an Answer

The question as to how rest and stability can be established and preserved remains unanswered in these stories. In the end, a new distribution of rest is established; however, traditional values are thrown into disarray. “Micah, who practices hospitality and provides lodging to the five able men from Dan, is punished; the Levite, who drives a hard bargain and abandons values of loyalty and gratitude, ends up benefiting; while the Danites, who plunder others, end up victorious and achieving their goal” (Amit 1999: 333). Nevertheless, the way the figures are portrayed is not totally negative; they even evoke some sympathy. What is remarkable, though, is that the narrative voice remains suspiciously reserved. It only comments on the general conditions of that time, but an explicit evaluation of the characters and their actions is missing. To add to the impression of randomness, the events of the story unfold seemingly by pure coincidence. Micah's encounters with the

---

the situation of someone whose last and only stronghold is יְהוּדָה (cf. Gillmayr-Bucher 2013: 204–5).

31. The inhabitants of Laish are compared to the Sidonians, and are described as living in the manner of the Sidonians (18:7). The Sidonians, for their part, are one of the people יְהוּדָה promised to drive out of the land in Josh 13:6. In Judg 3:3–4 they are mentioned again as a foreign nation that is to stay as a test for Israel.



traveling Levite as well as with the people of Dan are all based on pure chance. The Levite aimlessly wanders around and acts like a catalyst, connecting people and triggering events. Even the Danite scouts set out to explore the land lacking a predefined direction. They merely stumble upon Micah's house and come to Laish by chance. This presentation of the events shows how people achieve their goals not by planning but by reacting to situations that arise by chance. This seemingly aimless portrayal is part of the narrative strategy, as it describes a time in which no guidelines, laws or common interests are observed. The instructions given in the book of Deuteronomy on how to gain the promised land and with it security and rest appear to be unknown. Furthermore, the boundaries between the others, the enemies, and the people of Israel become blurred. Judges 17–18 vividly reflects the struggle to handle this situation with all its ambiguities and uncertainty. Although the stories admit that despite all turmoil a limited time of rest is possible, they also point out that a space constructed by human imagination and human efforts alone will not provide lasting stability.

The point of view presenting these stories shows concern but it offers no final solutions. Thus the readers are encouraged to step in and form their own opinion. Recognizing the total lack of a common order, a shared tradition or divine instructions they might be reminded that only God can guarantee tranquility and peace, and in this way emphasize divine instructions on how to (re)inhabit the land and establish a sanctuary. They even might be tempted to hope for a king who establishes an adequate social and cultic order (Guillaume 2004: 140). However, they will also be cautioned by previous stories in the book of Judges that even the best leaders can only establish a temporary rest. The memory of tranquility and stability thus remains ambivalent, combining hopeful visions of a future still possible with critical reflections of individual ambitions.<sup>32</sup>

---

32. The motive of the promised land and the temple as symbols of peace and security, promising a condition that enables the hoped for well-being of the people, shines through these stories (cf. Braulik 1986: 41–42).

## Bibliography

Achenbach, R.

- 1999 Levitische Priester und Leviten im Deuteronomium. *Zeitschrift für Altorientalische und biblische Rechtsgeschichte* 5: 285–309.

Amit, Y.

- 1999 *The Book of Judges: The Art of Editing*. Biblical Interpretation Series 38. Leiden: Brill.
- 2000 *Hidden Polemics in Biblical Narrative*. Biblical Interpretation Series 25. Leiden: Brill.

Bender, C.

- 2008 *Die Sprache des Textilen: Untersuchungen zu Kleidung und Textilien im Alten Testament*. Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament 177. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer.

Ben Zvi, E.

- 2011 On Social Memory and Identity Formation in Late Persian Yehud: A Historian's Viewpoint with a Focus on Prophetic Literature, Chronicles and the Deuteronomistic Historical Collection. Pp. 95–148 in *Texts, Contexts and Readings in Post-exilic Literature: Explorations into Historiography and Identity Negotiation in Hebrew Bible and Related Texts*, ed. L. Jonker. Forschungen zum Alten Testament 53. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.

Braulik, G.

- 1986 Gottes Ruhe – das Land oder der Tempel? Zu Ps 95,11. Pp. 33–44 in *Freude an der Weisung des Herrn*, ed. Ernst Haag. Stuttgarter biblische Beiträge 13. Stuttgart: Verl. Kath. Bibelwerk.

Butler, T.

- 2009 *Judges*. Word Biblical Commentary 8. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.

Cox, B. D., and Ackerman, S.

- 2012 Micah's Teraphim. *JHS* 12: article 11. Online: <http://jhsonline.org>

Gillmayr-Bucher, S.

- 2013 *Erzählte Welten im Richterbuch: Narratologische Aspekte eines polyphonen Diskurses*. Biblical Interpretation Series 116. Leiden: Brill.

Guillaume, P.

- 2004 *Waiting for Josiah: The Judges*. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplements 385. London: T&T Clark.

Groß, W.

- 2009 *Richter*. Herders Theologischer Kommentar Altes Testament. Freiburg: Herder.  
2012 Michas überfüllte Hauskapelle: Bemerkungen zu Ri 17+18. Pp. 72–88 in *Studien zum Richterbuch und seinen Völkernamen*, ed. W. Groß and E. Gaß. Stuttgarter biblische Aufsatzbände Altes Testament 54. Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk.

Lefebvre, H.

- 1991 *The Production of Space*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Löw, M.

- 2008 *Einführung in die Stadt und Raumsoziologie*. Opladen: Budrich.

Mayes, A.

- 2001 Deuteronomistic Royal Ideology in Judges 17–21. *Biblical Interpretation* 9: 241–58.

McMillion, P.

- 1999 Worship in Judges 17–18. Pp. 225–243 in *Worship and the Hebrew Bible*, ed. M. P. Graham, R. Marrs, and S. McKenzie. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplements 284. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic.

Na'aman, N.

- 2005 The Danite Campaign Northward (Judges XVII–XVIII) and the Migration of the Phocaeans Massalia (Strabo VI 1,4). *VT* 55: 47–60.

Niditch, S.

2008 *Judges: A Commentary*. Old Testament Library. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox.

Polzin, R.

1980 *Moses and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomistic History*. New York, NY: Seabury.

Preuß, H.D.

1986 נרח. Pp. 297–307 in vol. 5 of *Theologisches Wörterbuch Altes Testament*, ed. J. Botterweck, H. Ringgren, and H.-J. Fabry. 10 vols. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer.

Schenker, A.

2004 Land, Sicherheit und Angst. Eine anthropologische Lektüre der Landgabe in der hebräischen Bibel. *BULLET* 15: 184–191.

Willi-Plein, I.

1993 *Opfer und Kult im alttestamentlichen Israel*. Stuttgarter Bibelstudien 153. Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk.