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Pitkänen, Pekka M A ORCID logoORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0021-7579> (2016) P/H and D in Joshua 22,9-34. Biblische Notizen, 171. pp. 27-35.

Official URL: <https://www.uni-salzburg.at/index.php?id=21327>

EPrint URI: <https://eprints.glos.ac.uk/id/eprint/4311>

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This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by *Biblische Notizen* on 22 December 2016 (cf. <https://www.uni-salzburg.at/index.php?id=21327>)

Introduction

Joshua 22,9-34 describes an incident regarding the Transjordanian tribes of Reuben, Gad and Half-Manasseh. When the Transjordanians return from the conquest to their allotted territory, they build a big altar on the side of the Jordan (v. 10). Upon hearing this, the rest of the Israelites see the matter as a cultic violation and send a delegation to confront the Transjordanians (vv. 11-20). However, the Transjordanians explain that the altar is not to be for sacrifice, but it is to serve only as a memorial and a reminder for proper worship in front of the altar of the Lord which is before his tabernacle (*mishkan*; vv. 21-29). The Israelite delegation, led by Phinehas ben Eleazar accepts this explanation and returns back home to Cisjordan (vv. 30-34).

The story can be considered as somewhat anomalous. Above all, it is acknowledged to be fundamentally a priestly passage in an otherwise Deuteronomic² book of Joshua,³ even when one may argue that the book of Joshua has otherwise incorporated priestly features.⁴ The question of priestly vs Deuteronomic in fact relates to the question of whether Joshua should be considered as part of a Hexateuch or a Deuteronomistic history (or even perhaps still something else), a question that more or less has been asked on and off since the modern era of Old Testament/Hebrew Bible criticism. Joshua was considered to be part of a Hexateuch since at least the time of Wellhausen in the nineteenth century but the situation was changed when Martin Noth developed his famous theory of a Deuteronomistic History.⁵ At present, a number of scholars have returned to an idea of a Hexateuch, often in association with a so-called redactional layers approach

¹ A paper presented at the EABS conference in Cordoba, July 2015, Law and Narrative group, with light revisions.

² Due to terminological unclarities, I will use the word Deuteronomic in this essay, those who prefer the term Deuteronomistic may substitute with it suitably. I will however use the word Deuteronomistic when the postulated Deuteronomistic History is referred to.

³ See Pitkänen, Central, 185-193.

⁴ Cf. Pitkänen, Joshua.

⁵ Noth, Deuteronomistic.

to the composition of the Pentateuch.⁶ And yet, there are still those who adhere to a Deuteronomistic history approach. Thus, we may say that the pendulum started from the side of a Hexateuch, then took the opposite side of a Deuteronomistic History, and is now somewhere in between those positions, also depending on from whom you ask. For one thing, the question is important for an interpretation of Joshua 22,9-34 as Martin Noth famously sought to minimise the amount of priestly material in Joshua and considered any such materials whose priestly character could not be denied as “isolated additions” to the book.⁷ It should not come as a surprise that those who favour Hexateuchal style approaches are much more positive towards the existence of priestly materials in Joshua, even if they more or less acknowledge that the character of such materials is different in Joshua.

I on my part have previously argued that Joshua incorporates priestly materials in a Deuteronomistic framework,⁸ and more recently also argued that the book was composed together with the book of Deuteronomy as a continuation to Genesis-Numbers which itself was composed by another author who worked together with the author of Deuteronomy-Joshua.⁹ This of course assumes the priority of priestly materials to that of Deuteronomy, but my study is no more the only work that has argued thus,¹⁰ if it ultimately ever was.¹¹

The question is an important one as the relative priority of these materials has a strong bearing on the interpretation of the passage. If priestly materials precede Deuteronomy, there is a stronger case for the passage having been incorporated in the book of Joshua based on an overall Deuteronomistic framework, and conversely if the passage is a later priestly addition to the book of Joshua.

Certainly, the positioning of Joshua 22,9-34 is an interesting one. It is preceded by vv. 1-8 where the Transjordanians are portrayed as receiving authorisation from Joshua to return home after the conquest has been completed sufficiently successfully.¹² The story in vv. 1-8 can be classified as “purely” Deuteronomic and could finish at v. 8 without any need for the extra narrative and information that is given in verses 9-34. So in that sense the narrative about the Transjordanian altar can be considered as an addition and an appendix to the story of the Transjordanians that starts in Numbers 32. At the same time, verses 9-34 quite seamlessly (even if how seamlessly is at least arguably a question of an opinion on aesthetics) continue the account in verses 1-8. The passage also notably includes an

⁶ See e.g. Otto, Deuteronomium 1,1-4,43, esp. 1-256.

⁷ See Noth, Deuteronomistic.

⁸ See Pitkänen, Joshua.

⁹ See Pitkänen, Reading, 3-31.

¹⁰ See Kilchör, Mosetora.

¹¹ Cf. e.g. the work(s) of Milgrom. And, priestly materials were considered earlier than Deuteronomy before the time of Wellhausen.

¹² If one reads the book of Joshua carefully, also in light of ancient Near Eastern rhetorics and exaggerations, it is clear that the conquest is never portrayed as completely successful, see e.g. Pitkänen, Joshua.

explicit reference to the Achan account in Joshua 7. In addition to this, in a larger sense, the plotline and literary character in the account of the Transjordanian altar is very similar to that in Numbers 32. Most notably, both Joshua 22,9-34 and Numbers 32 have a priestly character and involve a plot of a conflict and its resolution.¹³ Moreover, one can think that Numbers 32 and Joshua 22,9-34 bracket the story of the Transjordanians in Genesis-Joshua.¹⁴ In other words, the passage in Joshua attests careful design in the context of both the book of Joshua and Genesis-Joshua as a whole.

I have already argued previously that integration of the passage in this way attests careful design and would therefore suggest that it is not an “isolated addition” (cf. Noth) in the book of Joshua. Obviously, this would fit with an idea of a priestly passage incorporated in a Deuteronomic context. I have then argued that the concept of centralization of worship in the passage should be seen as Deuteronomic rather than priestly.¹⁵ As part of that I have argued that the implied setting of the passage fits to a time at the end of the conquest where Israel has achieved sufficient rest so that the command to centralization (Dt 12) is in effect at the time. I did also argue that the relationship to the priestly material can be summarized by an idea that the wilderness camp can be seen as paradigmatic for the land. That is, priestly material advocates and requires centralization in the wilderness (Lev 17) and this concept is then paradigmatically valid for the land, emphasizing the importance of the central sanctuary without however requiring centralization as a must in the land. Such an interplay of the legal materials can then explain how a priestly passage could be and was integrated in the Deuteronomic context of the book of Joshua.

I will here add further nuancing for how the relationship of priestly and Deuteronomic materials in the passage could be understood. This should also help understand the interplay of these materials in the book of Joshua as a whole and beyond. To do this, I will look at the depiction of the Israelite wilderness camp, including in the book of Numbers.

Deuteronomic legislation as a continuation of Priestly concepts and the interpretation of Joshua 22,9-34

The Pentateuch certainly indicates how the Israelites are encamped at Sinai and in the wilderness, and the beginning of the book of Numbers describes the arrangement of the camp. Many of the priestly laws, and Leviticus 17 which is often seen at least partly as belonging to H, describe the Israelite cult that pertains to the tent of meeting, Israel’s portable temple (house of Yahweh) at the time. The tent of meeting has been often seen as fictional since the time of Wellhausen, together with a late exilic/postexilic dating of P/H. However, whether fictional or not, with a few comments on that also

¹³ See Pitkänen, Central, 209-210 for further details, referring to Jobling, Jordan, 183-207. Jobling’s article includes a literary analysis of the Joshua 22,9-34 passage on its own.

¹⁴ Pitkänen, Central, 210.

¹⁵ See Pitkänen, Central.

below, one should focus on what the camp actually portrays. A clue to the thought world may be given by Dt 23,9-14 and 2 Sam 11,11. These, together with ancient Near Eastern evidence, such as the war camp of Ramesses II (late second millennium BCE),¹⁶ suggest that the priestly author extended the concept of a military camp into the time of Israel's wilderness wanderings. Certainly, the Israelites undergo a census in the beginning of the book of Numbers (also in Numbers 26) which can be compared with censuses in Mari (early second millennium BCE) that related to enlisting men for the military.¹⁷ In Ex-Numbers, the arrangement of the camp is clearly specified (Num 1-4) and has the tent of meeting, the mobile house/home of Yahweh, in its midst, in the centre as might befit an important dignitary. An important difference of the Israelite wilderness camp from typical war camps is that the camp includes men, women and children. However, the reason for this arrangement is clear. The wilderness time was described as a time of migration of a whole people and therefore women and children were included in addition to the warriors themselves. The war camp should of course also be seen as having a preparatory function for the conquest of Canaan. Thus, the people are made into a war formation at Sinai in preparation for traversing the wilderness and conquering the land of Canaan.¹⁸

I will now postulate a more specific possible setting for the concept of the priestly wilderness camp. This particular setting should enable a natural and interlocked reading of the priestly requirement of centralization together with the Deuteronomic stipulations. This must involve some historical proposals, here different from the usual Wellhausenian postexilic appropriation.¹⁹ For that, let us imagine that a group led by Moses may have traversed the wilderness. This does not mean that one has to imagine that this was entirely according to the arrangement of the tribes described in the priestly texts of Numbers. Instead, one may imagine that the arrangement in the texts was a product of priests in the land after the settlement and that it was part of the Pentateuch's scheme of creating tribal unity around twelve tribes, together with the system of priests and Levites, as part of ancient Israel's ethnogenesis. An idea of all twelve tribes camped around a portable sanctuary in a military formation and united in worship around a single sanctuary (Lev 17) could surely help one towards imagining the possibility of forming a powerful bond between the Israelite tribes. Whatever the case, in terms of actual realities, unless one takes a strongly minimalist approach, it seems reasonable to think that tribal divisions already existed in early Israel as such divisions are attested by a number of texts, including Judges 5 that may be an example of early poetry. One may speculate that tribal divisions may even go back to Egypt and the wilderness, in case the Exodus has some

¹⁶ For a photo, see e.g. Hoffmeier, Sinai, photo gallery.

¹⁷ See e.g. Fleming, Democracy, 73-74.

¹⁸ Cf. Pitkänen, Numbers.

¹⁹ A point to be made here is that there is as such no reason to exclude the consideration of different possibilities, for example considering that we cannot travel back to the past to empirically verify a theory/theories that goes by a postexilic view of the origin of the materials, no matter how many pieces of academic writing might support such a view.

kind of historical kernel, itself of course a much disputed issue. However, I propose that any existing tribal divisions have been reinforced and reworked by the Israelites to reflect tribal settings and geographical divisions in the land where they settled. Based on ancient Near Eastern parallels, one may imagine that the tent of meeting itself could even be a real artefact from the early Israelite time, even if it is difficult to be certain of its origins. If one imagines that it is not an entirely fictional construct, one can think that it may go back as far as the wilderness period. Or, alternatively, one may imagine that it was constructed only after the settlement, even for Shiloh itself (Josh 18,1), or otherwise brought there, and projected back to the period of the wilderness, together with the Israelite legal materials, including those of P which pertain to the service of the tent of meeting.²⁰ In this way one can arrive at a mental picture where the priestly materials sought to create ancient Israel, mixing tradition with fiction and idealised depiction. Overall, such an idea could also help encourage tribes to continue settling and conquering the land, as part of ancient settler colonialism that I have analysed elsewhere.²¹

Seen in this way, Deuteronomic materials, including the book of Joshua in terms of its overall character, can simply be considered as continuing the themes expressed in the priestly material. This includes the narrative order, as Israel is depicted to conquer and settle the land in Deuteronomy, in continuation to what started at Sinai and the wilderness.²² As a case in point, it is commonly recognized that the unity of Israel is very strongly attested in Deuteronomy-Joshua, in perfect continuation to the priestly wilderness camp as just described. Such unity includes the Transjordanians, including in terms of Joshua 22,9-34, the passage we are primarily concerned of here. The tribal allotments (Josh 13-31) of course give a direct geographical sense of the tribes where they were seen as being in a tight formation in the wilderness (esp. Numbers 1-9). This includes priests and Levites in that where they were in a tight formation in the centre of the camp according to their divisions in the wilderness (Numbers 3-4), they are subsequently allotted towns throughout the land (Joshua 21; cf. 14,3; 18,7 in this sense).

If the texts are interpreted in this way, it becomes clear that, in the ancient Israelite thinking, the priestly wilderness camp paradigm can naturally be considered as valid in the wilderness but as not being valid in the land any more. The priestly concept has been superseded by Deuteronomy in the land. And yet, at the same time, the Deuteronomic concept is not a replacement of the priestly concept but an adjustment and a logical continuation of it.²³

²⁰ The descriptions of the tabernacle and its utensils should not be seen as blueprints but comparable to a verbal map(s) that represented the objects it depicted in a symbolic manner. Such approaches to mapping are demonstrably attested in the wider ancient Near East (see Rochberg, *Expression*, esp. 19, 43).

²¹ See Pitkänen, *Pentateuch-Joshua and idem.*, Reading. This includes comments about the possibility of writing in ancient Israel at the time.

²² Cf. above.

²³ E.g., there is nothing in Deuteronomic materials that would abrogate such priestly conceptions as the law of the Nazirite in Num 6.

Let us now move directly back to the issue of centralization of worship, the topic under consideration here. It is clear that, in the time of Joshua, the wilderness time is in the past and the tribes have settled, at least initially (Josh 21,43-45). The people are now enjoying a rest (Dt 12,8-14), idealised in the book of Joshua.²⁴ Also, the tent of meeting, the sanctuary where Yahweh dwells in the midst of his people Israel, has been set up in Shiloh (Josh 18,1). Therefore, the tent of meeting at Shiloh can be considered as the central sanctuary in Israel and, while Deuteronomy has relaxed profane slaughter (Dt 12,15-16.20-25), the tribes may not sacrifice anywhere else than there (Josh 22,29). Should sacrifices be made elsewhere, this would indeed be rebelling against Yahweh (Josh 22,16-20.29) in a manner of the deception of Achan (Josh 7) and the idolatry at Baal Peor (Num 25), from which great calamities resulted to both the wrongdoers and Israel as a whole. Arguably, the unity of Israel before Yahweh would also be broken (cf. Josh 22,24-27).

Summary and conclusions

By way of a summary, I have suggested here that the narrative about the incident involving the Transjordanian altar is about a cultic violation of the law of centralization of worship in Deuteronomy. However, the Deuteronomic requirement of centralization in the land is tightly related to the priestly concept of centralization in the wilderness. In the mind of the author, the Deuteronomic requirement is a logical and temporal continuation of the priestly concept. While it is the Deuteronomi(sti)c concept that has predominance, the tent of meeting, and undoubtedly much other priestly material and concepts, nevertheless also carry over to the land, notably attested by the setting up of the tent of meeting at Shiloh. Thus, there is a beautiful legal hermeneutic going on that is at the same time both straightforward and complex. While the overall direction is from priestly materials and concepts to Deuteronomic ones, priestly materials may also help nuance the interpretation of the Deuteronomic ones. For example, the drawing on of priestly concepts in this passage in relation to Achan and Baal Peor suggests that the author of Joshua considered that the Deuteronomic centralization requirement was a very serious concept, with its breach at the same level as the sin of idolatry at Baal Peor and the greed of Achan.²⁵

²⁴ On rest as an idealised concept among settler societies, see e.g. Pitkänen, Pentateuch-Joshua.

²⁵ Note however that the book of Joshua clearly seems to be a quite unique example of a work that carefully relates Israelite actions to legal materials in Genesis-Deuteronomy (see Pitkänen, Joshua). Other biblical books may have less of such a characteristic. This ties with questions of if, to what extent, and in what contexts ancient Near Eastern legal materials were meant to be understood literally and to what extent they might have had the characteristic of being “mere” scholarly exercises; cf. e.g. Kraus, *Königliche*; cf. Kitchen and Lawrence, *Treaty*. Of course, for Wellhausen and those following him the lack etc. of direct reference to these materials outside Genesis-Joshua implies that “the law came after the prophets”.

If the interpretation proposed here is taken, it is no wonder that many later scribes and scholars have found it difficult to look at these materials together, especially when the original setting of the materials became a remote past. Certainly, while the proposed reading here provides an overall framework for interpreting these legal materials that is ultimately a simple and straightforward one, they also have left behind a creative tension that cannot be completely unresolved.

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Abstract

This paper examines Joshua 22,9-34, a passage where the Transjordanians are potentially violating the law on centralization of worship. It builds on the author's previous work that relates to the passage (cf. Central; Reading). Joshua 22,9-34 has generally been recognised to attest priestly features, and Noth's classic assertion was that Joshua 22,9-34 is an isolated priestly addition in the book of Joshua. However, one may argue that the passage also exhibits Deuteronomic features and ties back to the rest of the Deuteronomic book of Joshua, in addition to having links with the book of Numbers, including Numbers 32 as a prime case. The paper will then suggest that, from the perspective of legal interpretation, Joshua 22,9-34 can be plausibly read as a priestly passage that has been carefully integrated in the Deuteronomic book of Joshua. More specifically, the paper will suggest that the passage in the context of the book of Joshua and Genesis-Joshua as a whole can be very plausibly seen as interpreting Pentateuchal legal materials based on the idea that centralization of worship in Deuteronomy (esp. Deut 12) is a continuation in the land of the concept of centralization in the wilderness in priestly material (Lev 17).