

The Fortified Cities of the Siddim (Josh 19:35) again; Rejoinder to N. Na'aman

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N. Na'aman is one of the most prolific and original scholars in his field. Lately he has suggested¹ a new reading for the old enigmatic verse of Josh 19:35 that deals with the allotment of the Tribe of Naphtali, and states as follows: *וערי מבצר הצדים צר והמת רקת וכנרת* “The fortified Cities of the Siddim, Ser, Hammath, Rakkath and Chinnereth”². Despite its ostensible simplicity, biblical translators and commentators ever since the LXX, seemed to find this verse quite challenging. Particularly since the words *Siddim* and *Ser* are elsewhere unattested in the Bible.

Scholars have recognized that this verse is corrupt; however, no MT witness provides a different version. Most translators prefer to ignore the definite article in the word *הצדים* and translate it as a place-name, despite the fact that the definite article would clearly indicate that it is a noun and not a place-name. This place-name is not recorded anywhere in biblical or extra-biblical literature. Interestingly the Vulgate is the only translation remaining faithful to a vocalization of the Hebrew article (yet without reading it as such) thus renders it as a place-name, Assedim. Needless to say this place-name is not recorded in any ancient text. In my article³ I have suggested restoring the definite article to the discourse and to read *הצדים* as a noun. Na'aman followed this suggestion although with a different interpretation of the noun.

Since the northern borders are missing from the description of the allotment for Naphtali, Na'aman has suggested that perhaps Josh 19:34-35 may

¹ Na'aman, 2014, 59-76.

² There is no English translation that renders this verse as such. Most translators follow King James Version: “And the fenced cities are Ziddim, Zer, and Hammath, Rakkath, and Chinnereth”. Some switch between “fenced” and “fortified” or use the past tense instead of the present tense, despite the fact that the past tense *היו* does not appear in the MT. The NRSV renders: “The fortified towns are Ziddim, Zer, Hammath, Rakkath, Chinnereth,” which is a little variation of King James. However, if the verse is indeed one sentence, a transliterated translation of this verse should be: “And the fortified cities of the Siddim [are] Ser, Hammath, Raqqat and Kinneret”. If this is the case then it is a nominal sentence in the imperfect tense and does not require a verb.

³ See Arav, Bethsaida, 193-201.

allude to it. He surveyed all the major interpretations and suggests a new reconstruction to these verses involving manipulating the verse to comply with an historical reconstruction that he postulates is behind the *mater lectoris*. This type of manipulation is a common method and considered reasonable as long as it is not exaggerated. However, when it is overdone and used to produce a circular argument, it is erroneous. The result of such reconstruction turns into a fact instead of a matter in question.

Consequently, the main question to be asked is what are the probabilities that a hypothesis is indeed historical? To answer this question it is not enough to fit the hypothesis into a lacuna in the text, because it can easily turn into circular evidence, but it is equally important to examine the hypothesis in light of the alteration and the diversion from the text.

Moreover, the historical probability of a postulated *mater lectionis* is actually quantifiable and a measurable material. To figure the quantitative value of the historical probability we need to suppose that every manipulation without a supporting witness is equally correct or wrong at the same time. Therefore, the more manipulations the less the historical probability the new reading would hold. For example, the out of context word יהודה⁴ in Josh 19:34 proposed by Lissovsky and Na'aman⁴, that aims to resolve the corruption⁵ contains five different manipulations of omissions and additions without any Hebrew supportive witness. Although the result is reasonable, the reconstruction is speculative and equally reasonable conjecture could have been to simply במזרה השמש or something similar, as the LXX implies. Another manipulation is implemented in the following verse 35 of Josh 19. Na'aman inserts into the enigmatic word הצדים the letter נ and creates a new word הצד<נ>ים (Sidonians)⁶. Further he proposes, based on Deut 3:9 that the Sidonians is a “cultural” term and not “ethnic” one that apparently is presumed to stand for the word Phoenicians.

A totally far flung manipulation takes advantage of the Hebrew imperfect tense sentences which are written without the verb “to be” and separates the verse into two unrelated sentences. Since there is no verb in Josh 19:35 Na'aman takes the liberty of breaking the MT verse into two unrelated segments. The first one וערי מבצר הצדים he associates with the former verse that delineates the borders of Naphtali. However, unlike the orientation given in verse 34b, this segment is said to refer to the north

⁴ See Na'aman, Cities, 59. יהודה was manipulated to <ש>ב <ק>ד <מ>ה.

⁵ The Septuagint omits the word יהודה and renders “Jordan eastward”.

⁶ In most biblical references (8 out of 12) this noun is spelled צידונים, with a YOD. Notice that in the same book, Josh 13:4 the word is spelled with YOD. No explanation Na'aman suggests for preferring the minority of this usage.

without spelling it out. Accordingly, the order of the proposed demarcation is: south, west, east and north. The northern demarcation seems to break away from the seemingly clockwise description and does not make sense, unless one suggests inserting the segment soon after the western demarcation. That would be possible, but then that manipulation detracts from the historical probability. Eventually he concludes that the fortified cities of the Sidonians are not the four cities, found in the rest of the verse (35b), but some unnumbered and unnamed cities located in the vicinity of Dan. Again without solid witness or evidence the historical probability of this assumption is rather questionable.

It seems that Na'aman puts the cart in front of the horses by aiming to fit his reconstruction into the presumption that the tribal allotments in Joshua are not an idealized description or a vague memory of history, but reflects an actual reality of the post Assyrian conquest. Namely, he assumes that sometime during 732 to 612 BCE this narrative was composed to describe a situation that was supposed to have taken place during the 12th century BCE. Accordingly the author(s) of this composition were very careful not to associate with any place-name east of the Jordan River or east of the Sea of Galilee despite the fact that during the Assyrian conquest no borders in this region mattered. Furthermore, during the Assyrian Empire the Phoenicians, the biblical Sidonians, were assumed to have invaded into the Upper Eastern Galilee and occupied some unnamed fortified cities in the vicinity of Dan. Na'aman continues to speculate that among the unnamed cities was the city of Dan itself. The avoidance of the names from the cities of Josh 19:35a was done to circumvent mentioning the name of the city of Dan, since at the time of Joshua this tribe was still located in northern Philistia. Why is it then that the author(s) of the text didn't use the former name of Dan – Laish? This oddity is not explained.

According to Na'aman, the four cities, dissociated from the first half of the verse, that is the cities of *צַר רִקַּת הַמַּת וְכַנְרַת*, are all located in the allotment of Naphtali, west of the Jordan River and in the Ginosar plain. This plain is indeed one of the most fertile plains around the Sea of Galilee, yet it is only about 15 km² and only provided in the past sustenance to one big city. During the Bronze and Iron Ages the city of Chinnereth governed the plain⁷, and during the Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine periods it was Magdala.

⁷ Raqqat which is identified with Tel Quneitreh is a much eroded small hillock situated about 2 km north of Tiberias (not 24 km as Rainey / Notley and White mistakenly indicated (Rainey / Notley, Bridge, 185; White, Rakkath, 612-613).

Nevertheless, and despite the fact that no Iron Age sites have been discovered in this plain, he proposes that Hammath has nothing to do with hot springs as the name implies, but instead is located in the valley of Hammam near Magdala. Şer is accordingly located somewhere in the region between Magdala and Chinnereth and since no Iron Age site was ever discovered in this region either, he does not specify where in the plain the predicted city should be found. Needless to say, that in trying to maintain the integrity of Joshua's descriptions of the allotments of Naphtali, these suggestions are substantially stretched too thin and because of the accumulation of hypotheses contained in this proposal, the historical probability of the entire construct is rather negligible.

By contrast the interpretation that was proposed in my above stated article and discarded by Na'aman as "suffering many flaws" should, despite all the "flaws", be considered tenable. The main reason is that no manipulations of the text are involved; instead my interpretation draws attention to a rare usage in Hebrew or Aramaic language. The result therefore, is not a convoluted hypothesis that requires too many premises, but is a simple, reasonable argument that provides a logical historical geography setting for the text that is supported by archaeological discoveries. Indeed it contradicts the supposition that the allotment of Naphtali, as described in Joshua, are situated only west of the Jordan river, but as scholars have already suggested, this corrupt verse was perhaps interpolated in the text⁸ and that the description of the allotments was never historical but idealized reality⁹. Since the toponyms are near the Sea of Galilee, it seems that the insertion of this verse in the allotment of Naphtali was made perhaps, due to the association with the lake.

Now to the details, Na'aman argues that "the verb *şwd* in biblical Hebrew means "hunt"". However, *şwd* (שׁוּד, שׁוּד) is a root, and not a verb. Indeed, this root is recorded in the Bible only as a noun, Ecc 9:12 כְּדָגִים שְׁנֵאוֹזְזִים שְׁנֵאוֹזְזִים. It is true, the verse lacks a verb. However, the word הַצְדִּים is not a verb either; in my contention it is also a noun that plays a role in a construct form which describes the sort of the fortified cities, meaning "the fortified cities of the fishermen". Therefore, it is enough to indicate that the root is used for fishing regardless its absence as a verb in the biblical texts. Undeniably the word *Şyad* is missing the YOD from this noun, but the Masoretic reading *Şidim* supports some of the proper Aramaic / Hebrew pronunciation.

⁸ White, Rakkath, 612-613.

⁹ Rainey / Notley, Bridge, 151.

Na'aman argues that Aramaic loan words are absent from the book of Joshua and therefore my interpretation is wrong. However, as demonstrated above the root 𐤍, 𐤌, 𐤍 is common to Aramaic, Hebrew and actually also to Arabic for fishing. So the word 𐤍𐤌𐤍 could have been Hebrew as well as Aramaic. Moreover, if citing Deuteronomy is good enough to interpret Sidonians as culture for the book of Joshua, two Aramaic words in Gen 31:47 should be good enough for proposing an Aramaic loan word in Joshua as well. As indicated above the word 𐤍𐤌 could be Hebrew as well as Aramaic.

My article from 1995 suggests the following reading: “The fortified cities of the fishermen are Şer Hammath Raqqat and Chinnereth” and lists four cities inhabited by fishermen, situated around the Sea of Galilee and arranged, similar to verse 34b, in a clockwise direction. Even without establishing a meaning for the word 𐤍𐤌 it seems reasonable to assume that a common denominator among the cities around the Sea of Galilee would have something to do with the lake. Their being fishing towns is therefore a reasonable conclusion.

It is my contention that the list begins with the largest city named Şer. Since Bethsaida is the largest Iron Age city in the region Şer should be Bethsaida. Moreover since 𐤍 and 𐤌 are often interchangeable due to their similarity of shape, it is possible to restore Şed instead of Şer which is close to Bethsaida. Indeed one of the LXX versions has this exact interchange of letters in this verse and reads Daqqat instead of Raqqat.

The city of Hammath is perhaps not Hammath near Tiberias, as Na'aman correctly noted, there are no Iron Age remains in Hammath Tiberias. However, contrary to Na'aman I propose identifying this place with Tel Dover on the southern shore of the Sea of Galilee. Tel Dover (Dweir) is close to Hammath Gader and contains Late Bronze Age and massive Iron Age remains.

A support to this proposal is provided by the Papyrus Anastasi I. In the section that follows the fords on the Jordan River near Hazor, the author of the papyrus proceeds to describe a few toponyms apparently all east and southeast of the Sea of Galilee. The towns are: Hammath, *Qdr*, identified by Na'aman¹⁰ with Gadara, today UmQeis, on the southern plateau of the Yarmuk gorge. Rainey¹¹ reads for this place-name Degel (Da-ga-al) and degel-El (Da-ga-al 'i-l) however, there are no attestations to these toponyms. The next place-name is ya'anu which Rainey¹² identifies with

¹⁰ Na'aman, Yeno'am, 198.

¹¹ Rainey, Bridge, 102.

¹² Rainey, Bridge, 102.

Yeno'am and agrees with Na'aman to identify it with Tel esh-Shihab up the Yarmuk River in the Syrian Bashan¹³. Hammath therefore must be in the vicinity of the Yarmuk River near Gadara and Tel Dover is a reasonable identification.

In conclusion, until an Iron Age town is found in Wadi Hammam, Tel Dover as Hammath is the best suggestion thus far. Raqqat and Chinnereth are commonly identified, the former with Tel Quneitra near Tiberias and the latter with Tel 'Oreime, today Tel Kinorot; Šer is probably Bethsaida and Šidim is the common denominator, for which fishermen seems reasonable.

Fortified fishing towns were as much an unusual visage in the ancient period as they would be now¹⁴. This is perhaps the cause for this curious verse. It might have been a part of a geographical "test" for scribes similar to papyrus Anastasi I, and could have been: "Could you name the fortified fishing towns around the Sea of Galilee?"

Summary

In a recent article Na'aman suggests a new interpretation to the enigmatic verse of Josh 19:35¹⁵. The first half of this verse (Josh 19:35a) he connects to the missing northern border of the tribe of Naphtali from Josh 19:34b. He suggests reading Sidonians instead of the enigmatic HŠDYM and maintains that the fortified cities (Josh 19:35a) are unnumbered and unnamed toponyms in the northern borders of the tribe of Naphtali. Josh 19:35b is accordingly a list of four toponyms located in the plain of Ginosar. The biblical description dates, in his view, to the Assyrian conquest.

This article examines this proposal and concludes that due to the accumulation of hypotheses and the lack of archaeological evidence, the historical probability of this proposal is rather meager. The interpretation proposed by me¹⁶ should be considered still tenable because of the following reasons: 1) The verse is not manipulated. 2) It suggests a rare usage of the Hebrew language. 3) The proposal is supported by archaeological discoveries.

Zusammenfassung

In einem kürzlich erschienenen Artikel schlägt N. Na'aman eine neue Interpretation des rätselhaften Verses Jos. 19,35 vor¹⁷. Er verbindet Jos 19,35a mit der fehlenden

¹³ Na'aman, Yeno'am, 168-177.

¹⁴ See the case of the fishing town of Gölyazi situated on the ruins of ancient Apollonia in Turkey.

¹⁵ Na'aman, Cities.

¹⁶ Arav, Bethsaida, 193-201.

¹⁷ Na'aman, Cities.

Nordgrenze von Naphtali in Jos. 19,35b und schlägt vor, anstelle des enigmatischen HŞDYM, ‘Sidonier’ zu lesen. Zudem hält er fest, dass die befestigten Städte von Jos 19,35a weder unnummeriert noch ungenannt seien und die Nordgrenze von Naphtali bezeichnen würden. Jos 19:35b ist dementsprechend eine Liste von Ortslagen in der Ebene von Ginnosar. Der biblische Text datiert seiner Meinung nach in die Zeit der assyrischen Eroberung.

Der vorliegende Artikel untersucht diesen Vorschlag und kommt zum Schluss, dass aufgrund sich überlagernder Hypothesen und wegen fehlender archäologischer Zeugnisse, die historische Wahrscheinlichkeit für diesen Vorschlag eher dürftig ist. Der Vorschlag des Verfassers¹⁸ sollte deshalb nach wie vor in Betracht gezogen werden weil: 1) der Vers nicht nachträglich verändert worden ist. 2) ein seltener Gebrauch der hebräischen Sprache vorliegt. 3) die Deutung von archäologischen Funden gestützt wird.

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¹⁸ Arav, Bethsaida, 193-201.