

Rijksuniversiteit Groningen

Tribes and Territories In Transition

The central east Jordan Valley and surrounding
regions in the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages: a
study of the sources

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Foreword

It has been said before, many times, that for an author the best part of a book is the foreword. Writing the foreword means that the work is done, the book is ready for the printer and one can finally lean back and relax.

With the book that lies before you now the word 'finally' deserves a special emphasis, because it is the result of 12 years work. In those 12 years it has been through numerous ups and downs, it has several times been on the verge of being turned into a bonfire, always to be rescued at the last minute, by people who saw the value of it when I could no longer see it. It is largely thanks to those people, that the work is finally done.

In 1990 I was excavating as a staff member at Tell Abu Sarbut, an Islamic site close to Deir 'Alla in the Jordan Valley. At the end of the season Margreet Steiner, who was one of the directors, suggested that we should spend a few days surveying some of the sites in the region, that were mentioned by Nelson Glueck and in the East Jordan Valley survey. While surveying I began to wonder why there were so many Late Bronze Age sites in this area, since the Late Bronze Age was a period that was notorious for its lack of settlement. That was the beginning.

I turned this relatively simple question into a pilot study that was funded, during 11 months, by the Dutch Organization for Scientific Research, a time that was largely spent studying the available literature. Some of this literature had been collected by the Department of Anthropology of Yarmuk University, where I spent a month studying it. I also got permission from Prof. Mo'awiyah Ibrahim to study the pottery from the East Jordan Valley Survey, which was stored at the University of Jordan, Amman. The pottery from Nelson Glueck's Explorations in Eastern Palestine proved to be less easy to find. After the Israel Antiquities Authorities had given me permission to study it, I spent two weeks with Alon de Groot from the IAA in real detective work, trying to locate the it. The good thing was that Alon became a good friend, and he still is.

The first part of the research for this thesis has been conducted at Leiden University, and I want to thank the staff of the department of Archaeology for the facilities they provided me with. The Archeology department also funded part of the excavations of Tell el-Hammeh, as part of the Deir 'Alla project. Another part was funded by the Department of Antiquities in Amman.

Henk Franken taught me to look at pottery, and encouraged me to publish my analysis of the Deir 'Alla pottery, even though he disagreed with my conclusions.

The Walk through the Zerqa was made possible through a grant from the Foundation for Anthropology and Prehistory in the Netherlands. That four-day trip through the Wadi Zerqa in spring was an unforgettable experience, and I want to thank those who made it possible: the students Eva Kapteyn, Carmen Harmsen and Ellis Grootveld; our guide from the Department of Antiquities, Ali el-Khayyat, who never lost his temper, and Ghazi Saudi, who offered us hospitality in his farm in Jal'ad.

At the beginning of the project I had asked myself a simple question: why are there so many Late Bronze Age sites around Deir 'Alla? When I started looking for answers, I stumbled upon another question, a much bigger one: to what extent does the tribal society of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries reflect human behaviour in earlier periods, and what does that mean for the interpretation of the archaeological record?

That question opened a Pandora's box of ideas and possibilities, that is yet far from exhausted. Over time it has influenced and changed my views, and consequently the original scope of the project, as it played an ever increasing role in the answers that I found. In places this process is still visible in the book: some chapters, such as chapter 5, reflect ideas that I had several years ago, but that have developed since then. Should I have to write that chapter now, I would write it differently.

Sometimes I feared that my ideas were far-fetched, but when I shared them with others, reluctantly, there were always people who believed in them. The first time that happened was in 1997, at the SBL conference in San Francisco. I was extremely nervous about what I was going to say, but after I had finished, Anson Rainey came up to me to tell me how much he appreciated my ideas. He has never stopped encouraging me since. Since that time there have been many more people who shared my enthusiasm and encouraged me to go on: Israel Finkelstein, Gloria London, Piotr Bienkowski, Mervyn Richardson, and last but not least, Prof. Ed Noort, my supervisor during the last stages of the research, without whose encouragement and occasional pushing there would not have been a book now.

Mervyn Richardson also kindly offered to correct my English and remove the Dutchisms from it, and he has been very thorough.

A special paragraph of thanks goes to Margreet Steiner. She has stood at the cradle of this project, just like she stood at the beginning of so many other episodes in my life. In the past 12 years we have not only shared our love for the archaeology of Palestine and Jordan, but the ideas, emotions, enthusiasm and frustrations that were the result of that love. She has given me the lion's share of the feedback that I needed to finish it.

Eke Bakker and Kees Donkersloot proved to be invaluable friends, who were always there when I needed to unwind from too many potsherds and Bedouin.

Last but not least I want to thank my parents for their support, love and encouragement, and for making it all possible in the first place. This book is dedicated to them.

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