

THE CONQUEST AND EARLY HEBREW POETRY

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A. STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

In the reconstruction of an historical event such as the Conquest, there are a variety of sources which may be drawn upon. The two main types for this particular event are the Biblical literary records and the material provided by archaeological research. The former may be subdivided into prose and poetry. The value of both prose and poetry as historical source material will be determined in the light of certain critical questions. Normally, poetry would be less valuable as historical source material than prose. Whilst both are the work of writers who interpret events and necessarily express value judgments, prose is usually informative and evaluative whereas poetry is primarily emotive and aesthetic. This is not to say that poetry will not contain historical information, but rather that the historical information will be incidental to the main purpose of the poetry. To take an example, the Song of Deborah contains information about a war against a Canaanite confederation, but there is not enough information here alone to provide a coherent picture of the course of events, for the primary purpose of the Song is to praise Yahweh for the victory which had been won. Thus in poetry, the historical material is usually secondary, and the primary purpose may be emotive or else religious (*e.g.* the poetry of worship or liturgy).

This study will be confined to the poetic sources for the Conquest. The term 'Conquest' is taken broadly; a brief survey of events from the Exodus to the early period of the Judges will be undertaken. The Conquest is set within this general period, but by allowing wide scope, the events preceding it and following it may add to our knowledge of the Conquest.

Thus the poetry to be considered will consist of the following: the 'Song of the Sea' (Ex. 15), the 'Balaam Oracles' (in Nu. 23-24), the 'Blessing of Moses' (Dt. 33), and the 'Song of Deborah' (Jdg. 5). In other words, the majority of the Old Testament material of the period will be subject to scrutiny. The main omissions will be firstly the 'Song of Moses' (Dt. 32) which is of a general nature and will not be examined in detail, secondly certain very short passages,¹ thirdly an Amorite Victory Song,² and finally some passages from the Psalms which may be very early.³ The poetry under examination will have two points of reference; the first will be the detail it gives concerning the immediate event being described, and the second (and often more important) will be the implications of this information for past or future history. Thus the 'Song of the Sea' describes a particular event, the destruction of the Egyptians in the Sea, but it also has implications for future events; the last few verses of the Song are proleptic. Or again the Song of Deborah celebrates a particular military victory, but retrospectively it implies a certain state of affairs which existed before the battle.

A further subdivision may be made in the type of evidence about the Conquest which this poetry may provide. Firstly, there are the historical details which may be clear from the poetry *per se*, whether they deal with present events or contain implications for the past or future; these will often be of a very general nature, as stated above. But secondly, there is the extent to which the general poetic information harmonizes with the prose literary context in which it is set. To take the 'Song of the Sea' as an example, it would be very difficult from this source alone to reconstruct a detailed picture of the Exodus events, but *given* these events, we may assess the extent to which the 'Song of the Sea' harmonizes (or otherwise) with the given situation.

In drawing information from poetry about events, caution must be taken not to be excessively literal. In the past critics have been quick to point out the lack of harmony between

¹ *E.g.* the 'Ark sayings' (Nu. 10:35) or the extracts from the 'Book of the Wars of Yahweh'.

² Nu. 21:27ff.; I am dealing with this passage elsewhere.

³ *E.g.* Psalm 68, which has similarities to the material being discussed; cf. W. F. Albright, *HUCA* 23 (1950-51) 1-39.

Judges 4 and 5 in—for example—the account of the slaying of Sisera. But whereas the prose chapter recounts the event, the poetic version, with its very effective use of language and repetition,⁴ conjures up the drama of the event by poetic imagery. The two passages perform different functions, but the heart of each passage is the same, namely that Jael killed Sisera. In any study of poetry as historical source material, the literary conventions which govern the poetic form and content must be taken into account.

B. QUESTIONS OF METHOD AND DATE

The theories of documentary analysis do not greatly affect our study of early poetry; the poetry, as distinct from its prose context, is usually thought to have an inherent unity of its own and to be older than the prose narrative. The tradition-history approach is more relevant to this type of material. There are references, for example, to the poems passed on by the *משלים*.⁵ But it must be remembered also that there are references to and quotations from early literary sources (apparently poetic) such as the 'Book of the Wars of Yahweh'. It seems most likely that here (as in early Islam) poetry of this kind had simultaneous written and oral transmission,⁶ and the tradition-history approach may have little to contribute to a fuller understanding of this early poetry.

The most important problems concerning early poetry are raised by the form-critical method. I have criticized the method elsewhere,⁷ and its basic weakness is brought out in a study by D. N. Freedman which indicates the circularity of the method and its tendency to subjectivity.⁸ However, having stated these preliminary cautions, it should be remembered that what is called 'form-criticism' is to a certain extent a twentieth century refinement of a much older method. For example, without consciously using form-critical methods, it might have been said that the Song of Deborah was a Victory Song (in

⁴ Cf. G. Gerleman, *VT* 1 (1951) 168ff.

⁵ Nu. 21:27.

⁶ Cf. J. van der Ploeg, *RB* 56 (1947) 5-41.

⁷ *TSF Bulletin* 47 (1967) 1-6.

⁸ *Interpretation* 17 (1963) 313.

effect its *Gattung*) used in a post-battle victory celebration (in effect its *Sitz im Leben*). Perhaps the significant difference is that these statements would have been made on the grounds of the evidence both internal and external to the poetry, whereas the form-critic's conclusions may be based only on his own interpretation of the contents of the poetry. But the point remains that there are certain common methodological principles at work. Before examining some of the form-critical studies of the poetry which is the subject of this study, some further principles will be examined which will guide the dating and general assessment of the poetry.

There are certain linguistic and orthographic criteria upon which an assessment of the date may be based. The date may give a strong indication as to the type and setting of the poem, and of its suitability in the context in which it has been traditionally set. The use of orthographic criteria has been worked out in the various studies of early Hebrew poetry by W. F. Albright, F. M. Cross and D. N. Freedman.⁹ A recent use of linguistic criteria, involving mainly the syntactical structure of Ugaritic poetry and the grammatical structure of the Amarna glosses, may be seen in the thesis of D. A. Robertson, *Linguistic Evidence in Dating Early Hebrew Poetry*.¹⁰ Although there is great value in both of these approaches, they have certain limitations which are not always clearly set out. In the first place, the present text of the poetry represents three dialects of Hebrew, each separated by a period of time.¹¹ The second of these dialects, represented by the addition of vowel letters, may be further subdivided into three stages of development, the early period when no vowel letters were used,¹² a second stage when final vowel letters were employed,¹³ and finally a period when all final vowels and certain internal vowels were indicated. The significance of all this for the dating of early Hebrew poetry is that with such a complex textual history,¹⁴

⁹ Particular articles will be referred to in subsequent footnotes.

¹⁰ Ph.D. Thesis, Yale University, 1966.

¹¹ There is the dialect of the original written form, the dialect represented by the addition of vowel letters, and finally the dialect represented by the Massoretic pointing of the consonantal text.

¹² Before 900 BC, but the evidence for this period is doubtful and depends largely on Albright's interpretation of the Gezer Calendar.

¹³ Between 900 BC and the Exile.

¹⁴ The possibility remains of oral transmission before written form.

here too there is considerable room for subjectivity. Thus in dating this poetry *as it now stands* a general rather than specific date will be given. I will use Robertson's idea of 'polarity' and refer to early poetic Hebrew (thirteenth to tenth centuries BC) and standard poetic Hebrew (eighth century BC to the Exile), without being quite so exact as Albright and others in defining the date. With this background in mind, we may examine the four main poems to form an assessment of their date, type, and original setting. I will simply give a résumé of my conclusions concerning each poem, and will note the other possibilities which have been proposed in the footnotes.

The text of the 'Song of the Sea' is full of archaisms according to Cross and Freedman,¹⁵ and it is the only poem which unambiguously resembles early Hebrew poetry when judged by the linguistic criteria of Robertson. There are examples of *nun energicum*, the archaic suffix *-mw*, a possible archaic accusative form (אמיתה), amongst many others. On the grounds of these criteria, together with the content of the poem, I think it can be dated with certainty as early Hebrew poetry. Its form is that of a Victory Song, and its original setting was within a celebration of the victory over the Egyptians.¹⁶ The peculiar combination of a text which is full of archaisms and yet which is remarkably free from corruption probably indicates that the 'Song of the Sea' was subsequently used as a regular part of the liturgy of Israel's worship; the subject-

¹⁵ *JNES* 14 (1955) 237ff. Other approaches from the one adopted here include the following: It was a hymn (M. Rozelaar, *VT* 2 (1952) 221ff., J. D. W. Watts, *VT* 7 (1957) 371ff., etc.) which was possibly used during the autumnal New Year Festival for the Enthronement of Yahweh (cf. R. E. Clements, *Prophecy and Covenant*, SCM Press, London (1965) 64). Or it may have been a liturgical composition, possibly a litany, used during a particular part of the autumn Festival at which individual vows were repaid (cf. H. Schmidt, *ZAW* 49 (1931) 59ff., and G. von Rad, *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays*, Oliver & Boyd, Edinburgh (1966) 10). Again it may have been a Passover cantata used during a feast in the Jerusalem Temple at the time of Josiah's reform (G. Beer, referred to in *Peake's Commentary* (new edition) by D. M. G. Stalker). Other suggestions include the possibility that the Song may have been the hymnic culmination of the cult legend of the 'Great Deliverance' which is said to be the substance of the foregoing chapters of the Book of Exodus.

¹⁶ This is claimed for the whole poem which is taken to be a unity. The archaisms are found throughout the poem and it has a certain inherent structural unity (cf. J. Muilenburg's article in *Studia Biblica et Semitica*, Wageningen (1966)). Some would argue that whereas the first twelve verses may be early, the remaining verses are from a later date (e.g. J. P. Hyatt, *VT* 5 (1955) 130ff., G. W. Coats, *VT* 17 (1967) 253ff., etc.). I believe this rests on a faulty exegesis of the verses which are examined below.

matter makes it most suitable for this.¹⁷ This may account for the ease with which so many scholars find its *Sitz im Leben* in the regular cultic life of Israel, and it points to the danger and difficulty of failing to distinguish between an original and secondary *Sitz im Leben*.

In the Balaam Oracles there are also signs of archaic Hebrew,¹⁸ though there are not so many as in the 'Song of the Sea'. There is the old form of the third m.s. suffix (קנה), there are two examples of case endings preserved in the construct chain (e.g. בנו צפר), there are examples of both *nun energicum* (e.g. אראנן) and *enclitic mem* (וירדם), whilst some words are possibly archaic in themselves in the Hebrew language (תרבעת). This evidence, together with the subject-matter (below), tends to confirm the classification of the Oracles as early poetic Hebrew.¹⁹ They are the type of Oracle commonly pronounced against an enemy before battle in the Ancient Near East (or were intended to be!), and their setting was originally in the cultic situation described by the prose context.²⁰ One reason for the preservation of the Oracles in Israelite tradition may have been the reference to the 'star which shall come forth out of Jacob' (Nu. 24:17) which was later taken to be a reference to David.

In the 'Blessing of Moses', the dating is more difficult. Although there are similar linguistic and orthographic criteria present,²¹ they are not so numerous as in the previous two poems discussed. Further, they tend to be localized; thus the Blessing of Levi is full of archaisms (according to Cross and Freedman) whereas other Blessings are apparently in standard Hebrew poetic diction. However, there is considerable corruption of the text in various places throughout the poem, and the versions appear to have had some difficulty in discerning the

¹⁷ N. H. Snaith remarks '... the Exodus song of Moses has been a Sabbath canticle amongst the Jews since early times' (*VT* 15 (1955) 395ff.).

¹⁸ W. F. Albright, *JBL* 63 (1944) 207ff.; cf. S. Daiches 'Balaam, a Babylonian Baru' in the *Hilprecht Anniversary Volume*, Leipzig (1909).

¹⁹ The possibility remains that their present form is a translation. If they were originally in Moabite, then the dialectical variations would have easily been lost in Hebrew, but they may have originally been in an Akkadian dialect; Balaam's home was in Mesopotamia, and the word תרבעת is of Akkadian origin.

²⁰ On the practice of pronouncing oracles, cf. A. Haldar, *Associations of Cult Prophets amongst the Ancient Semites*, Almqvist & Wiksell, Uppsala (1945).

²¹ Cross and Freedman, *JBL* 67 (1948) 191ff., and cf. D. A. Robertson, *op. cit.*, 207.

meaning of the text. Albright finds the evidence sufficient to posit a date in the third quarter of the eleventh century BC²² before the Philistine conquest. In view of the orthographic and linguistic criteria, taken with the corrupt and apparently ancient text (and the subject-matter, which is discussed below), the Blessing may be classified as early poetic Hebrew, with the provision that in its present form the evidence is not so strong as it was for the previous two poems. I take the Blessing to be a unity,²³ and would classify it as a combination of a dying man's blessing and a pre-battle blessing; the details of this description will be worked out below. The setting for the Blessing would have been an assembly of the tribes presided over by Moses prior to the critical point of the Conquest. In later times, the Blessing may well have been used in the regular worship of Israel for which it is most suitable, and this may again account for the theories of scholars who posit a *Sitz im Leben* for the Blessing in Israel's cultic life.²⁴ If we are correct, it would be a further case of failing to distinguish between an original and a secondary *Sitz im Leben*.

The Song of Deborah has been recognized for a long time as an early poem, and is generally thought to be almost contemporary with the events which it describes.²⁵ Here too there are examples of archaisms such as *nun energicum*,²⁶ and *z* used as a relative pronoun.²⁷ The text has suffered from a good deal of corruption and the difficulty it caused translators at an early period may be seen by comparing LXX A and B. The other versions are equally divergent at critical points. The whole Song is a Victory Song and its setting would have been

²² Cross and Freedman more cautiously suggest the tenth century.

²³ This is not generally agreed; many scholars would take the introductory and concluding verses to be a separate psalm; cf. I. L. Seeligmann, *VT* 14 (1964) 75ff.

²⁴ As with the 'Song of the Sea', suggestions concerning the *Sitz im Leben* have included the Covenant Renewal Festival and the New Year Enthronement Festival. In each case, the Blessing would be a liturgy in which the names of the tribes present were called out. The concluding verses (according to T. H. Gaster, *JBL* 66 (1947) 58ff.) celebrated the victories of Yahweh.

²⁵ Cf. G. W. Anderson, *A Critical Introduction to the Old Testament*, Duckworth, London (1959) 70; A. Robert & A. Feuillet, *Introduction à la Bible* 1, Desclée, Tournai (1959) 405; M. Noth, *The History of Israel*, A. & C. Black, London (1958) 61; H. W. Hertzberg, *Die Bücher Josua, Richter, Ruth*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen (1959) 173, and many other works.

²⁶ Cf. D. N. Freedman, *JAW* 72 (1960) 102, and W. F. Albright, *JPOS* 2 (1922) 78ff.

²⁷ J. M. Allegro, *VT* 5 (1955) 311.

in a victory celebration held soon after the event.²⁸ It seems unlikely that the Song would have been used at a later date as part of Israel's regular liturgy and worship.

C. THE HISTORICAL EVIDENCE OF EARLY HEBREW POETRY

In the examination of the historical significance of the poetry, it will be dealt with under certain topics rather than by a separate examination of each poem. The significance of the evidence may be seen in its similarities to—or its differences from—‘normative Biblical history’²⁹ and the recent standard works on Israel's origins and history.³⁰ The points of similarity or difference can not all be gone into fully since space does not permit.

1. *The Exodus and the Sinai Theophany*

We may begin by stating that the great Exodus event is the theme of the first poem (Ex. 15), it is clearly referred to in the Balaam Oracles, and it is not clearly mentioned in the Blessing of Moses or the Song of Deborah. In the ‘Song of the Sea’ the Exodus theme is central. It is plain that the Egyptian army had been lost in the disaster at the Reed-Sea and that Israelites interpreted this event as Yahweh's intervention in nature on their behalf; this was the ground for their praise of Yahweh. The Song does not in itself give a coherent picture of the event, but the first twelve verses are completely compatible with the

²⁸ I can not agree with A. Weiser (*ZAW* 71 (1959) 67ff.), who is followed by J. Gray (*Joshua, Judges and Ruth*, Nelson, London, 1967). Weiser takes only the last verses to refer to the battle, and he sets the first verses in the Covenant Renewal Festival. His evidence is strong (within the limitations imposed by the method), and given such a Festival, the early verses would not necessarily be out of harmony with its liturgy. But tradition sets the Song in a battle and victory situation and it seems to me to be most suitable there. And whereas the interpretation of the early verses is ambiguous in places, the tribal references are not so. In the Festival, as Weiser points out, there may have been a tribal roll-call, but the comments passed on the tribes—whilst with clear significance in the victory situation—would be of more doubtful significance in the Festival. Weiser's thesis needs a fuller refutation than this, but in the space available, I can only say that I find it unconvincing. Its plausibility may well be an example of the circularity of form-critical method. Having posited the Festival on the grounds of the content of the Song, then the Festival may cast further light on the content, but the first assumption is unproven.

²⁹ *I.e.* the picture of Israel's history drawn from the prose sources taken at face value, before being subjected to critical study.

³⁰ J. Bright, M. Noth, W. F. Albright, T. J. Meek, H. H. Rowley, *etc.*

prose account in which the Song is set. The vivid poetic imagery and the effective use of taunt (which is particularly evident in verses four and nine)³¹ reinforce the evidence adduced above for the nearness of the Song to the event being described.

Of the four main Balaam Oracles, there is a clear reference to the Exodus event in two of them; the passages are identical:

God brings them out of Egypt;

They have as it were the horns of a wild ox³²

(RSV Nu. 23:22 and 24:8).

Although the passages are short and identical, in each context they have a particular significance. In the second Oracle (23:22), the words immediately follow a description of Israel's invulnerability; this is ascribed to Yahweh's presence amongst them and the fact that the 'shout³³ of a king is amongst them'. If a victory shout is intended (*cf.* n. 33) the reference could conceivably be to a cry such as 'Yahweh is a Man of War',³⁴ which may have come into regular use amongst the Israelites in the early Conquest period. In the third Oracle, the passage is a prelude to a description of Israel's future military power. On the ground of the Exodus, it was to be expected that all Israel's enemies would be defeated.

The question may arise concerning why there is no reference to the Exodus in Dt. 33 and Jdg. 5, and although it would be arguing from silence, it is this type of omission which leads to theories of quite separate tribal sources for the main parts of what came to be Israelite tradition. The very nature of the argument is one which would be hard to prove or disprove, but it seems possible that there is an alternative solution to this silence in the subsequent sources. It is a question of perspective and of relative importance. The Exodus was a highly significant event, though its political and social significance

³¹ Taunt is a common feature of victory songs in the Ancient Near East. The expression מְבַחֵר שְׁלִשִּׁין 'the choicest of his officers' (on שְׁלִשִּׁין *cf.* A. Cowley, *JTS* 21 (1920) 326) may have been a deliberately sarcastic use of a familiar Egyptian expression 'of the choicest of. . . ' (*m stp.w n, etc.*); *cf.* A. S. Yahuda, *The Language of the Pentateuch in its Relationship to Egyptian* Vol. 1, Oxford University Press, London (1933) 79.

³² The second line is probably corrupt and its translation is doubtful.

³³ תְּרוּעָה is used of the blast of a trumpet, the shout of victory, even the crowning of a king (*cf.* S. Mowinkel's translation 'Königsjubil', *ZAW* 48 (1930) 233ff.). Perhaps 'victory shout' is most suitable here.

³⁴ Ex. 15:2. Samaritan renders 'Yahweh is a Mighty Man'.

was the most immediately obvious at the time, and the deeper religious significance was apparent later. Hence we are not surprised at the reference to the Exodus in the Balaam Oracles since it was the kind of event which would have become known in nearby areas. In contrast, the Sinai Theophany was specifically religious and of greater significance initially to Israel, although not necessarily a significant event outside Israel. Thus in both Dt. 33 and Jdg. 5, the Sinai Theophany has an important place (discussed below) and has temporarily eclipsed the Exodus in significance. In later times when perspective was regained through mature historical and religious thought, both events were accorded their due significance in Israel's early history. But it seems most likely that the absence of any mention of the Exodus from these two sources is to be explained in terms of the immediate historical perspective and perception of degrees of significance.

In both the Blessing of Moses³⁵ and the Song of Deborah³⁶ there are similar introductions which recall the Sinai Theophany. In both poems, the passages perform a particular function; they are an historical prelude and religious basis for what follows.³⁷ The Blessings which Moses pronounced were significant against the religious background of the God who was so dramatically present at Sinai. The victory over the Canaanite confederation was the result of a divine manifestation (Jdg. 5:20ff.) which called to mind the phenomena of the Sinai Theophany, and which was attributed directly to Yahweh.

A further significant aspect of the two descriptions of the Sinai Theophany is the wider contexts in which they are set. In both the Blessing of Moses and the Song of Deborah, ten

³⁵ Dt. 33:2. On the translation of this difficult verse, cf. A. F. L. Beeston, *JTS* 2 (1951) 30; G. R. Driver in *Hebraische Wortforschung* (*VTS* 16, 1967) 50; J. T. Milik, *Biblica* 38 (1957) 252ff. The best synthesis is given by P. D. Miller, *HTR* 57 (1964) 241-243.

³⁶ Jdg. 5:4-5. Many of the older commentators used to interpret these verses as describing Yahweh coming from the south to help His devotees in the north; the correct exegesis may be found in G. A. Cooke, *The History and Song of Deborah* (privately printed), Oxford (1898). *יהוה סיני* is not a gloss (as many commentators used to think, following presumably Symmachus *τοῦτοστι το Σινα*); Albright translates 'The One-of-Sinai' (*BASOR* 62 (1936) 30) and takes it to be a genuinely archaic name for God which strongly reinforces the opinion that the passage is early.

³⁷ Thus they have a functional similarity to the historical prologues of the treaty patterns in the Ancient Near East; cf. J. A. Thompson, *The Ancient Near Eastern Treaty Patterns and the Old Testament*, Tyndale Press, London (1964).

tribes of Israel are mentioned (a discussion of the tribes follows below). In the light of this, it seems most likely that the tradition of the Sinai Theophany was one which was common to the tribes, and not that it was the tradition of a particular group which was later accepted by the tribes as a whole; if the dating of the poetry is correct, then very little time has been allowed for such a supposedly heterogeneous group of tribes to accept as their own the religious traditions of one group.

2. *Details of the Conquest*

The last verses of the 'Song of the Sea' (Ex. 15:14-18) contain a preview of the Conquest; it is full of an optimism which is based on the victory over the Egyptians which Yahweh had just won. There is no compelling reason for assuming that these verses must be late and contain a retrospective glance at the Conquest already in the past, as many commentators assume.³⁸ The sequence of tenses in verses 14-16a is determined by the relationship of the verbs to שמעו in verse 14.³⁹ That is, the fear and trembling amongst the inhabitants of Palestine was a result (poetically speaking) of their having heard of Egypt's disaster and their fear for their own future. The lines do not necessarily refer to an event in past decades described and remembered by the Israelites when they were already in Palestine. Verse 16b describes the event which the inhabitants of Palestine dreaded, namely the time when Israel would pass through their land.⁴⁰ The four areas mentioned in the verses, namely Philistia, Edom, Moab, and Canaan, appear in the order in which Israel might expect to meet them. The only difficulty occasioned by this would be Philistia (which is not necessarily anachronistic⁴¹); presumably the reference is to Philistines situated in the region of Gerar.⁴²

Turning to the Balaam Oracles, it may be noted first that the Oracles fit harmoniously in the prose context in which they

³⁸ E.g. J. P. Hyatt, *VT* 5 (1955) 130ff.

³⁹ This assumes that tenses are used significantly in early poetry and not indiscriminately; on this, cf. D. A. Robertson, *op. cit.*

⁴⁰ On the exegesis of verses 14ff., cf. U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, Magnes Press, Jerusalem (ET 1967) 176ff.

⁴¹ The argument that it is an anachronism is largely one from silence; cf. T. C. Mitchell, 'Philistia' in *Archaeology and Old Testament Study*, Oxford (1967) 408 and 411.

⁴² So Cassuto, *loc. cit.*

are set.⁴³ They present a picture of the Moabite nation faced with a genuine military threat from the approaching Israelites. From this, it may be assumed that Moab's enemy was quite numerous; this may be implied by some lines in the first Oracle:

Who can count the dust of Jacob
Or number the raised dust of Israel.⁴⁴

In the other Oracles too, the military power and invincibility of the Israelites is expressed in many places. The size of the threat facing Moab, as presented in the Oracles, strongly indicates that the enemy were the Israelite tribes as a whole, and not simply a small section of the tribes, as might be supposed from some reconstructions of Israel's early history. This evidence is not conclusive in itself, but it is further supported by other factors which will be discussed below.

The Blessing of Moses does not contain detailed information about the Conquest. The whole Blessing, however, breathes the atmosphere of war; it is particularly evident in the concluding verses. The Israelites were 'an army made victorious by Yahweh' and their enemies would come cringing to them. A detailed examination of the tribal references is not possible in a paper of this length,⁴⁵ but certain points of significance may be noted. Firstly, there is a marked progression evident in certain sayings from those in Gn. 49. For example, the terminology used in the Blessing of Joseph is significant. The passage in Dt. 33 begins by referring to Joseph but ends with a reference to both Ephraim and Manasseh. The implication of this is that the Joseph tribe was at a stage in its growth where the tribal name (Joseph) was still applicable, and yet the growth in numbers was such that the Ephraim-Manasseh factions were clearly evident.⁴⁶ This is clearly compatible with a date for

⁴³ This was brought out well in Daiches' article, *op. cit.*

⁴⁴ However, it has been pointed out that these lines may refer not to numbers but to magical practices; cf. S. Gevirtz, *Patterns in the Early Poetry of Israel*, Chicago (1963).

⁴⁵ On the question of the tribal-sayings (here and in Jdg. 5) cf. H-J. Zobel, *Stammessprache und Geschichte (BZAW)*, A. Töpelmann, Berlin (1965). I do not find Zobel's conclusions very satisfying, partly because of his different methodological presuppositions concerning the literature in question.

⁴⁶ As might be expected, Gn. 49 refers only to Joseph, whereas Ephraim and Manasseh (*i.e.* Machir) only are referred to in Jdg. 5, showing the two extremes of the growth process.

the Blessing near the critical point of the Conquest. In conjunction with this, it may be noted that the Blessing of Levi marks the transition period between the tribe's early warlike character (Gn. 49:5-7) and its later more specialized priestly function, which is again in harmony with the setting which has been posited for the Blessing of Moses.⁴⁷ To take another example, the Blessing of Gad is of a particularly warlike character, which is quite in harmony with the setting of the Blessing at the beginning of the Conquest and with the concluding verses of the Blessing (above). It cannot be denied, however, that many of the Blessings have a very general character and are of no obvious significance as historical evidence. Again, others may be taken with some plausibility to refer to a period after the Conquest. It may be argued, for example, that the Blessing of Zebulun refers to a period when the tribe was already settled in the north of Palestine. But once again, the difficulty in establishing such a view would be in disproving that the Blessing was not of a general and prophetic nature, in which future events were looked forward to. The weight of the evidence suggests that the Blessing of Moses as a whole dates from the earliest period of the Conquest. It pictures a group of ten tribes, all of whom may be assumed to have experienced the Sinai Theophany, who were now poised in Transjordan ready for the critical onslaught of Canaan.

The Song of Deborah is of less immediate interest concerning this stage of the Conquest, but again the tribal references are informative concerning the history of the Israelites before that particular war with a Canaanite confederation. Of the ten tribes mentioned in the Song, six fought against the Canaanites and four abstained.⁴⁸ Clearly Israel was thought of as a unity on grounds other than simply joint participation in battle out of political necessity. There was a bond linking the tribes which suggested that they should act together in face of an external

⁴⁷ The tribe receives no mention at all in Judges 5, as might be expected.

⁴⁸ The comments passed on the non-combatant tribes are puzzling and not simplified by the difficulty of the text. One tentative suggestion as to their interpretation is that they each contain an element of sarcastic allusion. Thus the reference to Reuben's serious thought but lack of action calls to mind a similar characteristic from an earlier point of their history (Nu. 32:1-5). The comment passed in the Song may be a sarcastic allusion to a similar characteristic reappearing in this particular crisis. Similar points can be discerned for each of the non-combatant tribes. Cf. the comparable recent approach of A. D. Crown, *VT* 17 (1967) 240.

threat, and thus the tribes who were not present in the fighting were censured. The most obvious explanation of this bond is in terms of common kinship and religion, as it is expressed in the normative Biblical tradition. This is reinforced by the connection of the tribes with the Sinai Theophany, as in the Blessing of Moses. Once again, the evidence of implication is compatible with a conquest of Palestine by a group of tribes of common kinship and religion.⁴⁹

3. *Terms used for the Peoples involved in the Conquest*

The concern of this section is to identify as closely as possible the people referred to in Ex. 15 and the Balaam Oracles. There is little doubt that the Blessing of Moses and the Song of Deborah refer to Israel as a whole, but in the 'Song of the Sea', neither Israel nor any of the tribes is mentioned by name; in the Balaam Oracles, the terms Israel/Jacob are used in parallel, but none of the tribes is mentioned by name. Thus it could be argued superficially that these two sources refer only to a tribal group who maintained the Jacob-Israel tradition and the Exodus tradition.

From the very general nature of the 'Song of the Sea', it is plain that no definite conclusions can be reached. There are, however, good reasons for assuming that the people who were involved were the tribes of Israel as a whole. The first justification for assuming this is the religious content of the poem, but this will be examined more fully in the next section. The second justification, closely connected to the first, depends on the meaning of the phrase עַם יְהוָה. It is very probable that the term 'people' implies consanguinity,⁵⁰ and if this is the case, it is likely that the constituent tribes of Israel were involved. In one of the other sources which mentions both Israel and the tribes by name (Jdg. 5), this same phrase is again used meaning the peoples as a whole.⁵¹ Some scholars take the phrase to refer specifically to Israel as a cultic community,⁵² and whilst at a later stage in Israel's history this is undoubtedly true, it

⁴⁹ This is sharply in contrast with the views Noth, Meek and others, in spite of the fact that they accept the Song of Deborah as one of the earliest examples of Hebrew literature.

⁵⁰ Cf. R. de Vaux's article in *The Bible and Modern Scholarship*, Carey Kingsgate, London (1966), 21ff.; and also E. A. Speiser, *JBL* 79 (1960) 157-163.

⁵¹ Jdg. 5:12, 13.

⁵² E.g. J. Gray, *Joshua, Judges and Ruth*, 283.

may also have both a general significance (*i.e.* 'Israel') and even the sense of the 'army of Israel'. The mixed use of the phrase may be seen in the Qumran literature. In the *Manual of Discipline*, *יהה עם* plainly refers to the cultic community, but in the *Scroll of the War of the Sons of Light against the Sons of Darkness*, the words indicate the military character of the people of Israel.⁵³ The inference then from the use of this term in the 'Song of the Sea' is that Israel as a whole is referred to in this poem.

The significance of the terms Jacob/Israel cannot be established independently in the Oracles of Balaam, but the likelihood remains that they refer to Israel as a whole; the military strength (mentioned above) implies this. It is reinforced by the (admittedly circular) argument that if our conclusions concerning Ex. 15 are correct, then the same group is referred to in the Balaam Oracles, since there too the Exodus is mentioned. There is further evidence from the religious content of the Oracles which will be dealt with in the next section.

4. *The Religious Content of the Poetry*

Religion is not the primary concern of this study, but it is important because of its bearing on history, and in ancient Israel religion and history were closely associated with one another. Further the discussion in the following paragraphs will not be confined to religion *per se*, but will include the implications of religion for matters such as the leadership and unity of early Israel.

In the 'Song of the Sea', we have already noted the religious interpretation of the victory and the religious expression used for the Israelites, the 'People of Yahweh'. A further point of religious interest and historical significance is the expression 'Yahweh is a Man of War'.⁵⁴ The expression here has the form of an ecstatic, almost surprised, ejaculation. In the Song of Deborah, at a later date, Yahweh's participation in war is a source of praise but it is not a new experience. Here, however, the epithet implies a great new religious discovery on the part of the Israelites, the discovery that their God was one who

⁵³ Cf. Y. Yadin's edition *The Scroll of the War*. . . , Oxford University Press (1962) 44.

⁵⁴ Ex. 15:3. I have examined some of the theological difficulties connected with this epithet in a forthcoming article in the *Scottish Journal of Theology*.

could win battles in the furtherance of the cause of his people.⁵⁵ Such an expression is in keeping with the early date of the Song and the stage in the development in Israelite religion which it represents. And it sets the stage for the coming historical events of the Conquest. The Israelites went forward to take possession of the Promised Land trusting in their God who was a 'Man of War'.

At the end of the Song we have some further illuminating religious information in the expressions used for God's dwelling place. It is natural to assume that when the Israelites looked forward to a time when they would occupy their own land, they would hope to build a shrine or a temple.⁵⁶ Two terms of particular interest are used in the Song. The first is *נֶחֱדָה* 'dwelling place' which probably refers to the desert as the immediate objective of the Israelites on leaving Egypt. The term is most probably an archaic name for the sanctuary, strongly supporting the desert origin of Israelite religion.⁵⁷ The second expression used is the 'mountain of your inheritance'. Although this phrase (and the following lines of the Song) have been taken to date from the period of the Monarchy,⁵⁸ it is probable that the phrase and the surrounding lines are of a more general nature⁵⁹ and should be dated early. Cross and Freedman point out that the phrase was very old and that it was current in Canaanite before the time of the Conquest, and there does not seem to be strong ground for denying the origin of the phrase (and the surrounding verses) to the period immediately before the Conquest. The historical significance of all this is that it tends to support the prose account of a 'nation' going into the Conquest with their faith in a God of Victories, and that faith was expressed in worship at a religious shrine. It implies, or is compatible with, the concept of Israel which has already been mentioned, namely a people of common religion and kinship (*cf.* Ex. 15:2 'the God of my Father').

In the Balaam Oracles, there is less religious information of specifically historical value, and the question is complicated

⁵⁵ *Cf.* W. Caspari, *Zeitschrift für Wissenschaftliche Theologie* 54 (1912) 128ff.

⁵⁶ On this point, see Cassuto's comments, *op. cit.*

⁵⁷ More exactly, the word probably means 'shepherd's dwelling place'. On the question of its antiquity, *cf.* Cross and Freedman, *JNES* 14, *loc. cit.*

⁵⁸ *Cf. inter al.* J. Gray, *Legacy of Canaan* (VTS 5, 1965) 303 n. 7.

⁵⁹ On this topic, see the personal remarks of D. N. Freedman to Muilenburg which are contained in a footnote at the end of Muilenburg's article, *loc. cit.*

by our ignorance of the source of Balaam's knowledge of Israelite religion. One point may be made briefly; it concerns the constant reference to Israel's invulnerability and divine protection against external forces of magic. Balaam repeats several times the impossibility of cursing what God has not cursed, and ends by blessing Israel almost against his own will. Whatever our conclusions concerning Balaam's nature and office, he had a certain integrity in his art. The point of significance is the compatibility of Balaam's position with the great Deuteronomic principle that whoever blessed Israel would be blessed, and whoever cursed Israel would be cursed. Balaam's view of Israel is quite in harmony with the normative Biblical tradition concerning Israel's religion at this period.

We have already drawn out most of the historical significance of the religious content of the Blessing of Moses in our examination of the Sinai Theophany. There may be some further significance in verse 4: 'Moses commanded us a Law . . .' but the text is very difficult here, and it would be unwise at the present stage of textual studies to place too much weight on the words.⁶⁰ As it stands, however, the verse testifies further to the giving of the Law to the Israelites at Sinai.

We may conclude this section with an examination of the historical implications of the religious content of the Song of Deborah. The first point of interest lies in the concept of religious leadership and unity in early Israel. There was no hope in the desperate situation facing the northern tribes 'until you arose, Deborah, arose as a mother in Israel' (verse 7, rsv). Deborah was recognized primarily as authoritative and she delegated military leadership to Barak. But wherein lay Deborah's authority?⁶¹ It is significant that there is no mention here of a central sanctuary on which much of the idea of an amphyctyonic confederation depends. It is certainly not suggested in this chapter that Deborah was connected with the central sanctuary or that her authority was in any way dependent on it. She was exercising a charismatic leadership which per-

⁶⁰ Cross and Freedman, *JBL* 67, *loc. cit.*, think the lines were inserted into the framework of the introduction-conclusion, but this must remain hypothetical. T. H. Gaster (*JBL* 66 (1947) 58ff.) offers a translation based on a reconstruction of the text, but his meaning is not much clearer than the Massoretic Text.

⁶¹ With what follows, cf. Y. Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel*, Allen and Unwin, London (1961) 256ff.

sonified the great principles of the Israelite faith as it was expressed in the Sinai covenant. In such an office, she found a recognition and a following amongst the Israelite tribes because of their common faith, kinship, and recognition of the Sinai covenant. This is compatible with the 'normative Biblical tradition' but calls into question theories of Israelite origins which make large use of the idea of amphictyony.

The term amphictyony⁶² deserves a fuller examination in the light of the Song of Deborah. The term is used descriptively, but how far does the parallel between the Greek and Israelite systems allow it to be used thus legitimately? If in fact the parallel is not close, there is a danger that the semantic overtones of the word will colour the reconstruction of early Israelite history. For instance, John Bright writes: 'It is clear from the Song of Deborah that the amphictyony was in full operation in the twelfth century. . . .'⁶³ From the meaning of the term, this might be taken to mean that the Song of Deborah depicts the operation of a tribal confederation whose centre was at a certain sanctuary, presumably Shiloh.

The fact is, however, that nowhere in the Song is the sanctuary mentioned, nor is there any indication that the force which unified the clans was in any way connected with the sanctuary. The only reference to the sanctuary in the whole Book of Judges is in the incident in the closing chapters of the book.⁶⁴ In the story of the Benjaminite affair, the central shrine is mentioned, but it is in the context of settling *internal* affairs. This is not to deny for a moment that there was a central sanctuary during the time of the Judges; rather, it is to deny that it had anything like the prominence which the term 'amphictyony' suggests, at least during this particular period. Earlier, in the time of Joshua, the Ark was at the centre of the military encampment. Later, in the Books of Samuel, we hear more of the central sanctuary and the Ark. But during this particular period, the sanctuary does not appear to have such importance. The unifying factor in Israel lay elsewhere.

⁶² The term was brought into use initially through the works of Alt and Noth, but subsequently was accepted by historians of very different viewpoints; e.g. J. Bright, E. Ehrlich, W. F. Albright, etc.

⁶³ *A History of Israel*, SCM Press, London (1960) 145.

⁶⁴ Shechem is mentioned in chapter 9, but in the context of a shrine built to a non- or semi-Israelite god, Baal-berith.

It lay in the covenant and in the inspired leadership of the Judges who personified the faith of the covenant. The sanctuary was the fruit of this unity rather than its root; it added to the unity, but was not in any way its source. Hence it would seem on the ground of this evidence (and from the Book of Judges as a whole) that the term 'amphictyony' suggests an emphasis which the sources do not warrant.⁶⁵

D. CONCLUSIONS

Of the poetic sources for the Conquest which were examined, three could be dated with relative certainty as early poetic Hebrew; the case for the fourth poem, the Blessing of Moses was somewhat ambiguous, but it could be dated early with reasonable probability. The historical information which these sources contain was noted to be compatible with the prose account of the Conquest, taken at face value. The implications of the study call into question some recent reconstructions of Israel's origins in the writings of modern historians.

⁶⁵ Cf. for recent studies on this topic: H. M. Orlinsky in *Studies and Essays in Honor of A. A. Neuman*, Brill, Leiden (1962) 375ff.; B. D. Rahtjen, *JNES* 24 (1965) 100ff., etc.