Geography in the Visions of Amram Texts (4Q543–547)

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1 Introduction

The purpose of this brief article is to explore the role and function of geography in the narrative structure of Visions of Amram (henceforth: VA). This Aramaic composition, which has been preserved in at least five Qumran manuscripts, is clearly a narrative. The protagonist of the story is Amram, father of Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.¹

The narrative framework is a scene which takes place at Amram's deathbed. As his final active achievement, he has arranged for and celebrated his daughter Miriam's wedding to a family member. Having accomplished this, Amram prepares for his death, summons his children to his bedside, and recounts to them the crucial events of his life. The scene is set in Egypt, where the Israelites are situated before the events of the exodus, which are to take place in the generation of Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.

In his farewell address to his children, Amram describes a journey he undertook many years ago to the land of Canaan. He went there to build the tombs of his ancestors.² His sojourn in Canaan, however, dragged on for an extended period because of a war between Egypt and Philistia that kept the boarder closed. Amram had to stay in Canaan for 41 years, while his wife Jochebed remained in Egypt.

Eventually, Amram was able to return to Egypt, although his return is not narrated in the preserved text. Nevertheless, Amram clearly hints at his coming back to Egypt. Before returning from Canaan, though, he experienced a vision,

- 1 The text was published by Émile Puech in *Qumrân grotte 4.XXII: Textes araméens, première partie: 4Q529–549*, DJD 31 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), 283–405. While Puech regards the seven manuscripts 4Q543–549 as belonging to the Visions of Amram, Robert Duke holds that only five of the scrolls (4Q543–547) belong to this group, Robert Duke, *The Social Location of the Visions of Amram (4Q543–547)*, StBibLit 135 (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 35–42. On the question of overlaps and identity between the text of the different manuscripts, see Søren Holst's article in the present volume.
- 2 On the burial motif in VA, see Liora Goldman, "The Burial of the Fathers in the *Visions of Amram* from Qumran," in *Rewriting and Interpreting the Hebrew Bible: The Biblical Patriarchs in the Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. Devorah Dimant and Reinhard G. Kratz, BZAW 439 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2013), 231–49.

and the account of the vision is the central episode in his farewell address. In a dream vision, Amram encounters a transcendent dualistic world and sees otherworldly beings representing light and darkness, fighting over him. Moreover, he is informed of the dualistic structure of reality and the forces of good and evil. The revelation also includes a series of predictions regarding the future. Amram is told details of what is to take place in the generation of his children—the exodus events, the destruction of Pharaoh's army, the divine manifestation at Mount Sinai (which is explicitly mentioned in the vision account), and the future achievements of Moses and Aaron and their descendants.

The geography of VA—in its combination with the time-line of the narrative—exhibits a certain degree of complexity. The narrative framework, the scene at Amram's deathbed and his final address, takes place in Egypt. This level corresponds to the narrative's present. Amram's account of his journey—the narrative's past level—represents a movement from Egypt to Canaan, and back again. The vision seems—as I shall argue in this article—to be set during Amram's long sojourn in Canaan. Finally, the predictions included in the vision point to events taking place in Egypt and in the wilderness during the Israelites' wandering towards Canaan. These predictions represent the third, future level of the narrative.

The occurrence of geographical names as “locations” in a narrative like VA is not in itself surprising. The locations mentioned in the text are integral parts of the plot; the movements of the characters give structure and coherence to the story. However, there are good reasons to look for a deeper level of meaning behind the geography of the text: The locations mentioned may also be expected to carry a symbolic significance, in particular since the place-names in VA also play important roles in other literary traditions that were probably known to the author and intended readers.³

The geography of VA, in other words, is closely related to the text's character of “biblical rewriting.”⁴ The Aramaic composition was written as a “prequel”

3 On the mental and symbolic significance of geographical notions and designations, see Philip S. Alexander, “Early Jewish Geography,” *ABD* 2:977–988.

4 The terms “biblical rewriting” and “rewritten bible,” and their significance and usefulness, have been extensively debated. In my view, it is fruitful to understand “biblical rewriting” as an interpretative strategy which was, in antiquity, expressed in a variety of literary genres. Defining “rewritten bible” as a genre in its own right seems less relevant in this context. See Jesper Høgenhaven and Mogens Müller, “Indledning,” in *Bibelske genskrivninger*, ed. Jesper Høgenhaven and Mogens Müller, *FBE* 17 (Copenhagen: Tusculanum, 2012), 7–18 (7–9). Cf. more generally Molly Zahn, *Rethinking Rewritten Bible: Composition and Exegesis in the 4QReworked Pentateuch Manuscripts*, *STDJ* 95 (Leiden: Brill, 2011). On the function of reworked compositions as a vehicle for maintaining the authority of the tradition, see George J. Brooke, “Between Authority and Canon: The Significance of Reworking the Bible for

to the well-known exodus narrative. Intertextuality is a central element in the author's strategy. VA builds on familiar material, expanding and developing its characters, and drawing on the reader's knowledge of what will happen after the events narrated in the text.

I begin by giving a brief overview of the geographical names used in VA and their significance in the context. Next, I attempt to describe the geographical framework of the narrative and to investigate how this framework supports the overall structure of the composition, and which aspects of the geography, and their interplay with the temporal sequences in the narrative, serve to enhance the authority and importance of the story told and the vision it presents. Special attention will be given to the geography of the exodus events as they are presented in VA. I also examine the way in which the spatial movements of persons reflected in the text mirror or echo patterns of movement of exile and return, known to the potential readers from the narratives of the Pentateuch.⁵

2 The Geographical Names in VA and Their Significance

The preserved fragments of VA contain the following geographical names: Egypt or "the land of Egypt" (מצרים, or ארע מצרין),⁶ Canaan or "the land of Canaan" (כנען, or ארע כנען),⁷ Philistia (פלשת),⁸ and Mount Sinai (הר סיני), 4Q547 9 4). All these names occur in the exodus and wilderness narratives of the

Understanding the Canonical Process," in *Reworking the Bible: Apocryphal and Related Texts at Qumran: Proceedings of a Joint Symposium by the Orion Center for the Study of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Associated Literature and the Hebrew University Institute for Advanced Studies Research Group on Qumran, 15–17 January 2002*, ed. Esther Chazon et al., STDJ 58 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 85–104. Cf. also Jesper Høgenhaven, "Fortschreibung und Kanonisierung in der Bibliothek von Qumran: Bemerkungen mit besonderem Hinblick auf Genesis-Kommentar A (4Q252)," in *Rewriting and Reception in and of the Bible*, ed. Jesper Høgenhaven et al., WUNT 396 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 11–31.

5 We cannot know in which exact form these traditions were known to the author of VA, but it stands to reason that something close to the patriarchal stories in the Pentateuch must lie behind the composition.

6 מצרין, 4Q543 1 4; 3 3; 11 1; 544 1 5, 7, 9; 4Q545 1a i 4; 1a–b ii 19; 4Q546 10 1; 4Q547 1–2 5, 8; 4Q549 1 2; ארע מצרין, 4Q545 1a–b ii 16; 4Q546 2 2.

7 כנען, 4Q544 1 7; ארע כנען, 4Q545 1a–b ii 18; in one case written as a single word (ארעכנען, 4Q547 9 9).

8 4Q544 1 7; 4Q545 1a–b ii 19.

Pentateuch, which constitute the literary background of VA, and they are fundamental elements in the biblical storyline.⁹

In the longest and best-preserved account of Amram's journey to Canaan (4Q544 1 1–15), the land in which the tombs of his forefathers are located is referred to consistently as ארע כנען ("the land of Canaan," 4Q544 1 9) or more simply כנען ("Canaan," 4Q544 1 7). This corresponds in broad terms to the language of the Hebrew Bible, and, in particular, the Pentateuch. Thus, the great majority of references in the Hebrew Bible to the land of Canaan (ארץ כנען) occur in the Pentateuch and in Joshua in connection with the conquest narratives and the accounts of ongoing struggles and conflicts between the Israelites and the people of Canaan.¹⁰ The consistent references to the promised land as "(the land of) Canaan" in VA we should probably understand as a deliberate attempt to recreate the setting of the narrative in the time between the patriarchs and the exodus.¹¹

Between the land of Egypt and the land of Canaan lies, in the mind of VA, the land of Philistia. Philistia and Canaan are perceived as different countries in close vicinity—in 4Q544 1 7 they seem to be mentioned as standing on the same side over against Egypt in a conflict "between Egypt and Canaan and Philistia" (בין מצרין לכנען ולפלשת), the conflict that stops Amram from returning home to his wife in Egypt. The notion of the Philistines as playing an important role on the stage of international politics would also seem, from the vantage point of the author of VA, to reflect the ideas of a distant past, suitable for the situation in which the Amram narrative is set.¹²

The geographical language of VA, in other words, seems to be chosen to support the general perspective reflected in the composition, which presents itself

9 According to Exod 13:17 God did not lead the Israelites "by the way of the land of the Philistines" (דרך ארץ פלשתים) lest they would repent at the sight of war (בראתם מלחמה). Moses' song depicts the terror experienced by the "inhabitants of Philistia" (ישיב פלשת, Exod 15:14).

10 Gen 11:31; 12:5; 13:12; 16:3; 17:8; 23:2, 19; 31:18; 33:18; 35:6; 36:5, 6; 37:1; 42:5, 7, 13, 29, 32; 44:8; 45:17, 25; 46:6, 12, 31; 47:1, 4, 13, 14, 15; 48:3, 7; 49:30; 50:5, 13; Exod 6:4; 16:35; Lev 14:34; 18:3; 25:38; Num 13:2, 17; 26:19; 32:30, 32; 33:40, 51; 34:2, 29; 35:10, 14; Deut 32:49; Jos 5:12; 14:1; 21:2; 22:9, 10, 11, 32; 24:3; Jud 21:12; Ps 105:11; 1 Chron 16:18. The name ארץ הכנעני ("land of the Canaanites") is used in Exod 3:17; 13:5, 11; Deut 1:7; 11:30; Jos 13:4; Ezek 16:3; Neh 9:8. By contrast, the designation ארץ ישראל ("land of Israel") occurs rarely, 1 Sam 13:19; 2 Kgs 5:2, 4; 6:23; Ezek 27:17; 40:2; 47:18; 1 Chron 22:2; 2 Chron 2:16; 30:25; 34:7. The alternative אדמת ישראל is found solely in the Book of Ezekiel (Ezek 7:2; 11:17; 12:19, 22; 13:9; 18:2; 20:38, 42; 21:7, 8; 25:3, 6; 33:24; 36:6; 37:12; 38:18, 19).

11 We note the high frequency of this geographical designation in the Joseph story, which may be regarded as a central part of the background for the narrative in VA.

12 Cf. H. J. Katzenstein, "Philistines. History," ABD 5:326–328.

as a tale coming out of the distant past, and situates its narrative between the patriarchal period and the exodus from Egypt. This situation is important for the author and the potential readers. It points back to a decisive epoch in the history of Israel, as perceived by the Second Temple period writers, and firmly associates the revealed contents with the authoritative figures of that epoch.

3 The Geographical Scheme of VA

Egypt, where the text's present, the farewell scene at Amram's deathbed, takes place, is explicitly characterized as the place where the Israelites are in exile (גלות ישראל במצרים, 4Q545 1a i 4, cf. 4Q543 1 4). Amram's vision, on the other hand, is closely associated with his journey in the past to Canaan and seems to have taken place while Amram dwelt in the land of his ancestors. The preserved text does not make it entirely clear whether Amram actually experienced the vision while he was in Canaan, on his way back, or after his return to Egypt. However, the geographical scheme of the text indicates that the vision was indeed set in Canaan.

This, in my opinion, is also implied in the text itself. An important passage is the opening of the account of Amram's vision. This text survives in two manuscripts, 4Q544 and 4Q547. The best-preserved text is that of 4Q544 1 9–10:

4Q544 1 9–10

9 כולא די אתוב למצרין בשלם ואחזה אנפי אנתתי]
10 בחזוי חזוה די חלמא *vacat* והא תרין דאנין עלי ואמרין]

- 9 everything, that I would return to Egypt in peace, and that I would see my wife's face ...
10 In my vision, the vision of the dream. *vacat* And behold! Two were arguing over me, saying ...¹³

In the parallel text 4Q547 1–2 9 only the final words of the line are preserved: חזית בחזות. The verb חזית ("I saw") precedes the word בחזות, which can very plausibly be seen as a variant of the first word (בחזוי) or possibly the first two words of 4Q544 1 10 (בחזוי חזות). It would be natural for the verb חזית ("I saw")

13 Quotations in this article are dependent on, and generally follow, Puech's DJD edition. Differences from DJD are intentional, and based on the PAM photos. The translations are heavily indebted to both Puech's French translation and Duke's English translation.

to be the opening word of Amram's account of his vision. The phrase חזית בחזיון ("I saw in my vision, the vision of a dream") echoes Dan 7:2 (חזה הוית) די חלמא (בחזיון עם ליליא), cf. Dan 7:7, 13.¹⁴

At this point in the narrative Amram shifts his focus from recounting his sojourn in Canaan and his long separation from his wife, to describing his dream vision. The sentence "I saw in my vision, the vision of a dream" reads perfectly well as the opening of the description, followed (after a small *vacat*) by a presentation of the two angelic figures arguing over Amram (4Q544 1 10–11, cf. 4Q547 1–2 10–11). The narrative sequence, then, seems to imply that the vision experience follows immediately upon the account of the separation which still endures at the time the vision occurs. In other words, Amram receives the revelation while he is still in Canaan.

This interpretation depends on reading the imperfect forms (אתוב and ואחזה) in 4Q544 1 9 as indicating past future: Amram looks back on his time in Canaan, and recalls his confidence that he would, ultimately, return safely to Egypt and see his wife again. This is how Puech understands the two verbs: "que je retournerai en Égypte en paix et (que) je (re)verrai le visage de ma femme."¹⁵ Duke, however, understands אתוב and ואחזה as indicating simple past, narrated tense: "... that I returned to Egypt in safety. And I saw my wife's face."¹⁶ This interpretation of the two verbs in imperfect, however, seems strained in the context.¹⁷ The implication would be that Amram experienced his vision after his return to Egypt. The more natural understanding is that the verbs are indeed past future and express Amram's confidence at the time, while still in Canaan, in his safe return and reunion with Jochebed in Egypt. This statement would follow naturally after his previous words that he did not take any other wife (4Q544 1 8). At the end of line 8, Puech restores a reference to an angelic message: "Au cours d'une vision, un ange me fit connaître ..." ¹⁸ Amram's confidence, then, becomes the result of a revelation. This is not necessarily the case, but certainly plausible in the context of Amram's account.

14 Cf. the references in Puech, DJD 31:325.

15 Puech, DJD 31:324.

16 Duke, *The Social Location*, 17.

17 Imperfect/prefix conjugation is generally not used for past tense in this type of Aramaic. Takamitsu Muraoka, *A Grammar of Qumran Aramaic*, ANESSup 38 (Leuven: Peeters, 2011), 170, mentions the forms in the sentence ועמי תמלל ולי תאמר ("and there she was speaking with me and saying to me ...") in 1QapGen 2:13 as the only extant example of the prefix conjugation being used about "what went on at one point in the past." My colleague Kasper Siegmund also pointed to the verb ינדע ("that he would know") in 1QapGen 2:20. In the first case, though, we seem to have to do with ongoing action in the past, and in the second with an element of intention.

18 Puech, DJD 31:324.

4Q547 9 8–9 preserves the conclusion of Amram's vision account:

8 [ואנה אתעירת מן שנת עיני וחזוא כתב]ת
9 [מן ארעכנען והוא לי כדי אמר]

8 ... and I woke from the sleep of my eyes, and I wrot[e] the vision ...
9 ... from the land of Canaan, and it was for me as ... had said ...

Here Amram states that he woke up from his sleep, and then wrote down the contents of the vision. The beginning of line 9 has been lost, but the surviving text has a reference to Canaan with the preposition מן ("from"), most plausibly indicating that Amram moved out of the land of Canaan upon writing down his vision account. This passage, in other words, would appear to confirm the notion that the vision was indeed something Amram experienced during his sojourn in the land of Canaan.

4 Geographical Locations and the Spatiality of the Vision Account

The location of Amram's visionary experience in Canaan is reminiscent of the various divine revelations granted to the patriarchs. The general pattern in the patriarchal narratives is that God speaks to them, or reveals himself to them, in the land of Canaan (Gen 12:7; 13:14–17; 15:1–21; 17:1–22; 18:1–33; 22:1–2, 15–18; 28:10–15; 32:25–30; 35:1, 9–12).¹⁹

Through the references to the well-known patriarchal narratives and the location of the narrative in Canaan the author of VA creates a familiar setting which supports the authority of the vision account, linking it to the authority of the biblical figures. Furthermore, the geographical reference serves to assimilate Amram to the patriarchs. In this way, VA achieves an upgrading of the relatively peripheral figure of Moses' father to a significant figure of authority. Not only is Amram firmly associated with his sons Moses and Aaron and his daughter Miriam, he also appears as a direct successor in the line of the authoritative patriarchs.

The preserved passages relating to the vision create a rather different form of spatiality. A transcendent world is revealed to Amram in his dream, an angelic figure addresses him, and he sees two supernatural beings engaged in a strife concerning himself. The angel, apparently one of the two opponents

19 At the beginning of the Abraham narrative God speaks to him while he dwells in Haran (Gen 12:1–3).

in the heavenly battle, informs him that they are the rulers of two opposing realms, that of light and that of darkness.

4Q544 2 13–16 reads:

[ומלכי רשע vacat ואמרת מראי מא של]טן	13
חש[יכה וכל עבדה ח[ש]יד ובחשוכה הוא ד]	14
אנ[תה חזה והוא משלט על כול חושכה ואנה]	15
מן מ[צליא ²⁰ עד ארעיא אנה שליט על כול נהורא וכ]ל	16

Bottom margin

13 ... and Melki Resha'. *vacat* And I said, My lord, what is the dom[inion] ...
 14 ... da]rk, and all his work is dark, and in darkness he ...
 15 ... yo]u saw. And he rules over all darkness. And I ...
 16 from the [saved to the terrestrial I rule over all light and al[1] ...

The transcendent world, then, is also spatially structured: Darkness and light become the two areas of dominion, ruled over by the angelic princes of evil and of good.

The contours of the transcendent reality shown and explained to Amram in the course of his dream vision, in other words, stand in contrast to the familiar geographical and narrative setting within which it is embedded in VA. Through this contrast the author of VA obtains a neat balance between the well-known landscape and the narratives it represents, and the revelation of an otherworldly reality conveyed to Amram (and to the readers) by the angelic figures. Thus, a twofold authority is created for the vision account: It shares the established authority of the written traditions and enjoys the authority of a divine communication mediated by angels.

5 Geography and the Exodus Events in VA

From the point of view of the narrative in VA the events of the exodus are still in the future, destined to take place in the following generation, acted out by Amram's children. The scene of Amram's deathbed address is Egypt, and the events foreseen are set in the wilderness and, possibly, in the land of Canaan

20 Puech (DJD 31:326–27) finds that *tsade* is the preferable reading of the first visible letter. Duke (*The Social Location*, 21–22) reads an *ayin* and translates: “from the highest until the lowest.” This reading was originally proposed by Milik (cf. DJD 31:327).

after the conquest. The exodus is explicitly alluded to in Amram's farewell address to his children. In 4Q543 2a–b, Amram appears to be addressing Moses specifically.

4Q543 2 a–b

[אל תהוה ומלאך אל תתקרה] 4
[תעבד בארעא דא ודין חסין]²¹ 5

4 ... of God you shall be, and “angel of God” you shall be called ...
5 ... you will do in this land, and a strong judgment ...

That Moses must be envisaged as the addressee of his father's words here becomes especially clear from the words of line 5: תעבד בארעא דא (“you will do in this land”). The geographical perspective here is telling: “This land” must refer, in the context, to the land of Egypt, which is where the farewell address is delivered, and where the Israelites are still sojourning at the time of Amram's death.²² That which Moses will do refers, in all probability, to the signs accompanying the exodus, and, in particular, to the plagues. This interpretation is supported by the following reference to a “strong judgment” (דין חסין). The most obvious reference would seem to be the plagues of Egypt and the drowning of Pharaoh and his army in the sea.²³

Further support can be gained from the admittedly fragmentary text of 4Q546 10 which seems clearly to refer to the events of the exodus itself:

4Q546 10

[מצרין בכל בשר] 1
[אתי]ן ומפתין קדם פרעה 2

1 ... Egypt in all fl[esh]
2 ... sign]s and wonders be[fore Pharaoh]

This passage would also seem to belong to Amram's predictions, based on the vision he has received in Canaan, regarding the events leading up to the exodus,

²¹ Puech (DJD 31:294–95) reads a damaged *taw*.

²² I agree with Duke's interpretation of the passage as pertaining to Moses (*The Social Location*, 15–16). Puech (DJD 31:295–296) understands the passage as referring to Aaron.

²³ Cf. Duke, *The Social Location*, 16.

with Moses and/or Aaron as protagonists. As observed by Duke, the phrase אֲתִין וּמִפְתִּין (“signs and wonders”), with the first word partly reconstructed, is an unambiguous allusion to the Hebrew expression אוֹתוֹת וּמִפְתִּים.²⁴

It is noteworthy that Moses is designated מַלְאֲךְ אֵל (“angel/messenger of God”) in 4Q543 2 a–b 4. As Duke has observed, this may be read as an allusion to the name מַלְאכִיָּה (“Malachia”), which, in the narrative of VA, is apparently the Hebrew name of Moses (see further below).²⁵

6 Moses, Aaron, and “Writing in the Land”

There are some fragmentary passages of VA which are apparently concerned with the revelation on Mount Sinai and with the roles of Moses and especially Aaron.

4Q545 4 reads:

ע ואחזה לכה שמ־	14
כְּתָבְּ בִּארְעָא לֵה מוֹשֶׁה וְאֵף עַל [אַהֲרֹן]	15
א [חזה לכה רז עובדה כהן קדיש הוא]	16
קד[י] ש להוה לה כל זרעה בכול דרי ע[למין]	17
שביעי באנוש רעוֹתָ[א ²⁸ ית] קרה ויתאמר]	18
יתבחר לכה עלמין]	19

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14 ... and I will show you the name ...
 15 ... wrote/will write (?) in the land to him, Moses. And also on [Aaron ...
 16 I will] show you the mystery of his work, a holy priest he ...
 17 Ho[l]y will all his offspring be to him throughout all generations ...
 18 Seventh of the men of the will [he will] be called. And it will be said ...
 19 He will be chosen for an eternal priest ...

24 Deut 6:22; Jer 32:20; Ps 135:9; Neh 9:10. The corresponding Aramaic expression in Daniel is אֲתִין וּתְמַהִין (Dan 3:32–33; 6:28). Cf. Puech, DJD 31:363; Duke, *The Social Location*, 16.

25 Duke, “Moses’ Hebrew Name: The Evidence of the *Vision of Amram*,” *DSD* 14 (2007): 34–48 (43); *The Social Location*, 15.

26 Puech (DJD 31:342) reads שְׁמֵהּ [ת]ִי.

27 Puech (DJD 31:342) sees traces of an *aleph* before the lacuna.

28 Puech (DJD 31:342–43) restores רְעוֹתָהּ (“qui [lui] sont agréables”).

29 Line numbers follow Puech (DJD 31:342), who reconstructs the fragment as the lower part of a column with 19 lines.

The fragmentary text raises several questions at the linguistic and syntactical level. A particularly intriguing problem concerns the subject for the verb **כתב** in line 15. And is the verb a perfect or an imperfect form?³⁰ The basic form of the passage is clearly the address in the second person singular. In the context of the entire text, it seems obvious that the “you”-addressee is Amram. The fragment seems to be part of the description of his vision, and the speaker, accordingly, must be the angelic figure addressing Amram. This understanding of the text is strengthened by the repeated expression **ואחווה לכה** (“and I will show you”) in lines 14 and 16, announcing the angel’s intention of informing Amram regarding the divine plan for his descendants, which seems to be the focal point of this part of the conversation.

The repeated **ואחווה לכה** would seem to govern the structure of lines 14–16: There are, it would appear, two main points that the angel intends to reveal to Amram. The first point concerns his son Moses, whose name is preserved at the end of line 15. Since we have, right after the mention of Moses, the phrase **ואף על** (“and also on ...”, “and also as regards ...”), it does indeed seem almost inevitable to conjecture that Aaron’s name would have been mentioned in the following lacuna. The conjecture is confirmed by the references in the subsequent lines to Aaron as a “holy priest” (**בהן קדיש**, line 16) and an “eternal priest” (**בהן עלמין**, line 19), and to his offspring being holy for all generations to come.

The passage, in other words, seems clearly to have its main emphasis on the figure of Aaron and on his descendants, the priestly line. Moses, however, is mentioned first, and something important must have been included in the text with respect to him. What the angelic messenger discloses to Amram, then, is divided into a brief section on Moses (lines 14–15), followed by a longer section on Aaron (beginning with **ואף על**, line 15).

The word **שם** in line 14 may deliver a hint as to the contents of the angelic message regarding Moses. The “name” is the object of the verb **אחווה**. It is thus presented as that which the angel is about to reveal to Amram.³¹ In this function, the name can be seen as a parallel to the expression **רז עובדה** (“the mystery of his work”, line 16) concerning Aaron.³² In the context, the implication of the word **עובד** here seems to be the priestly office of Aaron and his descendants. When the text uses the term **רז** (“mystery” or “secret”) and combines it with the notion of Aaron’s “office,” the underlying idea is probably that there is a deeper

30 Puech (DJD 31:343) translates **כתב** as a perfect form with past meaning (“qu’il a écrit”), while Duke (*The Social Location*, 23) understands it as a future imperfect (“will write”).

31 Puech (DJD 31:342–43) reads **שמה [ת]**, and translates: “et je dirai tes noms.” A singular or plural form with suffix is certainly possible, but the preserved traces allow no decision.

32 Cf. Puech, DJD 31:343 (“Le **עובדה** רז, ‘mystère de son activité, exercice, oeuvre’ est la prétrise”).

The syntax at the end of line 15 is not unambiguous. It would be possible to read the phrase **וְאֵל עַל** as a direct continuation of the previous sentence, with the implication that whoever “wrote” or “writes” something for, or of, Moses, also wrote/writes (something else) with regard to Aaron. Alternatively, the whole idea of writing belongs in the Moses section of the angel’s speech, and **וְאֵל עַל** marks a shift in the revelation from Moses to Aaron. For the general meaning of the passage, however, this question is less important. But to whom does the text ascribe the writing in line 15? It seems unlikely that Moses should be the subject of **כָּתַב**. In that case, the prepositional clause **לָהּ** would have no reference. Another important argument is the expression “in the land” (**בְּאֶרֶץ**). This geographical term cannot easily mean anything else than the land of Canaan. Apart from the fact that Moses hardly wrote anything in the land of Canaan, which he was never allowed to enter, we would then be left with another intriguing question: For, or of, whom did Moses write in the land? The context makes it more natural that Moses is the object of the act of writing. Moses, then, is not the agent, but his future deeds are the subject matter of the revelation granted to Amram, whether the act of “writing” is, in the mind of the author, carried out by some unknown ancestor, by an angelic being, or even by Amram himself in the form of a written record of his vision: The angel might be instructing him to write the contents of the revelation down, or reminding him of something he was told to write down when he was in Canaan. This would accord with Amram’s statement in 4Q547 9 8 that, upon waking up from his sleep, he wrote the contents of the vision down (see below).

In any case, it is apparently important for the author to mention that the writing takes place “in the land.” When viewed in the perspective of the entire composition, this reference seems to provide a link to Amram’s account of his own journey to the land of Canaan. This holds true even if we assume that the vision was experienced by Amram at a later stage after he had left Canaan again. The idea of a written message, closely associated with the promised land as the scene of the act of writing, again provides the combined authority of sacred tradition and of direct divine revelation.

The function of Canaan as a central part of the geographical scheme of VA seems again to be, primarily, to support the authority of the divine promises and their significance for the Israelites and especially for the Levites. The Levitical identity of the protagonist and his descendants is clearly central to VA, and compared to the pentateuchal tradition, Aaron’s significance seems to be further enhanced. The text, however, strives to maintain a certain balance between the roles of Moses and Aaron.

7 Moses, Aaron, and an Altar at Mount Sinai

A passage which refers explicitly to Mount Sinai, informing us about events associated with the exodus and the journey of the Israelites towards the promised land, is found in 4Q547 9:

4Q547 9

	א[	1
	פצית]	2
	ומוש]ה בנה [מדבחה	3
	בהר סיני יצ]	4
	א[]ו[רכה רבא על מדבח נחש]	5
	ב[רָה יתרם כהן מן כול בני עלמא באח]	6
	מש]יח ובגוהי בתרה לכול דרי עלמין בק[	7
	ואנה אתערירת מן שנת עיני וחזוא כתב]ת	8
	מן ארעכנען והוא לי כדי אמר]	9
2	... I delivered ...	
3	... and Mos]es built [an altar ...	
4	... on Mount Sinai ...	
5	... great ... ³⁵ upon the altar of bron[ze ...	
6	... his [so]n shall be exalted (as) priest from all the sons of the world/of eternity in ...	
7	... an]ointed, and his sons after him for all the eternal generations in ...	
8	... and I woke from the sleep of my eyes, and I wrot[e] the vision ...	
9	... from the land of Canaan, and it was for me as ... had said ...	

This fragment seems, as far as the state of the text permits us to conclude, to be concerned with events associated with the revelation on Mount Sinai. Here as in 4Q545 4 both sons of Amram, Moses and Aaron, have their respective roles to perform. The fragmentary nature of the text renders it difficult to form a coherent picture of the scenes envisaged, but it does appear that altars and sacrifices are at the center of the discourse: Moses is credited with the construction of an altar, presumably at or near Mount Sinai. The tradition echoes the biblical accounts of Moses building altars (Exod 17:15; 24:4).³⁶ The episode most likely hinted at here would seem to be the building of an altar

35 Puech (DJD 31:388–89) restores רכה[לבק], and translates “ton gros [bétai]l,” while Duke (*The Social Location*, 24–25) restores רכה[ב, “great blessing.”

36 Cf. Puech, DJD 31:389, and Liora Goldman's article in the present volume.

and twelve pillars at the foot of Mount Sinai representing the Israelite tribes. In line 5 the focus shifts to the altar of bronze and the sacrifices to be performed there. No direct mention of Aaron has been preserved in the fragment, but the assumption suggests itself that Aaron is the person destined to perform these sacrifices, in accordance with the pentateuchal tradition. This assumption is indirectly confirmed when we examine lines 6–7 where the subject is the priestly succession: “His (presumably Aaron’s) sons” shall be anointed priests for all generations.

The tendency of VA to stress the position of Aaron and his descendants over against the overwhelming importance of Moses in the earlier sources is notable also in this passage, although the balance between the brothers and their respective functions is also upheld here.³⁷ The scene of the fundamental divine establishing and fixing of the roles of the paradigmatic leader figures is here explicitly located at Mount Sinai, as is the case in the literary traditions on which our text is modelled.

8 Mirroring Movements: Exile and Return in VA

We may summarize the chronological model presupposed in the VA texts as a sequence of clearly distinguishable periods, based on the literary traditions well known to its readers and authors, presumably from the Pentateuch. The sequence can be expressed as follows:

Temporal/spatial sequence envisioned in VA:

Patriarchs in Canaan – Israelites in Egypt (patriarchs buried in Canaan) –
Israelites at Sinai – Israelites in Canaan

This, obviously, is the temporal sequence of the storyline from the Pentateuch, which provides the background story against which the author of VA intended his narrative to be understood. At the same time, we have in this text a sequence of places, indicated by the geographical names, to which major events in the storyline of VA itself are tied:

37 Cf. Hanna Tervanotko, “Visions, Otherworldly Journeys and Divine Beings: The Figures of Levi and Amram as Communicators of Godly Will in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in *Crossing Imaginary Boundaries: The Dead Sea Scrolls in the Context of Second Temple Judaism*, ed. Mika S. Pajunen and Hanna Tervanotko. Publications of the Finnish Exegetical Society 108 (Helsinki: Finnish Exegetical Society, 2015), 210–238.

Temporal/spatial sequence reflected in VA:

Egypt (narrative framework, scene of Amram’s farewell address) – Canaan (Amram’s journey retold – vision retold) – Israelites at Sinai (vision retold) – Egypt (narrative framework)

Scholars have noted that the journey of Amram and the Levites to Canaan pre-figures the later movement of all Israel during the exodus and the journey from Egypt to Canaan. Interestingly, we seem also to have in the structure of VA itself an inversion or mirroring of the movement depicted in the Pentateuch:

Temporal/spatial sequence of the Pentateuch (and VA)	Temporal/spatial sequence within VA
Patriarchs in Canaan	Amram in Egypt (narrative framework, scene of Amram’s farewell address)
Israelites in Egypt (Patriarchs buried in Canaan)	Amram in Canaan (Amram’s journey retold, vision retold)
Israelites at Sinai	Israelites at Sinai (vision retold)
Israelites in Canaan	Amram in Egypt (narrative framework)

Furthermore, at a more detailed level in the account of Amram’s journey to Canaan there is another remarkable narrative inversion when this story is compared to the narrative chain of the Pentateuch. Amram is prevented by events beyond his control from leaving the land and returning to Egypt and his wife. This motif we may read as an inversion of the biblical narrative concerning the Israelites who, at the time of the exodus, are prevented by the stubbornness of Pharaoh from leaving Egypt and setting out towards the promised land, Canaan. Amram, on his part, wishes to leave Canaan and return to Egypt but is for 41 years unable to do so.

What we can observe here, it seems, is a rather subtle remodeling of motifs from the earlier tradition with the geographical structure as the point of departure for the deliberate and significant inversions of the narrative material aimed at highlighting the importance of the traditional figures and the message they are made to convey.

9 **Concluding Observations**

The geographical framework of VA plays a significant role as a structuring element in the composition. The geography of the composition shows a certain degree of complexity. Geographical names in the text are familiar to the reader

from the exodus and wilderness traditions and serve to locate the narrative in the distant past between the patriarchal period and the exodus, providing a firm link to the authoritative figures of that time. The location of Miriam's marriage and Amram's farewell address reflects the exile of the Israelites in Egypt. The vision experienced by Amram is, however, set in Canaan with all the weight and importance given to the promised land where the patriarchs are buried.

At the same time, the contrast between the familiar geographical framework and the transcendent, dualistic spatiality of Amram's vision account provides authority to the contents of the vision in VA. The repeated references to Canaan as the place of a divine revelation to Amram, and the place where something of central importance is being "written" (by Amram or someone else?) enhance the authority and importance of the contents. The location of Amram's visionary experience in Canaan also enhances the authority of the Amram figure: Amram is assimilated to, and becomes a direct successor of the patriarchs, in addition to being the father of Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.

Moreover, VA achieves a subtle inversion of the familiar geographical pattern: The storyline and sequence of events and places from the pentateuchal narrative (Canaan – Egypt – Sinai – Canaan) is upheld as the well-known background of VA. From the point of view of Amram, the patriarchal time in Canaan is in the past, and the exodus events at Mount Sinai in the future. The events narrated in VA, however, form a new temporal/spatial sequence (Egypt – Canaan – Sinai – Egypt), which inverts the sequence of the background story. In other words, the movements of Amram between Egypt and Canaan, and those of the Israelites, not narrated, but predicted in the vision, exhibit a mirroring and inversion of the movements of exile and return depicted in the biblical material. This seems to represent a deliberate and well-designed strategic use of the literary tradition with the purpose of enhancing the authority and persuasiveness of the composition.

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