THE BOOK OF JOSHUA
A HASMONEAN MANIFESTO?

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I have always wondered why the hill-country of Epraim and Manasse, that is, the central hill-country and also the most important part of the double monarchy, Israel and Judah, is not represented in the Book of Joshua.

We have, in the first part of the book, an account of the conquest of the south, centered on the territory of Benjamin, concluding with a short story about the subjugation of Judah after the battle in the valley of Aijalon (Jos. 2-10), most of which has been classified as aetiological legends; later there is an account of the conquest of Galilee in connection with a battle at Merom and the destruction of Hazor (Jos. 11,1-15), but nothing in between.

This is puzzling, as in later tradition the core of Israel was in Ephraim and Manasse with Shechem as its principal city (cf. Jos. 24; 1. Kings 12; 13,25), or Shiloh (1. Sam. 1-4), or even later Tirzah (1. Kings 14,17; 15,21-16,9; 16,15-18.23) or Samaria (1. Kings 16, 24-28).

The account in Jos. 1-11 is followed up in 12,1-6 by a sort of resumé of the conquests in Transjordan, clearly derived from Deuteronomy and perhaps Numbers. This resumé is in ch. 12,7-24 followed by a list of conquered kings in what is considered the ideal Israel. Again only a few cities of Ephraim are mentioned (Tirzah, Hepher, Tappuah and Apheq), whereas the cities of Judah/Benjamin and Galilee are more fully represented. The list seems to be a summary of ch. 1-11 with some additional names, and as such cannot be earlier than the rest of the book. To my mind, it would

1 M. Noth, Das Buch Joshua, HAT I,7 (Tübingen, 1938), p. XI.
2 It is easiest to see it on a map of Joshua’s conquests, see e.g. J. Strange, Stuttgartter Bibelatlas (Stuttgart, 1989), maps 33/34.
be futile to look for an historical setting which could accomodate this short list.

Another summary is found in ch. 13,1-6 where we have the list of "The Land that Remained". This is the area of the Philistine settlement, plus Geshur, to the east of the Lake of Gennesaret, and a great part of the Lebanon and Damascus, extending all the way to Lebo-Hamath. The text may have been taken from Judg. 3,1-34.

The summary is followed by a description of the division of the land east of the Jordan which is given to Reuben, Gad and Manasse, 13,7b-32. And then comes the long section on the division of the land west of the Jordan in ch. 14-19. This section consists partly of border descriptions, partly of lists of cities. But again there is the curious fact that whereas the south, represented by Simeon, Juda, Benjamin and Dan, and the North, represented by Asher, Naphtali, Zebulon and Issakar, are described with many names, the void is almost complete in the central part of the country, as may be seen on any map.

And for good measure the same thing is apparent in the list of Levitical cities in ch. 21 (parallel to 1. Chron. 6,39-69) which again may be easily seen on the map. The few cities mentioned from the central hill-country apart from Shechem and Shiloh, both of which play prominent roles in the book, lie in the vicinity of Shechem and are mentioned in connection with a border description. Finally, it should be mentioned that Joshua's burial place, Timnat-Serah, is mentioned in the last chapter of the book.

The reason for these oddities is probably to be found in the date of the book, as it may be assumed that names mentioned in the book were either known—or of interest—to the author or final redactor of the older material.

Now the Book of Joshua has recently been classified as a "program-