THE CAPTURE OF JERUSALEM
IN THE CHRONISTIC HISTORY*

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For Professor Alexander Rofé
with appreciation

1. The Chronicler and the pre-davidic Jerusalem

In Judg. i 8 it is recorded: “The children of Judah fought against Jerusalem; and took it, and smote it with the sword, and set the city on fire” (see also verse 7b). This story is contradicted in verse 21 of the same chapter in Judges, which tells just the opposite, “The children of Benjamin could not drive out the Jebusites who dwelt in Jerusalem; so the Jebusites have dwelt with the children of Benjamin in Jerusalem unto this day”. It is contradicted also by Josh. xi 63, which relates almost the same information but the children of “Judah” instead of “Benjamin”.1

Judg. i 8 should not be regarded as a “rätselhaft” text in the Hebrew Bible as defined by H.W. Hertzberg.2 It seems that the writer of the verse has been motivated by an ideology similar to that which is also in the background of texts such as Josh. x 40; xi 14-20; xii 7-10; that

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1 Schunck is of the opinion that the name “Benjamin” in Judg. i 21 is secondary, and that it was influenced by Josh. xviii 28, which includes Jerusalem in the territory of Benjamin (on this issue see below, note 4). In other words, originally Judg. i 21 had: “children of Judah”. Moreover, the whole verse in Judg. i 21—with its original reading “children of Judah”—seems to be a late gloss. Accordingly, the correction “children of Benjamin” has been introduced much later. See K.-D. Schunck, Benjamin: Untersuchungen zur Entstehung und Geschichte eines Israelitischen Stammes (BZAW 86; Berlin, 1963), pp. 78-79, and his review of the earlier references.

is, the Israelites were conquerors of the whole land and smote all its inhabitants according to the demands of the deuteronomistic law (i.e., Deut. vii 24; xx 16-17; xxxi 5). In other words, the verse reflects the ideological concept of its composer rather than reliable historical information. As a matter of fact, in the description of the Israelites’ inheritances, Jerusalem was excluded from the territory of Judah (Josh. xv 8), as well as from that of Benjamin (Josh. xviii 16). It remained a foreign city between the borders of these tribes, as is evident also from the story about the concubine at Gibeah (Judg. xix 10-12). Here Jerusalem clearly was regarded as “the city of foreigners, who do not belong to the people of Israel” (verse 12).

The story concerning the young David who took the head of the Philistine (= Goliath) and “brought it to Jerusalem” in the time of King Saul (1 Sam. xvii 53) is no more than an anachronistic note—to cite Karl Budde—“a late gloss” by the redactor of the book.6

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3 For another explanation, see K. Budde, Das Buch Richter erklärt (KHCAT 7; Freiburg i.B./Tübingen/Leipzig, 1897), p. 5. Mazar considers Judg. i 8 as a reliable historical source. He thinks the Jebusites took Jerusalem after Judah had conquered the city and left it in ruins; see B. Mazar, “Jerusalem in the Biblical Period”, in Cities and Districts in Eretz-Israel (Jerusalem, 1973), pp. 24-5 (Hebrew); see also Y. Aharoni, The Land of the Bible—A Historical Geography (2nd edn.; London, 1979), p. 214; T. Ishida, The Royal Dynasties in Ancient Israel (BZAW 142; Berlin/New York, 1977), p. 118. Similarly, Kallai regards Judg. i 8 concerning the capture of Jerusalem as “a temporary conquest with the city not held for any protracted length of time”; see Z. Kallai, Historical Geography of the Bible—The Tribal Territories of Israel (Jerusalem/Leiden, 1986), p. 283, and cf. already E. Sellin, Geschichte des israelitisch-jüdischen Volkes (Leipzig, 1924), p. 106. But if the tribe of Judah indeed smote the inhabitants of Jerusalem “with the sword, and set the city on fire”, who prevented them from holding the city for a long time? How could it happen that the Jebusites had settled in the ruined city without any resistance from Judah? Moreover, it is implausible to assume that Judah had captured Jerusalem, destroyed it, and then just neglected this important place situated on the major road connecting the southern and northern cities of the mountain ridge.

4 The inclusion of Jerusalem in the territory of Benjamin in Josh. xviii 28 is, probably, according to Judg. xix 10-12, see Schunck, Benjamin, p. 158; M. Noth, BH sub 28a-a (p. 351); R. Meyer, BHS sub 28b-b (p. 386). Kallai takes a different line. He is of the opinion that “Jerusalem’s inclusion in Benjamin’s territory emerges as just one particular in David’s and Solomon’s efforts to tighten the nexus of the land of Benjamin to Judah”; see Kallai, Historical Geography of the Bible, pp. 283-4.

5 The verse appears in the Masoretic Text as well as in the short version of the story in LXX B.

6 Cf. verse 57 the same chapter, and see K. Budde, Die Bücher Samuel erklärt (KHCAT 8; Tübingen/Leipzig, 1902), p. 130 and p. 219; see also the review of H.J. Stoebe, Das erste Buch Samuels (KAT 8,1; Gütersloh, 1973), p. 334; and R.W. Klein, 1 Samuel (WBC 10; Waco, TX, 1983), p. 181. Roè is of the opinion that the whole story has been composed in the Second Temple period; see A. Roè, “The Battle of David and Goliath: Folklore, Theology, Eschatology”, in J. Neusner, B.A. Levine, and E.S. Frerichs