

The Biblical Gilead

Observations on Identifications, Geographic Divisions and Territorial History

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Abstract

In this article we discuss issues related to the geographical and territorial history of the Gilead. First we deal with the identification of several key biblical regions and towns, most significant among them the two units described as "half of Gilead", the land of Gilead and Jazer and the towns of Gilead, Mizpah and *Lidbir*. Having established the location of these and other relevant sites, we turn to two broader themes: 1) long-term history and specific historical realities in the Gilead; 2) the core area of Israelite settlement in Transjordan versus phases of territorial expansion to the south and northeast.

Keywords: Gilead, Mizpah, *Lidbir*, Jazer, Tishbe, Kamon, Mahanaim, Penuel

The number of biblical toponyms in the highlands of northern Transjordan between Heshbon and the Yarmuk River is limited. Some are easy to locate, for instance Jabesh-gilead (Tell el-Maqlub on Wadi Yabis – Glueck, 1943a; Gass, 2004, 504–509) and Ramoth-gilead (either er-Ramtha or Tell er-Rumeith; see Glueck, 1943b; Lapp, 1968, 104–105; Knauf, 2001). The identification of other places is disputed. This includes the towns of Gilead, Mizpah of Gilead, *Lidbir*, Penuel, Mahanaim and Jazer. Their location is essential for understanding the

geographical perception of the biblical authors and the territorial history of the region. A related question is the identification of toponyms referring to regions (rather than towns) in this part of Transjordan, mainly the “hill country of Gilead” (הר הגלעד), “half of Gilead” (חצי הגלעד), “land of Gilead” (ארץ גלעד) and “land of Jazer” (ארץ יעזר).

In what follows we first deal with both types of toponyms – geographical units and towns – summarizing the history of identifications and adding our own insights. This sets the stage for a discussion of the settlement history and *territorialgeschichte* of the region.

The Toponyms

Gilead

The term Gilead has various meanings in the Hebrew Bible. In most instances it is used to indicate a large territory and in a few cases a town (Gass, 2004, 479–480; see also Levine, 2000, 483). Regarding the former, some references may point to the entire area between the Arnon and the Yarmuk, as “the land of Gilead” that was given to “the children of Reuben and the children of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh” (Josh 22:9, 15; 2 Kgs 10:33, see, e. g., Lemaire, 1981, 42; Macdonald, 2000, 195–199).

Yet, it is clear that the territory of these two and a half tribes included the Bashan, beyond the Gilead (the Hauran too was not part of the Gilead – Ezek 47:18). In the south, the area between the Arnon and Heshbon is referred to as “the plain country” – “the *mishor*” or “the land of *mishor*” (Deut 3:8–10; Josh 13:9.16–17; Jer 48:21) and affiliated with Moab. This means that the actual Gilead starts north of Heshbon and west of the Ammonite territory, and stretches over the more mountainous area, as is indicated by the root of the name – *g^ld* (Ottozon, 1969, 15–17 with earlier literature; 1992, 1020; Gass, 2004, 505). This composition of the different territories in the highlands of northern Transjordan is well described in Deuteronomy 3:8–10:

“So we took the land at that time out of the hand of the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, from the valley of the Arnon to Mount Hermon ... all the towns of the plain (= “the *mishor*”) and all Gilead and all Bashan, as far as Salecah and Edrei.”

The same conclusion can be inferred from Joshua 12:5, from the Jephthah story, which may be interpreted as hinting that the Gilead stretched down south to Minnith and Abel-keramim (Jud 11:33), and from the description of the southern boundary of the conquests of Tiglath-pileser III in Transjordan, mentioning the towns of Gilead, Minnith and Abel-shittim (see below).

This part of Transjordan is mentioned in the descriptions of the borders of the land and the tribal allotments as being divided into two sub-regions, referred to as “half of the Gilead” (חצי הגלעד) (Josh 12:2.5; 13:31) or “half the hill country of the Gilead (הר הגלעד) (Deut 3:12):

“And this land, which we possessed at that time, from Aroer, which is by the river Arnon, and half the hill country of the Gilead, and the cities thereof, gave I unto the Reubenites and to the Gadites. And the rest of Gilead, and all Bashan, being the kingdom of Og, gave I unto the half tribe of Manasseh; all the region of Argob, with all Bashan, which was called the land of Rephaim.” (Deut 3:12–13)

“... Sihon king of the Amorites who dwelt at Heshbon, and ruled from Aroer, which is upon the bank of the valley of the Arnon, and from the middle of the valley, and half of the Gilead, as far as Jabbok the valley, the border of the sons of Ammon ... and the border of Og king of Bashan, one of the remnant of the Rephaim, who dwelt at Ashtaroth and at Edrei, and ruled over Mount Hermon and Salecah and in all the Bashan as far as the boundary of the Geshurites and the Maacathites, and over half of the Gilead the boundary of Sihon king of Heshbon” (Josh 12:2–5).

The distinction is between half the Gilead given to the Reubenites and the Gadites up to the Jabbok and half the Gilead (or the “rest of the Gilead”), together with the Bashan related to half Manasseh (see “half Gilead” in relation to Ashtaroth and Edrei in Josh 13:31). In other words, the area of Transjordan north of the territory of Heshbon is divided into two parts, separated by the Jabbok (Simons, 1959, 37; Ottosson, 1969, 83; 1992, 1020).

To complicate things further, another biblical reference uses a different division:

“Now the sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad had a very great multitude of cattle; and they saw the land of Jazer and the land of Gilead, and behold, the place was a place for cattle.” (Num 32:1)

This verse, describing the territory of Reuben and Gad, is the only place that mentions “the land Jazer” as located next to “the land of Gilead.” A similar situation may be reflected in Joshua 13:25: “And their border was Jazer, and all the cities of Gilead” (see also 2 Sam 24:5–6). Noth (1935, 250, n. 2) suggested that “the land of Jazer” is secondary, while Mittman (1975, 95, n. 7) saw “the land of Gilead” as secondary. Schmidt (2002, 498) maintained that the text at this point does not include later additions and Seebass (1999, 40) assumed that this reflects an original tradition. If this is the case, the area between Heshbon and the Jabbok is divided between the land of Jazer and the land of Gilead (see, e. g., de Vaux, 1941, 25).

All this makes sense geographically. First, the Jabbok certainly forms a clear separation between two distinct units. Second, the region south of the Jabbok (and north of Heshbon) can indeed be divided between a higher, plateau-like area in the south, with an altitude of 950–1000 m above sea level, and a lower, enclosed, plateau-like area in the north, ca. 500 m above sea level (figs. 1–2).

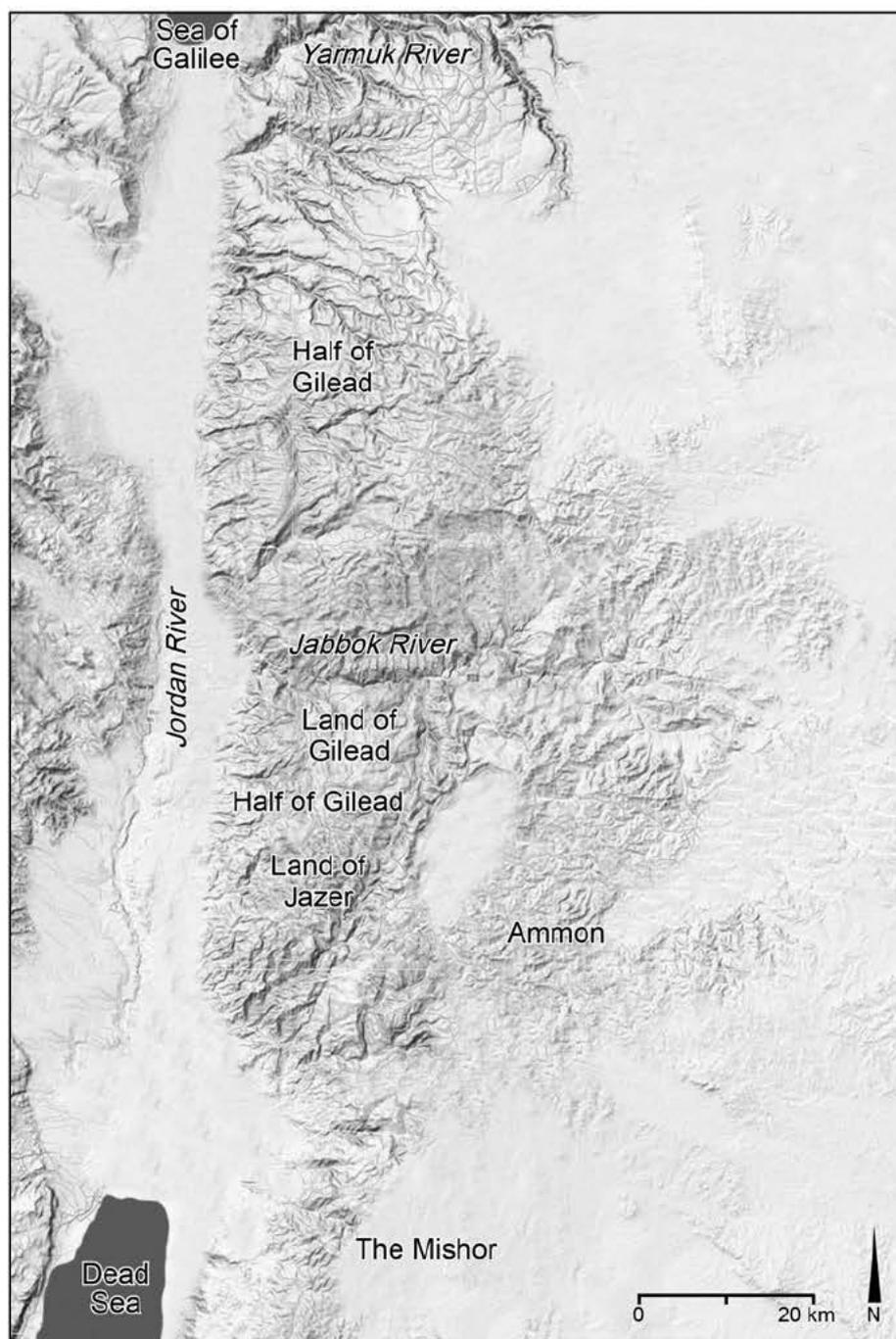


Fig. 1: Biblical geographical units referred to in the article, also marking the location of the towns of Gilead and Jazer.



Fig. 2: The enclosed plateau-like area south of the Jabbok, identified in this article as the Land of Gilead (Num 32:1). The photograph was taken from the higher grounds to the south, identified here as the Land of Jazer. The valley of the Jabbok is in the background.

The border between the two is the abrupt topographical drop to the north of es-Salt.¹ In other words, the “land of Gilead” of Numbers 32:1 is clearly defined between this topographical drop in the south, the Jabbok in the north, the drop to the Jordan Valley in the west and the ridge that separates it from the Sahl el-Baq’a in the east.

Moving to towns (fig. 3), there can be no doubt that the hilly and plateau areas between the Jabbok and the Yarmuk were considered as part of the Gilead. This is clear from a large number of biblical references to:

¹ The geographical and thus administrative nature of this topographical drop can be inferred from two places located in the higher area in the south, but overlooking the lower grounds to the north. The first is the biblical Jogbehah (Num 32:35; Jud 8:11), meaning a place located in high grounds (Hebrew root *gbh*). The site is identified in el-Ġubēha (G.R. 231 159), which is located in this elevated area farther to the east, overlooking lower grounds to the north and west (e. g., Noth, 1935, 238; Simons, 1959, 132, 295), or in its vicinity (see Gass, 2004, 469 and bibliography). The second is the reference to the village of Zia as the border between the Peraea and Philadelphia in Jos Ant. 20, 1, 1–2 (see Eusebius, On. 94:3; Vaux, 1941, 42–43). This place is identified in Khirbet Zey 6 km to the north of es-Salt (G.R. 217 168), on top of the descent from what we identify here as the “land of Jazer” to what we suggest is the “land of Gilead” enclave to the north of it (and south of the Jabbok).

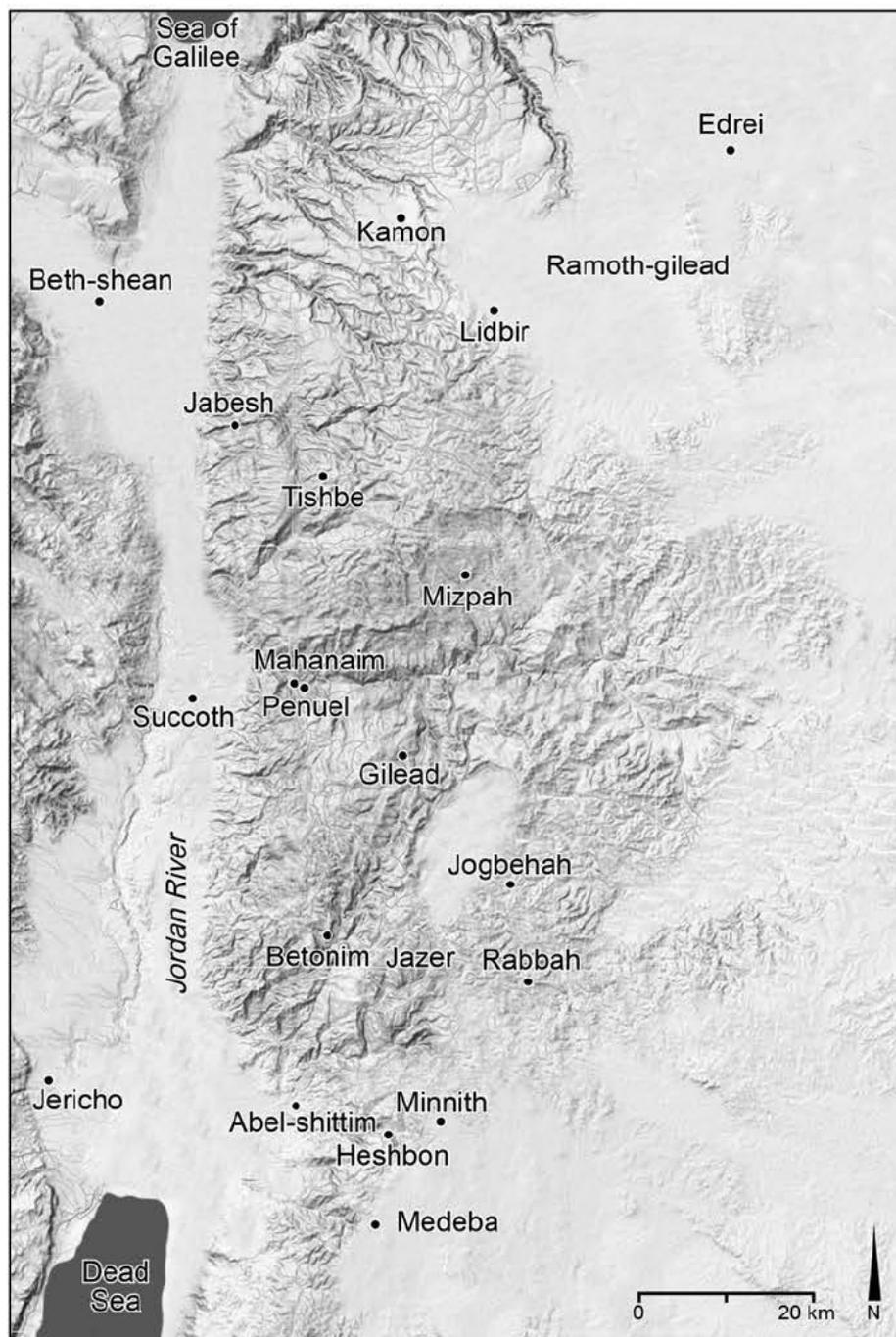


Fig. 3: Towns mentioned in the article.

- 1) The toponyms Jabesh-gilead for a town located in the western hilly slopes north of the Jabbok; Ramoth-gilead for a place on the plateau south of the Yarmuk River; Tishbe in Gilead, the hometown of Elijah (1 Kgs 17:1), which should probably be identified near Ajlun (below); and Mizpah of Gilead, which seems to refer to a site north of the Jabbok (below).
- 2) The minor judge Ja'ir the Gileadite, who is connected to *Havvoth-ja'ir* (Jud 10:3–4), which are associated, in turn, with the plateau areas near the Yarmuk (Deut 3:14; Josh 13:30; 1 Kgs 4:13).²

The existence of a town named Gilead cannot be doubted. Hosea (6:8) says that “Gilead is a city of wicked men, tracked with blood” (גִּלְעָד קְרִיַת פְּעֻלֵי אֶן עֶקְבָּהּ) םדמ, see also Hos 12:12),³ and Numbers 32:39, in a clear reference to a town, describes how “the sons of Machir the son of Manasseh went to Gilead and took it (וַיִּלְכְּדוּהָ), and dispossessed the Amorites who were in it.”⁴ The existence of this town is also clear from the description of Tiglath-pileser III’s conquest of the Damascene territories in Transjordan. We are following the translation of Na’aman (1995) for the stone fragment from Calah (Nimrud) (III R 10, 2, below, section a, and see Tadmor, 1962, 114–115; Weippert, 1972, 154–155), and for the broken tablet unearthed at Calah (ND 4301+) and published by Wiseman (1956, 125, rev. lines 3–4, below, section b, and see Tadmor, 1962, 117–119; Weippert, 1982, 405, n. 21):⁵

² This was the main reason Smend (1902, 149–151) hypothesized that the region between the Jabbok and the Yarmuk was the original land of Gilead. Aharoni (1967, 191–192) connected *Havvoth-Ja'ir* with the northern Gilead, on the border with the Bashan, while Na’aman (1986, 190) connected it with the mountainous Gilead north of the Jabbok.

³ Following Noth (1959, 35–36 and n. 48), Wolff (1974, 122) and Macintosh (1997, 239–241), and contrary to Ward (1966, 129) and Ottosson (1969, 32), the Gilead addressed in Hosea 6:8 and 12:12 is the town and not the region. As mentioned above, Hosea 6:8 calls Gilead “a city of wicked men,” paralleled with Adam (6:7) and Shechem (6:9), while in Hosea 12:11 Gilead is paralleled with Gilgal, the important cultic center to the west of the Jordan. Furthermore, contrary to Aharoni (1967, 331, n. 114) and Mays (1969, 101) who see Gilead as a short version of Ramoth-gilead or Jabesh-gilead (also Dearman, 2010, 198), we follow Noth’s understanding of Gilead as standing by itself and not as a shortened version of Jabesh-gilead (and see more below).

⁴ The Jephthah story ends by saying that he “was buried in his city in Gilead” (Jud 12:7 following the LXX, but on the latter see Irvine, 1994, 35, n. 58; the Hebrew says וַיִּקְבֵר עִירָו בְּעָרֵי גִלְעָד (“and he was buried in his city in Gilead”) theoretically either referring to עִירָו גִלְעָד (his city Gilead) or to the cities of Gilead mentioned in Josh 13:25). The former is preferable, though the story refers to Mizpah as the town of Jephthah (more below).

⁵ Tadmor (1962, and see 1994, 16–187) combined the two fragmented texts, added to them a third (K 2649) and produced a coherent description of the borders of the annexed territory. Tadmor’s interpretation is generally accepted, with some minor textual corrections (Na’aman, 1995, 105, with further literature).

(a) “[From] the town of Kashpuna which is on the shore of the Upper Sea [as far as the town of *mi²-in²*]-*ni-te*, the town of *ga-al-’a-’a’-[di]* and the town of *a-bi-il-šit-ti* which is on the border of Bīt Ḥumri, the widespread [land of Bīt Hazai]li in its entirety, I restored to the territory of Assyria ...”

(b) “The widespread [land of Bīt] Ḥazaili in its entirety, from the t[own of Kashp]una as far as the town of Gilea[d and the town of Abel-šit-ti which is on the bor]der of Bīt-Ḥumri, I [restored] to the territory of Assyria ...”

This text seems to locate the southern border of Aram Damascus (Bīt Ḥazaili) at the towns of [Min]nite, Gilead and *Abel-šit-ti*, meaning that it encompassed the Transjordanian territories down to the boundaries of Moab and Ammon.⁶ Minnith is mentioned in the Jephthah story as located close to the Ammonite territory (Jud 11:33); based on Eusebius, it is four miles from Heshbon on the way to Philadelphia (On. 132:1); Alt (1933, 27–28) located it in the vicinity of Umm el-Ḥanafish (G.R. 232 137, see also Mitmann, 1969, 71–73; Na’aman, 1995, 106), but this identification is not conclusive (Hübner, 1992, 133–136, with further literature). Abel-shittim was located in the Jordan Valley (Num 33:49; Josh 2:1; Mic 6:5; see also Jos Ant 4,5,1; 5, 1, 1); it should be identified in Tell el-Kefrein (Albright, 1926, 49; Abel, 1967, II, 234) or Tell el-Hammam (e. g., Glueck, 1943b, 13–18; Simons, 1959, 268). These two towns – Minnith and Abel-shittim – delineate the southeastern and southwestern points of the territory taken by the Assyrians from Aram Damascus. It seems that Gilead too marks the southern limit of the Assyrian conquest, south of the Jabbok. This may also be inferred from a verse in the Jephthah story that relates to the fords “against the Ephraimites” (מעברות הירדן לאפרים) – Jud 12:4–5), possibly in relation to the town of Gilead.

The town of Gilead was located in the “land of Gilead” (and hence the origin of the name of the latter), that is, in the lower plateau south of the Jabbok and north of es-Salt. The term “all the cities of Gilead” in the description of the territory of Gad (Josh 13:25; see also Num 32:26), following the area of Jazer, which in late monarchic times was part of the Moabite kingdom (Isa 16:8–9; Jer 48:32) may be interpreted as referring to the towns of this enclave. Indeed, in the center of this geographical niche one can find the village of Jal’ad, the site of Khirbet Jal’ad, and, according to de Vaux (1941, 28), also Jebel Jal’ad, all of which seem to preserve the name of the biblical town of Gilead (already Burckhardt 1831, 348).

Scholars identified the town of Gilead at the mainly Byzantine site of Khirbet Jal’ad (e. g., de Vaux, 1938, 416–417; 1941, 28; Glueck, 1939, 231–232; Noth, 1959, 36–38; Gass, 2004, 480, with further literature). Yet, this site, which (pos-

⁶ This was one of the main reasons that de Vaux (1938, 398–399) and Noth (1941, 58; 1959, 60–61) hypothesize that the original land of Gilead was located between es-Salt and the Jabbok.

sibly) yielded only a small amount of Iron Age pottery (Glueck, 1939, 231–232; de Vaux, 1938, 416–417), is not prominently located. The (modern?) village of Jalʿad – referred to by Glueck (1939, 232) as a ruin named Jelud – did not produce pre-Byzantine sherds either. It is therefore possible that the name Jalʿad originated from an older site somewhere near these places. Noth (1968, 237; see also Simons, 1959, 229–230) suggested locating the town of Gilead (wrongly identified by him and others who followed him with “Mizpeh-gilead” – see below), in er-Reshuni, 2 km northwest of Kh. Jalʿad, and Mittmann (1970, 217, n. 27) preferred el-Mishrefeh, 1 km north of Kh. Jalʿad. This area has not been systematically surveyed and hence it is possible that a large Iron Age site may still to be discovered in it. For instance, er-Rashuni – a site with Iron Age pottery – is described by de Vaux (1938, 415) as “l’un des sites anciens les plus importants de toute la région.”



Fig. 4: Tell Hajjaj south of the Jabbok, one of the possible locations for the town of Gilead.

Another solution is to place the town of Gilead in Tell Hajjaj – the most prominent mound in this part of Jordan (fig. 4). The site is located on the western edge of the lower plateau south of the Jabbok (G.R. 214 173) at the head of Wadi Hajjaj that leads down to Tullul edh-Dhahab in the valley of the Jabbok (the preferable location for Mahanaim and Penuel – see below). It is a prominent mound, which – including the terraced slopes – covers an area of ca. four hectares (for other possible identifications of this site see below). As far as we know, this site has never been systematically surveyed. Noth (1941, 86) mentions Iron I to Hellenistic pottery and de Vaux (1938, 405; 1941, 31) refers to

Iron Age pottery at the site. A short visit to this place in January 2011 revealed the existence of Iron Age sherds on its northern slopes. But this may be a less likely solution for Gilead because of the distance from Kh. Jal'ad.

Jazer

Jazer is mentioned 13 times in the Old Testament. The area around it – “Jazer with its pasture lands” (אֶת-יַזְעוֹר וְאֶת-מִגְרָשָׁהּ Josh 21:39) – is referred to in Numbers 32:1 as “the land of Jazer.” The site was located on the border of the land of Ammon (Num 21:32; Josh 13:25; 2 Sam 24:5; Isa 16:8 and cf. to the LXX rewriting of Num. 21:24 “for Jazer was the boundary of the Ammonites”), and is mentioned in relation to Heshbon, Sibmah and Elealeh (Isa 16:8–9; Jer 48:32) – the northernmost towns of Reuben and Moab (cf. also Num 32:3, where it is mentioned among various towns associated with the kingdom of Sihon). Jazer is also mentioned in 1 Maccabees 5:8 and by Josephus (Ant 12:8). The fact that it was an inhabited place in Hellenistic and Roman times lends credibility to the detailed description of Eusebius (On. 104:13–22), who puts Jazer 10 miles west of Philadelphia, 15 miles from Heshbon, and adds that “from it a very large river rises and falls into the Jordan.”

Five places that were suggested as the location of Jazer (Yāğūz, Kōm Yāğūz, Ḥirbet Bēt Zer'a, el-Yādūde, Ḥirbet es-Sīre) should be rejected because they lack either archaeological support or geographical logic (Gass, 2009, 173, n. 921 with further details and literature).⁷ Three other locations provide archaeological support and adhere to the geographical details in the written sources. Merrill (1881, 484) and others (e. g., de Vaux, 1941, 25–27; Van Zyl, 1960, 94; Aharoni, 1967; Kalai, 1986, 268–269), suggested Kh. eṣ-Ṣar (G.R. 228 150), some 12 km west of the Amman Citadel, not far from the towns in the vicinity of Heshbon and at the head of Wadi es-Sir, which flows into the Jordan. This location fits best the information in the Hebrew Bible (proximity to the northernmost towns of Moab), but is a bit too close to Philadelphia and Heshbon. Also, only a single Iron Age sherd was found during a survey of the site (Macdonald, 2000, 107; a “small quantity of worn EI sherds” according to Glueck, 1937, 13–14; 1939, 155; for more arguments against this identification see Gass, 2009, 173, n. 921, with further literature). A visit to this large site in January 2011 revealed strong post-Iron Age occupation, which may cover earlier layers; a modern survey of the slopes of the site is needed in order to check this assumption.

Rendtorff (1960, 132–135) and others (e. g., Kuschke, 1965, 102; Kalai, 1986, 268–270, n. 356; Hübner, 1992, 143 with further literature in n. 76) sug-

⁷ To the list of sites that should be rejected we wish to add the modern town of Nā'ūr (G.R. 228 142, see, e. g., Noth, 1959, 71–72; Seebass, 1999, 42). Although pottery sherds from the Iron Age, Persian and Byzantine periods were collected there, and Zwickel (1990, 193–194) drew attention to the nearby Ḥirbet el-Ḥağğār, which yielded Iron Age I–II pottery, and despite the fact that the distance of the site from Philadelphia (about 14 km) is within the limits of Eusebius' description, this place is much too close to Heshbon and hence cannot be identified with Jazer.

gested identifying Jazer with Tell el-ʿArēme (G.R. 225 146). Iron Age pottery was identified at the site, though most of the pottery collected there dates to the Hellenistic-to-Byzantine periods (Zwickel, 1990, 193). The location of the site and its distance from Philadelphia are in accordance with the description given by Eusebius, and its dominant location may be the reason for naming the area around it “the land of Jazer.”

Another good candidate is Ḥirbet Ǧazzīr (G.R. 219 156; according to de Vaux, 1938, 405, it is situated in Ard Jazzir), located in a “remarkable position” (ibid.) some 20 km west of Philadelphia and 25 km northwest of Heshbon, just south of es-Salt, on the west bank of W. Shueib, near a spring named ʿEn Ḥāzīr (see, e. g., Abel, 1938, 356–357; Simons, 1959, 119–120, 437; de Vaux, 1941, 25). De Vaux (ibid.; cf. also 1938, 405; and cf. Glueck, 1939, 236; Zwickel, 1990, 219; Gass, 2009, 173, n. 921) reported on Iron Age and Hellenistic pottery at the site. According to him, the biblical name Jazer had been preserved in Byzantine Azer, which in turn was preserved in the Arabic Ḥirbet Ǧazzīr and in the nearby spring of ʿEn Ḥāzīr.⁸ This is an attractive identification; the distances from Amman and Heshbon given by Eusebius may refer to the spot where the road to Jazer diverts from the Roman roads from Philadelphia to the west and from Heshbon to the north or west.

Only a thorough surface investigation of Kh. es-Sar, Tell el-ʿArēme and Kh. Jazzir can supply additional information which may help decide about the location of Jazer.

Mizpah

A place named Mizpah, located in the Gilead, is mentioned three times in the story of Jephthah (Jud 10:17; 11:11, 34). The same place appears twice in the same narrative as Mizpah of Gilead (Heb. *Miṣpā Gilʿād* מִצְפֵּה גִלְעָד; Jud 11:29). This place – Jephthah’s home town – was probably located in the northern Gilead, as hinted by its name Mizpah of Gilead, similar to Jabesh-gilead, Ramoth-gilead, Tishbe of Gilead – all located north of the Jabbok. The Jephthah story puts it not far from the territory of Ammon. The name discloses that it was located on a high spot overlooking its surroundings. This Mizpah should be associated with Mizpah of the Jacob cycle (Simons, 1959, 230; Ottosson, 1969, 24; contra Glueck, 1943b, 16), “And the Mizpah; for he said, the LORD watch between me and thee, when we are absent one from another” (Gen 31:49), mentioned in relation to the heap of stones that was built by Jacob, which “was named Galeʿed” (v. 48). This story reflects an Iron II reality of the border between Israelite and Aramean populations that lived in proximity in northern Transjordan; it may have been influenced by the idea of the Assyrian Kudurru border stones.⁹

⁸ A change of ʿayin to het is rare, but see ʿzmt > Hzm (Zadok, 1985, 161). We wish to thank Prof. Ran Zadok for this valuable note.

⁹ Römer (1998; see also Guillaume, 2004, 238–240, with further literature) argued that

Another place in the Gilead, named Ramath-mizpeh (Hebrew *Rāmat ham-Miṣpē* רמת המצפה), is mentioned in Joshua 13:26 together with Betonim as the northern limit of the territory of Gad. Some scholars proposed interpreting the two names, Mizpah of Gilead and Ramath-mizpeh, as defining a single place, and located it, based mainly on Judges 10:17; 11:29, near the northwestern border of the kingdom of Ammon (e. g., de Vaux, 1941, 29–33; Aharoni, 1967, 243; Na'aman, 1995, 105–106). We assert that these are two different places. Similar to Jabesh(-gilead) and Ramoth(-gilead), Mizpah(-gilead) was a place in the northern Gilead; without the second component it should be referred to as Mizpah (similar to Jabesh and Ramoth). Ramath-mizpeh was located south of the Jabbok; without the second component it was probably referred to as Ramah/Ramoth.¹⁰ We also assert (contra de Vaux, 1941) that Mizpah of Gilead and the town of Gilead were two different locals (already to Skinner, 1925, 403; Noth, 1941, 70; 1959, 36; Gass, 2004, 481–482).

Mizpah of Gilead was sought by some scholars at the village of Sūf (G.R. 229 191; Arnold, 1992, 881; Mittman, 1970, 95, reports Iron I pottery there, and see Zwickel, 1990, 279) and by others in Tell el-Maṣfā, ca. 2 km to the north of this village and 7 km to the northwest of Jareh (G.R. 227 193; Steuernagel, 1925, 108, 269; Lemaire, 1981, 44). This small site, which may preserve the ancient name, is located on a high hill near the northwestern sector of the territory of Ammon (fig. 5). It is one of the highest mounds in the Levant (ca. 1100 m above sea level). Dieter Vieweger visited the site in 2011 and observed Bronze and Iron Age sherds (personal communication). Though the site is small, it seems to us appropriate for the location of Mizpah for the following reasons:¹¹

the appearance of Mizpah of Gilead in the Jephthah story belongs to a post-exilic insertion (Jud 10:6–18; 11:11b–31 and 34–40). The author took the name from Mizpah of the Jacob cycle, knowing its importance in the patriarchal narrative and its location on the edge of the Gilead, and created an allusion to Mizpah of Cisjordan, that is, considering it as a cult place affiliated with YHWH. It is noteworthy that Mizpah in Cisjordan was regarded as a place of gathering in the Persian period compositions in Judges (Jud 20:1; 21:5.8) and Samuel (1 Sam 7:11).

¹⁰ Ramath-mizpeh was sought at Ḥirbet eṣ-Šār (G.R. 228 150; Noth, 1938, 26–29; Gass, 2004, 482). Only a few pottery sherds from the Iron Age were collected at this site; most of the finds were dated to the Hellenistic to Byzantine and later periods (Ji/Lee, 2002, 193, and see Glueck, 1939, 155).

¹¹ We oppose Noth (1957, 35–36, and cf. to Mittmann, 1969, 66; 1970, 217), who identified Mizpah of the Gilead at el-Miṣrēfe (G.R. 223 170); Kalai (1986, 300–301), who suggests a locality in the region of Kh. Jal'ad; Na'aman (1995, 106–107), who proposed to look for it close to Mahanaim and the Jabbok River; and Lipiński (2006, 272), who tentatively suggested Qal'at Rabaḍ, though no Iron Age remains are known from this site.

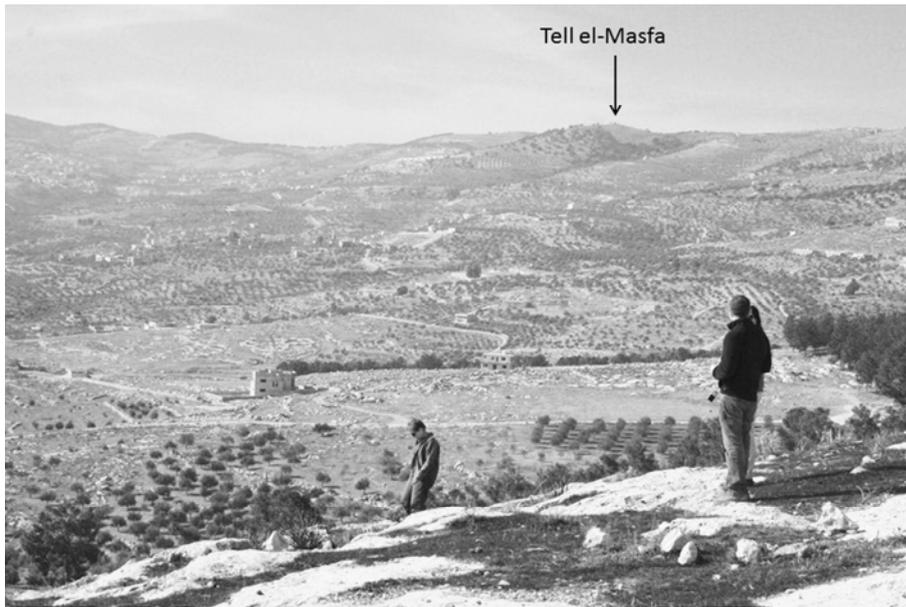


Fig. 5: Tell el-Masfa looking west. Photograph taken from the King's Highway north of Jerash.

- The setting on a high, dominating mountain fits the name.
- A high mountain seen from afar is a proper location for a story about a cairn that marks the boundary between the Israelite and Aramean populations in northern Transjordan.
- The location north of the Jabbok fits the structure of the name with the component “Gilead,” as all the other toponyms with this component are found in this region.
- It seems to be the most northeastern Israelite place in the Gilead, bordering on the territory of *Lidbir* (below).
- It is situated not too far from the northwestern border of the kingdom of Ammon and hence suits the logic of the Jephthah story.

Lidbīr

This town is named in several variants: in Joshua 13:26 and in 2 Samuel 9:4–5 as לו דבר (*Lw dbr*); in 2 Samuel 17:27 and in Amos 6:13 as לא דבר (*L³ dbr*); and in Joshua 13:26 as לדבר (*Ldbr*). Taking into consideration the contemptuous intention in the name לא דבר (Hebrew “nothing”), לדבר (*Lidbīr*) is preferable, though the spelling and pronunciation of the name remain unclear (Mays, 1969b, 122; Aharoni, 1967, 232; Edelman, 1992, 345–346).

Some scholars interpreted 2 Samuel 17:27 as hinting that *Lidbir* was not considered an Israelite town (e. g., Edelman, 1992, 346; this is quite evident in Amos 6, and see below), but in any event this verse (as well as 2 Sam 9:5) does not shed light on its location.

Two references may help in identifying this town. Joshua 13:24–27 seems to refer to the area north of the Jabbok.¹² Amos 6:11–14 probably refers to the expansion of the Northern Kingdom and the capture of *Lidbir* and Karnaim in the days of Jeroboam II (in accordance with 2 Kgs 14:28; e. g., Miller/Hayes, 1986, 307–308; Andersen/Freedman, 1989, 579–588). Karnaim is identified by most scholars at Sheikh Saad in the Bashan south of Nawa (G.R. 247 249; e. g., Aharoni, 1967), hence it may represent here the territory of the Bashan north of the Yarmuk, while *Lidbir* may represent the northern Gilead.

Scholars sought *Lidbir* in different places in northern Transjordan south of the Sea of Galilee. Most of these sites are located either in the Jordan Valley or in the hilly area immediately to its east – areas that do not fit a city that is mentioned together with Karnaim and as a place whose conquest gave the Israelites reason to rejoice. We refer to Tell el-Mudawar (Umm el-Dawar, G.R. 207 219; Aharoni, 1967, 313); Tell el-Hammah near Deir ʿAlla in the Jordan Valley (Metzger, 1960, 101–102); Khirbet Hadmid 11 km west of Jerash (Mittmann, 1970, 244) and Tell Muʿaniyeh north of Tullul edh-Dhahab (Noth, 1941, 87) in the heartland of the Israelite territory in the Gilead (on the identification of *Lidbir* see also Ottosson, 1969, 128; Lemaire, 1981, 49; Edelman, 1992, 346).



Fig. 6: Tell el-Husn south of Irbid, probably the location of biblical *Lidebir*.

We opt for the identification of *Lidbir* with the large mound of el-Ḥuṣn south of Irbid (G.R. 232 210) – one of the few major unidentified sites in the entire region (fig. 6)¹³. This large, ca. five hectare mound is strategically located on the

¹² Edelman (1992, 346) suggested that verse 26b was added to the original, as it seems to stretch the land of the Gadites to the north.

¹³ The impressive mound of Irbid is usually identified with Beth-arbel of Hosea 10:14 and Arbela “in the borders of Pella” of Eusebius (On. 14:19; Zwickel, 1990, 313; Lipiński, 2006, 279). Yet, the location of this place is far from agreed upon and hence it is not discussed here. Note that the site seems to feature a long occupational gap after the Iron IIA and until Roman times (idem; Lenzen, 1988) and hence was not inhabited in the time of compilation of most geographical texts in the Hebrew Bible, including those of

southwestern edge of the Irbid-er-Ramtha plateau, on the border with the hilly area to its southwest (for the results of recent excavation there see Khassawneh et al., 2011). This location is east of the line of Israelite towns on the slopes of the Gilead and connects well with Karnaim – the first symbolizing the northeastern Gilead and the second the Bashan, meaning that Jeroboam II probably took over the plateau on both sides of the Yarmuk River.¹⁴

Tishbe

Tishbe in Gilead is regarded as the birthplace of the prophet Elijah (“the Tishbite”), who, based on the reading of LXX, Lucian and Josephus (Ant, 8, 13, 2), was “from Tishbe in Gilead” (1 Kgs 17:1, and see Montgomery, 1951, 293).¹⁵ Though the traditional site for identifying this place – el-Istib/Listib 4 km northwest of Ajlun (e. g., Abel, 1938, 486; Glueck, 1951, 218, 227; Ottosson, 1969, 34; Lemaire, 1981, 44) – did not produce Iron Age pottery (Glueck, 1951, 218, 225–226; Mabry/Palumbo, 1988, 279), it is reasonable to look for a site in this area, mainly because of the Elijah tradition preserved in the adjacent, Byzantine ruin of Mar Elias (Mabry/Palumbo, 1988, 279). One candidate is the predominantly Iron Age site of Kh. Umm el-Hedamus 2 km to the east of Mar Elias (Mittmann, 1970, 68–69, 222, 230; Palumbo, 1992; for the history of research regarding the identification see MacDonald, 2000, 204–205).

Kamon (Qāmōn) and Havvoth-ja’ir

Another Israelite town in the Gilead is Kamon, the hometown of the minor judge Jair the Gileadite (Jud 10:3–5). According to verse 4, “he had thirty sons that rode on thirty donkeys, and they had thirty cities in the land of Gilead that are called Havvoth-ja’ir (*hawwōt̄ yā’ir*) to this day.”

According to 1 Kings 4:13 one of Solomons officers – Ben-geber (בֶּן-גִּבְרָ) – was situated in Ramoth-gilead, and “to him pertained *Havvoth-ja’ir* the son of Manasseh, which are in Gilead; to him also pertained the region of Argob, which is in Bashan, threescore great cities with walls and bronze bars.” Following this reference Kamon and Havvoth-ja’ir should be located on the plateau near the Yarmuk. Polybius (History 5.70, 12) mentions a place named Kamoun

northern origin.

¹⁴ A somehow similar line of thought was long ago suggested by Smith (1901, 341), who identified Lidebir with Ibdar, some 10 kilometers to the north of Irbid, on a tributary of the Yarmuk river. Yet, this site has no strategic importance and was probably inhabited only from the Byzantine period (Mittmann, 1970, 24).

¹⁵ The MT and Targum, however, read “who was *mittōšbê gil’ād* [= of the inhabitants] of the Gilead” (a reading preferred by Simons, 1959, 359–360). Already Burney (1903, 215–216) concluded that תושב is a late priestly word, and its occurrence in 1 Kings should be regarded as part of a late addition. McKenzie (1991, 81–100), Otto (2003) and Römer (2005, 153–154) argued that most of the Elijah stories, except for 1 Kings 21, were added to the Book of Kings in the Persian period. The latter indeed describes Elijah as “the Tishbite” (vv. 17, 28), but without the Gileadite orientation.

which was taken by Antiochus III together with Pella and Ephron (Mittmann, 1970, 227–228; on Ephron see also 1 Maccabees 5:46). The order here is Pella > Kamoun and Ephron > Abila and Gedara. Hence Kamon was sought in the northwestern Gilead. Many scholars suggested that the name is preserved in the village of Qam (G.R. 218 221), ca. 12 km north-northwest of Irbid (Gass, 2004, 347 and further literature in note 2491). Thomsen (1907, 76) and Simons (1959, 298, and see Gass, 2004, 348, for further literature) suggested identifying the site in Qumēm, 2 km to the south.¹⁶ The absence of Iron Age pottery in the village of Qam drove Mittmann (1970, 227–228) and Thompson (1992, 5) to identify Kamon in the village of Ḥinzīre (G.R. 216 208), which features Iron Age and Hellenistic pottery (Mittman, 1970, 46; Zwickel, 1990, 296). For the same reason, Schmitt (1995, 201) and Zwickel (2000, 49) suggested locating Kamon in Khirbet Umm el-Guzlān (G.R. 216 222), some 2 km to the south of Qam, which yielded Bronze and Iron Age sherds.

Mahanaim

Mahanaim is mentioned in the Jacob cycle (Gen 32:3), the tribal allotments (Josh 13:26.30; 21:38), the David cycle (2 Sam 2:8.12.29; 17:24.27; 19:33), and as a regional center in the Solomonic district system (1 Kgs 4:14). This toponym appears in the Shoshenq I list, apparently in a group of places near the outlet of the Jabbok to the Jordan River (Mazar, 1957; Aharoni, 1979, 323–325; Kitchen, 1986, 438).

Two places are the lead candidates for the location of Mahanaim.¹⁷ The first is Tullul edh-Dhahab in the valley of the Jabbok (e. g., Dalman, 1913, 71–72; Coughenour, 1989; Hutton, 2006). This place features two mounds, separated by the river (fig. 7). The western and larger (Tell edh-Dhahab al-Gharbi, ca. 5 hectares with the steep slopes – see plan in Gordon/Villiers, fig. IA) is located on the north side of the U-shaped meander of the Jabbok. Architectural remains seen on the surface of the site include fortifications (Gordon/Villiers, 1983, 277).¹⁸ The eastern and smaller mound (Tell edh-Dhahab esh-Sharqi) – though very close to the former site – is an independent settlement (the deep ravine of the Jabbok separates them), and thus the two must have been known in antiquity under different names. The eastern mound looks more like a fort or a site with a single prominent building on its summit (below). Glueck (1939, 234) and Gor-

¹⁶ Ephron should probably be located in et-Tayibe 3 km south of Qumēm.

¹⁷ Several scholars suggested the identification of Mahanaim in Kh. Mahne close to Tell el-Maqlub (Robinson 1865, 86 following Ashtori Ha-Parchi; Glueck, 1951, 234; Abel, 1938, 230). Yet the site is not impressive, its location not strategic, and it lacks the appropriate archaeological evidence. Tell er-Ruheil north of the Jabbok and 20 km east of the Jordan has also been suggested (Baly/Tushingam, 1971, 115; May, 1974, 134) and a survey at the site revealed Iron Age I–II remains (Glueck, 1939, 223), but this location is too far east for the biblical references.

¹⁸ For a recent dig at the site see: http://evtheo.fk14.tu-dortmund.de/cms/evtheo/de/faecher/altes_testament/projekt/index.html.

don and Villiers (1983, 283) reported Iron Age I–II and Hellenistic pottery sherds at both sites.

The other site mentioned in regard to the location of Mahanaim is Tell Hejjaj, 4 km to the south of Tullul edh-Dhahab (e. g., Noth, 1941, 86; Simons, 1959, 232; de Vaux, 1967, 31; Ottosson, 1969, 127–128, 218; Mittmann, 1970, 222 n. 34; and others; for a short description of the site see above, in the discussion of the town of Gilead).



Fig. 7: Tell edh-Dhahab el-Gharbi in the valley of the Jabbok, the location of Mahanaim.

The solution to the dilemma of identifying Mahanaim may be found in the etymology of the toponym and the traditions surrounding it. The Jacob narrative connects this place with the “camp of God”: “And Jacob said when he saw them, ‘This is God’s camp.’ So he named that place Mahanaim” (Gen 32:2–3). The ending *-ayim* does not represent a dual but rather a locative (Elitsur, 2004, 282–290 with further literature; *pace*, among others, Dalaman, 1913, 68–73; Coughenour, 1989, 57), and hence there is no obstacle for a reference to a *single* camp. On the other hand, the Esau insertion (Gen 32:4–32) clearly reflects a folkloric tradition, in which the ending of the name was understood as dual – two camps (“and he divided the people that were with him, and the flocks, and the herds, and the camels, into two camps”, v. 8). If this interpretation is correct, then this is the sole example in the Hebrew Bible of popular etymology of a *locative* as a dual ending (and see also Elitsur, 2004, 285, n. 64). Thus, it is possible that the background for this popular etymology is the phenomenon of two adjacent mounds in the valley of the Jabbok. Hence, Tullul edh-Dhahab, or at

least the larger, western mound, is the preferable identification for Mahanaim. A location in the valley of the Jabbok – the most prominent geographical feature in the region – also fits the description of the territory of Manasseh “from Mahanaim through all Bashan” (Josh 13:30). And the solitude of this well-protected site fits its description as a refuge town east of the Jordan for Abner (2 Sam 2:29) and David (2 Sam 17:24,27).

Penuel

Penuel (*Pānī`ēl*, *Pānū`ēl*) must be located in the same region as Mahanaim, as in Genesis 32 the two sites are mentioned side by side. In Judges 8 Penuel appears in relation to Succoth. This toponym is usually read together with Mahanaim and Succoth in the Shehsonq I list (e. g., Kitchen, 1986, 438). According to the description in Genesis 32:23, Penuel was situated close to a ford on the Jabbok River and as hinted in the Jacob cycle, probably featured a temple. This could have been the (fortified?) “tower” mentioned in Judges 8:9.17 (מגדל or מגדל פנואל).

According to 1 Kings 12:25 Jeroboam built “Shechem in the hill-country of Ephraim, and dwelt therein; and he went out from thence, and built Penuel.” Montgomery (1951, 254) described this verse as being “of archival origin ... the only purely secular datum, except 14:20, preserved for Jeroboam’s reign.”



Fig. 8: Tell edh-Dhahab esh-Sharqi in the valley of the Jabbok, the location of Penuel.

There are two main candidates for the identification of Penuel. The first is Tell edh-Dhahab esh-Sharqi – the eastern of the two mounds in the valley of the

Jabbok (e. g., Merrill 1881, 391; Albright, 1929, 12, 13; fig. 8 here). The second is Tell Deir ʿAlla in the Jordan Valley (Van der Kooij, 1986; Briend, 1990, 18; Lemaire, 1981, 51; Lipiński, 2006, 290).¹⁹

Regarding Tell Deir ʿAlla, first, according to Lipiński (2006), the talmudic identification of *Trʿlh* with Succoth is not well-established. Talmudic *Trʿlh* corresponds to Aramaic *Trʿlh*, “Gate of God,” which may allude to Hebrew Penuel – “Face of God”; the Aramaic name lost the *ayin* due to the *aleph* next to it, and thus was pronounced **Teraʿlah*, which echoes the Arabic Deir ʿAlla. The Aramaic connection of the town is evident from the Balaam inscription (see below) and other finds from the site (Hotijzer / van der Kooij, 1976). Second, Tell Deir ʿAlla had a regional sanctuary in the Late Bronze Age (Franken, 1992; van der Kooij, 1993, 339–340). The excavations unearthed no remains of an Iron Age sanctuary, but the Balaam inscription may point to the cultic importance of the site during the Iron II.

Identifying Penuel with Tell edh-Dhahab esh-Sharqi is preferable for three reasons:

- 1) The description of Penuel as located on a ford on the Jabbok fits the deep valley of the Jabbok, where the river flows in a strong stream, and not the open land in the Jordan Valley. Also, at least today, Tell Deir ʿAlla is not located on the Jabbok, which runs ca. 1.5 kms to its east and south.
- 2) The reference to a fortified tower, probably a temple, fits the site of Tell edh-Dhahab esh-Sharqi, which seems to feature remains of a major building on its summit.
- 3) Penuel is not mentioned in any biblical text speaking about the Jordan Valley (e. g., Josh 13:27).

As mentioned above, Tullul edh-Dhahab are separated from each other by the deep ravine of the Jabbok and where probably two distinct sites that featured two distinct names.

Discussion: Settlement and Territorial History

There are several reasons for the Hebrew Bible’s ambiguity regarding regions and towns in northern Transjordan. First, this area was dominated by the Northern Kingdom rather than Judah and at least the northern sites were somewhat far from the world of the southern authors. Second, some of the Israelite sites in the Gilead may have already been destroyed and deserted in the late 8th century, before the compilation of many of the relevant texts. Third, eight century BCE northern materials in the biblical texts which refer to this area (e. g., the core of the Jacob cycle and the Jephthah story) could have been blurred in the long process of transmission and redactions. All this stands in contrast to the detailed

¹⁹ Mazar (1957, 57) proposed locating it at Tell el-Hammah, where the Jabbok emerges from the hilly area and enters the Jordan Valley.

information found in the Hebrew Bible on the towns in northern Moab – closer to Judah geographically and to the biblical authors and their territorial concerns chronologically.

Transformations in the Meaning of the Term “Gilead”

The different Gilead terminologies are rooted first and foremost in the geographical features and long-term territorial history of the Transjordanian highlands. The division into two units, with the Jabbok separating them, can possibly be traced as far back as the partition of this region between two territorial entities in the Late Bronze Age – one centered near Amman and one near Irbid.²⁰ It is deeply rooted in the Hebrew Bible, where it finds expression in the tradition about the pre-Israelite division of Transjordan between the lands of Sihon king of Heshbon and Og king of Bashan who ruled from Ashtharoth/Edrei (Num 32:33, Deut 1:4, 3:8, 4:47; Josh 13:9–12; see Bartlett, 1970), which were separated by the Jabbok (Josh 12:1–5). The authors took this idea a step further, to describe how these ancient territories were inherited by two tribes – Gad settled in the northern part of the land of Sihon and Manasseh took over the land of Og.²¹

But the changes in the meaning of the term Gilead may also reflect different historical realities. The addition of the second component “Gilead” to names of places located only north of the Jabbok River (Jabesh-gilead, Ramoth-gilead, Tishbe of Gilead, Mizpah of the Gilead) seems to indicate a need to explain, at a certain point in history, that this area indeed belonged to the Gilead. This may hint that originally the term Gilead was restricted to the area south of the Jabbok and that it was called after the town Gilead located therein (see already de Vaux, 1941; Noth, 1941, 70; 1959, 14, contra Lemaire, 1981, 46, who argued that the older Gilead traditions relate to the area north of the Jabbok). This area and the valley of the Jabbok may have been the core Israelite territory in Transjordan. It is noteworthy that the Transjordanian Jacob cycle in Genesis, which apparently depicts relatively early Iron Age realities, is restricted to this territory (and to the parallel Bethel-Shechem territory west of the Jordan).

During the 9th and 8th centuries BCE the toponym Gilead was projected to the north (north of the Jabbok) and south (the Land of Jazer) of the original Gilead enclave, to include the entire territory of the Northern Kingdom in the hilly area east of the Jordan River.²² This was the moment when it became necessary

²⁰ This is somewhat similar to the division of the central hill country west of the Jordan between the city-states of Jerusalem and Shechem.

²¹ The division into two units continues in later periods, starting with the separation between Ammonites and Gileadites in Ptolemaic times (Lemaire, 1981, 45). In the Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk periods the area north of Wadi Zarqa was part of the district of Al-Urdunn, while the area between the Zarqa and the Mujib belonged to the district of Filastin (Walmsley, 2001, 517, fig. 15.1).

²² A parallel phenomenon can be found in the area facing the Gilead in Cisjordan, where the term Mount Ephraim “expanded” from a specific region south of Shechem (1 Sam

to explain – in the names of towns – that the area north of the Jabbok is also part of the Gilead. And this, in turn, gave birth to the notion of two halves of Gilead, and to the idea that the southern of the two is divided between the lands of Gilead and Jazer.²³

Another change in the way the territorial history of the Gilead is depicted in the Hebrew Bible seems to have occurred after the withdrawal of Assyria from the region in the late 7th century. The territorial vacuum which was created in Transjordan enabled the expansion of Moab to the north, into the ex-Israelite Land of Jazer (see Isa 16:9; Jer 48:32, in which Jazer is mentioned as a Moabite town). This may also be the background for the *literary* expansion of the kingdom of Sihon from the *Mishor* to the north, to include the Gilead south of the Jabbok (for the “original” Sihon territory see Num 21:27–30; Josh 13:9; for the “addition” of the area of Jazer see Num 21:24.32; Josh 12:2).²⁴

The Israelite Territory in the Gilead

Once the identifications of the towns in the Gilead are fixed, it is possible to delineate the Israelite territory in northern Transjordan. We refer to the area *actually* settled by groups considered as Israelite, not to territories taken over by the Northern Kingdom as a result of military expansion. In the area of the Jabbok and north of it the Israelite towns of Mahanaim, Penuel, Jabesh, Tishbe and Kamon are all located in the western slopes of the hill-country of the Gilead, at a distance of 5–15 kms from the Jordan Valley (fig. 9). The only exception is Mizpah of Gilead, which forms a sort of a bulge in the east (Tell el-Masfa is ca. 25 km east of the Jordan Valley). The location of Mizpah is reflected in the Genesis 31 tradition on the cairn erected by Jacob and Laban to delineate their border, that is, the boundary between the Israelite and Aramean territories south of the Yarmuk.²⁵ Mizpah – possibly not much more than a sanctuary – was the easternmost Israelite spot in the Gilead. The town of *Lidbir* to the north of it, probably to be identified in el-Husn, may have been the southwestern-most Aramean settlement in the plateau to the south of the Yarmuk River.

9:4) to the entire central hill country territories of the Northern Kingdom (Jer 50:19; Isa 7:9). Interestingly, both toponyms (Ephraim and Gilead) “expanded” to include territories considered in the tribal allotment as “half of Manasseh” (e. g., Josh 13:13.28; 17:1).

²³ 2 Kings 10:33, which seems to take the term Gilead even further south, all the way down to the Arnon, may preserve a memory of the conquests of the Omrides.

²⁴ For different interpretations of the role of the Song of Heshbon in Sihon narrative see Bartlett, 1970; 1978; Van Seters, 1972; 1980. In any case, the historical reflection is the same in our opinion – the Song of Heshbon is the earliest stratum, representing the initial view of the territory of Heshbon that did not include the hilly part of the Gilead.

²⁵ Possibly, this is also an etiological story, which explains the existence of a prominent tumulus near Mizpah.

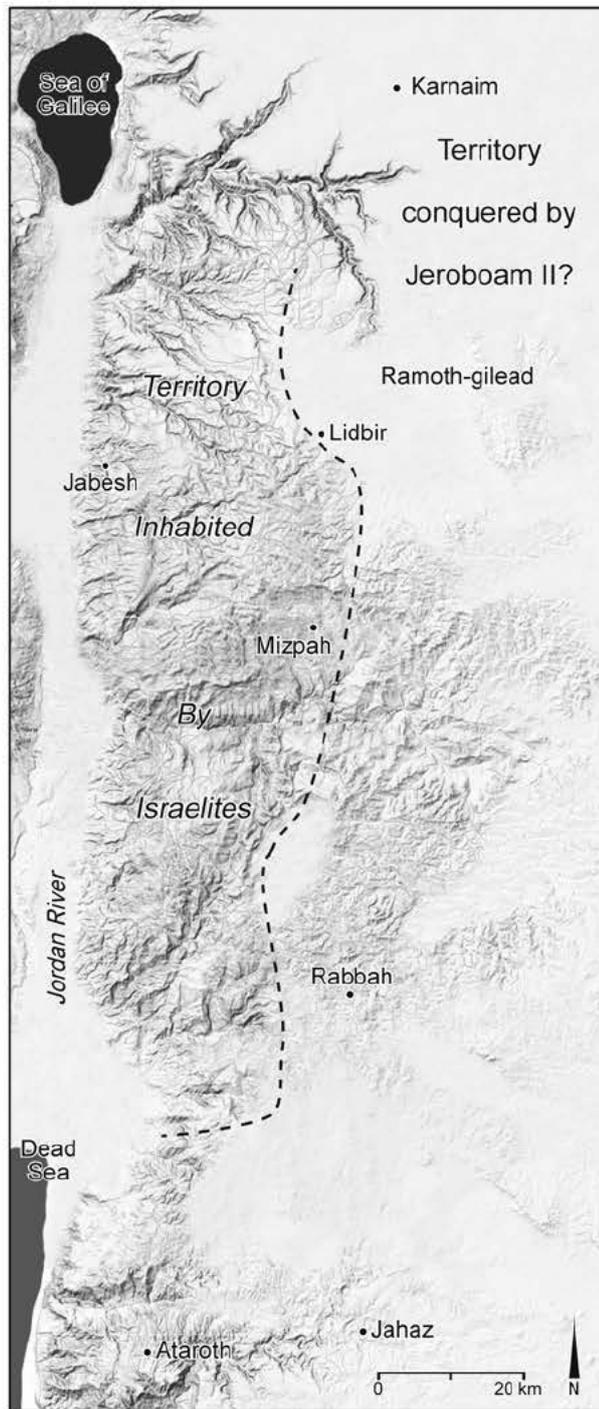


Fig. 9: The territories in the Gilead settled by Israelites and areas and towns conquered during the peak expansion of the Northern Kingdom.

This demographic situation may also be reflected in the listing of the three cities that cooperated with David when he was in Mahanaim (2 Sam 17:27), possibly considered as non-Israelite places surrounding the Israelite territory – Rabbah of the Ammonites, Lidbir and Roglim. Rabbah is self-evident and Lidbir – not an Israelite town according to Amos 6:13 – was probably located on the southwestern edge of the Irbid plateau. If the list goes from south to north, then Rogelim should be sought farther north. Abel's (1938, 427) identification of this place in Tell Barsina near Wadi Rujeileh southwest of Irbid (G.R. 223 215) based on the similarities Rujeileh = Roglim and Barsina = Barzillai is far from secure. Therefore the identification of Rogelim remains an open issue.

South of the Jabbok the Israelite towns were located to the west of the kingdom of Ammon and north of Moab. Minnith and Abel-shittim, which mark the southern end of the territories taken by Tiglath-pileser III from Aram Damascus, denote, in fact, the southern border of Israel a few decades before this event (as explained above, Moab probably expanded to the area of Jazer only a century later). The same boundary of Israelite territories in the Gilead is hinted-at by the mention of Minnith and Abel-keramim in the Jephthah story. The southernmost Israelite region in the Gilead was the land of Jazer – the territory known in later centuries as the Jewish Peraea.

Israelite Conquests in the South and Northeast

In two periods, the Northern Kingdom expanded from its core Israelite territories. The Omrides expanded both south and north. In the south they took over the *Mishor*, including Heshbon and the land of Madaba and established two fortresses on the border of the land of Dibon (Finkelstein/Lipschits, 2010). In the north they expanded to the Irbid plateau. The aim of the Omride expansion must have been the domination of the King's Highway and the transportation of copper along it (*ibid.*). Since there was no way to control this highly strategic highway without a hold on the plateau south of the Yarmuk River, the Omrides may have constructed a stronghold in this territory, at Ramoth-gilead or close to it (Finkelstein/Lipschits/Sergi, forthcoming). The words of the king of Israel: "Do you know that Ramoth-gilead belongs to us, and we keep quiet and do not take it out of the hand of the king of Aram?" (1 Kgs 22:3) may preserve an old memory, even if the biblical sequence of events in the wars with Aram Damascus is garbled (Miller, 1966; de-Vries, 1978, 92–99; Otto, 2001, 29–118; Na'aman, 2006), and despite the possibility that it reflects the situation in the later days of Jeroboam II. The prophetic stories related to this period – even if containing later redactions – include many historical germs, such as the memory of an eventful battle at Ramoth-gilead, the construction of Jezreel and the death of the two kings in a single event (for the differences between the prophetic stories and the Dan Stele see, e. g., Schniedewind, 1996; Na'aman, 2006; Lemaire, 2007). In any event, there can be no doubt that the Northern Kingdom lost the plateau as a result of Hazael's assault in 842 BCE.

The second Israelite territorial expansion in the Gilead took place in the first half of the 8th century, in the days of Jeroboam II, who is credited in II Kings 14:28 with pressing Aram Damascus in the north. Jeroboam II was seemingly the first Israelite king to have expanded to Dan (Arie, 2008; Finkelstein, 2011) and may have taken over Bethsaida. His expansion in Transjordan may be referred to by Amos (6:11–14), who hints that Israel conquered *Lidbir* south of Irbid and Karnaim north of the Yarmuk River. This territory was taken over again by Rezin king of Damascus a short while later (for an explanation of 2 Kgs 15:29, which mentions the conquest of the Gilead only in the days of Pekah, see Na'aman, 1995). The inclusion of the Ramoth-gilead – *Havvoth-ja'ir* – Argob area in the list Solomonic districts in 1 Kings 4:13 may represent a memory of an Iron II reality, either in the time of Jeroboam II (Finkelstein/Silberman, 2006, 161–162) or after the Assyrian take-over (Na'aman, 2001).

Summary

In this article we deal with several issues related to the geographical and territorial history of the Gilead.

- 1) The identification of several key biblical regions and towns in Transjordan. We suggest locating the town of Gilead in the low plateau south of the Jab-bok; the town of Mizpah of Gilead in Tell Masfa northwest of Jerash and the town of *Lidbir* in el-Husn south of Irbid. These and other identifications open the way to dealing with broader historical questions related to the Gilead
- 2) Long-term history, versus specific historical realities in the Gilead. We propose locating the original Gilead in the area around the town of Gilead south of the Jabbok. During the days of the Northern Kingdom the term “expanded” to include all Israelite territories in Transjordan, between Heshbon and the Yarmuk River. Other biblical geographical references to the Gilead are influenced by the expansion of Moab to the north after the withdrawal of Assyria from the Levant in the late 7th century BCE.
- 3) The core area of Israelite settlement in Transjordan. Plotting the Israelite towns in the Gilead on a map indicates that the core territory was limited to the western slopes of the Transjordanian highlands. The Northern Kingdom expanded to the King's Highway for a short period of time twice: The Omrides took over the plateau of Ramoth-gilead and Jeroboam II pushed his territory on both sides of the Yarmuk River.

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