

The Deborah-Barak composition (Jdg 4–5): some topographical reflections

Erasmus Gaß

Angaben zur Veröffentlichung / Publication details:

Gaß, Erasmus. 2017. "The Deborah-Barak composition (Jdg 4–5): some topographical reflections." *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 149 (4): 326–35.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00310328.2017.1386439>.

THE DEBORAH-BARAK COMPOSITION (JDG 4–5): SOME TOPOGRAPHICAL REFLECTIONS

ERASMUS GASS

The topography outlined in the prose and poetic accounts of the Deborah-Barak Composition has always been problematic (Sasson 2014: 274). According to the Song of Deborah, the battle took place at ‘Taanach by the waters of Megiddo’ (Jdg 5:19), where the kings of Canaan were killed in the waters of the Kishon torrent. Thus, the miracle seems to occur in the western Jezreel Valley. In the prose account, on the other hand, the location of the battle is not explicitly clarified. Only the encampment of the two armies — on Mt. Tabor and near the Wadi Kishon (Jdg 4:12–13) — is specified. After the defeat, Sisera fled to an otherwise unknown Elon-Bezaananim (Jdg 4:11), while Barak chased the Canaanite army as far as Harosheth-Hagoyim (Jdg 4:16).

Obviously, except for the mention of the river Kishon, the topography is different in the two accounts.¹ Thus it is important to take a closer look at the topographic indications as to the location of the battlefield. Since there are topographical disparities between the two accounts, the topography of each of them will be analysed separately. Afterwards the particular setting of both versions will be sketched.

I. THE TOPONYMS OF THE PROSE ACCOUNT

Deborah and Barak, the main actors of the Deborah-Barak composition, are linked to different places. The prophetess Deborah pronounces judgment in Israel, seated under the palm of Deborah between Bethel and Ramah (Jdg 4:5). Both places can be easily identified with equivalent modern sites (Matthews 2004: 65; Gass 2005: 72–76 for Bethel and 244 for Ramah). Thus, Deborah is a resident of the hill country of Ephraim.

Barak, however, is linked with a place called Kedesh-Naphtali. The place name Kedesh, meaning ‘sanctuary’, is a common one, so that there might be more than one site called Kedesh in the Hebrew Bible and in Israel. The Hebrew Bible speaks, either literally of both a Kedesh in Galilee (Jos 20:7; 21:32; 1Chr 6:61) and a Kedesh-Naphtali (Jdg 4:6), or by means of the context of a Kedesh in Issachar (Jos 12:22; 1Chr 6:57) and a Kedesh in Judah (Jos 15:23). Consequently, there is no need to think of only one Kedesh and to identify it as the well-known site Kedesh in Galilee.² The differences concerning the nomenclature and the literary context are decisive for the proposition that there are four places with this name.³ All in all, it seems possible that there are two sites with the same name belonging to the tribal inheritance of Naphtali. This proposal needs further clarification.

On the one hand, there is a northern site Kedesh explicitly called ‘Kedesh in Galilee’ in Jos 20:7 and Jos 21:32 // 1Chr 6:61. This northern Kedesh is located in the close vicinity of Hazor according to Jos 19:36–37 and 2Kgs 15:29, so that all five references are clearly to the northern place to be found on Tell Qedes (1997.2798) (Gass 2005: 247–49). This northern Kedesh belongs to the tribal inheritance of Naphtali and, on the basis of the biblical references, is located in the land or hill country of Naphtali.

On the other hand, there is another toponym explicitly called Kedesh-Naphtali in Jdg 4:6. The name Kedesh-Naphtali most probably sets this place apart from the more familiar northern site called simply Kedesh or Kedesh in Galilee. On account of its name the site Kedesh-Naphtali, like Kedesh in Galilee in the north, belongs to the tribal allotment of Naphtali. Therefore, two places called Kedesh are to be assumed in the tribal inheritance of Naphtali. Since there is a Kedesh in nearby Issachar, it is important to distinguish both southern places

by means of the tribal association. This southern Kedesh-Naphtali is the home town of the warrior Barak. Though not mentioned, this Kedesh-Naphtali seems to be the meeting place for the levy of the tribes of Naphtali and Zebulun according to Jdg 4:9–10. Therefore, one would expect this place to be closer to the battlefield than the northern Kedesh in Galilee. It seems topographically far-fetched that the troops of Zebulun marched all the way north to Kedesh in Galilee just to turn south again for battle.⁴ Moreover, the Galilean Kedesh lies about 7 miles north of Hazor, the capital of Jabin, the Canaanite king responsible for the combat. At least on the level of the final text the detour of the Israelite army to this place in the north is most illogical. Admittedly, the northern Kedesh in Galilee is the main city of the region (Seleznev 2006: 618), but it seems absurd to muster troops at this northern place located near the headquarters of the Canaanite king Jabin. Furthermore, some of Zebulun's clansmen had to travel some 20 miles northeast to meet at the Israelite camp. Thus, all the topographical indications of the prose account rule out the identification of Kedesh-Naphtali mentioned in Jdg 4:6 with the Galilean Kedesh.⁵

Similarly, the Issacharite Kedesh — which can be identified with *Tell Abū Qudēs* (1706.2184) — is not the proper place for the Israelite mobilisation according to Jdg 4:9–10 since it is too close to the Canaanite strongholds of Megiddo and Taanach. In this case it would have been easy for Sisera to stop the Israelite advance. Thus, the southern site of Kedesh-Naphtali is the best place for the Israelite forces to gather.

There are more indications for a southern position in the prose account of the Deborah-Barak composition. Admittedly, the MT of Jdg 4:11 is text-critically problematic, but it does indicate a southern locale. According to the *K^etiw* of Jdg 4:11 (אלון בצענים) the Kenite Heber has encamped in the vicinity of a place called Elon-Bazeannim near Kedesh.⁶ In contrast the *Q^{re}* (אלון בצענים) suggests a toponym Elon-Bezaananim. It is also attested in Jos 19:33 that this place marks the southern border of Naphtali.⁷ The proposed southern location according to Jos 19 fits the Deborah-Barak composition perfectly.⁸ In this case, the Kedesh mentioned in Jdg 4:11 cannot be identified as the northern site Kedesh in Galilee. Moreover, since Heber's wife Jael killed the fleeing Canaanite commander Sisera, both Elon-Bezaananim — Jael's place of residence — and Kedesh in Jdg 4:11 ought to be situated close to the battlefield. Thus the logic of the narrative excludes a northern location.⁹ All in all, it appears reasonable to look for a southern site named Kedesh within the scope of the prose account of the Deborah-Barak composition.

In the context of this topographic scenario there are only two possible places: either Kedesh-Naphtali in the south or Kedesh in Issachar. In relation to this, *Tell Abū Qudēs* — identified with Kedesh in Issachar — is sometimes considered to be Sisera's escape route (for the problem see Neef 2002: 167). If this is the case, Sisera would have joined his fleeing army. And would have undoubtedly been killed by the pursuing Israelite soldiers and not by the Kenite woman Jael (although note the objections of Na'aman 1990: 428, who thinks that Sisera fled in the same direction as the army).

Since the author of Jdg 4 does not indicate that the story takes place at different localities called Kedesh, he is most probably thinking of only one southern place. On the basis of the criterion of name preservation, Kedesh-Naphtali can be found at *Hirbet el-Qadīs* (2023.2378), to the west of the Lake of Gennesaret.¹⁰ The ceramics point to the Bronze Age, the Iron Age, and to the Roman-Byzantine Period. The main settlement period was the Iron Age (see Saarisalo 1927: 83–84; Kochavi 1963: 169–71; Thompson 1979: 129). Thus, this site is the perfect match for Kedesh-Naphtali in the south. The epithet Naphtali was obviously necessary to distinguish this site from Kedesh in Issachar, which is located only about 25 miles southwest of Kedesh-Naphtali. For this reason the author added the tribal name Naphtali in Jdg 4:6: to keep both sites separate.

According to Jdg 4:12, the Israelite army moved from Kedesh-Naphtali, *Ḥirbet el-Qadīs* (2023.2378), southwest to Mount Tabor, *Ġebel et-Ṭōr* (1870.2324). When the Canaanite commander Sisera heard of this, he called out his troops from Harosheth-Hagoyim to the Wadi Kishon (Jdg 4:13). It seems that both armies are now close to each other and ready for battle.

The toponym Harosheth-Hagoyim is most probably not a place name but signifies the western Jezreel Valley.¹¹ Literally it means ‘plowing place of the Gentiles’. In other words, Harosheth-Hagoyim defines the fertile environs of Megiddo and is just another term for the expression ‘at Taanach by the waters of Megiddo’ mentioned in the song of Deborah in Jdg 5:19 (see Gass 2005: 240). Any attempt to look for a camp of Sea Peoples to be identified as Harosheth-Hagoyim is futile.¹² It is noteworthy that the biblical term Harosheth-Hagoyim is preserved in modern toponyms like *el-Ḥarītīye* (1605.2364) and *Sīlet el-Ḥarītīye* (1716.2127), although the Arabic term *el-Ḥarītīye* means literally “arable land” so that there is no need to relate these toponyms to the biblical term (For the Arabic term see GTTOT 288. For the modern toponyms and their archaeological condition see Gass 2005: 237.240.). However, the biblical rendition of this fertile valley is similar to modern Arabic toponymy. Furthermore, it seems reasonable to situate Harosheth-Hagoyim in exactly this region, namely the Western Jezreel Valley (See Naʾaman 1990: 432 n. 25.).

After the lost battle, the Canaanite army fled westwards, back to the western part of the Jezreel Valley (= Harosheth-Hagoyim), whereas the commander Sisera tried to escape to the north. He was killed by Jael near a place called Elon-Bezaananim. It is difficult to locate Elon-Bezaananim. Talmudic tradition renders this toponym as ‘tree of the marshland’ (*y.Meg.* 70a, see Neubauer 1868: 225; Saarisalo 1927: 123–124.). Thus, *Ḥirbet ʿArbūta* (1891.2366), literally meaning ‘ruin of the marshland’, northeast of Mount Tabor, might fit the Talmudic description of this enigmatic site. *Ḥirbet ʿArbūta* is a 120 × 80 m sized ruin of undressed basalt blocks. There is a water source in the north-western part. The ceramics point to the Late Bronze Age, the Iron Age, the Persian, Hellenistic and Byzantine Periods (Saarisalo 1927: 27–28; Zori 1977: 136). However, *Ḥirbet ʿArbūta* is usually identified with the Biblical place Heleph located on the southern border of Naphtali. Be that as it may, Elon-Bezaananim need not be a proper settlement. It could also be only a spot in the landscape with a famous tree. Thus, Elon-Bezaananim could be located in the environs of *Ḥirbet ʿArbūta* (Fig. 1).

Searching for the Wadi Kishon, attested six times in the Hebrew Bible, is a major problem. This toponym is called a *naḥal* each time, so that it is specified as a brook. The Wadi Kishon is linked to only two biblical stories: the battle against Sisera in the prose and poetic accounts of the Deborah-Barak composition (Jdg 4:7,13; 5:21 twice) and the killing of the priests of Baal after the ordeal on Mount Carmel (1Kgs 18:40). A late reference to the battle against Sisera at the Wadi Kishon can be found in Ps 83:10, maybe an independent source for the topographical setting of the battlefield.

The usual identification of the Wadi Kishon is the *Nahr el-Muqattaʿ* (160.240) (Robinson 1841: 229). This wadi drains the Jezreel Valley westwards, flows north of Mount Carmel and reaches the Mediterranean near Haifa. Thus, *Nahr el-Muqattaʿ* is perfectly suited for the story of Elijah’s contest with the priests of Baal on Mount Carmel. Only the last part of the *Nahr el-Muqattaʿ* is a perennial stream, while the rest is actually a wadi whose bed is dry during the summer months but can become a destructive torrent in a flash during the rainy period, overflowing its banks and causing widespread flooding. It seems that this natural phenomenon supplies the background for the Song of Deborah in Jdg 5:21, where it is said that the torrent Kishon has swept away the kings of Canaan (see Neef 2002: 151). Moreover, the *Wādī Šemma* — the main wadi leading to the *Nahr el-Muqattaʿ* and coming as the *Wādī en-Nusf* from the region of *Ġelbūn* — is close to Megiddo and Taanach so that the battlefield might be found there. Since the *Wādī Šemma* has many tributaries from the Samarian highlands, the valley could be suddenly flooded in the rainy season. Therefore the area of the *Wādī Šemma* leading to

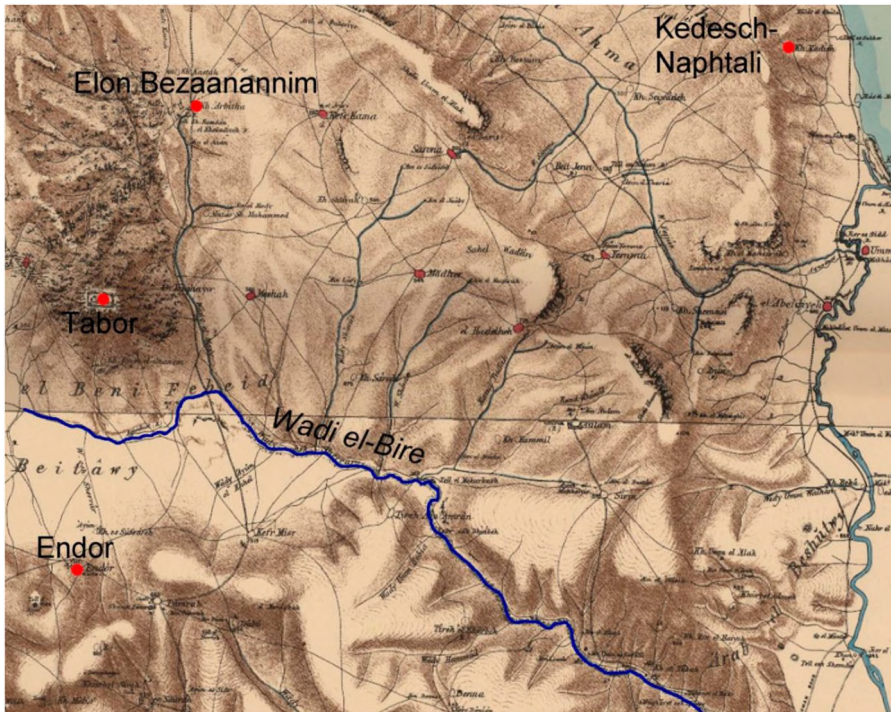


Fig. 1. The toponyms of the prose account (based on the PEF-Map 1880 © E. Gass 2017).

the *Nahr el-Muqatta'* would be an appropriate location for the battle with Sisera. This identification matches all the prerequisites postulated by the poetic account. All in all, attempts to locate the Wadi Kishon must be centred on this region according to the poetic version.

However, the prose account in Jdg 4 seems to be located somewhere else. All the other toponyms in Jdg 4 point to the northeastern Jezreel Valley. Unsurprisingly, the military camp of the Israelites is at Mount Tabor, the home town of Barak is at Kadesh-Naphtali, and Sisera's escape route leads to the same region. Thus, Sisera's military camp at the Wadi Kishon (Jdg 4:13) cannot be near Megiddo and Tanaach, but has to be located near Mount Tabor where both armies obviously met for battle (Boling locates Mount Tabor 'ten miles away from the beginning of the Wadi Qishon': 1975: 96).

Possibly there are two brooks called Kishon. In fact, there are strong indications — biblical and post-biblical — for a Wadi Kishon in the eastern part of the Jezreel Valley (see Zimbalist 1946/47: 28–33). Apart from the prose account, the biblical tradition also linked the battle with Sisera to the eastern part. According to Ps 83:9–10, Sisera and Jabin have been defeated at Endor: "Do to them as you did to Midian, as to Sisera and Jabin at the Wadi Kishon, who were destroyed at Endor, who became dung for the ground". Thus, independent biblical testimony relates these events to the area near Endor. The wording of Ps 83:9–10 seems to link the battle against the Canaanites (Jdg 4) with the battle against the Midianites (Jdg 7). Whereas Jdg 7 is clearly set in that area, Jdg 4 is usually situated in the region around Megiddo and Taanach. All things considered, the topographic information of Ps 83:9–10 fits only the prose version of the Deborah-Barak composition, but not the poetic account, which situates the battle at Taanach by the waters of Megiddo.

Similarly, Euseb located the Wadi Kishon not near Megiddo, but near Mount Tabor in his onomasticon. He maintains that the battle with Sisera was fought there. He considers the Kishon ‘a wadi near Mount Tabor where Sisera was attacked’ (Eusebius Onom. 116:23–24). Obviously Euseb has the area around Mount Tabor in mind.

In fact there is a possible candidate for another Wadi Kishon in the eastern part of the Jezreel Valley: the *Wādī el-Bīre* (195.228), which rises southeast of Mount Tabor and northeast of Endor¹³ and thus fits the biblical description of the prose account of the Deborah-Barak composition and the description in Ps 83:9–10 perfectly. The *Wādī el-Bīre* drains eastwards and empties into the river Jordan. The ruin of *Horvat Qasyūn* (1871.2297) is situated near the sources of the *Wādī el-Bīre*. *Horvat Qasyūn* might have retained the old biblical name. However, this name seems to be recent because the old 1 : 20,000 Map of Palestine called this place only *el-Hirbe* (Peterson 1992: 89). Maybe modern explorers have failed to recognize the old name since it is doubtful that the name *Horvat Qasyūn* was invented in modern times, particularly as modern tradition identifies the Biblical Kishon with *Nahr el-Muqattaʿ*. Moreover, medieval tradition preserved the old name (see below).

Unsurprisingly, the pilgrims of the Middle Ages also looked for the Wadi Kishon in exactly this area. The *Libellus de locis sanctis* by Theoderich of Wuerzburg and dated to the 12th century CE mentions a wadi called Kishon near the hill of Endor: ‘Above Naim there is situated Mount Endor; near its foot above the torrent Kadumim, which is Wadi Kishon, triumphed Barach, the son of Abinoam, encouraged with the advice of the prophetess Deborah — over Jabin, the king of the Idumeans, and Sisera, the leader of his militia’.¹⁴

The pilgrim Burchard de Monte Sion, a Dominican monk, visited the Holy Land in the 13th century CE. He is the author of *Descriptio Terrae Sanctae*, the best topography of the Holy Land of his time. Burchard distinguished between two Wadis with the same name Kishon: ‘and a note about that torrent Kishon, that must be accepted twice though it really seems and is said to be one in character, because it runs twice; for one part of it drains eastwards to the sea of Galilee, the other one drains westwards to the Great Sea’.¹⁵ The eastern Wadi Kishon is described by Burchard as follows: ‘At its (= Tabor) eastern foot flows down that torrent Kishon where Barak fought against Sisera, and defeated him and he fled. That torrent Kishon — collected from the rainy waters of Mount Tabor and Hermon — descends towards the Sea of Galilee, and issues in it near the fort of Belvoir’.¹⁶ This best fits the *Wādī el-Bīre*, which runs north of the stronghold of Belvoir located on *Kōkab el-Hawā* (1994.2218).

Moreover, the Jewish scholar Eshtori ha-Farhi mentioned in his geographic work *Caftor wa-pherach* that obviously the *Wādī el-Bīre* is called Qison in Arabic: ‘South of Tiberias about half a day is Beth-shean and mid-way is the brook Kishon, they call it קִישוֹן’.¹⁷ Eshtori ha-Farhi supplies further information on the eastern Kishon that allows its identification with *Wādī el-Bīre* as well. ‘And south of the outlet of Yarmuk into the Jordan, about half an hour issues the brook Kishon into the Jordan and it comes down from the west, from the south of mount Tabor’.¹⁸ Thus, he maintains that the Wadi Kishon empties into the Jordan about half an hour south of the mouth of the river Yarmuk. The Wadi Kishon comes from the west and rises south of Mount Tabor. ‘West of Mount Tabor there is Kislot Tabor for an hour and they call it כִּסְלוֹת; due south of it about an hour there is קִישוֹן and from there originates the river’.¹⁹ Therefore, there was a place called Kishon (most probably Kishjon) about one hour south of Mount Tabor, which may possibly be identified with modern *Horvat Qasyūn* (see above).

Overall, there is a strong tradition of another Wadi Kishon that drains eastwards to the Jordan river. The pilgrims of the Middle Ages placed the scene of the battle between Barak and Sisera in the eastern part as Ps 83:9–10 did. They were obviously thinking of a Wadi Kishon in the east. Furthermore, the local Arab residents knew about this tradition and preserved the alternative name for the *Wādī el-Bīre* and for the site *Horvat Qasyūn*. At least in the Middle

Ages pilgrims as well as local residents knew about a Wadi Kishon in the east. This eastern brook completely fits the requirements of the prose account of the Deborah-Barak composition. Therefore, the question is whether this tradition was invented at a later time to satisfy the pilgrims' need for identification. In any case, this eastern location of the events related in the prose account makes complete topographical sense.

Admittedly, it is also possible to relate the topographical setting of the prose account to the western Kishon. The rainfall in the Tabor region also drains westwards since there is an important watershed between *Iksāl* and Mount Tabor. Whereas the *Wādī el-Bīre* and its tributaries run eastwards, the *Wādī el-Muwēle* and its tributaries flow westwards. Furthermore, the *Wādī el-Muwēle* is a northeastern tributary of the main Wadi Kishon. In this respect, the *Wādī el-Muwēle* might be an option for the Wadi Kishon in the prose account. The *Wādī el-Muwēle* rises about four miles southwest of Mount Tabor. Maybe the *Wādī el-Muwēle* had initially borrowed the name Kishon from the place name Kishjon of the tribe of Issachar which were to be found in precisely this region (See *GTTOT* 77). Afterwards, the name Kishon was used to refer just to the lower reaches. However, strictly speaking, neither Tabor nor En-Dor could be related directly to the *Wādī el-Muwēle* so that an eastern option like the *Wādī el-Bīre* is an even better candidate for the Wadi Kishon mentioned in the prose version.

To conclude: the prose account of the Deborah-Barak composition seems to locate the battle with the Canaanite forces commanded by Sisera between Tabor and Endor. The Israelite troops under Barak pitched their camp on Mount Tabor (Jdg 4:12) whereas Sisera headed with his army from the western Jezreel Valley (Harosheth-Hagoyim) to the Wadi Kishon (Jdg 4:13), which can be identified as the *Wādī el-Bīre* (or less likely: the *Wādī el-Muwēle*). The Israelite army went down from Mount Tabor to fight the Canaanite forces (Jdg 4:1). This is also an indication that attempts to locate the battlefield should be centred on the area close to Mount Tabor and not about 14 miles to the southwest, where the battlefield is located according to Jdg 5:19.²⁰ With the help of Yahweh, the Israelites defeated the terrified Canaanites and pursued them westwards. Sisera himself got down from his chariot and fled north-eastwards on foot. He would certainly have been killed if he had joined his retreating army, so he had to take a different escape route. At Elon-Bezaananim he met his fate in Jael's tent. This place — identified as the region of *Ḥirbet 'Arbīṭa* — lies only nine miles west of Kedesh-Naphtali. Since Jdg 4:11 claims that the two places are close, the biblical description is fully appropriate. By means of the topographic connection of Elon-Bezaananim to Kedesh-Naphtali it has been possible to further define Sisera's escape route.²¹ Furthermore, *Ḥirbet 'Arbīṭa* is only about five miles north of the battlefield, so that Sisera could easily have reached it on foot.

II. THE TOPONYMS OF THE SONG OF DEBORAH

Unlike the prose account, the song of Deborah is almost completely devoid of topographical information. Only the expression 'at Taanach by the waters of Megiddo' in Jdg 5:19 provides a location for the scene of battle with the kings of Canaan. Both places, Taanach and Megiddo, can definitely be identified with specific sites in the Jezreel Valley (Gass 2005: 90–100). Thus, the battlefield as outlined in the poetic account should be sought in the vicinity of these well-known places.

The term *mē Megiddō* 'waters of Megiddo' is in need of explanation. The noun *mayim* could mean "sea" or "river" (Albright 1936: 27), so that this expression could denote different things. As there is not a proper sea in the western Jezreel Valley, the noun *mayim* seems to be the term for a river here. Thus, the 'waters of Megiddo' have been identified as a number of different rivers in the vicinity of Megiddo. One candidate is the *Wādī el-Lēggūn*, which runs behind the hills of Megiddo (Alt 1914: 74, n. 2; Albright 1936: 27). However, this wadi is rather small and not suitable as a topographical reference (*GTTOT* 290). Moreover, it is too far away from

Taanach so that the linkage between Megiddo and Taanach seems to be unfounded. However, this is not the only possible candidate in the close vicinity for locating the enigmatic ‘waters of Megiddo’. The wadi fed by the *Ēn el-Qubbe* (1678.2215) about 300 m northeast of Megiddo could be the ‘waters of Megiddo’ as well. Be that as it may, this is not the only possible locale for the ‘waters of Megiddo’.

Since the Wadi Kishon is mentioned in the close context in Jdg 5:21, the ‘waters of Megiddo’ might be a tributary of the *Nahr el-Muqattaʿ* or the *Wādī Šemma* (Guthe 1903: 46; *GTOT* 290, whereas Webb [2012: 214] and Sasson [2014: 303] opt for the Kishon or one of its tributaries). Accordingly, the brook Qina, a southern tributary of the Wadi Kishon, could also be the ‘waters of Megiddo’. Hence, the ‘waters of Megiddo’ could be a poetic designation for the brook Qina or the modern *Wādī Zalafé*, which flows past *Tell Abū Qudēs* (1706.2184) (See also Niemann 2002: 98). In particular, some manuscripts of the Septuagint render the enigmatic *nahal q’ānūm* of Jdg 5:21,²² a parallel term to Kishon, with καθήσει. Maybe these translators of the Septuagint identified the Wadi Kishon as a torrent near a site called Kedesh. Since all the references in the song of Deborah point to the region of Megiddo and Taanach, the translators most probably related the Wadi Kishon to the Issacharite Kedesh, to be identified with *Tell Abū Qudēs* (1706.2184).²³ This site lies between the well-known places Megiddo and Taanach. All in all, if καθήσει is a hint at Issacharite Kedesh by the Septuagint translators, the battlefield might be in the area where the *Wādī Zalafé* (χειμαρρὸς καθήσει) and the *Wādī Šemma* (= the main tributary of the Wadi Kishon) meet (Fig. 2). In any case, the battlefield must be located in the vicinity of Megiddo and Taanach through the exact identification of the ‘waters of Megiddo’ is a dead issue.²⁴

According to Jdg 5:21, it was the torrent Kishon that swept away the kings of Canaan. It seems that the Wadi Kishon must be related to the other topographical note ‘at Taanach by the waters of Megiddo’ mentioned in Jdg 5:19 (Sasson 2014: 303). Thus, the Wadi Kishon must be located near Megiddo and Taanach. In consequence, the area of the south-eastern tributaries of the *Nahr el-Muqattaʿ* is a good candidate for the battlefield as described in the poetic

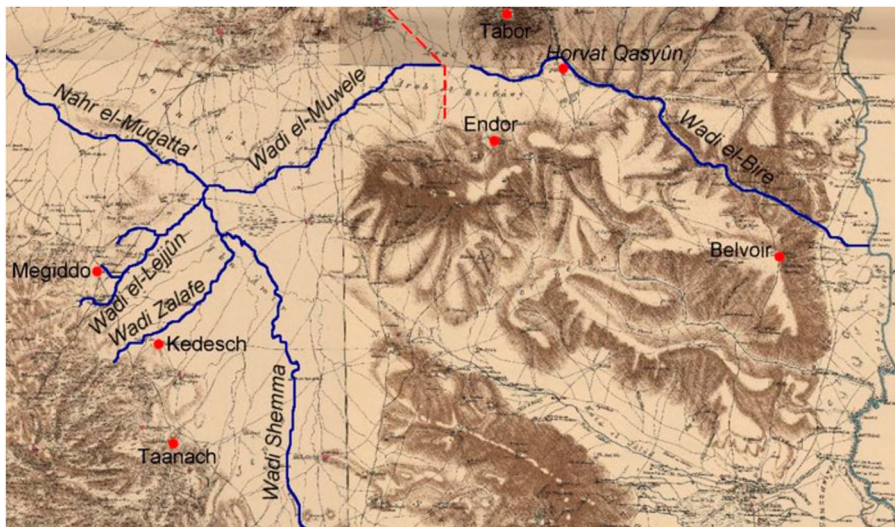


Fig. 2. The toponyms of the poetic account and the topographical shift (based on the PEF-Map 1880 © E. Gass 2017).

account. Contrary to the prose account, the Canaanite army is defeated not after they had panicked, but by a sweeping torrent, which emphasizes Yahweh's miraculous help even more.

Maybe the poetic account, whose topography is in total contrast to the prose story, creates a conceptual space (see especially Niditch 2008: 80). Taanach and Megiddo are two important Canaanite cities ruling the Jezreel Valley. They are notable symbols of the oppressive power of Israel's foes. Therefore the Canaanite army especially had to be defeated at its powerbases in the Jezreel Valley. Yahweh's power over the water could be underlined by means of the sweeping torrent of the Kishon. It could be that the attribute 'torrent of primordial times' is meant to emphasise this intention so that aspects of world creation and Yahweh's struggle against the power of chaos are insinuated in the poetic version.²⁵ All in all, these theological intentions could have led the author of the Song of Deborah to change the original topography near Mount Tabor and to locate the battle more to the west. Since the *Nahr el-Muqatta'*, the western Kishon, has a tributary nowadays called the *Wādī el-Muwēle* that rises near Mount Tabor, the original tradition could also be linked to the western area. It seems that the topographical setting wandered down the *Wādī el-Muwēle* to the main Wadi Kishon and was finally situated 'at Taanach by the waters of Megiddo'. Therefore, the tradition of the battle of Deborah and Barak with the Canaanites could be combined with the above-mentioned theological intentions. Most probably the original tradition of the Deborah-Barak composition (not necessarily the written prose or poetic account in Jdg 4–5) was located near Mount Tabor as is evident with respect to the independent tradition in Ps 83: 9–10. It is possible that the original version of the Deborah Song is older than the prose account though it is less likely on account of the topographical shift.

III. CONCLUSION

The Deborah-Barak composition cannot be read as a coherent literary work without any contradictions or discrepancies. Particularly the topographic picture of both accounts cannot be harmonized. Whereas the prose version locates the battlefield near Mount Tabor, the poetic version relates these events to the area between Megiddo and Taanach.²⁶ The first location is also confirmed by Ps 83. Therefore, the original Deborah-Barak tradition is primarily linked to Mount Tabor and was only later transferred to the western Jezreel Valley, where, in contrast to the retreat of the army in disarray of the prose account, Yahweh helped the Israelites with a miraculous flooding of the torrent Kishon. More obviously a miracle. The toponym Kishon enabled the battlefield to be transposed from Mount Tabor to Megiddo.

NOTES

¹ Nadav Na'aman 1990: 26 emphasised the accuracy of the topographical and geographical descriptions within biblical stories. Thus, it would be reasonable to consider the topography as proposed by the prose account reliable.

² See Seleznev 2006: 623. Halpern 1983: 390 might be correct in suggesting that the Issacharite Barak was transformed into a warrior from Naphtali in the prose account. However, this does not imply that one must necessarily assume only a northern location for Kedesh.

³ The contextual and literal differences have been overlooked in the discussion by Seleznev 2006: 617–23, who generally votes for literary analysis before site identification. However, literary analysis — though not discussed at length in Gass (2005: 246) — ultimately led to the proposition that there are four places. The diachronic and synchronic approaches to the

Deborah-Barak composition in Gass 2005: 263–70 discuss merely the topographic picture of the original tradition and of the redactor(s). Needless to say, there is no literary analysis of all the other verses which mention Kedesh outside the book of Judges. A proper discussion of the topography of the original tradition and of the redaction(s) of the Deborah-Barak composition is only possible with different topographic options at hand. Therefore, the methodological approach followed by Gass (2005 *passim*) is as follows: a) the overall picture of the toponym with all possible options and its meaning, b) all proposed site identifications and new suggestions, c) the special topographic picture of the book of Judges and its sources (synchronic and diachronic approaches). Thus, the criticism of Seleznev (2006) is not appropriate and leads to oversimplifications and even contradictory conclusions regarding the site of Kedesh.

⁴ See Aharoni 1967: 204: ‘it would be ridiculous to march first to Upper Galilee, far away from the field of battle’. Similarly Na’aman 1990: 429. In this respect Seleznev’s argument (2006: 618–19) is topographically absurd and betrays no knowledge of the specific geography of Galilee. Similarly, Ackerman 1998: 97–98, who also identifies Kedesh with the northern *Tell Qedes*, on the grounds that the story is especially connected with Naphtali and *Tell Qedes* is a city of refuge according to the biblical tradition.

⁵ The objection that the pan-Israel affair needs a southern location raised by Seleznev 2006: 618–619 does not hold. Note that the cited reference works in favour of a southern site Kedesh argue only with the prose account to locate Kedesh-Naphtali in the south. However, the prose account — unlike the poetic version — is definitively not concerned with all of Israel. The southern location is obviously not due to a proposed pan-Israel undertaking. The pan-Israel bias is misleading. Webb 2012: 190–191 still opts for an identification of Kedesh Naphtali with the northern Kedesh in Galilee. This place is to be distinguished from Kadesh-Barnea in the south.

⁶ Halpern believes that Elon-Bezaananim must be located in the north in the vicinity of Hazor because of the peace treaty between Jabin, king of Hazor, and the Kenite Heber who pitched his tent near Elon-Bezaananim near Kedesh (1983: 393). Thus Sisera’s extremely long escape route has a literary motivation.

⁷ See also Eusebius Onom. 158:17. In White’s view Elon-Bezaananim is ‘a well-known sacred tree near the S border of Naphtali, on the edge of the territory of Kedesh, in the vicinity of Mt. Tabor’ (1992: 1029).

⁸ For an identification of both places see Mazar 1965: 301 n. 21. In contrast, Lindars assumes three different places for the Deborah-Barak composition (1983: 163).

⁹ See also Seleznev (2006: 620), who thinks that Jdg 4:11 is secondary since this verse does not suit his thesis of only one northern Kedesh in Galilee. Actually, there is no contradiction at all if all the sites under the name of Kedesh in the prose account are located in the south. See his remarks: ‘But could it be that in the neighbouring verses (Jdg 4:9, 10, 11) the biblical author mentions two different localities under the same name without any attempt to clarify the references?’. The answer is easy: the biblical author simply did not mention two different localities. Similarly Rösel 1973: 56; Gross 2009: 262.

¹⁰ See Conder 1889: 69; Press 1933: 30 (Hebr.); Pfeiffer 2005: 104 n. 520. Sasson 2014: 258 thinks that this Kedesh is also attested in Josh 12:22 and 19:33. According to Webb 2012: 191, this Kedesh is the Issacharite Kedesh and the mustering place for the Israelite forces. However, this contradicts his map on the tribal boundaries since the border of Issachar is south of the Sea of Galilee. Thus, *Hirbet el-Qadīs* belongs to Naphtali and not to Issachar (ibid.: 2).

¹¹ Mazar 1952/53: 83 also thought that it could be a region and not a site name. Aharoni (1967: 201–203) identified Harosheth-Hagoyim as the forested regions of Galilee. But see the objections in Gass 2005: 239. For the identification of Harosheth-Hagoyim as the area near Megiddo and Taanach see Rainey 1981: 61 64 and 1983: 46–48. Sasson 2014: 253 considers Harosheth-Hagoyim ‘a bivouac or garrison area’.

However, Webb 2012: 181 still adheres to the theory that Harosheth-Hagoyim was ‘a staging post for chariotry’.

¹² Zertal and Mirkam 2000: 75 (Hebr.); Zertal 2002: 18–31, 60–61 locate Harosheth-Hagoyim at *el-Ahwāt* (1594.2105). For a critical assessment of this place, see Finkelstein 2002: 189–193; Gass 2006: 112–113.

¹³ Zimbalist 1946/47: 28–33; Frankel 1992: 89; Gass 2005: 255. But see the objections raised by Aharoni 1967: 205 n. 81, who refers to the contest at Mount Carmel as key witness for a western Kishon.

¹⁴ “*Supra Naim mons Endor situs est, ad cuius radices supra torrentem Cadumim, qui est torrentis Cison, consilio Debbore prophetisse animatus Barach filius Abinoen de Iabin rege Ydumeorum et Sisara militie eius principe triumphans*”, (Theoderich XLVI), see Bulst-Thiele 1976: 48.

¹⁵ “*Et nota de isto torrente Cison, quod, licet in rei veritate videatur et dicatur esse unus, dupliciter tamen accipitur, quia dupliciter currit. Aliqua enim pars eius currit contra orientalem ad mare Galilee, aliqua currit contra occidentem ad mare magnum*” (Burchard VII: 1), see Laurent 1864: 48.

¹⁶ “*In pede eius orientali descendit torrentis Cison ille, in quo Barach pugnavit contra Sisaram, et vicit eum et fugavit. Torrentis iste Cison, collectus de aquis pluvialibus montis Tabor et Hermon, descendit contra mare Galilee et intrat illud iuxta castrum Belvoir*” (Burchard VI: 9), see Laurent 1864: 48.

¹⁷ כחצי יום בית שאן ובאמצע הדרך נחל קישון קוריו לו קישון לדרום טבריא, see Edelmänn 1852: 46b,54–47a,1; Zunz 1841: 425.

¹⁸ שעה נכנס נחל קישון בירדן והוא יורד מהמערב מדרום הר תבור כחצי יום. לדרום כניסת ירמון בירדן כחצי יום. See Edelmänn 1852: 21b, 5–6; Zunz 1841: 404.

¹⁹ לו כסל לדרומו ביושר כמו שעה הוא קישון ומשם יצא הנחל למערב הר תבור הוא כסלות תבור לשעה וקורין. See Edelmänn 1852: 47b,12–13; Zunz 1841: 432.

²⁰ Aharoni 1967: 204 n. 79, who counters the location proposed by Jdg 5:19: ‘It is simpler to assume that here the poet is merely pointing out the two great Canaanite bases which are near the field of battle’.

²¹ There is no need to transpose Elon-Bezaananim to the north like Boling does (1975: 97), who supposes that Kedesh of Jdg 4:11 is differentiated from Barak’s home town in the south by means of Elon-Bezaananim. This presupposes, however, that Elon-Bezaananim was a popular and well-known place, which is of course questionable.

²² For the problem see Pfeiffer 2005: 39, who interprets this enigmatic term as ‘Bezeichnung für den vorderen/östlichen Teil des Kischon, also für dessen Oberlauf’. For the text-critical problem see also Echols 2008: 38.

²³ See Abel 1933: 469. For the text-critical problems of this verse see Becker-Spörl 1998: 41 n. 1; Niditch 2008: 75; Gross 2009: 301.

²⁴ See also Gross 2009: 326: ‘eines der Wadis oder eine Quelle zwischen den beiden Städten’. Fisher 1929: 9–11 refers to the many water sources around Megiddo that made it a fertile and promising site. Thus, these springs could be labelled ‘waters of Megiddo’.

²⁵ According to Matthews 2004: 77 a cosmic battle is described in Jdg 5:19–21. But see the critique of Pfeiffer 2005: 72–73, who assumes a detailed theological programme in the topography of the prose account (ibid.: 112).

²⁶ Similarly, Boling 1975: 96: ‘The poetic tradition, however, locates the decisive battle much farther to the southwest’.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abel, F.-M., 1933. *Geographie de la Palestine. Vol. 1 Géographie Physique et Historique (EBib)*, Paris: Gabalda.
- Ackerman, S. E., 1998. *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen: Women in Judges and Biblical Israel*, New York: Doubleday.
- Aharoni, Y., 1967. *The Land of the Bible: A Historical Geography*, Philadelphia: Westminster.
- Albright, W. F., 1936. 'The song of Deborah in the light of archaeology', *BASOR* 62, 26–31.
- Alt, A., 1914. 'Pharao Thutmosis III. in Palästina', *Pf* 10, 53–99.
- Becker-Spörl, S., 1998. "Und sang Debora an jenem Tag": *Untersuchungen zu Sprache und Intention des Deborahliedes (Ri 5)* (Europäische Hochschulschriften 23/620), Frankfurt a.M.: Lang.
- Boling, R. G., 1975. *Judges: Introduction, Translation and Commentary* (AB 6A), Garden City, NY: Doubleday.
- Bulst-Thiele, M. L., 1976. *Theodericus: Libellus de locis sanctis* (Editiones Heidelbergenses 18), Heidelberg: Winter.
- Conder, C. R., 1889. *Tent Work in Palestine: A Record of Discovery and Adventure*, London.
- Echols, C. L., 2008. "Tell me, o Muse": *The Song of Deborah (Judges 5) in the Light of Heroic Poetry* (LHBOTS 487), New York, NY: T & T.
- Edelmann, H., 1852. *Caftor wa-pherach auctore Pharchi (Parchi)*, Berlin: Zittenfeld (Hebr.).
- Finkelstein, I., 2002. 'El-Ahwat. A fortified sea people city?', *IEJ* 52, 187–199.
- Fisher, C. S., 1929. *The Excavation of Armageddon (OIC 4)*, Chicago, Ill.: Univ. of Chicago Press.
- Frankel, R., 1992. 'Kishon (Place)', *ABD* IV:89.
- Gass, E., 2005. *Die Ortsnamen des Richterbuches in historischer und redaktioneller Perspektive* (Abhandlungen des Deutschen Palästinavereins 35), Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
- Gass, E., 2006. 'Das Gebirge Manasse zwischen Bronze- und Eisenzeit', *TQ* 186, 96–117.
- Gross, W., 2009. *Richter* (Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament), Freiburg: Herder.
- Guthrie, H., 1903. *Kurzes Bibelwörterbuch*, Tübingen: Mohr.
- Halpern, B., 1983. 'The resourceful Israelite historian: The song of Deborah and Israelite historiography', *HTR* 76, 379–401.
- Kochavi, M., 1963. 'Khirbet Kadesh — Kadesh Naftali', *BIES* 27, 165–72 (Hebr.).
- Laurent, J. C. M., 1864. *Peregrinatores Mediæ Aevi Quatuor: Burchardus de Monte Sion, Ricoldus de Monte Crucis, Odoricus de Foro Julii, Wilbrandus de Oldenburg*, Leipzig: Hinrichs.
- Lindars, B., 1983. 'Deborah's song: Women in the Old Testament', *BjRL* 65, 158–75.
- Matthews, V. H., 2004. *Judges and Ruth*, (New Cambridge Bible Commentary), Cambridge: C.U.P.
- Mazar, (Maisler), B., 1952/53. 'Beth She'arim, Gaba and Harosheth of the peoples', *HUCA* 75–84.
- Mazar, B., 1965. 'The sanctuary of Arad and the family of Hobab the Kenite', *JNES* 24, 297–303.
- Na'aman, N., 1990. 'Literary and topographical notes on the battle of Kishon (Judges IV–V)', *VT* 40, 423–36.
- Neef, H.-D., 2002. *Deboraezählung und Deborahlied: Studien zu Jdc 4,1–5,31* (Biblich-theologische Studien 49), Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener.
- Neubauer, A., 1868. *La Géographie du Talmud* (Études Talmudiques 1), Paris: M. Lévy.
- Niditch, S., 2008. *Judges: A Commentary* (OTL), Louisville, Ky: Westminster.
- Niemann, H. M., 2002. 'Taanach und Megiddo: Überlegungen zur strukturell-historischen Situation zwischen Saul und Salomo', *VT* 52, 93–102.
- Peterson, J. L., 1992. 'Kishon (Place)', *ABD* IV, 88–89.
- Pfeiffer, H., 2005. *Jahwes Kommen von Süden: Jdc 5; Hab 3; Dtn 33 und Ps 68 in ihrem literatur- und theologischeschichtlichen Umfeld* (FRLANT 211), Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Press, I., 1933. 'Kedesh Naphtali and 'Allôn beša'anannim', *BIES* 1, 26–31 (Hebr.).
- Rainey, A. F., 1981. 'The military camp ground at Taanach by the waters of Megiddo', *ErIsr* 15, 61–66 (Hebr.).
- Rainey, A. F., 1983. 'Toponymic problems: Harosheth-Hagoyim', *TA* 10, 46–48.
- Robinson, E., 1841. *Biblical Researches in Palestine, Mount Sinai and Arabia Petraea: A Journal of Travels in the Year 1838. Vol. 3*, London: Murray.
- Rösel, H., 1973. *Die Topographie der Kriege in den Büchern Josua und Richter* (Ph.D. diss., Universität Tübingen).
- Saarisalo, A., 1927. *The Boundary Between Issachar and Naphtali: An Archaeological and Literary Study of Israel's Settlement in Canaan*, Helsinki: Suom. Tiedeakat.
- Sasson, J. M., 2014. *Judges 1–12: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (The Anchor Yale Bible 6D), New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press.
- Seleznov, M., 2006. 'Review of E. Gass, *Die Ortsnamen des Richterbuches*', *Babel und Bibel* 3, 615–23.
- Thompson, T. L., 1979. *The Settlement of Palestine in the Bronze Age* (Beihefte zum Tübinger Atlas des Vorderen Orients B/34), Wiesbaden: Reichert.
- Webb, B. G., 2012. *The Book of Judges* (NICOT), Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans.
- White, S. A., 1992. 'Zaanannim (Place)', *ABD* VI, 1029.
- Zertal, A., and Mirkam, N., 2000. *The Manasseh Hill Country Survey: III. From Nahal 'Iron to Nahal Shechem*, Tel Aviv: Ministry of Defence (Hebr.).
- Zertal, A., 2002. 'Philistine Kin found in early Israel', *BAR* 28.3, 18–31, 60–61.
- Zimbalist (Zori), N., 1946/47. 'Kishon and Kishyon', *BIES* 13, 28–33 (Hebr.).
- Zori, N., 1977. *The Land of Issachar: Archaeological Survey*, Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Soc. (Hebr.).
- Zunz, L., 1841. 'On the geography of Palestine from Jewish sources', in A. Asher (ed.), *The Itinerary of Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela II*, London: Asher, 393–448.