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## “Special Forces”: A Stereotype of Benjaminite Soldiers in the Deuteronomistic History and Chronicles

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**ABSTRACT:** This article explores one point of contrast between the characterizations of Benjamin-Judah relations in the DtrH and Chronicles. The argument is that the Deuteronomist offers a stereotype of Benjaminite “special forces,” which the Chronicler then co-opts in service of his own agenda. The remarkable aspect of this cooption is that the Chronicler does not retain or adapt any of the Deuteronomistic material that contributes to this Benjaminite stereotype, only the stereotype itself—i.e., the stereotype only manifests itself in the *Sondergut* material. The article suggests that the Chronicler repurposes the stereotype in service of a conciliatory agenda: the reincorporation of wealthy Benjaminites into the Jerusalem temple’s sphere of influence.

The irony of “Benjaminite” left-handedness is not a new observation; this essay suggests that they should be linked to the motif of “skill with long-distance weapons.” The two motifs are linked in three ways: 1) in practice, they represent a deviation from “regular” hand-to-hand warfare; 2) they overlap within the narratives; and 3) both are specifically linked to Benjaminites—left-handedness by the irony of the name, and long-distance weaponry by the fact that Benjaminites are characterized uniquely among the tribes by that skill (i.e., whenever Benjaminites are noted in a tribal list as having skill with the sling or bow, they are the only tribe that possesses that skill).

**Key words:** Hebrew Bible, Deuteronomistic History, Chronicles, Tribes of Israel, Yehud, Ancient Warfare

## I. Introduction

In a 2012 publication entitled, *The Legacy of Israel in Judah’s Bible*, Fleming examines the phenomenon of persistent Israelite identity. Nearly every text of the Hebrew Bible bears the imprint of Judah—the kingdom of Judah in the late monarchic period, the Judahite *golah* during the Babylonian period, or the province of Yehud during the Persian period. “Israel” ceased to exist as a polity in the eighth century—the larger and frequently more prosperous kingdom to Judah’s north. In its final form the Hebrew Bible is Judahite—yet Judah apparently retained and/or co-opted the “Israelite” identity, self-identifying as part of a larger people called “Israel.”<sup>1</sup>

Related to this phenomenon of self-identity and tradition is the even more complex identity of “Benjamin.” Benjamin is remarkable on a number of levels. The origins of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah are apparently in the region that is identified as Benjaminite. As a border area between the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, Benjaminite political and social identity was complex and varied over time. After the demise of the kingdom of Israel, Benjaminite territory was further incorporated into Judah; however, Benjaminites retained a separate identity within the kingdom of Judah and later within the province of Yehud.<sup>2</sup>

Numerous studies have identified what Philip Davies calls a “Benjaminite substratum” in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>3</sup> Large portions of the Deuteronomistic narratives are set in Benjaminite territory. The first king of Israel, Saul, is a Benjaminite, and the conflict between the houses of Saul and David may be understood in terms of a rivalry between Benjamin and Judah. Benjaminites are prominent in the postexilic rebuilding efforts and are listed as primary constituents of the returning *golah* community (Ezra 1; Neh 11).

In my doctoral dissertation (2014) I asserted that the Deuteronomistic History and the book of Chronicles present different portraits of the tribe of Benjamin and of the relationship between Benjamin and Judah.<sup>4</sup> The Deuterono-

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1. Daniel E. Fleming, *The Legacy of Israel in Judah’s Bible: History, Politics, and the Reinscribing of Tradition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

2. The resilience of Benjaminite identity contrasts with that of the tribe of Simeon, whose territory was contained within Judah’s (Josh 19,9) and was apparently later absorbed into Judah: “The pattern of Judahite domination over and even absorption of Simeon is strongly suggested by the Deuteronomistic work” (Gary N. Knoppers, *1 Chronicles 1-9 [Anchor Bible Commentary]*; New York: Doubleday, 2004], p. 372).

3. Philip R. Davies, “The Trouble With Benjamin,” in R. Rezetko et al. (eds.), *Reflection and Refraction: Studies in Biblical Historiography in Honour of A. Graeme Auld* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), p. 93.

4. Benjamin D. Giffone, “Sit at My Right Hand: The Chronicler’s Portrait of the Tribe of Benjamin in the Social Context of Yehud” (PhD dissertation, Stellenbosch University, 2014), <<http://hdl.handle.net/10019/11833>>. A revised version of this work will be published by T&T Clark in late 2016. The link takes you to a page in Japanese.

mistic History contains detailed accounts of the highs and lows of Benjaminite fortunes, and the alternately tense and peaceful relationship between Judah and Benjamin. The Chronicler, by contrast, attempts to smooth over the troubled history of Judah-Benjamin relations. The two works, therefore, perhaps offer two “snapshots” of intertribal relations: one from the late Babylonian (or early Persian) period and one from the late Persian (or early Hellenistic) period.<sup>5</sup>

The goal of this paper is to develop one particular point of contrast between these “snapshots.” The argument is that the Deuteronomist offers a stereotype of Benjaminite warriors as “special forces,” and that the Chronicler repurposes the stereotype in service of a conciliatory agenda: the reincorporation of wealthy Benjaminites into the Jerusalem temple’s sphere of influence. The remarkable aspect of this cooption is that the Chronicler does not retain or adapt any of the Deuteronomistic material that contributes to this Benjaminite stereotype, only the stereotype itself—i.e., the stereotype only manifests itself in the *Sondergut* material.

This essay is divided into three sections. First, we will briefly examine the historical background of Judah, Israel, Benjamin and Yehud during the eighth through sixth centuries, with particular attention to the evolution of the Benjaminite identity. Second, we will compare the manifestations of the stereotype of Benjaminite “special forces” in the Deuteronomistic History and Chronicles. Finally, we will postulate some reasons for this difference, and suggest a historical situation in which a repurposed Benjaminite stereotype (part of a recasting of Benjaminite identity more generally) would have suited the Chronicler’s agenda.

## II. Benjamin in the Eighth through Sixth Centuries

A cursory geographical survey of the books of Joshua through Kings reveals that Benjaminite territory and Benjaminite characters are quite significant.<sup>6</sup>

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5. My view is that the Deuteronomistic History reached its final form in the early Persian period, and that Chronicles is the product of a single author or school in the middle to late fourth century B.C.E. The present thesis is not dependent to any significant degree on the precise dating of either the Deuteronomistic History or Chronicles, but rather on the idea that the Chronicler used the Deuteronomistic History as a source.

6. One of the earliest works on Benjamin is Klaus-Dietrich Schunck, *Benjamin: Untersuchungen zur Entstehung und Geschichte eines israelitischen Stammes* (BZAW, 86; Berlin: Alfred Töpelmann, 1963). A few more recent examples include: Scott M. Langston, *Cultic Sites in the Tribe of Benjamin: Benjaminite Prominence in the Religion of Israel* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1998); Yigal Levin, “Joseph, Judah and the ‘Benjamin Conundrum,’” *ZAW* 116 (2004), pp. 223-241; Carl S. Ehrlich and Marsha C. White, eds., *Saul in Story and Tradition* (FAT, 47; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2006); Ernst A. Knauf, “Bethel: The Israelite Impact on Judean Language and Literature,” in Oded Lipschits and Manfred Oeming (eds.), *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), pp. 291-349; Joseph Blenkinsopp, “Benjamin Traditions Read in the Early Persian Period,” in Oded

Many of the important sites in the conquest narratives of Joshua (Jericho, Ai, Gibeon) become part of Benjamin's allotment (Josh 18,11-28). Prominent narratives about Benjaminites—narratives that set Benjamin and Judah in opposition or contrast—appear at the beginning and at the end of Judges (Jdg 1,21; 3,12-4,1; 19-21). The book of Samuel contrasts the two houses of Saul and David, and much of the action is set in Benjaminite territory. Jerusalem is a Jebusite city allotted to Benjamin that was finally conquered and made the capital by David (Josh 18,28; 2 Sam 5,6-9), so any narratives set within this city should be understood as relating to Benjamin (whether implicitly or explicitly).<sup>7</sup> In the book of Kings, Bethel and other Benjaminite cities are prominent in the narratives of Northern Israel, and the shifting borders between Judah and Israel appear to have run through Benjamin.<sup>8</sup>

The degree to which these narratives should be considered "historical" in the modern sense does not concern us here. There is no doubt that these memories, whatever their origin, have been filtered through the lens of later concerns. After the conquest of Northern Israel by Assyria in 722 B.C.E., the kingdom of Judah extended its hegemony northward to incorporate much of the Benjaminite territory (2 Kgs 17; 23). However, the balance of power appears to have shifted in the sixth century B.C.E. One of the more important revelations of archaeology has been the overturning of "the myth of the empty land," the notion that the land of Judah was evacuated by a mass deportation to Babylon. Studies by Lipschits and others have demonstrated that the damage wrought by the Babylonians was primarily limited to Jerusalem and its immediate environs, and that the Benjaminite regions of Yehud under Babylonian and early Persian rule actually flourished to a great degree. Far from encountering an "empty land," the waves of *golah* returnees under Per-

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Lipschits and Manfred Oeming (eds.), *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), pp. 629-645; Nadav Na'aman, "Saul, Benjamin and the Emergence of 'Biblical Israel' (Parts 1 & 2)," *ZAW* 121 (2009): pp. 211-224, 335-349.

7. Louis C. Jonker, "Of Jebus, Jerusalem and Benjamin: The Chronicler's *Sondergut* in 1 Chronicles 21 Against the Background of the Late Persian Era in Yehud," in Tyler F. Williams and Paul S. Evans (eds.), *Chronicling the Chronicler: The Book of Chronicles and Early Second Temple Historiography* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), pp. 83-84. I am indebted to Louis Jonker for sharing a pre-publication version of this essay with me.

8. Schunck, *Benjamin: Untersuchungen*, pp. 171-172; Fleming, *Legacy of Israel in Judah's Bible*, pp. 144-161. Note that the ambiguity in Benjamin's status between Judah and Israel that is established in 1 Kgs 12 (ten tribes versus one, "Judah alone" in 12,20) is removed by the Chronicler in 2 Chr 10-11. See also: Bethel's association with the North despite Benjamin's association with Judah (1 Kgs 12,29-33); the war between Baasha and Asa over Ramah (1 Kgs 15,17-22); and Josiah's hegemony extended north to Bethel and Samaria (2 Kgs 23,15-19).

sian rule met with resistance from *she'erit*<sup>9</sup> elites who had filled the power vacuum—many of whom were Benjaminite.<sup>10</sup>

Several scholars have observed that the Deuteronomistic narratives appear to reflect a Benjamin-Judah rivalry. Edelman, for example, suggests that the descendants of Saul and David competed for leadership in early Persian Yehud, and that the Deuteronomistic History in its final form contains an anti-Saul, anti-Benjamin polemic.<sup>11</sup> This seems plausible, though the Deuteronomistic History was perhaps composed from sources that were originally pro-Saul/pro-Benjaminite.<sup>12</sup>

Against the background of this historical rivalry reflected in the complex literary relationship between Benjamin and Judah in Deuteronomistic tradition, the Chronicler seems to be writing during a different phase in Benjamin-Judah relations. In my doctoral dissertation I attempted to demonstrate that the Chronicler—while certainly writing from a pro-Judah, pro-Levi perspective—reshapes the portrait of Benjamin in a positive, conciliatory direction through his omissions, revisions and additions.<sup>13</sup> The conclusion of this paper will reassess this assertion in light of the literary evidence here presented.

Having surveyed the background to the history of Benjamin and posited a broader contrast between the portraits of Benjamin-Judah relations in the Deuteronomistic History and in Chronicles, we will now focus on one particular element of these literary portraits: the motif of Benjaminite “special forces.”

9. The term שְׂאֵרִית (“remnant”/“leftover”), which refers to the communities of Judahites left in the land after 587 B.C.E. (analogous to גִּלוּלָה, “exile”), is purely descriptive, chosen to avoid the theological connotations of the English term “remnant.”

10. Oded Lipschits, *The Fall and Rise of Jerusalem: Judah Under Babylonian Rule* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005); “The History of the Benjamin Region under Babylonian Rule,” *Tel Aviv* 26 (1999): pp. 155-90; see also Hans M. Barstad, *The Myth of the Empty Land: A Study in the History and Archaeology of Judah During the “Exilic” Period* (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1996).

11. Diana V. Edelman, “Did Saulide-Davidic Rivalry Resurface in Early Persian Yehud?” in J. Andrew Dearman and M. Patrick Graham (eds.), *The Land That I Will Show You: Essays on the History and Archaeology of the Ancient Near East in Honour of J. Maxwell Miller* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), pp. 70-72; see also Yairah Amit, “The Delicate Balance in the Image of Saul and Its Place in the Deuteronomistic History,” in Carl S. Ehrlich and Marsha C. White (eds.), *Saul in Story and Tradition* (FAT, 47; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2006), pp. 71-79.

12. Marsha C. White, “Saul and Jonathan in 1 Samuel 1 and 14,” in *Saul in Story and Tradition*, pp. 119-138; Gregory Mobley, “Glimpses of the Heroic Saul,” in *Saul in Story and Tradition*, p. 80. It is usually argued that 1 Sam 9-14 formed the core of this Saul narrative. White points out the connections between 1 Sam 1-2 and Saul-Jonathan, so perhaps some earlier version of 1 Sam 1-14 formed an original narrative of Saul’s anointing prophet, Saul’s rise, and Saul’s success.

13. Giffone, “Sit at My Right Hand.”

### III. Benjaminite "Special Forces"

#### "Special" Forces?

As we turn our attention to the characterizations of Benjaminite warriors, it is important to clarify what is meant by "special forces."<sup>14</sup> This paper suggests that two recognized martial skills/attributes should be understood as complementary and overlapping aspects of the same specialty, irregularity, or uniqueness.

My contention is that the "specialties" or irregularities in view can and should be grouped together and understood in the following way: forms of combat *other* than the typical hand-to-hand combat or battle formation in which each infantryman holds a shield in the left hand and an *edged weapon*—sword or spear—in the right hand (which I will call "regular," "oppositional" or "conventional face-to-face" combat).

Irregularities present themselves in any form of opposition when left-handedness or ambidexterity is introduced—as competitive athletes will attest.<sup>15</sup> Each right-handed soldier in a rank formation protects his own left side with a shield, and attacks with an edged weapon in the right hand. His "right-hand man"—the soldier to the immediate right—protects his comrade's more vulnerable side with a shield in his own left hand, and *his* comrade to the right protects *his* right hand—and so on down the line. Furthermore, an attack by a right-handed opponent can be more easily parried by a shield in the left hand. It is apparent that a left-handed opponent changes the dynamic of both

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14. In an early draft of this paper I used the term "irregular warriors" to refer to the sort of soldiers and warfare in question. However, the term "irregular warrior" traditionally refers to one fighting *not* as part of a uniformed conscripted/enlisted force on behalf of a recognized polity (sometimes called "terrorist," "guerilla fighter," "partisan," or other non-neutral terms). While some of the warriors described in this essay would fall into this category, "special forces" or "special weapons and tactics" more accurately describes the range of the motif/stereotype that I am suggesting.

I am grateful to the participants in the Mid-Atlantic/New England Regional meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature (Newburgh, NY; March 2014) for their constructive comments on the early draft. I am also indebted to Fred Putnam of Eastern University (a biblical scholar and a fencer) for his insightful comments on style and martial terminology.

15. The advantages of left-handedness are particularly evident in sports in which the (a)symmetry of a particular opposition matters a great deal, such as baseball, tennis, or cricket. Left-handers are disproportionately represented at the highest levels of competition in these sports. While some have proposed that natural left-handers enjoy a neurological advantage in two-handed or hand-eye coordination, Wood and Aggleton argue (from a comparison of cricketers, tennis players and soccer/association football goalkeepers) that the tactical advantage of left-handedness is often significant, while innate advantage is undetectable. See C.J. Wood and J.P. Aggleton, "Handedness in 'Fast Ball' Sports: Do Lefthanders Have an Innate Advantage?" *British Journal of Psychology* 80 (1989), pp. 227-240.

offense and defense. Typically, a left-handed combatant (or athletic competitor) will be accustomed to facing right-handed opponents and will be in better position than his opponent to exploit the irregularities.

Another sort of “specialty” would be the use of a *ranged weapon*. The sling and the bow—the two sorts of individual projectile munitions most common in antiquity—require two hands to operate, precluding the effective use of a shield (and also making “handedness” less strategically relevant). These are strictly offensive weapons that are ineffective in close-range, hand-to-hand combat. The most effective use of these long-range weapons is from behind a defensive formation or barrier.

Neither sort of irregularity or specialty would have been unknown in ancient warfare. The contention is merely that soldiers who possessed these special skills (individual projectile munitions) or irregular traits (left-handedness or ambidexterity) would have been notable, and perhaps of great strategic value. Of course, the introduction of the name of “Benjamin”—which may have originally meant “son of the south”<sup>16</sup> but came to be understood also as “son of the right hand”—adds an irony to the left-handed/ambidextrous irregularity that features prominently in some of the biblical narratives.

### *Left-Handed Ehud and His Short Sword (Jdg 3)*

The first manifestation of the “Benjaminite special forces” stereotype is Ehud, the left-handed Benjaminite judge (Jdg 3,12-4,1). Ehud is far from the “ideal” judge. He is, with comical irony, a left-handed (אֶחָד יְמִינִי “right-hand-hindered”) Benjaminite (“right-hand son”)—that is, he is a defective Benjaminite—perhaps. Left-handedness has, in many cultures throughout history, been looked upon with suspicion.<sup>17</sup> He kills Eglon of Moab, not nobly in hand-to-hand combat or on the battlefield, but secretly while the king is sitting in his cool roof chamber. Ehud’s homemade weapon (concealed short sword under his right thigh), his left-handedness and his craftiness are his signature characterizations as a fighter. Although the short sword is an edged weapon, not a ranged weapon, it does not appear to have been designed for effective use in hand-to-hand combat—thus the categorization as a “special weapon” for the purpose of our survey.

Scholarly opinions of the characterization of Ehud in Judges vary widely.<sup>18</sup> However, whether one considers the portrayal of Ehud on balance to be

16. Interestingly: “If Benjamin is really ‘southern’ in local terms...it is from an Ephraimite point of view” (Fleming, *Legacy of Israel in Judah’s Bible*, p. 147).

17 In the ANE, as in many cultures today, the right hand was considered the hand of friendship; an offer of the left hand was an insult. Traces of this sentiment can be seen in modern English, with the word “sinister” derived from the Latin *sinistram*, “left.”

18. Negative evaluations of Ehud include: Lillian R. Klein, *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges (JSOTS, 68; Sheffield: Almond Press, 1988)*, pp. 38, 46-47; Robert H. O’Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges (VTS, 63; Leiden: Brill, 1996)*,



negative or positive, most scholars agree that Judges 3 intends to juxtapose Ehud with Othniel—the first judge and a Judahite (Jdg 3,5-11)—inviting comparisons between the two that influence the later question of which tribe has the right to rule. The account of Ehud is filled with details about the hero himself, his "heroic" act, and the successful rebellion; the Ehud narrative is as elaborate, comical, and ignoble as the Othniel narrative is terse, dignified, and idealized.

*Seven Hundred Left-Handed Slingers of Gibeah (Jdg 20)*

The conclusion of the book of Judges likewise sets left-handed Benjaminites in opposition/contrast to Judahites. When the Benjaminites muster at Gibeah to defend themselves against the rest of Israel (led by Judah: Jdg 20,18), they join 700 "choice men" (אִישׁ בַּחֹר) who defend Gibeah (20,15), each of whom is left-handed and highly accurate with the sling and stone (20,16).

Taking stock of the other combatants, we find three facts that are relevant to our study. First, the other 26,000 Benjaminites who join the Gibeahite left-handed slingers<sup>19</sup> are said to "draw the sword" (שָׁלַף חֶרֶב)—thus, the Benjaminite army contains complementary forces: infantry (with edged weapons for hand-to-hand combat) and individual munitions (ranged-weaponry). The army of Israel, led by Judah, consists of 400,000 who "draw the sword" and are "men of war" (20,2.17)—only infantry are mentioned. The Benjaminite army, though outnumbered fifteen-fold, is able to defeat Israel twice, inflicting casualties totaling 40,000 (20,21.25).

The narrator may be implying, then, that the surprising success of Benjamin against the odds is due to these special forces. The contrast between Benjamin's balanced army and Israel's monolithic army is highlighted by the repeated use of the phrase, "[those who] draw the sword" (שָׁלַף חֶרֶב), which occurs six times in the chapter. It is difficult to imagine that Gibeah's militia consisted of (or at least included) 700 left-handed individuals, all of whom were sling experts—and that these 700 long-range fighters enabled an army of 26,000 to inflict such casualties (40,000) on a force of 400,000 sword-bearing Israelites (20,17.21.25). However implausible the narrative appears,

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pp. 97-98. Evaluations of Ehud that are mostly favorable include: Tammi J. Schneider, *Judges* (Berit Olam; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), p. 52; Barry G. Webb, *The Book of Judges: An Integrated Reading (JSOTS, 46)* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), pp. 130-132; Yairah Amit, "The Story of Ehud (Judges 3:12-30): The Form and the Message," in J. Cheryl Exum (ed.), *Signs and Wonders: Biblical Texts in Literary Focus* (; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), pp. 97-123; Geoffrey P. Miller, "Verbal Feud in the Hebrew Bible: Judges 3:12-30 and 19-21," *JNES* 55 (1996): pp. 105-117.

19. Or, those 25,300 soldiers who, combined with the 700 Gibeahites, total 26,000—the text is not entirely clear.

the contrast in the composition of the armies and the number of casualties points to the *perceived* value of these left-handed ranged-weapon soldiers.

While the narrator clearly places a high strategic value on these Gibeahite slingers, there is no doubt that they are evaluated negatively within the narrative. These Gibeahites are likely participants in the Sodom-like rape of the Levite's concubine (Jdg 19). They are crafty, sinister, fearless and tenacious—and wicked!

*Saul: A Benjaminite "Conventional" Warrior (1 Sam 9-31)*

Scholars have observed the connections between Judges 19-21 and the Saul narratives.<sup>20</sup> The story may have been included partly to cast aspersions on Saul as a royal candidate. Whatever the connection, the Gibeahite warriors in Judges raise expectations for Saul as a military leader, particularly because his signature weapon—a spear—is mentioned specifically (1 Sam 13,22).

Saul's spear is a conventional edged weapon to be used in hand-to-hand combat with armor and shield. The Deuteronomist (or his source) highlights Saul's impressive physical stature (1 Sam 9,2). But like many of Saul's apparent strengths, his stature and his signature weapon are overshadowed by David's traits and exploits.<sup>21</sup> Saul is tall and handsome (1 Sam 9,2). But David is handsome (1 Sam 16,12), and he defeats Goliath, who is much taller than Saul (1 Sam 17,4) and whose spear is longer (17,7). Saul's weapons and armor are of no use to David (17,38-39), who defeats Goliath with expert slingsmanship (17,49-50). David's choice of weapon and his discounting the effectiveness of "sword and spear" in his response to Goliath (17,47) may be a subtle disparagement of Saul's prowess. After all—the author may imply—Saul is a Benjaminite, from Gibeah, no less—shouldn't *he* have been able to defeat a powerful opponent with a sling and stone?<sup>22</sup>

20. Yairah Amit, "The Saul Polemic in the Persian Period," in Oded Lipschits and Manfred Oeming (eds.), *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), pp. 647-661. Amit observes several connections between the narrative of the rape at Gibeah and its consequences (Jdg 19-21) and the stories of Saul: the conflict between a Judah-led coalition and Benjaminite Gibeah; the reference to Jabesh-gilead (Jdg 21,1-15; 1 Sam 31,11-13; 1 Chr 10,11-12); and "the spreading of information by means of a dismembered body" (Jdg 19,29; 1 Sam 11,7; 1 Chr 10,8-10). For Amit, Jdg 19-21 "openly attacks the behavior of the tribe of Benjamin and especially of its town Gibeah, and by inference, covertly also Saul" ("Saul Polemic," pp. 648, 652).

21. Steven L. McKenzie, "Saul in the Deuteronomistic History," in *Saul in Story and Tradition*, pp. 61-67; Mobley, "Glimpses of the Heroic Saul," pp. 80-85.

22. Interestingly, the LXX lists Goliath's height as "four cubits and a span" (1 Sam 17,4), which would make him the same height as Saul or only slightly taller (1 Sam 9,2). This reading discredits Saul even further, since he would have been the logical choice to oppose Goliath based on his height; see J. Daniel Hays, "Reconsidering the Height of Goliath," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48 (2005): 701-714.

The shortcoming of Saul's ability with his signature weapon—a weapon that was conventional and not "stereotypical" of Benjaminites—is further demonstrated by his two outbursts of anger: he hurls his spear—errantly—at David (1 Sam 19,10) and later at Jonathan (20,32-33).

*Jonathan: An Ideal Benjaminite Warrior (1 Sam 13-31)*

Jonathan is also said to have possessed a spear like his father (1 Sam 13,22); however, the weapon that receives greater attention in his hands is the bow (1 Sam 20,20-22.36-40). Jonathan uses his archery skills to warn David of Saul's intentions, thus showing his covenant loyalty to David. Jonathan is presented as skilled enough with the bow to confidently shoot an arrow past his running servant and to place it exactly where he wants it (and to tell the servant where it is). Jonathan is also crafty in battle, exhibiting the sort of courage and cunning that is valued in ancient literature (1 Sam 14,1-15).

I suggest—not on the basis of his skill with the bow—that Jonathan is presented as an ideal Benjaminite in the Deuteronomistic narrative. Rather than claiming his father's throne, he acknowledges a Judahite as YHWH's anointed, makes a covenant with him, and supports him at great risk to his own life (18,1-4; 19,1-3; 20,1-42). Jonathan hopes to sit at David's right hand when David succeeds Saul (23,16-18). David reciprocates Jonathan's loyalty by lamenting his death (2 Sam 1) and showing mercy to his son (2 Sam 9).

Consistent with these other aspects of Jonathan's characterization, his stereotypical Benjaminite skill with the bow is used *appropriately* in the narrator's eyes—that is, his skill is used in service to David.

*Benjaminite "Special Forces" in Chronicles (1 Chr 12; 2 Chr 14; 17)*

As we turn our attention to the "Benjaminite special forces" motif in Chronicles, two preliminary observations may be made concerning the portrayal of Benjaminites in the narrative sections of Chronicles (1 Chr 10-29 and 2 Chr 1-36).

First, despite placing Benjamin on par with Judah in the genealogies (1 Chr 2-4 and 8) and tracing Saul's royal genealogy to the postexile (1 Chr 9,35-44), the Chronicler pays relatively little attention to Saul and his household, for reasons that have been elaborated elsewhere.<sup>23</sup> The only reference to a weapon in the hands of Saul or his close family is Saul's own sword—a conventional edged weapon—which he turns on himself (1 Chr 10,4//1 Sam 31,4).

23. See the discussions of Louis C. Jonker, "Revisiting the Saul Narrative in Chronicles: Interacting with the Persian Imperial Context?" *OTE* 23 (2010), pp. 283-305; and Gary N. Knoppers, "Israel's First King and 'the Kingdom of YHWH in the hands of the sons of David': The Place of the Saulide Monarchy in the Chronicler's Historiography," in *Saul in Story and Tradition*, pp. 187-213. See also Giffone, "Sit at My Right Hand," §6.2.2.1.

Second, other than a few references to the members of Saul's household, all other references to Benjaminites in Chronicles occur in military contexts (except for one: Uriel of Gibeah, 2 Chr 13,2b), and all occur in the Chronicler's *Sondergut*.<sup>24</sup> This underscores the importance of Benjaminites as warriors within the narratives, particularly alongside Judah after the division of the kingdoms in 2 Chronicles 10.

We find three manifestations of the "Benjaminite special forces" motif in Chronicles:

- 1 Chronicles 12 lists Benjaminites who defected to David at Ziklag while Saul was still alive (12,2-7.16-18 [MT 12,2-8.17-19]), and mentions others who gathered to David at Hebron during the (implied) war of succession with Eshbaal (12,29 [MT 12,30]). Among these are men of Saul's family who are ambidextrous and skilled with both the sling and the bow (12,2). Of all the soldiers who defect to David in this chapter, only Benjaminites are said to be skilled with ranged weapons.<sup>25</sup>
- 2 Chronicles 14,8 (MT 14,7) records that Asa's army included 300,000 from Judah and 280,000 from Benjamin. The Judahites were armed with "large shields and spears," and the Benjaminites "bore shields and wielded the bow" (נשאי מגן ודרכי קשת).
- In 2 Chronicles 17,17-18, Eliada and (perhaps) Jehozabad of Benjamin are the fourth and fifth of Jehoshaphat's five military commanders. With Eliada were 200,000 warriors "armed with bow and shield" (נשקי-קשת ומגן)—Eliada's Benjaminites are the only warriors described specifically as archers.

### Comparison

The contrast between the portrayals of Benjaminite "special forces" within the Deuteronomistic History and Chronicles is intriguing. Within these works we find at least six manifestations of the motif, and one remarkable exception that bears the mark of some awareness of the motif (Saul).<sup>26</sup>

24. Giffone, "Sit at My Right Hand," §6.2.2.2.

25. Men of other tribes are said to be armed with "shield and spear" (Gad, 12,8 [12,9]; Judah, 12,24 [12,25]; Naphtali, 12,34 [12,35]). Others are able to "arrange in battle formation" (ערכי מלחמה; Zebulun, 12,33 [12,34]; Dan and Asher 12,35-36 [12,36-37]; cf 12,38 [12,39]), some with "all weapons of battle" (בכלי-כלי מלחמה; Zebulun, and the Josephite tribes: 12,37 [12,38]). Issachar contributes gifted strategists or seers (12,32 [12,33]). But even those who are able to use "all weapons of battle" are said to be arranged in formation, so presumably their arms are conventional edged weapons (sword/spear and shield).

26. It is also intriguing that three narratives of Abner's participation in the war of succession (2 Sam 2-3) are highly suggestive with respect to the motif of "Benjaminite special forces," though not as explicit as the other passages highlighted in the Deuteronomistic History: the mutual killing of twenty-four Benjaminite and Judahite champions (2 Sam 2,12-17); Abner kills Asahel (2 Sam 2,18-23); and Joab kills

In the Deuteronomistic History, we encounter two sets of Benjaminites who apply their special skills "inappropriately" (in the narrator's estimation), one character who fails to apply special skills "appropriately," and one character who applies his special skills "appropriately." Ehud is, at best, a complex figure who comes up short when compared to Othniel. The Gibeahite slingers are perpetrators of one of the vilest crimes in the Hebrew Bible, and oppose Israel led by Judah. Saul's stature, his tactics, and his conventional weapon come up short when compared to David, who bests Saul using the traditional skills of Saul's own clan. By contrast, Jonathan uses his craftiness and archery skills to protect David.

In Chronicles, Benjaminites continue to play an important role in Israel in the service of Judahite kings. Benjaminites are portrayed as crucial in David's rise and the establishment of his kingdom. Benjaminites are prominent in administration and the military.

The references to Benjaminites in 1 Chronicles 12 and 2 Chronicles are remarkable in two respects. First, all are part of the Chronicler's *Sondergut*. Second, these references reinforce the Deuteronomistic History's traditional characterization of Benjaminites as expert slingers and archers, as well as the fascination with Benjaminite ambidexterity or left-handedness.<sup>27</sup> But the stereotype manifests itself only in the *Sondergut* material, and the Chronicler has not included any of the passages from the *Vorlage* that contribute to these characterizations (or from which these characterizations are derived).

In contrast to the instances observed in Judges and Samuel, the "Benjaminite special forces" motif becomes a positive feature of the tribal characterization in Chronicles, since these traditional tribal skills are used in the service of David or a Davidide king to strategically complement the conventional Judahite warriors—rather than to oppose Judah or David. No mention is made in Chronicles of Saul's signature spear or David's skill with the sling, because these do not fit the stereotype.

Certainly not all Benjaminites are portrayed as left-handed/ambidextrous or skilled with long-distance weapons. Rather, the proposal is that the literary motif was compelling enough to have been maintained in a variety of manifestations across the two biblical works.<sup>28</sup> While in the Deuteronomistic His-

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Abner (2 Sam 3,23-39; compare to 20,9-10). In each case, the narrator's moral characterization of the actions is based on an implicit understanding of the nobility of "regular" oppositional right-handed-vs.-right-handed combat.

27. Interestingly, no mention is made in Chronicles of David's renowned skill with the sling (1 Sam 17,50), though the Chronicler harmonizes in David's favor the contradictory accounts of Goliath's death (1 Sam 17,50; 2 Sam 21,19; 1 Chr 20,5).

28. Perhaps an apt comparison would be the portrayal of certain characters in the fictional worlds of C.S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia* or J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. In Narnia, "dwarves" are characterized or stereotyped as skilled very skilled archers; besting a dwarf in an archery competition is a high achievement.

tory the “Benjaminite special forces” stereotype is usually negative, in Chronicles it is adopted for positive characterizations only.

#### IV. Conclusion

I have suggested the presence of a stereotype or literary motif concerning Benjaminite warriors in the Deuteronomistic History and Chronicles. The observations concerning the irony of Benjaminite left-handedness and ambidexterity (in Jdg 3, Jdg 20 and 1 Chr 12,2) are not new; however, I have suggested that they should be linked to the motif of skill with ranged or unconventional weapons. The two motifs are linked in three ways: 1) in practice, they represent a deviation from “regular” hand-to-hand combat; 2) they overlap within the narratives themselves; and 3) both are specifically linked to Benjaminites—left-handedness by the irony of the name, and long-distance weaponry by the fact that Benjaminites are characterized uniquely among the tribes by that skill (i.e., whenever Benjaminites are noted in a tribal list as having skill with the sling or bow, they are the *only* tribe that possesses that skill).

Whether or not this stereotype/motif originated with the Deuteronomistic History is uncertain. But the relevant observation is that the Chronicler seems to have adopted the stereotype without adopting any of the manifestations from the Deuteronomistic History. I suggest that this is part of a larger strategy: to smooth over tensions between Benjamin and Judah that were part of the social memory of Yehudians in the late Persian (or early Hellenistic) period.<sup>29</sup>

Material evidence from the Babylonian and Persian periods indicates the Jerusalem cult was heavily reliant upon the participation of wealthier areas to its north.<sup>30</sup> Knowles states, “In a situation where most members of the population of Yehud were subsistence farmers living in small unwalled villages, these individual offerings were probably small, so the temple would need the support of a large number of people.”<sup>31</sup> One of the Chronicler’s goals may

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In Tolkien’s world of Middle Earth, elves—not dwarves—typically possess superhuman skill with the bow.

29. This goal is a secondary component of numerous goals, including the legitimization of the Jerusalem cult, and the establishment of the “All Israel” ideal. The pro-Benjamin agenda relates indirectly to these goals: the Chronicler highlights the fact that the temple was built on the border between Benjamin and Judah (1 Chr 21,1-22,1), and Benjamin is the primary “other” constituent tribe of “All Israel” (besides the special tribes of Judah and Levi) in the Chronicler’s day (1 Chr 9). See Jonker, “Of Jebus, Jerusalem and Benjamin,” pp. 81-102.

30. Giffone, “Sit at My Right Hand,” §7.2.1.

31. Melody D. Knowles, *Centrality Practiced: Jerusalem in the Religious Practice of Yehud & the Diaspora in the Persian Period* (Atlanta: SBL, 2006), p. 117. John W. Wright suggests: “The small, poor Persian province of Yehud faced new challenges in the demands placed upon them as the land to their immediate south west became the frontier between the land of Egypt and of the Great King. Moreover, *ethnoi* more

have been expanding the temple's constituency, and thus its revenue and relative prominence. The historically Benjaminite and southern Josephite regions, more prosperous than Jerusalem's immediate vicinity, would have been an attractive audience for the Chronicler's message.<sup>32</sup>

As part of a larger strategy of incorporating Benjaminites into the Jerusalem temple's sphere of influence, the Chronicler repurposes the "Benjaminite special forces" stereotype in his narrative with a more positive spin. For the Chronicler, Benjamin as a whole and Benjaminites as individuals are "at their best" when they are supporting the Jerusalem temple, serving the Davidide monarch, and complementing Judah and Judahites—serving as Judah's powerful "right hand."

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numerous, powerful, and wealthier stood to Yehud's southwest, west, northwest, and north. From other sources, we know that the Jerusalem temple struggled to sustain a centralized economic position within the province. A thriving temple economy could help sustain Yehud against the powerful economic and political pressures toward assimilation" ("The Priestly Center of the Sons of Levi: Temple Familial Patronage Differentiation in the Book of Chronicles," presented at the annual meeting of the SBL in Chicago, IL, in November, 2012). I am grateful to Professor Wright for sharing a pre-publication version of this paper with me.

32. This message appears to be embedded in many of the direct-speech passages in Chronicles. A prime example would be David's appeal in 1 Chr 29. Knoppers writes (in his comments on 1 Chr 26,20-32): "Major benefactors, whose dedications make their way to the treasury, include Samuel the seer, Saul son of Qish, Abner son of Ner, and Joab son of Zeruiah (26,28). It seems that in Chronicles any Israelite contemporary of David who was of any consequence and who ever waged war makes a dedicatory gift. In his speech to the entire assembly (29,1-5), David makes a concerted pitch to enlarge this elite circle of benefactors" (Gary N. Knoppers, *1 Chronicles 1-9* [Anchor Bible Commentary; New York: Doubleday, 2004], p. 886).