

# Transjordan and the Southern Levant

Edited by  
BENEDIKT HENSEL

*Archaeology and Bible*

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**Mohr Siebeck**

# Archaeology and Bible

Edited by

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# Transjordan and the Southern Levant

New Approaches Regarding the Iron Age  
and the Persian Period from Hebrew Bible Studies  
and Archaeology

Edited by  
Benedikt Hensel

in collaboration with Jordan Davis

Mohr Siebeck

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## Preface

Considering the Iron Age, the study of the Transjordanian regions and the kingdoms of Ammon, Moab, and Edom during that period has experienced an upswing in recent years, with particularly high interest in its historical and archaeological aspects as well as its place within larger Near Eastern studies. Meanwhile, its importance for the fate of the Southern Levant in antiquity is becoming increasingly clear. Despite lying on the fringes of the Southern Levant, these kingdoms were rather influential polities; both the copper mining activities of Edom in the early stages of its nomadic tribal organization (at Timna and at Faynan) as well as the later international trade and economic systems proved rather impactful for the entire eastern Mediterranean. In short, with these intriguing perspectives, new developments in the fields of Transjordanian archaeology and Hebrew Bible studies, and the complex cultural entanglement of the regions involved in the background, it becomes clear that Transjordan and its part in the cultural, religious, and political development within the Southern Levant and beyond needs to be re-addressed and re-evaluated. A task which the present volume seeks to undertake via its detailed studies.

This volume is the result of some of my projects and research related to Transjordan. I mention here only a few: In 2022 a volume on “Edom and Idumea in the Persian Period” was published (Equinox Publishing), which I developed together with Diana V. Edelman and Ehud Ben Zvi. The studies collected in that volume show the cross-cultural impression of Transjordan. During the work on the Edom volume, the idea emerged to focus on Edom in the broad temporal perspective, from the Iron I to the Hellenistic period. Together with my colleague and friend Erez Ben-Yosef (Tel Aviv University) we held a three-day workshop on this topic in the context of the EABS Annual Conference 2022 in Toulouse: “Edom East and West of the Arabah Valley, in the Negev and in the Hebrew Bible.” The results from this conference led to the realization for the need of looking at the whole Transjordan. This was followed in late summer 2022 by a conference on “Transjordan in Biblical Traditions: Exploring New Avenues and Perspectives for Future Research” in Oldenburg, which I organized.

The present volume provides a representative sample of the fruitful and stimulating discussions that arose in these areas. I am glad that many distinguished international specialists contributed to the success of this volume with their articles. It was important to me to make this volume and the new research

results it presents available to the research community as soon as possible. I will be able to include one of those who had to cancel their contribution due to time constraints in a second volume, which is already in the planning stage.

There is a high potential for new discoveries within Persian period Transjordan. Here, research still has a lot of homework to do – I am therefore pleased that this volume is able to present four detailed articles that provide innovative and material-rich contributions from archaeology as well as Hebrew Bible Studies.

I would like to offer my thanks to all contributors to the volume for their excellent articles and further stimulating the conversation – be it during the sessions at the various conferences or in discussion with me as the editor and my postdoc research assistant Dr. Jordan Davis while writing and finalizing their articles. I also hope that this volume will encourage (the much needed) further discussion.

Dr. Jordan Davis provided magnificent help at all stages of the organization of the conferences and the editing of the volume. I wish to extend our gratitude towards the editors of this series, Israel Finkelstein, Deirdre Fulton, Oded Lipschits, Christophe Nihan, Thomas Römer, and Konrad Schmid, for accepting the volume for publication. We want to express our sincere appreciation for the editorial staff at Mohr Siebeck for their help in preparing this volume, for their professionalism and for the support they have provided us.

Oldenburg, June 2023

Benedikt Hensel

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# New Impulses from Archaeology, Cultural Studies, and Hebrew Bible Studies on Transjordan in the Context of the Southern Levant and Beyond

An Introduction

*Benedikt Hensel*

## 1. Transjordan: No Marginal Phenomenon during the Biblical Periods

There is a certain blind spot in the study of Israel's and Judah's history, and in a sense, it encompasses the entire Transjordan region, or in more traditional terms, Ammon, Moab, and Edom. The archaeology of the southern Levant is much further along in the historical reappraisal of these regions; biblical scholarship, in my view, is still lagging behind. This has mainly to do with the assumed double "marginal position" of Transjordan:

1. From the point of view of Israel's history, i.e., in Cis-Jordan, Transjordan lies on the periphery – the name Transjordan also emphasizes this terminologically.
2. From the perspective of Near Eastern Studies and the great empires in Mesopotamia, this region was long perceived as a peripheral region, as a near-worthless extension of the Assyrian, Babylonian, or Persian empires that were steadily spreading across the Levant towards Egypt.

Yet, considering the Iron Age, the study of the Transjordanian regions and the kingdoms of Ammon, Moab, and Edom during that period has experienced an upswing in recent years, with particularly high interest in its historical and archaeological aspects as well as its place within larger Near Eastern studies. Meanwhile, its importance for the fate of the Southern Levant in antiquity is becoming increasingly clear. Despite lying on the fringes of the Southern Levant, these kingdoms were rather influential polities; both the copper mining activities of Edom in the early stages of its nomadic tribal organization (at Timna<sup>1</sup> and at Faynan<sup>2</sup>) as well as the later international trade and economic

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<sup>1</sup> Levy et al. 2014.

<sup>2</sup> See Ben-Yosef 2018, 28–63.

systems proved rather impactful for the entire eastern Mediterranean.<sup>3</sup> The Transjordanian regions of Moab,<sup>4</sup> Ammon,<sup>5</sup> and Edom<sup>6</sup> stood alongside the Aramean kingdoms, the Phoenician city-states, and the Southern Levantine coastal plain under the cultural influence of the Philistines as places of vital importance for their respective cultural contacts in the Iron Age until the Babylonian conquest of the sixth century BCE.

As has been correctly suggested by various scholars both recently and in the more distant past, it was under the Neo-Assyrian imperial expansion of the ninth to seventh centuries BCE that the regions prospered and ultimately developed into full-grown polities or kingdoms. Moab, Ammon, and Edom were closely integrated into the network of trade routes, many of which were also largely controlled by the pastoral tribes, possibly the Edomites.<sup>7</sup> The so-called “King’s Highway” emerged in the Assyrian period as an essential artery for the Near East, and its route from Mesopotamia to the Assyrian-controlled port of Tell el-Khulefi on the Red Sea via Syria and Transjordan established a swift connection to (Upper) Egypt and northwestern Arabia. Its geographic position suggests that it was especially the Edomites who were involved in the transportation of goods from the Hijaz (in modern western Saudi Arabia) through their own territory on both sides of the Arabah and further westward to Gaza. These routes provided opportunities for both trade and cultural contact, and offered the residents access to international wares and technological expertise.<sup>8</sup> From early on, the Assyrian authorities had promoted this “Arabian trade” through the Transjordanian territories.<sup>9</sup>

Seemingly, the Transjordanian kingdoms along the route were a key asset for the Assyrians to assert authority over nearby kinship-based groups, as has been convincingly argued by Bradley Crowell in his recently published monograph *Edom at the Edge of Empire: A Social and Political History*. With help from the tribes – named as “Arabs” in inscriptions – incense in particular was transported through a route that would come to take its name as the “Incense

<sup>3</sup> See Knauf 2019, 281–295.

<sup>4</sup> See MacDonald 2020 (despite the title, the study deals almost exclusively with Late Bronze and Iron Age Moab); Gaß 2009; Timm 1989; and Bienkowski 2009.

<sup>5</sup> Hübner 1992; 2019, 251–279; and Tyson 2014. More generally on religion in Iron Age Transjordan: Schmitt 2020, 165–171.

<sup>6</sup> Crowell 2021; and Danielson 2020 (unpublished PhD thesis); MacDonald 2020; cf. also the classical studies: Weippert 1971 (unpublished Habilitation); and Bartlett 1989.

<sup>7</sup> Due to the findings in the copper ore districts of Timna and Faynan, some scholars consider the possibility of an early, Iron I “invisible kingdom” of Edom; in particular, this hypothesis is currently advocated vehemently by Levy et al. 2014, 977–1001; Ben-Yosef 2019, 361–387. For different perspectives see esp. Fantalkin/Finkelstein 2006, 33.

<sup>8</sup> On Transjordan’s connection with the trade routes, see Frahm 2017, 299–310; Tebes 2006, 45–62.

<sup>9</sup> See Lindsay 1976, 29–39; Beaulieu 1989, 165–185.

Route.” Incense trade became equally crucial in the Neo-Babylonian period (625–539 BCE). Cosmetics, disinfectants, and medicinal ointments as well as prestigious luxury wares used for cult purposes guaranteed high profit margins.

It is thus no wonder that time and again, Moab, Ammon, and Edom play significant roles in the biblical texts that reflect the city-state milieu of the Iron Age II – even if these texts regard them quite ambivalently. The Hebrew Bible mentions Moab, Ammon, and Edom as neighbors, occasional coalition partners, and frequent enemies of Judah and Israel. The depiction in the historical books of the Hebrew Bible of the contacts of the Transjordanian kingdoms with the early Israelite state may be inaccurate in its details and is a matter of heavy debate,<sup>10</sup> especially given the great unlikelihood of an empire established under David that stretched into the territories of Moab and Edom as well as other neighboring polities. However, even if the texts stem from a later period, they nevertheless attest to the importance that the biblical authors and redactors attributed to Moab, Ammon, and Edom by retrojecting initial contacts into the early monarchic and even pre-monarchic periods.

### 1.1 *Trans- and Cisjordan as One Cultural Zone*

It can therefore be assumed with good reason that the importance of the Transjordan regions, especially in Iron Age I and II, cannot be overestimated.

In addition, Transjordan together with its “semantic counterpart” Cisjordan also describe a common – and not a shared – cultural space. The archaeological field has increasingly realized in recent years (although unfortunately only within the context of fine details of findings or specific sites, and only sporadically) that the material culture indicates multifaceted interactions between Cisjordan and Transjordan between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries BCE.<sup>11</sup> Unlike what is suggested by the geographic designation “Transjordan” and is consistently presented in present research – the Jordan River as well as the Wadi Arabah did *not* represent a geographic, intellectual, or cultural divide. The Jordan River and the Wadi Arabah were a *route* and *not a barrier*, connecting Transjordan with the west.<sup>12</sup> A description of these regions must therefore also include its complex and complicated connections to the Southern Levant and to Judah. Or, stated differently, the regions typically referred to as Transjordanian (in traditional terms, Moab, Ammon, and Edom) are an essential part of the history of the Southern Levant as a whole. For that reason, the volume understands the term Transjordan in the way that not only the “East Jordanian”

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<sup>10</sup> For recent discussion, see Na’aman 2015, 197–211.

<sup>11</sup> See especially Thareani 2017, 409–428 on the “cultural contact zone” in the Southern Negev; and Hensel 2021a, 103–107 (discussion of literature, with discussion of the biblical material).

<sup>12</sup> Bienkowski/Galor 2006 were in fact the first publication to make this point and changed our perspective. See now also Danielson 2022; and Bienkowski 2022.

regions are considered, but a description of Transjordan, as presented in the volume, also covers the Jordan River as well as the Wadi Arabah. The Persian region and later province of Idumea, which established itself as a successor product of the former kingdom of Edom, is a telling example of how “Transjordan” had an immense cultural influence in Cisjordanian areas as well.

*To sum up the observation so far, it is intriguing to realize* that, despite lying on the fringes of the Southern Levant, the Transjordan regions (together with the Jordan Valley and Idumea in the Western Arabah Valley) prove rather *impactful* for the entire eastern Mediterranean and especially for the formation of Judah, early Judaism, and their normative scriptures that later became the Hebrew Bible. This is one major perspective this volume and its contributions will focus on.

In the current debate there are many open questions regarding the history of the Transjordanian regions, their impact on the history of the Southern Levant as such, and their reflection within certain biblical traditions and – correspondingly – the dating and meaning of certain redactional layers seemingly relating to certain Transjordanian historical realities. In particular, the question of the early origins of the Transjordan sociological and political “entities” in the early Iron Age I. A crucial and vivid debate between (amongst others) Piotr Bienkowski, Erez Ben-Yosef, and Israel Finkelstein develops around the question of the so-called early statehoods or early monarchies in these regions, the existence (or non-existence) of a related phenomenon coined “invisible kingdoms” (a term and theory put forward in recent years mostly by Erez Ben-Yosef’s studies) and its possible methodological and cultural-historical implications.<sup>13</sup>

### *1.2 Bringing the Persian and Hellenistic Periods into Focus*

While recent research in this field has highlighted the significance of Edom, Moab, and Ammon for the Iron Age I and II (especially for transregional trade) in many excellent and detailed studies, the history of Transjordan *from the Babylonian period onwards* is a notorious desideratum in research, lacking a coherent, concise depiction of the region. This period even regularly disappears from current depictions of the history of Israel and Judah.<sup>14</sup> The reasons for this I have dealt with elsewhere,<sup>15</sup> and they do not need to be specifically discussed here, these are, however, particularly related to a misjudgment of the

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<sup>13</sup> See, e.g., Ben-Yosef 2019, 361–387; Ben-Yosef/Zachary 2023; and earlier already Levy et al. 2014, 977–1001, who advocate for an early (Iron I) Edomite but “invisible kingdom”; for the different perspective see esp. Fantalkin/Finkelstein 2006, 33 and Bienkowski 2023, 1–5.

<sup>14</sup> See, e.g., Tilly/Zwickel 2011; Kratz 2013; Schmitz 2014; Knauf/Niemann 2021.

<sup>15</sup> See Hensel 2024.

archaeological findings, which has been occurring since Nelson Glueck<sup>16</sup> in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century BCE had established.

In contrast, the latest findings suggest just the opposite: The archaeological record proves to be quite complex.<sup>17</sup> Granted, despite a long history of research,<sup>18</sup> the archaeological coverage of the various Transjordan regions had long remained fragmentary, as large areas have not been surveyed and others have provided data that are not stratigraphically controlled. Only a few sites have been excavated in the past, and only three major sites have been published in their final form, while others have been presented in the form of articles, reports, and overviews.<sup>19</sup> This means that questions about precise dating, use of sites, and the nature of the material culture could not be answered effectively.<sup>20</sup> However, with these methodological restraints in mind, recent findings strongly suggest that there was a significant decline in settlement history after the Babylonian interventions, but there was also *continuity of settlement* at several key sites in the Persian period, as well as a continuation of nomadic or semi-nomadic pastoralism that had been a characteristic of this landscape for centuries.<sup>21</sup> An increasing number of finds can be attributed to the Babylonian, Persian and later periods, and there is also a growing body of pottery and small finds at many locations from the Persian and Hellenistic periods. The timing of the project is thus ideal for undertaking a contextualization and systemization of the findings up-to-date with such publications.

Biblical research has also since identified the Persian period as a decisive phase for the formation of the Hebrew Bible<sup>22</sup> and has become sensitized to the possibility that specific texts that reference Transjordan may have stemmed from that time and do also depict or reflect contemporary “Transjordanian realities.” Particularly noteworthy are the *positive* (!) depictions of Moab or Edom in contrast to their earlier, generally *negative* depictions. Certain biblical texts from the Pentateuch, Enneateuch (Gen–2 Kgs), the prophetic corpus, and Ruth (for Moab) appear to depict particular affiliations and points of contact with Edom, Moab, and Ammon during the late 6<sup>th</sup> century or later. It is especially for the regions of Edom and Idumea (but only for these) in Persian times, that various detailed studies on different textual areas of the Hebrew Bible are available in this regard, such as on the reflections of Persian Idumean realities

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<sup>16</sup> See, e.g., Glueck 1933, 83.

<sup>17</sup> Bienkowski 2014, 782–794.

<sup>18</sup> For research on Edom see the aforementioned studies from notes 6 and 12.

<sup>19</sup> For a discussion of the published material see MacDonald 2015, 34 and Lindner/Farajat 1987, 75–185; Bienert et al. 2000, 119–148, esp. 122–133.

<sup>20</sup> On the methodological problems see Bienkowski 2014, 782.

<sup>21</sup> LaBianca/Younger 1995, 399–415: 403–405.

<sup>22</sup> See, among others, Gertz et al. 2016.

in the late editorial texts of the Jacob Cycle,<sup>23</sup> in the Book of Chronicles<sup>24</sup>; in the late redactional “Edom texts” in Samuel to Kings<sup>25</sup> and for the post-exilic prophetic corpus.<sup>26</sup> Yet, the phenomenon as such is a much broader one, and one may identify the reflection of Transjordanian realities beyond the regions of Edom and Idumea also in so-called Moab, Ammon, or Gilead texts of late origins.<sup>27</sup>

The volume will focus on Transjordan from the Babylonian periods in several articles and from different methodological perspectives, which will cover the material findings that we are aware of up until now and bring this together in a consistent picture with the biblical evidence.

## 2. Scope and Aim of the Volume

The present volume focuses on Transjordanian regions in biblical times, covering the early Iron Age I down to the Hellenistic periods. Unlike current research, Transjordan is not perceived here as a geographical or cultural marginal phenomenon, but the volume takes it upon itself to describe the integration of Transjordan both within the Southern Levant and then, however, also into the major supra-regional references of world of antiquity in the ancient Near East, namely its connections with the regions of the Mediterranean, Egypt, and Mesopotamia along with their major political powers.

Many questions surrounding Transjordan and its influence on history, religious history, and cultural history are currently unresolved. This volume captures these areas of discussion in its breadth. In particular, this volume is the first to present studies that deal with the Persian period in Transjordan from a multi-disciplinary perspective – a period that has been almost completely ignored in current research in favor of the Iron Age.

The task of understanding the complex history of Transjordan and its entanglement with Cisjordan and especially Judah during these periods requires a *multidisciplinary perspective*, that is a combination of perspectives from (territorial) history, socio-cultural history, and the literary history of the Hebrew Bible. This task will be met in the volume by combining for the first time the research and methodological perspectives from the disciplines of archaeology, Hebrew Bible studies, social/cultural history, Assyriology, ancient history, and religious history, which will enable a comprehensive and precise treatment of the topic.

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<sup>23</sup> See Hensel 2021a, 57–134 and Hensel 2021b, 397–417.

<sup>24</sup> See Ben Zvi 2022a, 321–337 and Ben Zvi 2022b, 429–439.

<sup>25</sup> See Germany 2022, 363–391.

<sup>26</sup> See Edelman 2022, 392–428.

<sup>27</sup> On this see Hensel 2024 (with further literature).

### 3. Structure of the Volume

The volume will be divided in two sections. The opening essay of the first section, termed “The Iron Age: Cultural Contacts and Geopolitical Contextualization,” comes from *Zachary Thomas* (Tel Aviv University, Israel). Thomas’ article, “Early Iron Age Politics in the Southern Levant: Methodological Remarks,” provides a critique against so-called “neo-evolutionary” models of statehood. That is, the often uncritically accepted idea that tribes developed into chiefdoms, which in turn developed into states. Thomas argues that this is a particularly Euro-centric idea that has been anachronistically imposed upon ancient cultures, not least those of Israel and Judah. Thomas highlights three key areas of weakness in this regard: 1) problems underlying the assumptions of sociopolitical organization in the ancient Near East; 2) the lack of archaeological evidence for securely identifying state structures, and 3) the problem of “gaps” in the archaeological record, especially the problem of tent-based tribal organizations that leave little to no archaeological trace. With these key points Thomas pleads for a more critical view of history, one in which archaeology does *not* function as the final arbiter of the truth.

In “Friendly Aggression: Egypt’s Interests in Transjordan between Diplomacy, Trade, and Conflict (ca. 1075–525 B.C.),” *Katja Weiß* (University of Mainz, Germany) emphasizes the nature of cultural contact between Egypt and Transjordan, especially during the 26<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. Weiß argues that the Libyan kings forwarded a policy of “friendly aggression” whereby Egypt attempted to gain access to all the resources they needed while trying to limit political and military conflict. Instead, a forceful trade policy was enacted such that Egypt ensured its place within the trade network of the Levant and beyond. She argues that Egypt’s goal was not to expand its own empire like the Pharaoh’s of old, but to initiate ever thicker trade arrangements with its neighbors.

In “Inscribing the Northern Kingdom of Israel’s Eastern and Southern Interests: The Exodus-Wilderness-Eastern Conquest Tradition,” *Quinn Daniels* (New York University, USA) argues that the Transjordanian conquest, as preserved in Deut 1–3\*, best represents the ending of the exodus tradition that would have circulated in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. He proposes that Israel’s literary combination of the exodus, the wilderness, and the eastern conquest functioned to inscribe into the distant past their current landholdings in the Transjordan, and likewise, their current activities in the deep south. Daniels further suggests that such a literary piece could have been used in training Israelite scribal administrators in the divinely-ordained routes to and from the southern desert.

In “Israelite and Judahite Involvement in Transjordan during the Monarchic Period: A Synthesis of the Biblical and Extrabiblical Sources,” *Stephen Germany* (University of Basel, Switzerland) questions the region of Gilead as it is preserved in 2 Samuel. Although references to the Transjordanian region of



Gilead occur most frequently in biblical narratives set prior to the end of the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 BCE, there is good reason to conclude that many of the biblical texts relating to Gilead were written by Judean scribes long after the periods that they portray. Germany thus considers what could have motivated these later Judean authors to write about a region that possibly had little historical connections to Judah at the time when many of the texts in question were composed. Through its analysis of two case studies from 2 Samuel (the site of Mahanaim and the figure of Barzillai the Gileadite), the study concludes that certain references to Gilead in 2 Samuel serve a symbolic function as part of a discourse on exile and life in the diaspora following the end of the kingdom of Judah in 586 BCE.

In “Sihon and the Problem of Israel in Transjordan,” *Jordan Davis* (University of Oldenburg, Germany) demonstrates that the Sihon narrative sits at odds with the broader Hexateuchal narrative, which features very clear indicators that the Jordan marks a distinct, theological border. Given these strong indicators, the idea that Israel conquered Sihon’s (and Og’s) territory in Transjordan is jarring. Davis thus investigates the Sihon narrative in Num 21:21–35\* and Deut 2:24–3:20\* and proposes that an ideological/theological explanation underlies the development of this tradition. The Sihon tradition was developed as a reaction to Numbers 32, whose roots go back to the Northern royal tradition of the Nimshides, the introduction of the character of Sihon, then, seeks to explain Israel’s Transjordan presence in light of the later notion that the Promised Land was confined to Cisjordan.

In “Tribes and Territories in Transjordan: The Tribe of Gad in Moab and Israel,” *Erasmus Gaß* (University of Augsburg, Germany) argues that the core territory of Moab is to be found in the Mishor, north of the Arnon river, and not on the *Arḏ el-Kerak* since this area was previously called ‘Ar. According to the Moabite perspective, Mesha united different tribes settling in the area of “Moab” by using the geographical term “Moab” as supra-tribal identity marker based on geography and by referring to the dynastic god, Kemosh, as legitimation for his territorial claims. Gaß then turns his attention to the tribe of Gad and argues that this was an indigenous population group living in the land of Moab and thus belonged to Mesha’s kingdom. The Mesha Stele report of the Gadite massacre in the city of Ataroth is best explained as a punishment for disloyalty in light of their cooperation with the Omrides.

The second section, “The Persian Period: Overcoming a Research Desideratum, Tracing Biblical Traditions, and Their Historical Backgrounds,” opens with an article authored by *Benedikt Hensel* (University of Oldenburg, Germany). In “Transjordan and Judah from the Babylonian to the Hellenistic Periods (6<sup>th</sup>–2<sup>nd</sup> Centuries BCE): Their Cultural, Religious, Economic, and Political Entanglements and Their Impact on the Formation of the Hebrew Bible and Emerging Judaism,” Hensel presents a reconstruction of the historical development of Transjordan (in traditional terms: Ammon, Moab, and Edom),

the Jordan Valley, the western Arabah Valley, and Idumea from the Babylonian to Hellenistic periods (6<sup>th</sup> to 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries BCE) in the context of the Southern Levant. The article first presents a brief history of research relating to the Transjordan in the context of the Southern Levant, in particular the changing perspective on the limitations of research on Transjordan concerning the Persian period realities, as well as a discussion on the possibilities of identifying and characterizing findings of the Persian period. This is followed by an analysis of the presently available archaeological, epigraphic, iconographic, and literary (i.e., biblical) sources. A particular emphasis will be dedicated to Transjordan's cultural, political, and economic entanglement with Cisjordan, especially regarding questions of group identity and the attribution of ethnicity, as well as the possible reflections of these historical realities in different biblical traditions. The article demonstrates that despite lying on the fringes of the Southern Levant, the Transjordan regions (together with the Jordan Valley and Idumea in the western Arabah Valley) prove rather *impactful* for the entire eastern Mediterranean and especially for the formation of Judah and early Judaism, and their normative scriptures that later became the Hebrew Bible.

In "Transjordan in the Persian Period: The Archaeological Evidence and Patterns of Occupation," *Piotr Bienkowski* (University of Manchester, UK) shows that the current archaeological evidence contradicts the old assumption for an occupational gap during in Transjordan during the Persian period. With evidence from a series of sites it is demonstrated that there are distinctive patterns of occupation in Edom, Ammon, and the Jordan Valley, and some regional variation in the local pottery. Imported Attic pottery of the fifth and fourth centuries BCE have been found at sites throughout Transjordan, which demonstrates that they were connected to the trade and exchange system with the Mediterranean.

In the essay, "Powerful 'Localisms': Interconnecting Imperial, Regional, and Local Expressions in Persian-Period Glyptic East of the Jordan River," *Ben Greet* (University of Zurich, Switzerland) surveys a number of recently discovered glyptics found primarily in the region of Amman. He demonstrates that although many of motifs can be traced back to the symbolism from larger empires, that the local forms are not inherently "Egyptian" or "Persian," etc. rather they have undergone their own local processes of adaptation and evolution. Via this "localism," Greet argues that the glyptics demonstrate not only the broader imperial influences of their age, but also the interconnectedness of people groups within the Southern Levant.

In "Edom in Yehud: How did Postexilic Judeans Imagine Edom?" *Yigal Levin* (Bar-Ilan University, Israel) surveys the references to Edom, Seir, and Esau in Neo-Babylonian and Persian period biblical literature, and attempts to understand the historical background and the geographical allusions of these references. Levin argues that all texts that specify geographical features refer to the territory of Iron-Age Edom, while none of them seem to refer to a

supposed Edomite “invasion” of southern Judah or to the area later known as “Idumea.” Given that Edom, Seir, and Esau are not mentioned at all in Ezra-Nehemiah, Haggai, or Zechariah Levin concludes that the province of “Idumea” did not exist in the Persian period.

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