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Shamgar ben Anat (Judg 3:31) – a Meaningful Name

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Shamgar is mentioned twice in the Hebrew Bible. First we read after the story of the liberation by Ehud and before the reference to Ehud's death: »After him was Shamgar the son of Anat, who killed six hundred men of the Philistines with an ox goad; and he also delivered Israel« (Judg 3:31). The second time is in the song of Deborah and Barak, describing the problematic situation of Israel before the arising of Deborah: »In the days of Shamgar the son of Anat, in the days of Jael, the highways were deserted, and the travellers walked along the byways« (Judg 5:6). The scarcity of information evokes many questions and leaves room for much speculation, which is furthered by the fact that in a number of Greek manuscripts there is a similar note on Shamgar after 16:31.¹ In most commentaries it is taken more or less for granted that in 3:31 we are dealing with a later addition, explaining the reference to Shamgar in 5:6, but disturbing the smooth transition from the story of Ehud to that of Deborah at the end of chapter 3.² There remain doubts, however, about the assumed editorial process behind the Masoretic text³ and even more about the historical background.⁴

1 See Andreas Scherer, »Simson und Schamgar: Zur Frage nach der ursprünglichen Position der Schamgarnotiz im Richterbuch,« *ZAW* 114 (2002): 106–109, stating that the text was moved by the translators. However, Natalio F. Marcos, *Judges*, BHQ 7 (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2011), 51*, suggests leaving open the possibility that its position after the stories of Samson is original.

2 The most elaborate and still dominant discussion is the one by Wolfgang Richter, *Die Bearbeitungen des »Rettterbuches« in der Deuteronomistischen Epoche*, BBB 21 (Bonn: Peter Hanstein Verlag, 1964), 92–97. Recently, it was defended again by Mark S. Smith, »Midrash in the Book of Judges: The Case of Judges 3:31 and 6:7–10,« *CBQ* 78 (2016): 256–271.

3 Richter, *Bearbeitungen*, 97: »Auch hier gelingt es nicht, den Raum der Vermutungen zugunsten fester Beweise hinter sich zu lassen.« Walter Groß, *Richter*, HThKAT (Freiburg: Herder, 2009), 249 f.: »Die Kargheit seines Inhalts hat zu vielfältigen Spekulationen Anlaß geboten, die häufig wiederholt werden, aber sämtlich über den Status einer Vermutung nicht hinauskommen konnten.« Andreas Scherer, *Überlegungen von Religion und Krieg: Exegetische und religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zu Richter 3–8 und verwandten Texte*, WMANT 105 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2005), 75, recalls his opinion (defended in his *ZAW* article published three years before) that Judg 3:31 is a later addition. See also the different views on the Greek text mentioned in n. 1.

4 Elaborate, but not very convincing speculations about the historical background can be found with Albrecht Alt, »Megiddo im Übergang vom kanaanäischen zum israelitischen Zeitalter,« in *Kleine Schriften zur Geschichte des Volkes Israel*, Band I (München: C. H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1953): 256–273, and Adriaan van Selms, »Judge Shamgar,« *VT* 14 (1964): 294–309.

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The new attempt presented here to make sense of Judg 3:31 within its present context is based on the observation that the name Shamgar can be associated with common Hebrew words and in this way gives a clue about the role of Shamgar within the present context. Within the book of Judges this would not be exceptional, because it contains many examples of wordplay, especially on names.⁵ The name of the opponent of the first judge is Cushan Rishataim (3:10), which not only rhymes with the name of his country, Aram Naharaim, but also can be translated as »the Nubian (black man) of double wickedness«. The opponent of the second judge, Ehud, is called Eglon, which is based on the Hebrew word for »calf«. The fact that he is also called very fat (3:17) underlines the association with an animal. In the story of the assassination of Sisera, we encounter a play on the name of Sisera: »And Jael went out to meet Sisera, and said unto him: Turn in (סִיֶּרָה), my Lord, turn in (סִיֶּרָה) to me; fear not. And when he had turned in (וַיָּסֶר) unto her into the tent, she covered him with a mantle« (Judg 4:18).⁶

It is usually stated that the name Shamgar is not Hebrew and is probably of Hurrian origin.⁷ However, the observation already made long ago⁸ that the name Shamgar is reminiscent of the name Gershom, reversing the two syllables, should not be dismissed. As will be demonstrated below, these two syllables constitute a phrase which fits very well within the present context, suggesting wordplay. Moreover, the name Gershom takes a prominent place in the story told in chapters 17–18. The name Gershom is explained in Exod 2:22 as referring to the fact that Moses had been a stranger in a foreign land, relating it to the words שָׁם, »there«, and גֵּר, »stranger«, and to the well-known phrase שָׁם גֵּר, »to stay there as a foreigner« (Gen 12:10; 35:27; Deut 18:6; 26:5; Isa 52:4; Jer 42:15,17,22; 43:2; 44:8,12,14,28). It is interesting to note that in Judg 17:7 the Levite priest is explicitly introduced as a foreigner: וְהוּא גֵר־שָׁם. Within the story of the Micah and the Danites this remarkable statement at the beginning about the Levite priest⁹ forms an inclusio with the end of the story identifying him as the son of Gershom.¹⁰

Cf. Volkmar Fritz, *Die Entstehung Israels im 12. und 11. Jahrhundert v. Chr.*, Biblische Enzyklopädie 2 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1996), 40: »bleibt für Schamgar nur die Annahme, daß der Name aus der literarischen Tradition übernommen wurde, ohne daß diese im Blick auf Alter und Verhaftung näher zu bestimmen ist.«

5 See, for example, Moshe Garsiel, »Homiletic Name-Derivations as a Literary Device in the Gideon Narrative: Judges VI–VIII,« *VT* 43 (1993): 302–317, and Klaas Spronk, »Namen als leeswijzer in het boek Rechters,« in *Festschrift K. A. D. Smelik*, ed. M. G. S. Coetsier et al. (forthcoming).

6 See Yair Zakovitch, »Explicit and Implicit Name-Derivations,« *HAR* 4 (1980): 167–181, 174 n. 14.

7 A recent evaluation of the discussion can be found in Jack M. Sasson, *Judges 1–12*, The Anchor Yale Bible 6D (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 242 f.

8 See Olaf A. Toffteen, *The Historic Exodus* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1909), 302. It is also mentioned by Thomas F. McDaniel, *Deborah: Poetry in Dialect* (2003), 49. Eva Danelius, »Shamgar Ben 'Anath,« *JNES* 22 (1993): 191–193, suggests to explain the name Shamgar as consisting of two separate parts, one Egyptian, one Israelite, both having the meaning »stranger« (p. 193). See now also Smith, »Midrash«: 259–260.

9 See Groß, *Richter*, 775–778, on the difficulties explaining how a man from the tribe of Judah can also be described as a Levite living there as a stranger.

10 According to Serge Frolov, *Judges*, FOTL (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 293 »the Levite's Mosaic ancestry is also subtly hinted at in the very beginning of the unit: the consonantal sequence גרשם in 17:7 can be read as both גֵּר שָׁם (he was a resident alien there) and גֵּר־שָׁם (Ger-

In 3:31 the epithet »son of Anat« emphasizes the non-Israelite character of the name Shamgar and again one can note a relation to Gershom. The reference to the relation with the Canaanite goddess Anat stands opposite to Gershom being a son of Moses. Whereas the name Gershom son of Moses pointed to the situation of an Israelite living in a foreign country, the name Shamgar son of Anat points to a foreigner in Israel.

In Judg 5:6 Shamgar is placed next to Jael. What unites them is that both fought against enemies of Israel, although they are not Israelite themselves. Jael is presented in 4:11 as the wife of Cheber, a descendent of the Kenite Hobab, the father-in-law of Moses. She finishes the work started by Deborah by killing Sisera.

There are also connections between Shamgar and Ehud.¹¹ Shamgar's story is connected to the preceding story by the phrase וְאַחֲרָיו, »and after him«. This is not unusual in the book of Judges in the references to minor judges (cf. 10:3; 12:8,11,13). 3:31 is unique in that on the one hand we hear even less about Shamgar, but on the other hand this information is preceded by a reference to a comparatively very long period of eighty years of rest for the land after the liberation from the Moabites by Ehud (3:30). Because this is twice the period of rest related to the previous judge, Othniel (3:11), the text seems to suggest that forty of the eighty years of rest can be attributed to Shamgar.¹² Also the fact that the death of Ehud is mentioned after the reference to Shamgar (4:1) indicates that Ehud and Shamgar are coupled, similarly to Deborah and Jael. After the Israelite saviour, support comes unexpectedly from a non-Israelite. In the case of Shamgar this is underlined by גַּם־הוּא, »he too« liberated Israel, while in the case of Jael her remarkable role is fully developed in the story. They also have in common that their deadly weapons are non-military: an ox-goad¹³ and a tent peg.

All this seems to point to Shamgar ben Anat being a literary fiction. However, the author probably took some information from existing historical sources. In the history of research many scholars have pointed to the clear parallels with the information about David's heroes in 2Sam 23:8–12,18–23 and 1Chron 11:11–14,20–25.¹⁴ In the list in 2Sam 23:11–12 we read: »And after him (וְאַחֲרָיו) was Shammah (שָׁמַח) son of Agee, the Hararite. The Philistines gathered together at Lehi, where there was a plot of ground full of lentils; and the army fled from the Philistines. But he took his stand in the middle of the plot, defended it, and killed the Philistines; and YHWH brought about a great victory.« There is also a correspondence with the story of Samson slaying thousand Philistines at Lehi (Judg 15:14–16). To this one can add that in the list of heroes which includes Shammah the Harodite, 2Sam 23:27 also mentions a certain Abiezer the Anathothite, combining the name of a forefather of Gideon (Judg 6:11) with another reference to Anat.¹⁵ It may be tentatively suggested that the author of the book of Judges adapted information from a traditional list of heroes to create the foreign hero Shamgar ben Anat.

shom).« Cf. also J. Alberto Soggin, *Judges*, OTL (London: SCM Press, 1981), 266, who suggests to read Gershom instead of גֶּרְשֹׁם in 17:7.

¹¹ See Sasson, *Judges*, 245, who also notes the parallel with Jael.

¹² See Scherer, *Überlegungen von Religion und Krieg*, 76.

¹³ According to S. D. (Fanie) Snyman, »Shamgar ben Anath: A Farming Warrior or a Farmer at War?«, *VT* 55 (2005): 125–129, this agricultural aspect is the most important for his identity.

¹⁴ See Frolov, *Judges*, 110.

¹⁵ See John Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, JSOTSup 265 (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 133, mentioning »the Anathothite« as one of the allusions to Anat.

Abstract: The name Shamgar ben Anat (Judg 3:31) can be explained as a reference to him being a foreign hero, comparable to Jael. Within the book of Judges he is the counterpart of Gershom ben Moshe.

Zusammenfassung: Der Name Schamgar ben Anat (Ri 3,31) kann erklärt werden als Verweis darauf, dass es sich um einen ausländischen Helden handelt, vergleichbar mit Jaël. Innerhalb des Buches Richter ist er das Gegenstück zu Gerschom ben Moshe.

Résumé: Le nom de Shamgar ben Anat (Jg 3,31) peut être compris comme une référence à un héros étranger, comparable à Yaël. Dans le livre des Juges, il constitue un pendant de Gershom ben Moshe.

Keywords: Shamgar – Anat – Gershom – wordplay – Jael