

ARGOB OF BASHAN Argob (Heb. אַרְגֹב, *argov*). A region of unknown location in the upper Transjordan whose name occurs five times in the Old Testament (Deut 3:4, 13, 14; 1 Kgs 4:13; 2 Kgs 15:25).

Etymology

In four of its five occurrences, the biblical texts call this territory “the region of Argob” (חֶבֶל אַרְגֹב, *chevel argov*). The word חֶבֶל (*chevel*), meaning “rope” or “measuring line,” in this instance refers to a demarcated section of land, implying Argob had clearly defined borders. Etymologically, Argob might relate to רֶגֶב (*regev*), a “clod” of earth (Job 21:33; 38:38).

Biblical Relevance

Deuteronomy mentions Argob three times while discussing territory captured from King Og of Bashan (Deut 3:4, 13, 14). It describes Argob’s 60 conquered cities as fortified with gates and high walls. Moses and the Israelites destroy the cities as God commands (Deut 3:5–6). Moses assigns Argob to the half-tribe of Manasseh (Deut 3:13–14, though verse 14 requires emendation), and Solomon later appoints Ben-Geber as prefect over Argob (1 Kings 4:13).

Jair, son of Manasseh, changes the region’s name to Havvoth-jair (“Jair’s tent-villages”) in Deut 3:14, and Josh 13:30 confirms that this is part of Bashan. However, other biblical texts place Havvoth-jair in Gilead (Num 32:40–41, Judg 10:4, 1 Kgs 4:13, and possibly 2 Kgs 15:25), lending confusion to Argob’s true location.

The Israelites were unable to dislodge the inhabitants of the small kingdom of Geshur, which neighbors Argob to the west (Josh 13:13), and it remained an independent kingdom. Around 886 BC (Mazar, “Geshur and Maacah,” 121), Geshur joined forces with Aram to attack Argob (here called Havvoth-jair), conquering all 60 towns (1 Chr 2:22–23). After this event, Argob/Havvoth-

jair disappears from the written record.

Location

Though the exact location of Argob is unknown, it is a subset of land in Bashan, an area in the Transjordan north of Gilead, west of Salcha and Mount Haruan (possibly including Jebel Druze), and south of Mount Hermon (see Josh 12:5, 13:11). The Yarmuk River flows toward the south of the territory. Bashan includes distinct geological areas: mountains (the Golan Heights and Mount Hauran), plains, and a jutting island of rocky highland known today as el-Leja.

Formed by a lava flow from Jebel Druze and towering twenty to fifty feet above the surrounding plains, Leja is the likeliest location of Argob, though the identification is far from certain. This area, 30 miles south of Damascus and 40 miles east of the Sea of Galilee, contains enough soil and water to allow limited agricultural activities and historically has been populated.

The Targumim identify Argob as טרכונוא (*trkwn'*) (*Targum Onqelos* and *Neofiti*) or טרגונוא (*trgwn'*) (*Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*), rendered in Greek as Τραχωνίτις (*Trachōnitis*) and English as Trachonitis (also mentioned in Luke 3:1), which corresponds to the Leja territory. Trachonitis means a “rocky, rough region,” which describes well the basaltic, scoriaceous land. The volcanic rock in this area provides a natural border to the territory, reflecting the “measured region” of Argob.

However, the possible overlap between Argob and Trachonitis/Leja is not exact, as Trachonitis does not extend as far west as Argob, which covers land to the border of the territory of the Geshurites and Maacahthites (Deut 3:14). In addition, the possible etymology of Argob as a “clod” of riverbed dirt does not correspond to the rugged territory of Leja.

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