

Interpellation, not Interpolation:

Reconsidering Textual Disunity in Numbers 13–14 as Variant Articulations of a Single Ideology

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Abstract: This article examines the numerous tensions in Numbers 13–14 concerning the identity of those who are exempted from Yahweh’s death sentence against Israel. It does so in light of Louis Althusser’s theory that ideology is typically articulated in different and even inconsistent ways by the subjects of different ideological state apparatuses. Source- and redaction-critical approaches have tended to treat the spy narrative’s inconsistent exemptions of Caleb, Joshua, the younger generation of Israelites, and/or Moses (and possibly others) as indicative of multiple sources, redactional layers, supplements, or interpolations within the text, and of the development of the text over many centuries. Most of these signs of disunity, however, may be more productively viewed as the result of different subject positions and their corresponding ideological inflections, derived from different sectors of the Judean and Samarian populace yet coalescing in their support of the text’s ideology of a righteous remnant. The article also identifies the Hellenistic socio-economic transition from a dominant agricultural to a dominant tributary mode of production as the most likely relevant authorial context for understanding the composition of Numbers 13–14 and its literary tensions. Yet authorship in the late Persian period remains a distinct possibility. The major line of tension in the spy narrative between priestly and military leaders mirrors the underlying socio-economic circumstances which prevailed during the period of composition, wherein both priestly and military-administrative families competed for power and ideological legitimation. The article thus develops Roland Boer’s recognition of the potential of Althusser’s view of ideology to challenge the assumptions and conclusions of the historical-critical problematic.

Numbers 13–14 contains an expanded version of the so-called spy narrative also found in Deuteronomy 1, in which twelve Israelite spies are sent to explore the land of Canaan while the Israelite army is poised for invasion on the southern border. The majority of the spies bring back a negative report concerning the prospects for conquering the land, even claiming that terrible giants live there. Despite Caleb and Joshua’s appeals to continue with the invasion, the Israelites refuse to proceed and they propose a return to Egypt. Yahweh retaliates by condemning the entire generation of Israelites to death in the desert, granting entrance to the land only to their innocent children and the two faithful spies Caleb and Joshua.

Yet such a summary inevitably oversimplifies what is a complex and tension-ridden narrative. Were the Israelites encamped in Paran (per Num 12:16) or at Kadesh (per Num 13:26 and Deut 1:19)? Was the destination Hebron and Eshcol (Num 13:22–24) or the whole land (13:2, 17–21, 26, 28–29, 32)? Was it Moses who sent the spies (13:1–3, 16–20, 30; 14:11–19, 36, 39, 41–43, 44) or Moses and Aaron (13:26; 14:2, 5, 26)? Did Yahweh command the spy expedition (Num 13:1–2) or was it the idea of the people (Deut 1:22)? Who would be saved from the divine death sentence: Caleb (MT Num 14:24)? Caleb and Joshua (Num 14:38)?

Moses alone (14:11–12)? Or Caleb and those Israelites aged less than twenty years (LXX Num 14:23–24)? And who were the inhabitants of the land? Giants called Anakim and their offspring (Num 13:22, 28b; 33)? Or ordinary humans? And if the latter, were they the Amalekites and Canaanites of the hill country (14:43, 45), or the Hittites, Jebusites, and Amorites of the hill country along with Amalekites and Canaanites in the lowlands (13:29; 14:25a)?

The Historical–Critical approach to narrative disunity

The extent of textual disunity in Numbers 13–14 is eclipsed, nonetheless, by the staggering number of historical–critical attempts to reconstruct the text’s alleged literary development. Norbert Rabe (1994) provides an appendix tabulating 58 different hypothetical source allocations of Numbers 13–14 beginning with Friedrich Bleek’s in 1860. Since then we might add Rabe’s own effort (1994) as well as Ofer (1993), Levine (1993), Van Seters (1994), Dozeman (1996), Artus (1997), Knipping (2000), Otto (2000), Frankel (2002), Achenbach (2003b), Schmidt (2002, 2004), Seebass (2003), Boorer (2012), and Schart (2013). The still dominant diachronic “solution” involves dividing Numbers 13–14 into two major compositional layers, sometimes adding an incomplete third layer which supplies the Mosaic intercession tradition in Num 14:11–20. The chronologically earlier layer (the Yahwist, “J”, or Jehovist, “JE”, in the classical documentary hypothesis) typically situates the Israelite camp in Kadesh, has Moses alone send the spies to Hebron, makes Caleb the sole loyal scout, and condemns all other Israelites to death in the wilderness. The later layer (priestly, “P”) situates the Israelite camp in the desert of Paran, has both Aaron and Moses send the spies to the whole of Canaan, makes both Caleb and Joshua the two loyal scouts, and condemns only those Israelites who were aged twenty or older. To the extent the other parts do not quite fit into this primary division, they are explained by such devices as a deuteronomistic interpolation here, a few post–priestly supplements there, the circumscribed creativity of a reviser or *Bearbiter*, the odd vestige of oral tradition, the helpful flourishes of a passing glossator, or the cautious insertions of a redactor. The main variations in recent historical–critical scholarship on Numbers 13–14 are forms of the supplementary hypothesis, in which the role of documentary *sources* has been substantially taken over by extensive *redactional layers*. The most influential supplementary hypotheses have been developed by Eckart Otto and Reinhard Achenbach, for whom the spy narrative begins with a deuteronomistic core, is supplemented by a Hexateuch redactor in “the age of Nehemiah”, is in turn supplemented by a Pentateuch redactor in “the age of Ezra”, before end–redactors complete the narrative sometime in the fourth century BCE (Otto 2000; Achenbach 2003b).

One seemingly unshakeable assumption underlying all of these documentary and supplementary approaches is that the signs of disunity in the text may be accounted for primarily in *temporal* terms. Textual disunity is assumed to be the result of the juxtaposition of different literary layers within the text, written at different times, usually over a period of several centuries. And so the question of disunity is (all too quickly) assimilated into the problematic of source and redaction criticism. By developing a suggestion by Roland Boer, in *Marxist Criticism of the Bible*, I want to examine an alternative way to account for the multiple and contradictory exemptions from Yahweh’s death sentence in

Numbers 13–14, one which utilises Louis Althusser’s theorisation of the operation of ideology in society. Boer critiques historical criticism’s tendency to assume that a biblical text simply mirrors the monolithic opinion of a scribal elite, which is curiously detached from its wider society (Boer 2003: 17–18). Historical criticism overlooks the often contradictory and inconsistent effects of various ideological state apparatuses on the scribal elite, and therefore ignores the varying impact of different societal stations on the development of biblical traditions. When we examine the spy narrative in particular, Althusser’s conceptualisation of ideology challenges us to produce an account of the tensions in Numbers 13–14 that does not immediately assume a lengthy history of composition and, conversely, which shows an appreciation of the contradictions inherent in the production of elite ideology. Such an account may even be more successful in elucidating the peculiar mixture of *narrative disunity* and *ideological unity* which, as we shall see, constitutes a distinctive and curious feature of the spy narrative.

Althusser on ideology

Within Marxism, ideology has traditionally constituted a negative category, referring to the means of obfuscating the real material circumstances faced by the exploited class and of convincing them to act against their own best interests (Boer 2003: 14–15). Althusser rejects the view that ideology simply describes a person’s misunderstanding of their way of life and rejects any reduction of ideology which would make it only a matter of conscious will, something able to be controlled by a human “agent”. Rather, for Althusser, ideology is “a relation between relations, a second degree relation” (2005: 233–34; 1971: 175), sustaining the very structure of the society in which its subjects live and are constituted as subjects. As Althusser expresses it, “in ideology, men represent their real conditions of existence to themselves in an imaginary form” (1971: 163). Accordingly, Althusser lends ideology a more expansive and much less instrumental function. The exemplary task of ideology is that it forms individuals as “subjects”, that is, as beings who live in relation to a particular socio-economic system, who are formed by its discourse, images, concepts, practices, and institutions, and who are thereby given a role in that society (1971: 170). Humans are not the *agents* but the *products* of ideology, living the ideology provided to them by their roles within society: “it is as if people, in order to exist as conscious, active social beings in the society that conditions all their existence, needed to possess a certain *representation* of their world, a representation which may remain largely unconscious” (1990: 25). For Althusser, ideology is that which sustains the whole system of relations between people and their conditions of existence—within which we may account for the subject’s constitutive relationship to those conditions. So Althusser’s conception does not follow the negative or ‘critical’ conception of ideology in which it is viewed as a means of obfuscating people’s real position in society, but treats ideology positively or ‘descriptively’ as a worldview, following similar usage in Lenin, Lukács, and Gramsci (Barrett 1991: 18–19). Althusser’s descriptive sense of the term “ideology” has been widely influential in critical theory (eg. Eagleton 1988; Žižek 1994) yet has had more limited application within biblical studies (eg. Boer 2004; Welborn 2012; Myles 2014).

Althusser's famous formulation of what has been termed the *structuralist* approach to ideology is made in his essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses", where he states that "ideology interpellates individuals as subjects" (1971: 170). What Althusser evokes with the metaphor of interpellation, or hailing, is the immediate self-recognition that occurs when someone shouts our name, the obviousness that it is "me" who is addressed, and the unreflexive desire to respond according to social custom and subject formation (Ferretter 2006: 88).¹ Yet unlike hailing in the street, in which there is a sequence of before and after, Althusser adds that these things happen without any succession (1971: 175). The ideological structure is always already in place, preceding individual subjects.

There is an important passage in "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" in which Althusser clarifies that last point:

It is not their real conditions of existence, their real world, that "men" "represent to themselves" in ideology, but above all it is their relation to those conditions of existence which is represented to them there. It is this relation which is at the centre of every ideological, i.e. imaginary, representation of the real world. (1971: 164)

The double-scare-quoted phrase "'men' 'represent to themselves'" is taken up from Althusser's earlier explanation of ideology as the process in which "*men represent* their real conditions of existence *to themselves* in an imaginary form". Althusser now finds it more correct to say that a person's relation to the conditions of existence "*is represented to them*" by ideology, not that people "*represent to themselves*" their ideology. In this crucial switch from the reflexive to the passive sense, ideology itself becomes the *actor*, not people; people do not properly "represent to themselves" (*se représentent*) ideology, but they *passively receive* the ideology that "is represented to them" (*y est représenté*). In Althusser's more precise formulation, the representation of the false, imaginary relationship of people to the world is unmediated by any actor; it relies only on the effectiveness of the structure to function in the way it does; it allows for no agent anywhere in society who stands outside ideology.

Therefore, ideology must not only be understood to control the exploited masses but also to control those elites who stand to benefit most from the system—a conclusion which is of paramount importance for considering the effects of ideology on the priestly-scribal elite responsible for composing the Hebrew Bible. When Althusser comes to explain why people need the false representation of reality provided by ideology, he begins by dismissing the possibility that a small group of cynical priests or despots have orchestrated a beautiful lie to entrap everybody else, to their own benefit. Althusser writes that the work of ideology "can never be purely *instrumental*; the men who would use an ideology purely as a means of action, as a tool, find that they have been caught by it, implicated by it, just when they are using it and believe themselves to be absolute masters of it" (2005: 234). On the one hand, Althusser affirms that "the

¹ The term "interpellate" is the translation of the French *interpeller*, which has a primary meaning of "to call out to", "to shout at", "to hail" someone and an interesting secondary meaning of "to interrogate" as by police and the military (Ferretter 2006: 88).

ruling ideology is ... the ideology of the ruling class”, and the ideology of society’s elite dominates every cultural product. But on the other hand, he argues that “the ruling class does not maintain with the ruling ideology ... an external and lucid relation of pure utility and cunning” (2005: 234). For as the ruling elite themselves enter their position in society after ideology has performed its subject–constituting role, they “arrive too late” to be able to cynically forge the ideology which would serve their elite position: that work has already been done, and the dominators are as inescapably subject to ideology as the dominated. “A class that *uses* ideology is its captive too” (2005: 235).

Although Althusser’s focus is on ideology within modern capitalism, he considers that some form of ideology is a necessary part of every human society. For the “subject–making” function which lies at the heart of ideology is not contingent on any particular class position, or the existence of class consciousness, or on any particular social formation or mode of production. And it is for this reason that Althusser makes the provocative claim that “ideology has no history” or “ideology is eternal” (1971: 61). While acknowledging histories of *particular* ideologies, within particular sectors of society, or within particular social formations, or involving particular modes of production, what Althusser means by the trans–historical nature of ideology is simply that, by definition, it has this same subject–making structure and function “throughout what we can call history” (1971: 61).

Ideology for Althusser always has a material, practiced, even institutional aspect. It operates via a multiplicity of ideological state apparatuses or ISAs—the religious ISA, educational ISA, family ISA, cultural ISA, etc. These ISAs are the primary means by which any society reproduces its relations of production, and the primary basis of subject formation, inculcating practices, values, expectations, and beliefs that serve the current socio–economic structure. But Althusser quickly adds that each of these apparatuses operates “in the way proper to it”. Within the overall socio–economic system, each level in society, from subsistence farmers to the ruling elite, is “provided with the ideology which suits the role it has to fulfil” in that society (1971: 155).² Although “in concert” each ISA “is dominated by a single score”, a common societal ideology (1971: 154), there are real differences in the articulation of ideology between each ISA and these in turn give rise to a complex series of contradictions and tensions between each related social group. Or from the perspective of society as a whole, ideology is significantly overdetermined by its various inflections throughout that society. And so as his long–time colleague Jacques Derrida observes, Althusser’s theorisation of overdetermination and the complexity of causation it entails stand in an uneasy relationship with one of his other central claims, his claim that the determination

² If Althusser’s conception of the imposing role of the ISA too quickly closes down political change and the possibility of self–emancipation, as Rancière objects (1998: 29), Rancière might be charged with the opposite error, of romanticizing the intuitive ability of the masses to effect change and overeagerly celebrating the impact of May ’68. It is a difficult dilemma, rehearsed more recently in the Žižek–Butler exchange, again without any clear resolution.

of these superstructural relationships is by the economy “in the last instance” (albeit an ultimate instance that “never comes”; Derrida 2002: 170).³

Before moving to the spy narrative, it is worthwhile to note that the already complex overdetermination of ideology throughout society is complicated further in the case of a *literary* work. Literature appropriates, as its “raw material”, the “ideological representations of people’s lives that are at work in a given society”, setting them within its imaginary structure (Ferretter 2006: 47). The literary production of a particular ISA, such as the scribal production of the book of Numbers, thus tends to be overdetermined by the complex set of interrelationships between it and the variety of positions people hold within society. For example, in his 1975 study, Terry Eagleton contends that the Brontë sisters’ novels are overdetermined by their mirroring of the complex form of conflict found in nineteenth-century society, which was marked by the “constant struggle between two ambiguous, internally divided sets of values” located within the ranks of the nineteenth-century elite. These are the values of the landed aristocracy and the industrial bourgeoisie. Within the Brontë sisters’ novels, these oppositional real-world values play themselves out in terms of various conflicts in plot development and characterisation (Eagleton 1988: 4). I contend that a somewhat similar opposition between Judean elites influenced the contours of the spy narrative in Numbers 13–14.

Textual disunity in Numbers 13–14 as variant inflections of a single ideology

In the remainder of this article, I will seek to develop the argument that a fundamental antagonism or opposition between elite interests accounts for the shape of Numbers 13–14. This antagonism is centred on a division of responsibility between aristocratic priests and aristocratic military-administrative leaders in the time of the composition of the spy narrative. Drawn from the same circle of elite families, members of each group appealed to the same religious ideology that not all Israelites are true followers of Yahweh, yet did so with either priestly or military-administrative inflections. The author of Numbers 13–14, who also shared this overall ideology, incorporated Israelite founding traditions drawn from both priestly and military-administrative spheres.

This line of division is clearly mirrored in the textual disunity within Numbers 13–14 and especially in the central tension between Yahweh’s exemption of the Levite Moses and his exemption of the city-founding hero Caleb. In Num 14:11–12, Yahweh’s initial exemption to his death sentence concerns only Moses, from whose descendants he plans to establish a new chosen nation, replacing all the other Israelites. The exemption is mutually exclusive of the Judahite and Ephraimite military leaders Caleb and Joshua, who had only just faithfully pleaded with the people in Num 14:6–9. It is even ambiguous about the fate of Aaron,

³ This archi-causality, Derrida suspects, is Althusser’s “concession to the economist dogma of Marxism”. And might we also view Althusser’s need to emphasise the *materiality* of ideology—its institutional structure, its Pascalian logic in which one performs a ritual in order to believe—as the compensation of a Marxist who at some unconscious level knows he is guilty of ascribing too much causative power to the superstructure than he ought?

whose last action in Num 14:5 was to prostrate himself before the people alongside Moses. (It is possible that Aaron, as Moses's brother, is implicitly included with the family of Moses who are likewise exempt from divine punishment, but the lack of any explicit mention makes the matter quite uncertain.) After Moses's intercession for the people in Num 14:13–19, Yahweh agrees to forgive the Israelites; but the divine forgiveness is quickly qualified. In the Masoretic text version of the story, the exemption of the entire younger generation has been omitted, and instead Yahweh exempts only Caleb from among the millions of Israelites (14:24). The LXX includes the younger generation in Yahweh's exemption, i.e., all of those aged under twenty years of age. In either case, the result strikes many modern readers as bizarre. While Yahweh is responding agreeably to Moses's intercession on behalf of the other Israelites, he curiously forgets that he was initially going to save Moses alone. Now Moses is not even included in the divine exemption; only Caleb escapes from the condemnation of his entire generation. Furthermore, Joshua's role alongside Caleb in Num 14:6–9 has been forgotten. Moreover, in contradiction of the initial divine plan to save only Moses and his descendants, the grounds Yahweh offers for Caleb's exemption indicates that, all along, he was the only one who deserved it. Yahweh states that Caleb possesses a *rûah 'aḥeret* ("different spirit"), distinct from all other Israelites, and that *waymallē' aḥārāy* ("he [Caleb] got fully in behind me"; i.e., "fully followed me"). When Yahweh repeats his declaration of who will die in the desert in the second divine speech in Num 14:26–35, he finally remembers Joshua, who along with Caleb and the younger generation of Israelites, are all given exemptions from Yahweh's decree. Again, no mention is made of Moses's fate, and this seems particularly puzzling and even cruel, given that it was Moses who had interceded for these additionally exempt Israelites in the first place.

Historical-critical analysis typically claims to resolve these differences, and absolve Yahweh of his apparent muddle-headedness, by assigning the exemption of Caleb to the Yahwist, the exemption of Joshua to the Priestly source, and the exemption of Moses to a Deuteronomistic interpolation. Justification of the historical-critical "solution" typically also involves distinguishing the allegedly early Calebite material as "secular" and "military-focused", and the later Mosaic intercession tradition as "theologically" sophisticated. So for Sean McEvenue, P turns "a folk-tale about spying and raiding into a story of radical sin and radical punishment". P replaces "action with theology, suspense with symmetry, interiorly motivated conflict with objective tableau" (1971: 123, 97). For Walter Beltz, the original Calebite tradition only included a military focus and, conversely, lacked a theology of divine gift. On this basis, Beltz concludes that the Calebite tradition is typical of *einer Ideologie einer nomadisch-militärischen Gruppe* ("an ideology of a nomadic military group"; 1974: 45). For James Pace, P's alterations to J "express deeper theological motives" than did the Yahwist: a story about the fear of giants is transformed into a blasphemous rejection of Yahweh's gift (1976: 52). Philip Budd, too, traces a development from a local, secular tradition which narrated a military defeat, to J's narrative of "unbelief" causing the forty-year wandering in the desert, to P's rewriting of the tradition to provide theological support for Jewish claims to the land (1984: 155, 161). For Avi Ofer, while the earlier layer was a simple spy story, the later layer constitutes "salvation history" (1993: I.6). Similarly, Martin Rose claims that Caleb had only a

military role in the *Grundschrift*, but that this was later “demilitarized” in the later “theological” portrayal of Numbers 13–14. To make this argument, Rose is forced to reinterpret the description of Caleb as “fully faithful to me [Yahweh]” (*waymallē’ aḥārāy*) not as a theological statement of faith but as a typical soldier’s vow, and therefore merely military in meaning. He does so by adducing the use of *mal’û* in a military context in Jer 4:5 and in an alleged Akkadian parallel (*malû qašta*; 1981: 268–70). These texts, however, employ *malû/mal’û* with a technical sense of “mustering troops”, a sense which is simply not possible when the term does not occur on its own but within a phrase (*waymallē’ aḥārāy*).

Rather than spending time addressing the dubious grounds of these distinctions, I want to challenge the more fundamental diachronic assumptions on which they are based. Is it likely that a “final author” has orchestrated a deliberate ideological transformation of what had been a military text into a theologically charged narrative? Or is it the greater likelihood that Numbers 13–14 reflects different subject positions produced by a single ideology at a certain point in time? There are, of course, many possible reasons for the presence of inconsistencies and tensions in a biblical text. These features do not necessarily indicate a development of the text over time, but may reflect, for example, an author’s literary or aesthetic preferences, or a higher toleration for inconsistencies and tensions, or (following Althusser) the type of inconsistencies that are typically produced by a dominant ideology within a stratified society. Moreover, literary inconsistencies and tensions may be more pervasive in ancient than in modern literature, due to the fact that ancient writers did not share the same sensitivities to what we might perceive as inconsistencies in the text. As Jack Miles pointedly comments, “It is the critics’ inability to imagine an aesthetic of disorder, or of deliberately mingled order and disorder, that may separate them most sharply from the ancient writers and editors they study.” An appreciation of the different aesthetic standards operating in ancient Judea and of the textual inconsistencies which are symptomatic of ideology should open our eyes to the possibility of disunity arising synchronically within the text, and conversely, reduce our own concern “for the harmony and smoothness that historical scholarship would impose on the text” (Miles 1981: 28).

When considering the particular features of Numbers 13–14 that might favour a synchronic rather than a diachronic explanation, it is of foremost significance that the spy narrative is almost comically overdetermined. An inconsistent morass of bases for exemption jostle with each other, each striving to demonstrate Yahweh’s infinite mercy to a particular group or their representatives, while inadvertently making the divine mercy look at best hopelessly confused and at worst arbitrary and capricious. Two elements are especially worth highlighting: (1) the text’s ideology of a righteous remnant within Israel recurs with *remarkably consistency* throughout Numbers 13–14; (2) this single ideology is *inconsistently applied* to quite different persons within the text. Such a unified ideology makes little sense if the text was developed over centuries, although this is, often unreflectively, presumed in most historical-critical reconstructions. The inconsistencies we see in the text relate not to the ideology of the righteous remnant, but to the text’s *application* of this ideology to different persons. This type of inconsistency is precisely what we would expect from differing articulations of a single ideology within each of the military-

administrative and priestly state apparatuses at a single point of time. To demonstrate this mixture of consistent ideology and its inconsistent articulations, we need to examine more closely the way ideology is articulated in respect of the Levite Moses and military leader Caleb.

In Num 14:11–12, Yahweh contrasts Moses with those who do not trust (*lōʾ-yaʾāminû*) in him or follow his signs, with the inference that this comparison forms the basis of Moses’s exemption. Indeed, in the immediately preceding chapters, Moses had performed miraculous signs in Yahweh’s name. The contrast is thus between the unfaithful mass of Israelites and the uniquely faithful Moses. This may explain the exceptional scene in Num 14:5 in which Moses falls on his face before the remainder of Israel rather than (as usual) before Yahweh.⁴ Plausibly a gesture of imploring the people to change their minds, the scene sets Moses (with Aaron) against the great multitude of the assembly of Israel and provides a particularly striking enactment of the text’s ideology of the righteous remnant among/against the unfaithful masses. The bowing also evokes the posture of the Levitical intermediary, creating a distinctly priestly inflection of the text’s ideology of a pious and faithful remnant. The contrast is heightened in Num 14:10a, when the multitude responds by threatening to stone Moses and Aaron (and/or Joshua and Caleb).

Likewise, but in a manner which is strictly inconsistent with the exemption of Moses, Num 14:24 exempts only Caleb from Yahweh’s death sentence, on the grounds that he is the only one who is “fully faithful”. Although Yahweh promises, in Num 14:12, to replace the majority of the Israelites with Moses’s own posterity, in Num 14:24 Yahweh exchanges his earlier promise to Israel that they will inherit the land with a promise limited to Caleb’s descendants. The contrast between Caleb and the remainder of Israel is thus quite at odds with the earlier divine speech, in which Moses is contrasted with the remainder of Israel, while also closely repeating its presentation of the theme of a righteous remnant.

This presentation of Caleb as uniquely faithful among his fellow Israelites is not an isolated feature in Num 14:24 that can be dismissed as the result of a late interpolation (so, eg. Frankel 2002: 156). It is the culmination of a sustained contrast, throughout 13:30–14:10, between the faithful Caleb and the other unfaithful spies and between faithful Caleb and the faithless assembly of all Israel. We begin with Caleb’s positive speech to the people (Num 13:30), which proclaims that the Israelites are able to overcome the inhabitants of the land. This is immediately opposed in 13:31 by “the men who went up with him”, that is, by the remainder of the spies. Caleb’s faithfulness is demonstrably inflected in the military language of “going up” against the people and of military victory. Conversely, the other spies urge Israel not to “go up” against the land’s inhabitants, forecasting defeat if they do. Caleb’s unreservedly positive statement, *yākōwl nûkal lāh* (“we are certainly able to overcome it!”) is deliberately opposed by the spies when they employ the words *lōʾ nûkal* (“we are *not* able ...”). When

⁴ Commentators struggle to explain the meaning of the action. There is no good justification for Budd’s claim that Moses and Aaron are interceding here (1984: 156), and none to suggest they simply fear death (contra de Vaulx 1971: 175). Jacob Milgrom’s suggestion (1990: 108) that the action conveys helplessness before the people is possible, but in such case would be a very unusual gesture.

the spies surreptitiously spread an evil rumour among “the sons of Israel” (Num 13:32–33), their act contrasts with Joshua and Caleb’s open and public address before “the whole assembly of the sons of Israel” (14:7). Furthermore, in Num 14:9, Caleb directly counters the spies’ rumour that the land eats its inhabitants (13:32) with a claim that the people of the land will be *lahmēnû* (“our food”), one military metaphor countered with another. The presentation of Caleb as an exceptional Israelite therefore pervades the narrative; it cannot be easily written off as a one-time accident by a clumsy redactor.

So the spy narrative’s ideological portrayal of a faithful minority within Israel is remarkably consistent throughout the sections which deal with Moses and Caleb, while paradoxically being remarkably inconsistent by being applied to both of them. Numbers 13–14 exempts both Moses and Caleb according to the same ideology of the righteous remnant of Israel and distinguishes them both as unique champions of faithfulness to Yahweh. Differing articulations of the ideology of divine exemption and exclusivity voiced by priest and military leader thus serve to reinforce that unitary ideology. But the exemptions involve different perspectives, different roles and stations, and different societal vantage points, a priestly intercession for the people versus a rousing speech by a fearless military commander. What we see as disunity, the ancient writer may well have considered harmonious if his or her major concern was with the ideological theme of a righteous remnant within Israel.

This overdetermination of the ideology of righteous exemption creates at least two further ambiguities in the text of Numbers 13–14. And yet again, these reflect priestly and military concerns. The first concerns the fate of the Levites: Yahweh’s declaration that “all those twenty and upwards” cannot come into the land (14:29) is based on the formula of the first census, from which the Levites were specifically exempt (1:47–48: cf. Milgrom 1990: 113). So can we conclude that the Levites are also exempt from the divine death sentence? Significantly, a note which follows the second census, in Num 26:64–65, states that none of those enrolled in the second census was included in the first, except for Caleb and Joshua. The note also maintains that Yahweh only said “of them” (i.e., those numbered on the first census) that “they shall die in the desert” (26:65). So as none of the Levites was numbered in the first census, were the Levites likewise not included in Yahweh’s condemnation? Noteworthy also is that the twelve spies, who triggered the rebellion, include no representative from the tribe of Levi (Milgrom 1990: 113). It is, accordingly, unclear whether the Levites have been deliberately excluded from Yahweh’s death sentence, or if their fate has simply been overlooked in Numbers. Milgrom is right to voice some doubt about their exemption, on the grounds that “it is hard to conceive that any Pentateuchal source would have excluded the Levites from the fate of the rest of the people without explicitly mentioning it” (Milgrom 1990: 229). But the debate as to whether the Levites were implicitly exempted or condemned may obscure the reason for having such a debate in the first place. In the light of the overdetermined ideology of Numbers 13–14, the conflict might be viewed as the result of the author’s unconscious incorporation of complex and conflicting articulations of the single ideology concerning a favoured remnant. That is, far from being the product of an author who is fully in control of what is going on, the

uncertainty regarding the Levites should instead be viewed as a result of the inherent tendency of ideology to produce ambiguities in its various articulations.

A similar problem occurs in respect of the Israelite women, due to the fact that the two censuses consist of fighting *men* over the age of twenty. In addition, in Num 14:3, what the assembly of Israel grumbles about is that it suspects Yahweh was planning to “bring us to this land to fall by the sword” while “our wives and our little ones will become as spoil”. The perspective is clearly that of soldiers and men, raising the possibility that the Israelite women are exempt from punishment. On the other hand, Num 14:31 only makes explicit mention of an exemption for “the little ones”, i.e., the younger generation. And in the following Korahite rebellion, Yahweh punishes not only Korah, Dathan and Abiram, but all their households—women and children included (Num 16:31). That we are dealing again with the effects of ideology is clear from consideration of the narrative progression of the book of Numbers. There are about 600,000 fighting men numbered at the first census, and about the same number at the second census. In the imaginative progression, the whole generation of fighting men has been replicated, without any mention of the involvement of women in the reproductive process, and indeed without any indication that women still exist at the time of the generation of the new generation of fighting men. It is a prime example of what Irigaray terms “the reign of hom(m)o–sexuality”, the exchange of natural for imaginary reproduction that reduces the bodies of women to mere service–providers in the economy of relations among men (Irigaray 1985: 171–72). There may even be some displacement involved here, as the usual function of a census in antiquity was for tax–gathering, not military musters. It is no wonder, then, that women have been overlooked between the (male) priestly and (male) military articulations of the ideology of exception and remnant. An attempt to resolve the ambiguity is made in MT Josh 5:6. By employing the appositional phrase *kol–haggōy ’anšē hammilḥāmāh* (“all the people, the men of war”), MT interprets the references to “all the congregation” in Num 14:1, 2, 7, 10 as the whole *male* military congregation. As with the central conflict between the exemptions of Moses and Caleb, the ambiguous fate of the Levites and women (versus male soldiers) reflects ideologically charged priestly and military interests. The presence of such ambiguities in the text is a symptom of the ideology of the righteous remnant to which both priestly and military groups subscribed, but in different ways.

Underlying socio–economic antagonisms in Yehud/Judea

Yet in order to complete the argument, we must be able to link the literary conflict—which, as we have seen, centres on differences between priestly and military–administrative representatives—with socio–economic antagonisms within the elite group responsible for the composition of the text.

If the spy narrative is to be understood as an essentially unitary composition rather than as the product of several centuries of development, and as the overdetermined product of differently interpellated subject–positions, we are plausibly dealing with a late or post–Persian milieu. For the spy narrative in Numbers is remarkable in its reuse of a number of earlier traditions, all of them usually dated no earlier than the Persian period. First, Numbers 13–14 makes use

of an earlier and parallel spy/rebellion tradition (Van Seters 1994) found in the late, deuteronomic Deut 1 (Noth 1981: 14, 33; Kratz 2000: 138; Otto 2000: 231–57). Second, it makes use of a tradition concerning the founding of Hebron by Caleb which appears elsewhere only within late, post-dtr passages, in particular Joshua 14–15 and Judges 1 (Frankel 2002: 153; Van Seters 1983: 338; Becker 1990: 21–62). Third, Numbers 13–14 makes use of the Mosaic intercession at Sinai, in Exodus 32 and 34. These chapters in Exodus are already dependent on dtr precursor texts in 1 Kgs 12:26–33 and Deut 9:7–10:11, and therefore represent late dtr if not post-dtr compositions (Van Seters 1994: 303–7; Dozeman 2009: 699). Fourth, Numbers 13–14 makes use of the motif of the autochthonous giant, which is almost certainly influenced by Hellenic traditions, and which appears elsewhere only in late supplements (eg. Deut 1–3). Moreover, the giant motif also notably increases in Jewish pseudepigraphic and apocalyptic literature from the third century BCE onwards (Perlitt 1994: 245; Doak 2012: 12). As Numbers 13–14 incorporates *all four of these Persian-period traditions*, the better inference is that the passage was composed at a still later stage. In addition, if we are consistent in not making *ad hoc* appeals to interpolation, the *ex eventu* prediction of the Greek defeat of the Persian empire recorded in the Balaam prophecy (Num 24:24) would support a Hellenistic dating.⁵ Furthermore, as Thomas Römer has argued, from his analysis of Num 5–10, the various laws contained in Numbers are dependent on and later than those in Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy (2008: 23–24). Römer concludes that “the combination of supplementary laws in the first part of the book of Numbers can only be explained by the fact that the books of Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy were already ‘closed’ and could no longer accommodate new additions to the Torah” (2008: 24). The composition of the book of Numbers, already dated in its final layer to the mid-fourth century by Achenbach (2003a: 557–59), plausibly belongs, therefore, to the late Persian period (c. 400–333 BCE) or early Hellenistic era (333–c. 280 BCE).

Most significantly, if composed within this timeframe, Numbers coincides with a major socio-economic change in Judea: the transition from a dominant *agricultural-peasant* and temple-based economy to a dominant *tributary* or tax-based mode of production. As I will show, the shift is relatively well evidenced in the early Hellenistic era. But there is evidence that tax collection and administration had already assumed greater importance in the Persian period, when it began to rival the temple apparatus in Jerusalem, providing the socio-economic context for the precise tensions we found are reflected in Numbers 13–14. Initial support is available in Herodotus, who describes Darius I’s reorganization of the empire into twenty fiscal regions (the satrapies), the governors of which were charged with the payment of tribute to the Persian king (*Hist.* 3.89–96). Herodotus does not provide, however, any firm indication that the new tax administration was particularly innovative or especially harsh in

⁵ The prophecy refers to the Kittim who subdue Asshur and Eber. The Table of Nations (at Gen 10: 4) identifies the Kittim as descendants of Japheth, the peoples based in Anatolia and to the west and north of Anatolia: Eshel 2001: 29. Although used of the Romans in later texts, the Macedonians are by far the most likely match for those from the area of Japheth who defeat Assyria/Persia (cf. 1 Macc 1:1; 8:5; and Persia as Assyria in Ezra 6:22).

contrast to earlier imperial administration. Yet the recent excavations at Ramat Rahel (2005–2010) provide good evidence of the growing importance and independence of the taxation and administrative functions within Yehud. In the Persian period, Ramat Rahel becomes established as the governor’s residence and major tax-administration centre, operating separately from or independently of the priests and temple who were based in Jerusalem (Lipschits, Gadot, and Langgut 2012: 77). At the very least therefore, there existed in the Persian period (in contrast to the situation before) a power base which rivalled the priestly power base in Jerusalem. What remains difficult to ascertain, however—due to the nature of the evidence—is the *extent* of the corresponding shift in power from the priestly/temple institution to the military-administrative class.

Under the Ptolemies (from 319 BCE in Judea), however, the tributary system clearly emerges as the *dominant* mode of production in Judea, an economic transition accompanied by a significant power shift among local elites. This is certainly not to suggest that the tributary mode of production replaced the formerly dominant agricultural-peasant mode of production. Rather, agricultural production was largely preserved in a now *dominated* form (see Althusser 1995: 43). As Joseph Manning summarises, “much of this new structure stood on the base of very ancient institutions, among them village organization, family traditions” and the provincial structure (2010: 87).

Ptolemy I introduced fiscal changes very early on, that is, in the final two decades of the fourth century BCE, pressed by the need to raise finance during the Wars of the Diadochi (Hölbl 2013: 28). Manning concludes, in respect of Egyptian taxation, that despite earlier use of tax collectors and farmers, “the Ptolemaic taxation system was more extensive and more thorough than anything seen before in Egypt” (2010: 53). The Ptolemaic empire instituted layers of bureaucratic organization in Egypt from village level to the provincial or nomic level. Officials as well as tax farmers selected from the local elite were responsible for overseeing regular tax collection, ensuring that producers met agricultural production targets, and administered the government monopolies over certain products—the bulk of the revenue from which was spent on sustaining the Ptolemaic army (2010: 79–80, 84–85). Manning estimates a Ptolemaic tax-take of 14–21% of overall gross domestic product, consistent with Claire Préaux’s earlier figure of 16%—which *doubles* even the succeeding Roman taxation levels (2003: 135 n21; 2010: 127; cf. Préaux 1939). Manning concludes that “if these estimates are anywhere near the truth, the Ptolemies must count as among the most impressive taxing powers and mobilizers of resources in antiquity” (2010: 127). A similar conclusion extends to the region of Coele-Syria, including Judea, which was in the continual control of the Ptolemaic empire from 312 BCE. Lester Grabbe notes that the total salt tax for Judea in 250 BCE of 20 talents, recorded by Josephus (*Ant.* 12.4.1), would require a population of 96,000, which is more than double or triple population estimates from the late Persian period (Grabbe 2008: 220).

The new Hellenistic taxation system was by no means merely a parasitic extraction of surpluses from a surviving agricultural mode of production. It reached far deeper, organising production targets, setting prices, organising royal monopolies, offering military and police protection, setting up offices and record-

keeping from the village level upwards, and reorganising the elite relations of production especially by setting noble families against priestly families (Manning 2010). The Decree of Ptolemy II from 260 BCE, recorded in the Rainer papyrus (*SB* 8008), demonstrates that the scope of local tax administration and control extended to the level of individual villages. Whereas under Persian rule the provincial governor was responsible for tax collection, “the difference that apparently came about under Ptolemaic rule”, observes Grabbe, “is that tax collection was supervised by government officials down to the lowest level. In this the local peoples were employed at village level and perhaps even higher to do the work of the ruling powers” (2008: 197).

Manning argues that the delegation of the responsibility for tax collection to various local elites was not only for the practical purpose of ensuring a regular income flow, but also for the imperial–political purpose of co-opting elites and creating organizations “that competed against each other, thus making coordination at the local level difficult” (2010: 201). Jean Bingen likewise argues that the administration of the Revenue Laws under Ptolemy II Philadelphus created “structural tensions” at every level of society, “between the interests of the agricultural administration, the financial administration, the controllers who supervised this financial administration, the more or less independent businessmen who farmed the royal revenues, the small local contractors, and all the guarantors who were involved in the tax–farming system of the third century” (2007: 191). The new Hellenistic bureaucratic order radically realigned “the loyalties of the key constituent groups of the ruling classes” (Manning 2010: 86). Tax farming in particular “created an incentive structure that aligned the interest of individuals with the ruler’s” (Manning 2010: 155). Lester Grabbe provides a good reason why this would have been the case in Judea, asking rhetorically, “If the Ptolemies were willing to allow—indeed to make use of—local administrative arrangements and local elites in Egypt itself, how much more in those areas outside Egypt where governance was likely to be more difficult?” (2008: 186). That the gerousia, or council of noble elders, became prominent in third century Judea may also be a sign of this rise of the military–administrative noble class under sponsorship of the Ptolemaic state. It is in the decree of Antiochus III that we first see mention of the gerousia as an authoritative body functioning alongside the priests (Josephus, *Ant.* 12.3.3–4).

Although Ste. Croix is better known for his heavy-handed categorization of the ancient mode of production as a *slave* mode, when he comments specifically on Hellenistic Coele–Syria, it is significant that he names *taxation* as the primary form of surplus extraction. Distinguishing direct from indirect forms of exploitation, with slaves and tenant farmers in the former category and taxation and military conscription in the latter, Ste. Croix notes the “special case of imperialism”, in which there is not necessarily direct control of the conditions of production but indirect control via tribute (Ste. Croix 1981: 44, cf. 53):

In those parts of Asia Minor and Syria which were brought into the Greek world from the late fourth century onwards, with the conquests of Alexander and the many city–foundations of that monarch and his successors, slavery already existed; but the institution was not nearly as developed as in the Greek world, and it seems likely that a far larger place was occupied than in Old

Greece by other forms of exploitation: occasionally outright serfdom and debt bondage, but also exploitation of free or semi-free peasants through rent and tributary payments.... (Ste. Croix 1981: 227–28)

In Ptolemaic Egypt in particular, “chattel slavery never seems to have played a very important role in production, at least agricultural production” (1981: 228), a point confirmed recently by Dorothy J. Thompson in respect of Egypt and the East in general (Thompson 2011: 212). Yet Ste. Croix verifies that even indirect means of exploitation such as taxation could alter the relations of production “for example through support given by the imperial power or its agents to the exploiting class or classes within that community” (Ste. Croix 1981: 44).

In Judea of the third century BCE, the Zenon archive and the so-called Tobiad romance in Book 12 of Josephus’s *Jewish Antiquities* combine to present a picture of a local elite operating separately from the priests and the Temple, with their own “considerable power and autonomy” (Grabbe 2008: 52, noting Tobias [*CPJ* 1.1; 1.4] and Jeddous [*CPJ* 1.6]). There are substantial problems in dating the events underlying the Tobiad romance and caution is required in separating true from fictional elements within the narrative. Nevertheless, the story illustrates the substantial wealth available for those who farmed tax on behalf of the king, as early as the third century BCE, and the close relationship between tax farmer and king which set them in opposition to their own family and people. The Tobiad romance illustrates the dual power base arising in Judea between “the high-priestly family of the Oniads and the noble family of the Tobiads” (Grabbe 2008: 77). In addition, the Zenon archive (*CPJ* 1) confirms the close connection between tax collection and the military, depicting the tax farmer Tobias as the head of a Ptolemaic cleruchy of soldiers in the Transjordanian region (Grabbe 2008: 155, 195).

In the fourth and third centuries BCE, antagonisms developed between priests and tax administrators/military commanders which were also played out within Judea’s literary productions, including the book of Numbers. The subject positions of priest and military administrator are represented literarily in the figures of Moses and Caleb and reflect the more fundamental opposition between the recently dominated sacrificial-agricultural and newly dominant taxation-military modes of production. The author shows no obvious favouritism to one or the other group, but incorporates traditions which are based on a common ideology of the righteous remnant within Israel—to which each group appeals so as to legitimate their elite positions within society. For the priests, this ideological claim is established through founding traditions celebrating Moses as law-giver, leader of Israel, and Yahweh’s exclusive spokesperson. For military-administrator families, it is made via a city-founding tradition in which the Judahite leader Caleb wages war in his god’s name. The exemption of Joshua in this schema may be seen as an extension of the military-administrative tradition from Judea to Samaria. For the list of spies in Num 13 makes Caleb and Joshua representatives of, respectively, Judah and Ephraim, and thus founding heroes of (revealingly) the third-century political centres of Judea and Samaria.

Although I have concentrated on the divide between the priestly and military-administrative ISAs, these represent only one line of division; there were probably more divisions along both ISA and geographical lines. Yet precisely the

same combination of priestly and military–administrative interests seems to manifest itself in some of the other composite narratives in Numbers, indicating that they too might be gainfully accounted for in terms of different articulations of the same ideology. Although space does not permit detailed explanations, I will briefly mention three of these other passages. The Korah rebellion in Numbers 16–17 combines a Levite–Aaronide story with a story about leaders and (military) “men”. The quail and judging stories, which are intermingled within Numbers 11, affirm both Moses’s unique authority and also the authority of a group of elders, the latter perhaps again reflecting the gerousia of the author’s time. In Numbers 21, the account of Moses’s actions as priestly intermediary before Yahweh is followed by a variety of insertions with a clear military or administrative focus: a quote from the “Book of the Wars of Yahweh”; itineraries; an ascription of the building of a well to “leaders” and (unusually) “nobles”; a city–founding ballad (the Song of Heshbon); and an account of the defeat of King Og taken from Deut 3:1–2. All of these composite narratives should arguably be viewed as reflecting the growing complexity of power in Yehud or Judea and, correspondingly, the emergence of multiple sites for the production of tradition, each with their own peculiar characteristics and inflection of a shared ideology.

Conclusion

Althusser’s theorisation of ideology suggests a way to conceive of the many contradictory exemptions or possible exemptions from Yahweh’s death sentence in Numbers 13–14 without having recourse to a hypothetical prolonged period of literary development. Historical critics have typically assumed that the many tensions and inconsistencies in Numbers 13–14 must be the result of centuries of redaction and rewriting. This article has argued that the tensions regarding Yahweh’s exemption of certain Israelites from his death sentence are better viewed as the result of an overdetermined ideology generated from multiple subject positions, appropriated at a single point of time in the composition of Numbers 13–14. The explanation offers the significant advantage that it accounts for *both* the narrative disunity *and* the ideological unity which we find present within Numbers 13–14. The spy narrative applies a single and united ideology—of the righteous remnant of Israel—in different ways to various parties: the Levitical Moses and Aaron, the military leaders Caleb and Joshua, the non-combative persons aged under twenty years of age, and plausibly also the non-combative Levites and Israelite women. The basic literary divide within Numbers 13–14 is accordingly between priestly and military–administrative leaders and it mirrors the underlying socio–economic circumstances which prevailed during the period of composition, when both priestly and military–administrative families competed for power and ideological legitimation under a new imperially enforced tributary mode of production.

The ideology of a righteous remnant within Israel was a major innovation to existing Torah traditions, and one that goes to the core of the book of Numbers, with its portrayal of the death of the exodus generation and its replacement by the younger, “innocent” generation, each numbered in the two censuses in chapters 1 and 26, and of the preservation of the faithful Caleb and Joshua. The book of Numbers thereby denies the earlier conception in the Torah that the adult Israelites who left Egypt were the same ones to enter the promised land (Deut

5:2–5; LXX Josh 5:2–5). The inconsistency of this innovation in Numbers vis-à-vis Exodus–Leviticus and Deuteronomy–Joshua generates the single most dramatic fissure within the Pentateuch, of considerably greater importance than the much-discussed tension between the Patriarchal/Matriarchal traditions in Genesis and the exodus traditions in Exodus. The innovation may well have been the main impetus which gave rise to the harmonising composition which we now know as the Hexateuch/Pentateuch, a development which recent work has suggested may overlap with the translation of Numbers into Greek (Kislev 2009). But this is a subject for a further study.

Abbreviations

CPJ V.A. Tcherikover et al. 1957–64. *Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum*.

SBF Preisigke et al. 1915–. *Sammelbuch grieschen Urkunden aus Ägypten*.

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