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"Method in the Study of Early Hebrew History"
by Roland de Vaux, O.P.

p.23 Often in the Pentateuch and in the book of Joshua the name of a person or the name of a place, a custom, a monument or ruin, or even a natural formation is explained by the account of an action, a situation, or an event. The account often ends by recalling the custom or the monument "which stands to this day," and which is proposed as the evidence and proof of the truth of this history. According to certain authors, and especially to Martin Noth on the accounts of the conquest, these explanations are invented; they are etiological accounts. One must point out, however, that a name, a custom, a monument always has its explanation.²¹ It happens that this explanation may be unknown or forgotten, and then the human need to

p.24 understand impels tradition to invent an explanation. These false etymologies and false interpretations belong to all time and all places. It is possible, it is likely, and in certain cases it is sure that such and such an explanation of the Bible is etiological, but it is not possible that all explanations are, and that a whole tradition should be founded only on etiology. If there had never been a conquest of Canaanite cities one would never have dreamed of explaining such and such a ruin by an account of conquest. One must decide in each case whether the account is historical or whether it is invented, whether the explanation is authentic or etiological. Etiology has certainly not had a primary role in the formation of tradition.

20. M. Noth, Das Buch Josua, 1938, 2nd ed., 1953

21. Cf. especially W. F. Albright, BASOR, LXXIV (1939), 12-17, and my review of M. Noth in EB, XLVII (1938), pp. 462-64.