

A Forgotten Diary and Photograph Collection as Valuable Records for the Historical and Archaeological Study of Israel and Transjordan

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A Dutch traveller recorded his journey through the Levant in the mid-1950s by writing an account of his travels as well as taking photographs. This interesting document fell into oblivion for almost 55 years, and its existence finally came to light only recently. The record – which concerns Israel and Transjordan in particular – reflects the historical and archaeological state of affairs at the time and can therefore be considered to be valuable for scientific research in this area. This article casts a glance at the document and reveals the significance of the account and the photographic material.

The diary and photograph collection

As an employee of the National Museum of Antiquities in Leyden, the Netherlands, I happened to meet Leo Boer¹ (Fig. 1) on an ordinary day in 1999. He approached me with some questions while he was visiting an exhibition. During our conversation, the subject gradually changed, and 30 minutes after we had started talking we were discussing topics such as the land of Israel, biblical archaeology and the Dead Sea Scrolls. It seems that Boer had studied for the priesthood at the Pontificium Institutum Biblicum (Pontifical Biblical Institute) at Rome in the mid-1950s. In the course of his studies, he had the opportunity to stay at the École Biblique et Archéologique Française de Jérusalem for one year (1953-1954), where he concentrated on studying the Bible, joined the third excavation led by Roland de Vaux at Qumran, and participated in many archaeological excursions organised by the École. During this year, Boer kept a diary and took about 800 photographs. Remarkably, he never thought about his travel account or his photographic material after he returned to Rome and, some years later, to the Netherlands.

Initially, Boer made brief notes about events, encounters and experiences in two small notebooks. A few times a week, he wrote out most of these notes into accurate accounts. Although he had ceased to think about his photographs, Boer did make a list of the photographs he had taken. This included the numbers of the



Fig. 1. Leo Boer. *All the following photographs were taken by Leo Boer, unless otherwise stated.*



Fig. 2. (12.1.1954) This assumed Roman aqueduct between Nablus and Samaria has been only sporadically photographed from this side.

pictures, captions and the dates when they were taken. Moreover, in his account of his travels, Boer refers to the numbers of the corresponding photographs.

While reading Boer's document and admiring his photographs, I realised that they comprised a significant document with regard to the political, religious and archaeological situation in Israel and Transjordan in the middle of the 20th century. In addition, a considerable number of his photographs were taken from positions from which none of the previously published pictures from the same period had been taken (Fig. 2). Moreover, most of these locations have since changed irreversibly, which makes the purchased material even more valuable.

The account can be divided into the following sections: Boer's journey to East Jerusalem; his stay at the École and in Jerusalem; archaeological hikes; monthly excursions; and journeys through Transjordan and Israel. This article aims to provide a short overview of this inspiring document, and will review the categories mentioned above.

From Rome to East Jerusalem

Travelling from Rome to East Jerusalem 60 years ago was not as easy as it is today. Boer left Rome on Sunday 4 October 1953 and arrived in Jerusalem 10 days later. From Rome he travelled by train to Naples, and from there he took a boat which was headed for Beirut. Three days after the ship had left Naples, it passed Alexandria, where some of the passengers went ashore. After a stop of six hours, the ship headed for Beirut, where it arrived on 8 October. Boer stayed in Beirut for three days at a monastery run by Franciscan friars, and visited Baalbek (Fig. 3), among other sites. Then, on 11 October, he was brought to Damascus in a taxi, where he stayed with Franciscans for another two days. Finally, Boer took a taxi to East Jerusalem via Amman, where he arrived at the École on 14 October at 3 p.m.

A few issues are striking in Boer's account of the journey to East Jerusalem. He describes in detail the encounters that he had on this journey, especially the ones on the ship, in which he emphasises the religious and cultural background of his discussion partners. It seems that there were a lot of ministers on board. This document also reveals the political circumstances in Egypt at the time. Boer writes that when the boat arrived at the berth in the harbour at Alexandria, the chief of the harbour police dropped by. He welcomed the passengers to Egypt in a variety of languages, and assured them that the situation was under control at the time thanks to Muhammad Naguib, the first president of Egypt (1953–1954). Boer noticed that the defeat of King Farouk was illustrated by the empty royal palace that was located a little bit further on from the boat. Finally, Boer refers twice to cases of anti-Semitism, although both cases involve only brief remarks. The first anti-Semitic incident concerned a fellow passenger – a Muslim from Cairo – whom Boer visited because the man was ill. Boer writes that the man 'had been under the weather much in his lifetime, because his wife was a Jewess'. Further on, when Boer writes about his journey from Baalbek to Damascus, he writes: 'Useless

formalities at the border. Everything went well. Hate against Jews'. Unfortunately, an explanation for this note is lacking.

Boer's stay in Jerusalem and at the École

The diary illustrates the political circumstances in Jerusalem in the mid-1950s very well. The École (Fig. 4) was located in the Transjordanian sector of the city and was separated from the Jewish section by a length of no man's land. The crossing point was situated at the Mandelbaum Gate (Fig. 5), about 150 m to the north of the École. Travelling from one section to the other required certain formalities, such as being in possession of two passports because it was not possible to have both an Israeli and a Transjordan visa on one passport.

Boer starts his account with a description of the condition of the housing at the École, which was not very good from his point of view. He was staying with 11 other students in a separate building with one faucet and one shower (a rope fastened to a bucket) which sometimes provided warm water. The door to Boer's room – which was also the front door – was too high at the bottom, too low at the top, and too small. There was no heating in the room. The cook at the institute used to be a veterinary surgeon. The story went that he often dished up meat from female camels that had been prepared for hours in a pressure-cooker. Nevertheless, it was inedible, causing many of the residents to go to the Dom Polsky hostel for dinner on a regular basis (Fig. 6).

His stay at the institute offered Boer the opportunity to meet well-known scholars and persons who were at the beginning of their promising scholarly careers. He was in touch with scholars such as Roland de Vaux (who, at the time, was also the director of the École), Louis-Hughes Vincent and Józef Milik.² Boer studied together with Maurice Baillet, who was a student at the École from 1952 to 1954 and the eighth member of the 'Cave 4 team' from 1958 onwards, and was present at his farewell party on 23 April 1954. Furthermore, he spent a great deal of time with Ernest-Marie Laperrousaz, who participated in the excavations at Khirbet Qumran under the guidance of de Vaux during these years.

Biblical and archaeological expertise came together, not only in the École, but across the whole of Jerusalem. This was an outstanding and inspiring environment for a 26-year old student. For example, Boer encountered Isac Leo Seeligmann, who had joined the Bible Department of the Hebrew University in 1950, had several conversations with Frank Cross who had just been appointed as the 'annual professor' at the American Schools of Oriental Research for 1953–1954 and was its acting director at the same time, met Kathleen Mary Kenyon (who had been the Honorary Director of the British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem since 1951) twice at Tell es-Sultan nearby Jericho where she was excavating at the time (Kenyon 1954, 1957, 1960–1983), and was guided through the Homo Carmelitanus at the Rockefeller Museum by Dorothy Garrod. Garrod directed the renowned campaign in 1929 when several caves at the foot of Mount Carmel were explored and the remains of human skeletons were discovered (Garrod 1937, 1962).



Fig. 3. (11.10.1953) The grand court in Baalbek with the 22 m high columns of the Temple of Jupiter in the background. This photograph was taken from the direction of the Hexagonal Court.



Fig. 4. (6.12.1953) Photograph of the *École Biblique*, taken from the Ben Shadad road.



Fig. 5. (24.12.1953) The Mandelbaum Gate, on the border between the Transjordan and Israeli sectors. On the right is a signalling board which directs people to the right at the crossing.



Fig. 6. (Bart Wagemakers, 18.1.2011) Dom Polski at Hahoma Hashlishit Street 8, which is still a Polish guest house today.

Finally, Boer had the opportunity to acquire archaeological experience during his time at the École. Despite the fact that he was a student of Biblical studies, he was expected to join in the excavation at Khirbet Qumran for one week, where he participated in de Vaux's third expedition from 20 to 27 March 1954. It became apparent only recently that his visit to Qumran was important with regard to the present research in the field of Qumran archaeology. Boer took more than 20 photographs at the settlement during that week, and some of them seem to be of great significance. Thanks to two of his photographs, existing theories concerning the 'dining room' and the 'pantry' belonging to the Qumran community – L.77 and 86 – need to be reconsidered (Wagemakers and Taylor 2011).

Historical and archaeological walks

The École used to organise walks to historical and archaeological locations in Jerusalem at an average rate of one every two weeks. Unfortunately, Boer does not describe the walks in his diary in great detail. As he mentions the destinations and dates of walks, we know that they visited (among other sites) the Ophel, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Gethsemane, the Mount of Olives, the Garden Tomb, Cedron Valley, Hezekiah's Tunnel, Aceldama, Robinson's Arch and the 'former Jewish Quarter'. Despite the fact that a comprehensive account is lacking, we do have the photographs which Boer took during his visits to these locations at our disposal (Fig. 7).

Monthly excursions

At the École, Father Lemoine was responsible for conducting the excursions. Once a month, a voluntary daytrip was organised, although the trips were frequently postponed in 1953–1954 because of poor weather conditions. Most of the excursions were rather intensive: the participants left early in the morning, travelled long distances by a private bus, and did not return until the evening. Boer's accounts of the excursions, of which there were five in total, are very detailed, but this is not the proper place to explore their content in its entirety. Nevertheless, in order to illustrate these kinds of excursions, I will list some of the locations which Boer visited and add some of the remarks from Boer's account. Please note that the remarks represent the (archaeological) views of the time. The references to the relevant literature are my own.

The first excursion that Boer joined was to Tell el-Ful (Gibeah).³ William Foxwell Albright excavated the site in 1922 and found (among other things) the foundations of a building which he attributed to King Saul (Albright 1924: 8). In 1927, parts of the walls collapsed as a result of an earthquake. According to Boer, the site was nothing more than 'a pile of stones' in 1953, although he was in the position to photograph a corner of Saul's building (Fig. 8).

The first stop in the second daytrip was Et Tell (Ai), located 2.5 km northeast of Bethel (Beitin). Judith Marquet-Krause excavated the site in 1933, 1934 and 1935



Fig. 7. (1.6.1954) The 'former Jewish Quarter' at the southeast sector of the Old City in Jerusalem. The Sidna Omar minaret is visible in the background. The domes of both the Tifaret Yisrael Synagogue and the Hurva Synagogue – which used to embellish the skyline of this quarter – are lacking because they were demolished in the war of 1948.



Fig. 8. (12.11.1953) A corner of Saul's building in Tell el-Ful (compare with Albright 1924: 59, Fig. 7). About 10 years after Boer took this photograph, King Hussein of Transjordan decided to build a palace on top of this tell. This building project came to a standstill due to the Six-Day War in 1967.

(Marquet-Krause 1935, 1949). Boer describes the results of the campaign in fairly elaborate detail and mentions *inter alia* three walls, a gate, an ancient sanctuary containing three constructions from different periods, a palace, and a few houses dating from the Iron Age. Later that day, the group drove to Khirbet el-Maqtar – 1 km due west of Et Tell – where they looked for the outlines and pieces of mosaic from a fourth-century church and a monastery dating from the sixth century. Burg Beitin was the next stop. There they saw a second-century *temenos* and a large part of a Crusader tower measuring 42 × 32.60 m. Unfortunately, the ‘modern’ town of Beitin had been built on top of the exact location of biblical Bethel, meaning that little could be seen of the campaign which Albright directed there in 1934 (Albright 1934a and b, 1968).⁴

After they visited Jebel el ‘Asūr (Baal-Hazor), the group was surprised by a heavy rain shower and had a break in et-Tayyibe. There had not yet been any excavation in this village, but they were able to see the ruins of a Byzantine church and St. Elias, a Crusader castle which was handed over to Boniface of Montferrat by Baldwin IV in 1185. Just outside the town stood the fifth century church of St. George which had been restored by crusaders (Fig. 9).

The destination of another excursion was Hebron and the sites along the road. As the road to Bethlehem and Hebron, which started at the Jaffa Gate in Jerusalem, ran through Israeli territory, the Jordanians decided to build a new road in 1952. Thanks to these building activities, a part of Pilate’s water pipe running from ‘Ein ‘Arrub (Qiriath ‘Arbaia) to Jerusalem was uncovered 1 km from Sur Baher (Fig. 10). The group stopped at Solomon’s pools⁵ (Fig. 11) after visiting the cistern of ‘Ein ‘Arrub. In Hebron, the group was able to enter the mosque despite being non-Muslims thanks to the permission of the Jordanian Ministry of Awqaf. After they visited the pool of Hebron (2 Sam. 4: 12), the bus brought them to Jebel Rumeide where they saw the city walls of ancient Hebron, topped by the Deir Arbain monastery. In the afternoon, they arrived at Ramat el Khalil, which is ancient Mamre. Boer refers to the excavations of Evaristus Mader some 25 years earlier (Mader 1957), as he summarises the following conclusions: (1) an enclosure, which measured 65 × 49 m, dated from the time of Herod (Mader 1957: 77–78); (2) at the time of Emperor Hadrian (117–136), a temple was built which was dedicated to Hermes (Mader 1957: 81); (3) the ‘altar of Abraham’ had been found (Mader 1957: 103–106); (4) a church was built on the orders of Constantine I (323–337) (Mader 1957: 99–115); and (5) the ancient floor found beneath the first construction dates from the period of the Kings (Mader 1957: 48).

Transjordan and Israel

During Boer’s stay at the École, the institute organised two extended trips: one through Transjordan (18–29 October 1953) and one through Israel (26 April–13 May 1954). Despite the different destinations, there are many corresponding components in the two journeys. In both cases, the group (Fig. 12) was led by



Fig. 9. (26.11.1953) Et-Tayyibe, with the church of St. George in the background.



Fig. 10. (9.12.1953) A first-century water pipe near Sur Baher in southeast Jerusalem.



Fig. 11. (9.12.1953) The lowest pool of the three in Solomon's Pools. Boer writes that the pool is '177 m long, 83 till 45 m broad, and reaches at some places a depth of 12 m. The water-basin is almost dry'.



Fig. 12. (28.04.1954) The group from the École walking through the remains of the stables at Megiddo during their trip through Israel.

Louis Lemoine, visited numerous archaeological sites, came into contact with many local people, travelled long distances every day, and – despite the full programme – reserved a relatively large amount of time for lunch. As the account of the journeys is too extensive to discuss here, I will restrict myself to some general remarks:

- (1) Travelling through Transjordan and visiting its archaeological sites required some particular proceedings. The group had to, for instance, be in possession of recommendations from the local police or, even better, from the Arab Legion (the Transjordan army). In addition, the leader of the group was supposed to put some time aside to drink coffee with the responsible local authority before visiting the site;
- (2) On several occasions, the group encountered a hostile, ‘anti-Western’ attitude from the local residents. At times, this tension led to the cancellation of an intended visit to a site or village, such as the intended visit to Halhul (Alula), which is located in the neighbourhood of Hebron. At other times, the group did visit their destination, but only in the company of armed policemen or soldiers (Fig. 13). A good example is their visit to the city of Hebron itself. Boer writes that, before entering the city, a policeman got onto the bus as a precaution. According to Boer, the inhabitants could be aggressive towards Westerners, and the group was strictly forbidden from taking photographs of the residents. In addition, during an excursion in the Negev, the group was provided with an armed escort, although Boer does not say whether this was for the same reason as in the cases mentioned above. The fact is that during the visit to the caves of Marisa, near Beth Govrin (Eleutheropolis), the armed escort got the party to leave immediately after shots were heard at close range;
- (3) When the group arrived at sites in Transjordan, they were frequently welcomed by members of the Antiquities Guard who were acting upon the instructions of Mr. Lancaster Harding, the Director-General of the Department of Antiquities. As a result of his recommendations, not only was the group granted access to every part of the sites, they were also given free entrance: ‘Do not forget’, Boer writes, ‘that the admission fee of Petra is even 1 Dinar’. Unfortunately, Lancaster Harding was not there when they visited the recently-built Museum of Antiquities in Amman in order to thank him for his help (Fig. 14);
- (4) The group had good relationships with police posts in Transjordan: on several occasions, they ate and slept at the posts;
- (5) Some of the Israeli sites could not be visited in the 1950s, because of the presence of the army. The ruins of a Crusader castle in Antipatris (Fig. 15), for example, were not accessible because soldiers had settled there. The famous Byzantine Monastery of the Cross on the outskirts of Jerusalem also became a military station. The group was also prohibited from visiting ‘Atlit (Bucolonpolis), which housed ‘one of the best preserved Crusader castles in the region’, because the army had a camp with depots at the site.



Fig. 13. (12.5.1954) During their visit to Tell ed-Duweir (Lachish), the group was also accompanied by armed soldiers. Here they are standing on the wall of the palace located at the northern corner of the site.



Fig. 14. (29.10.1953) Photograph taken to the south from the citadel in Amman. In the centre is a second-century Roman theatre.



Fig. 15. (27.4.1954) The ruins of Crusader castle Migdal Aphek in Antipatris, which accommodated soldiers in the mid-1950s.



Fig. 16. (26.10.1953) The group was discouraged from visiting Tell Kheleifeh (Ezion-Geber), which was situated in no man's land, by the British army because of the tense state of affairs. Instead of visiting the site, the group had the opportunity to take a look at this stone with its Greek inscription.

The archaeological situation in the 1950s

From the account, it seems that archaeology, especially in Israel, prospered in the 1950s. Boer visited several sites during their excavation and frequently mentions or illustrates recent discoveries. The following is a description of a few examples.

When Boer was travelling through Jordan with the group from the *École* and visited Aila (Aqaba) on 26 October 1953, an English Major showed them a stone with a Greek inscription that had been found by soldiers just a few days earlier. The text was hard to read, and after trying very hard to do so for an hour they decided to give up (Fig. 16).

On 9 December 1953, during one of the monthly excursions, the group encountered a burial chamber in the stony bottom of the road from 'Ein ed Dirwe to Beth Zur (Khirbet et Tubeiqa). This chamber had been discovered only a few months earlier. The entrance, a set of steps, was closed, but the ceiling had collapsed. Boer counted 12 tombs, and noted that some of the bones were exposed. The wall of this cavern was decorated with a symbol of the Christian cross. This was all he could say at the time.

Walking in the vicinity of Khirbet Mazmil, near 'Ein Karem, the group's attention was drawn by eight heaps of stones, known by the local population as Ruḡum (Fig. 17). This location had been excavated by Ruth Amiran over the past year, but without any striking conclusions. Boer postulates that the area which contained the heaps of stones could have functioned as a *bamah*, a 'high place'. The heaps could then be explained using the ancient tradition of throwing stones at cursed places. In this instance, Boer is probably representing the views of one of the scholars in the group.

When the participants in the trip through Israel were in the vicinity of Tiberias on 2 May 1954, they passed an excavation which was raising a lot of questions in the archaeological world at the time. In his account, Boer calls it the 'Place of the Bath' (the quotation marks are his), as it seems that the location did not yet have an official name. Some Arabic layers had already been excavated at the site, but the place also included Byzantine elements. According to Boer, the location contained a hall measuring 20 × 5.50 m. The floor of the hall was paved with mosaics of flowers, birds and other animals, including two donkey heads and an elephant. Other mosaics featured birds and fishes. The images were placed in a kind of framework, which was more restrictive than the ones in Tabgha, which are older. In addition, the site had a complicated system of waterworks and several hypocausts. A construction with pipes was used to heat the second floor. There was a water reservoir with two canals, in which archaeologists found 15 jars. The opening of all of these jars pointed in the same direction. Finally, 24 columns were found that had been re-used in other buildings.

It is certain that the group visited the ruins of the bathhouse in ancient Tiberias, which had been excavated by Bezalel Rabani in the early-1950s (Rabani 1953), because there are many similarities between the details in Boer's account and the archaeological reports.⁶ At the time when Boer visited this place, several Islamic

layers, a Byzantine layer and a layer from the late Roman period had already been revealed. Both halls that had been discovered in the bathhouse were decorated with mosaic floors dating from the sixth century, from the second building phase of this complex (Hirschfeld and Galor 2007: 217, 220). The list of representations that Rabani provided included animals (elephants, leopards, griffins, donkeys, birds and fishes) and flowers. In addition, Rabani exposed a brick oven that was connected to a hypocaust cellar with vaults through which pipes ran (Rabani 1953: 265). The water reservoir containing the 15 jars has now been identified as a fish pond which might have been used to breed fish and has been dated to the third century (Hirschfeld and Galor 2007: 215).⁷

In addition to these ‘recent’ discoveries, Boer also describes the existing views from the archaeological debate which was ongoing in those days. In his account of his visit of Et Tell (Ha Ai), for instance, Boer mentions a difference of opinion. Judith Marquet-Krause, who led the excavations from 1933 till 1935, found a double wall behind which the inhabitants could entrench themselves. The first wall was 5 to 6 m thick and the second one – at a distance of 2.5 m from the first – 1 to 2 m (Fig. 18). In her opinion, the space between the walls had been used as a corridor (Marquet-Krause 1949: 21–22, 31–32). Boer writes that de Vaux disagreed with her and postulated that this construction was similar to the defence system at Tell Fara, and that the space used to be filled with sand in order to prevent the walls from collapsing.

Elsewhere, when Boer describes the ascent of the Jebel ‘Asūr (Baal Hazor), he refers to the theory of F. -M. Abel, who stated that Judas Maccabee had died here (1 Macc 9: 14–19; Abel 1949: 162–163 note 15). On the other hand, Boer continues, de Vaux challenged this view and pointed to Bir-Zeit (which is more to the east and on the other side of the Jerusalem-Nablus road) as the right spot (de Vaux 1946: 260–262).

Conclusion

As demonstrated in this overview, Leo Boer’s document offers valuable access to the historical and archaeological past of Israel and Transjordan. The combination of the account and the photographic material gives an outstanding impression of the state of affairs almost 60 years ago. Unfortunately, Boer died in 2009, and so he is unable to witness the scholarly benefits that have resulted from the document which he stored in his garage for all those years.

Notes

1. For 10 years, I was in contact with Leo Boer, during which time we had very interesting conversations. Unfortunately, Leo passed away on 9 November 2009. I wish to express my gratitude to him and his wife Annemie who entrusted me with the diary and the photographs. I am also grateful to Annemie who gave me permission to publish both of them.



Fig. 17 (26.4.1954) Possible 'high places' in the surroundings of Khirbet Mazmil, near 'Ein Karem.



Fig. 18 (26.11.1953) Two walls of Et Tell separated by a corridor. When this photograph is compared with Plate XXVII, 2 by Marquet-Krause (1949), it becomes clear that these two form part of a set of three walls.

2. The latter arrived again in Jerusalem in September 1953 in order to work on the fragments of the Dead Sea Scrolls that were found in Cave 4.

3. For the identification of Tell el-Ful as Gibeah, see Albright 1924: 28–43.

4. Strangely enough, the excavation team did not find building installations of any kind in the Byzantine, Roman, Hellenistic or Persian levels when they started work at the location of the 1934 camp during the second campaign in 1954. When the archaeologist asked the land owners about the absence of these installations, they informed him ‘that they had already dug up this area to secure stone for the erection of the new boundary wall between this old camp site and Area I of the former dig’ (Albright 1968: 7).

5. According to Boer, the pools were wrongly ascribed to Solomon. The historic waterworks (Ecclesiastes 2: 4–6) should be situated in the surroundings of En-Roghel in the Cedron Valley.

6. In addition to these parallels, there is also a difference between the account and the reports. Whereas Boer mentions one hall of size 20 × 5.50 m, Rabani writes about two halls of 10 × 20 m and 5.50 × 9 m respectively (Rabani 1953: 265).

7. Hirschfeld and Galor mention two fish ponds in this area of ancient Tiberias: one is located in Area C and the other under the bathhouse in Area A (see fig. 2 in Hirschfeld 2007: 213). When reading Boer’s description, it is clear that he saw the pool beneath the bathhouse.

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