

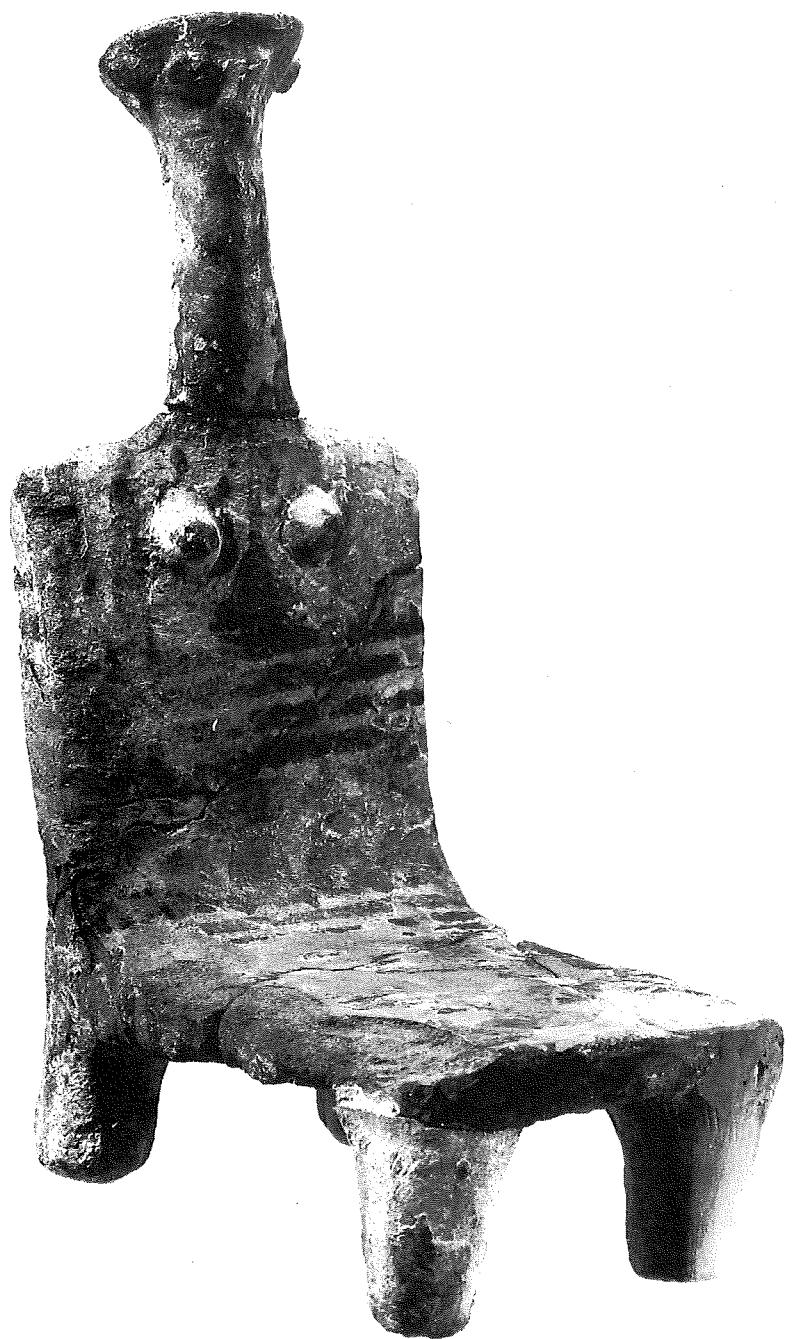


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Forging an Identity

The Emergence of Ancient Israel



LAWRENCE E. STAGER

Shortly after 1200 BCE the once great Hittite empire in Anatolia and the Mycenaean empire in mainland Greece—the Trojans and the Achaeans, to use the language of Homeric epic—collapsed, releasing different centrifugal forces. Within the Mycenaean and Hittite worlds an internal process of fragmentation and ruralization began, leading to what archaeologists often call a “dark age.” This in turn triggered mass migrations by sea to the already crowded coastlands of the Levant and Cyprus, sending repercussions into the interior of Canaan as well. The Philistines were one group taking part in these migrations. Not long before, another group had appeared in the land of Canaan, although by a process that is much more disputed. This group called itself Israel, and according to the biblical story it also had arrived from a foreign land—escaping slavery in Egypt, crossing a body of water, and eventually entering Canaan from the east. This chapter focuses on reconstructing the early history of these two new groups, the Philistines and the Israelites, in the land of Canaan, insofar as the textual and archaeological evidence permits such a synthesis.

The Egyptians maintained some control over parts of Canaan until just after the death of Rameses III in 1153 BCE. By the first half of the twelfth century, Canaan had become a virtual mosaic of cultures, including Canaanites, Egyptians, Israelites, and the mysterious “Sea Peoples,” of whom the Philistines are the best known. The settlement process in highland Israel began a generation or two before the Sea Peoples arrived on the coast. An event of such magnitude must have had powerful repercussions on the

An enthroned Philistine goddess, about 17 centimeters (7 inches) high. Similar figurines from Mycenae are evidence of the link between the Mycenaeans and the Philistines. The Philistine name for the goddess is unknown; archaeologists who discovered figurines like this one during their excavation of Philistine levels at Ashdod dubbed her “Ashdoda.”

indigenous Canaanite population as it was being squeezed out of the plains. Some of these displaced inhabitants probably entered the frontier communities located in the highlands east and west of the Rift Valley—the polities of early Israel, Moab, Ammon, and perhaps Edom. The displacement and migration of the tribe of Dan from the central coast to the far north is symptomatic of the ripple effects of this event.

Early Written and Iconographic Sources

The Egyptian pharaoh Merneptah (1213–1203 BCE) provides the earliest nonbiblical reference to ancient Israel, in a short poem appended to a much longer prose account of his self-proclaimed victory over the Libyans and their allies, the Sea Peoples. The victory stela (now usually known as the “Israel Stela”) was erected in 1209 in Merneptah’s funerary temple at Thebes. The relevant part of the victory ode reads:

The princes are prostrate, saying “Shalom” [Peace]!
Not one is raising his head among the Nine Bows.
Now that Libya [Tehenu] has come to ruin,
Hatti is pacified.
The Canaan has been plundered into every sort of woe;
Ashkelon has been overcome;
Gezer has been captured;
Yanoam is made nonexistent;
Israel is laid waste and his seed is not;
Hurru is become a widow because of Egypt.

The leading adversaries of the Egyptians—three city-states, or kingdoms, designated by their capitals (Ashkelon, Gezer, and Yanoam), and a people known as Israel—lie within the larger geographical framework of Canaan and Hurru. The latter, bereft of her spouse, has become a “widow” because of Egypt. Ironically, Merneptah’s premature proclamation of the demise of Israel is the first reference in history to this polity, which survived for another six hundred years as a “nation,” first as a confederation of tribes and later as a monarchy (1025–586 BCE).

Within the larger territorial framework of Canaan, the Egyptians use the determinative for a fortified city-state to designate the smaller kingdoms of Ashkelon, Gezer, and Yanoam; Israel is correctly distinguished as a rural or tribal entity by the determinative for “people.” In Egyptian the names of foreign countries, provinces, and cities are treated syntactically as feminine. But Israel, with the “people” determinative, is a masculine collective, probably indicating its identity with an eponymous patriarchal ancestor. Clearly the Egyptians regarded Israel as a different kind of polity from the other three, although all were apparently equal adversaries, if not part of an organized anti-Egyptian Canaanite coalition. The campaign against Canaan proceeds from the

southwest to the northeast, Ashkelon to Gezer, and then farther north to Yanoam, somewhere near the Sea of Galilee.

Where was this early Israel located, and what was its settlement pattern and social structure? The people determinative can be used of tribally organized pastoralist or agriculturalist groups, with or without territorial boundaries. The Egyptian designation could apply equally well to an unsettled or to a settled group or confederation organized along tribal lines. This early entity must have had sufficient military strength to stand on par with the three other city-states, or kingdoms.

When the rebellion of Canaanites and Israelites against Egypt is placed in broader perspective, it appears that this was just one of many trouble spots that threatened Egyptian control and order in the late thirteenth and early twelfth centuries BCE. The first wave of Sea Peoples (which did not include the Philistines), allied with the Libyans, lapped right up to the shores of Egypt itself during Merneptah's reign. Three decades later a second wave of Sea Peoples (including the Philistines) threatened the Nile Delta and carved out coastal kingdoms in Canaan at the expense of the Egyptian empire under Rameses III.

In this larger context of disorder in the eastern Mediterranean it is abundantly clear from the Merneptah Stela that Israel was a political-ethnic entity of sufficient importance to the Egyptians to warrant mention alongside the three Canaanite city-states. Indeed, this event of about 1200 BCE was the nearest thing to a real revolution in Canaan—and it was against the Egyptians.

An elegant and precise pictorial complement to the victory hymn of Merneptah has recently been identified in four battle reliefs at Karnak. Formerly attributed to Rameses II but now assigned with confidence to Merneptah, these reliefs depict the three city-states (Ashkelon is mentioned by name in the reliefs) and the “people” Israel.

In the Merneptah reliefs, the Israelites are not depicted as Shasu, but wear the same clothing and have the same hairstyles as the Canaanites, who are defending the fortified cities of Ashkelon, Gezer, and Yanoam. This new evidence does not, of course, settle the perennial question concerning the “origins” of Late Bronze Age Israel, that is, whether it consisted predominantly of pastoralists, peasants, new immigrants, or all three. But it does undermine the older notion that the Israelites were only the Shasu known by a new name, who settled down in agricultural villages about 1200 BCE.

Another victory ode, this time from the early Israelites themselves, is preserved in Judges 5 and is known as the Song of Deborah. George Foot Moore considered the poem the “only contemporaneous monument of Hebrew history” before the United Monarchy. It probably dates from the twelfth century BCE. As a celebration of victory over the Canaanite coalition at the battle of Kishon, the poem is a masterpiece of Semitic literature. As a historical document, it is important for the self-portrayal and self-understanding of early Israel that the poet provides.

Drawing of wall reliefs at Karnak, carved by Pharaoh Merneptah (1213–1203 BCE). This is the earliest pictorial representation of the “people” Israel (above) and the fortified city Ashkelon (below, identified in the hieroglyphic inscription). Although the relief is badly damaged in the portion that portrays Israel, it is clear that Israel is depicted as a military force being defeated in the open field.



The poem portrays Israel as a confederation of ten (not twelve) tribes, a theopolity known as the “people [kindred] of Yahweh” (Judg. 5.13). Marching forth from the southeast, from Seir and Edom, Yahweh leads his people to victory over the Canaanites “at Taanach, by the waters of Megiddo.” Through divine succor from the heavenly host and a flash flood in the Wadi Kishon, the Israelites rout the better-armed Canaanites, who are equipped with chariots. The final blow of the battle is struck by Jael, a woman of the Kenite clan (a subgroup of the Midianites), who drives a tent peg through the head of Sisera, leader of the Canaanite coalition.

Early in the twelfth century BCE the confederation of ten tribes was occupying a variety of ecological niches on both sides of the Jordan, and carrying on a variety of professions, such as highland farming (Ephraim, Machir, Benjamin, Naphtali), sheep and goat herding (Reuben), and seafaring (Dan and Asher). Such a wide-ranging confederation of disparate groups committed to the kindred of Yahweh did not always act in concert, as the Song of Deborah indicates. Sometimes individual tribal interests and economic entanglements prevailed: Reuben, Gilead, Dan, and Asher declined to answer

the call to arms. The positive response to the muster came from the highland village militia of the six other members of the confederation.

The Israelite understanding of themselves as a kindred of Yahweh in Judges 5 is compatible with the Egyptian designation of Israel as a “people,” although the constituency of that polity probably changed from the late thirteenth into the early twelfth centuries. When considered together with the archaeology of the region, both documents provide an invaluable resource for reconstructing aspects of the social, political, and religious life of nascent Israel.

The Conquest Narratives

The literary sources for the biblical account of the conquest of Canaan by twelve tribes under the command of Joshua are embedded in the great work of the Deuteronomic Historian(s) (DH), writing some six hundred years after the event he purports to describe. From the perspective of DH, the conquest of Canaan was a unified, lightning-fast event that swept from east to west—from Ammon and Moab, across the Jordan River to the hill country of central Canaan, and then north to Galilee. It was a conquest of the indigenous “Canaanites” by “outsiders,” namely, the “Israelites,” under the protection and guidance of their deity Yahweh. Although DH’s theological perspective is incompatible with modern historiographic methods, he can by ancient standards be considered among the “first historians,” as Baruch Halpern has phrased it, every much a historian of ancient Israel as Herodotus was of ancient Greece.

DH tells a coherent story from entry into the Promised Land to the end of the monarchy. He creates dialogue for his leading characters. At the same time, however, DH makes use of the limited sources available to him. These include a variety of earlier oral traditions and written documents, the only survivals of which are now in the Bible. They range in date and genre from early poetry of the twelfth century, such as Judges 5, to boundary lists of the seventh century, such as Joshua 15.

DH sometimes weaves multiple accounts of the same event into his narrative, even when they are at variance or contradictory. The most obvious example is the prose account of the battle of Kishon (Judg. 4), in which two tribes battle the Canaanites. This is followed in the next chapter by the poetic account, the Song of Deborah, in which at least six tribes fight. All scholars agree that the prose account is later and dependent on the poetic version. Nevertheless, perhaps wishing to preserve a variety of traditions, DH chose to present both versions of the same event.

This same concern for sources leads to the tension between the monolithic conquest of Canaan as presented in the book of Joshua and the partial takeover that introduces

the book of Judges. In his use of sources DH differs radically from another ancient Israelite historian, the Chronicler, writing more than a century later. The Chronicler has winnowed his sources and constructed a narrative into a unified whole that does not allow for variant or multiple accounts of a single event.

Nevertheless, for all the care that DH lavished on his sources, most of them derive from the period of the monarchy, several centuries later than the purported era of Joshua and the conquest of Canaan. As Nadav Na'aman has observed, many of the conquest narratives were modeled on later battles, such as those of David against the Philistines or the Arameans, or Sennacherib's campaign against Judah. Thus it is extremely difficult for the modern historian to disentangle the many strands of DH's braided narrative, composed as it is from a very particular historiographic perspective, and including invented dialogue and limited sources presumed to be contemporary with the era of conquest but mostly dating much later.

The Conquest Hypothesis

Of the three regnant scholarly hypotheses formulated to account for the emergence of Israel in Canaan, the "conquest" hypothesis conforms most closely to the biblical presentation of DH. W. F. Albright developed a powerful formulation of the conquest hypothesis, which many American and Israeli archaeologists later espoused, G. Ernest Wright and Yigael Yadin being two of its most notable proponents. They were confident that the essential historicity of the conquest narratives could be vindicated by the use of external evidence provided by archaeology. Until relatively recently, many archaeologists believed that excavations at sites thought to be identified with biblical Heshbon, Jericho, Bethel, Ai, Lachish, Eglon, Debir, and Hazor actually supported the notion of a unified conquest of Canaan by outsiders in the latter part of the thirteenth century BCE. This interpretation relies heavily on the conquest narratives in the book of Joshua (chapters 6–12) and, to a lesser extent, in Judges 1. For this group of scholars the archaeology of widespread and synchronous destruction at many of these key cities as well as the cultural change that followed about 1200 BCE buttress the validity of the biblical accounts preserved in the Deuteronomic History, many of which are based, according to this view, on much older oral and written sources. In this view, Israel swept into Canaan from the eastern desert and swiftly conquered city after city.

Archaeologists agree that dramatic cultural change affected not only parts of Canaan but also much of the eastern Mediterranean at the end of the Late Bronze Age (ca. 1200 BCE). How much of that change was brought about by the migrations and/or invasions of newcomers to Canaan, and specifically by invading Israelites, is still an open question.

To make a persuasive archaeological case for the mass migration of peoples from one homeland to another, certain criteria must be met:

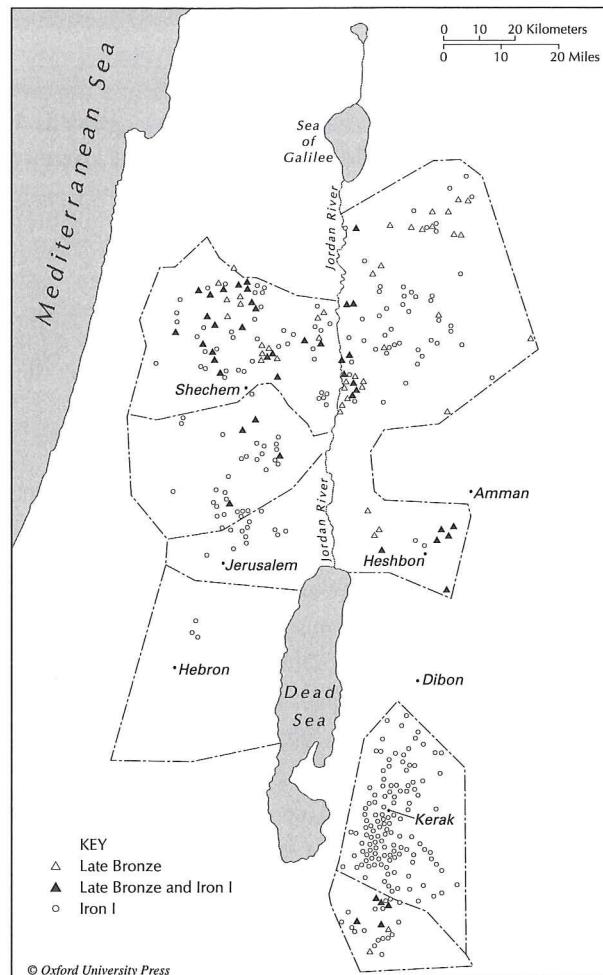
1. The implanted culture must be distinguishable from the indigenous cultures in the new zones of settlement. If the intrusive group launches an invasion (as proponents of the Israelite “conquest” postulate), then there should be synchronous discontinuities, such as destruction layers, separating the previous “Canaanite” cultures from the newly established “Israelite” cultures in the zone of contention.
2. The homeland of the migrating/invading groups should be located, its material culture depicted, and temporal precedence established in its place of origin. In the case of invading Israel, this should be in Transjordan or in Egypt.
3. The route of migration/invasion should be traceable and examined for its archaeological, historical, and geographical plausibility. If the new immigrants took an overland route, the spatial and temporal distribution of the material culture should indicate the path and direction of large-scale migrations.

As the Israelites advanced from Egypt toward Canaan, the conquest narratives have them taking Heshbon (modern Hesban), the city of Sihon, and Medeba in Ammon, as well as Dibon (modern Dhiban) in Moab (Num. 21.21–31). At Heshbon and Dibon, extensive excavations have uncovered no Late Bronze Age occupation, and only meager remains from Iron Age I. The situation at Medeba is being investigated. As the settlement map indicates (see p. 130), most of Transjordan was unoccupied when the Israelite invaders are said to have moved through these territories in the late thirteenth century BCE.

After crossing the Jordan River, Joshua and his troops conquered Jericho (Josh. 6). They blew the rams’ horns and shouted in unison until the walls of Jericho collapsed. This miracle has no archaeological reflex; in fact, there is little or no occupation at Jericho in the thirteenth century. Kathleen Kenyon, the British archaeologist who pioneered stratigraphic excavations at the site, thought that erosion had deprived history of the Late Bronze Age city that Joshua captured. But the absence of tombs and even potsherds from this period makes Kenyon’s view highly unlikely.

When Joshua and his troops moved farther west, up the wadi to Ai (Josh. 7.2–8.29), they ultimately scored a great victory over the king of Ai and the inhabitants of the city. But here again archaeology demonstrates that a tall tale is being told. Ai, whose name means the “ruin,” had not been occupied during the second millennium. Its “ruins” dated from the latter part of the third millennium, among which an Iron Age I village was planted in the twelfth century. As German scholars have long maintained, Ai is a showcase example of how etiological explanations were used to enhance the conquest narratives by explaining extensive ruins as the result of early Israelite victories. Nearby

Highland Settlements in the Late Bronze and Iron I Periods

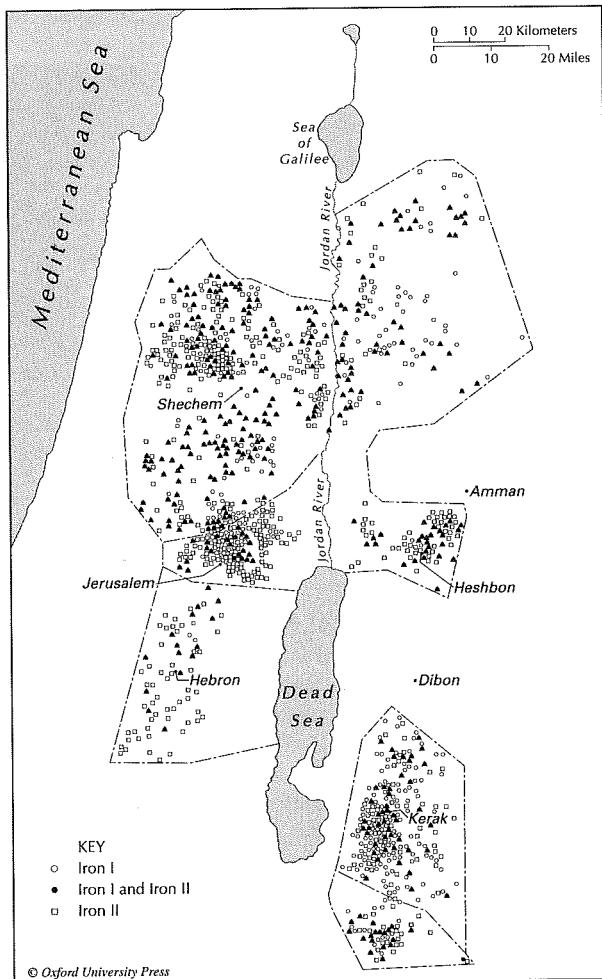


Bethel was put to the sword (Judg. 1), and archaeology has confirmed its destruction in the thirteenth century.

The next major conquest occurs in the north at Hazor, the former “head of all those kingdoms.” All of the dependencies of Hazor were taken, but only Hazor itself was burned to the ground (Josh. 11.10–13). This was the largest city of Canaan, its inhabitants numbering twenty thousand or more. The only agents who claim responsibility for destroying this Canaanite city are the Israelites. There is no reason to deny them their claim.

Finally, there is a summary of Joshua’s victories west of the Jordan (Josh. 12.9–24). Following this list, the identifications of the ancient sites and the archaeological evidence are summed up in table 3.1 (see pp. 132–33).

Of the thirty-one cities said to be taken by Joshua and the Israelites, twenty have



Highland Settlements in the Iron I and Iron II Periods

been plausibly identified with excavation sites. Of these, only Bethel and Hazor meet criterion 1, and even there, it is debated whether the destruction of Hazor XIII was as late as that of Late Bronze Age Bethel. The conquest of Laish/Dan, recounted in Judges 18, may be reflected in the destruction of Tel Dan, Stratum VIIA (ca. 1175–1150 BCE)—too late to be synchronized with the demise of Late Bronze Age Bethel and Hazor. The Late Bronze Age city of Lachish VII was destroyed in the latter half of the thirteenth century BCE. This destruction could have resulted from the purported Israelite invasion, but recent excavations have shown that the rebuilt city (Lachish VI) was an Egypto-Canaanite settlement, occupied as a buffer against Philistia during the reign of Rameses III, until about 1150. None of the Transjordanian settlements mentioned in the conquest of Sihon's “Amorite” kingdom by the Israelites (Num. 21) has Late Bronze Age occupation. The three cities of Philistia—Gaza, Ashkelon, and Ekron—listed as captured by

Table 3.1 Cities in Joshua 12.9–24

ANCIENT PLACE-NAME	BIBLICAL REFERENCES	ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE
1. Jericho	Joshua 12.9; 6; 24.11	Meager LB II occupation
2. Ai	Joshua 12.9; 7.2–8.29	No occupation from 2250 to 1200
3. Jerusalem	Joshua 12.10; Judges 1.21	No destruction at the end of LB II
4. Hebron	Joshua 12.10; 10.36–37; 14.13–15; 15.13–14; Judges 1.10	No evidence
5. Jarmuth	Joshua 12.11; 10.5	LB II to Iron I occupation
6. Lachish	Joshua 12.11; 10.31–32	City VII destroyed in late thirteenth century; City VI destroyed ca. 1150
7. Eglon	Joshua 12.12; 10.34–35	Tell ‘Aitun; LB occupation unclear
8. Gezer	Joshua 12.12; contra Judges 1.29	LB destruction, probably Merneptah or Philistines
9. Debir	Joshua 12.13; 10.38–39; 15.15–17; Judges 1.11–13	Tell er-Rabud, no destruction at end of LB
10. Geder	Joshua 12.13	Khirbet Jedur; LB II and Iron I pottery; not excavated
11. Hormah	Joshua 12.14	Identification unknown
12. Arad	Joshua 12.14	No LB occupation
13. Libnah	Joshua 12.15; 10.29–31	Identification unknown
14. Adullam	Joshua 12.15	Khirbet ‘Adullam; not excavated
15. Makkedah	Joshua 12.16; 10.28	Identification unknown
16. Bethel	Joshua 12.16; 8.17; Judges 1.22–26	Destruction in the late thirteenth century
17. Tappuah	Joshua 12.17	Tell Sheikh Abu Zarad; not excavated
18. Hepher	Joshua 12.17	Tell el-Muhaffer; not excavated
19. Aphek	Joshua 12.18	LB destruction followed by Iron I “Sea Peoples” occupation

Table 3.1 (*continued*)

ANCIENT PLACE-NAME	BIBLICAL REFERENCES	ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE
20. Lasharon	Joshua 12.18	Identification unknown
21. Madon	Joshua 12.19	Identification unknown
22. Hazor	Joshua 12.19; 11.10–13; Judges 4.2	LB city, Stratum XIII, destroyed in thirteenth century
23. Shimron- meron	Joshua 12.20	Identification unknown
24. Achsaph	Joshua 12.20	Khirbet el-Harbaj: LB II and Iron I pottery
25. Taanach	Joshua 12.21; contra Judges 1.27	Meager LB II remains; Iron I village destroyed in latter half of twelfth century
26. Megiddo	Joshua 12.21; contra Judges 1.27	LB II/Iron I city, Stratum VIIA, destroyed in latter half of twelfth century
27. Kedesh	Joshua 12.22	Tell Abu Qudeis; Iron I settlement, Stratum VIII, destroyed in latter half of twelfth century
28. Jokneam	Joshua 12.22	LB II settlement, Stratum XIX, destroyed in late thirteenth or twelfth century; gap follows
29. Dor	Joshua 12.23; contra Judges 1.27	“Sea Peoples” known as Sikils occupy city in twelfth century; transition from LB to Iron I not yet determined
30. Goiim	Joshua 12.23	Identification unknown
31. Tirzah	Joshua 12.24	Tell el-Farah (N); LB II and Iron I occupation; no evidence of destruction

Judah in Judges 1.18, according to the Masoretic Text, are said not to have been, according to the Greek version.

Thus by the most generous interpretation of the archaeological data, the “unified conquest” hypothesis fails to meet the minimal standards of criterion 1. Nevertheless, the insistence of the Deuteronomic Historian that Israel was an “outside” force, rather lately “conquering” Canaan and wresting control from the autochthonous population, is not so easily explained. This is especially highlighted by later Near Eastern historiography represented by Manetho’s *Aegyptiaca*, Berossus’s *Babylonica*, and Josephus’s *Jewish Antiquities*. All three historians go to great length to establish the antiquity and priority of their respective peoples.

Perhaps, then, there is something to be said for a migration, if not an actual invasion, of Israelites into Canaan toward the end of the Bronze Age. For this more general explanation of culture change, variants of criteria 1 through 3 are still valid. They pertain to the other hypotheses concerning the emergence of early Israel as well. But before those are explicated, it is necessary to summarize new data in the archaeology of the Late Bronze Age and Iron Age I, which have come from excavations and, especially, systematic surface surveys of sites on both sides of the Rift Valley. (For a summary, see tables 3.2 and 3.3 and the settlement maps.)

The Archaeological Evidence of Early Israel and Neighboring Polities

In the nine areas surveyed, eighty-eight Late Bronze Age sites occupy a built-up area of more than 200 hectares (500 acres), for an estimated total population of about 50,000. In the same areas there are 678 Iron Age I settlements, each site being a hectare or less, for a total of about 600 hectares (nearly 1,500 acres), with an estimated 150,000 inhabitants (see table 3.2 and settlement maps). Six hundred and thirty-three, or 93 percent, of these Iron Age I sites are new foundations, usually small, unwalled villages. Most of these new settlements are located in the highlands or plateaus on both sides of the Jordan River. Settlement is especially dense in the territories of Manasseh and Ephraim in the west and in Gilead and Moab in the east, both “frontiers” having been sparsely settled in the Late Bronze Age. This extraordinary increase in occupation during Iron Age I cannot be explained only by natural population growth of the few Late Bronze Age city-states in the region: there must have been a major influx of people into the highlands in the twelfth and eleventh centuries BCE.

Recent attempts to distinguish movements from east of the Jordan into the west,

Table 3.2 Survey of Sites by Region and Period Appearing on Settlement Maps

	LATE BRONZE	IRON I	IRON II
Judah	0	18	68
Benjamin	0	52	180
Ephraim	4	102	89
Manasseh	32	147	220
Gilead	19	77	53
Jordan Valley	20	40	41
Hesban (in Ammon)	6	32	61
Moab*	0	170	98
Wadi el-Hasa (in Edom)	7	40	42
Total	88	678	852

*In the absence of Mycenaean or Cypriot imported pottery and lack of local pottery with exclusively LB II characteristics, all of the LB sites in the Kerak Plateau Survey have been reassigned to the Iron I period.

or vice versa, lack sufficiently precise chronological control to be convincing. What can be said is that Iron Age I settlements throughout the highlands display a similar material culture, which is best identified with rural communities based on mixed economies of agriculture and sheep-goat herding. That many of these villages belonged to premonarchic Israel (as known from Judg. 5 and perhaps from the Merneptah Stela) is beyond doubt. This is especially clear from the continuity of settlement patterns from Iron Age I into Iron Age II (see table 3.3) in the survey zones of Ephraim, Manasseh, and Gilead, the heartland of monarchic Israel.

Biblical sources indicate that premonarchic Israel was structured according to tribal principles of social organization. Archaeology is providing support for understanding the social organization of premonarchic Israel and other Transjordanian polities (for example, Moab, Midian, Ammon) as kin-based, “tribal” societies. In the Iron Age I highland villages, the heartland of early Israel, it is possible to distinguish multiple family compounds, such as those at Khirbet Raddana. These family compounds, comprised of two or three houses set off from their village surroundings by an enclosure wall, formed the basic socioeconomic units of the community, usually with a population of no more

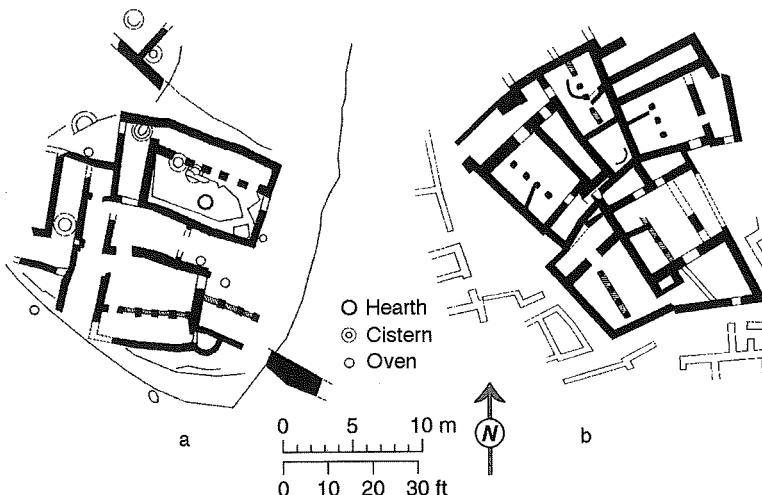
Table 3.3 Continuity of Settlement Patterns from Late Bronze II to Iron Age I and from Iron Age I to Iron Age II

	LATE BRONZE	IRON I	IRON II
Judah	→	0%	→ 22%
Benjamin	→	0%	→ 19%
Ephraim	→	4%	→ 84%
Manasseh	→	14%	→ 38%
Gilead	→	0%	→ 68%
Jordan Valley	→	23%	→ 61%
Hesban	→	19%	→ 39%
Moab	→	0%	→ 47%
Wadi el-Hasa	→	13%	→ 45%
Total	→	7%	→ 42%

than one hundred to two hundred persons per village. In such villages, the extended or multiple family unit was the ideal type. Such a household may have constituted a minimal “house of the father” (Hebrew *bêt ’āb*), or a small patrilineage.

Further clues to the composition of early Israelite villages can be deciphered from compound place-names. The first element of the place-name reveals the settlement type, such as “hill,” “enclosure,” “diadem”; the second element, the name of the founding families or leading lineages. Examples are Gibeah (“hill”) of Saul (1 Sam. 11.4), Hazar (“enclosure of”)-addar (Num. 34.4), Ataroth (“diadem of”)-addar (Josh. 16.5), and Ataroth-beth-joab (“diadem of the house of Joab”; 1 Chron. 2.54). Likewise, on the regional level territories could take their names from the dominant large families, either lineages or clans, who lived there. Samuel, a Zuphite, lived at his ancestral home at Ramah, or Ramath(aim)-zophim, named after his Ephraimite ancestor (1 Sam. 1.1), in the land of Zuph, through which Saul passed in search of his father’s lost asses (1 Sam. 9.5). District or clan territories remained important subdivisions of tribal society even during the monarchical period, as the Samaria ostraca attest.

Without clear indications from texts, it is doubtful that archaeologists can distinguish one highland group from another. The cluster of material culture, which includes collared-rim store jars, pillared houses, storage pits, faunal assemblages of sheep, goat, and cattle (but little or no pig), may well indicate an Israelite settlement, but this as-



Iron Age house compounds. The first cluster (a) of pilastered houses, from Khirbet Raddana (Site S), dates to Iron Age I and is probably Israelite. The second (b) is from Tell Beit Mirsim and dates to the eighth century BCE.

semblage is not exclusively theirs. Giloh and Tell el-Ful (Saul's Gibeah) are generally considered to be "Israelite" villages, but they have many things in common (for example, collared-rim store jars) with neighboring "Jebusite" Jerusalem and "Hivite" Gibeon. "Taanach by the waters of Megiddo" seems to be Canaanite in the Song of Deborah, yet its material culture is hardly distinguishable from that of the highland villages. There is a greater contrast between the twelfth-century city of Canaanite Megiddo (Stratum VIIA) and the contemporary Canaanite village of Taanach than between putative Israelite and Canaanite rural settlements. The differences derive more from socioeconomic than from ethnic factors.

The evidence from language, costume, coiffure, and material remains suggest that the early Israelites were a rural subset of Canaanite culture and largely indistinguishable from Transjordanian rural cultures as well.

The Pastoral Nomad Hypothesis

In 1925 the German scholar Albrecht Alt articulated the second regnant hypothesis to explain the appearance of early Israel. Alt used texts to compare the "territorial divisions" of Canaan with those of the Iron Age. From this brilliant analysis, made without the aid of archaeology, Alt concluded that early Israel evolved from pastoral nomadism to agricultural sedentarism.

This interpretation, which has held sway especially among German scholars, accepts the biblical notion that the Israelites were outsiders migrating into Canaan from the eastern desert steppes as pastoral nomads, specialists in sheep and goat husbandry. These clan and tribal groups established more or less peaceful relations with the indigenous Canaanites, moving into more sparsely populated zones, such as the wooded highlands

In this typical assemblage of Iron Age I pottery from the highland settlement of Shiloh, collared-rim store jars, or *pithoi*, stand in the back row. Many archaeologists consider these jars to be "type fossils" of the Israelites. Their wide distribution, however, makes it likely that they were not exclusively Israelite.

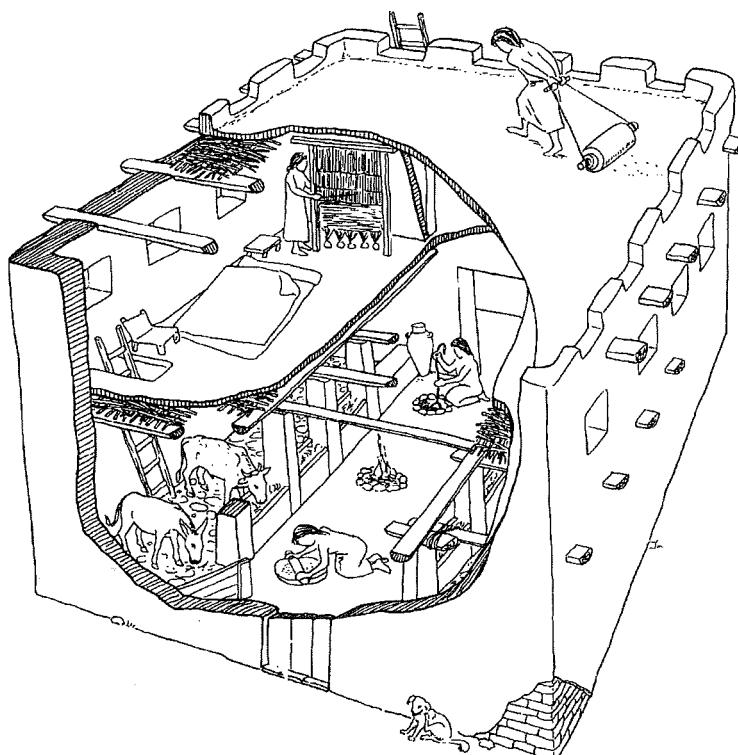


of Palestine or the marginal steppes—areas outside the domain of most Canaanite kingdoms and beyond the effective control of their overlords, the Egyptians. These pastoralists have sometimes been identified specifically with a wide-ranging group called the Shasu in Egyptian texts dating from 1500 to 1150 BCE. They appear as mercenaries in the Egyptian army, but more often they are regarded as tent-dwelling nomads who raise flocks of sheep and goats. Their primary range seems to be in southern Edom or northern Arabia (known as "Midian" in the Bible). In Merneptah's time, Egyptians recognized the "Shasu of Edom." A Dynasty 18 list mentions among their tribal territories the "Shasu-land of Yahweh," perhaps an early reference to the deity first revealed to Moses at Horeb/Sinai in the land of Midian (see below).

Recent anthropological research has rendered obsolete the concept of the pastoral nomads who subsist on the meat and dairy products they produce and live in blissful solitude from the rest of the world. Equally outworn is the concept of seminomadism (still embraced by too many scholars of the ancient Near East) as a rigid ontological status, marking some cultural (pseudo-)evolutionary stage on the path to civilization, from desert tribesman to village farmer to urban dweller: in archaeological parlance, the "from tent-to-hut-to-house" evolution.

Scholars of the ancient Near East are only recently rediscovering what the great fourteenth-century CE Arab historian Ibn Khaldun knew well. In his classic *Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, he observed:

Desert civilization is inferior to urban civilization, because not all the necessities of civilization are to be found among the people of the desert. They do have some agriculture at home but do not possess the materials that belong to it, most of which [depend on] crafts. They have . . . milk, wool, [camel's] hair, and hides, which the urban population needs and pays Bedouins money for. However, while [the Bedouins] need



A typical Israelite pillared house, as reconstructed by the author. On the ground floor, food was prepared and the family's animals were stabled. On the second story, warmed in winter by the cooking fire and the heat of the animals, dining, sleeping, and other activities took place.

the cities for their necessities of life, the urban population needs [the Bedouins] for conveniences and luxuries. (p. 122; trans. Franz Rosenthal, abr. and ed. by N. J. Dawood, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1967)

The Israeli archaeologist Israel Finkelstein has adapted and updated Alt's nomadic hypothesis to explain the hundreds of new settlements that have been recorded in archaeological surveys. But it is difficult to believe that all of these new-founded, early Iron Age I settlements emanated from a single source, namely, sheep-goat pastoralism. In symbiotic relations the pastoral component rarely exceeds 10 to 15 percent of the total population. Given the decline of sedentary people in Canaan throughout the Late Bronze Age, it seems unlikely that most of the Iron Age settlers came from indigenous pastoralist backgrounds.

The Peasants' Revolt Hypothesis

The third leading hypothesis to account for the emergence of ancient Israel was posed by George E. Mendenhall and elaborated further by Norman Gottwald. For them, the Israelites consisted mainly of oppressed Canaanite peasants who revolted against their masters and withdrew from the urban enclaves of the lowlands and valleys to seek their

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freedom elsewhere, beyond the effective control of the urban elite. In this sense, they represent a parasocial element known as the *Apiru* in second-millennium BCE texts from many parts of the Near East. Moshe Greenberg has characterized them as “uprooted, propertyless persons who found a means of subsistence for themselves and their families by entering a state of dependence in various forms. A contributory factor in their helplessness appears to have been their lack of rights as foreigners in the places where they lived. In large numbers they were organized into state-supported bodies to serve the military needs of their localities. Others exchanged their services for maintenance with individual masters” (*The Hab/piru*, New Haven, Conn.: American Oriental Society, 1955, p. 88). These were propertyless persons in a state of dependency on a superior. They might be servants in a household or hired laborers. In hard economic times and periods of social disintegration, they became gangs of freebooters and bandits under the leadership of a warlord, such as Jephthah (Judg. 11) or David before he became king. Whether this was a revolution from the bottom up, which resulted in the new Yahwistic faith (according to Gottwald), or whether the new faith served as the catalyst for revolutionary change (according to Mendenhall), both variants of the “peasants’ revolt” hypothesis consider the participants to be insiders, not outsiders—an underclass of former Canaanites who took on a new identity as they joined the newly constituted community “Israel.”

The “peasants’ revolt” model and concomitant “Yahwistic revolution” have only partial explanatory power. If these farming villages were the product of this Yahwistic revolution, then how does one account for an almost equal number of “egalitarian” villages outside the confines of premonarchic Israel? They appear over a much wider landscape than even the most maximalist views of early Israel could include, ranging from Ammon to Moab and even into Edom, not to speak of those settlements within Canaan itself, where the ethnic identity of their inhabitants is in question.

It is unlikely that all these newly founded early Iron I settlements derived from a single source—whether of Late Bronze Age sheep-goat pastoralists settling down, or from disintegrating city-state systems no longer able to control peasants bent on taking over lowland agricultural regimes for themselves or pioneering new, “free” lands in the highlands. When one considers the widespread phenomenon of small agricultural communities in Iron Age I, it becomes even more difficult to explain it all by any hypothesis that would limit it to “Israelites” alone, as all three hypotheses do.

To draw the boundaries of premonarchic Israel so broadly as to include every settlement that displays the most common attributes of that culture (pillared farmhouses, collared-rim store jars, terraced fields, and cisterns), or to claim that all of these villages and hamlets on both sides of the Jordan are “Israelite” just because they share a common material culture, is to commit a fallacy against which the great French medieval historian Marc Bloch warned, namely, of ascribing a widespread phenomenon to a “pseudo-local

cause.” A general phenomenon must have an equally general cause. Comparison with a similar, but widespread phenomenon often undermines purely local explanations. Now that archaeologists have collected the kinds of settlement data that provide a more comprehensive pattern, the focus must be widened to include a more comprehensive explanation than the regnant hypotheses allow—whether they relate to an Israelite “conquest,” a “peasants’ revolution,” or “nomads settling down.”

It would be overly simplistic to draw the boundaries of premonarchic Israel so broadly as to ascribe the change in the settlement landscape to this historical force alone. This, of course, does not preclude the use of particularistic, historical studies to elucidate aspects of the larger process. Once the results of highland archaeology need not be accounted for by an exclusively “Israelite” explanation, one can then look at this well-documented polity as a case study within the larger framework.

A Ruralization Hypothesis

From the changing settlement patterns in the Levant and elsewhere in the eastern Mediterranean, it seems that the pattern of deep, structural change had more to do with the process of ruralization than revolution. In the Late Bronze Age there must have been acute shortages of labor in the city-states, where attracting and retaining agricultural workers was a constant problem. Evsey Domar (*Capitalism, Socialism, and Serfdom*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989) has isolated a set of interrelated variables that may help explain the proliferation of agricultural villages in frontier areas, where such entities as Israel, Moab, and Edom are already found in thirteenth-century BCE Egyptian sources. According to this formulation, only two of the three following variables can coexist within the same agricultural regime: free land, free peasants, and nonworking landowners. In the Late Bronze Age city-states, free land (in the highlands and marginal regions), nonworking landowners, and “serfs” existed. With the decline of some city-state systems, there would have been a centrifugal tendency for peasant farmers to settle beyond areas of state control, especially in the less accessible mountain redoubts.

So long as the Late Bronze Age markets and exchange networks were still operating, the sheep-goat pastoralists would have found specialization in animal husbandry a worthwhile occupation. However, with the decline of these economic systems in many parts of Canaan in the late thirteenth to early twelfth centuries BCE—when “caravans ceased and travelers kept to the byways” (Judg. 5.6)—the pastoralist sector, engaged in herding and huckstering, may also have found it advantageous to shift toward different subsistence strategies, such as farming with some stock-raising. This group undoubtedly formed part of the village population that emerged quite visibly in the highlands about 1200.

Especially in marginal “frontier” zones, the trend was toward decentralization and ruralization, brought about by the decline of the Late Bronze Age city-state and, in certain areas, of Egyptian imperial control. It is in this broader framework that we must try to locate the more specific causes that led to the emergence of early Israel.

Israel developed its self-consciousness or ethnic identity in large measure through its religious foundation—a breakthrough that led a subset of Canaanite culture, coming from a variety of places, backgrounds, prior affiliations, and livelihoods, to join a supertribe united under the authority of and devotion to a supreme deity, revealed to Moses as Yahweh. From a small group that formed around the founder Moses in Midian, other groups were added. Among the first to join was the Transjordanian tribe of Reuben, firstborn of the “sons of Jacob/Israel.” Later, this once powerful tribe was threatened with extinction (Deut. 33.6). But by then many others had joined the Mosaic movement scholars call Yahwism.

Midianites, Moses, and Monotheism

Nearly a century ago the historian Eduard Meyer traced the origin of Yahwism to the Midianites and to one of their subgroups, the Kenites. Recent archaeological discoveries in northern Arabia and elsewhere have revived and revised the “Midianite/Kenite” hypothesis, most elegantly expressed in the writings of the biblical scholar Frank M. Cross. A biography of Moses, the founder of Yahwism, cannot be written from the biblical legends that surround him. But several details in his saga, especially concerning the Midianites, seem to be early and authentic.

According to the epic source called J (Yahwist), Moses, after killing an Egyptian, fled from an unnamed pharaoh (perhaps Seti I) to the land of Midian. The heartland of Midian lay in the desert of rose-red mountains and plateaus above the great Rift Valley, east of the Gulf of Aqaba in northwestern Arabia. Medieval Arab geographers still referred to this region as the land of Midian; today it is known as the Hijaz. There Moses married the daughter of the Midianite priest Jethro (called Reuel or Hobab in other sources). During this initial episode in Midian, Moses experienced the theophany of Yahweh in the thornbush, which was blazing but was not consumed (Exod. 3.1–4.17).

After the Exodus from Egypt (probably during the reign of Rameses II), Moses returned with his followers to the same “mountain of God [’elohim]” in Midian, where he experienced a second theophany. In this episode Moses received the Ten Commandments and sealed the covenant between God (’elohim) and his people. Moses’ father-in-law, the priest of Midian, counseled him about implementing an effective judicial system among the Israelites, apparently based on one already in use among the Midianites (Exod. 18.13–27).

Jethro expressed his commitment to God (’elohim) through burnt offerings and



Egypt, Sinai, Arabia,
and the Land of
Midian

sacrifices, and his solidarity with Moses and his followers through a shared meal “in the presence of God [‘elohim]” (Exod. 18.12). Later Moses’ father-in-law helped guide this group through the wilderness as far as Canaan, but he declined to enter the Promised Land, averring that he must return to his own land and to his kindred (Num. 10.29–32).

The traditions of benign relations between the Midianites and the Moses group reflect the period prior to 1100 BCE, that is, before the era of Gideon and Abimelech, when the camel-riding and -raiding Midianites had become the archenemies of the Israelites (Judg. 6). The Midianites, like the Kenites, the Amalekites, and the Ishmaelites, disappear from biblical history by the tenth century BCE. It strains credulity to think that traditions about Moses, the great lawgiver and hero who married the daughter of the priest of Midian, were created during or after these hostilities.

Early Hebrew poetry suggests that the “mountain of God,” known as Horeb (in the

E and D sources) and as Sinai (in the J and P sources), was located in the Arabian, not the Sinai, Peninsula. When Yahweh leads the Israelites into battle against the Canaanites in the twelfth-century Song of Deborah, the poet declares:

When you, Yahweh, went forth from Seir,
When you marched forth from the plateaus of Edom,
Earth shook,
Heaven poured,
Clouds poured water;
Mountains quaked;
Before Yahweh, Lord of Sinai,
Before Yahweh, God of Israel.

(Judg. 5.4–5; my translation)

Likewise in the archaic “Blessing of Moses”:

Yahweh came from Sinai,
He beamed forth from Seir upon us,
He shone forth from Mount Paran.
(Deut. 33.2; my translation)

And the same locale is given for Yahweh’s mountain home in Habakkuk 3:

God came from Teman,
The Holy One from Mount Paran. . . .
He stood and he shook earth,
He looked and made nations tremble.
Everlasting mountains were shattered,
Ancient hills collapsed,
Ancient pathways were destroyed. . . .
The tents of Cushan shook,
Tent curtains of the land of Midian.
(Hab. 3.3–7; my translation)

The tribesmen of Cushan were already encamped on the southeast border of Palestine in the early second millennium BCE, according to Middle Kingdom texts from Egypt. Later they were absorbed into the confederation of Midianites.

The epic traditions concerning Moses and the Midianites occur in story time between the Exodus from Egypt and the conquest of Canaan. The setting for these encounters on or near the “mountain of God” is connected with Edom, Seir, Paran, Teman, Cushan, and Midian. There, in the Arabian, not the Sinai, Peninsula, Yahweh is first revealed to Moses, and it is from there that the deity marches forth to lead the nascent Israelites into battle, according to the earliest Hebrew poetry.

In historical time the benign relations between Midianites and Israelites should be set before 1100 BCE, a period that also coincides with the floruit of “Midianite ware”

(see below) and the presence of pastoralists in the region. The Egyptians of the New Kingdom included those tent-dwellers under the general rubric *Shasu*. Among their territories southeast of Canaan mentioned in the lists of Amenhotep III, one is designated the “land of the Shasu: *Srr*,” probably to be identified with Seir; another is known as the “land of the Shasu: *Yhw3*,” or Yahweh.

Until the enmity between Israelites and Midianites, exemplified in the wars of Gideon, dominated their relations, the two groups were considered kin, offspring of the patriarch Abraham: Israelites through Isaac, son of the primary wife, Sarah, and Midianites through Midian, son of the secondary wife or concubine, Keturah, whose name means “incense.” From Moses on, Midianites were also linked to Israelites by marriage to the founder of Yahwism.

All of this changed dramatically during the period of the judges. The about-face in attitude and policy toward the once-friendly Midianites is nowhere more vividly portrayed than in the polemic against the worship of Baal of Peor in Moab. In the J summary of the event (Num. 25.1–5), the Israelites are depicted as fornicators, whoring after the “daughters of Moab” and their deity Baal of Peor. Apparently a plague interrupted the festivities, and to ward it off the leaders of the Israelites “who yoked [themselves] to Baal of Peor” were executed. In the P account (Num. 25.6–18), Phinehas, who represents the later priestly household of Aaron, calls into question the genealogical charter of the priestly household of Moses and challenges the legitimacy of this dynasty of priests. When Phinehas finds a notable scion of the Israelites copulating with a notable daughter of the Midianites within the sacred precincts of the tent-shrine or tabernacle, the Aaronide priest skewers them both with a single thrust of his lance.

In the lineage of Abraham in Genesis, Keturah’s “sons” represent tribes and peoples trafficking in goods from Arabia (Gen. 25.1–4). Midianites and Ishmaelites settle in the land of Havilah (25.18), through which one of four rivers of Eden flows, a land rich in gold, bdellium, and carnelian (Gen. 2.11–12). Another river of paradise flows around the land of Cush (2.13), or Cushan, whose descendants include not only Havilah but also Seba/Saba/Sheba (Gen. 10.7; 1 Chron. 1.9).

When the queen of Sheba (modern Yemen, in south Arabia) visited King Solomon, she brought camel caravans loaded with aromatics, gold, and gemstones (1 Kings 10.2). Her “gifts” to the Israelite potentate of the tenth century BCE differ little from the tribute exacted from Sheba by the Assyrian emperor Esarhaddon three centuries later. Yautha, king of a confederation of North Arabian tribes known as the Kedarites, delivered to the Assyrian monarch 10 minas of gold, 1,000 choice gems, 50 camels, and 1,000 leather bags of aromatics of all kinds.

In the sixth century BCE the great Phoenician seaport of Tyre was exporting the wealth of Arabia to other parts of the Mediterranean: the Kedarites brought young bull-camels, rams, and he-goats; the Dedanites, from an oasis north of Yathrib (Medina),

traded in saddle cloths for riding; and Sheba exported gold, incense, and all kinds of gemstones (Ezek. 27.20–22).

Even later the book of Isaiah (60.6–7) anticipated that Arabia's riches would be brought to a restored Jerusalem:

A multitude of camels shall cover you,
the young bull-camels of Midian and Ephah [a son of Midian in Gen. 25.4];
all those from Sheba shall come.
They shall bring gold and frankincense. . . .
All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered to you.

Thus whether the great caravaneers of Arabia were known as Midianites (Gen. 37.28, 36; Judg. 5.10), or later as Arabs and Kedarites, or later still as Nabateans, the merchandise and produce they exported to the rest of the ancient Near East and to the Mediterranean remained basically the same.

Linkage between remote desert oases in Arabia required the camel. It was the only pack animal that could survive the long distances between watering holes in the desert oases, the vital links between the resources of southern Arabia and the wider world. W. F. Albright's assessment, based on contemporary texts and limited faunal remains, that dromedary camels became important to the caravan trade only toward the final centuries of the second millennium BCE, is still valid.

In Sheba grew the best aromatics in the world. Frankincense is a white resin obtained from trees that grow in abundance on the mountainous south coast of the Arabian Peninsula, in the Hadhramaut and Dhofar. It was burned as a pungent aromatic incense or as a compound in other fragrant offerings to the gods. Myrrh, harvested from bushes growing in the steppes of Punt (modern Somalia) and Sheba, was another aromatic in great demand for its use in cosmetics, perfumes, and medicines.

By the Late Bronze Age, the aromatics trade had become the most lucrative business in the ancient Near East thanks to the dromedary camel. Not only did the merchants become rich; so did the camel breeders, the escorts who provided protection for caravans through hostile territory, and the rulers who exacted tolls from caravaneers passing through their kingdoms (see 1 Kings 10.15).

As J. David Schloen has recognized, it was the disruption of this lucrative caravan trade under the aegis of the Midianites and the protection of the Israelites that sparked the battle between Canaanites and Israelites, celebrated in the Song of Deborah, when:

In the days of Shamgar ben Anat,
In the days of Jael,
Caravans and trailblazers held back,
Caravans traveled by circuitous routes,
Village tribesmen in Israel held back.



Midianite painted pottery from Timna. In the mid-twelfth century BCE, the cliffs of the Timna Valley in the land of Midian, north-northwest of the Red Sea, were used for a tented shrine by the nomadic people of the southern Negeb desert, who had defaced an earlier Egyptian shrine dedicated to the goddess Hathor. Ostriches are depicted on the vessels on the left.

They held back until you arose, Deborah,
Until you arose, a mother in Israel.

(Judg. 5.6–7; my translation)

The heroine of the victory was Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, who drove a tent peg into the temple of the Canaanite commander Sisera (Judg. 5.24–27). In one tradition Moses' father-in-law is identified with the Kenites (Judg. 1.16), whose descendants dwell among the Amalekites in the northern Negeb near Arad (1 Sam. 15.5–6). Moshe Kochavi has plausibly suggested that the main Amalekite center was located at Tel Masos. Apparently the Kenites and the Amalekites were part of the large confederation of Midianites, who in the twelfth century BCE were still on friendly terms with the Israelites. Genealogical traditions identified Kenites with Cain (*qayyan* means “metalsmith” in Aramaic) and Tubal-cain “who made all kinds of bronze and iron tools” (Gen. 4.22).

The date and distribution of “Midianite painted pottery,” also called “Hijaz painted pottery,” corroborates and clarifies some of the Midianite traditions adumbrated above. The key site is a large urban oasis known today as Qurayyah in northwestern Arabia, in the heartland of ancient Midian. The site awaits systematic excavation, but using intensive surface surveys Peter Parr has been able to provide many details about it. The citadel of this center is extremely large, encompassing about 35 hectares (86 acres), below which lies a fortified settlement of another 15 hectares (37 acres). As many as ten to twelve thousand inhabitants lived in this caravan city. Some local subsistence for the large community was provided by an elaborate system of irrigation farming utilizing seasonal floodwaters.

The most striking artifact from the survey is a beautiful painted pottery, found at Qurayyah in abundance. It is decorated with painted geometric designs (probably

imitating textiles) and zoomorphic motifs, such as the desert ostrich. Pottery kilns at the site and petrographic analysis of this “Midianite painted pottery” leave no doubt that Qurayyah was a major production center for it, exporting it southeast as far as the great oasis at Tema and north as far as Amman and Hebron. Small amounts of this ware have also been found in the northern Negeb at Tel Masos and at Tell el-Farah (S), and in the foothills of Canaan at Lachish; another sherd has been found at Tawilan in Edom.

The date of this pottery and its association with copper metallurgy has been confirmed by excavations at Timna in the Wadi Arabah, 200 kilometers (125 miles) north of Qurayyah. There, in an Egyptian sanctuary nestled beneath a cliff, Midianite painted pottery made up about 25 percent of the pottery assemblage. Associated objects inscribed in Egyptian dated to the thirteenth to twelfth centuries BCE. In its final stages the sanctuary was appropriated and rededicated by iconoclastic Midianites. Three hundred kilometers (186 miles) north of its production center Qurayyah, Midianite painted pottery has been found in quantity in the greatest copper mining district of the Bronze and Iron Ages—at Khirbet Feinan, known in the Bible as Punon (Num. 33.42), one of the stopping points of the Israelites during their desert wanderings.

Thus the distribution of Midianite painted pottery, from its production center(s) in northern Arabia (Midian) to a wide range of settlements in the Negeb, the Arabah, and beyond, fits rather nicely the locale and routes of a people known for their metal-smithing and caravaneering. The floruit of this distinctive pottery is precisely the era in which most biblical historians (quite independently of this ceramic evidence, which has only recently come to light) would date the Israelite Exodus from Egypt, their sojourn through Midian and Transjordan, and their settlement in Canaan in the late thirteenth and twelfth centuries BCE.

Circumstantial evidence of time and place suggests Midianite antecedents and contributions to Yahwism. Such formal elements as the proper name *Yahweh*, his sacred mountain in Midian as the locus of Moses’ theophanies, and the prominent roles of Moses’ father-in-law (priest and sheikh of the Midianites) and his wife Zipporah provide tantalizing hints about the relationship. But until more is known about Midianite religion, these connections will remain tentative at best.

What is known, however, is that only a century before the “Mosaic era” and the advent of Yahwism, Egypt experienced a brief episode of radical monotheism during the so-called Amarna Revolution. The pharaoh Akhenaten (1352–1336 BCE; formerly Amenhotep IV) proclaimed Aten—the luminous, numinous power of the sun disk—the sole and universal god of Egypt and its empire (including Canaan). Atenism was suppressed by succeeding pharaohs, who reinstated the traditional pantheon; nevertheless, the memory of this radical monotheism survived in some circles, and centuries later the Israelite poet who composed Psalm 104 borrowed directly from the sublime

Egyptian “Hymn to the Aten.” Thus, by the latter part of the second millennium BCE, the Egyptians had had a brief experiment with monotheism that may have had repercussions beyond Egypt and affected other Near Eastern cultures.

In more complex societies like Egypt and Mesopotamia, whether there were one or many intracosmic deities, rulers were either the incarnated or the designated “sons” of the deity, intermediaries between heaven and earth, between the divine ruler and the ruled. The populace identified with its geographical territory and its rulers, who interceded on its behalf with the patron deities.

There is a sense in which Yahwism represents a radical break with the past and a breakthrough in the history of religions and in human consciousness. The philosopher and political scientist Eric Voegelin has analyzed this change in the following terms: the pragmatic escape of the Hebrews from Egypt becomes, at the same time, a “spiritual exodus from the cosmological form of imperial rule. The sonship of god is transferred from the pharaoh to the people of Israel in immediate existence under Yahweh” (*The Ecumenic Age*, 26). It is the constitution of a “people” or “kindred” directly under the patrimonial authority of Yahweh that forges a new relationship between deity and community and a new identity for those who participate directly in this new order.

Tribes and Tribalism in Early Israel

The tribes of premonarchic Israel continued to exist in various forms and permutations throughout the monarchy and even thereafter. One reason for this is that by the early Iron Age I, they were territorial entities with boundaries and rights established in part by the nature of their tribalism.

Some scholars see an egalitarian, kin-based tribal confederation being supplanted by a hierarchical state in which class displaces kin, and patronage dominates relationships. G. Ernest Wright (“The Provinces of Solomon,” *Eretz-Israel* 8 [1967], 58*-68*) suggested that Solomon’s provincial system led to crosscutting kin groups by gerrymandering tribal territories in the interest of breaking up old sodalities forged through common descent (whether real or fictive) and a radical realignment based on production and service to the king and his royal household. According to Wright, this reorganization of the countryside by Solomon (1 Kings 4.7–19) had the beneficial effect not only of replacing old kin loyalties with royal ones but also of distributing the tax burden to each provincial unit according to its proportion of the gross national product, so that each of the twelve units (“tribes” become “provinces”) was required to provide for one month’s living expenses at the king’s quarters in Jerusalem.

That such a rational system never existed in ancient Israel and that the premonarchic clan and tribal allocations remained intact are partially demonstrated by the Samaria

ostraca, receipts found in the capital of the northern kingdom and dated to the eighth century BCE. They refer to the collection of taxes in kind of olive oil and vintage wine, which were presented to the king by the notables or clan leaders—the local elite—who commanded enough loyalty and honor to represent various clan districts from that territory still intact more than two and a half centuries after the establishment of the monarchy. This could not have occurred if the reorganization of Solomon's kingdom had been as radical as suggested by those who believe that tribes and states cannot coexist.

Tribalism could wax and wane, sometimes depending on external circumstances and threats either from other tribes or, more often in the case of tribal Israelites, from neighboring states or alien tribal polities. At that time the symbolic systems could be reactivated and the contrast with those outside the group highlighted. Vis-à-vis the Philistines, this took the form of various contrastive rituals given the force of religious injunctions, such as circumcision and the pig taboo in food. They might assert their myth of common ancestry as a son of Jacob/Israel through genealogies. At the tribal level these function as social charters expressing allegiance through fictive kinship and the obligations that issue therefrom.

But to describe tribes as kin-based or kin-ordered groups is insufficient, especially since there are many other ties that bind these larger entities together. Notions of descent, of course, and implied kinship can be operative at the village and clan level in nontribal societies. At these lower levels, descent functions to secure property rights (in the case of Israel, landed ones) and to organize food production. On the higher and broader levels, descent as expressed in genealogies locates these smaller social units within the broader polity through the language of common ancestry. Genealogies, it must be emphasized, are charters of sociopolitical organization, not necessarily actual family trees that detail blood relations. Tribalism then becomes a political statement of group allegiance and identity. In Israel kinship expressed through common descent provided a unifying principle at the tribal level, but it was not sufficient to account for larger polities.

Commitment to the people, or kindred (Hebrew *'am*), of Yahweh ranked above individual tribal affiliation. This also required a more inclusive system of beliefs, which transcended tribal boundaries, local polities, and intermeshing economic networks. Through the revelation of Yahwism to Moses came a newly constituted people or kindred. Sanctuaries sprang up during the period of the judges at central locations in the highlands, such as Shechem and Shiloh. Through these central sanctuaries, where covenant ceremonies were celebrated (Josh. 24.1–28), religious unification was reinforced. Thus, as in early Islam, both the confederation and the monarchy of Israel were established on religious foundations, which helped centralize authority. The political, social, and economic systems were based on beliefs informed by revelation, whether to Moses

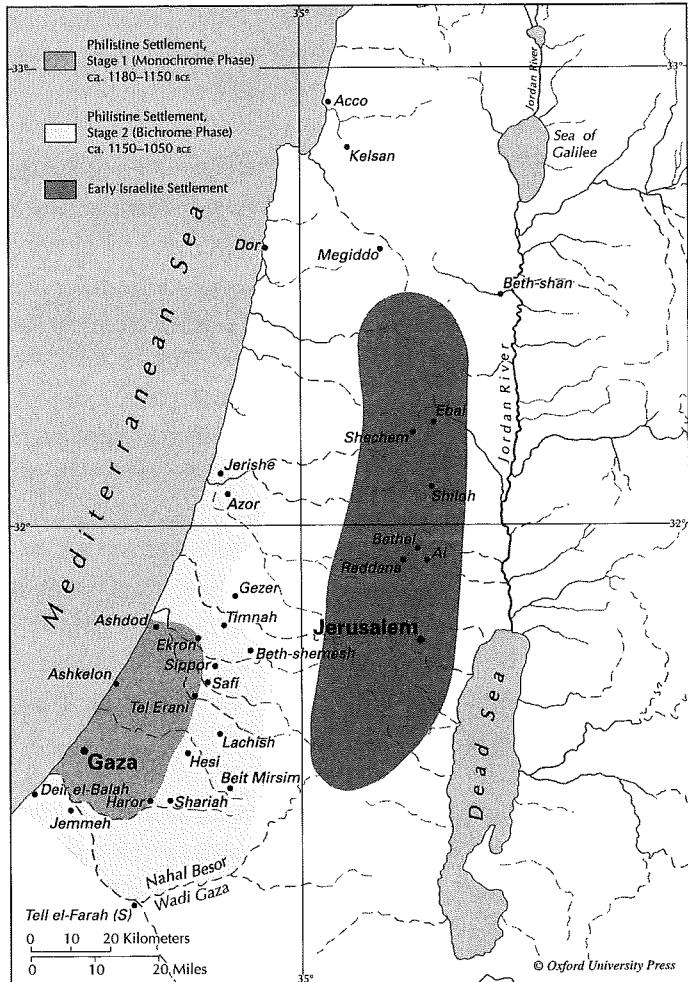
or Muhammad. During the twelfth and eleventh centuries that new entity was the tribal league; in the tenth century and later, it was the monarchy.

The Israelite *'am* resembles the Islamic *'umma* in that religious allegiance to a single deity, whether Yahweh or Allah, required commitment to the larger “family,” or super-tribe. In the case of the early Israelites, they understood themselves to be the “children” of an eponymous ancestor Jacob (who retrospectively became “Israel”) and, at the same time, to be the “people” or “kindred” of Yahweh. It was a religious federation with allegiance to a single, sovereign patriarch or paterfamilias—Yahweh. He was the ultimate patrimonial authority, in Max Weber’s formulation, for those bound to him through covenant as kindred or kindred-in-law.

The Israelite terminology of self-understanding was probably no different from that used by neighboring tribesmen and kinsmen, living east of the Jordan River, who became the kingdoms of Ammon and Moab. The J strand of the Israelite epic preserves an odd tale (Gen. 19.30–38) that could go back to the formative stages of these polities in Transjordan, when various tribal groups were trying to sort out their respective relations and alliances. According to this social etiology, Lot, while drunk, impregnated his two daughters, who then gave birth to Moab (the firstborn) and Ammon, thus making these two “brothers” fraternal “cousins” of Jacob. In the Bible the Ammonites are generally called the “sons of Ammon” (for example, Gen. 19.38; 2 Sam. 10.1) and in the Assyrian annals the “House of Ammon.” In the epic sources (J and E, Num. 21.29; also Jer. 48.46) the Moabites are referred to as the “kindred” of Chemosh, after their sovereign deity.

Through these familial metaphors one sees a series of nested households, which determined position in society and in the hierarchy of being. At ground level was the ancestral house(hold) (*bêt āb*). This could be small, if newly established, or extensive, if it had existed for several generations. From the Decalogue it is known that the neighbor’s household included more than the biological members of the family: an Israelite was not to covet his neighbor’s wife, male or female slave, ox or donkey, or anything else that came under the authority of the master of the household (Exod. 20.17; Deut. 5.21). At the state level in ancient Israel and in neighboring polities, the king presided over his house (*bayit*), the families and households of the whole kingdom. Thus, after the division of the monarchy the southern kingdom of Judah is referred to as “house of David” (*byt dwd*) in the recently excavated stela from Dan, and probably also in the Mesha Stela, just as the northern kingdom of Israel is known as the “house of Omri” (*bit Humri*) in Assyrian texts.

The Expansion of
Philistine Settlement,
ca. 1180–1050 BCE



The Arrival and Expansion of the Philistines

The Philistines were one contingent of a larger confederation known collectively as the Sea Peoples. Beginning about 1185 BCE and continuing a generation or two, they left their homeland and resettled on the southeast coast of the Mediterranean, in a region that had been occupied by Canaanites for a millennium or more. This movement is documented by a variety of written sources in Akkadian, Ugaritic, Egyptian, and Hebrew, by Egyptian wall reliefs, and by archaeology.

According to the biblical prophets Amos (9.7) and Jeremiah (47.4), the Philistines came from Caphtor, the Hebrew name for Crete; as we shall see, archaeological evidence suggests that this later tradition may preserve an accurate historical memory. Biblical and Assyrian sources indicate that Philistine culture emanated from a core of five major

cities—the Philistine pentapolis—located in the coastal plain of southern Canaan (Josh. 13.2–3). For nearly six centuries, during most of the Iron Age, these five cities—Ashdod, Ashkelon, Ekron (Tel Miqne), Gaza, and Gath—formed the heartland of Philistia, the biblical “land of the Philistines.” Each city and its territory were ruled by a “lord” called *seren* in Hebrew (Josh. 13.3), perhaps a cognate of the Greek word *tyrannos* (compare English “tyrant”). Four of the five cities have been convincingly located. Ashdod, Ashkelon, and Ekron have been extensively excavated; Gaza, which lies under the modern city of the same name, has not. Gath is usually located at Tell es-Safi, but its proximity to Ekron makes this unlikely.

The archaeology of the Philistines can be divided into three stages:

Stage 1 (ca. 1180–1150 BCE). The Philistines arrive en masse on the coast of southwest Canaan. The path of destruction along coastal Cilicia, Cyprus, and the Levant suggests that these newcomers came by ship in a massive migration that continues throughout most of Stage 1, and perhaps into Stage 2. They destroy many of the Late Bronze Age cities and supplant them with their own at the four corners of their newly conquered territory, which extends over some 1,000 square kilometers (386 square miles). During Stage 1 the Philistines control a vital stretch of the coastal route, or “Way of the Sea,” which had usually been dominated by the Egyptians and their Canaanite dependencies.

During this stage the Philistines have much the same material culture as other Sea Peoples. The process of acculturation has not yet begun, which will lead to regional differences among the various groups of Sea Peoples. In their new settlements along the eastern Mediterranean coast and along the coast of Cyprus, the new immigrants share a common pottery tradition, brought or borrowed from Aegean Late Bronze Age culture. It is a style of Mycenaean pottery, locally made, which is usually classified as Mycenaean IIIC:1b (hereafter Myc IIIC).

Along with this shared pottery tradition, the Philistines bring other new cultural traditions to Canaan: domestic and public architecture focusing on the hearth; weaving with unperforated loom weights; swine herding and culinary preference for pork; drinking preference for wine mixed with water; and religious rituals featuring female figurines of the mother-goddess type. Most of these cultural elements are found in the earlier Mycenaean civilization, which flourished during the Late Bronze Age on the Greek mainland, in the islands, especially Crete (Caphtor), and at some coastal enclaves of Anatolia. Around the Philistine heartland, Egypto-Canaanite cultural patterns persist well into the twelfth century as Egyptians garrisoned in predominately Canaanite population centers try to contain the Philistines.

Stage 2 (ca. 1150–1050 BCE). With the breakdown of Egyptian hegemony in Canaan after the death of Rameses III (1153 BCE), the Philistines begin to expand in all directions beyond their original territory, north to the Tel Aviv area, east into the foothills

(Shephelah), and southeast into the Wadi Gaza and Beer-sheba basin. Their characteristic pottery is known as Philistine bichrome ware, which, like other items, shows signs of contact and acculturation with Canaanite traditions.

Early in this stage, the Israelite tribe of Dan seems to have been forced to migrate from the coastal plain and interior to the far north, though remnants of that tribal group remained in the foothills. The Samson saga (*Judg. 13–16*) illustrates limited Philistine and Israelite interaction along the boundaries shared by two distinctive cultures, Semitic and early Greek.

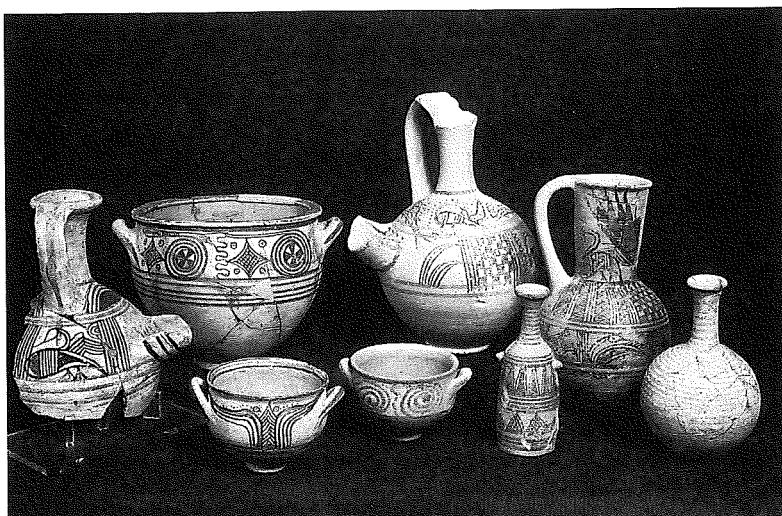
Stage 3 (ca. 1050–950 BCE). Through acculturation, Philistine painted pottery loses more and more of its distinctive Aegean characteristics. The forms become debased, but they are still recognizable. The once-complex geometrical compositions and graceful motifs of water birds and fishes of stage 2 bichrome ware are reduced to simple spiral decorations (if any at all) painted over red slip, which is frequently burnished.

This process of acculturation in the material repertoire does not, however, signal assimilation or loss of ethnic identity among the Philistines. As a polity they are never stronger. During the latter half of the eleventh century BCE their expansion into the highlands triggers numerous conflicts and outright war with the tribes of Israel. Philistine military advances into the Israelite highlands are so successful, and the crisis among the Israelites so great, that the latter demand the new institution of kingship.

After the investiture of the successful warlord David as king over a fragile yet united kingdom, the tide of battle eventually turned against the Philistines. By 975 BCE David and his armies have pushed the Philistines back into the coastal territory controlled by the pentapolis, finally completing the Israelite “conquest” of Canaan.

Philistine Pottery

The most ubiquitous and most distinctive element of Philistine culture, and a key in delineating the stages summarized above, is their pottery. The Myc IIIB pottery of the Late Bronze Age was imported into the Levant, whereas all the Myc IIIC wares found in the pentapolis in the early Iron Age were made locally. When Myc IIIC (stage 1) pottery from Ashdod and Ekron in Philistia or from Kition, Enkomi, and Palaeopaphos in Cyprus is tested by neutron activation, the results are the same: it was made from the local clays. This locally manufactured pottery was not the product of a few Mycenaean potters or their workshops, brought from abroad to meet indigenous demands for Mycenaean domestic and decorated wares, as the large quantities found at coastal sites from Tarsus to Ashkelon demonstrate. At Ras Ibn Hani in Syria and at Ekron, locally made Mycenaean pottery constitutes at least half of the repertoire, at Ashdod



Philistine bichrome pottery. These vessels are typical of stage 2 (ca. 1150–1050 BCE). The strainer jugs (*left and center rear*, often mistakenly identified as beer jugs) are part of a wine set, which includes a large mixing bowl or krater (between the strainer jugs) and smaller drinking bowls or cups (*center, front*).

about 30 percent. Local Canaanite pottery, principally in the forms of store jars, juglets, bowls, lamps, and cooking pots, makes up the rest of the assemblage in the pentapolis.

The appearance in quantity of Myc IIIC in Cyprus and the Levant heralds the arrival of the Sea Peoples. At Ashdod, Ashkelon, and Ekron new settlements characterized by Myc IIIC pottery were built on the charred ruins of the previous Late Bronze Age II Canaanite, or Egypto-Canaanite, cities. These Philistine cities were much larger than those they replaced. This new urban concept and its impact on the landscape will be discussed further below.

Stage 2 Philistine pottery is a distinctive bichrome ware, painted with red and black decoration, a regional style that developed after the Philistines had lived for a generation or two in Canaan. To the basic Mycenaean forms in their repertoire they added others from Canaan and Cyprus, and they adapted decorative motifs from Egypt and a centuries-old bichrome technique from Canaan.

This bichrome ware was once thought the hallmark of the first Philistines to reach the Levant, early in the reign of Rameses III. An earlier contingent of Sea Peoples had fought with the Libyans against the Egyptian pharaoh Merneptah, but the Philistines were not among them. This pre-Philistine or first wave of Sea Peoples supposedly brought the Myc IIIC pottery traditions to the shores of Canaan, where they founded the first cities on exactly the same sites later identified with the Philistine pentapolis.

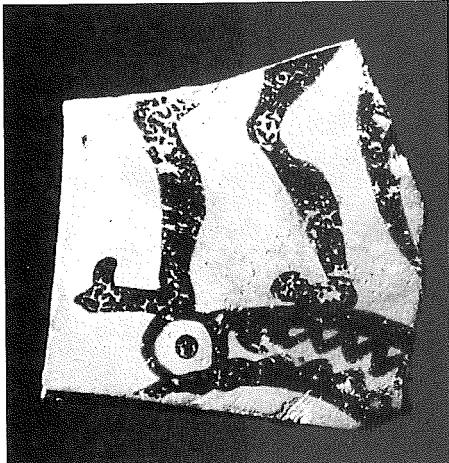
But the battle reliefs of Merneptah make it clear that Ashkelon, the seaport of the pentapolis, was inhabited by Canaanites, not Sea Peoples, during that pharaoh's reign. The simplest explanation is that the confederation of Sea Peoples, including the Philistines, mentioned in texts and depicted in reliefs of Rameses III were the bearers of

Myc IIIC pottery traditions, which they continued to make when they settled in Canaan. The stylistic development from simple monochrome to more elaborate bichrome was an indigenous change two or three generations after the Philistines' arrival in southern Canaan. The eclectic style of bichrome pottery resulted not from a period of peregrinations around the Mediterranean during the decades between Merneptah and Rameses III, but from a process of Philistine acculturation, involving the adaptation and absorption of many traditions to be found among the various peoples living in Canaan. This acculturation process continued among the Philistines throughout their nearly six-hundred-year history in Palestine.

As one moves from core to periphery in the decades following stage 1, the material culture of the Philistines shows evidence of spatial and temporal distancing from the original templates and concepts. Failure to understand the acculturation process has led to the inclusion of questionable items in the Philistine corpus of material culture remains, such as the anthropoid coffins (or worse, to a denial of a distinct core of Philistine cultural remains) just two or three generations after their arrival in Canaan at the beginning of stage 2 (ca. 1150 BCE).

Shortly before the final destruction of Ugarit, a Syrian named Bay or Baya, "chief of the bodyguard of pharaoh of Egypt," sent a letter in Akkadian to Ammurapi, the last king of Ugarit. Bay served under both Siptah (1194–1188) and Tewosret (1188–1186). His letter arrived at Ugarit while Myc IIIB pottery was still in use. At nearby Ibn Hani, however, the Sea Peoples built over the charred ruins of the king's seaside palace, which contained Myc IIIB ware. More than half of the ceramic yield from their new settlement was Myc IIIC pottery, a proportion comparable to that of stage 1 settlements in Philistia. The final destruction of Ugarit, as well as of many other coastal cities in the eastern Mediterranean, occurred only a decade or so before the events recorded by Rameses III (1184–1153) in his eighth year:

The foreign countries [Sea Peoples] made a conspiracy in their islands. All at once the lands were removed and scattered in the fray. No land could stand before their arms, from Hatti, Kode [Cilicia], Carchemish, Arzawa, and Alashiya [Cyprus] on, being cut off at [one time]. A camp [was set up] in one place in Amor [Amurru]. They desolated its people, and its land was like that which has never come into being. They were coming forward toward Egypt, while the flame was prepared before them. Their confederation [of Sea Peoples] was the Philistines, Tjeker [Sikils], Shekelesh, Denye(n) and Weshesh, lands united. (trans. John Wilson; p. 262 in James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1969)



Mycenaean IIIC pictorial sherd from Ashkelon. This broken piece of pottery depicts a bird-headed prow or stern of a ship, with a sailor standing on it.

Seaborne Migration

The Sea Peoples established beachheads along the entire coast of the eastern Mediterranean. Their route can be traced by the synchronous destructions of Late Bronze Age coastal cities from Tarsus to Ashkelon. The same pattern of devastation is found in several cities of Cyprus, which the raiders could have reached only by ship.

The renaming of whole territories after various groups of Sea Peoples provides another measure of their impact. After the Sea Peoples' invasion of Cyprus, its name was changed from Alashiya to Yadanana, "the isle of the Danunians/Danaoi/Denyen." The Philistines bequeathed their own name to Philistia (and later to all of Palestine). The Sikils, who settled at Dor, also sailed west and gave their name to Sicily, and the Sherden, who probably established a beachhead in Acco, gave theirs to Sardinia.

On Cyprus the sequence of beachheads followed by stage 1 settlements is remarkably similar to those in the Levant. New cities, with Myc IIIC pottery, were built over the ruins of Late Bronze Age cities, many of which had received the last of the Greek imported pottery known as Myc IIIB. On the coastal promontories the newcomers built fortified strongholds, such as Maa and Pyla. Farther inland, the Sea Peoples founded new settlements, such as Sinda and Athienou.

Cypriot archaeologists invoke the Achaeans or Danaoi of Homeric epic as the agents of culture change in Cyprus; in the Levant, the same change is ascribed to the Sea Peoples. Both agents participated in the event recorded by Rameses III and should be related to the same confederacy of Sea Peoples, or Mycenaean Greeks, who invaded the coastlands and the island of Alashiya (Cyprus) around 1185–1175.

Correspondence between the king of Cyprus and the king of Ugarit can be correlated

with the archaeology of destruction to provide vivid details of the Sea Peoples' onslaught. The capital of a Syrian coastal kingdom under the suzerainty of the Hittites, Ugarit had over 150 villages in its hinterland and a population of 25,000, nearly the same as that of Philistia during stage 1. Its king also controlled a nearby port and had a seaside palace at Ras Ibn Hani.

During the final days of Ugarit, letters (in Akkadian cuneiform) exchanged between its king, Ammurapi, and the king of Cyprus show how desperate the situation was, as well as the source of the trouble. The Cypriot king writes to Ammurapi:

What have you written to me “enemy shipping has been sighted at sea”? Well, now, even if it is true that enemy ships have been sighted, be firm. Indeed then, what of your troops, your chariots, where are they stationed? Are they stationed close at hand or are they not? Fortify your towns, bring the troops and the chariots into them, and wait for the enemy with firm feet. (Sandars, 142–43)

Ammurapi replies:

My father, the enemy ships are already here, they have set fire to my towns and have done very great damage in the country. My father, did you not know that all my troops were stationed in the Hittite country, and that all my ships are still stationed in Lycia and have not yet returned? So that the country is abandoned to itself. . . . Consider this my father, there are seven enemy ships that have come and done very great damage. (Sandars, 143)

An earlier text explains to whom the marauding ships belong. The Hittite king writes (also in Akkadian) to a veteran official of Ammurapi about hostage taking:

From the sun, the great king, to the prefect: Now, with you, the king, your master, is young. He does not know anything. I gave orders to him regarding Lanadusu, who was taken captive by the Shikalayu, who live on ships. Now, I have sent to you Nisahili, he is an administrative official with me, with instructions. Now, you (are to) send Lanadusu, whom the Shikalayu captured, here to me. I will ask him about the matter of the Shikila and, afterwards, he can return to Ugarit. (trans. Gregory Mobley)

The Sikils, “who live on ships,” were sea traders who were terrorizing Ugarit before it fell to them about 1185 BCE, not long before events recorded by Rameses III, who also mentions the Sikils (Tjeker) as part of the Sea Peoples’ confederation.

In the Egyptian reliefs of the naval battle, the Sea Peoples’ ships are oared galleys with single sails and with finials in the shape of water birds at prow and stern. These resemble the “bird-boat” painted on a krater from Tiryns, another clue to their Aegean origin.

The Sikils then sailed down the coast and landed at Dor, identified as a city of the Sikils in the eleventh-century Egyptian tale of Wen-Amun. They destroyed the Late Bronze Age Canaanite city and constructed a much larger one over its ruins. During



stage 1 the Sikils fortified Dor with ramparts and glacis, and created an excellent port facility for their ships.

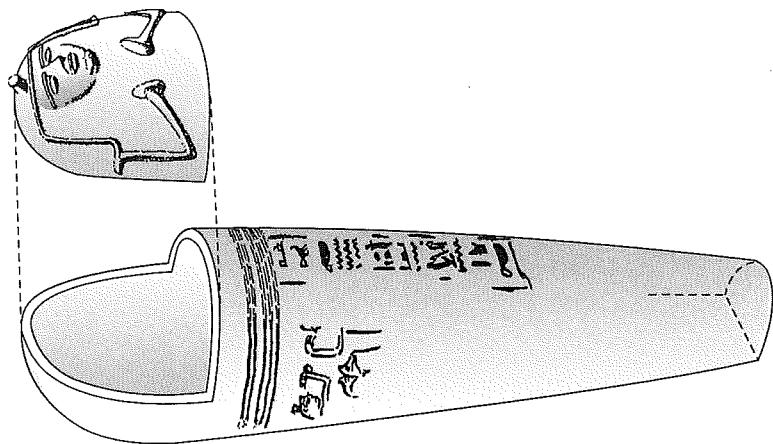
All of this evidence—their beachheads, the coastal pattern of destruction (followed in many cases by new cities with Myc IIIC pottery), references to living on ships, and illustrations of their craft—leave no doubt that the Sea Peoples, including the Philistines, had the necessary maritime technology and transport capacity to effect a major migration and invasion by sea.

Philistines and Egyptians

From Egyptian texts and wall reliefs at Medinet Habu, a reconstruction of the battle between Rameses III and the Sea Peoples and its aftermath has been developed that has attained nearly canonical status. According to this reconstruction, the Sea Peoples came to the Levant by land and by sea. The reliefs show whole families trekking overland in ox-drawn carts, and warriors in horse-drawn chariots fighting with the Egyptians in a land battle on the northern borders of Canaan. A flotilla of their ships even penetrated

Detail from a relief at Medinet Habu showing naval battle between Sea Peoples (including Philistines) and Egyptians during the reign of Rameses III (1184–1153 BC). Philistines and Sea Peoples were "feathered" or "spiked" headed. Their ships, on the right, have prominent stern ornaments in the shape of birds.

Anthropoid clay coffin from Lachish, with Egyptian hieroglyphic funerary inscriptions and depicting Egyptian deities, dating from the first half of the twelfth century BCE. Mistakenly, this and other anthropoid coffins have been attributed to the Philistines or other Sea Peoples.



the Nile Delta before Rameses III repelled them. After his victory, Rameses III engaged troops of the defeated Sea Peoples as mercenaries for his garrisons in Canaan and Nubia, and reasserted Egyptian sovereignty over southern Canaan. Egypt once again controlled the vital military and commercial highway successively known as the Ways of Horus, the Way of the Land of the Philistines (*Exod. 13.17*), and the Way of the Sea (*Isa. 9.1*).

Some Egyptologists have rightly challenged this reconstruction. The wall reliefs of Rameses III show only one scene of departure before the land battle and only one scene of victory celebration after the sea battle. The Sea Peoples threatened the Egyptians at the mouth of the Nile, not in far-off northern Canaan. If the Philistines had settled in southern Canaan before 1175 BCE, when the battle for the Nile Delta took place, both the chariotry and the oxcarts could have come from their settlements there; they would not need to be interpreted as transport for a long overland trek of Sea Peoples through Anatolia into the Levant. As we have seen, they migrated by sea.

The hypothesis that Rameses III reestablished Egyptian control over Canaan and used Philistine mercenaries in his garrisons there was apparently bolstered by the evidence of the clay anthropoid coffins found at such Egyptian strongholds as Beth-shan, Tell el-Farah (S), and Lachish. At Tell el-Farah (S), the discovery of large bench tombs with anthropoid clay sarcophagi, Egyptian artifacts, and Philistine bichrome pottery led the excavator, Sir Flinders Petrie, to conclude that these were the sepulchers of the “five lords of the Philistines.” Other scholars proposed Cypriot and Aegean prototypes for the style of the bench tombs themselves. One of the anthropoid clay coffins from Beth-shan had a feathered headdress, which was compared with the headgear of the Philistines, Denyen, and Sikils shown on the Medinet Habu reliefs. But in the 1970s excavations at the cemetery of Deir el-Balah, southwest of Gaza, uncovered dozens more of these clay coffins dating to the Late Bronze Age, a century or two before the Sea Peoples arrived in Canaan.

The ideal for Egyptians living abroad was to be buried back in Egypt. However, with the expansion of the New Kingdom empire, more Egyptian troops were stationed abroad, in both Canaan and Nubia, and it became impractical to return every Egyptian corpse to the homeland. But Egyptians who died outside Egypt could at least be buried abroad in suitable containers, such as anthropoid clay coffins.

Further support for interpreting the anthropoid clay coffins as Egyptian comes from a sarcophagus excavated at Lachish, in a tomb dating to the time of Rameses III. On this coffin is a depiction of the Egyptian deities Isis and Nephthys, along with an inscription that some have labeled Egyptian pseudohieroglyphs or Philistine gibberish. But some Egyptologists have interpreted the text as a perfectly good Egyptian funerary inscription: “Thou givest water [a traditional mortuary offering] (of the) West [the region of the dead] to the majesty (of) thy [...].”

Thus the most parsimonious hypothesis is that the anthropoid sarcophagi found in Canaan in the Late Bronze and the Iron I periods belonged to Egyptians stationed there, and should not be connected with the Sea Peoples and their burial customs. When so interpreted, these coffins are important evidence for delineating cultural (and hence political) boundaries between Canaanite territory still under Egyptian control and Philistia.

During stage 1 the Philistines occupied a large region in southern Canaan, taking it from the Canaanites and their overlords, the Egyptians. The boundaries of this territory can be plotted by using settlements whose ceramic repertoire has more than 25 percent Myc IIIC pottery. This rectangular coastal strip was about 20 kilometers (12 miles) wide and 50 kilometers (31 miles) long and had an area of 1,000 square kilometers (386 square miles), and the Philistines located their five major cities at key positions along its perimeter. Unlike the Egyptians, the Philistines did not govern their territory by installing military garrisons within Canaanite population centers. Rather, they completely destroyed those centers, and then built their own new cities on the ruins of the old. This wholesale takeover must have resulted in the death or displacement of much of the Late Bronze Age population.

Along the northern coast of their territory, the Philistines destroyed by fire the large Egyptian fortress at Tel Mor and the neighboring city of Ashdod. Over the ruins of Ashdod they built a new city, while the Egyptians rebuilt the fortress at Tel Mor, although on a smaller scale. Farther inland, some 20 kilometers (12 miles) to the east, was the small Canaanite city of Ekron (Tel Miqne), about 4 hectares (10 acres) in area. The Philistines burned it too, and over its ruins raised a city five times larger than its predecessor, with massive mud-brick fortifications and organized on a grand scale. In the layer of occupation were found large quantities of Myc IIIC pottery. Northeast of Ekron was Gezer, a major Canaanite city from which some of the Amarna letters had been sent. At the end of the Late Bronze Age it too was destroyed by fire, either by the

Philistines or by Pharaoh Merneptah in his campaign of 1209. In any case, Gezer, with no evidence of Myc IIIC, was rebuilt as an Egypto-Canaanite counterforce to Ekron during the reign of Rameses III. A faience vase bearing cartouches with that pharaoh's name is associated with this level of occupation, but there is no Myc IIIC pottery. A small percentage of Philistine bichrome pottery appears later, during stage 2.

The Late Bronze Age city of Ashkelon, on the Mediterranean coast between Ashdod and Gaza, was also destroyed, either by Merneptah or (more probably) by the Philistines. Egyptian policy was to garrison and control, not eradicate, the Canaanite population. There the Philistines built their main seaport, which during stage 1 must have extended along the coast for almost a kilometer (over half a mile) and occupied an area of 50 to 60 hectares (125–150 acres). Later, in the early Iron II period, the preexisting arc of earthen ramparts was fortified at the northern crest by two large mud-brick towers linked by a mud-brick curtain wall. Opposite this Philistine stronghold, about 30 kilometers (18 miles) to the east, Rameses III established another Egyptian control center at Lachish. Hardly a trace of Philistine bichrome pottery has been found there, but archaeologists have uncovered an Egyptian-inspired temple, hieratic bowl inscriptions recording taxes paid to the Egyptians, a large bronze gate-fitting inscribed with the name of Rameses III, and two anthropoid coffins, all attesting to the presence of an Egyptian garrison.

Philistia's eastern boundary during stage 1 was a 50-kilometer (31-mile) line from Ekron in the north to Tel Haror in the south, some 20 kilometers (12 miles) inland from Gaza. At Haror, the Philistines devastated the Late Bronze Age city, and both Egyptian and Myc IIIB pottery were found in the destruction debris. Above the ruins rose a new Philistine settlement, with Myc IIIC pottery as at the pentapolis sites.

Just across the border from Haror was another Egyptian center, Tell esh-Shariah. A large Egyptian administrative building or governor's residency, several hieratic bowl inscriptions, and Egyptian pottery all attest to Rameses III's containment policy. During stage 2, the Egyptians abandoned Shariah and it became a Philistine city, probably to be identified with biblical Ziklag. According to 1 Samuel 27.1–7, Ziklag was subject to Achish, the ruler of Gath, who gave this country town to his loyal retainer David and his personal army of six hundred men. Gath itself, Achish's capital and Goliath's hometown, is usually located at Tell es-Safi. But this site's proximity to Ekron, its distance from Ziklag, and the paucity of Myc IIIC pottery there make this an unlikely identification. Gath should be strategically located in the southeast corner of Philistia during stage 1, not far from its dependency Ziklag during stage 2; if so, the most plausible candidate for Gath is Tel Haror, which has both Philistine monochrome and bichrome pottery. Regardless of the identifications, it seems clear that Haror was inside and Shariah outside Philistine territory during stage 1, but both were within the Philistine domain during stage 2.

In the southwest corner of Philistia lay Gaza, a major outpost and caravan city of

the Egyptians, presumably taken over by the Philistines during stage 1. Excavations at Gaza have been limited, and they have revealed little or nothing of the character of the Egyptian and Philistine cities. During stage 1 Philistia probably did not extend south of the Wadi Gaza (Nahal Besor). To protect his northern frontier, Rameses III built a formidable fortress and residency at Tell el-Farah (S), which remained under Egyptian control throughout much of the Ramesside era, well into stage 2, as the sequence of tombs with anthropoid clay coffins, Egyptian artifacts, and Philistine bichrome pottery attests.

The contrast is thus sharply delineated between the territory controlled by the Egyptians under Rameses III and that of the Philistine pentapolis, the latter characterized by the presence of Myc IIIC pottery and by the absence of Egyptian monuments, buildings, and artifacts. A new and formidable foreign power, the Philistines had carved out an independent territory right up to the Egyptian frontier. All Rameses could do was to attempt to contain them, a policy that continued until his death in 1153.

Philistine Economy

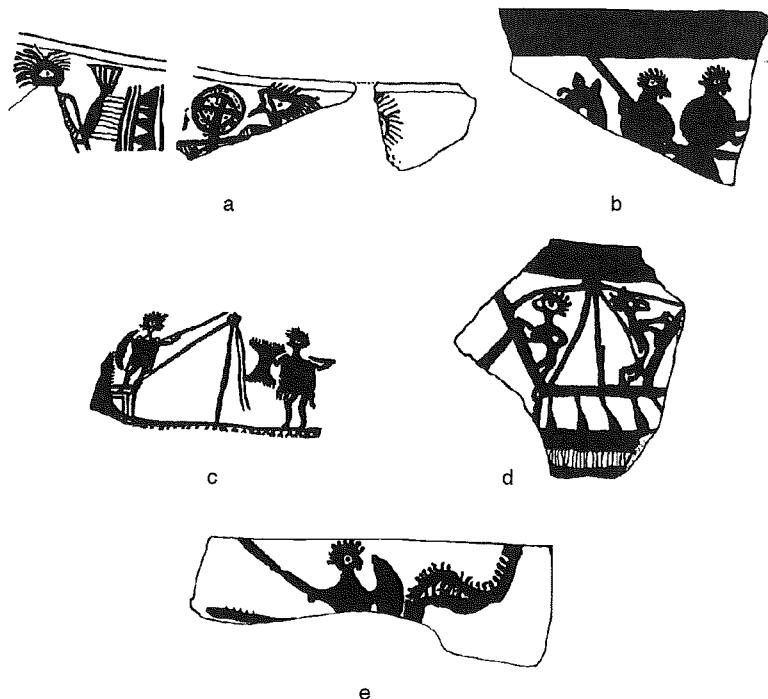
The total occupied area of the pentapolis was at least 100 hectares (250 acres), with a total population of about twenty-five thousand. To attain such size so soon after their arrival, boatload after boatload of Philistines, along with their families, livestock, and belongings, must have arrived in southern Canaan during stage 1. By the beginning of stage 2, natural growth had more than doubled the Philistine population, enabling their expansion in all directions. By the second half of the eleventh century BCE, in stage 3, they were a menace even to the Israelites living in the highlands to the east.

Their new home provided the Philistines with the natural and cultural resources to become both a maritime and an agrarian power. The sea offered fishing and shipping, and to its east lay rich agricultural lands suitable for growing grains, olives, and grapes. This region lacked timber and mineral resources, but even early in stage 1 the Philistines were importing both.

Philistia constituted a vital stretch of the coastal road. As the eleventh-century Egyptian tale of Wen-Amun makes clear, the Philistines, along with other Sea Peoples and the Phoenicians, soon controlled the maritime lanes as well. After some stability had returned to the eastern Mediterranean, the Sea Peoples once again became traders rather than raiders. Shortly after landing, the Sikils constructed the harbor at Dor. By the eleventh century, trade with Cyprus was bustling, and Ashkelon was a busy port again, exporting grain, wine, and oil from Philistia to other parts of the Mediterranean.

From Ashdod to Gaza, the coast of Philistia was ideal for the cultivation of grapes. The sandy soil and warm, sunny climate produced many good wines, from Ashkelon's

Pieces of a Philistine bichrome krater (a) recently discovered at Ashkelon provide the first self-portraits of Philistine warriors. Each soldier is depicted in profile, with a large eye looking out from under a spiked or feathered head-dress. Strengthening the connection between Philistines and Mycenaeans, these cartoonlike characters resemble soldiers and sailors on sherds from Greece and Crete: (b) two charioteers on a Mycenaean IIIC krater from Mycenae; (c) two sailors on a ship on a Mycenaean IIIC sherd from Kynos (Greece); (d) two sailors on a Late Minoan IIIC sherd from Phaistos (Crete); (e) sailor on ship with bird-headed prow on a Late Helladic IIIC sherd from Kynos.



light and palatable varieties to Gaza's heavier ones. At Ashkelon a royal winery, with pressing rooms alternating with storerooms within a large ashlar building, occupied the same central area in the seventh century where a major public building had stood in Iron Age I. Similar Iron II wine production facilities have recently been found near Ashdod.

In modern idiom, the term *Philistine* means an uncouth person, interested in material comfort rather than art and ideas. Archaeologists may inadvertently have assimilated this notion in their terminology: one of the most common Philistine ceramic forms is a jug with a strainer spout, usually called a "beer-jug." But the ecology of Philistia is better suited for grape-growing than for cultivating barley, the grain generally used for beer. Moreover, the repertoire of Philistine decorated pottery, both Myc IIIC and bichrome, indicates that wine rather than beer was the beverage of choice. The large bowl, called after its Greek name, *krater*, was used for mixing water with wine, apparently a Greek rather than a Canaanite custom. Such kraters were popular among the Mycenaeans, and in the Iron I period the relatively large proportion of kraters in Philistia compared with non-Philistine territory suggests that the Philistines continued to mix their wine with water. Large bell-shaped bowls for serving wine and small bell-shaped bowls or cups for drinking it are two popular forms of decorated Philistine pottery. The jug with the strainer spout completes the wine service; it was used as a carafe, and its built-

in sieve strained out the lees and other impurities as the wine was poured. All these forms testify to the importance of viticulture and wine production during that era.

The inner coastal zone of Philistia, with its wide, undulating plains and deep, fertile soils, was ideal for growing wheat and olives. Oil produced here supplied not only Philistia but also other parts of the Levant, especially the perennial and enormous Egyptian market. In the seventh century BCE Ekron was the undisputed oil capital of the country: just inside the city's fortifications were more than a hundred olive oil processing facilities.

The Philistines also brought changes to the region's animal husbandry. Like their Canaanite and Israelite neighbors, the Philistines kept flocks of sheep and goats as well as cattle. To these they added a specialization in hogs. In the highland villages of the Iron I period, the bones of pigs are rare or completely absent, but in Philistia they constitute a significant proportion of excavated faunal remains: at Ashkelon 23 percent (but the sample is small), at Ekron 18 percent, and at Timnah (Tel Batash) 8 percent. These differences in pig production and consumption were due more to culture than to ecology. The Mycenaeans and later Greeks valued swine and preferred pork in their diet, a preference brought by the Philistines to Canaan in the twelfth century. It is probably then, the biblical period of "the judges," that the Israelites developed their taboo against pork consumption, in part to differentiate themselves from their Philistine neighbors; circumcision was another such distinctive cultural marker.

Urban Imposition

As we have seen, soon after the arrival of the first generation of new immigrants, the Philistines successfully sited their five major cities, taking maximum advantage of their military, economic, and political potential. The urban tradition embodied in their cities differed from the Canaanite patterns they replaced, and the details of their urban planning provide additional reasons for concluding that the Philistines were not a small military elite who garrisoned the indigenous population but a large and heterogeneous group of settlers who brought many aspects of their old way of life and culture into their new landscape. Behind the archaeological residues of the pentapolis one can detect, however faintly, the activities of a diverse community of warriors, farmers, sailors, merchants, rulers, shamans, priests, artisans, and architects.

Weaving industries were often found in major centers. At Ashkelon more than 150 cylinders of unfired clay, slightly pinched in the middle, were found lying on the superimposed floors of two successive public buildings, some still aligned along the walls as if they had been dropped from vertical weaving looms. The floors themselves had concentrations of textile fibers. Common Levantine pyramidal loom weights have

perforated tops, but these were unpierced and were probably spools around which thread was wound and hung from the loom. Similar clay cylinders have been found at Ekron and Ashdod, on Cyprus in temple precincts at Enkomi and Kition (the Sea Peoples' emporia there), on the Mycenaean mainland, on Thera (in the Cyclades), and in Crete. At Ashkelon, Ekron, and Ashdod these spool weights are found in abundance in stages 1 and 2. They were made from the local clays, but the Aegean parallels further indicate the origin of the new immigrants.

The best example of urban planning comes from another pentapolis city, Ekron. Over the ashes of the Late Bronze Age city was built a much larger Philistine one, about 20 hectares (50 acres) in size, with perhaps five thousand inhabitants. Even during stage 1 at Ekron there are signs of urban planning: industry was located along the perimeter of the city, just inside its fortification walls. Next were houses for ordinary citizens, and in the center of the site were public buildings, including a palace-temple complex, which was rebuilt several times in the more than two centuries of its use.

In the long, pillared main hall of this complex was a large circular sunken hearth. Such a hearth was characteristic of Mycenaean palaces, and the same feature is found at several sites in Cyprus during stage 1, as well as at Tell Qasile, a Philistine settlement north of the pentapolis founded in the mid-twelfth century.

Three rooms of the stage 2 public building at Ekron opened onto its central hall. In the northernmost room dozens of spool weights were found, suggesting that it was for weaving, perhaps by religious functionaries who were making vestments for the statue of the great Mycenaean mother-goddess. (An analogy, perhaps, is the notice in 2 Kings 23.7 of women weaving garments for Asherah in the precincts of the Jerusalem Temple.)

A plastered platform, perhaps an altar, stood in the middle room, identifying it as the primary place of worship. Nearby was an ivory handle of a knife for sacrifice, identical to the complete example in the southernmost room. There were also three bronze spoked wheels, part of a mobile cult stand with parallels in Cyprus and in the Jerusalem Temple. In the third room, next to another small platform or altar, archaeologists found a complete bimetallic knife. Knives with iron blades and bronze rivets are also a rarity in the Levant, occurring more frequently at Aegean and Cypriot sites.

Thus, at the beginning of the twelfth century, some groups within Aegean society transplanted their urban life and values to the similar ecological setting of the eastern Mediterranean coast and Cyprus. This event, sketched above as a mass migration of Sea Peoples during the period 1185–1150 BCE, may have been precipitated by the dissolution of the highly articulated, finely tuned, hierarchical polities and economies of the Aegean and Anatolia, sometimes called the “palace economy.”

Philistines and Israelites: Interaction and Conflict

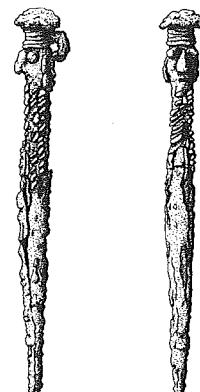
The settlement process for highland Israel had begun a generation or two before the arrival of the Sea Peoples on the coast. That event would necessarily have swelled the highland polity of early Israel as the indigenous Canaanite population found itself squeezed out of the plains. The displacement and migration of the tribe of Dan from the coast to the north is a specific example of such a ripple effect. In biblical tradition there are important differences between Dan and the other tribes of Israel. The Danites never controlled the territory they were allotted, which extended to the Mediterranean coast as far as Joppa (Josh. 19.40–48). Moreover, unlike the other tribes, Dan has no extended genealogy (see Gen. 46.23; Num. 26.42). And in the Song of Deborah, Dan is characterized as serving as a client on ships (Judg. 5.17), although seafaring was not a characteristic Israelite activity. Because of these differences, some scholars have suggested that originally the Danites were not a part of Israel, but rather a member of the Sea Peoples' confederation, to be identified with the Danaans of Homer and the Denyen in Rameses III's inscription. Thus the Denyen should have been among those who settled along the coast during stage 1. But the Philistines did not settle in the Joppa region before 1150 BCE (stage 2), and the Sea Peoples do not figure in the twelfth-century Song of Deborah, so the identification of the biblical Danites with either Danaans or Denyen is dubious.

It is much more likely that the expansion of the Philistines into the Joppa region, marked by the founding of Philistine Tell Qasile, forced the Danites out of that area and sent most of the tribe to the far north, to the Canaanite city of Laish. There, according to Judges 18.27, “The Danites . . . came to Laish, to a people quiet and unsuspecting, put them to the sword, and burned down the city.”

Evidence for this destruction has recently been discovered by Avraham Biran in his excavations at Tel Dan. Over the ruins of a prosperous Late Bronze Age city, a rather impoverished and rustic settlement was discovered. It had storage pits and a variety of collared-rim storage jars, but little or no Philistine painted pottery. The biblical traditions and the archaeological evidence converge so well that there can be no doubt that the Danites belonged to the Israelite, not the Sea Peoples', confederation.

Either before the move of the Danites to the north or after, with remnants of the tribe still remaining in the south, interaction between a Danite family and the Philistines is preserved in the legends of Samson (Judg. 13–16). Samson is portrayed as an Israelite “judge” from the tribe of Dan. But he is unlike other judges, typically tribal leaders of the Israelite militia of Yahweh. After the beginning of the account of Samson’s birth (Judg. 13.2), the Danites are not even mentioned in the saga because most of the tribe had already migrated north. Philistine control over Judah is the larger issue in the stories.

Two views of a bronze lynchpin (17 centimeters [6.6 inches] high) for a chariot found in an Iron Age I context (ca. 1100 BCE) at Ashkelon. The upper portion is in the shape of the Philistine goddess "Ashdoda."



Samson fights his battles alone and performs feats of strength more in the mold of the Greek Heracles than of the Israelite Gideon. Samson tells riddles, has seven magical locks of hair, and cavorts with Philistine women. His adventures take place on the border between the Israelites and the Philistines. Samson chooses a Philistine bride from the Philistine town of Timnah, where Philistine bichrome ware is abundant. This intermediate zone in the foothills between the highlands and the coastal plain was the first point of contact between the two cultures in the late twelfth century BCE and became a zone of contention and conflict thereafter.

Philistine expansion during stage 2 can be traced by the comparatively high yield of Philistine bichrome ware in the Gaza and Beer-sheba basins in the northern Negeb. The narrative in Genesis 26 concerning Isaac and King Abimelech of the Philistines reflects this era. The Cherethites, who served as mercenaries under King David, are probably to be identified with Cretans, a contingent of the Philistines ("Pelethites") who had settled in the semiarid Negev (1 Sam. 30.14; 2 Sam. 8.18; 15.18; 1 Kings 1.38).

By the mid-eleventh century BCE (the beginning of stage 3), the Philistines had expanded into the Shephelah well beyond their earlier boundaries. From there they launched a military effort to conquer the highland home of the Israelites. One need only compare the large, cosmopolitan cities of the plain and their rich, fertile countryside to the impoverished villages of the hills and their tiny tracts of arable land to appreciate the advantages in wealth and power that the Philistines had over the Israelites.

A supposed Philistine monopoly on iron and steel is a modern myth, based on a misreading of 1 Samuel 13.19–22. But there is no mistaking their superiority in military organization and hardware. The Philistines were known as "chariot-warriors" in Egyptian inscriptions at Medinet Habu. They fielded expert bowmen (1 Sam. 31.3) and crack infantrymen. Bronze lynchpins for war chariots have been found at Ashkelon and Ekron, but nowhere else. The top half of the Ashkelon lynchpin is in the form of a Philistine goddess in the Aegean tradition. She leads and protects the elite corps of charioteers as



Warrior vase from Mycenae, 41 centimeters (16 inches) high, ca. 1150 BCE. This side of the vessel shows a row of Mycenaean warriors wearing horned helmets; on the other side, they wear spiked helmets.

they enter battle. These finds give substance to the biblical historiographer's lament that "Judah could not [following the ancient Greek rather than the Hebrew tradition] take Gaza with its territory, Ashkelon with its territory, and Ekron with its territory. Yahweh was with Judah, and he took possession of the hill country, but could not drive out the inhabitants of the plain, because they had chariots of iron" (Judg. 1.18–19). Of course the war chariot was not completely made of iron, but a most essential part of it was—the axle, which stood for the whole vehicle. Homer describes the splendid chariot of the gods as having bronze wheels on either side of an iron axle (*Iliad* 5.723).

The disparity in infantry is highlighted in the duel between David and Goliath. The latter is armed like the Mycenaean warriors depicted on the famous "Warrior Vase" (Myc IIIC, twelfth century BCE) found at Mycenae. These soldiers wear tunics with long sleeves, over which fit corselets; they hold semicircular shields in their left hand and in their right carry throwing spears with leaf-shaped heads. They wear greaves that reach just above the knee, and protective helmets: on one file of warriors, with two horns and a crest; on another, with a row of spikes reminiscent of the Philistine "feathers."

The champion Goliath "had a helmet of bronze on his head, and he was armed with a coat of mail; the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels of bronze. He had greaves of bronze on his legs and a javelin of bronze slung between his shoulders" (1 Sam. 17.5–6). He also carried a sword. His Israelite opponent, so the story goes, was armed with only a sling and a stone.

Had the Philistines accomplished their military goal, it would have been the first

time in recorded history that a lowland polity had succeeded in bringing the highlands under its control. The once mighty Egyptian army of the New Kingdom had brought only nominal hegemony over this hilly, wooded frontier, where chariotry was of little or no use in battle. More often it was the highland kingdoms, such as that of Shechem under Labayu during the Amarna age, that consolidated their power over the lowlanders. Ignorant of historical precedents, the Philistines made valiant attempts to turn these natural, long-term odds in their favor.

In the battle of Ebenezer (ca. 1050 BCE), a site within a day's journey of Shiloh, the Philistines took a major step toward realizing their goal. Not only did they capture the ark of the covenant—the most sacred Israelite symbol, over which Yahweh, the divine warrior, was enthroned (the equivalent of capturing the statue of the warrior god in iconic cultures) (1 Sam. 4.1–11)—but they also advanced even farther upland, destroying the sanctuary of Yahweh at Shiloh and wiping out the Elide dynasty of priests serving there (see Jer. 7.12).

Recent excavations at Shiloh by Israel Finkelstein have confirmed the results of the earlier Danish expedition, as interpreted by W. F. Albright. Shiloh (Stratum V) flourished as a major Ephraimite center in the first half of the eleventh century BCE. Its temple served as a major annual pilgrimage site for the Israelite tribes in the autumn, during the wine (and New Year's?) festival. The destruction of this sanctuary by the Philistines around 1050 BCE reverberated in the memory of the Israelites for centuries (Ps. 78.60–64; Jer. 7.12).

After their decisive victory at Ebenezer, the Philistines continued to press their offensive against the Israelites. During the second half of the eleventh century, the Philistines reached the height of their power. This is the era of Samuel, too, and it is paradoxical that he is portrayed so positively by the biblical historiographers when actually he did so little to thwart the Philistine onslaught. In fact, military encroachment by the Philistines precipitated a crisis of leadership during Samuel's judgeship of such proportions that the people demanded a ruler capable of dealing with it. Popular pressure led to the anointing of Israel's first legitimate king, Saul of the tribe of Benjamin. By that time the Philistines had established garrisons in the hill country at Bethlehem, Geba, and Gibeath-elohim, and they were fighting the Israelites on their home turf at Michmash and near Jerusalem (1 Sam. 10.5; 13.3, 11; 2 Sam. 23.13–14).

It took the military genius of the outlaw and later king David to reverse the fortunes of war with the Philistines. The destruction of such predominately Canaanite cities as Megiddo, Beth-shan, and Tell Abu Hawam can be synchronized with that of predominately Philistine cities, such as Ekron, Tell Qasile, Timnah, and Dor—all in the first quarter of the tenth century BCE. The likely agent of this devastation is the Israelites under the leadership of King David. By the time Solomon set up his administrative

provinces (1 Kings 4.7–19), Israel was in control of Megiddo, Taanach, and Beth-shan, formerly Canaanite city-states, and Dor, formerly a Sea Peoples' city-state.

The Philistines were driven back to the initial territory of stage 1, that of the pentapolis. Even there the coastal cities show signs of expansion at the expense of those in the inner plain. Ekron is reduced to one-fifth its former size, from a city of 20 hectares (50 acres) during stages 1 and 2 to one of 5 hectares (12 acres) at the end of stage 3. At the same time (after ca. 980/975 BCE), Ashkelon becomes a well-fortified seaport, covering more than 60 hectares (150 acres). Ashdod expands five times its former size to a large metropolis of about 40 hectares (100 acres). Thus as Israel expands from its highland heartland, Philistia retreats to well within its earliest boundaries.

By consolidating his base of support in the highlands and by uniting a loose-knit tribal confederation, King David was able to conquer and hold vast amounts of lowland territory, formerly under the control of the Canaanites and Sea Peoples. From his conquered capital of Jerusalem he was able to overcome the political fragmentation endemic to tribal confederations (as well as to the more cosmopolitan city-states of the enemy), creating a large territorial state under one patrimonial ruler. From the modern historian's perspective it is only after the reign of King David that the "conquest" of Canaan was complete.

Conclusion

The biblical historiographers attributed the rise of kingship in ancient Israel to external stimuli. Foremost of those military threats were the Philistines from the coast, who were occupying key settlements leading up to the highlands and planting garrisons in the heartland of Israel. Recent biblical scholarship, following anthropological models, has emphasized internal dynamics within the social system which led to kingship in Israel, minimizing the external threats. There was nothing in the social structure of premonarchic Israel that prevented the rise of a more permanent warlord, or ruler, later known as a king; in fact, just such permanence of leadership had been attempted in the cases of Gideon (Judg. 8.22–23) and Abimelech (Judg. 9). Structurally there was always a place under the deity and above the tribal leaders for a patrimonial ruler, known as *melek*, or "king." Monarchy was not a foreign or urban institution grafted onto a patrimonial order; it could have occurred in nascent or fully developed form at any time during the period of the tribal confederation. When kingship finally was established and acknowledged by the tribal polity, it was the external military threats that served as the catalyst for kingship.

Like others in the Israelite community, kings were to be subject to customary law

and tradition (Deut. 17.14–20), and there were condemnations of royal excess (1 Sam. 8.11–18), but kingship could easily fit into the structure between the divine authority and the nested tribal authorities already established in premonarchic Israel. This seems clear from the language of house and household (*bayit*) used by the biblical writers to refer to the deity (*bêt Yahweh*), to the king, his household, and his dwelling (*bêt hammelek*), and to the notables or heads of household (*bêt ’āb*). Each patriarch was sovereign over overarching domains, from joint families and their lineages, to clans, to tribes, to the king whose family and household included the whole kingdom. Because the landed patrimony was handed down from father to son(s), great importance was attached to orderly succession—the usufructuary right, whether to ancestral estate or to royal estate (the kingdom). And the patriarchal deity held ultimate sovereignty and proprietorship over the human estate and state(s), as well as over all creation. Thus the king and the state were the household and family estate writ large, and the national deity was the paterfamilias writ larger still. Domains of authority and dominance were not structurally incompatible, and kingship in Israel, “like other nations” (1 Sam. 8.5), was patrimonial. The real problems with kingship were not of principle or structure but of function. How could power and dominance be pragmatically exercised without infringement on the various overarching domains? Answers to that question led to various assessments of each king as he held office. The tensions and balance of power among divine, royal, and familial forces provide much of the stuff of Israelite history.

Note

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