Israel, Judah, and Neighboring Groups in the Books of Samuel

Edited by
STEPHEN GERMANY
and BENEDIKT HENSEL

Mohr Siebeck

Orientalische Religionen in der Antike
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Ägypten, Israel, Alter Orient
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Textual and Historical Approaches

Research on Israel and Aram in Biblical Times VIII

Edited by

Stephen Germany and Benedikt Hensel

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Preface

The books of Samuel, which narrate the beginning of kingship in Israel and the reigns of Israel's first two kings, Saul and David, are replete with references to groups and individuals from areas in the geographic vicinity of ancient Israel and Judah, including, among others, Philistines, Ammonites, Amalekites, Edomites, Moabites, Arameans, Gileadites, and Gibeonites. While the biblical narrative portrays Saul and/or David as interacting with all of these groups and with individual members of the latter, the question arises to what extent historical conditions from later periods in Israel and Judah might be reflected and evaluated through the literary representation of such interactions already during the reigns of Israel's founding kings, Saul and David.

The contributions in this volume present a variety of case studies dealing with the representation of interactions between Israel (and especially its first two kings, Saul and David) and neighboring groups both within the world of the narrative and in relation to the historical circumstances presupposed by the narrative's authors. Many of the contributions were first presented as papers at the conference "The Book of Samuel in the Shadow of Empires: Relations between Israel, Judah, and Neighboring Nations in Historical, Compositional, and Theological Perspective", held at the University of Basel on October 12–14, 2022 with the financial support of the Swiss National Science Foundation. These contributions have been supplemented with additional studies that address the topic at hand from various perspectives, some of which have been published previously in other contexts, while others have been written specifically for this volume. Rather than constituting a comprehensive "handbook" on the representation of every neighboring group of Israel and Judah mentioned in the books of Samuel, the contributions in this volume reflect a snapshot of scholarship on the books of Samuel in the early 2020s and the diversity of approaches existing at the interface of literary analysis, history, and archaeology.

We would like to offer our thanks to all of the authors for their contributions to the volume and for the stimulating discussion that arose both at the conference in Basel and in the process of revising the contributions for publication. We would also like to thank Anita Dirnberger, Nora Hurter, Damaris Zaugg, Joris Krapf, and Michael Klaiber for their outstanding help with the organization and practical logistics of the conference in Basel and with the formatting of the present volume. Finally, we wish to extend our gratitude to the editors of the RIAB series for accepting the volume for publication, to the editorial staff at Mohr Siebeck for their support in preparing the volume, and to the Swiss National Science Foundation, which provided the financial support for the Open Access publication of the volume.

Lausanne and Oldenburg, January 2025 Stephen Germany
Benedikt Hensel

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List of Abbreviations

Ä&L	Ägypten und Levante
AASF.B	Annales Academiae Scientiarum Fennicae Bulletin
AASOR	Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research
ÄAT	Ägypten und Altes Testament
AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	*Anchor Bible Dictionary*
ABG	Arbeiten zur Bibel und ihrer Geschichte
ABS	Archaeology and Biblical Studies
ACEBT	*Amsterdamse Cahiers voor Exegese en Bijbelse Theologie*
ADAJ	Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan
ADPV	Abhandlungen des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins
AIL	Ancient Israel and Its Literature
AJA	*American Journal of Archaeology*
ANEM	Ancient Near East Monographs
ANES	*Ancient Near Eastern Studies*
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
AoF	*Altorientalische Forschungen*
ARA	Annual Reviews in Anthropology
ARAM	*Aram, Society for Syro-Mesopootamian Studies*
ATD	Altes Testament Deutsch
ATDan	Acta Theologica Danica
ATANT	Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments
BA	*Biblical Archaeologist*
BAR	*Biblical Archaeology Review*
BASOR	*Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*
BBRSup	Bulletin for Biblical Research Supplements
BCH	*Bulletin de correspondance hellénique*
BE	Biblische Enzyklopädie
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium
Bib	*Biblica*
BibEnc	Biblical Encyclopedia
BibSem	The Biblical Seminar
BK	Biblischer Kommentar
BKAT	Biblischer Kommentar, Altes Testament
BMes	Bibliotheca Mesopotamica
BN	*Biblische Notizen*
BTAVO	Beihefte zum Tübinger Atlas des Vorderen Orient
BWANT	Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament
BZ	*Biblische Zeitschrift*
BZABR	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für altorientalische und biblische Rechtsgeschichte
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft

CAT	Commentaire de l'Ancien Testament
ConBOT	Coniectanea Biblica: Old Testaement Series
CEJL	Commentaries on Early Jewish Literature
CHANE	Culture and History of the Ancient Near East
COS	*The Context of Scripture* (ed. W.W. Hallo; 4 vols.; Leiden 1997–2017)
CurBR	*Currents in Biblical Research*
DCLS	Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature Studies
DÖAW	Denkschriften. Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften
EdF	Erträge der Forschung
ErIsr	*Eretz Israel*
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
FzB	Forschung zur Bibel
HACL	History, Archaeology, and Culture of the Levant
HdO	Handbuch der Orientalistik
HeBAI	*Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel*
HSS	Harvard Semitic Studies
HThKAT	Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IEJ	*Israel Exploration Journal*
JANER	*Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions*
JANES	*Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Studies*
JARE	*Journal of Archaeological Research*
JAS	*Journal of Archaeological Science*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JBTh	*Jahrbuch für Biblische Theologie*
JHNES	The Johns Hopkins Near Eastern Studies
JHS	*Journal of Hebrew Scriptures*
JJTP	*Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy*
JNES	*Journal of Near Eastern Studies*
JPOS	*Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society*
JSJ	*Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman Period*
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
KAI	H. Donner/W. Röllig, *Kanaanäische und Aramäische Inschriften* (Wiesbaden 2002)
KHC	Kurzer Hand-Commentar zum Alten Testament
LAS	Leipziger altorientalische Studien
LHBOTS	The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
NBL	*Neues Bibel-Lexikon* (ed. M. Görg; 3 vols.; Zürich, 1991–2001)
NCB	New Century Bible
NEA	*Near Eastern Archaeology*
NEAEHL	*The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land* (ed. E. Stern; 4 vols.; Jerusalem 1993)
NEchtB	Neuer Echter Bibel
NICOT	The New International Commentary on the Old Testament
OBO	Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis
OLA	Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta

ORA	Orientalische Religionen in der Antike
OTL	Old Testament Library
OTS	Old Testament Studies
PdÄ	Probleme der Ägyptologie
PEQ	*Palestine Exploration Quarterly*
RB	*Revue Biblique*
RBS	Resources for Biblical Study
RIAB	Research on Aram and Israel in Biblical Times
RIMA	Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia: Assyrian Periods
SAHL	Studies in the Archaeology and History of the Levant
SBAB.AT	Stuttgarter biblische Aufsatzbände, Altes Testament
SBLDS	SBL Dissertation Series
SBLStBL	SBL Studies in Biblical Literature
Sem	*Semitica*
SHAJ	Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan
SHCANE	Studies in the History and Culture of the Ancient Near East
SJOT	*Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament*
SSN	Studia Semitica Neerlandica
StPohl	Studia Pohl
TA	*Tel Aviv*
TB	Theologische Bücherei
THAT	*Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament*
ThQ	*Theologische Quartalschrift*
ThWAT	*Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament*
	(ed. G.J. Botterweck/H. Ringgren; Stuttgart 1970)
ThZ	*Theologische Zeitschrift*
Transeu	*Transeuphratène*
TynBul	*Tyndale Bulletin*
UF	*Ugarit-Forschungen*
UTB	Universitätstaschenbücher
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
WANEM	Worlds of the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean
WAW	SBL Writings from the Ancient World
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
WO	*Die Welt des Orients*
ZAR	*Zeitschrift für altorientalische und biblische Rechtsgeschichte*
ZAW	*Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*
ZBKAT	Zürcher Bibelkommentare Altes Testament
ZDPV	*Zeitschrift des deutschen Palästina-Vereins*

Introduction

Benedikt Hensel and Stephen Germany

The aim of the present volume is to investigate the portrayal of Israel's and Judah's relations with neighboring groups in the books of Samuel from both literary and historical perspectives. Many of the contributions in the volume were first presented as papers at the conference "The Book of Samuel in the Shadow of Empires: Relations between Israel, Judah, and Neighboring Nations in Historical, Compositional, and Theological Perspective", held at the University of Basel on October 12–14, 2022 with the financial support of the Swiss National Science Foundation. These contributions have been supplemented with additional studies that address the topic at hand from various perspectives, some of which have been published previously in other contexts (see the contributions by Aren Maeir and Jürg Hutzli), while others have been written specifically for this volume (see the contribution by John Will Rice and Matteo Bächtold as well as the contribution by Stephen Germany and Assaf Kleiman).

Two major questions that this volume seeks to address are: (1) What is the relationship between the depiction of population groups neighboring Israel in the world of the text and relations between Israel, Judah, and other populations and polities (including major empires) in the world in which the narratives in Samuel were composed? (2) How can the latest historical and archaeological evidence pertaining to the various neighboring population groups in the southern Levant during the first millennium BCE be related to the rhetorical aims of the books of Samuel? In short, closer investigation of the representation of neighboring groups in the books of Samuel from the multiple perspectives of narrative structure, ideological content, compositional development, and extrabiblical evidence facilitates understanding the historical background and literary history of the books of Samuel more broadly.

In order to reach a historically sound interpretation of the books of Samuel, it is crucial to distinguish clearly between different levels of interpretation and methodological approaches. The discussion involves various levels of analysis – biblical texts, extrabiblical texts, and archaeology – which have not always been adequately distinguished from each other in previous research. The contributions in this volume reflect the distinct areas of expertise of their authors (above all textual analysis and archaeology, respectively), and at certain points, the historical conclusions reached by text-focused scholars on the one hand and by archaeologists on the other are not easily reconciled. This tension is not necessarily a bad thing, however, as it cautions against overly simplistic assumptions, such as the idea that the antiquity of the narratives in Samuel finds clear confirmation in the archaeological evidence, or, conversely, the idea that the narratives are purely a reflection of later times and do not reflect any received knowledge about the early monarchic period in Israel.

Certain contributions in this volume can be read in tandem with each other, providing different perspectives on a single question, such as the historical background(s) underlying the portrayal of the Philistines in the books of Samuel (see the contributions relating to the Philistines by Hannes Bezzel, Ann Killebrew, and John Will Rice and Matteo Bächtold). Others lack dialogue partners within the volume itself but are nevertheless embedded in current scholarly debates at the intersection of literary analysis and archaeology (see the contribution on Edom by Zachary Thomas and Erez Ben-Yosef and the contribution on Amalek by Cynthia Edenburg). Yet others seek to open up a dialogue between textual analysis and archaeological research within a single study (see the contribution on Aram by Stephen Germany and Assaf Kleiman) or focus specifically on textual analysis (see the contribution on the Gibeonites by Walter Bührer), pointing to the potential for further historically-oriented research on the depiction of specific groups in the books of Samuel.

The opening contribution by *Aren M. Maeir*, "On Defining Israel: Or, Let's do the *Kulturkreislehre* Again!", offers a theoretical and critical frame for the historical reconstruction of ethnic groups in antiquity. He begins with a discussion of the theoretical basis for the study of archaeological correlates of identity, providing a brief sketch of the dominant view in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century that there was a direct link between discrete archaeological assemblages and distinct human groups (the "pots equals peoples" theory) and its critique beginning in the mid-twentieth century with the advent of New Archaeology. It was only later, beginning in the 1980s, that theoretical research on ethnicity began to make its mark in archaeology, yet in Levantine archaeology, as Maeir notes, engagement with such theory remains superficial, and in practice many Levantine archaeologists continue to equate ethnicity with material culture. On the basis of recent research on ethnicity, Maeir reiterates that culture and ethnicity do not overlap, and that, to the extent that identifying ethnicity in the archaeological record is possible at all, one should compare *practices* between groups rather than objects themselves. In the second main part of the essay (part 3, Israel in Extra-Biblical Iron Age Texts), Maeir emphasizes that, with regard to antiquity, "identifications of ethnic and other identity groups are almost always based on textual information. […] Given that the biblical texts may very well reflect later ideologies and seek to backdate the origin of a group identity, and the large lacunae in the mention of Israel in other texts, extreme caution is called for when offering hypotheses about who and what Israel was, and what ancient populations can be archaeologically identified with this group" (p. 23). The same can be said – *mutatis mutandi* – for other (ethnic) groups mentioned in the biblical texts and other ancient sources. As an alternative way forward, Maeir "propose[s] that a major focus of future studies of the various stages of Iron Age Israel and related cultures and groups, place a strong emphasis on the study of group-specific technological praxis. This includes analyses of a broad range of facets of societal technology, such as pottery production, food preparation and consumption, building methods, metallurgy, and coroplastic (figurine) production" (p. 31). Given the aim of the present volume to illuminate the interplay between historical circumstances and the textual representation of Israel's neighbors in the books of Samuel, Maeir's concluding programmatic statement poses a challenge to the synthesis of archaeological and textual data: "Let us set aside grand narratives of large entities and instead

concentrate on the lived lives of local communities of practice and belonging that comprised Israel at different stages of the Iron Age. To define what Israel was, and how it developed over time, we should focus on what people did, based on archaeologically observable evidence" (p. 32).

The contribution by Hannes Bezzel, "Who Are the Philistines in the Books of Samuel?", deals with the question of which group(s) – and in which geographical area(s) – are in view in the portrayal of the Philistines in the books of Samuel. Bezzel begins by critiquing the circular reasoning of the "Philistine Paradigm" in which the biblical narratives about the Philistines (especially in Samuel) have been used to explain the archaeological evidence, which is then used once again to explain the biblical texts. Bezzel argues that this paradigm can be called into question both on the basis of recent archaeological research and on the basis of diachronic analysis of the biblical texts. At the same time, he moves away from his own earlier position that the Saul-David narrative as a whole dates to the late eighth century, now suggesting that "the equation of the literary Philistines with the historical Assyrians on every redaction-historical level appears to be a little too simplistic" (p. 52). Rather, Bezzel argues that the oldest references to the Philistines in the books of Samuel reflect "no specific historical ethnic or political group" but instead "represent the oppressive enemy as such" (p. 55); only later did they come to be associated with the inhabitants of the southern coastal plain and implicitly compared with the Assyrians.

The contribution by Ann Killebrew, "The Philistines in the Book of Samuel: An Archaeological Perspective" provides an overview of the current archaeological evidence from six sites commonly identified as Philistine: Ekron, Ashdod, Tell es-Safi/Gath, Ashkelon, Tel Batash, and Tell Qasile. Killebrew reviews the material culture evidence from these sites during the late Iron I and Iron II periods "in order to respond to questions about the historical backdrop and literary history of the books of Samuel" (p. 59). Following her survey of the archaeological evidence, Killebrew stresses that the Iron Age I is the only period of time when all four of the excavated "Pentapolis" sites (Ekron, Ashdod, Tell es-Safi/Gath, and Ashkelon) were major urban centers. On the basis of the appearance of Philistine material culture at Tel Batash/Timnah and Tell Qasile beginning in the Iron IB, she further concludes, "These findings suggest the expansion of Philistine influence beyond the original core settlements, and they tally with the biblical account in the books of Judges and Samuel of Philistine superiority over Judah" (p. 85). Moreover, Killebrew suggests a correlation between the narratives of David's victories over the Philistines (2 Sam 5; 8) and evidence for the decline of certain Philistine sites during Iron IIA, especially Tel Miqne-Ekron, Tel Batash, and Tel Qasile, but possibly also Ashdod and Ashkelon. While the fluctuation in settlement at the six sites discussed by Killebrew may be uncontroversial, the question arises for interpreters of the books of Samuel: Is it merely a coincidence that 2 Samuel places David's defeat of the Philistines roughly in the same historical period that the decline of multiple presumed Philistine sites is attested? Or did the authors of the Philistine passages in Samuel have access to some sort of knowledge of this "apex" (whether connected to traditions about David from the outset or only later linked with him)? On the other hand, caution is advised here, since the framing of the archaeological evidence in Killebrew's survey follows precisely the "vicious circle" that Bezzel warns of in his

essay: "The text served as the basis for a historical reconstruction which was taken as a matrix for interpreting archaeological findings which, reciprocally, were used to confirm the supposed historical reliability of the biblical account" (p. 48).

In their contribution "Tradents of the Lost Ark: The Ark of the Covenant as an Object of Discourse on Divine and Human Kingship", John Will Rice and Matteo Bächtold make an innovative contribution to the interpretation of the Ark Narrative in 1 Sam 4–6 by focusing on the motif of divine kingship. Following a review of both earlier and recent views on the literary development and rhetorical function of the Ark Narrative, Rice and Bächtold emphasize that the later, expanded version of the narrative in 1 Sam 4–6 cast the ark "as a symbol of a lost era of self-determination within discussions of a future self-determination taking place in many texts across the Hebrew Bible" (p. 95). In contrast to earlier scholarship on the Ark Narrative, which followed Rost in regarding the text as an originally independent "source", Rice and Bächtold emphasize that the narrative, "is most likely a product of its current literary context leading to the institution of the Israelite monarchy" (p. 98). In addition, they show how the authors of several different biblical texts used the "social availability" of the ark to advance their own views about the nature of prophecy, priesthood, and human kingship (part 4). In the last part of the study, they theorize the ark in terms of the poet Charles Baudelaire's idea of *malentendu universel* (universal misunderstanding), concluding that "it is the looseness of the ark that gave it its impact and turned it into one of the main symbols of nationhood in post-monarchic contexts" (p. 105).

The contribution by Jürg Hutzli, "Proximity to David, Proximity to Yahweh: Foreigners in the David Narratives", takes a literary approach to the portrayal of non-Israelites in the books of Samuel. He argues that the frequent reference to the place of origin of many of the characters mentioned in Samuel is intentional: In many cases, non-Israelite characters are depicted positively, thus standing in contrast to the negative Deuteronomistic image of foreign nations. Hutzli observes that the prominent place that individual foreigners hold in the David narratives is reminiscent of the "foreigner-friendly" perspective of the book of Ruth. Notably, the books of Samuel refer to foreigners swearing by Yhwh, turning to Yhwh in times of need, handling the ark of Yhwh competently, or having a Yhwh-theophoric name. On the basis of this evidence, Hutzli argues that the books of Samuel presuppose a custom whereby foreigners residing in Israel recognize Yhwh as the "god of the land" and turn to him, for example, in times of need. In Hutzli's view, many of the passages in Samuel featuring foreign individuals date to the preexilic period. This relatively early dating of the narratives rests in part on the argument that narratives mentioning the city of Gath reflect historical circumstances prior to the destruction of Gath in the ninth century and likely would not have featured this city if they had been written later. However, the fact that these passages share a perspective similar to that found in the book of Ruth raises the question of whether they may be better understood as reactions *against* a Deuteronomistic ideology rather than as early texts that predate this ideology.

The contribution by Cynthia Edenburg, "In Search of Amalek: The Pursuit of an Historical Referent in 1 Sam 30", raises the question whether the passages in the books of Samuel mentioning Amalek and Amalekites may be a cipher for Persian-period Idumea rather than references to an Iron Age nomadic group. She takes 1 Sam 30 as a

case study, beginning with linguistic observations that lend support to a late dating of the chapter (part 3), from which she concludes that "the scribe who penned the narrative attempted to emulate the style of oral storytelling, but ultimately left tell-tale signs of the scribal erudition of the Persian period" (p. 138). She then turns to a broader discussion of the literary portrayal of Amalek in the books of Samuel as a whole (part 4), where she notes that "[p]erhaps the most striking feature in the biblical profile of Amalek is the lack of ambivalence towards them on the part of the biblical scribes, in sharp contrast to Edom, Midian, or the Kenites" (p. 139). While other scholars have suggested that Amalek was a "blanket name" for the tribal groups of the southern desert or as a cipher for first-millennium BCE Arabs, Edenburg asks why such groups would evoke such hostility on the part of the biblical scribes and thus considers whether certain details in the narrative might better fit another group. Edenburg notes that Judean hegemony in the southern Hebron hills and the Negev began to wane at the beginning of the sixth century BCE, thus disrupting the equilibrium between different groups in the northern Negev and leading to competition between pastoralists and the settled population for access to arable land. For Edenburg, the geographic sphere of the Amalek narrative in 1 Sam 30 provides the key for identifying the group behind the term "Amalek": After the Babylonian conquest, the southern Hebron hills and the Negev were no longer controlled by Judah and ultimately became the province of Idumea in the Hellenistic period. In the end, Edenburg proposes two alternative scenarios for the composition of the account of David's battle with the Amalekites in 1 Sam 30. In the first scenario, the story would have originally been a "legal midrash explicating the origin of the custom for distributing war booty" (p. 146), and the identification of the raiders with Amalek would be part of a late reworking that gave the story an anti-Idumean slant. In the second scenario, this "legal midrash" would have been associated with Amalek from the outset and was motivated "by the wish to reverse the hold of Idumea upon what used to be southern Judah" (p. 146), retrojecting this wish onto Judah's founding figure.

The contribution by Zachary Thomas and Erez Ben-Yosef, "Copper, Nomads, and Kings: Rethinking the Social and Historical Background of the Book of Samuel", focuses on the problem that not all complex hierarchical societies are readily identifiable in the archaeological record. The study is divided into two distinct parts. In the first main part (sections 2–3), Thomas and Ben-Yosef make the case for the existence of an Edomite polity during the tenth century BCE on the basis of archaeological evidence and extrabiblical texts (the reference to Shasu tribes in Papyrus Anastasi VI and the Nimrud Slab of Adad-Nirari III). In doing so, they identify the workers involved in copper smelting at the southern Arabah site of Timna with the Shasu and note that "the society responsible for this early Iron Age copper industry can only have been tent-dwelling pastoral nomads" (p. 157). They identify this polity with Edom, critiquing in detail the questioning of such an identification by Piotr Bienkowski (and in doing so rely in part on biblical texts such as 1 Kgs 9:16; Num 34:3; and Josh 15:1). In the second main part (section 4), the authors argue that biblical scholars should take seriously a reading of the books of Samuel "against the background of a socially polymorphous Israel during the early Iron Age" (p. 160) and provide four case studies of how such a background affects the reading of particular passages in Samuel. They propose (1)

understanding the reports of Saul's and David's defeat of Edom in 1 Sam 14:47 and 2 Sam 8:12–14 as reflecting these kings' desire to control the supply and trade of copper; (2) understanding certain instances of the term עיר in Samuel as referring to a social unit dwelling in a tent camp rather than a built-up city; (3) interpreting the term מדבר against the background of pastoral nomadism rather than as a term designating the fringes of civilization; and (4) interpreting the references to Shiloh in 1 Sam 1–4 as reflecting a tent-shrine that would fit within the pastoral-nomadic social structure of early Israel. In sum, the authors use recent archaeological evidence for a largely "invisible" complex society that they identify as Edom as the starting point for the thesis that certain details in the books of Samuel relating to Edom and early Israelite social structure as historically reliable.

The contribution by Stephen Germany and Assaf Kleiman, "Arameans in the Book of Samuel: Textual, Historical, and Archaeological Approaches", inquires into the historical background of multiple passages in the books of Samuel in which "Aram" (i.e., Damascus) and/or other Aramean groups or polities are mentioned (or potentially mentioned). The first part of the study consists of a textual analysis of the passages in Samuel in which Arameans are either mentioned explicitly or potentially implied, including an evaluation of the relative dating of these passages within the compositional history of the books of Samuel. The second part of the study considers extrabiblical textual evidence relevant to contextualizing the aforementioned references historically, and it reinforces the conclusion that the texts reflect knowledge of historical circumstances from well after the time depicted in the narratives, namely, the second half of the ninth century at the earliest and possibly extending down to the Persian period. The third part of the study reviews the archaeological data for the settlement history of the central Levant during the early first millennium BCE and places a special focus on the Sea of Galilee region. Both extrabiblical texts and the archaeological evidence from the Sea of Galilee region suggest that the authors of the books of Samuel had access to knowledge about the region extending back to the late ninth century (but likely not earlier) and knowledge of an inhabited Sea of Galilee region as late as the Persian and Hellenistic periods. Parallel to this, the analysis of the biblical texts themselves suggests that the specific passages in Samuel referring to Arameans were composed sometime between the late eighth century and the Persian period. In order to account for the difference between the *terminus post quem* suggested by the extrabiblical evidence and that suggested by the biblical texts themselves, one is almost inevitably faced with the necessity of postulating the reception of earlier "traditions" in the passages in question. Yet contrary to earlier scholarship, which would regard these as traditions about David, a more parsimonious conclusion would be that the authors of Samuel had access to fragments of information (such as from Neo-Assyrian annals or copies of inscriptions from neighboring regions).

The contribution by Walter Bührer, "The Long Shadow of the Gibeonites in the Account of Saul's Post-mortem Rejection and Restitution (2 Sam 21:1–14)", addresses the role of the Gibeonites, who are portrayed as non-Israelites residing within the boundaries of Israel, in the books of Samuel. In contrast to other recent analyses of the story relating to Saul's bloodguit in 2 Sam 21:1–14, Bührer concludes that the story is largely a compositional unity, with only isolated later additions in vv. 2b–3aα, 7, 12aβb–

13a. On the basis of this diachronic analysis, Bührer finds the hypothesis that the "bloodguilt of the house of Saul" originally meant the "bloodguilt *against* the house of Saul" (H. Bezzel) unconvincing. Rather, the "bloodguilt of the house of Saul" was bloodguilt against the Gibeonites from the outset. Yet the Gibeonites' demand to David to kill seven descendants of Saul and to deny them a proper burial as recompense creates a new violation of the social order: the failure to honor the dead. As Bührer points out, "The post-mortem destruction of the killed Saulides aims at the radical erasure of the memory of Saul. By not only killing his descendants and thus preventing them from commemorating their father and grandfather, but also preventing them from being remembered themselves, the Gibeonites aim at a complete *damnatio memoriae* for Saul's family. Following the execution, Rizpah's wake over the bodies of the murdered Saulides makes David realize that Saul himself is still not buried in his family tomb, leading David to transfer Saul's bones from Jabesh-gilead to the land of Benjamin.

The final contribution by Benedikt Hensel and Stephen Germany, "Shifting Trends in the Study of Non-Israelite Groups in the Books of Samuel", provides a wider context for the preceding contributions in the volume by briefly reviewing the current state of research on the portrayal of non-Israelite groups in the books of Samuel, especially with regard to the hypothesized historical context(s) in which the various literary strata of these books were written.

On Defining Israel: Or, Let's do the *Kulturkreislehre* Again![*]

Aren Maeir

1. Introduction

> If the scope of archaeological research is to obtain an insight into the identity constructions of Iron Age people as suggested by the material evidence, then we need not to be fixed on one particular type of identity, which may or may not be actually present in the archaeological record, but rather allow for all possible scenarios to unfold and pick the one(s) that seem(s) most plausible. This implies a 180° turn in the relationship between identity concepts and the material record. One should not categorize the material record based on some large (ethnic) identities that we assume people shared, but rather reconstruct past identities based on the material record patterns.[1]

While the opening quote seems to fit in perfectly with some of the conundrums of the archaeological definition of identity in the Iron Age Levant, and in particular of ancient Israel, in fact it is directed at quite a different period and cultures (early medieval Europe). Clearly, the issues discussed in this article are not only relevant to the study of ancient Israel. Rather, critical perspectives from the broader contexts of archaeological research are of importance in attempts to archaeologically define early Israel.[2]

But why do we need another discussion on archeologically defining early Israel? Can an archaeological perspective help discussions like those in this issue on the question of a "big" and "little" Israel?

Both questions can be answered with "Yes". It appears that we do indeed need to bring up these issues again, though perhaps from a slightly different angle. As I will try to demonstrate below, much of the discussion, archaeological and textual, on the definition of "early Israel" in general, and of the formation and meaning of the term "Israel", is wrought with serious theoretical and methodological problems.

To do so, I will step back and consider the question primarily from an archaeological perspective. But I will not simply reiterate well-known criteria from the material record that have been used frequently in previous studies. Rather, I will consider them through a critical theoretical lens. As such, my data set will not be limited to what is usually used for defining ancient Israel. I will also adduce relevant scholarship from the study

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[*] This contribution was originally published in *HeBAI* 10 (2021): 106–148.

[1] Popa 2018, 191.

[2] As used in this contribution, "Israel" can refer to several things. 1) Specific mentions of the name Israel in ancient sources; 2) The commonly used generic term for the population of the southern Levantine central hills region (often "Ancient Israel"); 3) "Big" and "Little" Israel, following Monroe/Fleming 2019, referring to the changing meaning of the term Israel during the Iron Age. As needed, the specific use will be noted.

of identity of other ancient cultures and contexts, where many of the same problems are being grappled with.

In doing so, I realize that I am entering a minefield. Archaeologists and historians who write about ancient Israel have focused on the five Ws (who, where, when, why and what). These, indeed, are the essential questions, and the axes of complex debates in the field. What I have to offer will not resolve these disagreements. Neither do I claim that the theoretical perspectives I bring here are entirely unknown to my colleagues, some of whom, indeed, refer to them in their work. But I maintain that they have insufficiently informed work in the field; indeed, in the work of many scholars of ancient Israel they play no role at all.[3] Clearly, to define (and identify) what ancient Israel is, at different stages, requires, as a precondition, some common ground in the field not only on what the term "Israel" refers to, but also on how it is manifested in the archaeological record, both at specific points in time and over extended periods.

By and large, archaeologists and historians in the field fall into the same trap. When thinking of ancient Israel, they picture it in a manner according with their intuition of what it should look like. Usually, the image comes from an Israel of a very specific socio-historical timeframe. They then project this image backwards and forwards, most often flattening the developmental processes and the temporal and situational diversity of how this Israel is manifested in the material record.

Even given the premise that there was a group (or groups) consisting of people with a common identity that they, or others, defined as "Israel" in some form or another, at different stages of history (from that term's first appearance c. 1210 BCE on the Merenptah Stele to modern times), the referent it points to was neither static nor one that underwent a simplistic, uniform and linear development. Richard Jenkins puts it in a nutshell: Identity, he writes, "is a process – identification – not a 'thing'. It is not something that one can have, or not; it is something that one does."[4]

In other words, the meaning of the term "Israel", denoting a group with a common identity, has always been in flux, taking on very different characters over time. Furthermore, the nature of its permutations is complex. That means that any presumption that the term can be simplistically defined by reference to specific definitions, characteristics, continuities, and developmental pathways is untenable. For example, the entities referred to as "Little Israel" and "Big Israel" in the recent scholarly discussion are not simply a physical development of each other, but are connected to complex ideological viewpoints, both in antiquity and in modern interpretations. Thus, from an archaeological perspective, a straightforward developmental continuity of the material correlates of various stages of Israel may be very difficult, if even impossible, to define. Indeed, there may not be any such thing.

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[3] I am hardly the first to question the theoretical foundations of a substantial part of the discussions on the definitions of early Israel, in particular in relationship to the definition of ethnicity and its archaeological manifestations. See, e. g., Kletter 2006; Kletter 2014; Lemche 2010; Lemche 2012; Nestor 2010. It is crucial to continue pointing this out due to the fact that these theoretical misconceptions can still be seen in seemingly influential publications (e.g., Dever 2017, 210–218; Faust 2018).

[4] Jenkins 2008, 5. See as well, e.g., Melucci 1982, 68; Schlesinger 1987, 237. For a review of concepts of identity in connection with early Israel, see Töyräänvuori 2020, 205–215.

There is an enormous volume of research and publications addressing the question of how to define "early Israel". While I will refer to various previous studies, I cannot, within the space of this contribution, review all (or even most) of the relevant research. I therefore restrict my scope to some of the better-known and more recent discussions.

2. Studying Identity

I begin with a review of the theoretical basis for the study of archaeological correlates of identity.[5] This is quite important, given that one of the recurring problems in the archaeology of the southern Levant in general and in the study of ancient Israel in particular is the shaky theoretical foundation on which many of these studies stand. Even when scholars engage the relevant social theory, they generally do so superficially, in ways that evince a profound lack of familiarity with the theories they adduce. Work addressing the archaeological manifestations of identity – and in particular, ethnicity – in the southern Levant is especially guilty of this shortcoming. The specific case that I address is the work that seeks to identify and define "ancient Israel" during the Iron Age (and other periods) in terms of the archaeological record. I thus begin with a brief account of the theoretical background of the relationship between the archaeological remains and ethnicity and identity in general.

In the late nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries CE, the reigning paradigm in archaeology presumed that there was a direct link between discrete archaeological assemblages and distinct human groups, such as tribes and ethnicities. This was often termed the culture-historical approach.[6] Based on the *Kulturkreislehre* ("cultural environment school") of central European anthropology, the German archaeologist Gustav Kossinna, as part of his *Siedlungsarchäologie* method, posited what became known as the Kossinna axiom: "Streng umrissene, scharf sich heraushebende, geschlossene archäologische Kulturprovinzen fallen unbedingt mit bestimmten Völker- oder Stammesgebieten zusammen."[7] This approach was put into practice by many leading figures in the field at that time,[8] such as V. Gordon Childe[9] and Alfred Kroeber,[10] and was widely accepted in archaeological interpretation.[11]

The approach came under criticism in the mid-twentieth century CE, particularly with the advent of the movement often labeled New Archaeology. Scholars such as Walter

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[5] I am putting aside critical discussions on the very use of the term "identity" and its application in social research, such as, e.g., Brubaker/Cooper 2000; Yuval-Davis 2010; Appiah 2018; Fukuyama 2018.

[6] See, e.g., Trigger 1989; Jones 1997.

[7] Eng.: "Strictly outlined, sharply defined, bounded regions of archaeological culture necessarily coincide with certain ethnic or tribal areas." Kossinna 1926, 21. The English translation is my own.

[8] Veit 1984.

[9] E.g., Childe 1956.

[10] Kroeber 1939.

[11] I would stress that while Kossinna was justifiably vilified for his racist views, many others used his (and similar) approaches without explicit racist underpinnings, as this was the accepted Weltanschauung of these times. On this, see, e.g., Rebay-Salisbury 2011.

Taylor,[12] Lewis Binford,[13] David Clarke,[14] Peter Ucko[15] and Ian Hodder,[16] and many others,[17] criticized the premises behind the axiom. They showed that particular types of material culture and assemblages cannot necessarily be equated with groups, societies, and ethnicities, and that the geographical dispersal of cultural assemblages does not point straightforwardly to human group identities. Similarly, they argued that the appearance of a new cultural assemblage should not always be interpreted as representing the appearance of a new group; other factors, whether environmental or anthropogenic, must be taken into account in determining whether the artifacts were produced by a new group or by the same group adopting different practices. They also questioned the connection between cultures and so-called primordialist understandings of ethnicity.[18]

Given that this so-called "pots equals peoples" assumption has been under critique for more than seventy years,[19] it is astonishing that archaeology, both in the Levant and elsewhere, has yet to discard such essentialist perspectives. Time and again, almost reflexively, perhaps because it is so effortless and satisfying,[20] archaeologists equate material culture with identity. Indeed, some have recently defended the approach, arguing that a "sharp fall-off" in the archaeological record (that is, the fairly rapid disappearance of specific kinds or styles of artifacts) enables us to see a "meaningful pattern" of ethnic demarcation.[21] The *Kulturkreislehre* approach seems to be rising like a phoenix from its own ashes.

The New Archaeologists were reluctant to address identity and ethnicity. Instead, they sought what they referred to as an overarching systemic and law-based understanding of culture.[22] Nevertheless, the connection between material culture and ethnicity was very much at the center (even as a subtext) of what was called the style debate of the 1970s and 1980s. James Sackett[23] coined the term "isochrestic variation" to name stylistic variations that passively serve as ethnic markers. These could be found in all aspects of a given culture and, he believed, enabled group members to express their group identity. Polly Wiessner[24] used the term "emblemic styles", which she suggested bear distinct and easily recognizable messages to mark and maintain group boundaries, particularly at times of social and economic transition. She posited that since these emblemic items were distinct, archaeologists should be able to discern them

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[12] Taylor 1948.

[13] Binford 1965.

[14] Clarke 1968.

[15] Ucko 1969.

[16] Hodder/Orton 1976.

[17] For overviews, see, e.g., Trigger 1989, 294–303; Roberts/Vander Linden 2011. Most recently, see Feinman and Neitzel's plea to excise (!) cultural-historical approaches from contemporary archaeological interpretation (Feinman/Neitzel 2020).

[18] Shennan (ed.) 1989; Jones 1997.

[19] E.g., Kramer 1977.

[20] Popa/Stoddart 2014.

[21] Faust 2018, 277, fig. 2.

[22] E.g., Hodos 2010, 8.

[23] Sackett 1977.

[24] Wiessner 1985.

in the material record. In other words, attempts were made to decipher identity from the archaeological finds.

Just as mainstream New Archaeology (called "processual archaeology") in the 1970s and even in the 1980s shied away from reference to ethnicity, social theory was making important advancements in the study of precisely that category. The best known of the works emerging from this field was a slim volume edited by Fredrik Barth.[25] Barth's introduction to the volume in particular was a harbinger of a major shift in the understanding of ethnicity.[26] His succinct presentation of the ideas and concepts of writers in the field had a major impact and changed to a large extent the way the social sciences understand ethnicity. It cast off the shackles of primordialist views that, by and large, had up to that point been central in thinking about ethnicity. According to a primordialist view, there is a tangible and primordial basis for ethnic identifications, which display long-term continuity, whether biological or social. In this view, ethnic groups retain over long periods – at times without change – a very specific identity.[27]

Barth instead suggested that individuals and groups selectively emphasize those forms of cultural differentiation that are important to them. He contended that the maintenance of ethnic boundaries occurs through interactions between "us" and "them" across a group boundary. Moreover, the cultural features that are drawn upon in this interaction are not fixed; they are situationally defined, in other words dependent on the specific social contexts. In this way, Barth emphasized the relational, interactional and situational nature of ethnicity.

Arguing that "ethnic groups are categories of ascription and identification by the actors themselves",[28] Barth maintained that it is "the ethnic boundary that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses."[29] He stressed the formation and maintenance processes of ethnic boundaries, largely irrespective of the cultural traits enclosed by those boundaries.[30]

Barth's approach has become the leading basis for understanding ethnicity and its variations, as well as for framing disagreements on the definition of manifestations of ethnicity. It is important to keep this in mind, because many archaeologists treat Barth's views as tantamount to sacred and final, viewing him as the sole and incontrovertible authority on all aspects of ethnicity. This simply does not reflect the current state of the social sciences and social theory, where a wide range of views on ethnicity in social theory, some quite contradictory, are being debated in anthropological and sociological

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[25] Barth (ed.) 1969.

[26] Barth 1969, 9–38.

[27] It should be stressed that primordialist understandings of ethnicity are still espoused by some social theorists, e.g., Gil-White 1999; Bayar 2009. Also worth mentioning are the common, public misperceptions (at times racist), which espouse primordialist views on ethnic groups, their past origins, and the supposed unchanging characteristics, which more recently are supposedly supported by genetic studies (e.g., Brubaker 2015; Hakenbeck 2020).

[28] Barth 1969, 10.

[29] Barth 1969, 15.

[30] The central role of boundaries in Barth's original study, has since then, at times, led to an overemphasis of the importance of boundaries (e.g., Wimmer 2013), something that Barth himself subsequently noted. See Barth 2000.

literature. In addition to Barth's "instrumentalist" approach and its variants,[31] other views and understandings of ethnicity abound. These include constructivism, which sees ethnicity as being constantly constructed and reconstructed as individual identifications change;[32] perennialism, which perceives ethnicities and nations as basically the same;[33] and modernism, which connects the appearance of ethnic groups to the emergence of modern nation-states.[34] There are also a number of postmodern approaches, some of which challenge the very use of the term ethnicity and even identity.[35]

It was only in the 1980s and 1990s that these lively discussions on ethnicity in the social sciences began to make a significant mark in archaeology. Ian Hodder was a pioneering voice in his ethnoarchaeological work in Africa.[36] Noteworthy are studies by Stephen Shennan,[37] Geoff Emberling,[38] Jonathan Hall,[39] Sian Jones,[40] and Margarita Díaz-Andreu et al.,[41] where the up-todate social theory of their day was discussed in archaeological contexts. Jones,[42] whose volume is frequently quoted in archaeological studies of ethnicity in the last two decades, understood ethnicity as but one type of identity. She attempted to bridge instrumentalist approaches with Bourdieu's[43] theory of practice and concepts such as habitus and doxa, which stress how individual humans act in their daily lives and how they perceive the social world around them and thus manifest culture and identity. Jones used this synthesis to explain how ethnicity is perpetuated in day-to-day life, and how it can be perceived in the archaeological record.

A number of postmodern perspectives have also been highly influential in theoretically-charged archaeological studies on ethnicity. Approaches such as agency, post-colonialism, fragmentation of narratives, hybridity, transculturalism, and entanglement have added new, multi-faceted, and complex perspectives to the concepts of identity and ethnicity, and to a certain extent, their application (or critique), in archaeology.[44] These have resulted in a number of recent explorations of ethnic identity in the archaeological literature. Some of these studies display an acute awareness of the complexity of the definition of ethnicity in particular, and identity in general, and the intense discussions that these topics generate in contemporary social theory.[45]

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[31] E.g., Cohen (ed.) 1974.

[32] E.g., Chandra (ed.) 2012.

[33] E.g., Smith 2008.

[34] E.g., Epstein 1978; Carter/Fenton 2010.

[35] E.g., Brubaker 2004; Brubaker 2014; Brubaker/Cooper 2000; Wettstein 2016.

[36] Hodder 1982.

[37] Shennan (ed.) 1989.

[38] Emberling 1997.

[39] Hall 1995.

[40] Jones 1997.

[41] Díaz-Andreu et al. 2005.

[42] Jones 1997.

[43] E.g., Bourdieu 1977; Bourdieu 1990.

[44] E.g., Hodos 2010, 9–10; Knapp 2014.

[45] There are numerous archaeological studies with sophisticated utilization of social theory in the study of ethnicity. For a small sampling of this, see, e.g., Hakenbeck 2007; Hakenbeck 2011; Knapp 2008; Knapp 2014; Derks/Roymans (eds.) 2009; Mac Sweeney 2009; Mac Sweeney 2011; Amundsen-Meyer/Engel/Pickering (eds.) 2011; Curta 2011; Curta 2013; Curta 2014; Fernández-Götz 2013; Hu

These, however, remain exceptions. The greater part of archaeological discourse on ethnicity, particularly in Levantine archaeology, appears blissfully unaware of such developments in social theory on the subject. Indeed, much of it seems not only to be incognizant of this work, but also to adhere to a traditional primordialist viewpoint. Even studies that display awareness of newer directions in the study of ethnicity, such as the work of Barth and beyond, often cite Barth alone, or another more recent study. But then, having nodded in the direction of social theory, they revert to a very traditional view, most often equating ethnicity with material culture.[46] Hardly limited to Levantine archaeology, Guillermo Reher has termed this phenomenon the "Introduction of Ethnicity Syndrome".[47]

Since the definition and social significance of ethnicity is a much debated and still evolving field of research in contemporary social theory, both in relation to ancient and contemporary societies, archaeologists cannot afford to disregard it. They must engage with cutting-edge theoretical discourse. Reference to decades-old research is hardly sufficient. Barth's volume recently turned fifty,[48] and the foundational studies on archaeological ethnicity, those most often quoted in the archaeological literature,[49] were published about twenty years ago.[50]

Before proceeding, I would like to list some important points culled from a broad range of mostly recent discussions of ethnicity:

– Ethnicity and identity remain highly controversial issues.[51] While Barth[52] is rightfully seen as the starting point for modern discussions on ethnicity, his is hardly the last nor the most up-to-date view of the issue. Rogers Brubaker has gone as far as stating that "ethnicity is a chronically [sic] unsettled and ill-defined field of inquiry".[53]

– Ethnicity is an evolving and relational concept by which a group defines itself. Its definition is based on supposed common attributes and origins, in relationship to other ethnic groups, and on how other groups define it (what social theory refers to as the emic versus etic perspectives). Andreas Wimmer offers a convenient definition: "a subjectively felt sense of belonging based on the belief in shared culture and common

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2013; Popa/Stoddart (eds.) 2014; Blanton 2015; Reher/Fernández-Götz 2015; Buchberger 2017; Popa 2018; Bader 2021.

[46] See Reher 2011; Cohen 2019. They both cite multiple examples of archaeological discussions on ethnicity that quote Barth, seemingly demonstrating familiarity with up-to-date social theory, but then go on to espouse views on archaeological ethnicity that are at times completely contrary to these very social theories.

[47] Reher 2011; Reher/Fernández-Götz 2015.

[48] Eriksen/Jakoubek (eds.) 2019.

[49] E.g., Hall 1995; Emberling 1997; Jones 1997; Díaz-Andreu et al. 2005.

[50] Building on what Emberling stated (Emberling 1997, 300: "If we are going to use the term 'ethnicity' to refer to social groups in the past, we must be prepared to accept its meanings in the present"), it is obvious that one can only deal with ethnicity in the past, if one is fully aware of up-to-date theory on ethnicity in the present.

[51] E.g., Brubaker/Cooper 2000; Brubaker 2004; Brubaker 2014; Jenkins 2008a; Carter/Fenton 2010; Sokolovskii/Tishkov 2010; Hu 2013; Hahn 2017.

[52] Barth 1969.

[53] Brubaker 2014, 804.

ancestry".[54] This identity can, however, be highly politicized and controlled and defined by interest groups.[55]

– Ethnicity, and identity in general, is a process, not a thing.[56] As Guy Halsall has pointed out:

Ethnicity is a state of mind, with no necessary correlation to things which are objectively measurable, whether material, biological or genetic. This will always make attempts to read off monolithic ethnic identities, or even the interplay between monolithic ethnic identities (which is what is at stake in 'acculturation' arguments), highly dubious. More pertinently, perhaps, ethnicity is itself a complex dimension of an individual's identity, existing in several layers which can be adopted or highlighted, abandoned, played down or concealed.[57]

– While the boundaries, their definition, and the differences between ethnic groups are important, other factors, including ones internal to a group, affect ethnic identification.[58] Likewise, these boundaries are not closely defined physical spaces, but somewhat amorphic "social spaces". To quote Gary Reger:

The social spaces wherein cross-group interactions take place are the effective social boundaries between groups. It is in these social borderlands that hybridities can emerge, perhaps more often than at geographical borders.[59]

Not only are boundaries in constant flux, but overlapping, and at times contradictory, boundaries are common. As Joel Migdal writes,

People thus encounter multiple sets of boundaries, which configure space differently and which have various sets of meaning as well as checkpoints with scrutinizing and enforcing devices attached to them. Individuals, in short, daily confront radically divergent mental maps of how the world is configured.[60]

– Culture and ethnicity do not overlap. The dispersal of cultural artifacts does not mirror the dispersal of ethnic groups, and cultural assemblages cannot be assumed to equate ethnic groups.[61] To claim that a sharp fall-off in the appearance of artifacts, interpreted as markers of a specific material culture, can indicate a borderline between cultures and populations[62] harkens back to the Kossinna axiom cited above. The same is true for

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[54] Wimmer 2008, 973.

[55] E.g., Cohen 1974.

[56] Jenkins 2008a, 5.

[57] Halsall 2011, 25.

[58] E.g., Olsen/Kobylinski 1991, 22; Yuval-Davis 2011, 99; Wimmer 2013; Brubaker 2014; Brubaker 2015; Vranić 2014, 172; Eriksen/Jakoubek 2019, 3. Particularly noteworthy are Barth's own reservations on the over focus on boundaries in ethnicity studies, ever since his 1969 edited volume. See Barth 2000; Barth 2007, 10.

[59] Reger 2014, 116.

[60] Migdal 2001, 8.

[61] E.g., Moerman 1965; Daim 1998; Pohl 1998; Pohl 2018; Knapp 2008, 44–46; Knapp 2014; Strobel 2009, 121; Terrell 2010; Curta 2011; Halsall 2011, 25; Chandra (ed.) 2012, 85; Sommer 2011; Cohen 2019, 25; Eriksen/Jakoubek 2019.

[62] Faust 2018, 277.

equating language and ethnicity, which time and again has been shown to be a problematic correlation at best.[63]

– If it works at all, ethnic and other identities might be archaeologically noticeable less on the basis of the dispersal of objects (even those that are defined as emblemic markers[64]), and more so on the basis of comparing contemporary practices between groups[65] and particularly based on archaeologically identifiable differences in practices (such as technological praxis).[66]

– To define ethnicity (and other identities) in the archaeological record, a much smaller scale of similarities and differences must be studied, considerably smaller than the spatial and temporal dispersal of so-called "archaeological cultures",[67] preferably at the community level,[68] in well-defined and limited time frames,[69] and preferably as manifested in communities of practice.

– Ethnicity is only one of the various identities at play, in a complex manner, at any given moment, in any group of people. There is no reason to favor ethnicity over other identities, and to see it as more indicative or salient in the archaeological record.[70]

– Cultural attributes which sometimes can be associated with specific identities, ethnic and otherwise, most often do not retain their meaning or even their use over extended periods. Some can fall out of use, some can continue, while others can change their meaning.[71]

– The identities of groups, as well as of individuals, can merge and separate in diverse manners, a concept often referred to as situational or contextual ethnicity.[72]

These introductory points lead to a discussion of the theoretical and methodological complexities in recognizing ethnicity and other identities in the archaeological record of the Iron Age Levant, and more specifically, how this effects the various definitions of early Israel. Many studies have exercised insufficient caution and awareness of the pitfalls which I have described. All too often scholars have built their claims on simplistic assumptions regarding supposed evidence for long-lasting ethnic groups, such as Israel at various stages. They have often based their arguments on the identification

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[63] E.g., Derks/Roymans 2009, 2; Lytra 2016; Mumm 2018; Brubaker 2019. Similarly, linking script with identity is problematic as well. See, e.g., Berlejung 2019.

[64] Needless to say, the very definition of what is an emblemic object is, by and large, based on the archaeologist's present day subjective interpretation, and its relevance for ancient societies should not be taken for granted.

[65] E.g., Naum 2014; Haak 2015, 19.

[66] E.g., Gosselain 1992; Gosselain 2000; Degoy 2008; Peelo 2011; Albero Santacreu et al. 2019; Roux 2019, 5–6. On the importance of defining technological practice and "communities of practice", see below.

[67] E.g., Jones 1997; Lucy 2005, 109; Knapp 2008, 47.

[68] E.g., Maran 2011; Porter 2013; Pohl 2015; Berzon 2018; Flexner/Bedford/Valentin 2019; Welton et al. 2019; Steidl 2020b; Steidl 2020a.

[69] Hodos 2010, 16.

[70] E.g., Delgado/Ferrer 2007, 36; Glick Schiller/Çağlar/Guldbrandsen 2006; Theuws 2009; Hodos 2010, 27; Hakenbeck 2011, 53; Popa 2018, 52–53; Sagiv et al. 2019.

[71] E.g., Jones 1997, 126; Daim 1998; Hakenbeck 2011, 61–62; Sommer 2011, 175; Hummell 2014, 49–50; Wettstein 2016, 391.

[72] E.g., Okamura 1981; Jones 1997; Hakenbeck 2007; Hakenbeck 2011; Noels/Clément 2015.

of emblemic objects in the archaeological record, objects that were allegedly in use over extended periods, with a consistent symbolic meaning.

But this flaw is not confined to work in the Levant. Many of the same shortcomings can be seen elsewhere, such as in studies on early medieval ethnic identities in Europe.

Putatively relevant historical sources name ethnic groups that supposedly lived in different regions of Europe in the early medieval period. Archaeologists working on early medieval sites and finds from across Europe have attempted to tie the groups mentioned in these texts to specific archaeological remains, and thus to delineate their material culture. Recent critical scrutiny has questioned the very basis, theoretical and methodological, of these studies. Scholars such as Walter Pohl,[73] Sebastian Brather,[74] Florin Curta,[75] Susanne Hakenbeck,[76] K. Patrick Fazioli,[77] Erica Buchberger[78] and James Harland[79] have shown that, in many cases, attempts to equate specific cultural assemblages with ethnic groups that are mentioned in historical sources are tenuous in the extreme and even downright mistaken. Often, the archaeological identifications of these groups, supposedly based on the archaeological remains, are in fact built on texts which allegedly describe these groups, but in fact date to much later periods in which the identification of these groups was ideologically charged. They thus do not have any connection to the objects unearthed in archaeological excavations of early medieval sites.

Addressing the pitfalls of previous scholarship on the archaeological evidence of early medieval ethnic groups in Bavaria, Susanne Hakenbeck (see Fig. 1) has offered a good summary of the accepted approach to the connection between ethnicity and archaeological evidence. Tellingly, the methodologies she critiques are pretty much the same ones used by archaeologists who work on Iron Age sites in the southern Levant:

It was assumed that in early medieval society these ethnic meanings of objects could and would have been read by all in the same way. The ethnic paradigm therefore worked with simplistic interpretations of material culture; both people and objects were considered classifiable by their external attributes, and the only difficulty lay in getting the classification right.

Furthermore, studies of ethnicity in the early medieval period have relied heavily on a literal reading of historical sources, creating a self-referencing circular argument. The sources are thought to provide a framework of facts and dates into which archaeological evidence can be fitted. Fragments of information gained from historical sources are taken out of context and used to identify the movements and settlement areas of the barbarian peoples. Distribution maps of specific artefact types then apparently identified these areas on the ground. The next step is to identify the ethnicity of individuals by making a connection between these artefacts and the identity of those that were buried with them. Once the tribal areas became populated with people, these people then turned fully-clothed into the actors mentioned in the historical sources.[80]

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[73] Pohl 1998; Pohl 2015; Pohl 2017; Pohl 2018; Brather 2004.
[74] Brather 2011.
[75] Curta 2011; Curta 2013; Curta 2020a.
[76] Hakenbeck 2007; Hakenbeck 2011.
[77] Fazioli 2014.
[78] Buchberger 2017.
[79] Harland 2017a; Harland 2017b; Harland 2019.
[80] Hakenbeck 2011, 38–39.

So archaeologists working on medieval European sites look at written sources that purport to provide historical accounts of the movements and habitations of ethnic groups on the continent in this period, and then simplistically attempt to identify specific artifacts or assemblages with these groups. Often they do so without taking into account that most of the written sources on which they base their work on the early medieval period do not date to that time but were written much later, reflecting later ideological perceptions of an earlier period.

This is a textbook example of a self-referencing circular argument, in which archaeologists "read" artifacts in light of texts, and then go back and read these texts in light of their reading of the artifacts.

Similar fallacies can also be found in work on cultural contexts that are spatially and temporally closer to ancient Israel. For example, in discussing attempts to connect textual references to the Phoenicians and the archaeological record, Michael Sommer notes that "No study of the Phoenicians can ignore textual sources, but rather should take them as what they are: not 'evidence' in the proper sense, but 'narratives' created for all kinds of purposes, including handing down information."[81]

Often then, the theoretical, methodological, and data-based approaches that are used to connect archaeological remains with specific ethnic (and other identity) groups are both outdated and faulty. This is certainly the case in much of the archeological work that seeks to identify Israel in the various stages of the Iron Age.
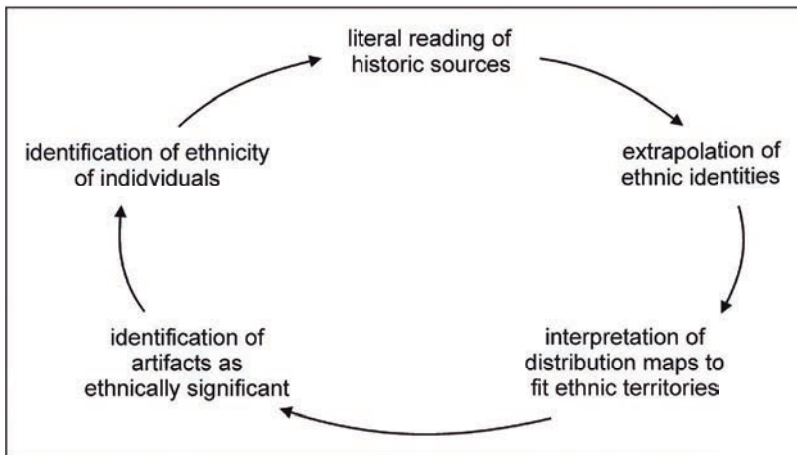

Fig. 1: The Self-Referencing Circular Argument of Identifying Ethnic Groups in the Archaeological Record. Based on Hakenbeck 2011, 39, fig. 1.

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[81] Sommer 2010, 119. For a similar view on the interface between text and archaeology in the definition of the Philistines, see Lemche 2012.

3. Israel in Extra-Biblical Iron Age Texts

The starting point in the search for ancient Israel, through its different stages, is without a doubt the appearance of the term Israel in texts, both biblical and extra-biblical. While my focus here is on the archaeological criteria for the identification, I want to stress that the identifications are all dependent on texts; indeed, they may be seen as an example of the "tyranny of the texts".[82] No less important is that I claim no expertise of any sort in the interpretation of the relevant biblical texts. That said, however, I'm keenly aware of the diversity of approaches, some of them mutually exclusive, in contemporary biblical historical interpretation.[83] Nevertheless, even if the biblical texts retain kernels of historical information, they are the end products of a long process of development, and also reflect later (late or post- Iron Age) ideologies. It should be self-evident, then, that much caution must be exercised in using biblical texts to recreate the realia of early Iron Age Israel.[84] When the term "Israel" appears in biblical texts[85] it should be used very cautiously in illuminating what really went on in the Iron Age, especially in the early stages of the Iron Age.

While the few extra-biblical mentions of Israel should not be seen as objective and problem free sources, they nevertheless represent distinct points in time when the term "Israel" is used in reference to a group (or groups) in the southern Levant. They are thus important as corroborating evidence – beyond the mentions of Israel in biblical texts – regarding the existence of an identity group called "Israel" in specific times and contexts.

I want to state clearly that I fully accept the overall scholarly consensus[86] that a group termed "Israel" is in fact mentioned in the Merenptah Stele, which at present is the earliest known textual reference to this group.[87] What this means is that by the late thirteenth century BCE, but probably a bit before, there was a group in Canaan known to others as Israel. Despite claims to the contrary, it is important to stress that this reference provides no other information. It does not say where in Canaan this group was located, how large a group it was, or anything about its character. Thus, all attempts to use this reference to place "Israel" within a specific region or attribute to it a specific socio-economic and geopolitical character are at best tenuous and at worst speculative in the extreme.

But this single word in a single inscription has sent legions of scholars into self-referencing circular arguments. They assert that the Israel referred to in the Merenptah

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[82] E.g., Thurston 1997; Kohl 2006.

[83] As stressed, e.g., by Sommer 2011; Grabbe 2017, 31–37.

[84] E.g., Brettler 2014; Mazar 2014; Finkelstein 2017; Grabbe 2017.

[85] For an overview of "Israel" in the biblical texts, see, e.g., Weingart 2014.

[86] The literature on this is enormous. See for example: Hasel 1994; Hasel 2003; Hasel 2008; Rainey 2001; Kitchen 2004; Miller 2004; Killebrew 2005, 154–155; Morenz 2008; Dever 2009; Dever 2017, 191–194; Nestor 2015; Grabbe 2017, 85–86; Schipper 2019, 14–18.

[87] The suggestion of an earlier mention of Israel (Görg 2001; van der Veen/Theis/Görg 2010; van der Veen 2012; van der Veen/Zwickel 2014; Zwickel/van der Veen 2017) is questionable (e.g., Adrom 2016; Ritner 2020). Even if one accepts this suggestion (and I do not), it only means that the formation of the group called "Israel" began a bit earlier.

Stele must name the people who lived in the settlements that appeared in the central hills of Palestine in the late thirteenth century BCE. The next step is to note that biblical traditions place the early Israelites in this region, where the kingdoms of Israel and Judah later emerged. Thus, these settlements, and the material culture found in them, represent early Israelites.

It goes further. Supposed continuities between the material culture of these Iron I settlements and later Iron Age Judah and Israel (for example, four-room houses, abstention from pork, an egalitarian ethos) have led repeatedly to claims that there is a clear cultural continuity in the group identity of "the Israelites", linking those who lived in Iron I to those of Iron II.[88]

This unequivocal interpretation has been challenged, from different perspectives.[89] Defenders such as William G. Dever[90] respond that those who question the identification of early Israel are insufficiently familiar with the archaeological remains. But my whole point here is that familiarity, or lack thereof, with the archaeological remains is precisely not what is at issue (and I can safely say that I know these materials). The problem is a logical one, whether the premises on which these successive inferences regarding early Israel have a solid theoretical basis.

I want to make clear that I do not question that at different stages of the Iron Age and later there was a group – or groups – that identified themselves, or were identified by others, as Israel. I see a need, however, to flag what I percieve as overly simplistic interpretations and narratives that attempt to forge a straightforward and uncritical connection between manifestations of Israel, on the one hand, to specific and tightly defined relationships with archaeological remains, on the other. This, in my opinion, is unwarranted. It is supported neither by the archaeological materials nor by an up-to-date theoretical framework.

So what can we say about Merenptah's Israel? Not very much, save that there was a group, somewhere within the southern Levant, probably in peripheral regions, that was called Israel in this inscription. It may very likely be that this "Israel" was a name for some of the inhabitants of the newly founded settlements in the central hills region, or in other parts of the southern Levant (northern Galilee; Transjordan).[91] Despite all that has been written about the definition of Merenptah's Israel, and the many suggestions that have been raised, the actual evidence does not permit saying much more than that.[92]

Furthermore, many scholars claim that the unique material culture seen in the central hills and other regions in Canaan during the Late Bronze–Iron Age transition was the

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[88] Most recently, for example: Dever 2017; Faust 2018; Schipper 2019.

[89] E.g., Van Seters 1983; Lemche 1990; Davies 1992; Thompson 1994.

[90] Dever 2007; Dever 2017.

[91] Various suggestions (for a survey, see, e.g., Hasel 2008) regarding the geographic location of Israel, such as located the group between Gezer and Yenoʿam, or more generally, in the central hills region, are a likely possibility, but cannot be seen as explicitly proven. First, it assumes that the locations in the Merenptah inscription were geographically arranged, which might not be the case due to the literary character of the inscription. In addition to this, the very vagueness of the term "Israel" does not allow us to define its size and location, unless one extrapolates from later biblical and extra-biblical sources. See, e.g., Kletter 2006, 580–581.

[92] Recently, Monroe/Fleming 2019, 17–18; see also Fleming 2021.

material culture of this same Israel. However, for a number of reasons, there can be no certainty that sites with this specific material assemblage can be securely identified as the group called Israel:

(1) Even if we could be certain that there was a group called Israel in these regions, and what the exact character of this group was, the very attempt to create a parallel between material culture and group identity is fraught with problems.

(2) The fact that the Merenptah Stele names a group called Israel does not have to mean that such a group actually existed. Rather, it means that Israel was perceived as a defined group in contemporaneous royal Egyptian ideology. Nor does it provide any information about who the groups' members were and what their relationship to other contemporary groups was.

(3) Furthermore, the elements of the "trait list" which scholars have associated with early Israel (e. g., four-room houses, collared-rim pithoi, the absence of pig bones), on the basis of the reference in the Merenptah Stele, cannot be presumed to be unique to the group called Israel. Perhaps not all the settlements exhibiting these traits belonged to the group named in the stele. Perhaps other groups had similar material cultures.

(4) There is no ground for presuming that there was a large-scale group known as Israel living in the central hills and other regions. A much more likely scenario is that there were many groups with similar characteristics, whether small and local or large and supra-regional entities. In later stages of the Israelite and Judahite kingdoms, these states were comprised of many small-scale local leaders who owed fealty to the king in a patron-client relationship.[93] It seems reasonable that there might have been groups of different types and sizes, interacting in a range of ways, during the early Iron Age as well. With all probability, local groups were of cardinal importance. And there is no certainty in defining these groups archaeologically.[94]

The vagueness of the terms "Israel" and "Israelite" continues in later stages. As many have noted previously,[95] following the late thirteenth century BCE mention of Israel in the Merenptah inscription, these terms are rarely used in extra-biblical texts. They appear again in the ninth century BCE, with the mention of "Ahab the Israelite" in the Kurkh Monolith of Shalmaneser III (853 BCE), and two mentions of "king of Israel" in the Mesha Stele and the Dan Stele (both ca. 840 BCE). Following this, "Israel" or

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[93] E.g., Benz 2016; Maeir/Shai 2016; Shai/Maeir 2018): 45*; Pfoh 2018; Niemann 2019; Sergi 2019a.

[94] The biblical traditions on the tribes of which Israel was comprised (e.g., Weingart 2014; see Monroe 2021), and of the many different peoples in Canaan, may very well reflect the complex and diverse groups that resided in early Iron Age Canaan, and in particular in the Central Hills. Seeing all of these as being under a general umbrella of Israel, arguably might be seen as no more than a much later ideologically charged lens. I do not think it is necessary to understand the biblical traditions of the tribes either as reflecting nomadic elements in early Israel, as reflecting the reigns of David and Solomon (e.g., Kallai 1997; Blum 2020), or seeing the traditions of the twelve tribes as a later Iron Age tradition (e.g., Knauf/Guillaume 2016, 46; Grabbe 2017, 130–134; Tobolowsky 2017; Monroe/Fleming 2019; Monroe 2021), without any historical basis.

[95] E.g., Berlejung 2012, 66–71; Weingart 2014, 4–7; Schütte 2018; Monroe/Fleming 2019; Sergi 2019b.

"Israelite" does not appear again in any extra-biblical text up until its appearance in two inscriptions from the early second century BCE Samaritan synagogue in Delos.[96]

Thus, altogether, the term Israel/Israelite appears only four times, just before and during the Iron Age. By comparison, the clan/family of Nimshi, seemingly of much less significance, appears five (and perhaps six) times in extra-biblical Iron Age inscriptions.[97] This indicates the need for caution in extrapolating meaning from the textual references of Israel.

In all other references to the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, or to peoples from these kingdoms and ethnicities, other terms are used. It could be that the name Israel had emic (internal) meaning among groups identifying as Israel, and possibly this meaning is reflected in biblical texts. There is no justification for presuming that all non-biblical sources are using the term in this sense of internal self-definition; that might be a reasonable inference only during the mid-ninth century BCE, perhaps in the very specific geopolitical contexts of that time.[98]

A number of hypotheses have been offered regarding the evolution in the use of the emic/internal sense of the name "Israel" among Israelites/Judahites during the Iron Age. Some have suggested that the name was first used by peoples in the northern Israelite kingdom. Following its demise, in this view, the name was adopted first by the Judahite kingdom, and/or much later by Jews in the late Hellenistic and Early Roman Periods.[99] Others have suggested that the term "Israel" was of significant meaning, but perhaps used differently, in both the kingdoms of Israel and Judah during the Iron Age.[100] Both approaches have their merits, but neither can be proven indubitably.

At the end of the day, identifications of ethnic and other identity groups are almost always based on textual information.[101] In the case of Israel, if the biblical and the handful of extra-biblical texts did not exist and all that was available was the archaeological evidence, there would be no way of attaching the label "Israel" to those remains. Given that the biblical texts may very well reflect later ideologies and seek to backdate the origin of a group identity, and the large lacunae in the mention of Israel in

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[96] Bruneau 1982; Kartveit 200); Kartveit 2014; Kartveit 2019; Weingart 2014, 329–330; Schütte 2018, 152. For further discussion of the few appearances of "Israel" in Antiquity, see, e.g., Grabbe 2005, 168–169.

[97] In addition to the three (perhaps four) better-known Iron IIA references to Nimshi (נמש), one from Tel Amal (Levy/Edelstein 1972, 336, fig. 6, pl. 25:3–4) and two (and perhaps a third one) from Tel Rehov. For further discussion, see Aḥituv/Mazar 2014, 42–45, figs. 4–7; Aḥituv/Mazar 2020, this name appears also on the early eighth-century BCE Samaria Ostracon 56. See, e.g., Renz/Rollig 1995, 104, as well as in a possible Iron I inscription in Zertal 2004, 176 survey of the site of Kh. Tannin, 7 km southeast of Jenin (first published in Lemaire 1985; Aḥituv/Mazar 2014, 43 n. 23, who question this reading). Note that the appearance of the name of Nimshi in the region of Samaria, both in Iron I (possibly) and Iron IIB, may require revising Sergi's (Sergi 2019a, 223) understanding of the origin and role of the Nimshi clan/family in the Beth Shean Valley (which was based on the inscriptions at Tel Amal and Tel Rehov). That said, the different character of the inscriptions in which "Israel" and "Nimshi" are mentioned should be stressed.

[98] On the possible background of this, see, e.g., Fleming 2012, 243–246.

[99] E.g., Schütte 2012; Schütte 2018.

[100] E.g., Weingart 2014; Sergi 2019a.

[101] E.g., Hall 2000; Lemche 1990.

other texts, extreme caution is called for when offering hypotheses about who and what Israel was, and what ancient populations can be archaeologically identified with this group.

The nature of the entity called Israel most likely changed over time, both during and after the Iron Age. New groups were incorporated and others were excluded and the meaning of the term shifted, as did the geographical region to which it applied. This involved the creation of new and largely invented traditions[102] and newly imagined communities[103] whose members shared, or were meant to share, a common identity at that point in time. These identities were built, exhibited, and reified in a number of ways – performatively, and by the construction of political and cultic focal centers (such as Samaria and Jerusalem) by elites.[104] In fact, several stages of political and cultic centralization in the Iron Age Levant can be seen, perhaps, as stages in the transition between various Israels. Thus, historical kernels in the biblical texts on the centralization of cult ("reforms") may perhaps be viewed as "performative" actions aimed at changing social/political relations in Iron II Judah,[105] as at Arad, Tel Sheva,[106] Lachish,[107] Moza,[108] and Jerusalem.[109] These may have changed the matrix and relationships between local groups and local elites in the direction of more centralized control emanating from Jerusalem.[110]

A theoretically sophisticated approach to the archaeological definition of ancient Israel does not, in my opinion, contend that there was no Israel in any given historical period. Rather, it accepts the complexity of the task. It makes explicit the problematics of assuming that overarching identities existed over long periods. It acknowledges that similarities in material culture do not prove that an identity group called Israel (by itself or by others) extended throughout the Iron Age in large parts of Canaan and remained static over extended periods. It questions whether so-called "identity markers" necessarily have longue durée use and relevance. It realizes that the group(s) that defined themselves as Israel may well have shifted and even drastically changed over time. Finally, it displays awareness that the social and historical processes identifiable during the Iron Age (among them small-scale regional identities and cultic reformations) may be intricately tied to processes of group identity transformation – including the definition of what was and was not Israel.

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[102] Hobsbawm/Ranger (eds.) 1983.

[103] Anderson 1983.

[104] E.g., Hodos 2010, 18–19; Pandey 2011; Wettstein 2016.

[105] On performative aspects as identity markers, see, e.g., Butler 1997; Alexander 2006; Hodos 2010, 18; Yuval-Davis 2010; Pandey 2011; Aly 2015; Swenson 2015; Wettstein 2016.

[106] Herzog 2010.

[107] Ganor/Kreimerman 2018. For different views on these remains, see: Kleiman 2020; Ussishkin 2021.

[108] Kisilevitz 2015; Kisilevitz/Lipschits 2020.

[109] Szanton 2013.

[110] E.g., Lowery 1991; Halpern 1996; Lehmann 2012, 291; Ackerman 2012; Lehmann/Niemann 2014, 90; Maeir/Shai 2016; Shai/Maeir 2018; Niemann 2019; Niemann 2020.

4. Discussion

The meaning of the term "Israel" went through substantial changes over time. There may well be aspects of continuity and overlap in how the term was used over time. For example, some of the people whom the Merenptah Stele referred to as Israel could have been ancestors of people who lived under the Israelite kingdom. But that is where it ends, particularly from an archaeological point of view. If the use of the name of this group changed drastically over time,[111] the archaeological manifestations of this group at specific times and in a longue durée perspective, would clearly be very different.

Simplistic interpretations of the term Israel and the presumption of a straightforward, long-term continuity of an Israelite "ethnicity" which ex tends from the time of Merenptah through the Iron Age and beyond are often argued based on supposed continuities in traditions. Archaeological manifestations in Iron II in the kingdoms of Israel and Judah are projected backwards to the Iron I; biblical traditions and customs are identified in the archaeological record and are used for identifying and defining Israelite ethnicity; and differences in the appearance of items of material evidence are then used to demarcate the appearance of this ethnicity in history. The reasoning is circular and self-referential, and therefore faulty.

To underline this, I want to address the problematic nature of supposed continuities in Israelite ethnicity and culture, using several examples from recent work by a leading proponent of this approach, Avraham Faust.

4.1. Consumption of Pork

The absence of pig bones at a site has been suggested as a way of identifying it as Israelite/Judahite. A subject of extensive debate,[112] this criterion was at first proposed as a way of defining a site as Israelite, and was seen as a classical example of continuity of Israelite foodways from the early Iron Age into post-Iron Age Judaism.[113] Later research has acknowledged that the issue is much more complex. At some sites identified through other evidence as Israelite and Judahite, pig bones are absent, indicating that pork was not consumed, whereas at other sites pig bones are part of the assemblage.[114] Faust has recently argued that abstention from pig consumption can nevertheless be seen as an emblemic behavior of the Israelites/Judahites. He proposes that, when pig bones are found at sites within Israelite regions, they indicate pork consumption by non-Israelites ("Canaanites") living at these sites.[115] This is a blatant

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[111] See Ehrlich 2016, where he recently pointed out the fluidity of Israelite ethnic identity in biblical traditions as played out in the biblical depictions of Ittai the Gittite, while perhaps originally of Gittite origin, had become an Israelite according to the text.

[112] E.g., with further literature, Horwitz et al. 2017; Finkelstein/Gadot/Sapir-Hen 2018; Finkelstein/Gadot/Sapir-Hen 2019.

[113] E.g., Finkelstein 1996.

[114] On this, see, e.g., Finkelstein/Gadot/Sapir-Hen 2018.

[115] Faust 2018. For evidence of pig consumption in Iron Age II Jerusalem (in the City of David), see Sapir-Hen/Uziel/Chalaf 2021.

example of how circular reasoning can lead to an improper use of material culture for identifying groups.

4.2. The Four-Room House

This well-known Iron Age building type has been extensively discussed, and for many years was seen as the emblemic building type of the Israelites/Judahites. Faust[116] has repeatedly argued that this understanding should be retained, and that this building type can, almost without exception, be identified as Israelite. The problem is that four-room houses also appear at sites and in regions that lack other markers of Israelite culture. Faust's way around this obvious difficulty is to argue that the examples adduced are either not full-fledged four-room houses or that the regions in question (particularly in Transjordan) might actually have been Israelite.[117] This is problematic on several levels. First, Faust's typology of what is and what is not a four-room house is subjective, to put it mildly, given that even at Israelite/Judahite sites there are many variants on this type of house (e. g. Tel Sheva).[118] Second, and no less importantly, too many examples of this structure type have been reported from clearly non-Israelite/Judahite sites to permit a simplistic one-to-one link between this house and Israelite/Judahite culture. Examples from Iron Age Philistia, such as Qasile[119] and Tel Sera,[120] on the one hand, and the ever-expanding number of examples from various parts of Transjordan, on the other,[121] support those who question that this house type should be directly connected to Israel/Judah.[122]

Thus, while it could be argued that such houses are more common at Israelite/Judahite sites, they can hardly be used as an ethnic marker, and more importantly, not as evidence for clear-cut continuity between Iron I Israel and Iron II Israel and Judah. Other groups might very well have resided in houses of this type throughout the Iron Age.

4.3. Biblical Laws on Menstruation

The identification of the four-room house as a uniquely Israelite phenomenon is closely tied to Faust's previous research, in which he repeatedly argued for a specific functional and ideological interpretation of this architectural phenomenon.[123] His claim is that the layout of this type of dwelling facilitates gender separation, specifically to enable menstruating women to have a defined and separate area within the home, as biblical law seems to require. I have demonstrated elsewhere[124] that other interpretations of this

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[116] E.g., Faust/Bunimovitz 2003; Faust 2012.

[117] E.g., Faust 2012, 219.

[118] For comments on the problems in the definition of this type of building, see, e.g., Gadot/Bocher 2018, 213–214.

[119] Mazar 2009.

[120] Oren 1993.

[121] E.g., Routledge 2000; Herr/Clark 2009; Swinnen 2009; Levy et al. 2014; Ray 2019.

[122] E.g., Finkelstein 1997, 226; Nur ed-Din 2003; Mazar 2008, 89; Berlejung 2012, 104.

[123] E.g., Bunimovitz/Faust 2002, 59–60; Bunimovitz/Faust 2003; Faust/Bunimovitz 2003.

[124] Maeir 2013.

plan are possible,[125] which call for completely different views of the function and meaning of this house type.

Faust's thesis is problematic on several counts. It is hard to imagine that the woman of the house was ever segregated for days at a time from the house courtyard, since this is the area where domestic production and food preparation happened.

But much more cardinal to the issue at hand, the alleged continuity of Israelite habitus from the early Iron Age until post-Iron Age times involves Faust's assumption that you can assume that biblical texts about menstrual impurity and purification can be linked to actual praxis and archaeological remains from Iron Age contexts. It requires positing that the biblical regulations regarding menstrual pollution, separation, and purity rituals reflect a system practiced during a certain period and not an ideological and literary creation. Furthermore, it presumes these texts (and in particular those in Leviticus) date to the Iron Age. Faust cites the texts simplistically and uncritically, disregarding recent textual scholarship that shows the complex way in which these texts reached their current form, suggesting that they may in large part date to after the Iron Age.[126] For the same reasons, Faust's recent suggestion regarding a plaster installation used in a supposed purity-related ritual in an Iron Age building at Tel Eton[127] is quite hard to accept.

Finally, Faust's association of the Four-Room House with the rules of ritual purity for women contradicts his other work on this architectural phenomenon. In other places he has argued that the disappearance of this house type at the end of the Iron Age is a clear indication that there was a change in population at the time, before the return of the Jews from exile in the early Persian period.[128] Yet unambiguous textual and archaeological evidence of menstrual-related purity customs only appear in post-Iron Age contexts, and there appears to be no architectural evidence of spatial segregation for menstruating women in post-Iron Age Judea. Thus, even if we accept that the traditions reflected in the purity-related biblical texts have Iron Age origins, and that there is continuity in these traditions between the Iron Age, Persian and Classical periods, there is no consistent architectural manifestation of the practices.

Any direct link between the biblical purity (and other) texts and the Iron Age archaeological remains should be made with utmost caution, if at all.[129] While menstrual-related practices are known in later Jewish traditions, much more definite evidence that they were observed in earlier periods is required to provide a basis for seeking a material imprint of such behavior in Iron Age Judah. Even if there is genetic and cultural continuity between the early Iron Age and late Iron Age, and between Iron

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[125] E.g., Avissar Lewis 2018; Avissar Lewis 2019, 111–116.

[126] E.g., Erbele-Küster 2008; Erbele-Küster 2012; Erbele-Küster 2015; Erbele-Küster 2017; Nihan 2012; Lemos 2013; Cranz 2014; Hieke 2014; Hieke 2015; Klawans 2014.

[127] Faust/Katz 2017; Faust 2019, 62.

[128] E.g. Faust 2012.

[129] For a similar cautionary note on a suggested direct connection between Iron Age economics and the text of Deuteronomy, see now Berge et al. 2020. For general caution in extrapolating about "societal rules" based on the archaeological evidence, see, e.g., Risjord 2012; Palecek 2020.

Age Judahite populations and post-Iron Age Jews, the continuity of behaviors and their material manifestation are not simple.[130]

4.4. Israel and Judah as a Uniform Culture

Israel and Judah are, in much work on the Iron Age, presumed to be closely related or even identical culturally. This is evident in the substantial amount of biblical and archaeological research in which the topics of study are defined as "Israelite" (Israelite History, Israelite Religion, and so on). The practice was dominant in past research and is still very common today. But the premise has recently been questioned from the perspective of both textual[131] and archaeological[132] evidence. While the two cultures are certainly very close and related, significant differences are evident. These diversities, in areas such as language, architecture, cult, social structure, economy, and diet, indicate that despite many affinities, the differences were substantial. They might best be likened to the cultural and political connections between the multiple Aramean entities in the Iron Age Levant. While clearly displaying close connections on many levels, they were independent and were not one cultural unit.[133]

This complexity should be obvious, but some contemporary research ignores it. Faust,[134] while noting some differences between the material culture of the Northern and Southern kingdoms, explains them by means of what I argue is a simplistic ethnic differentiation. As with the issue of pig bones found at supposedly Israelite sites, he claims that the variation in the material culture between the two kingdoms are due to Canaanite ethnic components within specific sites and regions (in particular the northern valleys) within the borders of the Israelite monarchy, at sites such as Qiri, Rehov, Kinrot and others, rather than being indications of societal complexity and multiple identities.

It may well be that the situation was much more multifarious. Perhaps within the overall polity defined as the kingdom of Israel there were many group identities at play, identities that cannot be delineated by simplistic labels such as Israelite and Canaanite. There may well have been a broad range of classifications, with stratigraphies and overlapping identities of various kinds.

The archaeological evidence from Tel Rehov can be seen as an excellent example of this complexity and diversity.[135] Some of the material aspects at the site, such as diet, pottery, some of the cult, and inscriptions, are quite similar to what is found at a number of typical sites in the northern valleys of the Kingdom of Israel. On the other hand, some of the material assemblage, such as some of the architecture and use of honey in cult practices, is quite divergent from what is seen at other sites in the kingdom of Israel. It

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[130] Similar caution regarding the identification of functions of specific architectural spaces as being related to menstruation has been noted for ancient Egypt as well. Thus, Koltsida 2007, has questioned L. Meskell's suggestion that the back rooms of the private houses at Deir el-Medina were used for the seclusion of menstruating women (Meskell 1998, 238).

[131] E.g., Gelander 2011; Fleming 2012; Schütte 2012.

[132] E.g., Maeir/Shai 2016; Shai/Maeir 2018; Niemann 2019; Niemann 2020.

[133] E.g., Niehr 2020, 165.

[134] E.g., Faust 2000; Faust 2017; Faust 2018.

[135] E.g., Mazar 2015; Mazar 2016a; Mazar 2016b.

looks as if the population of Rehov cannot be pigeonholed as "purely" Israelite, or as "Canaanite" either. Rather, the material culture of the inhabitants of Iron Age Rehov indicates complex identity politics unfolding at this site, which was apparently a unique community (or communities) of practice and be- longing. While it would be convenient to identify the occupants of the site as belonging to a single unambiguous identity, such as Israelite or Canaanite, they may very likely have belonged to other identity groups or communities, perhaps ones that were not ethnic in character.

5. Where Do We Go from Here?

As I have shown, there are fundamental theoretical and methodological problems with much archaeological work touching on the origins, identity, definition, and characterization of Israel. There is no solid basis for positing a group called Israel which possessed a unique, distinct, and continuous culture and ethnic consciousness from the early Iron Age (concurrent with the appearance in the Merenptah Stele) through Iron IIA (parallel to its appearance in three extra-biblical inscriptions), and which according to biblical traditions extended from pre-monarchic through monarchic times.

Neither is there any certainty about what the term "Israel" refers to in the Merenptah inscription, save that it is a group in the southern Levant. While it is tempting to identify the settlements in the peripheral regions of the southern Levant during the early Iron Age as representing Israel, I have shown that there is no clear theoretical or methodological basis for doing so. I personally have no doubt that there was a group called Israel at the time, but where this group was located and what sites it settled is impossible to determine. Israel may name an ethnic group, but I have shown that material culture does not necessarily map onto identity, ethnic or otherwise. In short, there is no way of associating sites with early Iron Age remains in the southern Levant with the term Israel. There is no way of knowing whether they were also or instead associated with other groups from that time.

Similarly, there is no way of determining who comprises the larger group referred to as Israel in the Iron IIA inscriptions from the Kurkh Monolith, the Mesha Stele, and Tel Dan. Was it a combination of different groups that coalesced into a larger socio-political entity? And if so, where was the group located and what were its components? The term Israel can only be applied unambiguously to the Northern kingdom of Israel, and this does not provide us with significant details.

Another serious problem is that Israel is not mentioned in later Iron Age extra-biblical inscriptions, including those relating specifically to the kingdom that supposedly named itself as such. Something had clearly changed in how other groups and kingdoms understood the groups in the southern Levant if the term "Israel" was not used when referring to the kingdoms of Israel and Judah.

None of this means that we simply lack adequate data to create a more robust picture of the early history, development, and metamorphosis of Israel throughout the Iron Age.

I suggest an alternative path. Instead of attempting to build grand narratives about "little Israel" and "big Israel" at the different stages of the Iron Age, based on shaky

theoretical and data foundations, little textual evidence, and problematic interpretations of the archaeological evidence, I suggest the opposite trajectory. Instead of working from the top down, I suggest going from the bottom up.[136] Instead of looking for macro-groups of very tenuous identity, and from there building meta-narratives of the history of Israel and related groups, look at the micro-scale and try to identify small-scale groups in the archaeological record.[137]

Can this be done? I believe so. While it is clear that material culture cannot map onto identity groups, more and more research shows that the study of practice, technological practice in particular, provides an important tool for differentiating between communities of practice, and through that, communities of meaning. As Jenkins has noted, "Identity is produced and reproduced both in discourse – narrative, rhetoric and representation – and in the practical, often very material, consequences of identification."[138] In other words, groups, or communities of practice, do exist, and at times may be archaeologically recognizable, but we must be aware of the complexities involved.

It is a methodological flaw to draw a direct link between material culture and identity. But any number of studies have shown the utility of studying communities of practice[139] and the unique technologies and chaînes opératoires (operational sequences) relating to them. It is a potent method for differentiating between groups. Its validity derives from the very specific motor skill traditions, typical of different groups, acquired in childhood, through shared learning and apprenticeship, which are cognitively retained throughout a lifetime, within the specific group in which these traditions were learned.[140] Close study of the technological practices/chaîne opératoire has the potential to delineate different groups and communities, based on their unique technological practices. For example, recent study of technological traditions in Iron Age Philistia highlight the complex and diverse origins and practices seen in the region.[141] It should be stressed, however, that technological traditions are not simplistically transferred between groups; rather, when technological transfer occurs, the mechanisms of appropriation and change must be considered and taken into account.[142]

As a concept, communities of practice offer not only a way of defining groups by means of members having similar technological praxes and traditions, but also of pointing to archaeological definitions of communities of belonging.[143]

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[136] E.g., Lucy 2005, 109; Veeramah 2018; Hakenbeck 2020.

[137] Lehmann's attempt to define kinship structure in the settlement pattern and family burials can be seen as a step in this direction. See, Lehmann 2004; Lehmann/Varoner 2018.

[138] Jenkins 2008b, 200–201.

[139] Wenger 1998; Wenger/McDermott/Snyder 2002.

[140] For a selection of important studies on this, see: Gosselain 1992; Gosselain 2000; Degoy 2008; Peelo 2011; Wendrich (ed.) 2012; Fazioli 2014; Gokee/Logan 2014; Antczak/Beaudry 2019; Albero Santacreu et al. 2018; Abell 2020; Derenne/Ard/Besse 2020; Fulminante/Unavane 2020; Hensler 2020; Harush et al. 2020. For a related approach, see now Robin 2020.

[141] E.g., Meiri et al. 2018; Maeir et al. 2019.

[142] Stockhammer/Maran (eds.) 2017; Maran 2020.

[143] E.g., Yuval-Davis 2010; Tomaney 2015; Youkhana 2015; Lähdesmäkls et al. 2016; Antonsich 2019.

I thus propose that a major focus of future studies of the various stages of Iron Age Israel and related cultures and groups, place a strong emphasis on the study of group-specific technological praxis. This includes analyses of a broad range of facets of societal technology, such as pottery production,[144] food preparation and consumption,[145] building methods,[146] metallurgy,[147] and coroplastic (figurine) production.[148] Instead of the current common mode of study of the material culture of early Israel and contemporaneous cultures, based on the presence or absence of types of objects – more or less as a trait list – I call for in-depth studies of the technological traditions and praxis by which such objects were produced.[149] Through such studies it may be possible to start noticing, and differentiating between, the fine web of chaînes opératoires that prevailed in different communities of practice in the Iron Age southern Levant, both in regions where the group Israel may have lived and in adjacent regions. It may be possible to define the evolution of such communities of practice throughout the stages of the Iron Age, and to discern how and when such communities expanded, contracted, coalesced, disappeared or changed.[150]

A strong focus of archaeological research on Iron Age Israel should shift toward defining the communities of practice[151] and belonging[152] comprising the entity called Israel at different stages of the Iron Age. In light of Thomas Eriksen and Marek Jakoubek's suggestion that "The anthropology of ethnicity may thus be limited to studying people's perceptions of their own culture and their actions, instead of studying their culture",[153] I think the closest we can get to peoples' perceptions, from an archaeological perspective (save if very specific kinds of texts are found), is how these perceptions are reflected in daily praxis – and in particular, in technological practice. For example, can subtle differences in pottery production or food preparations map different Iron Age communities in the Iron Age Levant? Such work will open a window, albeit a small one, showing how the communities that comprised Israel (and additional groups in the region) defined themselves and others. It might intimate the concomitant imaginaries[154] of these communities at different stages of the Iron Age. It might also offer some sort of a glimpse into the fundamental underlying "biopsychosocial"[155] mechanisms of the peoples, groups, and even individuals, of the Iron Age southern Levant.

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[144] E.g., Gosselain 2000; Roux 2017; Roux 2019.

[145] E.g., Jones 2002; Gokee/Logan 2014; Jones, 2015; Mills 2016.

[146] E.g., Wright 1985.

[147] E.g., Eliyahu-Behar/Workman/Dagan 2019; Workman et al. 2020.

[148] E.g., Ben-Shlomo/Darby 2014.

[149] For an initial study in this direction, see Maeir et al. 2019.

[150] Porter (Porter 2013) has argued for the importance of focusing on the community level in the study of the Iron Age Levant. That said, his focus was still mainly based on various types of objects and architecture, with little emphasis on practice, and technological praxis in particular.

[151] E.g., Wenger 1998; Wenger/McDermott/Snyder 2002; Wendrich (ed.) 2012; Roddick/Stahl 2016; Spielmann 2017.

[152] E.g., Yuval-Davis 2010; Tomaney 2015; Lähdesmäkls, et al. 2016; Antonsich 2019.

[153] Eriksen/Jakoubek (eds.) 2019, 12.

[154] E.g., Castoriadis 1987; Strauss 2006; Stavrianopoulou (ed.) 2013.

[155] E.g., Borrell-Carrió/Suchman/Epstein 2004.

My hope is that such an approach will provide crucial insights into a topic that has been addressed extensively in the past, but so far has been unable to offer firm and rigorous conclusions.[156]

Let us set aside grand narratives of large entities and instead concentrate on the lived lives of local communities of practice and belonging that comprised Israel at different stages of the Iron Age. To define what Israel was, and how it developed over time, we should focus on what people did, based on archaeologically observable evidence.

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[156] One might add that cutting-edge bioarchaeological studies (e.g., ancient DNA, isotopic analyses, etc.) of the populations that may have comprised "Israel" during the various stages of the Iron Age, do have potential to contribute to understanding the origin, character and development of groups in the Iron Age Southern Levant. While bioarchaeology does not provide direct insights on identity per se, it can provide information on biological relatedness and origins, which, if used prudently, can shed light on the composition of populations and groups. However, a sophisticated and critical interpretive approach is needed when dealing with the interface between bioarchaeology and material culture, otherwise one wanders into a veritable interpretative minefield. See, e.g., Furholt 2018; Veeramah 2018; Curta 2020b; Hakenbeck 2020; Abel/Schroeder 2020; Crellin/Harris 2020; Gokcumen/Frachetti 2020; Wagner et al. 2020; Maran 2021. Such analyses, at this point, are but a desideratum, due to lack of sufficient relevant finds. I hope that future finds – and analytic programs – will change this.

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Who Are the Philistines in the Books of Samuel?

Hannes Bezzel

1. The "Philistine Paradigm"

Who are the Philistines in the books of Samuel?[1] To the reader, the answer to this question might be short and simple: The Philistines are the Philistines. In 1 Sam 4, when they enter the stage, they obviously need no introduction. Depending on which textual tradition one prefers, either "Israel" attacks them (so the MT) or is attacked by them (so, with a textual plus, LXX and Vetus Latina according to L[115]).[2] The text-critical discussion of which reading might be the older one, is, as always, controversial. Some argue in favor of the shorter MT,[3] others in favor of the longer LXX,[4] and indeed, the repeated motif of the Philistine gathering in 1 Samuel (cf. 13:5; 17:1; 28:1, 4; 29:1)[5] can serve as an argument for both. Be that as it may – and although the Ammonites (1 Sam 11) and the Amalekites (1 Sam 15; 30) also take on the role of Israel's enemy –, from now on the Philistines are Israel's main opponent around whom the main strand of the narrative unfolds in the following chapters. This narrative is about an oppressor, represented by the Philistines, and an oppressed, represented by Israel, and after a series of battles lost and won the latter is able to free itself for good of the enemy threat in 2 Sam 8:1 thanks to David, king of Israel. Of course, that the Philistines are Israel's enemy is already known to the reader since Judg 3:31, and the notion that rescuing Israel out of their hands would be the main task for the chapters to come is clear already in Judg 13:5, when the angel predicts that the yet unborn Samson will begin to liberate Israel out of the hands of the Philistines. The Philistines make their main appearance, however, in the books of Samuel.

Until most recently, the literary narrative of the books of Judges and Samuel was taken as the main source and basis for the reconstruction of the history of "Israel" in the early Iron Age. As far as I can see, especially in German scholarship, the historical narrative greatly emphasized the function of the "Philistine threat" as a catalyst for

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[1] I would like to thank my research assistant, Johannes Seidel, for critically reading the present text and for his many valuable comments.

[2] MT reads "and Israel went out against the Philistines to battle" (ויצא ישראל לקראת פלשתים למלחמה), while LXX[B] and the Vetus Latina (*congregarentur*) begin with the gathering of the enemy: "And in these days, the foreigners gathered for war against Israel, and Israel went out against them to war" (καὶ ἐγενήθη ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις ἐκείναις καὶ συναθροίζονται ἀλλόφυλοι εἰς πόλεμον ἐπὶ Ισραηλ καὶ ἐξῆλθεν Ισραηλ εἰς ἀπάντησιν αὐτοῖς εἰς πόλεμον).

[3] Cf. Stoebe 1973, 129; Pisano 1984, 34.

[4] Cf. McCarter 1980, 103; Dietrich 2010, 199.

[5] On these passages, cf. Bezzel 2015, 232.

Israel's nation building. Gradually, their presence would have become more oppressive, until finally Israel united under a king in order to organize the resistance.[6] As Siegfried Kreuzer put it: "[M]ost scholars agree that the introduction of kingship in Israel came about quite reluctantly and late, and that the resistance against it was finally overcome by the military threat posed by the Philistines."[7] According to this view, the United Monarchy (in German terms, the Davidic "Großreich") arose because a foreign threat made it necessary to unite under one monarchic leader in a centralized state. As both other scholars and I have observed elsewhere,[8] this way of imagining nation-building with a centralized nation-state as its logical conclusion seems to be heavily influenced by nineteenth-century political philosophy. It is only a slight exaggeration to say that it is hard to read a German commentary on Samuel from the late nineteenth century without getting the strong impression that Israel is the German Reich, Samuel is Bismarck, Saul is Wilhelm I (and David Wilhelm II) – and the Philistines represent the French. This is the (German) exegetical version of what Israel Finkelstein called (and criticized) as the "Philistine paradigm" that is "based – directly or indirectly – on uncritical reading of the biblical text".[9] Thus, the Philistines and their relation to Israel can serve as a prime example for the all-too-common vicious circle in reconstructing the history of the Iron Age or of a history of Israel "in biblical times" in general: The text served as the basis for a historical reconstruction which was taken as a matrix for interpreting archaeological findings which, reciprocally, were used to confirm the supposed historical reliability of the biblical account.[10] This, of course, can be called a truism, and one might think that it would be only relevant for those interested in the history of biblical research. However, like most vicious circles, this one, too, is not so easy to avoid: It is relatively easy to criticize this approach in general, but it is much more difficult to find and define another mode of a hermeneutically conscious interdisciplinary cooperation between biblical exegesis and biblical archaeology.

   The biased character of the nineteenth-century German perspective described above is, however, obvious, and so are the general methodological and hermeneutical concerns against taking the books of Samuel as an historical source too rashly. But if the "classic" interpretation of the Philistines in Samuel and their relation with Israel is a prime example of biased historical reconstruction, one must ask where the concrete problems of the "Philistine paradigm" lie and what alternative interpretations are possible.

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[6] Cf. Dietrich 1997, 193: "Ihre Überlegenheit in Palästina wurde derart drückend, daß in Israel die Bereitschaft zur Gegenwehr wuchs" ("Their superiority in Palestine became so oppressive that in Israel there was a growing readiness to fight back").

[7] Kreuzer 2006, 39.

[8] Cf. Bezzel 2021a, 166–167. On German exegesis in the context of the Wilhelmine Empire, cf. Kurtz 2018.

[9] Finkelstein 2007, 521.

[10] Cf. the observations of Aren Maeir to a similar effect in this volume, p. 18.

2. Deconstructing the "Philistine Paradigm" Archaeologically and Redaction-Critically

The theory that "the Philistines" and the Philistine threat dialectically served as a catalyst for the nation-building of the Iron Age Israelite and Judahite monarchies has been criticized from an archaeological as well as from an exegetical point of view. Over the past fifteen years, there has been an intense and still ongoing debate whether it is even possible to easily differentiate "Israelite", "Canaanite", and "Philistine" ethnic identity by means of the material culture found at the respective sites – and to relate them to the identities named in such way in biblical texts.[11] For the Philistines, my impression is that the poles of the debate are marked by the questions of (a) the scale of the immigration of "Sea Peoples" in the Late Bronze Age, (b) how strongly and in what ways one identifies groups of these Sea Peoples of the Late Bronze Age with certain populations of the Iron Age I and IIA several centuries later, and (c) how strongly one identifies the latter with the Philistines of the biblical texts. At one end of the spectrum, Ann Killebrew, for example, interprets the pottery assemblages of especially the southern Levantine cities as evidence of an immigration of "well-organized and relatively prosperous colonizers, representing a large-scale immigration".[12] Over the following centuries, however, these groups would have undergone a process of "creolization", and "[b]y the end of the Iron II, the Philistines had lost much of their distinctiveness as expressed in their material culture".[13] At the other end of the spectrum, Omer Sergi argues that "[t]here is no direct correlation between objects and ethnic identity, especially since the very existence of ethnic self-awareness in the kin-based societies of the ancient Near East is in question."[14] For Sergi, what has been known as "Philistine pottery" should rather be labelled "locally made Aegean-style pottery", and its distribution throughout Canaan reflects trade routes for luxury products rather than "demographic or ethnic turnover".[15]

To my mind, the re-interpretation of the ceramic assemblages together with a new understanding of ethnicity, identity, and concepts of statehood in the Iron Age Levant as more fluid phenomena, are extremely important points in the discussion. Current research on the Philistines as carried out by Aren Maeir and Louise Hitchcock[16] or Ido Koch[17] emphasizes what already Israel Finkelstein suggested in 2007: Most probably, neither the rulers nor the inhabitants of the polities that Josh 13:3 ascribes to the "five lords of the Philistines" – Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron – understood themselves as being part of one nation or one political entity in the early Iron Age. Their identities may have been defined first and foremost by their city; thus, according to Aren Maeir, "attempting to define a uniform and monolithic 'Philistine identity' is both futile

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[11] For further discussion of this issue, see the chapter by Aren Maeir in this volume (pp. 9–46).
[12] Killebrew 2005, 15. See also the discussion by Ann Killebrew in this volume (pp. 59–88).
[13] Killebrew 2005, 233–234.
[14] Sergi 2023, 149.
[15] Sergi 2023, 148; see also Kleimann 2021, 235–236.
[16] Cf. Maeir/Hitchcock 2017.
[17] Cf. Koch 2020.

– and misdirected."[18] There probably was not such a thing as a "we, the Philistines". Instead, it rather looks like the identity marker "Philistines" was not a self-description of an ethnic group but an attribution from the outside, defining a group of fierce warriors or even pirates,[19] with its origin in the famous *pršt* of the Egyptian sources of the Late Bronze Age though not identical with them. Three centuries later, in Iron Age Assyrian inscriptions and documents, the term *kurpa-la-as-tú*, *kurpi-lis-te* or similar seems to have become a geographical designation from the time of Adad-Nirari III (809–782 BCE) onwards.[20] With this dating, however, we have arrived at the "age of empires" again – and we have arrived at a time when major strands of the Samuel tradition may have been put into writing.

Approaching the biblical narrative of the books of Samuel redaction-critically also contributes to the questioning of the "Philistine paradigm". Although everyone who has dealt with these texts in detail has developed their own distinct redaction-critical reconstruction, I think that one or two things are a matter of general consensus:

(1) Perhaps the broadest consensus may be seen in the insight that whatever dating one may suggest for the oldest pieces of the books of Samuel, they are not older than the Iron Age IIA. This implies that even if one stresses phenomena of cultural continuity in the transition from the Bronze Age to the Iron Age over the obvious disruption and discontinuity, one should be careful in referring to supposed Bronze Age analogies in explaining Iron Age texts. Hence, methodical caution is advised against overly rash identifications. This may pertain to phenomena such as the popular description of the historical David as an ʿApiru leader,[21] and it pertains even more to transferring Late Bronze Egyptian imagery of the *pršt* to the Philistines of the biblical texts.

(2) In 1–2 Samuel, the oldest textual traditions that can be reconstructed do not deal with the topic of the invention of a new form of government called monarchy, nor are they interested in the question of how Israel became a centralized state. Instead, they tell how the young Benjaminite Saul became king over Israel,[22] how the Ephratite David from Bethlehem became Saul's successor on the throne, and how a sacred object called the "ark" was lost in a battle with the Philistines – differences in the reconstruction of the redaction history notwithstanding.[23] The question of whether the "Succession Narrative" or "Court History" in 2 Sam 9–1 Kgs 2 in its core represents an independent ancient collection or whether it is a *Fortschreibung* of the David story may be left aside here, since the Philistines disappear from the scene after 2 Sam 8.[24]

(3) A bit less consensual might be the view I argued for in my monograph on Saul, namely, that the oldest tradition about the first king of Israel did not narrate anything

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[18] Maeir 2019, 152.

[19] See Hitchcock/Maeir 2016. Hence, an analogy to the deconstruction of the ethnic concept of Philistines may be the deconstruction of the formerly dominant concept of the "Vikings." I owe this observation to my research assistant Johannes Seidel.

[20] Cf. Bagg 2007, 189–191; Koch 2020, 12.

[21] See, e.g., Finkelstein 2013a, 134.

[22] See Schmidt 1970, 101; modified in Bezzel 2015, 205.

[23] Cf. Porzig 2009, 136–142, and Hensel 2022.

[24] For the view that the "Succession Narrative" was once an independent narrative, see, e.g., Kratz 2000, 182–186; for the view that this unit is a *Fortschreibung*, see, e.g., Van Seters 2000, 91–92.

about the Philistines at all but only spoke about Saul's successful defeat of the Ammonites (1 Sam 11*).[25] It was only the first – and early – rewriting of this story about how a young Benjaminite successfully fought against invaders and in return became king over Israel that brought the Philistines into the picture. However, what I call the "enhanced Saul tradition" which added the character of Samuel (1 Sam 1; 3*), the core of the ark narrative (1Sam 4*), a basic stratum about the battle of Michmas in 1 Sam 13–14*,[26] and the first version of Saul's death on mount Gilboa (1 Sam 31*),[27] does feature "the Philistines" in a central role. They drive forward the plot of the story from beginning to end – and this also holds true for any basic layer of a "History of David's Rise" or David Story between 1 Sam 17 and 2 Sam 5.

3. Saul, David, and the Philistines

The observation that the Philistines do not play a role in what I defined as the oldest Benjaminite Saul tradition or in the "Court History" from 2 Sam 9 onwards but are central to an "enhanced Saul tradition" as well as to any "History of David's Rise" raises the question of why this is the case. Finkelstein's 2007 assessment that the biblical Philistines mirror eighth-century realities,[28] together with the perceived need not only to present a relative dating of several literary strata but also to provide at least a tentative absolute dating and a historical context, invites speculations about seeing the Philistines as a cipher for the enemy of the day, namely, the Assyrians. Consequently, the story about the rise and fall of Saul can easily be read against the backdrop of the fall of Samaria in 720 BCE. Together with the core of 1 Sam 4*, this would have made a narrative about Israel losing both its main sanctuary (represented by the ark) and its king.[29] This fit my overall idea of the redaction history of the Saul tradition and its connection with the David story quite well, but it was "with even greater caution" that I suggested to read the Philistines as a cipher for the Assyrians.[30] Today, I would say that this theory in this form is under-complex and too simple. It neither does justice to the complexity of the archaeological research on Philistia from the past 15 years, nor does it do justice to the complexity of the redaction history. In a recent article, Stephen Germany has made a good case for reading the books of Samuel typologically as an anticipation of Israel's and Judah's history as it is told in the books of Kings (and beyond).[31] In this context, he favors precisely the interpretation that the Philistines in the books of Samuel would typologically represent the Assyrians. However, it may be no coincidence that he draws this conclusion from a *synchronic* reading of the books. Diachronically, there are some points indicating that this perspective may illuminate

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[25] Bezzel 2015, 206–207.
[26] Bezzel 2016.
[27] Bezzel 2015, 228–234.
[28] Cf. Finkelstein 2007, 519.
[29] Cf. Bezzel 2015, 234.
[30] Bezzel 2015, 234 ("Mit noch größerer Zurückhaltung").
[31] Germany 2023.

only one dimension of the text – and that of a certain time. For example, with regard to 1 Sam 31 – which is perhaps *the* central chapter for the Philistine problem in the books of Samuel – the verse that constructs the strongest intertextual connection with the Assyrian expansion (in 2 Kgs 15:29) is v. 7.[32] I would be careful with counting this verse as part of the basic layer of the chapter.[33] However, Germany's article illustrates superbly that some people at a certain time wanted the Philistines from the days of the early monarchy to be understood at least as an analogue to the Assyrians of later times. With the older and oldest strata, however, things may look different.

Irrespective of the exact redaction-critical analysis of the Saul- and David tradition and the absolute dating of the multiple strata, there are a number of features which clearly represent a political situation that mirrors the situation before the campaign of Hazael at about 840 BCE as it is known today. This relates, for example, to the role of the city of Gath or the absence of the Judahite sites in the Shephelah in the David story.[34] Thus, dating the literary material as a whole to the late eighth century without the assumption of older traditions or "memories" – as I did in my 2015 monograph – probably falls a bit short, and, as a consequence, the equation of the literary Philistines with the historical Assyrians on every redaction-historical level appears to be a little too simplistic.

Keeping this (self-)critique in mind, our question arises anew and slightly modified: Who are the Philistines (a) in the enhanced Saul tradition and (b) in the History of David's Rise?

3.1 The Philistines in the Enhanced Saul-tradition

In the enhanced Saul tradition as I reconstructed it, one does not really get much information about the Philistines apart from place names: In 1 Sam 4, the Philistines are at Aphek and the Israelites in Shiloh; in 1 Sam 13–14, the battle takes place at Michmas and the surroundings, and afterwards the defeated Philistines simply "go to their place"; in 29:1 they assemble again at Aphek, in 29:11b they march up to Jezreel and are ready to meet Saul on mount Gilboa in chapter 31. After the battle they fasten the dead king's body to the wall of Beth Shan and disappear from the scene. Where they come from or where their dwellings are is not stated, nor is there, at least according to my reconstruction, anything said about economic relations between Israelites and Philistines, like the famous monopoly on iron or the like, the note of 1 Sam 13:19–22 most probably being a secondary addition.[35] The Philistines appear as a collective entity and as such are depicted as a rather featureless character. Whether they are qualified as uncircumcised already at this literary level (cf. 1 Sam 31:4) might be a matter of discussion.[36] But obviously, their main function lies in the fact that they are skilled fighters with archers in their ranks. And first and foremost, they are the enemy. Perhaps the most surprising fact is that they appear at all especially in this redactional layer, at

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[32] Cf. Germany 2023, 550.
[33] Cf. Bezzel 2015, 126.
[34] Cf. Na'aman 2002, 202, 210; Finkelstein 2013a, 138–139; Sergi 2019, 228.
[35] Cf. Bezzel 2015, 217; *pace* Kreuzer 2006, 41.
[36] Cf. Germany 2024.

least if one works with the idea of Philistines living first and foremost in Philistia, i.e., in the cities of the southern coastal plain. Indeed, one aspect of the "enhanced Saul tradition" compared with the older version is that (apart from Michmas) it integrates more northern regions into the narrative: Samuel and the sanctuary of Shiloh, the ark and Aphek/Ebenezer, and, of course, the Jezreel Valley with Gilboa and Beth-Shan.

3.2 The Philistines in the "History of David's Rise"

That the Philistines are the enemy holds true for their role in the History of David's Rise, too. If one is willing to accept a basic stratum of an HDR or a David story in 1 Sam 17*; 18*; 23*; 27*; 29*; 2 Sam 1*; 2*; 5*[37] then it is obvious that David's rise begins with his encounter with "the Philistine" in 1 Sam 17 (named Goliath in later layers of the story); David reaches a first high point as Saul's general because of his military prowess fighting the Philistines in chapter 18, either still in the position as Saul's general[38] or as a freelancer, he liberates the town of Keilah from marauding Philistines in chapter 23; after Saul's death at the hands of the Philistines he goes up to Hebron, becomes king of Israel and captures Jerusalem.[39] The Philistines are the enemy, and again, one does not get much detailed information about them. Note also that Hermann Niemann argues that the motif of David's wars against "the Philistines" would have been foreign to the David tradition and therefore, in 2 Sam 5, would have been taken over from the stories about Saul.[40] At least with respect to the HDR, this seems to me to be a rather bold thesis.

But what about 1 Sam 27, which speaks about David seeking refuge in the "land of the Philistines" and entering the services of a Philistine leader? Indeed, here it looks like David was defecting to the enemy, at least in the final shape of the books of Samuel: Achish accepts David as his liegeman because he thinks that David has made himself "stinking" to "his people in Israel" (27:12), and in chapter 29, the Philistine military leaders demand of Achish to suspend David from his services because to them he does not seem to be reliable. These passages do come close to the perception of two "nations" fighting each other, and Achish of Gath being part of a pan-Philistine state-like entity. However, I would assign neither 1 Sam 27:12 nor these parts of chapter 29 to the basic literary stratum of any HDR. As for Achish of Gath, Ido Koch remarked that while he is called "king", he is "never, interestingly, designated as a Philistine".[41] I think that this observation cannot be overstated. The differentiation between "the king of Gath" and "the Philistines" holds true even for the final shape of the chapters. On the level of what one may call the basic layer or oldest tradition, David does not even enter the land of the Philistines but simply goes to "Achish, son of Maoch, king of Gath" (27:2), from

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[37] More specifically, 1 Sam 17*; 18:2, 5αβb, 20, 22, 26a, 27b, 28b (, 30?); (22:2?;) 23:1abα, 2abα, 5a; 27:2*, 3a, 5, 6; 29:1, 11b; 31:1–13*; 2Sam 1:1aα, 1bα, 2aα²β, 3, 4, 11, 12abα¹β; 2:1, 2aαm 3a^LXX, 4a (without על-בית יהוה); 5:6 (see Bezzel 2021b, 176–177). On the basic layer of 1 Sam 17, cf. Aurelius 2002, 61.

[38] Cf. Bezzel 2021b, 174.

[39] Cf. Bezzel 2021a, 163.

[40] Cf. Niemann 2013, 259.

[41] Koch 2020, 21.

whom he receives Ziklag as a kind of fiefdom.[42] To make it clear: David never serves "the Philistines" but rather Achish of Gath. The Philistines are those whom he fights. They represent an enemy identity.

4. Who Are "the Philistines"?

So, once again, who are "the Philistines"? I started this essay with the tautology: The Philistines are the Philistines, and I would like to come back to that. Nevertheless, who "the Philistines" are or which entity is designated by this name, may have changed over time. Yet the central point, which was also the starting point, remains the same: The Philistines are the enemy. On the level of the "enhanced Saul Tradition", they seem to be located in the southern coastal plain, since they gather at Aphek, but they are seen in action in the central hill country (Michmas) and, of course, they appear far north on Mount Gilboa. These Philistines on Mount Gilboa and in the Beth-Shan Valley have constituted a major interpretative crux. Israel Finkelstein suggested to understand the "odd appearance"[43] of the Philistines in the Jezreel/Beth-Shan region as a "memory" of Egyptian dominance or of Egypt's attempt to regain this region under Sheshonq I.[44] This proposal is loaded with all of the methodological difficulties that arise as soon as one begins to operate with the vague category "memory" as a kind of gap-filler. No one will ever be able to prove or disprove a potential "memory" of the early Iron Age. And thus, this suggestion remains an explanation that does not explain anything.

The Philistines' classification as both "well-trained, fierce warriors" and "the ultimate Other", as it is suggested by Ido Koch,[45] perhaps opens a way out of the crux of what the Philistines of the southern coastal plain would have hoped to gain by marching up to Mount Gilboa only to fight Saul and the Israelites there. It is not necessary to identify these literary Philistines directly, either by speculating over Bronze Age or Early Iron Age memories about the Egyptians, nor with the Assyrians of the eighth century or with Hazael and the Arameans of the ninth century. Omer Sergi's suggestion that the entire Gilboa scenery may be the work of a Jerusalemite scribe who was not well acquainted with Israelite geography[46] might go in the right direction insofar as it makes clear that the "Philistines" in these texts are no specific historical ethnic or political group. Similarly, Eran Arie argues that the Beth-Shan Valley came under Israelite rule in the days of the Omrides by means of military annexation, and 1 Sam 31 – irrespective of the absolute dating of the text – may thus have mentioned a Philistine connection with Beth Shan in order to mark it as "being foreign (that is, not Israelite)".[47]

However, with the Philistine identity being marked as an alien and enemy identity in this manner, it is wide open for interpretation from the very beginning. Therefore,

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[42] Cf. Bezzel 2021b, 175.
[43] Sergi 2020, 72.
[44] Cf. Finkelstein 2013b, 53–60.
[45] Koch 2020, 17.
[46] Sergi 2020, 72.
[47] Arie 2017, 13.

although in the course of the redaction history of the books of Samuel the Philistine warrior bands transformed rather early on into the inhabitants of the coastal region south of the river Yarkon (known as Philistia in Assyrian sources from the late ninth century onwards), the literary Philistines retain the core part of their identity: They still represent the oppressive enemy as such. This being the case, it was not necessary for later scribes living "in the shadow of empires" to insert unequivocal references to the Assyrians or Babylonians. For the skilled reader, the alien imperialistic enemies were already there, in the text. Thus, the Philistines *are* not the Assyrians, but at a certain stage of the redaction history they were literarily available to represent the Assyrians in a typological manner.[48]

The redaction-historical development of 1 Sam 17 as it has been laid out most convincingly by Erik Aurelius clearly illustrates how Goliath and the Philistines maintain their character as the hostile Other while at the same time they are transformed into the hostile *pagan* Other.[49] 1 Sam 17:45 says it all: "You come to me with sword and spear and with a shield; but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel whom you have defied."

Ido Koch correctly continues this line into the Greek translation of the Septuagint which translates פלשתי with ἀλλόφυλος, "foreigner", "of different origin".[50] And of course, I am more than grateful that Koch even goes further in the reception history by mentioning the city and the university of Jena where, as it seems, the once common use of the term "Philistine" for tendentially skeptical or hostile bourgeois townspeople originated in the seventeenth century.[51] So, in the end, the Philistines are the Philistines – and the Philistines always are the Other.

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[48] Cf. Germany 2023.

[49] Aurelius 2002.

[50] Cf. Koch 2020, 8.

[51] Cf. Koch 2020, 8.

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The Philistines in the Books of Samuel:
An Archaeological Perspective

Ann E. Killebrew

Following a period of spiritual lapses, societal chaos, and conflict with the Philistines as described in the book of Judges, the books of Samuel (1 and 2 Sam) continue the saga of the Israelite people and the rise of centralized authority that unites the Israelite tribes. Through the lives and adventures of Samuel, Saul, and David and their complex interactions with neighboring peoples, the development of a monarchy is traced. Of these groups, the militant Philistines, who according to the biblical account occupy the southern coastal plain of the Levant (Josh 13:3; 1 Sam 31:9 ["land of the Philistines"]), are Israel's most prominent foe. As recounted in the books of Samuel, the Philistines are eventually defeated by David, who creates an empire that marks the beginning of the "golden age" of Israel's united monarchy.

Biblical chronologies and links with later extrabiblical textual evidence place the events narrated in the books of Samuel in the second quarter of the eleventh through the first quarter of the tenth century BCE, a period spanning nearly a century. However, as it is generally accepted that the redaction of the books of Samuel dates centuries after the events of the narrative, scholars have raised questions concerning their value as an historical text.[1] In this study, I address the question: What does the archaeological evidence indicate regarding the Philistines during the time of Samuel, Saul, and David? I examine the abundant material culture remains of the Philistines during the eleventh through early tenth centuries BCE (Iron I–Iron IB/IIA) in order to respond to questions about the historical backdrop and literary history of the books of Samuel. I also consider the archaeological evidence relevant to the Philistines during the Iron II period, spanning much of the first half of the first millennium BCE. These later periods correspond to dates that the more recent scholarly discussion suggests for the compilation of the books of Samuel, because it references ideological aspects that seem to reflect Israelite interaction with the later Assyrian, Babylonian, and Persian empires.

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[1] See Germany 2025 and numerous references to other relevant publications therein.

1. Identifying the Philistines in the Archaeological Record

The starting point for any attempt to identify the Philistines in the material culture record is the Hebrew Bible, where they are referred to 294 times.[2] The Philistines appear frequently in the Deuteronomistic History, most notably in Judges and especially in 1 Samuel, where they are mentioned 152 times. These biblical books depict the Philistines as an expansionist power who dominated the Israelites through military victories (e.g., the battles of Aphek [1 Sam 4:1–10] and Mount Gilboa [1 Sam 31]) and their superior technology (e.g., metallurgy [1 Sam 13:19–21]). According to the books of Samuel, David is the first leader who reverses the balance of power, foreshadowed in his defeat of Goliath (1 Sam 17), and curtails Philistine expansion (e.g., 2 Sam 5). Following David's successes against the Philistines and consolidation of the tribes, the Philistines are less frequently mentioned. Later prophetic oracles of the minor prophets forecast the destruction of Ekron, Ashdod, Ashkelon, and Gaza at the end of the seventh century BCE by the Neo-Babylonians (Jer 25:20; Zeph 2:4; Zech 9:5–7). This event is well documented in the archaeological record at three of the excavated sites (Ekron, Ashdod, and Ashkelon). However, Gath has disappeared from the oracles' list of Philistine cities as it had ceased to exist following its destruction by Sargon II in 711 BCE, a fact reflected in the archaeological evidence.

Biblical passages that are key to the identification of Philistine settlements in the archaeological record include Josh 13:2–3, which indicates lands not conquered by Joshua (Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gaza, Gath, and Ekron; Fig. 1). These same cities, often referred to in modern literature as the Philistine Pentapolis, are mentioned again in 1 Sam 6:17 in connection with the return of the ark of the covenant. Four of these cities – Ekron, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ashdod – have been extensively excavated. These sites have revealed the earliest and most comprehensive evidence for our reconstruction of the Philistines, heralded by the sudden appearance of a very distinctive Aegean-style material culture during the first half of the twelfth century BCE.[3] As the most ubiquitous form of material culture, pottery serves as a key factor in dating archaeological contexts and as an indicator of cultural affinities and interconnections. It is noteworthy that locally produced Aegean-style Mycenaean IIIC pottery, representing the initial phase of Philistine settlement, has thus far only been found in significant quantities at the biblical Pentapolis sites. In what follows, I examine the archaeological evidence from these four major sites, together with two smaller sites – Tel Batash/Timnah and Tell Qasile – that have been identified as Philistine settlements located on the western and northern peripheries respectively of Philistia, the territory associated with the Philistines (see Table 1 for a comparative Iron Age stratigraphic chart of these sites).

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[2] Specifically, the term *Pelištim* (nominal plural), *Pelešet* (nominative singular), or *Pelišti* (gentilic adjective); see Machinist 2000, 54 n. 2.

[3] See, e.g., Killebrew 2000; Killebrew 2005, 197–245; Killebrew 2017; Yasur-Landau 2010.
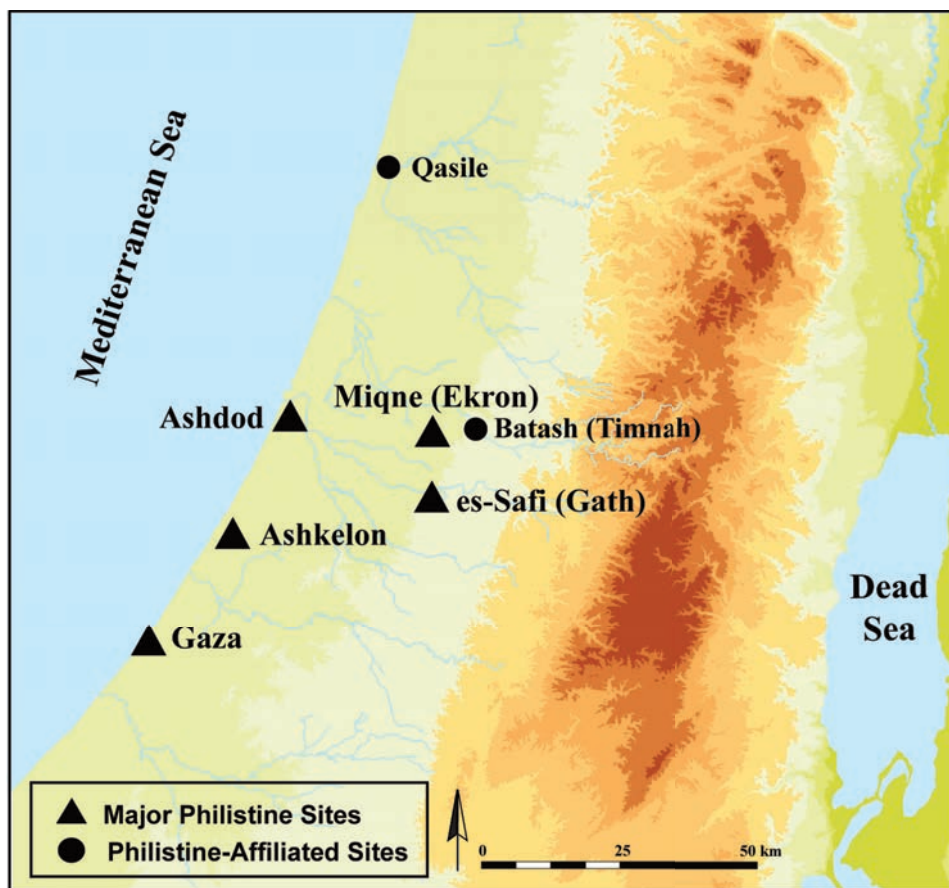
Figure 1: Map of Philistine sites. (Graphics: Jane C. Skinner)

Period, Date (BCE), and Diagnostic Pottery Type	Tel Miqne/Ekron	Ashdod	Tell es-Safi/Gath	Ashkelon	Tel Batash/Timnah	Tell Qasile
Iron IA Early/Mid-12th c.–12th c. **Philistine 1**	Stratum VIIB–A	Stratum XIIIb	Strata A6 and F12	Stratum XVII	Unoccupied	Unoccupied
Iron IA/IB Late 12th–Early 11th c. **Philistine 1 and 2**	Stratum VIB–A	Stratum XIIIa	Strata A6 and F12	Stratum XVI	Unoccupied	Unoccupied
Iron IB Early 11th–Early 10th c. **Philistine 2 and 3**	Stratum VC–A	Strata XII and XI	Strata A5, D5, F11, and E3	Stratum XV	Stratum V	Strata XII and XI
Iron IB/IIA First Half of 10th c. **Philistine 3 and Red-Slipped/Burnished**	Stratum IVB–A *Destruction*	Strata XI and Early X *Destruction*	Strata A4, D4, F10, and C6–3 *Destruction*	Stratum XIV	Stratum V (IVB?)	Stratum X *Destruction*
Iron IIA Mid-10th–9th c. **Red-Slipped/Burnished and Late Philistine Decorated Ware**	Stratum III	Strata X and IX	Strata A3, C6–2, D2/3, E2, F9, J2, K2, and M1 *Destruction*	Stratum XIII	Stratum IV *Destruction Gap*	Strata IX and VIII
Iron IIB 8th c. **Late Philistine Decorated Ware**	Stratum IIB–A	Stratum VIII *Destruction*	Strata A2, F7–8, and P2 *Earthquake(?), Destruction*	Stratum XIII	Stratum III *Partial Destruction*	Unoccupied
Iron IIC 7th c. **Southern Coastal Plain Tradition**	Stratum IC–A *Destruction*	Stratum VII *Destruction* Stratum VI	Unoccupied	Stratum XII *Destruction*	Stratum II *Destruction*	Unoccupied

Table 1: Chronology, associated diagnostic pottery types, and stratigraphy of key Philistine sites.

2. Ekron

Biblical Ekron (place name and the gentilic *'Ekroni*) appears 23 times in the Hebrew Bible and is a focal point in the books of Samuel, where it is mentioned eight times in the books' depiction of Israelite-Philistine hostilities. Noteworthy interactions include the capture of the ark (1 Sam 5:10), the Israelite recapture of cities that Philistines had captured (1 Sam 7:14), and the pursuit of the Philistines to the gates of Ekron following David's victory over Goliath (1 Sam 17:52). In contrast to its prominence in the books of Samuel, Ekron seldom appears in other books of the Hebrew Bible. In 2 Kgs 1:2–3, King Ahaziah of Israel consults Baal-zebub of Ekron, and several of the minor prophets predict Ekron's destruction by outside imperial powers.[4]

Ekron was first identified with Khirbet el-Muqanna' (Tel Miqne) during surveys of the site by Joseph Naveh in 1957.[5] Beginning in 1981 and continuing until 1996, Trude Dothan (Hebrew University of Jerusalem) and Seymour Gitin (Albright Institute of Archaeological Research) directed fourteen seasons of excavation on this large, ca. 20-hectare site. The findings from three major areas, Fields I, III, and IV, and several smaller areas, including Fields II, V, VII, and X (Fig. 2), on the tell have produced the most extensive and complete stratigraphic sequence of Philistine material culture to date, which spans its initial appearance in the first half of the twelfth century BCE (Stratum VII: Iron IA) through the destruction of Ekron by Nebuchadnezzar II in 604 BCE (Stratum I: Iron IIC; see Table 1).[6]

Based on these excavations, a clear settlement pattern on the mound emerges (Fig. 3a–d). During the Late Bronze Age (ca. 1550–1150 BCE: Strata X–VIII), the settlement was modest in size and confined to the four-hectare acropolis (Field I; Fig. 3a). With the arrival of the Philistines at Ekron (Stratum VII), the site rapidly expands and covers the entire 20-hectare mound (Fig. 3b). The arrival of the new group of people is discernible in the archaeological record by the appearance of a new and distinctive Aegean-style material culture, evidenced by city planning, architecture, technology, cuisine, pottery, and cultic practices.[7] The hallmark of this earliest Philistine twelfth-century BCE phase is locally produced decorated Mycenaean IIIC (monochrome Philistine 1) pottery (Fig. 4a and b), accompanied by an assemblage of undecorated Aegean-style vessels. It appears in Strata VII and VI at Tel Miqne-Ekron. This pottery is a dramatic departure in shape, decoration, and manufacturing techniques from the earlier indigenous Late Bronze Age assemblages of the Levant. Aegean-style bichrome (Philistine 2) pottery, characterized by its red-and-black painted decoration, develops out of monochrome Philistine 1 pottery and is the dominant ware at Tel Miqne-Ekron and other Philistine eleventh-century BCE settlements (Fig. 5). Philistine 2 pottery

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[4] See Amos 1:8 (Ekron, Ashdod, and Ashkelon are threatened with destruction); Jer 25:20; Zeph 2:4; and Zech 9:5–7 (the destruction of Ekron, Ashdod, Ashkelon, and Gaza by the Neo-Babylonians is predicted).

[5] Naveh 1958.

[6] For a concise summary of the results of the 14 seasons of excavation at Tel Miqne-Ekron, see T. Dothan/Gitin 1993; T. Dothan/Gitin 2008.

[7] See n. 3 above for general treatments of Philistine material culture. Regarding Tel Miqne-Ekron, see, e.g., T. Dothan 1995; T. Dothan 1998.

makes its appearance in Stratum VI and continues into Stratum V. By the mid-eleventh century, Philistine pottery is gradually losing its Aegean-style features and begins the process of assimilation with the ceramic traditions of the neighboring regions. Also referred to as Philistine 3 (debased Philistine), this pottery assemblage is a late development of Philistine 2 vessels that is characterized by its simplified decoration or lack thereof. Red-slipped vessels, including some with hand-burnished surface treatments, and Phoenician-style pottery also first appear in the late eleventh and continue into the tenth century BCE (Strata VA and IV; Fig. 6). This pottery sequence is also documented at the other excavated Pentapolis sites of Ashdod, Gath, and Ashkelon.[8]

The early Philistine Iron I (Stratum VII) city was well planned and included domestic, elite, and industrial areas.[9] From its inception, Philistine Ekron was fortified by an impressive mudbrick city wall that encircled the 20-hectare mound.[10] Impressive mudbrick structures in Field IV, which included artifacts and installations associated with domestic cultic activities, likely served as elite dwellings spanning the Iron I period (Strata VII–IV; Fig. 7). Pottery workshops, which produced the Aegean-style early Philistine pottery assemblage, formed an industrial zone located on the edges of the city close to the inner face of the mudbrick fortification wall (Fig. 8).[11] A glacis was added to the exterior during Stratum VI. Tel Miqne-Ekron remained a large fortified urban center throughout the Iron I into the Iron I/Iron II transition (ca. mid-twelfth to first quarter of the tenth century: Strata VII–IV).

Following the destruction of Stratum IV, the settlement shrank in size. During the Iron IIA–Iron IIB (Strata III–II), occupation was again confined to the upper city (Field I). The lower city (Fields II, III, IV, V, X) experienced an occupational gap of nearly three centuries after the end of the Iron I (Stratum IV, ca. 975 BCE) until it was again resettled in Stratum I of the seventh century BCE. This marks the revival of Tel Miqne-Ekron's significance following its dramatic decline in importance during the mid-tenth to eighth centuries (Fig. 3c). During the seventh century BCE (Stratum I), Tel Miqne-Ekron regained its importance as a large, well-planned 20-hectare Philistine urban center, with massive city wall and fortifications (Fig. 3d).[12]

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[8] For a detailed discussion of Iron Age I pottery assemblages at Tel Miqne-Ekron and other Pentapolis sites, see, e.g., T. Dothan/Zukerman 2004, T. Dothan/Zukerman 2015; Ben-Shlomo 2006; T. Dothan/Gitin/Zukerman 2006; Killebrew 2013; Zukerman/T. Dothan/Gitin 2016.

[9] See Gitin 2010, 335–346 for a concise overview summarizing the history of occupation at Tel Miqne-Ekron and an extensive bibliography.

[10] Segments of this fortification wall were uncovered in Fields I and III. The Iron I mudbrick city wall is dated to the twelfth-century (Stratum VII) early Philistine city. This is based on several archaeologically secure contexts including artifacts recovered from the foundation trench of the mudbrick city wall in Field I and from the mudbrick wall itself. See Killebrew 1996, 16–17; Gitin/Meehl/T. Dothan 2006, 30–32 for a detailed description and references to sections and plans.

[11] For a detailed description of the pottery workshops and kilns excavated at Tel Miqne-Ekron, see Killebrew 1996, 146–153; Killebrew 2013, esp. 85–95.

[12] See Gitin 1998 for a summary of Tel Miqne-Ekron during the Iron II period.
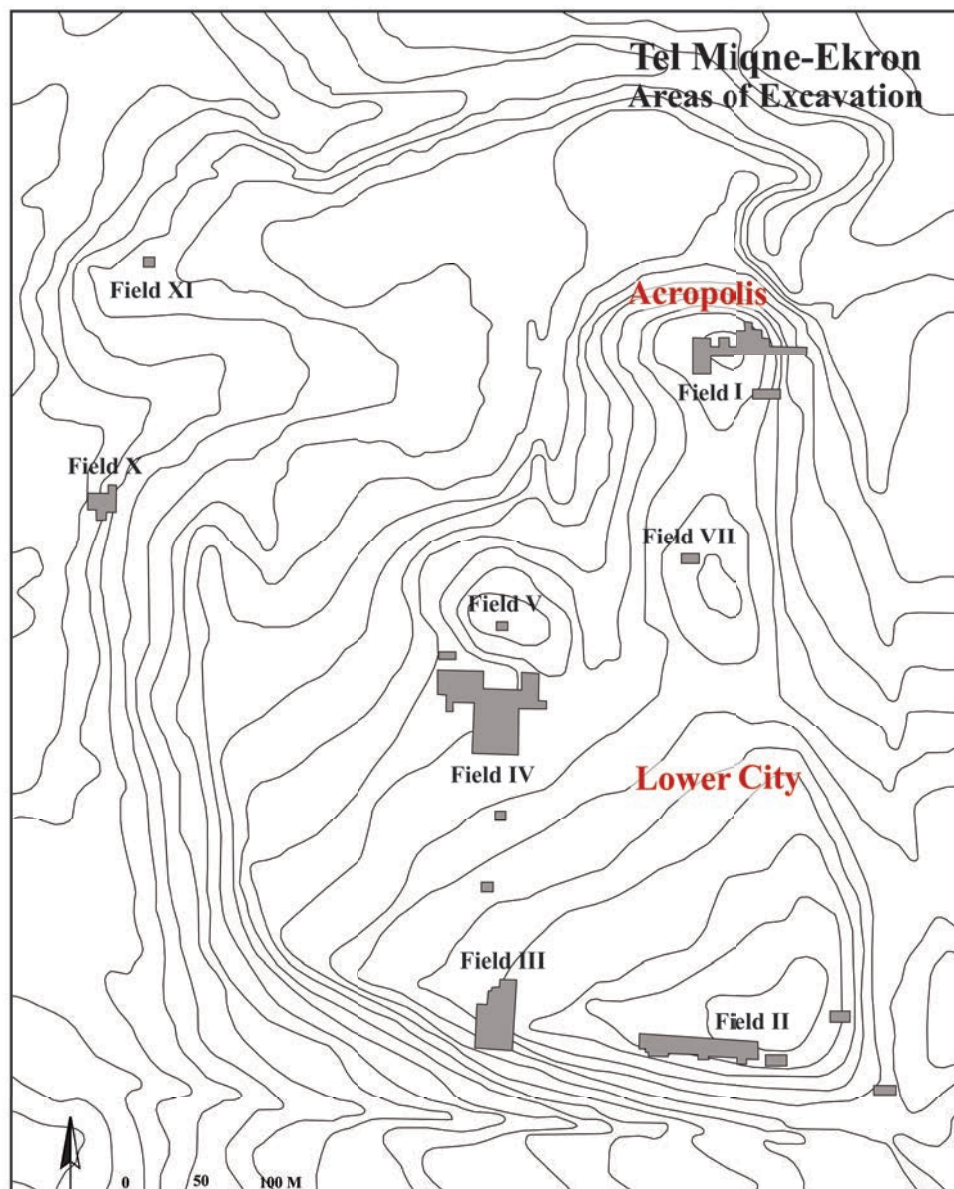
Figure 2: Tel Miqne-Ekron: Map of excavation areas. (Graphics: Jane C. Skinner, after Killebrew 1996, Fig. 1)
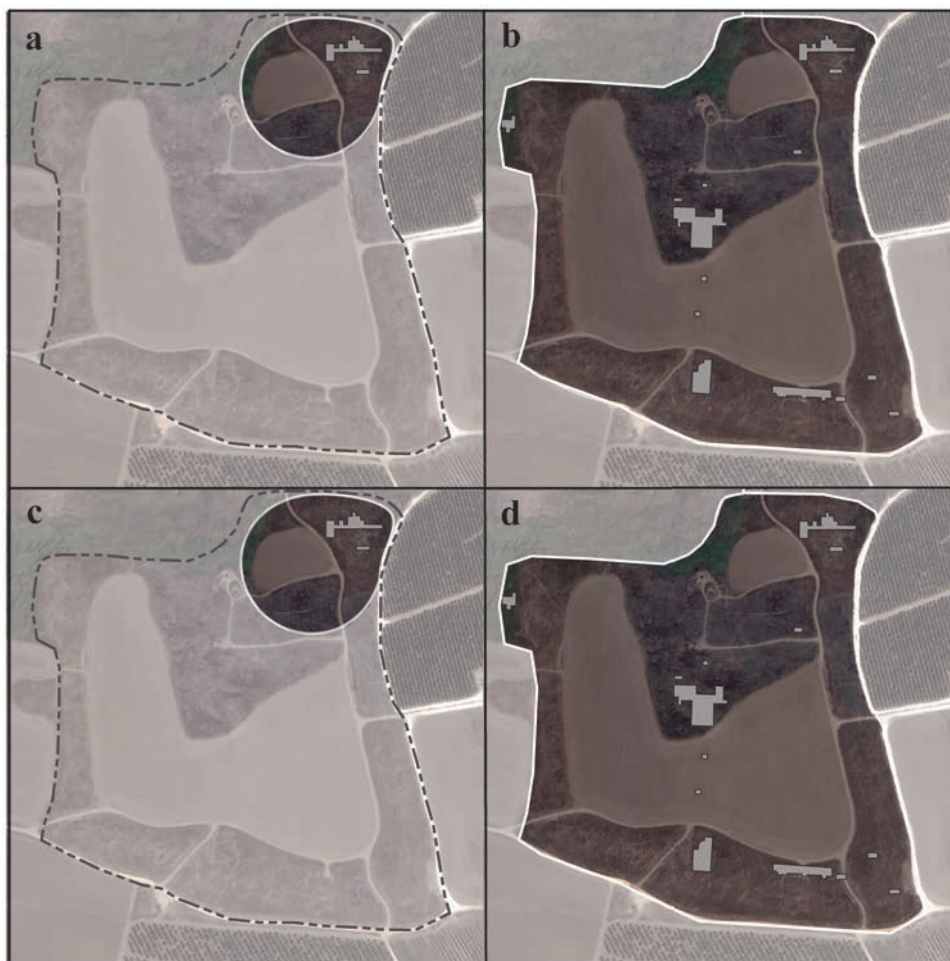
Figure 4a–b: Tel Miqne-Ekron: Mycenaean IIIC (Philistine 1) pottery. (Photos: Ilan Stulman; courtesy of the Tel Miqne-Ekron Excavations)

Figure 5: Tel Miqne-Ekron: Bichrome (Philistine 2) pottery. (Photo: Ilan Stulman; courtesy of the Tel Miqne-Ekron Excavations)

Figure 6: Tel Miqne-Ekron: Red-slipped and burnished (Philistine 3) pottery. (Photo: Ilan Stulman; courtesy of the Tel Miqne-Ekron Excavations)
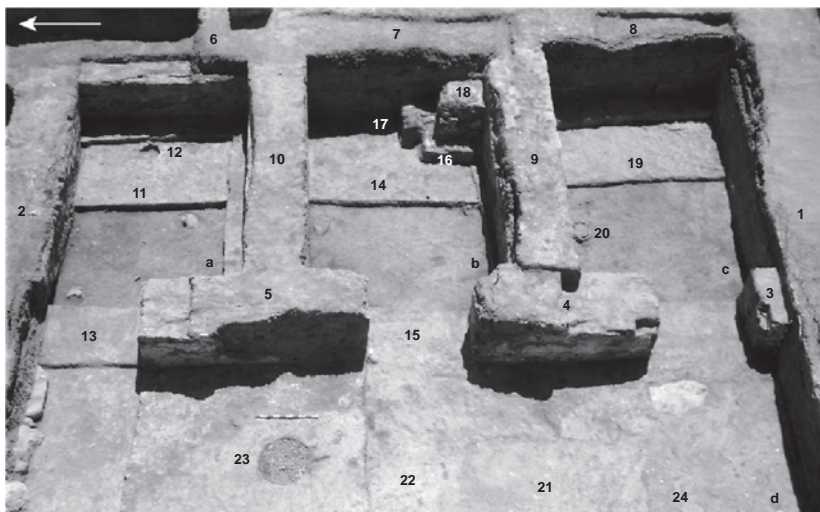
Figure 7: Tel Miqne-Ekron: Elite Iron I structure in Field IV. (Photo: Ilan Stulman; courtesy of the Tel Miqne-Ekron Excavations)

Description of numbered features in IVNW Building 350 Strata V–IV: (1) Wall 7004B, (2) Wall 9021, (3) Wall 23016, (4) Walls 23014/24020, (5) Walls 24018/25032; Strata VA–IVA: (6) Wall 9017, (7) Wall 8007B, (8) Wall 7013B, (9) Wall 8019, (10) Wall 8015A; Room a Stratum VA: (11) Surface 9030, (12) Basin 9032, (13) Threshold 25064; Room b Stratum VA: (14) Surface 8031, (15) Threshold 24040, (16) Platform 8033, (17) Bamah 8030, (18) Bamah 8032; Room c Stratum VA: (19) Surface 7011; Room d Stratum VB: (20) two cooking pots in situ; Stratum VA–C: (21) Platform 23022/24044/40022; Stratum VA: (22) Surface 24038, (23) Hearth 24037, (24) Surface 23016.
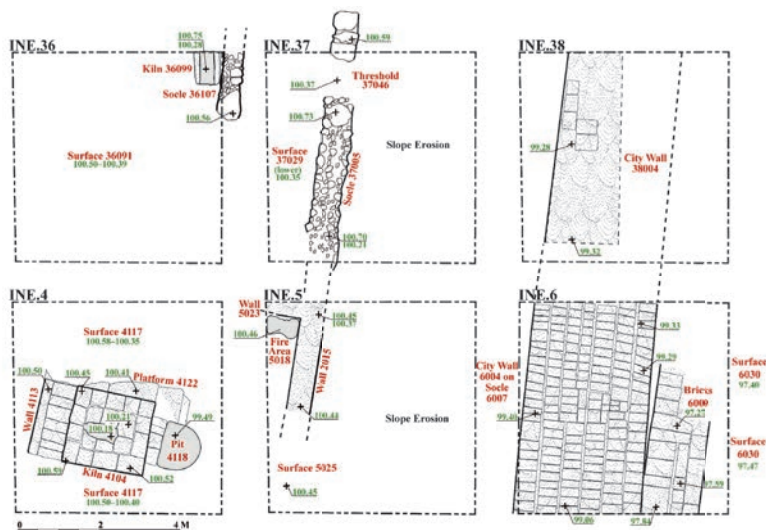
Figure 8: Tel Miqne-Ekron: Plan of Early Philistine twelfth-century BCE pottery industrial zone, including a pottery kiln, and the Iron I mudbrick city wall (Stratum VII). (Graphics: Jane C. Skinner, after Killebrew 2013, fig. 4)

3. Ashdod

Biblical Ashdod (place name and the gentilic *Ašhdodi or Ašhdodit*) appears 23 times in the Hebrew Bible and is mentioned seven times in the books of Samuel, mainly in connection with the capture of the ark and its placement in the temple of Dagon (1 Sam 5) before it is transferred to Gath and later Ekron (1 Sam 5:10). Ashdod is also mentioned as one of the cities attacked by the eighth-century BCE Judahite King Uzziah, who broke down the walls of Ashdod, along with those of another Philistine Pentapolis city, Gath. As with Ekron, several of the minor prophets foresee its demise at the hands of the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian empires.[13]

Nine seasons of excavation (1962–1972) in eight areas (A, B, C, D, G, H, K, and M) conducted under the directorship of Moshe Dothan (Israel Department of Antiquities) revealed a substantial Iron I–II Philistine settlement spanning the twelfth through seventh centuries BCE (Fig. 9).[14] The first Philistine town, Stratum XIIIb, was constructed on top of the Stratum XIV (Late Bronze Age II). As at Tel Miqne-Ekron, this earliest twelfth-century Philistine phase is defined by the appearance of locally produced Mycenaean IIIC (monochrome Philistine 1) pottery, accompanied by an assemblage of undecorated Aegean-style vessels (Stratum XIIIb–a). Gradually Philistine bichrome pottery (Philistine 2) develops (Strata XIIIa and XII), followed by debased Philistine (Philistine 3) and red-slipped and burnished pottery, which become the dominant wares at Iron Age IB and early Iron IIA Ashdod during the eleventh through mid-tenth centuries (mainly Stratum XI).[15] In the following Strata X and IX (tenth and ninth centuries BCE) that mark the beginning of the Iron II period, a new type of prestige pottery referred to as Ashdod Ware or Late Philistine Decorated Ware (LPDW) develops out of the Iron I Philistine and early Iron IIA Phoenician decorated ceramics. Based on provenience studies, this class of pottery was apparently produced at Ashdod and Tell es-Safi/Gath (see Fig. 14 below).[16]

As at Tel Miqne-Ekron, all aspects of the material culture of the earliest Philistine occupation at Ashdod (Stratum XIII) – constructed on top of the Late Bronze IIB settlement (Fig. 10a) – mark a departure from Late Bronze Age traditions. Early Iron Age remains were found in Areas A, G, and H (Figs. 9 and 10b). These include parts of a fortress and city wall and workshops that may indicate an industrial zone. Excavations in Area H reveal a well-planned Philistine city comprising two buildings that represent an elite area of Philistine dwellings. It includes an unusual apsidal building and hearths, the latter a typical feature of Iron I Philistine architecture. This is also the area where the iconic *Ashdoda* figurine that resembles a seated woman forming part of a chair or

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[13] See note 4 above for biblical citations.

[14] For a concise summary of the excavation results from Ashdod, see M. Dothan 1993. The findings from the nine seasons of excavation are published in five volumes (M. Dothan/Friedman 1967; M. Dothan 1971; M. Dothan/Porath 1982; M. Dothan/Porath 1993; M. Dothan/Ben-Shlomo 2005). For a recent overview of the excavation results, see Ben-Shlomo 2003, which responds to Israel Finkelstein and Lily Singer-Avitz's (2001) redating of Ashdod's Iron Age stratigraphic sequence. See also Finkelstein/Singer-Avitz 2004 for their response to Ben-Shlomo 2003.

[15] See note 8 for the relevant bibliography.

[16] See Ben-Shlomo/Shai/Maeir 2004 for a detailed discussion of Late Philistine Decorated Ware.
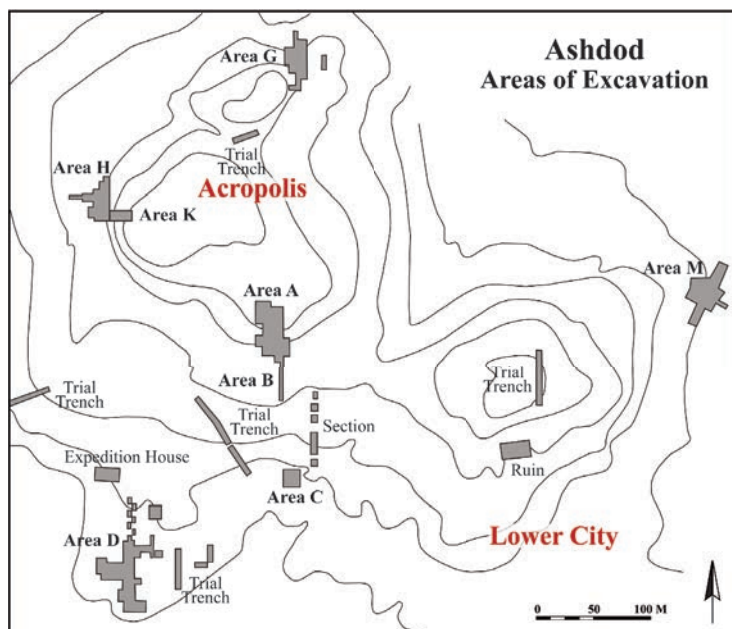
Figure 9: Ashdod: Map of excavation areas. (Graphics: Jane C. Skinner, after M. Dothan/ Ben-Shlomo 2005, fig. 1.1)
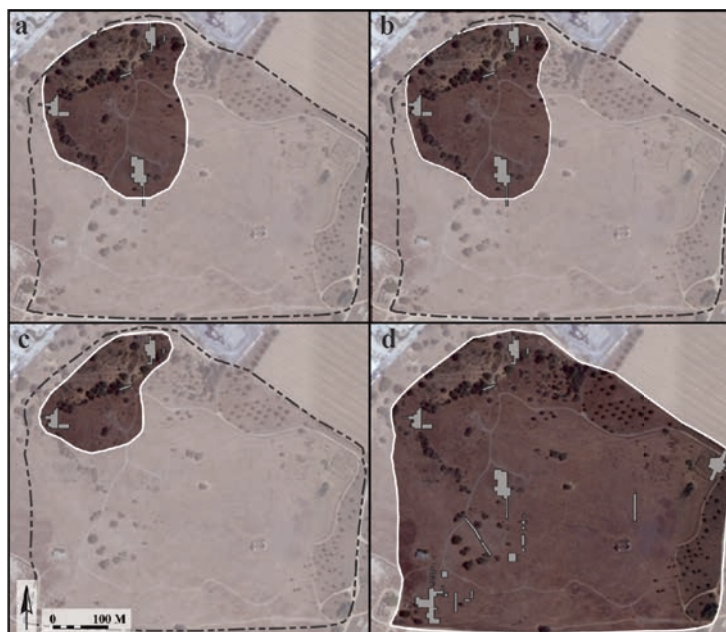
Figure 10a–d: Ashdod: Estimated settlement sizes: a) Late Bronze II; b) Iron IA–B; c) Iron IB/ Iron IIA; d) Iron IIB. (Graphics: Jane C. Skinner)

throne was recovered (Fig. 11).[17] Architecturally, the Iron I/IIA transition and the Iron IIA periods (Strata X–IX) are elusive at Ashdod, though they are well represented in the ceramic repertoire (Fig. 10c). This may be due in part to architectural continuity between the Iron I and Iron I/II occupation and the lack of a destruction at the end of this period. Based on the limited excavations on the mound, Ashdod reached its apex during the Iron IIB, especially in the eighth century BCE (Fig. 10d), as represented by Stratum VIII. This city was conquered by Sargon II in 712 BCE but continued to be occupied through the end of the Iron Age and beyond.[18]

Figure 11: Ashdod: Iron IB female ceramic figurine (Ashdoda). (Courtesy of Todd Bolen/ BiblePlaces.com)

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[17] See Russell 2009 regarding Ashdoda and the bibliography there.
[18] See M. Dothan 1993 and Ben-Shlomo 2003 for summaries of the stratigraphic sequence.

4. Tell es-Safi/Gath

Biblical Gath (place name and the gentilic *Gitti*) appears 44 times in the Hebrew Bible, though the occurrences may not all refer to the same place.[19] The city and its inhabitants play a central role in the books of Samuel, with 23 mentions total. Noteworthy interactions include the city's temporary possession of the ark of God (1 Sam 5:8), its role as the hometown of the Philistine Goliath (e.g., 1 Sam 17:4 and 2 Sam 21:19), and especially David's role there (e.g., 1 Sam 21 and 27; 2 Sam 15). Gath continues to appear prominently in the books of Kings and Chronicles, most notably as a city that was captured by David (1 Chr 18:1), Hazael of Damascus (2 Kgs 12:17), and later by King Uzziah (2 Chr 26:6). It was still considered a Philistine city in the eighth century, as indicated in Amos 6:2. Following its conquest by Sargon II in 711 BCE, Gath disappears from the biblical and extrabiblical as well as the archaeological records.[20]

Twenty-five seasons of excavations (1997–2021) in thirteen main areas (A, B, C, D, E, F, G, J, K, M, P, T, and Y) conducted under the directorship of Aren Maeir (Bar-Ilan University) uncovered an impressive Iron I–II Philistine settlement spanning the twelfth through late eighth centuries BCE (Fig. 12).[21] The early Philistine settlement (Areas A [A6] and F [F12]) with its trademark Mycenaean IIIC and Aegean-style pottery was constructed above the remains of the Late Bronze Age settlement. Though only relatively small areas have been excavated, Gath was most likely urban according to Maeir and paralleled Ekron in size and importance (Fig. 13a). As with other Pentapolis settlements, additional distinctive features of Philistine culture are on display, including changes in diet, flora, architecture, and cult. During the eleventh through early tenth centuries, the city continued to expand in the Iron IB (appearance of Philistine 2 bichrome pottery) and Iron I/IIA (appearance of Philistine 3 and red-slipped/burnished pottery) periods (e.g., Areas A [A5–4], C [C6–3], D [D5–4], E [E3], F [F11–10]; Figs. 12 and 13b). Key Iron I discoveries include a temple (Area A) that shares features with the Tell Qasile temple (see pp. 81–84), domestic zones (Areas A and P), and a large public structure (Area P).[22]

During the Iron IB period, Tell es-Safi/Gath began to expand northward to the lower city as evidenced in Area D. Tell es-Safi/Gath reaches its apex during the Iron IIA period (mid-tenth through late ninth centuries BCE), when it expands to ca. 45–50 hectares and becomes the largest and most important Philistine city (Fig. 13c). Excavations reveal extensive domestic architecture, household crafts, cultic corners, industrial zones, a temple, and fortifications. Due to its extensive destruction by King Hazael ca. 830 BCE, Gath's assemblage of Iron IIA material culture is the most complete thus far excavated in Philistia. This includes a rich repertoire of Late Philistine Decorated Ware associated

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[19] See Machinist 2000, 54.

[20] See Levin 2017 for a detailed discussion of Gath in the Bible.

[21] For a concise summary of excavation results from Tell es-Safi/Gath, see Maeir 2017; a series of short articles dealing with specific periods and topics published in two special issues of *Near Eastern Archaeology*, vols. 80/4 (2017) and 81/1 (2018); Maeir 2022; and Chadwick 2022 that include extensive bibliography. See Maeir 2012 and Maeir/Uziel 2020 for final excavation report publications.

[22] See Maeir 2017, 217–220 and Maeir 2020, 17–21 for a summary of the Iron I period.
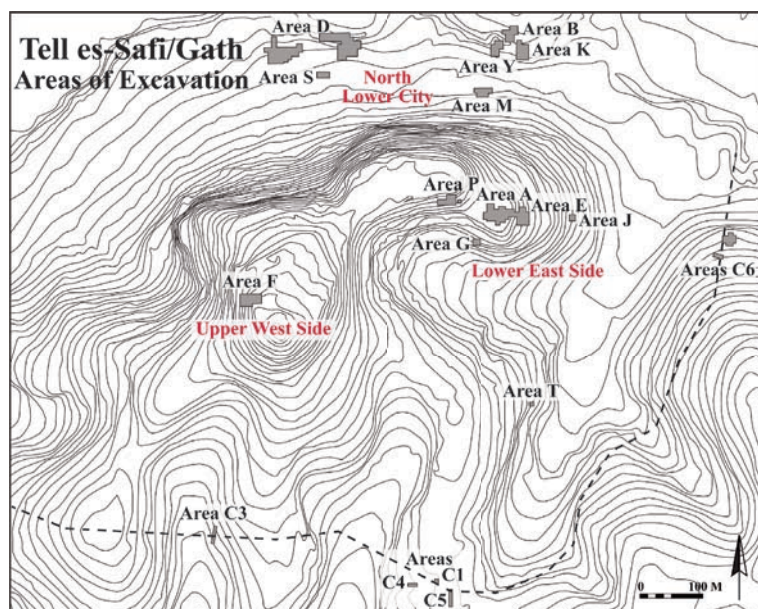
Figure 12: Tell es-Safi/Gath: Map of excavation areas. (Graphics: Jane C. Skinner, after Maeir/Uziel 2020, Fig. 1.9)
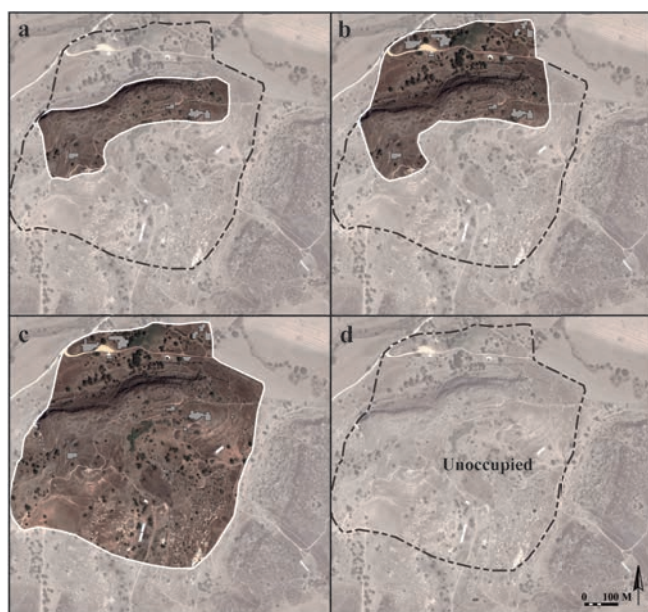
Figure 13a–d: Tell es-Safi/Gath: Estimated settlement sizes: a) Iron IA; b) Iron IB; c) Iron IIA; d) Iron IIC. (Graphics: Jane C. Skinner)

with Iron IIA–B Philistine sites (Fig. 14). Gath never recovers after its devastation by Hazael. It is abandoned in the late eighth century BCE (Fig. 13d) and is replaced by Ekron in the seventh century BCE as the leading Philistine settlement.[23]

Figure 14: Tell es-Safi/Gath: Late Philistine Decorated Ware pottery assemblages. (Photo: Aren M. Maeir; courtesy of the Tell es-Safi/Gath Archaeological Project)

5. Ashkelon

Of the Philistine Pentapolis sites, Ashkelon is mentioned the least frequently in the Hebrew Bible, appearing only 13 times. It is referenced twice in the books of Samuel (1 Sam 6:17; 2 Sam 1:20). As with the other three Philistine centers, Jeremiah (25:20; 47:5–7), Zechariah (9:5), and Zephaniah (2:4) prophesize Ashkelon's destruction at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar II.

The earliest explorations of ancient Ashkelon, which uncovered a Roman-period peristyle structure, were led by Lady Hester Stanhope in 1815. John Garstang and W.J. Phythian-Adams followed with excavations from 1921 to 1922, uncovering remains from the Bronze and Iron Ages in addition to Roman-period public structures. Between 1985 and 2016 two series of excavations were conducted, initially under the directorship

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[23] See Maeir 2017, 220–227; Maeir 2020, 21–35.

of Lawrence Stager (Harvard University: 1985–2000) and later resumed by Daniel Master (Wheaton College: 2007–2016; Fig. 15). Excavations on the North Slope and in two additional grids, 38 and 50, on the South Tell reached Middle Bronze through Iron Age I levels.[24] Late Bronze and Iron I early Philistine remains were excavated on the North Slope (North Tell: Phase 9) as well as in Grid 38 (Phases 21–17) and Grid 50 (Phases 10 and 9) on the South Tell. Though no Late Bronze or Iron Age strata were reached in the areas inside the city fortifications to the south and east of the two tells – due to thick layers of post-Iron Age settlements at the site – Stager and Master offer convincing evidence that the Middle Bronze through late Iron Age city occupied the entire 50- to 60-hectare site.[25]

The limited areas in which the Iron I period was reached reveal that, as at other Pentapolis sites discussed before, the city experienced a nearly complete transformation in material culture as a result of the influx of Philistine immigrants. Mostly domestic structures were uncovered. These include houses that lack a courtyard and differ from earlier Late Bronze Age house plans. Philistine vernacular architecture was linear in plan, with work areas located inside the house. Two larger buildings were noteworthy for their size and contents. A unique plastered altar with "horns," interpreted as indicating household cultic activities, was found in one of these structures (Fig. 16).[26]

Archaeological evidence for the Iron IIA–B periods (North Slope [Phase 8], Grid 38 [Phases 16 and 15], and Grid 50 [Phase 8]) is not well preserved, possibly due to damage by later building activities. However, during the final seasons of excavation (2013–2016), an Iron IIA Philistine cemetery was discovered to the north of the northern city fortifications (Fig. 15). It included simple pit burials, built tombs, and cremations in jars. This is the first cemetery excavated at a Pentapolis site, and it provides previously unknown information about Philistine burial practices (Fig. 17).[27]

Along with Ekron and Ashdod, Ashkelon is destroyed by the Neo-Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar II in 604 BCE. A royal winery in Grid 38 and a vibrant marketplace in Grid 50 testify to Ashkelon's prosperity during the seventh century BCE and to its connections with Egypt. Along with a rich assemblage of seventh-century pottery, a bronze statuette of the god Osiris and other objects of Egyptian origin or inspiration probably reflect the pro-Egyptian policies of Ashkelon. These findings parallel Ekron, where Egyptian objects were also excavated.[28]

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[24] For overviews of the history and summary of excavations at Ashkelon, see Stager 1993; Stager 2008; Schloen 2008a; Schloen 2008b; Stager/Schloen 2008.

[25] See Stager 2020, 11–12; Daniel Master, email communication. Master also notes the existence of a Philistine cemetery in the north, and outside of the North Tell city wall, which suggests that this was the northern boundary of the Iron IIA city.

[26] The final excavation report for the Iron I period at Ashkelon was published in 2020; see Stager/Master/Aja 2020 for a detailed description of the excavations in Grids 38 and 50. Regarding the "horned" altar, see also Master/Aja 2011.

[27] See Master/Aja 2017 for a detailed description of the Philistine Iron Age IIA cemetery.

[28] The final excavation report of seventh-century BCE Ashkelon was published in 2011; see Stager/Master/Schloen 2011 for a detailed description of Grids 38 and 50.

Ashkelon
Areas of Excavation

N5

Philistine
Cemetery

North Tell

Mediterranean Sea

South Tell

0   50   100 M
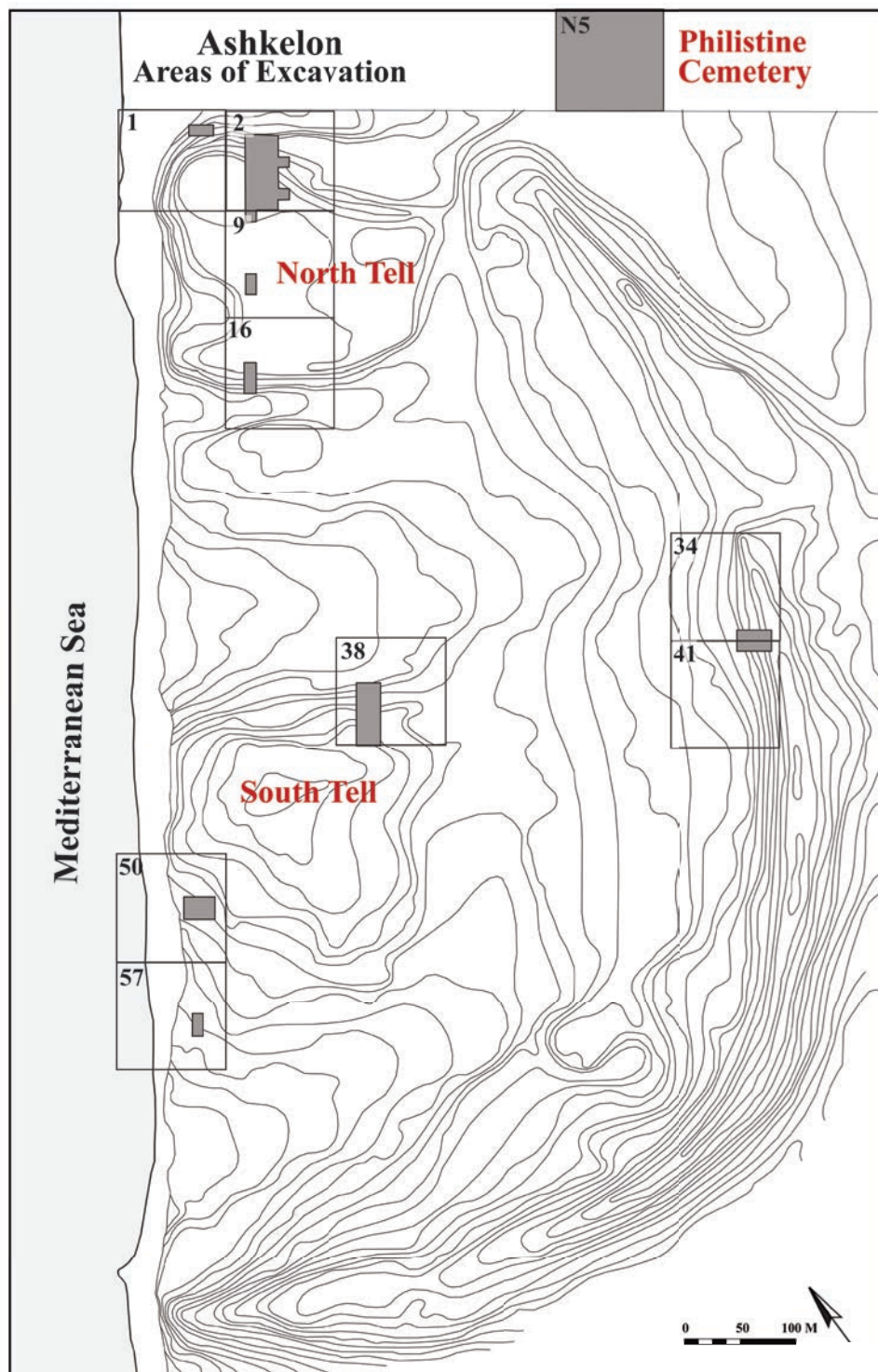
Figure 16: Ashkelon: Iron IA "horned" altar in Building 572 (view to the east). (Courtesy of the Leon Levy Expedition to Ashkelon)

Figure 17: Ashkelon: Burial 240, simple pit grave with jars, bowl, and juglet, looking northeast. (Photo: M. Aja, © Leon Levy Expedition to Ashkelon)

6. Tel Batash (Timnah)

Tel Batash has been identified as Timnah based on a biblical passage in Josh 15:10–11 that describes the northern boundary of the kingdom of Judah and the location of Timnah as being between Beth Shemesh and Ekron. Timnah is best known for its association with the story of Samson (Judg 14–15), which attests to its importance as a Philistine town. Though not mentioned in the books of Samuel, 2 Chr 28:18 refers to Timnah as one of the cities that were reclaimed by the Philistines during the reign of Ahaz, and it is often considered to have formed the eastern border of the kingdom of Ekron.

Twelve seasons of excavation (1977–1989) were completed at Tel Batash under the direction of George Kelm (Baptist Theological Seminary in New Orleans and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary) and Amihai Mazar (The Hebrew University of Jerusalem). Nine areas of excavation (A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, and J) were opened, and occupation from the Middle Bronze through the Persian periods was uncovered (Fig. 18). The Late Bronze Age town (Areas A, B, C, and J) comprised an outer belt of houses with massive walls along the crest of the mound, including evidence of well-built pillared houses (Fig. 19a). Stratum VIA represents the transitional Late Bronze/Iron period. During the Iron IA, Tel Batash experienced a gap in occupation that parallels the early phase of Mycenaean IIIC Philistine pottery (Fig. 19b).[29]

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[29] For a brief summary of the excavations at Tel Batash, see Mazar/Kelm 1993.
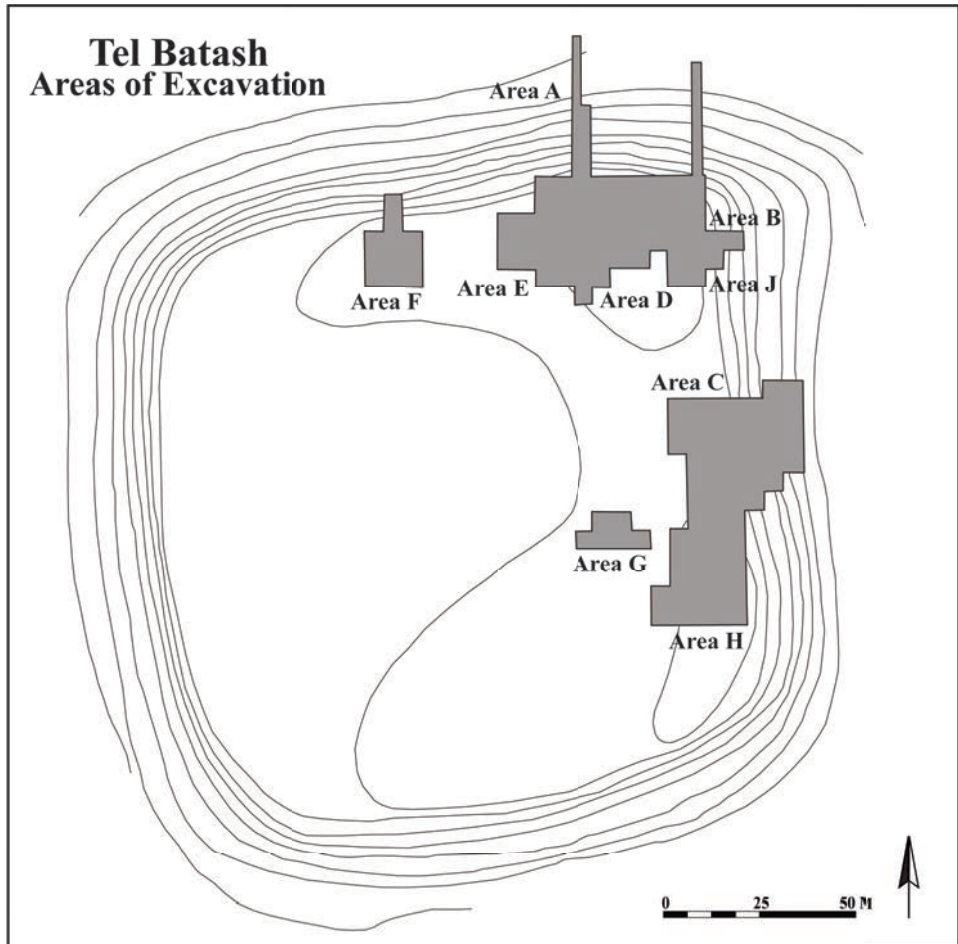
Figure 18: Tel Batash/Timnah: Map of excavation areas. (Graphics: Jane C. Skinner, after Mazar 1997, fig. 2)

The Iron IB (Stratum V: Areas B, C, D, E, and J) settlement at Tel Batash is a substantial town with a city wall and domestic structures (Fig. 19c). Based on the rich repertoire of Philistine bichrome pottery and associated artifacts, it has been identified as a Philistine town. Remains of the Stratum IV tenth-century settlement are fragmentary and attest to a less dense population. During the IIB–C periods (Strata III and II: Areas A, B, C, D, E, F, G, and H), Tel Batash once again flourished (Fig. 19d). The town was rebuilt with well-planned fortifications, a street system, and an industrial zone. At the end of the seventh century, Tel Batash was destroyed, likely by the Neo-Babylonians.[30]

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[30] For detailed descriptions and final reports of the Tel Batash/Timnah excavations, see Mazar 1997; Mazar/Panitz-Cohen 2001; Panitz-Cohen/Mazar 2006.
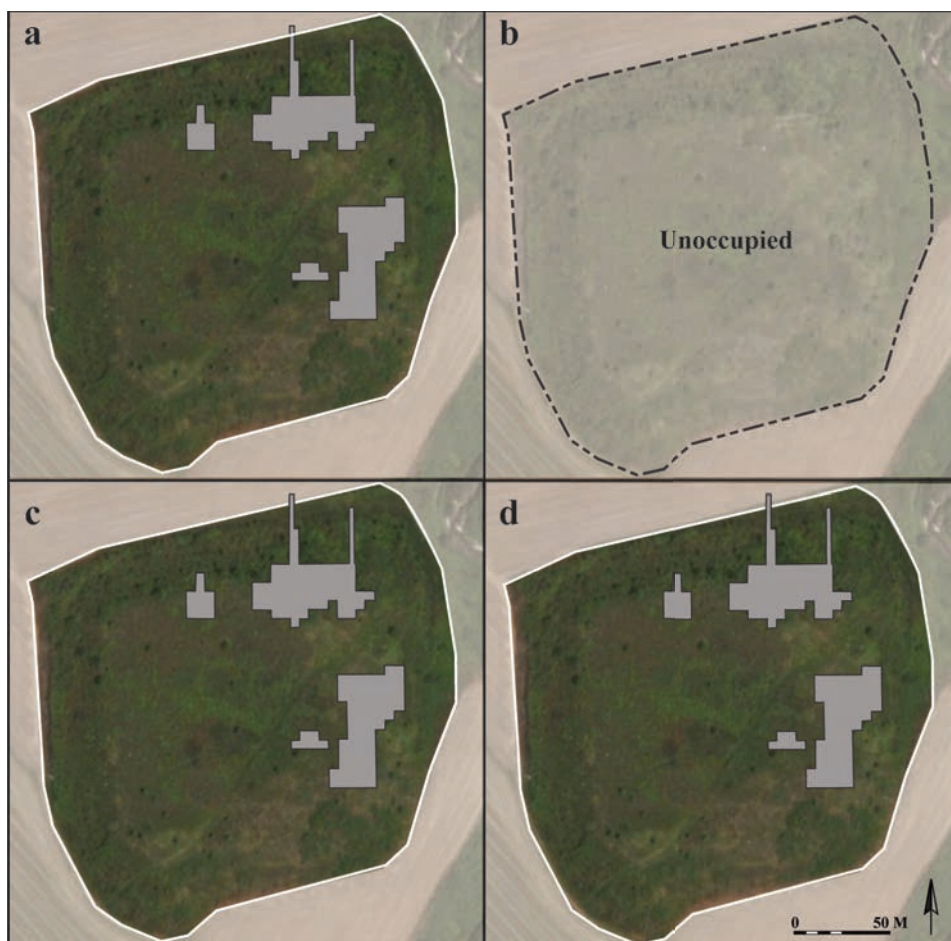
Figure 19 a–d: Tel Batash/Timnah: Estimated areas of settlement: a) Late Bronze Age; b) Iron IA; c) Iron IB; d) Iron IIB–C. (Graphics: Jane C. Skinner)

7. Tell Qasile

Tell Qasile has not been identified with a location mentioned in the Hebrew Bible and its ancient name is unknown. Three series of excavations were conducted by Benjamin Mazar (Israel Exploration Society: 1948–1950), Amihai Mazar (Hebrew University of Jerusalem: 1971–1974), and Smadar Harpazi-Ofer and Amihai Mazar (Eretz Israel Museum and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem: 1982–1992). Two main areas of excavation were opened: Area A in the southern section of the mound and Area C to the north of Area A (Fig. 20). No evidence of a Late Bronze or Iron IA settlement was found (Fig. 21a and b). The site was first occupied during the Iron IB period (Stratum XII) and, based on the appearance of noteworthy quantities of bichrome Philistine pottery,
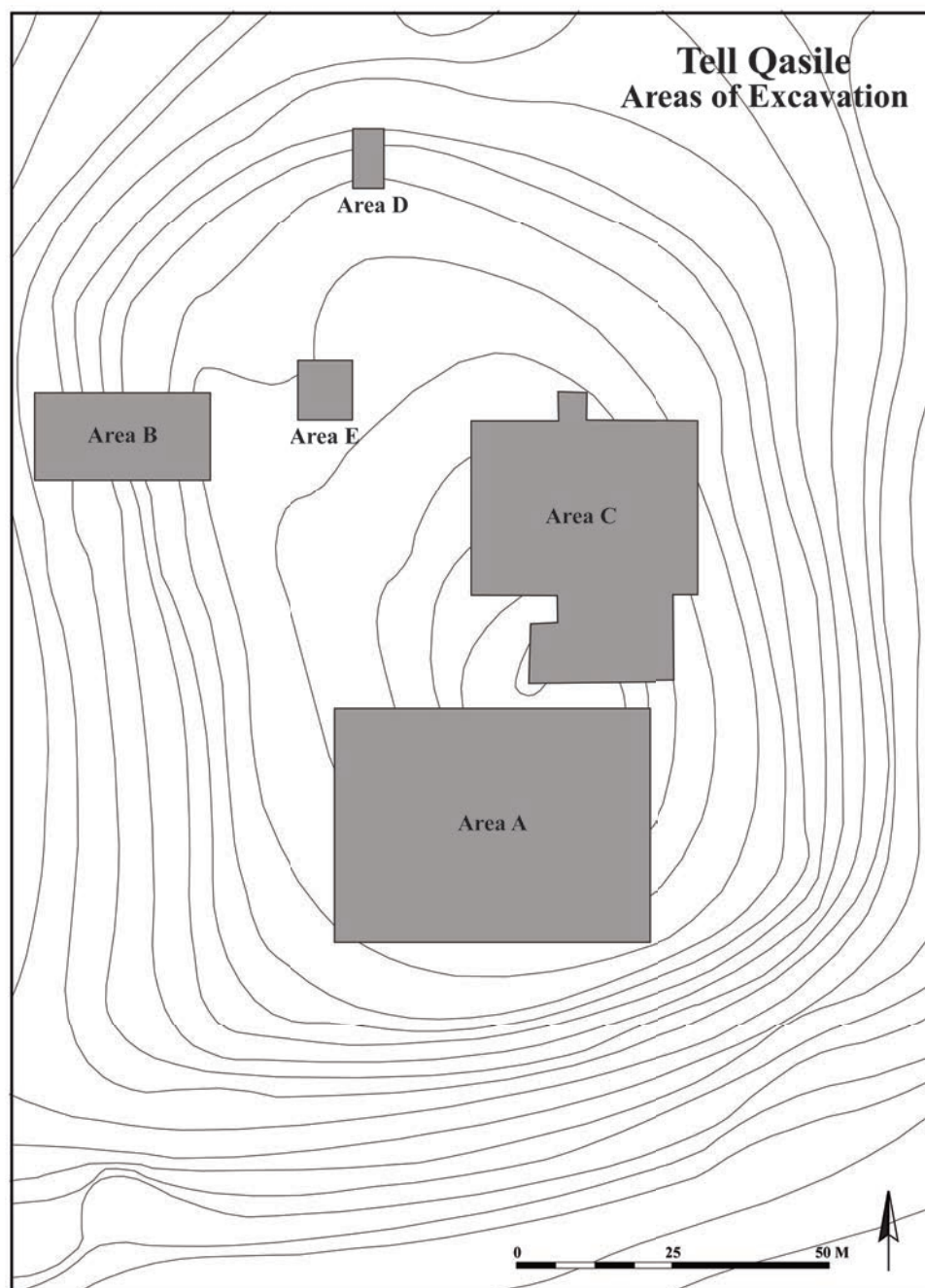
Figure 20: Tell Qasile: Map of excavation areas. (Graphics: Jane C. Skinner, after Mazar 1980, fig. 2)
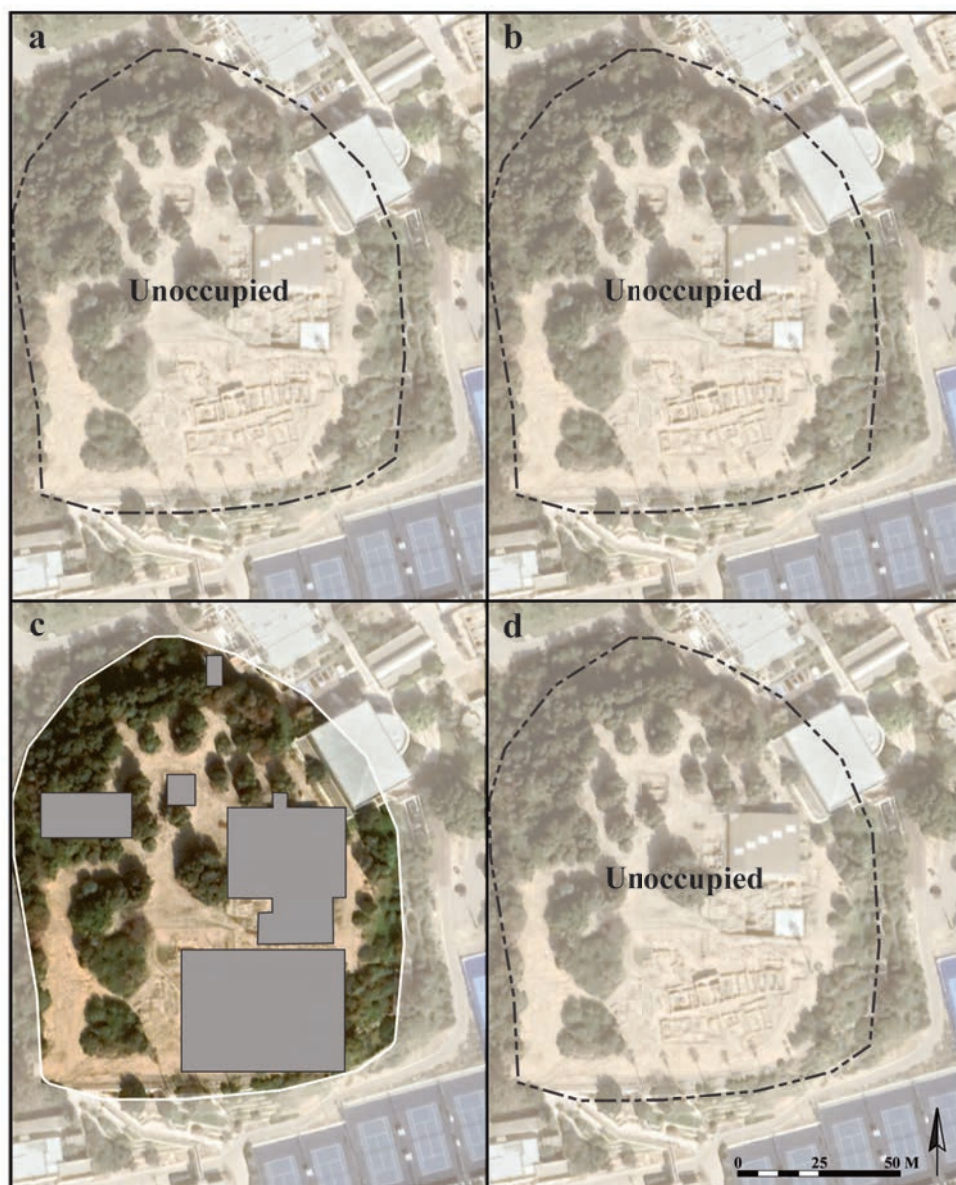
Figure 21a–d: Tell Qasile: Estimated areas of settlement: a) Late Bronze II; b) Iron IA; c) Iron IB–Iron IIA; d) Iron IIB–C. (Graphics: Jane C. Skinner)

was identified as a Philistine settlement. The site continued to be inhabited during the eleventh (Stratum XI) and late eleventh/early tenth centuries (Stratum X; Fig. 21c). Following the destruction of Stratum X, the town was rebuilt, perhaps by the previous inhabitants, as several of the structures were reconstructed (Strata IX and VIII). However, Philistine material culture largely disappears. The site was eventually

abandoned at the end of the tenth century BCE and remained abandoned through the late seventh century BCE (Fig. 21d).[31]

The most significant discovery was a temple, which Amihai Mazar excavated in Area C. It was constructed in the Iron IB (Stratum XII). The temple was rebuilt and expanded twice (Strata XI and X), reaching its greatest extent in Stratum X (Fig. 22). Due to the appearance of Philistine 2 (bichrome) and 3 (debased) pottery, this temple is often identified as a Philistine temple.[32] There are no exact architectural parallels, though the recently discovered cultic structure at Tell es-Safi/Gath shares some similarities in plan with this temple.

Figure 22: Tell Qasile: Temple in Area C. (Courtesy of Todd Bolen/BiblePlaces.com)

8. Philistia in the Eleventh through Early Tenth Centuries and Beyond

From this survey of key Iron Age sites in the southern coastal plain that are usually identified as Philistine on the basis of their material culture and the biblical account, several conclusions can be drawn. The four Pentapolis sites that have seen extensive excavation flourished in the eleventh through early tenth centuries BCE. It should be emphasized that this is the only period of time when all four cities were major urban centers. It is also during the Iron IB and IB/IIA that Philistine material culture appears

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[31] For a brief summary of the series of excavations, see T. Dothan/Dunayevsky 1993; Mazar 1993.

[32] For detailed descriptions and final report of the Tell Qasile temple, see Mazar 1980; Mazar 1985; Mazar 2023.

in noteworthy quantities at sites outside of the Pentapolis, such as Tel Batash/Timnah and Tell Qasile. These findings suggest the expansion of Philistine influence beyond the original core settlements, and they tally with the biblical account in the books of Judges and Samuel of Philistine superiority over Judah.

Contemporary with the period that biblical accounts suggest for Israelite military victories over the Philistines, that is, the time of David (ca. late eleventh–early tenth century BCE), Tel Miqne-Ekron experiences a marked decline and a dramatic population decrease from the later tenth through the eighth century BCE. Only in the seventh century does Ekron recover and emerge once again as a major urban center. At Ashdod and Ashkelon, evidence for the Iron IIA period is elusive and may indicate a decline in importance. Tel Batash is also diminished during the Iron IIA. Tell Qasile is past its heyday and is abandoned at the end of the tenth century for several hundred years. Only Tell es-Safi/Gath expands in size and dominates the southern coastal plain; however, a century later it is destroyed by King Hazael of Damascus, resulting in its eventual abandonment during the eighth and seventh centuries.

It is essential to recognize the complexity of the redaction of the Hebrew Bible and its many layers of composition that are imbued with later political, ideological, and theological overtones. As several contributions in the present volume demonstrate, the imprint of later historical and cultural contexts is certainly evident in the books of Samuel, especially in its theological message. However, it is no less important to acknowledge that we also encounter authentic eleventh- and early tenth-century memories in the backdrop of the political, ideological, and theological messages of this book – which is when Philistia reached its apex. This observation is the unique contribution that the archaeological record of the Philistine settlements affords us. It needs to be taken seriously alongside any insights provided by the analysis of the biblical and extrabiblical texts.

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Tradents of the Lost Ark

The Ark of the Covenant as an Object of Discourse on Divine and Human Kingship

John Will Rice and Matteo Bächtold

1. Introduction

The fate of the lost ark, referred to in the Bible as "the ark of the covenant" (e.g., Exod 25–40, *passim*), "the ark of Yhwh/God" (e.g., 1 Sam 4–6, *passim*), or "the ark of the covenant of Yhwh/God" (e.g., 1 Sam 4:3–5; 1 Kgs 8:1, 6), has preoccupied biblical interpreters both ancient and modern and is well established in modern popular culture.[1] Already 2 Macc 2:5–7 reports that Jeremiah himself hid the ark until the day when Yhwh would reveal it again, while Jer 3:16–17 seems to suggest that people need to forget the ark. According to the book of Revelation, the ark is revealed in the heavenly temple after the blowing of the seventh trumpet (Rev 11:19). Conversely, Talmudic tradition holds that the ark was taken to Babylonia, or that Josiah buried the ark, alongside manna, oil, Aaron's rod, and the chest of the Philistines, even before the temple was destroyed by the Babylonians (b. Yoma 52b–54), while Josephus claims that it was taken already by the Assyrians (*B.J.* 5.215). And many today would say that it is being kept, inaccessible to all but a guardian monk, at the Maryam Ts'ion church in Axum! The question has been such a prominent one throughout history because, although the Hebrew Bible often depicts the ark as the locus of the presence of Yhwh, the god of Israel, there is no direct report of its fate after being brought into the Jerusalem temple in 1 Kgs 6–8.[2] Over the centuries, the temple is sacked by the Egyptian pharaoh Shishak (1 Kgs 14:25–28), King Jehoash of Israel (2 Kgs 14:13–14), and the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kgs 24:13). Furthermore, Ahaz (2 Kgs 16:8) and Hezekiah (2 Kgs 18:15–16), kings of Judah, both offer treasures from the temple to the Assyrians. Ultimately, the temple is plundered a second time by the Babylonians, when it meets its end (2 Kgs 25:8–17). Yet, in all of this, not a word is written of the fate of the ark of the covenant.

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[2] Note, however, that 2 Esdras 10:22 claims that the ark was looted during the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem ("*arca testamenti nostri direpta est*").

   The ability for such contradictory and competing traditions to arise about the fate of the ark is an example of what Patrick Boucheron has called the "social availability of memory".[3] Since it seems that there was no ark in the Second Temple (so, e.g., m. Yoma 5:1–2, and again Jer 3:16), the ark of the covenant would have emerged as a post-monarchic site of memory only as an abstractum, without a physical referent in the Jerusalem temple (or anywhere else). This is how the post-monarchic concept of the ark became a "locus of longing" for the days of yore, whatever traditions about the ark may or may not have existed in the monarchic period. Rachel Adelman recently took this as the point of departure for an investigation of the role of the ark as a locus of "longing" and "return" within a diaspora context, with the ark representing a "precious symbol of the love of God for his people".[4] Following Adelman's evaluation of the ark as a locus of longing, we turn our focus here to the political discourse inherent in such discussions of, and longings for, the ark. Through its connection with the presence of the deity, and underscored by the theme of loss/exile inherent in the Ark Narrative (1 Sam 4:1b–7:1 [henceforth "1 Sam 4–6"]; 2 Sam 6), the "lost ark" is taken up time and again as a site of memory for looking back to the loss of statehood and (nominal) political independence signaled by the Babylonian conquest of 587 BCE. However, this longing is not an end in and of itself. Rather, tradents of the ark tradition used retrospection within a larger discourse about theoretical modes of political rule in a future free of foreign imperialism – in other words, for a coming time free of the "shadow of empire". In this way, the tradition of the ark takes its place within a much larger (and eventually "apocalyptic") discourse across biblical literature that becomes an act of self-determination, in which the composition of literature becomes a mode of expressing beliefs and facilitating debate about what *would* be best *if* political autonomy were achieved.

2. Cult Foundation Legend? Catastrophe Narrative?

Understandings of the Ark Narrative as a primarily political document are, of course, not new and have been baked into the research discussion from the beginning, since such political themes are evident even in a surface reading of the text. Nevertheless, scholars have long disagreed on the exact *raison d'être* of the narrative. It is clear that the Ark Narrative in its current literary form is a reflection of the experience of exile and presupposes the Babylonian conquest of 587 BCE. Not only does 1 Sam 4:19–22 speak of the loss of the ark to the Philistines with the same vocabulary as the captivity of the Jerusalem elite (גלה "to be removed, to go into exile"),[5] but the entire narrative structure of "military confrontation – loss and captivity – foreign sojourn – return" also mirrors the literary representation of the Babylonian exile in the Hebrew Bible.

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[3] So Boucheron 2019, 9.

[4] Adelman 2019, 162.

[5] Note, however, that the same verb גלה is used in 2 Kgs 17 for the exile of the Israelites, but here without the prospect of return.

Leonhard Rost, who developed the theory of an "Ark Narrative" in 1 Sam 4–6; 2 Sam 6 in his monograph *Die Überlieferung von der Thronnachfolge Davids* (1926), thought of the Ark Narrative as an independent narrative document about the ark of the covenant that was used, alongside the "History of David's Rise" and the "Succession Narrative", as one of the major sources for the books of Samuel. Rost understood the Ark Narrative to be a theological presentation of a historical loss of the ark to the Philistines and its return to the Israelites, one composed shortly after the events in question. He believed this narrative to have been written as a story about "the loss of the ark", a "cult legend" (*Kultlegende*), and the *hieros logos* of the Jerusalem temple sanctuary.[6] However, especially the lattermost of these is wholly dependent upon Rost's theory that 1 Sam 4–6 and 2 Sam 6 initially comprised a single document. While many first maintained this,[7] Franz Schicklberger provided an extensive argument for the independence of 2 Sam 6 from 1 Sam 4–6,[8] and most thereafter consequently abandoned this aspect of Rost's hypothesis. However, this separation of 2 Sam 6 changes the character of the original Ark Narrative quite dramatically, since it removes Jerusalem from the picture. Shicklberger explained this problem by proposing a two-staged development of 1 Sam 4–6: (1) a "catastrophe narrative" (*Katastrophenerzählung*) in 1 Sam 4* composed in or around Shiloh that told of the loss of the ark of the covenant in a battle with the Philistines and (2) an expansion of this catastrophe narrative through 1 Sam 5–6 composed in Jerusalem after the fall of Samaria in 722 BCE, which told of the ark ultimately returning to the Israelites.[9] Schicklberger's "catastrophe narrative" thesis has remained popular in the field, as reflected in Peter Porzig's monograph *Die Lade Jahwes im Alten Testament und in den Texten vom Toten Meer* as well as in publications by Walter Dietrich and Benedikt Hensel.[10] Although the foci of their inquiries are quite different, they all follow Schicklberger at important points: The original stratum of the Ark Narrative is a catastrophe narrative limited to 1 Sam 4*,[11] and the ark itself was probably originally a war palladium of a specific Israelite tribe or clan before its association with the Jerusalem temple.[12]

However, only a few years after Schicklberger's publication, Patrick D. Miller, Jr. and J.J.M. Roberts put forth another suggestion that has also seen wide reception in the field. They accepted the distinction between 1 Sam 4–6 and 2 Sam 6 but maintained Rost's idea of the basic unity of 1 Sam 4:1b–7:1[13] and even extended its scope back to

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[6] Rost 1926, 27, 108, and 36, respectively.

[7] See, e.g., Campbell 1975.

[8] Schicklberger 1973, 129–149; see earlier also Schunck 1963.

[9] Shicklberger 1973, 70–71, 176.

[10] Porzig 2009; Dietrich 2007, 250–252; Dietrich 2011; Hensel 2022; Hensel 2023. Porzig's research contribution was a diachronic reassessment of all ark texts in the Hebrew Bible and at Qumran. For a similar analysis, see also the recent UC Berkeley dissertation of D. Fisher (Fisher 2018).

[11] Porzig 2009, 141; Dietrich 2011, 213–214; Hensel 2022, 171–172.

[12] Porzig 2009, 289–290; Dietrich 2011, 214; Hensel 2022, 172.

[13] So already Wellhausen 1899, 254.

1 Sam 2:12–17, 22–25 to include earlier material about the Elides.[14] While their literary-critical work brought a strong critique of the Elide priesthood into the debate, much more of their discussion focused on the narrative's ancient Near Eastern context, namely in its presentation of divine warfare and the ancient Near Eastern practice of "godnapping". Unlike Schicklberger and other contemporaries,[15] Miller and Roberts still saw the text as inherently historical, having been written "between the disastrous defeat at Ebenezer and the much later victories of David",[16] while the ark still sat at Kiriath-jearim. Within this presumed historical scenario, Miller and Roberts understood the primary function of the Ark Narrative to be a theological reaction to the temporary loss of the ark, which – tying back to their inclusion of material from 1 Sam 2 – the narrative attributes to the wickedness of its priestly caretakers, the sons of Eli.[17]

While the Miller-Roberts thesis was adopted shortly thereafter by P. Kyle McCarter in his commentary on 1 and 2 Samuel (1980/1984), many scholars have subsequently accepted the idea of a unified narrative in 1 Sam 4–6 but without the addition of the Elide material of 1 Sam 2. For example, Cynthia Edenburg understands 1 Sam 4–6 to be largely a literary unity from the post-monarchic period,[18] while Christa Schäfer-Lichtenberger attributed it to an oral tradition with roots in the northern kingdom of Israel.[19] The fundamental problem with this thesis, unless it is suggested that 2 Sam 6 actually predates 1 Sam 4–6,[20] is what to make of the narrative ending not in Jerusalem but at Kiriath-jearim. A solution to this has been proposed by Thomas Römer and Israel Finkelstein in several recent publications: The original Ark Narrative, which ended in 1 Sam 7:1, was the *heiros logos* or "cult foundation legend" (*Kultgründungslegende*) not for the temple in Jerusalem but for a separate Yahwistic sanctuary at Kiriath-jearim, which they consider to have been under the control of the kingdom of Israel in the eighth century BCE.[21] This text then stands as one of several texts from the days of Jeroboam II, the king in Samaria who oversaw its final period of prosperity and political independence in the first half of the eighth century BCE.[22] In some ways, this constitutes a modernizing of the Miller-Roberts (and Wellhausen) thesis but without the Elide material, insofar as Römer and Finkelstein see in 1 Sam 4–6 both a literary unity as well as a reflection of the historical location of the ark. However, the Römer-Finkelstein

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[14] Miller/Roberts 1977, 28. Cf., however, recent studies by Ann-Kathrin Knittel (2019, 75–97) and Jaime Myers (2022), who offer (differing) diachronic analyses that demonstrate the unlikelihood of 1 Sam 2:12–17, 22–25 being a single textual unit lying on the same literary level as 1 Sam 4 (5–6).

[15] So, e.g., Stolz 1981, who speaks of a theologically reworked "legend" (*Sage*) (19), elements of historical reliability in 1 Sam 4 (40–42), and "historical memory" (*historische Erinnerung*) (49).

[16] Miller/Roberts 1977, 93.

[17] Miller/Roberts 1977, 88.

[18] Edenburg 2020.

[19] Schäfer-Lichtenberger 2003, 328–329. See also Stirrup 2000, 100.

[20] A possibility suggested recently by Edenburg 2020, 163.

[21] See esp. Finkelstein/Römer 2020; Finkelstein et al. 2018; Finkelstein et al. 2021; Römer 2020; Römer 2021; Römer 2023.

[22] These texts include the pre-Priestly Jacob and exodus narratives, the "Book of the Saviors" in Judges, stories of the kings Saul, Jeroboam I, and Jehu, and possibly a version of the conquest tradition. In this reconstruction, early versions of these texts were authored in Israel and were brought to Judah by Israelite refugees after 720 BCE. For this, see especially Finkelstein 2019.

thesis adapts this conception to a state of the field in which the David and Solomon materials are no longer understood as reflecting actual events from the time of these two kings but the historical realities of later periods. In particular, they see the pre-monarchic setting with a unified "Israel" as reflective of a time when the kingdom of Judah served as a *de facto* vassal of the kingdom of Israel under Jeroboam II.[23] In constructing this thesis, they have drawn on their recent excavations at Kiriath-jearim, where Finkelstein believes to have found a large, monumental podium constructed in the style of Omride Samaria and Jezreel.[24]

One natural implication of the cult legend hypothesis is, of course, that the ark would have been a central feature in the sanctuaries in question.[25] However, there is a (well-known) problem with this: The ark is noticeably absent from several texts where one would expect mention of such an important cultic object, namely the core of Deuteronomy, the depiction of the temple in Isa 6 (or any eighth-century prophetic literature at all), and any text in 1–2 Kings coming after 1 Kgs 8. For the books of Kings, as mentioned above, this includes a lack of any mention of the ark's fate after the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem. A great interest in the ark becomes prominent only in late/post-Priestly literature.[26] To explain this within the framework of the updated "cult foundation legend" hypothesis, Römer has proposed that the transfer of the ark to Jerusalem happened only during the time of the cultic centralization efforts by King Josiah – that is, during the late seventh century BCE, mere decades before Jerusalem's destruction at the hands of the Babylonians.[27] In support of this, Römer cites 2 Chr 35:3, which claims that Josiah ordered the ark to be placed in the Jerusalem temple, and Ps 132:6–8, which associates the ark not with Jerusalem but with the "fields of Jaar", that is, Kiriath-jearim. Nevertheless, this hypothesis is complicated by the likelihood that both 2 Chr 35 and Ps 132 are late texts written as innerbiblical constructions rather than reflections of monarchic-era memories.[28]

The problem of the silence about the ark is easier to address within the "catastrophe narrative" framework, or when dating the entire text of 1 Sam 4–6 to the post-monarchic period. For the former, it was only with the later expansion of the original catastrophe narrative in 1 Sam 4* into the fuller textual complex in 1 Sam 4–6 sometime after the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BCE that the lost war palladium was connected literarily with exile. Most notably, Porzig's analysis suggests that most ark texts are curiously "late" and that no monarchic-era text attests to the presence of the ark in the Jerusalem temple.[29] It was only after the monarchic period that it then began appearing in other texts, especially in later Priestly and Deuteronomistic literature, becoming "a connecting

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[23] E.g., Römer 2023, 8.

[24] Finkelstein et al. 2018, 57–60; Finkelstein/Römer 2020.

[25] E.g., Römer 2023, 6–8.

[26] Porzig 2009, 287.

[27] Römer 2023, 8–10.

[28] Cf. Römer 2023, 9, following an original proposal by Mowinckel (1922, 93) that Ps 132 reflects a pre-exilic "procession liturgy." For further discussion of Ps 132 as an early text reflecting Davidic ritual, see Seow 1989, 145–203.

[29] Porzig 2009, 289–291.

element between the founding period of Israel and its later history".[30] These observations on the ark texts outside of 1 Sam 4–6 remain valid even when dating the entire Ark Narrative after the monarchic period. This means that the natural conclusion of both hypotheses is that, from its very literary beginnings, the ark is a "lost ark", either "lost" as a war palladium or as a cultic object of a destroyed temple.

Although not as prominent in the research discussion, there have also been voices in favor of a third option, namely, that the Ark Narrative was never an independent document but was composed specifically for its present context. Edenburg considered this a possibility amid interpreting the entire section of 1 Sam 4–6* as a later, post-Deuteronomistic insertion between 1 Sam 4:1a and 7:2b–3.[31] Likewise, Reinhard Kratz came to the conclusion that the Ark Narrative, alongside Rost's "History of David's Rise" and "Succession Narrative", were "not independent works but all part of a greater whole".[32] In any case, recent publications by Jürg Hutzli and Hannes Bezzel attest to the increasing tendency to understand 1 Sam 4* as having been composed as a part of a theologically driven introduction to the monarchic history that follows.[33] However, it should also be noted that this is no recent phenomenon. The prospect of the Ark Narrative coming from a Deuteronomistic hand saw many proponents already from the 1970s to the 1990s.[34] Such argumentation has focused primarily on two angles. The first is the unlikelihood of the proposed process, in which an independent Ark Narrative document identified by biblical scholars was preserved and then integrated into the Deuteronomistic History; the second is how the various themes that shape the Ark Narrative are intimately tied to their present Deuteronomistic literary context and are hardly conceivable within a narrative composition outside of it. The weakness of this position has been the general lack of engagement with in-depth diachronic literary analysis compared to representatives of the other positions. This, however, has been remedied by Stephen Germany,[35] whose extensive analysis assigns 1 Sam 4* to a narrative thread comprising 1 Sam 1–4*; 7* that was composed as a preface to the history of the monarchy. This new introduction, including the loss of the ark and the presence of Yhwh, was intended to give a theological explanation to the fall of Samaria in 722 BCE.

In what follows, we approach the Ark Narrative in 1 Sam 4–6* with an eye to the question of Israelite kingship. The focus on this theme highlights the section's integrality with its current context at the beginning of the books of Samuel, particularly the Deuteronom(ist)ic ambivalence towards human kingship expressed especially in

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[30] Porzig 2009, 292.

[31] Edenburg 2020, 153–154.

[32] Kratz 2005, 174.

[33] Hutzli 2007, 199–202; Bezzel 2015, 193, esp. nn. 175, 176.

[34] Willis 1971; Willis 1979; Smelik 1980; Smelik 1983; Smelik 1989 (revised and expanded in Smelik 1992); Van Seters 1983, 346–353; Ahlström 1984, 149; Na'aman 1992, 654; van der Toorn/Houtman 1994: 222–224. See, however, more recently Na'aman 2013, who seems now to reckon with an independent Ark Narrative.

[35] We express our thanks to Stephen Germany for providing us with portions of his new monograph (Germany 2025) after we separately arrived at the same conclusion.

Deut 17:14–20.[36] This is true even when limiting an earliest Ark Narrative to 1 Sam 4*. Therefore, in what follows, our analysis of the Ark Narrative is reflective of the position that the earliest Ark Narrative in 1 Sam 4* was composed for its present context by a Deuteronomistic author.

3. The Ark Narrative after Babylon

For literary criticism of the Ark Narrative, it is clear that "all roads lead to Babylon", no matter how one sees the earlier machinations of the Ark Narrative (if any) – catastrophe narrative or cult legend, real object from the Jerusalem temple or literary construct. After the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem, 1 Sam 4–6 was being used as one of the primary texts for reflecting upon these new life circumstances by focusing on the ark of the covenant as the physical presence of the national deity. Even those who postulate a monarchic-era origin of the Ark Narrative in one form or another agree that, by the time of the post-monarchic period, the ark "takes on greater significance for all Israel and demonstrates in its effects the power of its god, Yahweh".[37] The Ark Narrative draws a clear and explicit connection between the loss of the ark to the Philistines and the experience of exile, namely in the loss of the deity and his temple at the hands of the Babylonians. Edenburg has recently highlighted the combination of the themes of divine abandonment and godnapping[38] in 1 Sam 4–6 in order to develop "the notion of divine self-exile [as] a powerful image for explaining the disaster that overtook Judah with the Babylonian conquest".[39] Here, we explore the (seemingly secondary) connection that the text makes between "exile and exodus" alongside the motif of divine kingship that runs throughout the narrative. When focusing on these themes within the expanded Ark Narrative of 1 Sam 4–6, what emerges is the ark as a symbol of a lost era of self-determination within discussions of a future self-determination taking place in many texts across the Hebrew Bible.

3.1. Exile

The theme of exile, while inherent in the basic structure of the ark's capture in 1 Sam 4 (5–6), is referenced directly in 1 Sam 4:19–21, 22 (Heb. גלה, 2x). When the Ark Narrative is understood to have a monarchic-era core, some or all of these verses are therefore often treated as a secondary addition to the narrative.[40] Although the Babylonian exile is the most obvious context for this, Hensel has recently pointed out that the theme of "godnapping" that stands in the background to the Ark Narrative also makes reference to exile a plausible, and even sensible, component of the narrative

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[36] See the discussion in section 3.3 below.

[37] So Porzig 2009, 290.

[38] Edenburg 2020, 167; for the latter, see more extensively Hensel 2022.

[39] Edenburg 2020, 170.

[40] See, e.g., Porzig 2009, 140–141; Dietrich 2011, 211; Römer 2020, 267; Hensel 2022, 175. Cf. Edenburg 2020, 166, who sees the root כבד as a *Leitwort* for the entire narrative of 1 Sam 4–6, and hence even sometimes "employed even when unnecessary or in a rare or unusual fashion."

within a Neo-Assyrian period context.[41] The same is true for the depiction of the Philistines as representative of the hegemonic powers who take local gods from the conquered periphery into the imperial heartland. There is also no reason to assume that Samarian participation in what would become "biblical" literature stopped after 722 BCE, when an Israelite equivalent to the Judahite "exilic" period would have begun in the north. Nevertheless, even if such themes could have stemmed from the Neo-Assyrian period, the indications of editorial additions throughout 1 Sam 4–6 suggest an increased interest in the themes of loss, exile, and return within the social contexts of later eras.

Edenburg interprets the text as presenting Yhwh going into self-imposed exile as an explanation for the disaster (fundamentally, an expression of the idea that "this has happened because the deity has chosen to leave us"). Unlike other biblical texts in which the deity withdraws his presence from among the people due to their wicked actions (so, e.g., Deut 31:16–17; Jer 33:5; Ps 10:1–10), Edenburg sees the divine abandonment in the Ark Narrative as completely removed from any human agency.[42] Thus, the people need not worry about their role in affecting the deity's course of action, since "the Ark story has little interest in representing dual causality, in which the course of events are determined both by human initiative and divine direction."[43] However, this interpretation focuses on 1 Sam 4–6 as a self-contained unit. When including the material in 1 Sam 2 concerning the Elides, the loss of the Ark directly results from the wickedness of the Elide priesthood at Shiloh. The question at hand then becomes the extent of the critique of the Elides, namely, whether it should be interpreted as an anti-priest polemic more generally. We return to this question below.

This brings us to the final lines of 1 Sam 4: "The radiance (of Yhwh) has been exiled, for the Ark of God has been captured" (vv. 21–22).[44] This chapter ends with an emphatic lament over the loss of the presence of the deity, a loss placed in the hands of a corrupt priesthood according to 1 Sam 2. Nevertheless, the doubling of the statement is generally understood as an indication of later editorial activity in this area, since v. 22 is little more than a short recapitulation of v. 21. In this, at least one of the two verses is generally viewed as a later addition aimed at a smoother introduction to the narrative of exile and return of 1 Sam 5–6.[45] This serves as a more general indication that, whenever 1 Sam 4–6 was composed, the entire narrative complex saw an increase in interest in the post-monarchic period in Judah, with the journey of the ark being read in light of the historical circumstances after 587 BCE. The end result of this process is that the current ending of 1 Sam 4 "turns the triumphal campaign through Philistia into a parable of the exile".[46]

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[41] Hensel 2022, 175.

[42] Edenburg 2020, 169.

[43] Edenburg 2020, 169.

[44] Following Edenburg 2020.

[45] See once again Dietrich 2011, 211 and Hensel 2022, 175, who see v. 22 as part of the *Fortschreibung* of the original catastrophe narrative in order to shift attention back to the ark as the transition to 1 Sam 5.

[46] Porzig 2009, 141.

3.2. Exodus

If the possible editorial activity concerning the theme of exile in 1 Sam 4–6 suggests an increased interest in the narrative in the post-monarchic period, this becomes even clearer when looking at the Ark Narrative's allusions to the exodus. The direct references to the exodus are as follows:

(1) *1 Sam 4:8*: This verse introduces the first of the Ark Narrative's references back to the exodus narrative. The (apparently polytheistic) Philistines are struck with fear before the Israelites, saying to themselves, "These are the gods who struck [or "plagued"] the Egyptians with all kinds of strikes [or "plagues"] in the wilderness." The reference comes not only through the explicit reference to Egypt and the events therein but also in the use of נכה, which is characteristic of the plague narrative and is used elsewhere with Egypt as its direct object in Exod 3:20.[47] At least this verse, if not all of 1 Sam 4:6b–8, is commonly identified as a later insertion, even by scholars who see 1 Sam 4–6 as a single, unbroken narrative.[48]

(2) *1 Sam 4:9a*: Although the phrase "lest you slave for the Hebrews as they have slaved for you" is most directly referencing Judg 13:1, it is clear that the larger theme of "slavery" stands within the network of allusions to the exodus, especially in the preceding verse.[49] In addition, the phrase והייתם לאנשים in v. 9b appears to be a *Wiederaufnahme* of והיו לאנשים in v. 9aα, indicating that v.9aβ is a later addition (suggested also by the verse's absence from OG[B]). This addition to the Ark Narrative draws thematic connections between the Philistines, the enemies *par excellence* of the book of the Samuel who have earlier already "enslaved" (*עבד) the people,[50] and the imperial powers of Egypt and Babylon, whose imperialistic actions likewise deprive the people of basic human rights.

(3) *1 Sam 6:6*: This verse, like 4:8, is an explicit reference to the events of the exodus. When discussing whether or not to return the ark to the Israelites, the Philistines fearfully liken themselves to the Egyptians, who fought to no avail against letting the Israelites go and suffered great disaster for it. Although the verse can conceivably be stricken from the text without doing damage to the flow of the narrative, there are no direct indications of it being a later expansion. Therefore, should the verse be original, it would indicate that already the earliest composition of 1 Sam 5–6 was meant to be understood as a parallel to the events of the exodus from Egypt.

As Edenburg has observed, these references to the exodus should be seen as part of an extensive set of allusions to both P and non-P (particularly post-P) material in the exodus narrative (also including the "hand of Yhwh/Elohim"),[51] which itself also suggests a composition or redaction sometime in the post-monarchic period. In fact,

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[47] Edenburg 2020, 159.

[48] See Römer 2020, 266; see also Stolz 1981, 42; Dietrich 2011, 211–212. Schicklberger (1973, 85–88) identified all of vv. 5–9 as a later addition.

[49] Römer 2020, 266; Germany 2025; see also Pisano 1984, 248–249.

[50] But for a nuanced analysis of this "othering", including a conscious effort to paint the Philistines as better than their exodus-tradition predecessors, the Egyptians, see recently Römer 2021.

[51] Edenburg 2020, 161–162; on the P and post-P nature of the plague narrative, see Gertz 2000, 185–188.

even setting 1 Sam 4:8 aside, it is difficult not to see the entire plaguing of the Philistines in 1 Sam 5 and the ensuing return of the ark in 1 Sam 6 as related to the plagues of the exodus narrative.[52] This should not be surprising, since the exodus narrative was an expression of foreign domination and captivity away from the homeland. Many texts in the Hebrew Bible, including both the P narrative and Deutero-Isaiah, attest to the importance of the exodus narrative to the scribal elites of Palestine after the loss of political autonomy for this very reason.[53] If the capture of the ark was meant to represent the experience of exile, then the expansion of 1 Sam 4* into the larger 1 Sam 4–6* narrative and the addition of connections with the exodus would have instilled its earliest readers with the hope that, like the time of slavery in Egypt, the state of existence in post-monarchic times was also a temporary condition from which they would be saved when the deity so willed it.

The redactional nature of the exodus motifs in 1 Sam 4 and their integrality in 1 Sam 5–6, in addition to the belief that some or all of 1 Sam 4:21–22 is redactional, are some of the points given to support the idea of a once-independent Ark Narrative. However, the scribal redaction of the Ark Narrative pointing in the direction of exodus and exile was facilitated by certain base characteristics already present in the earliest narrative. One is the ending of 1 Sam 4* with the ark's loss to the Philistines. Another, however, is the notion of divine kingship that 1 Sam 4* inherited from its literary context.

3.3. Divine Kingship

Although the experience of the Ark in the expanded 1 Sam 4–6 narrative can be paralleled with a more general hope for a freer political future for Jerusalem and Judah, another, related dynamic has received less attention but is worth highlighting in this context. There is general agreement that what takes place in 1 Sam 5–6 is a divine war against the Philistines waged by Yhwh and the ark.[54] This depiction of Yhwh as the "divine warrior" has already been discussed extensively by Miller and Roberts; as they noted, the "hand" of a deity is "common Near Eastern language for speaking about plague and pestilence, which are seen as coming from the deity".[55] Thus, in the Ark Narrative, the physical presence of the deity as the leader of the Israelite army is part of a larger conception of Yhwh as the "divine warrior" who fights against the Philistines just as he did against the Egyptians.[56]

Absent in Miller's and Roberts' formulation, however, is the next logical step: Yhwh's status as a "divine warrior" as part of his larger role as the "divine warrior-

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[52] In addition to Edenburg 2020, 161–162 and Römer 2020, 273, see also Porzig 2009, 146–174; Dietrich 2011, 217–218; Hensel 2022, 174.

[53] So, e.g., Baltzer et al. 2016, 20, who describe Deutero-Isaiah as "a work whose theme is preeminently the exodus."

[54] So, e.g., Edenburg 2020: "Yahweh chooses to depart from Israel and allows the symbol of his presence to be seized by the Philistines. In doing so, he allows the Israelites to suffer defeat, but he continues to wage his own war on Philistine soil" (168). See also Schicklberger 1973, 96–99; Stolz 1981, 42; Porzig 2009, 137. Although Dietrich emphasizes the passivity of the ark in its trip through Philistia (2011, 259), he also refers to it as a "Trojan horse" (2011, 277).

[55] Miller/Roberts 1977, 63, and more fully 63–66.

[56] Miller/Roberts 1977, 64.

king", present also in 1 Sam 4–6.[57] While 1 Sam 4–6 features both Israelite and Philistine priests as well as the "lords of the Philistines", its depictions of Israel lack any kingly office.[58] This, like the "pan-Israelite ideal" that defines the text,[59] is most likely a product of its current literary context leading to the institution of the Israelite monarchy and not a feature of a previously independent narrative. The opening of the book of Samuel shares the Deuteronom(ist)ic ambivalence towards the monarchy found also in Deuteronomic law of the king in Deut 17:14–20.[60] This law paints a picture of a monarchy that exists only from the impetus of the people and is very limited in function. Whether this law and the larger Deuteronomistic attitude that produced it is *antagonistic* against monarchy and/or reflects the thought world of an author living under imperial rather than local monarchic rule need not be addressed here; its importance lies in its recognition of human monarchy as a less-than-ideal, if inevitable, political circumstance. This is made no clearer than in 1 Sam 8, a direct reception of Deut 16–17 aimed at exactly the loss of the Eden-like state of the divine monarchy. While in 1 Sam 1–7 it is the corrupt (Elide) priesthood that brings about the loss of the Ark and the divine presence, 1 Sam 8 draws upon Deut 17:14b to suggest that divine monarchy (1 Sam 8:7) gave way to human monarchy due to human failings more generally. Although 1 Sam 8 is one of the latest texts in the books of Samuel,[61] it is clear that even without the chapter, the Deuteronom(ist)ic ambivalence towards human kingship shaped the staging of 1 Sam 1–7*, including the texts of the Ark Narrative.[62]

4. Of Prophets, Priests, and Kings:
Political Debate between the Ark Narrative and Other Ark Texts

Up to this point, we have spoken primarily about the formation of the "Ark Narrative" in 1 Sam 4–6 with minimal discussion of its companion narrative in 2 Sam 6, in which David delivers the ark to Jerusalem. The possibility that the original Ark Narrative ended in 1 Sam 4* with the loss of the ark to the Philistines creates the problem that a cultic object now so intimately tied to the Jerusalem temple was originally no Jerusalemite cultic object at all and only became such through the *Fortschreibung* of the books of Samuel, namely, through the resuscitation of the "lost ark" through the composition of 1 Sam 5–6* and its ultimate ascription to a Jerusalemite cultic context in 2 Sam 6; 1 Kgs 8. In this section, we discuss a few of the traditions that grew up

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[57] See recently Flynn 2014 and the review of earlier research on pp. 5–16 therein.

[58] Cf. Van Seters 1983, 346–353; Smelik 1989, esp. 130; Germany 2025.

[59] Ahlström 1984: 149.

[60] See Müller 2004, 198, 202–206; Nihan 2013, 322–339, and further literature therein. See also their identification of an earliest layer (without the royal δευτερονόμιον command) in vv. 14–15a, 16a, 17, 20aαb. Cf. Achenbach 2009, 219–230 (with further literature); Otto 2016, 1454 for the view that Deut 17:14–20 is a reception of 1 Sam 8 and 10. For the distinction between the Deuteronomic and Deuteronomistic attitudes towards (human) kingship, see, e.g., Knoppers 1996; Knoppers 2001.

[61] See Nihan 2013, 332–339 and further literature therein.

[62] For the Deuteronomic conception of kingship in light of Deut 17:14–20*, see further Müller 2004, 197–213.

around this "lost ark" in the time after the composition of its being rescued from the Philistines.

Jeremiah 3:16–17 contains an oracle about the future of Jerusalem, in which the city "shall be called the throne of the LORD, and all nations shall gather to it" (v. 17; NRSV). This last clause makes clear that in this conception of the ideal Jerusalem, it will not be lorded over by the Assyrians, or the Babylonians, or the Persians, or any other foreign imperial power. Instead, *it* will be the center of the world, rather than Nineveh, Babylon, or the like. In this ideal future, Jeremiah sharply notes that "they shall no longer say, 'The ark of the covenant of the LORD.' It shall not come to mind, or be remembered, or be missed; nor shall another one be made" (v. 16; NRSV).

Although Jer 3:16–17 is speaking against such rhetoric and turning it on its head, the verses thus attest to a "longing" for the ark by others that is distinctly *political* in nature. In the "past/present/future" conception presented in Jeremiah, others use the memory of the "lost ark" to look back to a lost, glorified Jerusalem of the past. The Jeremiah text speaks against this present longing by promising an idyllic Jerusalem of the future in which Yhwh is king over not just Jerusalem but the whole earth (thus in agreement with 1 Sam 4–6 concerning the ideal nature of divine kingship). In this context, Edenburg has noted how the ark "play[s] a significant role in the way that the past is imagined and constructed" in the book of Jeremiah, and how the ark in this context is meant to impart hope to its readers by serving as a "'sit[e] of memory'... for the restoration of divine presence and its attending providence".[63] As Römer has recently discussed, it seems that the two verses in Jer 3:16–17 are a later addition into their present literary context.[64] Exactly *how* late is difficult to answer; at a minimum, they seem to presuppose the early Persian period and a discussion about what to do about the lost ark in the Second Temple.[65] Thus, this text must be contextualized within other competing associations between Jeremiah, the ark, and the (political) restoration of Jerusalem that arose in the centuries after its destruction.

The Hellenistic Jewish historian Eupolemus, writing in the mid-second century BCE, mentions that Jeremiah saved the ark and the tablets of the law from the spoils that Nebuchadnezzar carried off to Babylon.[66] A more extensive idea is then reported in 2 Macc 2:5–7, part of the so-called "Second Epistle" fronting the second book of Maccabees. This was a separate work from the book that follows in ch. 3 and seemingly written originally, unlike what follows, in a Semitic language.[67] Contra Jer 3, which dismisses the memory of the ark amid the promise of a time of political renewal, and seemingly building upon the tradition attested in Eupolemus, 2 Maccabees tells of Jeremiah saving the ark, along with other objects of cultic or religious value such as the tabernacle and Aaron's staff, by *hiding* it in a place that is to remain unknown until Yhwh himself returns the ark to the people at a future time of his choosing. There are

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[63] Edenburg 2020, 171.

[64] See Römer 2019.

[65] See Römer 2019, 65 and Schäfer-Lichtenberger 2000, 235.

[66] The surviving fragments of Eupolemus's work are mediated through quotations by Alexander Polyhistor, who was in turn quoted and preserved in Eusebius, *Praeparatio evangelica* (here 9.39).

[67] See, e.g., Goldstein 1983, 154–160; Schwartz 2008, 129–134.

multiple ways of understanding the history of this literary nexus: The connection between Jeremiah and the ark may be rooted in the oracle of Jer 3:16–17,[68] with later authors developing Jeremiah's mention of the ark into a fuller tradition about him saving it (seemingly contrary to the original purpose of the text). Or, the oracle could have been inserted into Jer 3 as a reaction against the Jeremiah/ark tradition as attested in Eupolemus and 2 Maccabees, speaking against the hope of the return of the ark through the mouth of the prophet who was supposedly responsible for its survival.

Whatever the case may be, the exact relationship between these traditions (Jer 3; Eupolemus; 2 Macc 2) is less pertinent for the present purposes than the fact that they attest to an ongoing dialogue about the fate of the ark and its role in the future Jerusalem. These texts attest to the ark having become an avenue through which people "remember" or "invent" the past – not only a past in which the deity's presence was among the people in the Jerusalem temple, or a past before the people were scattered to the ends of the earth, but a past that was defined by a sense of political autonomy. This is, of course, a defining theme throughout the books of Samuel. However, the idea of political self-determination expressed through the ark is not monolithic but takes several different forms. Even once the idea of independence has been established and tied to the ark, the question remains as to who within Israel should exercise power. Several competing positions emerge, which articulate the role of God, priest, and king in different ways. It is here that the aforementioned "social availability" of the ark is fully expressed, allowing competing actors to argue over the same discursive element by mobilizing different aspects of the element in question (here, the ark). By the time of this competitive discourse, the ark of the covenant was no longer in Jerusalem (if it was ever there at all), and we begin to see clearly in the class of post-monarchic "literati", as the producers and propagators of biblical literature, the bearers of these divergences of political nature expressed in the texts about the ark.[69]

As discussed above, 1 Sam 4–6 and certain related texts support a political vision in which God is the one and only king. Nevertheless, these texts do so in the context of a triangular relationship with the institutions of human kingship and priesthood. We have already mentioned the absence of human kingship in 1 Sam 4–6, yet there are also several signs of antagonism against Israelite priests in this text.[70] Firstly, although there is a strong anti-Elide polemic running from 1 Sam 2 to 1 Sam 4, the expansion of the Ark Narrative in 1 Sam 5–6 may also be ambivalent or antagonistic towards Israelite priests more broadly. With 1 Sam 6:15 bracketed out as a later addition,[71] no Israelite priests or Levites handle the Ark after its return from Philistia, whether in Beth Shemesh or Kiriath-jearim. Secondly, the birth of Ichabod in 1 Sam 4:19–22 underscores the idea of God departing from Israel because of the priests. Finally, as Cat Quine has shown,

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[68] So, e.g., Holladay 1981, 120–121.

[69] See esp. the work of Ehud Ben Zvi for Persian-period literati and the construction of "social memory", namely Ben Zvi 2019 and further works cited in Ben Zvi 2019, 3–4 n. 3.

[70] For 1 Sam 6:15 as a later insertion blaming the rejection of Beth Shemesh upon the people, rather than the Levites, offering sacrifices, see Edenburg 2020, 157. There is also the matter that it is the *Philistine* priests who seem to be the only people in the entire narrative with enough awareness of the situation to bring any order to it.

[71] See Edenburg 2020, 158; Römer 2020, 270 n. 78; Germany 2025.

the death of Eli at the gate of Shiloh may indicate both the failure of Eli and the transfer of his judgeship *to Yhwh*.[72] Thus, the text reflects a discourse characteristic of what Martin Buber called a "theocratic" perspective on the kingship of God.[73] Yet even with 1 Sam 6:15 included, there are still no priests aiding in the ark's arrival at its (pen)ultimate resting place at Kiriath-jearim. In this way, the expanded Ark Narrative in 1 Sam 4–6 presents a political fiction mobilizing the ark in which God is not dependent on priests as intermediaries.

First Samuel 4–6 should therefore be seen as running counter to other texts about the ark that present pro-priestly or pro-Levite agendas. For example, Jaeyoung Jeon has recently discussed the quite significant role that the ark plays in the generally pro-Levitical perspective of the Chronicler in presenting a Levitical connection with the Davidic monarchy as superseding the priests and their Mosaic orientation.[74] Conversely, Num 3 (P) divides the care of the cultic spaces and objects that make up the tent of meeting among the different priestly families, with the custody of the ark given to the Kohathites (v. 31). In a similar vein, Exod 40 (P) tells of Moses not only preparing the entire tent of meeting but also inserting the poles of the ark and carrying the ark into the tent, all by himself (vv. 20–21). Then, there are the ark texts of Josh 3–4 and 6, which highlight the role of the priests (and Levites, in Josh 3:3) in caring for the physical manifestation of the divine presence but often subordinated to the earthly authority, Joshua.[75]

As has long been noted, 2 Sam 6 – like 1 Sam 4–6 – contains key elements of Yhwh as the divine warrior-king.[76] However, unlike its counterpart in 1 Samuel, it reflects Yhwh's kingship not on its own but through David, a human king, as the conduit of the deity's rule. At the same time, 2 Sam 6 shares the critical stance towards priests found in 1 Sam 4–6, presenting a political fiction in which the human king David acts correctly where priests and even the king's entourage fail.[77] Firstly, both Uzzah (2 Sam 6:7) and Michal (2 Sam 6:23) interact incorrectly with the ark or misunderstand it and are therefore punished, leaving David, the human king, as the only figure able to properly interact with the ark (and therefore Yhwh), even if this correct understanding can defy common sense and provoke criticism.[78] Secondly, through the divine punishment of the

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[72] Quine 2016.

[73] Buber 1932; see also Brody 2018, 81–122. Cf. the use of "theocratic" in Wellhausen 1905, and recently and notably the "theocratic revision" (*Theokratische Bearbeitung*) of the Hexateuch postulated by Achenbach 2003, who does not sharply distinguish between a "theocratic" and a "hierocratic" ideology.

[74] See Jeon 2018a; Jeon 2018b, 106–108.

[75] See further Coats 1985.

[76] See Seow 1989, 79–144.

[77] The religio-political dynamics inherent in David's procession into Jerusalem with the ark are legion, as are the academic works discussing them. See esp. Seow 1989, 1–7 for a short history of research, including the proposals that 2 Sam 6 is rooted in a yearly pro-Davidic ritual procession serving to legitimize the ruling dynasty.

[78] Concerning the story of Michal in 2 Sam 6, Daniel Bodi (2005) sees it as a criticism of the monarchy and a foreshadowing of the monarchy's collapse, with Michal's infertility rendering a complete bond between the houses of Saul and David impossible. However, 2 Sam 6, like 2 Sam 21 (which also mentions Michal), seems to be a text aimed more at criticizing Saul and his descendants

priest Uzzah associated with the site of Perez-uzzah, 2 Sam 6 presents one priest angering Yhwh and downplays the other priest, his brother Ahio. While Uzzah and Ahio bring the ark to the house of Abinadab on a cart in vv. 1–11, after Uzzah touches the ark and is killed, Ahio is forgotten and the ark is brought into Jerusalem in vv. 12–13 carried on people's shoulders.[79] Here, this downplaying of the priests is not to show that Yhwh can act on his own accord but serves to underline the power of the human king, who in this text is the cultic leader of the community, leading the music, dances, and sacrifices.[80]

As discussed above, there is a scholarly consensus that 2 Sam 6 did not come from the same hand as 1 Sam 4–6. Beyond the differences in style and vocabulary, several substantive changes related to the description of the ark can be observed. Here, it is called "the ark of God" (2 Sam 6:3b), and it is now deadly to the touch rather than to sight (cf. 1 Sam 6:19 MT and 2 Sam 6:6–7). Yet, the most significant change is that the ark is now passive in its movement and is relocated only at the king's initiative (2 Sam 6:3, 12). The agency of the ark visible in 1 Sam 5–6 has now been transferred to David, while it has also been stripped of the role of kingship, which is now filled by the human king. Reading the narrative in a synchronic perspective, Maria J. Metzler has spoken about the idea of David "taming the Ark"[81] in 2 Sam 6 to describe this loss of agency. But from a diachronic perspective in which 1 Sam 4–6 and 2 Sam 6 represent perspectives on the ark from different authors, the changes in the ark's features and comportment would be linked to the fact that the writers of 2 Sam 6 had a different view of contemporary power and politics, and they changed the ark's features and whereabouts in order to fit it with this perspective.

Although the critique of the priests, Elide or otherwise, is a common question in research on the ark narrative, it has not been adequately connected to the larger discourse on divine vs. human kingship found in the Ark Narrative and its immediate literary context.[82] Both sections of the so-called "Ark Narrative", 1 Samuel 4–6 and 2 Samuel 6, play a significant role in discussions occurring within the books of Samuel and throughout the Hebrew Bible on how the ark and its role as the physical manifestation of the divine presence among the people should be imagined. Furthermore, a focus on these questions reveals the continuity that especially 1 Sam 4–6 displays with its immediate narrative context within the books of Samuel, namely, the shift from divine to human kingship. This remains true even if, as seems to be the case, the references to the related themes of "exile and exodus" in 1 Sam 4 as well as 1 Sam 5–6 as a whole can be bracketed out of the core narrative as later redactional additions. Moreover, this should be connected with the role of the ark in other texts, such as those in Jeremiah,

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than the monarchy itself, since David always appears in a favorable light in these texts. Michal certainly speaks against David, but the text is constructed to present her as being at fault; see Bodi 2005, 40–53.

[79] Another critical stance towards the priests has been identified by Sarah Schulz (2019), who shows that David's outfit in 2 Sam 6:14 is a criticism of the position held by the priests on the cultic dress code during the Persian period, as expressed, for example, in Exod 28.

[80] See, e.g., Wright 2002.

[81] Metzler 2016, 174–222.

[82] In addition to, e.g., Myers 2022, see also the recent investigation of Shiloh at the beginning of 1 Samuel by Knittel 2019.

2 Macc 2, and Eupolemus, that use the ark to look back on a lost monarchic past. What emerges in this is an expanded Ark Narrative in 1 Sam 4–6 using the ark within an idealized divine monarchic past that is contrasted to a less-ideal human monarchic future, while other, seemingly later texts use the ark tradition to simultaneously look back longingly at a human monarchic past and forward expectantly to a divine monarchic future.

5. The Ark as a *malentendu universel*

There is, however, another step to take regarding the ark and its role as an element of political discourse in the Ark Narrative. The loss of a historical ark (if one ever existed) into the unknown, or the rescue of a literary ark (if it did not) led to great ambiguities concerning what it actually was and how it functioned. This led to a *malentendu universel* around the ark – to appropriate Baudelaire's words[83] – as shown by the conflicting literary conceptions of its nature, function, attributes,[84] and relationship to different groups and individuals. Like in a debate over the etymology of a rare object of unknown use or a minor deity of unknown function, the element serving as an interpretative lever for the entire corpus of sources remains impossible to determine with certainty.

As discussed above, the biblical authors started to take an interest in the ark long after its alleged presence in the First Temple or on the battlefield, and so if there was ever an ark, it seems likely that there would have been little information about it available to the biblical authors.[85] Therefore, when biblical texts discuss the ark, the different authors tapped not only into a shared knowledge about it but also into a shared *ignorance*. Thus, the uncertainty about the nature, qualities, relations, and whereabouts of the ark is not a problem to be solved in order to access it; from a literary/compositional perspective, it is the very nature of the ark itself. The ark is a mystery without a key, defined in its very structure by its absence of a key, yet of which certain (often competing) groups and individuals claimed (and still claim) to be the holders.

Up to this point, we have generally avoided referring to the ark as a "symbol" of something, whether of competing political ideologies or of the days of yore. Yet, the question of the "symbolic" nature of the ark is a natural consequence of the reflections on the ark presented above – particularly the observation that the ark is defined by its uncertainty. However, this also poses a problem, since not only must the symbol's referent (that which is symbolized) be defined, but also what the symbol *itself* actually is. The narrow definition of "symbol" as an object referring to a reality transcending

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[83] Baudelaire 1949, 76.

[84] For irreconcilable inconsistencies between certain biblical descriptions of the ark and the kapporet, see already de Tarragon 1981.

[85] Cf. Fisher 2018, 148–149, who concludes that a major outcome of the Ark Narrative was to make the loss of the (historical) ark "*conceivable*" to later biblical authors (here p. 148, emphasis original), who then had to reckon with its loss after the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BCE (pp. 151–152).

materiality[86] can therefore only be used with caution. "The ark (of the covenant)" is a name covering a wide range of potentialities as much on the side of the symbolized as on that of the symbol, which is limited and anchored only by a few contextually varying points of consensus defining, in the words of Jeffrey Andrew Barash, the shared "overall intelligibility"[87] of the subject. If the term "symbol" is to be maintained, it must be acknowledged as what we would call a "bilayered amphibological symbol", in which both the symbol and the symbolized are ambiguous in the dialogue of the groups having recourse to it. The opacity, which is contingent to the symbol according to Ricœur,[88] is doubled in the case of the ark: The potentiality of multiple meanings, which necessitates the hermeneutical process, is at the same time inherent within the object and within its referent.

This multi-leveled uncertainty, and the misunderstandings that arise from it, is the basis on which political discourses about the ark are built. Baudelaire underlines the oft-disregarded fact that *malentendu* is an essential part of a functioning political apparatus in a society, as expressed in his poem "Mon coeur mis à nu":

Le monde ne marche que par le Malentendu.
C'est par le Malentendu universel que tout le monde s'accorde.
Car si, par malheur, on se comprenait, on ne pourrait jamais s'accorder.[89]

In her latest book, Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney used this poem to talk about the use of communicative opacity in political spaces.[90] The topic at hand, however, requires a slight shift away from these ideas. If there is a *malentendu* over the ark, it is not the condition of a common agreement on the ark's nature, as Baudelaire would suggest, but the condition of a structured disagreement, in other words, *a debate*. The ark is therefore like one of the "zones of awkward engagement, where words mean something different across a divide even as people agree to speak" studied by Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing.[91] Of course, this kind of debate must be seen as the total antithesis of the seventh aphorism of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*: "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent."[92] Paradoxically, by introducing disagreement on the subject of discourse, this *malentendu* allows people to debate aspects of a single idea, such as the presence of the deity or ideal political rule in the case of the ark texts.[93] As the foregoing discussion has attempted to show, it is the looseness of the ark that gave it its impact and turned it into one of the main symbols of nationhood in post-monarchic contexts.

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[86] As, e.g., found in Tillich 1958.

[87] Barash 2017.

[88] Pavan 2015; Ricœur 1969, 35.

[89] Baudelaire 1949, 76.

[90] Ohnuki-Tierney 2015.

[91] Tsing 2005.

[92] Wittgenstein 1922, 90.

[93] It must be kept in mind that biblical authors were aware of their polemical use of the question of the nature and whereabouts of the ark, as is shown in particular by Jer 3, which critiques its contemporary opponents on the reproducibility – and therefore the uniqueness – of the ark.

Postscript

The type of politically charged discourse involving the ark did not stop with the end of the writing of the Hebrew Bible or even the closure of the canon. The *malentendu* has remained available to certain groups throughout history (primarily Jews, Christians, and Muslims) who have mobilized it according to the same mechanisms already presented. As recently discussed by Steven D. Fraade,[94] in order to counter the influence of contemporary Rabbinic Judaism on his followers, John Chrysostom focused on the question of the ark's features at a time when Jews were making reproductions of the ark in synagogues: "What sort of ark is it that the Jews now have, where we find no propitiatory, no tables of the law, no holy of holies, no veil, no high priest, no incense, no holocaust, no sacrifice, none of the other things that made the ark of old solemn and august?"[95] Eivor Andersen Oftestad has also shown how the medieval idea of the ark of the covenant being in Rome served a political discourse about the failures of the Crusades and the preponderance of Rome over Jerusalem.[96] These mechanisms have not ceased to function and remain observable even today. For example, in 2012, Jaap Timmer showed how the evangelical Deep Sea Canoe Movement's claim to possession of the ark of the covenant served a theocratic and secessionist political ideology on the island of Malaita in the Solomon Islands.[97] There are many other ancient and modern examples, and treating them all would represent a work of its own. What these discourses make clear, however, is that the day when everyone agrees on the ark is the day in which the ark as we know it will cease to exist; finding a complete consensus on the ark is tantamount to destroying it. To assign a precise nature and function to the ark is not to solve its mystery, but to produce, in Baudrillard's terms, a *simulacrum*[98] of the ark. In short: The ark cannot exist without its veil.

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[94] Fraade 2019.

[95] Chrysostom, *Discourses against Judaizing Christians*, 6.72 (1979, 172–173).

[96] Oftestad 2019.

[97] Timmer 2012.

[98] Baudrillard 1981.

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Proximity to David, Proximity to Yhwh

Foreigners in the David Narratives

Jürg Hutzli

The books of Samuel reflect several distinct features compared to other biblical books.[1] Claus Westermann has shown that their literary genre differs from that of the other historical books, especially from that of the books of Kings.[2] While in 1–2 Kings brief historical reports predominate, in 1–2 Samuel the narrative style is more elaborate. In many of the narratives, human nature and human emotions play an important role, and the lives of individuals are affected by fateful events. Moreover, the books of Samuel contain many details concerning the social background of the main protagonists. For example, they present relatively long family trees of Samuel and Saul as well as the names of David's officials and elite warriors (such as the "thirty heroes" in 2 Sam 23). On the whole, the books of Samuel mention an astonishingly high number of individuals. When the entire cast of major and minor characters in the narratives and lists in Samuel is taken together, it is striking to note that many "foreigners" (Philistines, Ammonites, Moabites, Hittites, etc.) are among these characters. A particularly large number of foreigners appear in the narratives relating to David.

The present study investigates the many passages in the books of Samuel that refer to non-Israelites. In light of the different occurrences, one must first ask to what extent "foreigners" can be identified as such and differentiated from native Israelites or Judahites. In what follows, I will inquire into the image of foreigners in the David narratives and the role that they play therein. How does their role relate to various Deuteronomistic passages in the other historical books? A further focus of the study will be on the striking fact that the books of Samuel often non-Israelites in close connection to Yhwh. The final section of the study will focus, finally, on the literary-historical place of the many passages that reveal a special interest in foreigners.

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[1] The present contribution is a revised and translated version of my article "Nähe zu David, Nähe zu Jhwh. Fremdstämmige in den Daviderzählungen", published in W. Dietrich (ed.), *Seitenblicke. Nebenfiguren im zweiten Samuelbuch*, Fribourg: Academic Press/Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011, pp. 71–90. I thank Stephen Germany for his meticulous translation and for the stimulating and fruitful discussion on the literary-historical setting of the passages treated herein.

[2] Westermann 1994, 58–59.

1. Foreigners in the David Narratives

References to foreigners in the David narratives can be divided into two groups. The first group includes a variety of leaders of neighboring tribal territories and kingdoms such as Moab, Gath, Geshur, and Tyre:

– According to 1 Sam 22:3–4, David's parents find refuge with the *king of Moab* during the time of Saul's pursuit of David.
– According to 1 Sam 27:1–28:2 (cf. also 1 Sam 29), David finds refuge from Saul with the Philistine prince *Achish of Gath*, who treats David positively and rewards him with the city of Ziklag.[3]
– According to 2 Sam 3:3, David married *Maacha*, the daughter of *Talmai*, king of the small Aramean kingdom of Geshur. David's third-oldest son, Absalom, stems from this marriage.
– *Hiram of Tyre* is another king with whom David maintains good relations; Hiram builds the royal palace for David (2 Sam 5:11).
– *Shobi*, a son of the *Ammonite* king Nahash, together with *Machir* from (the non-Israelite?[4]) town of *Lo-Debar* and with Barzillai the Gileadite a large quantity of beds, covers, earthen vessels and foodstuffs to David and his men during their flight from Absalom (2 Sam 17:27).
– In the narrative in 2 Sam 21:1–14, David fulfills the *Gibeonites'* request for revenge against Saul. According to 2 Sam 21:2, and in agreement with Josh 9, the Gibeonites are portrayed as non-Israelites ("Amorites").[5]

Many passages in the David narratives also describe David's relationships with foreigners who reside in Israel and who serve David (whether as warlord or as king) in important positions.

   – In the story of David's sparing of Saul's life in the wilderness of Ziph, David meets *Ahimelech the Hittite*. Together with Joab's brother Abishai, Ahimelech serves as one of David's most trusted elite warriors (cf. 1 Sam 26:6). Interpreters are in disagreement over how the expression "Hittite" in the narratives in 1–2 Samuel (as well as in the book of Genesis) should be understood. P. Kyle McCarter assumes that the "Hittites" Ahimelech and Uriah (on the latter, see below) are descendants of a "neo-Hittite" population in Syria that increasingly took on Semitic influences over the centuries.[6] According to Manfred Hutter, in contrast, "Hittite" is an umbrella term for various "non-Israelite" ethnic groups in Palestine.[7]

   – *Obed-Edom the Gittite* plays an important role in transporting the ark to Jerusalem. After the fatal incident with one of the bearers of the ark, Usa, the ark remains in the house of Obed-Edom for three months (2 Sam 6:10–12). After David perceives that Yhwh has blessed the house of Obed-Edom, he brings the ark to Jerusalem. It is not certain that Obed-Edom comes from the Philistine city of Gath, since there is also a town in Israel, Gittaim, that contains the element "Gath", which means simply "wine

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[3] In contrast, according to the tradition in 1 Sam 21:11–16, David is not accepted by Achish.
[4] Cf. Edelman 1992, 345–346 and Amos 6:13.
[5] There are several indications that this narrative may be a later addition within the "appendix" to the books of Samuel (2 Sam 21–24) (see Hutzli 2011).
[6] McCarter 1984, 285–286; see also McMahon 1992, 231–233.
[7] Hutter 1992, 144.

press" (2 Sam 4:3).[8] However, all of the other passages that use the gentilic גתי "Gittite"[9] clearly have individuals from the Philistine city of Gath in view. If 2 Sam 6:10–12 had an Israelite town of Gath/Gittaim in view rather than the Philistine city of Gath, we would expect this to be made clear here.[10]

– *Uriah the Hittite*, whose death in battle David arranges after the affair with Bathsheba (2 Sam 11), is, according to 2 Sam 23:39, one of David's thirty elite warriors.

– The military leader *Ittai the Gittite*[11] plays an important role in David's battle with Absalom, leading one of David's three armies (2 Sam 15:19–22; 18:2, 5, 12). After Achish and Obed-Edom, Ittai is the third Gittite who plays an important role in the David narratives. In the books of Samuel, Gath is the most frequently mentioned and most important city of the Philistine pentapolis. David's relationships with Philistines are thus ambivalent: On the one hand, he fights against them in battle, and on the other hand, he maintains friendly relations with them.

– David's corps of bodyguards is composed of members of two foreign tribes ("*Cherethites/Cretans*" and "*Pelethites*"; see 1 Sam 30:14; 2 Sam 8:18; 15:18; 20:7, 23; 1 Kgs 1:38, 44). It is not known whether the gentilic כרתי "Cherethite/Cretan" refers to Philistines as a whole, to a subgroup of Philistines, or to a distinct ethnic group.[12]

– David's counselor ("friend") *Hushai the Archite* (ארכי, see 2 Sam 15:32; 16:16; 17:5, 14) thwarts the advice of Ahitophel. Here it is an open question whether Archites are considered to be "foreigners" in the books of Samuel. According to Josh 16:2, the territory of the Archites is located in the border region of the tribe of Joseph. Almost all commentators of the passage in question assume that this territory is a Canaanite enclave.[13] In 2 Sam 15–17, the notable frequency with which Hushai is labeled explicitly as an "Archite" could speak in favor of the view that he is viewed as a foreigner in those chapters (see further below).

– Just as his rebellious son Absalom does, David himself makes *Amasa* the leader of the Israelite army (in place of Joab; see 2 Sam 19:14). According to the presumably older tradition preserved in 2 Sam 17:25 LXX[A] and 1 Chr 2:17, Amasa is the son of an *Ishmaelite*.[14]

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[8] Cf. Anderson 1989, 68–69 and Bar-Efrat 2009, 69.

[9] Cf. Josh 13:3; 2 Sam 15:18, 19, 22; 18:2; 21:19; 1 Chr 13:13; 20:5.

[10] Most commentators regard Philistine Gath as Obed-Edom's place of origin; see Smith 1899, 293–295; Herzberg 1983, 224; Maucheline 1971, 224; Stolz 1981, 216; McCarter 1984, 170.

[11] The gentilic here undoubtedly refers to Philistine Gath.

[12] Cf. Ehrlich 1992, 898–899. According to 1 Sam 30:14, the "Cherethites" resided in the Negev. In Ezek 25:16 and Zeph 2:5, כרתים is used in parallel with פלשתים.

[13] Cf. Hertzberg 1953, 101; Soggin 1970, 134; Boling 1982, 397; Görg 1991, 77.

[14] Different textual witnesses of 2 Sam 17:25 render Amasa's ethnicity/place of origin differently: Mt has the more difficult reading הישראלי "the Israelite"; LXX[L] reflects *היזרעאלי "the Jezreelite." LXX[A] and 1 Chr 2:17 reflect the reading הישמעאלי "the Ishmaelite." The latter reading ("the Ishmaelite") is the most likely to have provoked textual change: A scribe could have viewed the fact that a foreigner is depicted as leading the Israelite army as problematic. Many interpreters regard "the Ishmaelite" as the original reading (Geiger 1857, 361–362; Driver 1890, 252; Smith 1988, 355; McCarter 1984, 391–392). In contrast, Knauf 1989, 12 regards הישראלי "the Israelite" as the original reading (which the author of Chronicles, so Knauf, felt to be pleonastic and thus changed it to "the Ishmaelite"). However, it should be noted that the term הישראלי occurs nowhere else in the books of

– Besides Uriah, two additional non-Israelites are mentioned in the list of David's elite warriors in 2 Sam 23: *Yigal*, the son of Nathan, from the small Aramean state of Zoba (2 Sam 23:36) and *Zelek the Ammonite* (2 Sam 23:37).

2. Terminological Differences between Israelites/Judahites and Foreigners in the Books of Samuel

In the books of Samuel, the number of foreigners who have contact with David or are part of his entourage is striking. At this point, we should stop and reflect on whether the term "foreigner" (in contrast to "native" Israelites) is a suitable designation for the various individuals mentioned in the books of Samuel, since it could be the case that it is not possible to differentiate clearly between "foreigners" and "natives" in these books.

The specific terms that the Hebrew Bible uses for "foreigners" and "sojourners" appear only rarely in the books of Samuel. The term גר "sojourner" is used only once: the Amalekite who conveys the news of Saul's death to David in 2 Sam 1:1–16 describes himself as such. In a dialogue between David and Ittai the Gittite, David refers to the latter as a "foreigner" (נכרי).[15] These two terms appear nowhere else in the books of Samuel.[16] However, in many other passages, people of non-Israelite origin can be identified as such through the use of gentilic adjectives, which are used very rarely for Israelites and Judahites. This difference is relevant for the terminological differentiation between Israelites and foreigners: Ittai, the Philistine general, who is mentioned only briefly in 2 Sam 15:19–22 and 18:2, 5, 12, is referred to as a Gittite three times.[17] In 2 Sam 11–12, Uriah is labeled as a "Hittite" no fewer than seven times.[18] In the story of David's sparing of Saul in the wilderness of Ziph, two of David's close supporters are mentioned. One of them, Ahimelech, is referred to as a Hittite, whereas the reference to the second person, the Bethlehemite Abishai, lacks a reference to Abishai's place of origin. The gentilic adjective is for Israelites and Judahites almost absent.[19] For the characters Joab, Abishai, Asael, Benaiah, Zadok, and Nathan, who are mentioned relatively frequently, it is never used.[20] *The frequent reference to one's place of origin for foreigners is certainly intentional and not coincidental; meaning is assigned to the fact that Uriah, Ahimelech, and Ittai are of non-Israelite origin*. In his treatment of a

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Samuel and occurs elsewhere in the Tanakh only in Lev 24:10. Furthermore, in my view, it is more difficult to imagine why a later scribe would have regarded the reading הישראלי as problematic.

[15] The rare term תושב appears nowhere in the books of Samuel. On the terms גר and נכרי, see Martin-Achard 1971, 409–412; Kellermann 1973, 983–991.

[16] In 2 Sam 4:3, the verb גור "to reside as a sojourner/resident alien" is used in connection with the Bechorites who had fled to Gittaim.

[17] Cf. 2 Sam 15:19, 22; 18:2. The name Ittai also appears in 2 Sam 15:21; 18:5, 12.

[18] 2 Sam 11:3, 6, 17, 21, 24; 12:9, 10. In 2 Sam 11–12, the name "Uriah" appears 22 times.

[19] In one case, the gentilic is also used multiple times for a Judahite: In 1 Sam 16–17, Jesse is called a "Bethlehemite" three times (only twice in the LXX): 1 Sam 16:1, 18; 17:58 (MT). What the three texts have in common is that the gentilic is used in direct speech. The specification was probably intended to identify Jesse respectively David for the recipient of the speech.

[20] Nathan and Zadok, who are perhaps of Jerusalemite origin (see section 3 below), seem to be treated as "natives" in the text.

Ugaritic personnel list (RS 11.840), Pierre Bordreuil likewise regards the use of the gentilic as a literary device that serves to differentiate between foreigners and natives.[21] As mentioned above, Hushai is also likely depicted as a foreigner, since he is referred to as an "Archite" four times in the story of Absalom's revolt.[22] His opponent, the more frequently mentioned Judahite Ahitophel, is referred to in terms of his place of origin ("Gilonite") only once, when he is first introduced.[23] In the case of Hushai, however, the following consideration must be kept in mind: While there is no question that the authors of the books of Samuel made a clear distinction between native Israelites/Judahites on the one hand and Philistines, Moabites, Amalekites, etc. on the other, there was probably also a gray area in between: certain tribes and clans were possibly perceived as distinct ethnic groups yet still closely related to Israel. Groups such as Archites and possibly also Gileadites could have occupied such a position (see Barzillai the Gileadite's intervention, together with Shobi the Ammonite, on behalf of David in 2 Sam 17:27).[24]

Nothing is said in the books of Samuel about the legal status of foreigners living in Israel. There are no indications that they had a different status from native Israelites. As the example of Uriah the Hittite shows, they had access to high positions in David's army.

3. The Significance of Foreigners in the David Narratives

It is undeniable that the authors of the books of Samuel had a special interest in foreigners in David's social entourage. This raises the question of the role that foreigners play in the books of Samuel and whether any general tendencies can be observed.

In the David narratives, foreigners are often portrayed positively. The actions of certain foreigners are highly significant for David and are sometimes a matter of life and death: When David is being pursued by Saul, he is given asylum by Achish, and David's parents find refuge with the king of Moab. The fact that the ark is ultimately able to be transported to Jerusalem safely is due in large part to the Gittite Obed-Edom. In the suppression of Absalom's rebellion, Ittai the Gittite (as one of David's three generals) and Hushai the Archite (as David's agent and disingenuous advisor to Absalom) both play very important roles. In addition, the material assistance that David receives from Shobi the Ammonite and others is crucial. Without the support of all of these foreign individuals, Absalom would likely not have been overcome and David would not have been able to reestablish his rule.

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[21] Bordreuil 2010, 28. In the text in question, a Canaanite, an Ashdodite, and an Egyptian are given special emphasis through the use of the gentilic.

[22] 2 Sam 15:32; 16:16; 17:5, 14 (in LXX^B also in 17:15). The name Hushai is mentioned eleven times in 2 Sam 15–17.

[23] Cf. 2 Sam 15:12. Ahitophel is mentioned fifteen times in 2 Sam 15–17. He is mentioned one further time in 2 Sam 23:34 in the list of David's thirty warriors, there as the father of Eliam. As is the case with almost all of the names in the list, the gentilic is used for Ahitophel as well.

[24] On Barzillai the Gileadite, cf. Rudnig 2009: "der … wegen seiner ostjordanischen Herkunft halb als Fremder gilt."

The many positive references to foreigners in the books of Samuel stand in stark contrast to the negative Deuteronomistic image of foreign nations, which depicts foreigners as a "snare for Israel".[25] From the six (or in some cases seven) nations which, according to the Deuteronomistic texts Exod 33:2; 34:11; Deut 7:1; 20:17; Josh 3:10, should have been driven out or wiped out at the time of the conquest, the Hittites and Jebusites are mentioned in 1–2 Samuel. Here, they do not have a negative connotation: The Hittites Ahimelech and Uriah are among David's elite warriors. The opaque report of David's seizure of power in Jerusalem (2 Sam 5:6–9) makes no mention of the expulsion or extermination of Jebusites. According to 2 Sam 24, the Jebusite Arauna sells David his threshing floor. The important and characters of Nathan and Zadok, who are portrayed positively, should possibly be understood as Jerusalemites.[26]

The important place that individual foreigners hold in the David narratives is reminiscent of the "foreigner-friendly" perspective of the book of Ruth. Here, Ruth the Moabite holds an important place among David's ancestors. Readers of the book of Ruth can conclude that without Ruth's love for Naomi and without her advances toward Boaz, Boaz' genealogy would have been a different one and would not have led to King David. Without Ruth the Moabite, there would be no King David. In this respect, the book of Ruth can be read as a "foreigner-friendly" preface to the books of Samuel (note the placement of Ruth before Samuel in the Septuagint). The books of Samuel, for their part, also connect well to the book of Ruth since, as was discussed above, David receives significant support from foreigners.[27]

A balanced discussion of David's relations with foreigners in the books of Samuel must also mention, however, the reports of tensions and wars with foreigners. At the beginning of 2 Sam 10–12, David sends messengers to Rabbah, the capital of Ammon, in order to give his condolences to Hanun, the son of the deceased king Nahash. The Ammonites are distrustful and treat the messengers in a demeaning manner. This leads to a war between the Israelites and the Ammonites and their allies. What is noteworthy about this narrative, however, is that it begins with a friendly gesture by David toward a foreign ruler. In this respect, it fits well within the overall picture of David's friendly relations with foreigners. On the other hand, the summary report of David's wars against neighboring nations in 2 Sam 8 does not fit well within this picture. For example, David's brutal treatment of the Moabites in 2 Sam 8:2 (where he has the defeated Moabites lie on the ground and has two-thirds of them executed) stands in stark contrast to the Moabite king's treatment of David's family in 1 Sam 22:3–4 (where he offers them protection). Further texts that contrast with the David's positive interactions with

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[25] Cf. Exod 23:33; 34:12; Deut 7:16, 25; Josh 23:13; Judg 2:3; Ps 106:34–36.

[26] On the basis of the information provided in the text, it is difficult to determine Nathan's historical position and function (cf. Görg 1995, 902–903; Oswald 2008). Among the various hypotheses regarding Zadok's descent, the most likely seems to be the idea that he was a member of the Jebusite priesthood of Jerusalem; cf. Dahmen 2001, 1149–1151.

[27] Here, it is noteworthy that it is the king of Moab who provides refuge to David's parents. According to the book of Ruth, David's father Jesse was the grandson of Ruth the Moabite.

foreigners as discussed above include the report of David's encounter with Doeg the Edomite (1 Sam 21:8) and with the anonymous Amalekite (2 Sam 1:1–16).[28]

4. Foreigners with a Connection to Yhwh

In addition to the general observation of David's close and positive relations with non-Israelites, a more specific phenomenon can also be observed: Some of these foreigners seem to have a close connection to Yhwh. The books of Samuel refer to foreigners swearing by Yhwh, turning to Yhwh in times of need, handling the ark of Yhwh competently, or having a Yhwh-theophoric name.

(1) In 1 Sam 29:6, during the muster of the Philistine troops in Aphek, the "princes of the Philistines" do not allow David and his men to fight on their side against Israel. David is indignant over this decision, or at least feigns indignance. David's patron, Achish of Gath, tries to appease him by reiterating the high esteem in which he, Achish, holds David. In doing so, he invokes Yhwh in an oath (introduced by חי יהוה, "as Yhwh lives") in order to drive his message home:

Then Achish called David and said to him, "As Yhwh lives, you have been honest, and to me it seems right that you should march out and in with me in the campaign; for I have found nothing wrong in you from the day of your coming to me until today." (1 Sam 29:6a)

(2) During Absalom's rebellion, David inspects his servants, officials, and soldiers, who demonstrate their willingness to leave Jerusalem with him. Among these individuals is the Philistine general Ittai, who commands a group of 600 Philistine mercenaries. David tells Ittai to return to the king (here he means Absalom) and wishes him Yhwh's support:

Then the king said to Ittai the Gittite, "Why are you also coming with us? Go back, and stay with the king; for you are a foreigner, and also an exile from your home. 20 You came only yesterday, and shall I today make you wander about with us, while I go wherever I can? Go back, and take your kinsfolk with you; and may Yhwh show steadfast love and faithfulness to you." (2 Sam 15:19–20)

At the end of v. 20, the translation provided above follows the reading of the reconstructed *Vorlage* of the Septuagint.[29] Most interpreters assume that the shorter reading of MT[30] is the result of textual loss due to parablepsis.[31] According to the

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[28] In 1 Sam 22:6–23, Doeg is depicted completely negatively. However, there are numerous indications that this story is a late interpolation directed against Saul; see Hutzli 2009, 185–208.

[29] LXX[B,A]: ἐπιστρέφου καὶ ἐπίστρεψον τοὺς ἀδελφούς σου μετὰ σοῦ καὶ κύριος ποιήσει μετὰ σοῦ ἔλεος καὶ ἀλήθειαν. Reconstructed *Vorlage*: שוב והשב את אחיך עמך ויעש יהוה עמך חסד ואמת ("Return and bring your brothers with you; may Yhwh treat you mercifully and loyally!"). LXX[L] also contains the plus and places three verbs at the beginning of the sentence (πορεύου καὶ ἀνάστρεφε καὶ ἀπόστρεφε ...).

[30] שוב והשב את אחיך עמך חסד ואמת "Return and bring your brothers with you; steadfast love and faithfulness be with you!" A copyist of the proto-MT presumably left out ויעש יהוה עמך after עמך due to the repetition of the word עמך in the original sentence.

[31] Cf. Wellhausen 1871, 197; Driver 1890, 243; Barthélemy 1982, 274; McCarter 1984, 365.

presumably older reading of the Septuagint, David wishes Ittai Yhwh's support while he remains in Jerusalem.

Like in Ruth's response to Naomi in the book of Ruth, Ittai the Philistine refuses to follow David's advice. Even in this difficult situation, he is committed to serving David. Notably, Ittai, like Achish, also responds to David by invoking Yhwh in an oath:

But Ittai answered the king, "As Yhwh lives, and as my lord the king lives, wherever my lord the king may be, whether for death or for life, there also your servant will be." (2 Sam 15:21)

In the case of both Achish and Ittai, the following question arises: Do these two Philistines swear by Yhwh solely because of their esteem for David, such that their outward actions do not necessarily reflect an inner religious conviction?[32] Here, it must be kept in mind that oaths are by their very nature solemn speech acts in which the person uttering the oath can invoke only a power to which he or she has a close relationship. Otherwise, it would be an insincere oath. Yet in neither case is there any indication that Achish or Ittai are invoking Yhwh insincerely. Here, it is also necessary to keep in mind that the narratives in question are not simply reports of facts and events, but are stories whose motifs the narrator has consciously chosen; this reiterates the impression that the invocation of Yhwh in the oaths of these two foreigners has narrative significance. This state of affairs should also be kept in mind when considering the third passage in question:

(3) According to the text of the Septuagint, the Philistines invoke Yhwh during the second battle with the Israelites at Eben-ezer and Aphek (1 Sam 4:7). This occurs within a passage that places several different statements in the mouths of the fearful Philistines (1 Sam 4:6–9):

[6] When the Philistines heard the noise of the shouting, they said, "What does this great shouting in the camp of the Hebrews mean?" And they learned that the ark of Yhwh had come to the camp.

[7] MT And the Philistines were afraid;	[7] LXX And the Philistines were afraid
for they said, "God has come into the camp."	and said: "These gods have come to them in the camp.
They also said, "Woe to us!	Woe to us! Deliver us today, Yhwh!
For nothing like this has happened before."	For nothing like this has happened before."

[8] Woe to us! Who can deliver us from the power of these mighty gods? These are the gods who struck the Egyptians with every sort of plague in the wilderness. [9] Take courage, and be men, O Philistines, in order not to become slaves to the Hebrews as they have been to you; be men and fight." [10] So the Philistines fought; Israel was defeated, and they fled, everyone to his home. There was a very great slaughter, for there fell of Israel thirty thousand foot soldiers.

Verse 7 reflects the following differences between the MT and the Septuagint:

ויראו הפלשתים	καὶ ἐφοβήθησαν οἱ ἀλλόφυλοι
כי אמרו	καὶ εἶπον
בא אלהים אל המחנה	οὗτοι οἱ θεοὶ ἥκασιν* πρὸς αὐτοὺς εἰς τὴν παρεμβολήν
ויאמרו אוי לנו	οὐαὶ ἡμῖν ἐξελοῦ ἡμᾶς κύριε σήμερον**
כי לא היתה כזאת אתמול שלשם	ὅτι οὐ γέγονεν τοιαύτη ἐχθὲς καὶ τρίτην

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[32] Cf. McCarter 1980, 427 (with a view to 1 Sam 29:6), although he thinks it is probable that the narrator mistakenly has Achish swear by Yhwh ("this is a slip on the part of the Yahwistic narrator")!

* οὗτοι οἱ θεοὶ ἥκασιν LXX[B,A]] LXX[L]: οὗτος ὁ θεὸς αὐτῶν ἥκει

** οὐαὶ ἡμῖν ἐξελοῦ ἡμᾶς κύριε σήμερον LXX[B,L]] LXX[A]: ἐξελοῦ ἡμᾶς κύριε σήμερον οὐαὶ ἡμῖν.

The most important differences are as follows: (1) According to the text of the Septuagint, the Philistines refer to the ark as "gods"; in MT, in contrast, the singular verb form indicates that אלהים is being used as a singular proper noun ("God"). (2) The Septuagint also contains a plus, whose Hebrew *Vorlage* can be reconstructed without difficulty as הצילנו יהוה היום "deliver us, Yhwh, today!"

The reading of the Septuagint is given little attention by most interpreters. P. Kyle McCarter, one of the few commentators who mentions it, regards the plea as "impossible in the mouth of the Philistines".[33] Walter Dietrich is somewhat more cautious ("höchst ungewöhnlich").[34] In contrast, for Bernard Grillet and Michel Lestienne, who are concerned with interpreting the Greek text of Samuel,[35] it is not inconceivable that the Philistines would turn to Yhwh (with reference to the oath by Achish of Gath). They interpret 1 Sam 4:7 as follows: Unlike the Israelites, the Philistines are able to differentiate between the ark of Yhwh and Yhwh himself. They refer to the ark of Yhwh as "these gods"; in contrast, Yhwh is a living force who can be called upon for help in a threatening situation – even when the threat emanates from the very same ark that is ascribed to Yhwh.[36]

There is, however, the difficulty that the plus in the Septuagint stands in tension with v. 8a that follows, in which the question seems to remain regarding what power can deliver them: אוי לנו מי יצילנו מיד האלהים האדירים האלה "Woe to us! Who can deliver us from the power of these mighty gods?" (LXX = M). If one interprets the utterances of the Philistines in 1 Sam 4:6–9 as the *voices of different individuals*, then there is no contradiction in the different statements. This is how Shimon Bar-Efrat interprets the passage, with reference to Rashi, albeit without discussing the reading of the Septuagint.[37] According to this line of interpretation, the text of the Septuagint in 1 Sam 4:7–8 would have to be understood as follows: One Philistine calls upon Yhwh, while another asks which deity is capable of saving them. There are other passages in the Hebrew Bible in which collective speech (introduced by the plural verb ויאמרו) can be understood as discrete utterances of several individuals. George Savran has called attention to the "multivocality" of several instances of collective speech in the books of

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[33] Cf. McCarter 1980, 104.

[34] Dietrich 2010, 200.

[35] Grillet/Lestienne 1997, 164–165.

[36] Grillet/Lestienne 1997, 164–165: "Ce qui est étonnant ce n'est pas que les Étrangers invoquent le Seigneur – Ankhous, un Étranger lui aussi, jure par le Seigneur (29,6) –, mais que, tout en invoquant le Seigneur, ils parlent de 'ces dieux' à propos du coffre. Par la bouche des Étrangers, le narrateur veut, semble-t-il, exprimer ironiquement son point de vue sur l'emploi qu'Israël fait ici du coffre: Israël emporte le coffre du Seigneur comme si, ce faisant, il emportait le Seigneur ; les Étrangers, eux, sont capables de distinguer entre le Seigneur et le coffre...."

[37] Bar-Efrat 2007, 109, with reference to Rashi's interpretation of the verse: בספרי [בהעלתך, פה] שנינו שהפרשה הזו עירובי דברים: מי שאמר זו לא אמר זו "In Sifre we have read that there is a combination of speeches: The one who said this did not say that."

Samuel, Genesis, and Jonah.[38] The speech of the Philistines in 1 Sam 4:7–9 can be divided among several individual speakers as follows (the translation follows the Septuagint[39]):

[7] And the Philistines were afraid and said:
– These gods have come to them in the camp.
– Woe to us! Deliver us today, Yhwh! For nothing like this has happened before.
– [8] Woe to us! Who can deliver us from the power of these mighty gods?
– These are the gods who struck the Egyptians with every sort of plague in the wilderness.
– [9] Take courage, and be men, O Philistines, in order not to become slaves to the Hebrews as they have been to you.
– Be men and fight them!

When read in this way, the wording of the Septuagint makes good sense. The specific motif of a Philistine calling upon Yhwh also fits quite well with the aforementioned passages in Samuel in which Achish and Ittai, respectively, invoke Yhwh in their oaths.

   With regard to 1 Sam 4:7, it is not easy to determine whether the MT or the LXX reflects the more primitive reading. On the one hand, it is possible that the LXX plus goes back to a later copyist of the Septuagint's *Vorlage* or to the Greek translator. The textual change would have allowed the positive outcome of the battle for the Philistines to be explained more easily. On the other hand, it is possible that a copyist of the proto-Masoretic textual tradition would have regarded the statement that the Philistines (or an individual Philistine) turned to Yhwh in a time of need as unimaginable, thus leaving out the part of the verse in question. This second possibility is perhaps more likely, especially considering that in the other major divergence in v. 7 the Septuagint also offers the more difficult reading (the ark is referred to as "gods"), while the MT has the "theologically correct" reading (one "God" rather than "gods").

   (4) A striking feature of the story of the bringing of the ark to Jerusalem in 2 Sam 6 is the fact that David leaves the ark in the house of a certain Obed-Edom for three months following the incident at the threshing floor of Nacon, in which one of the bearers of the ark, Uzzah, dies. The second part of the name "Obed-Edom" is generally interpreted as referring to a Canaanite or an Edomite deity ("Servant of [the god] Edom/Adom").[40] The man presumably comes from the Philistine city of Gath (see

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[38] See Savran 2009, who discusses 1 Sam 9:11–13; Gen 37:19–20; 42:10–11; 42:21; Jon 1:8–9; and 2 Sam 19:11–12.

[39] The translation of 1 Sam 4:9 follows LXX[A,M,N]: κραταιοῦσθε καὶ γίνεσθε εἰς ἄνδρας ἀλλόφυλοι μήποτε δουλεύσητε τοῖς Εβραίοις καθὼς ἐδούλευσαν ἡμῖν καὶ ἔσεσθε εἰς ἄνδρας καὶ πολεμήσατε αὐτούς. In LXX[B], the terms ἀλλόφυλοι and ἄνδρας are absent, probably the result of parablepsis (ἄνδρας ... ἄνδρας).

[40] The designations *'bd 'dm* and *mlk 'dm* are attested in Punic (Benz 1972, 260). For *'bd 'dm*, the first part of the designation (*'bd*) suggests that *'dm* may refer to a deity (cf. the biblical names Obadiah [*'bd-yh*] and Obadyahu [*'bd-yhw*]; Noth 1928, 135–137 speaks of a "confessional name"; see also Thompson 1992, 5–6). Several interpreters, referring to the Leiden Magical Papyrus 345+347 verso 7, assume a reference to a Canaanite deity *'dm* (the partner of Resheph, deity of the underworld); see Dahood 1963, 289–303, here 292; Albright 1968, 122: Tan 2007, 217–230, here 218–219. Another possibility is that the element *'dm* refers to the land of Edom and its primary deity Qaus (*qws*), in which case the name would be a hypocoristic form of *'bd qws 'l 'dm* ("servant of Qaus, god of Edom"); see Knauf 1999, 273–274.

above). If one assumes that 2 Sam 2 and 1 Sam 4–6 form a single literary unit, then David's decision to entrust the ark to a Philistine seems strange at first glance, since according to 1 Sam 5 the ark wreaked havoc among the Philistines. On the other hand, according to 1 Sam 6, the Philistine diviners and priests proved to be competent in their handling of the ark, which found its way back into Israelite territory. As a "self-explanatory" name, Obed-Edom ("Servant of the deity Edom") could indicate that its bearer was likewise a religious specialist – a priest. However one wishes to interpret David's experiment of leaving the ark with Obed-Edom, it is striking that Yhwh blesses the house of this individual who bears a non-Yahwistic name and who is likely meant to be understood as a Philistine.

Uriah, a "Hittite" who lives in Jerusalem, seems to have a Yhwh-theophoric name ("my light/my fire is Yhwh").[41] While Bernd Schipper does not exclude a Hurrian origin of the name,[42] there are several indications in favor of a Semitic origin of the name Uriah in 2 Sam 11–12: (1) The names of all of the other "Hittites" mentioned in the Hebrew Bible seem to be of Semitic origin.[43] None of them suggest a non-Semitic, Hittite, or Hurrian origin.[44] (2) The name אוּרִיָּה "Uriah" is attested elsewhere in the Bible (2 Kgs 16:10–16; Isa 8:2; Jer 26:20–23; Ezra 8:33; Neh 3:4, 21; 8:4) and in inscriptions[45] as a name given to men residing in Israel or Judah. In contrast, as noted above,[46] McCarter assumes that Bathsheba's husband was descended from "neo-Hittite" population that gradually took on Semitic cultural features over the course of several centuries.[47]

The name of a person alone cannot reveal the religious views of its bearer (although it can reveal those of a person's father or mother). In his report to David about how the troops have to spend the night in huts or in the open field (2 Sam 11:11), Uriah also mentions the ark of God, which allows for the (cautious) conclusion that Uriah has high regard for this sacred object and the deity to which it belongs. Even if one is of the view that the narrative is a late literary composition,[48] Uriah's name as well as his reference to the ark suggest that the story's authors sought to emphasize this Hittite's proximity to Yhwh.

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[41] Cf. Noth 1928, 18, 168–169 (no. 67); Fowler 1988, 335; Schipper 2001, 984.

[42] Schipper 2001, 984.

[43] See also Hutter 1992, 142–145, here 145.

[44] (1) Ephron (Gen 23:8): from עֹפֶר "young ibex"; (2) Zohar (Ephron's father; Gen 23:8): from צחר "to be bright, white"; (3) Beeri (Esau's father-in-law; Gen 26:34): from בְּאֵר; (4) Elon (Esau's father-in-law; Gen 26:34): from אַיִל "ram"; (5) Ahimelech (one of David's elite warriors; 1 Sam 26:6): from אָח "brother" and מֶלֶךְ "king."

[45] Ostraca from Arad, Jerusalem, Khirbet el-Qom, and Samaria from the eighth to sixth centuries BCE (see Renz/Röllig 1995, 57); a seal from Jericho (see Vattioni 1969, 378, no. 184).

[46] See part 1 above, with n. 6.

[47] McCarter 1984, 285–286; cf. McMahon 1992, 231–233.

[48] See, e.g., McKenzie 2000, 132–135.

5. The Conception of Yhwh as a God of the Land

Several passages in the books of Samuel presuppose that the deity Yhwh is worshiped not only by Israelites, but also by non-Israelites. This raises the question of what this means for the conception of God in the books of Samuel. In the books of Samuel (and in 1 Kgs 1–2), Yhwh is often referred to as the "God of Israel" (1 Sam 1:17; 14:41; 20:12; 23:10, 11; 25:32, 34; 1 Kgs 1:30, 48), whereby the name "Israel" can refer to the people and/or the geographical "land of Israel". Considering that a variety of "foreigners" are closely associated with Yhwh in the books of Samuel, one may ask whether these individuals perceive (strictly speaking: are *portrayed* as perceiving) the deity Yhwh primarily as *the god of the territory of Israel*. This conception of Yhwh appears in two passages in the books of Samuel, in the speech of two "native" Israelites.

In 1 Sam 26:19–20, David makes the following accusation against his pursuer, Saul:

[19] Now therefore let my lord the king hear the words of his servant. If it is Yhwh who has stirred you up against me, may he accept an offering; but if it is mortals, may they be cursed before Yhwh, for they have driven me out today from my share in the heritage of Yhwh (נחלת יהוה), saying, 'Go, serve other gods.' [20] Now therefore, do not let my blood fall to the ground, away from the presence of Yhwh; for the king of Israel has come out to seek a single flea, like one who hunts a partridge in the mountains.

This passage can be interpreted as implying that Yhwh is a "god of the land" who can be worshiped only within the territory of the land. If an Israelite is "abroad", he or she is required to serve other gods.[49]

In the next passage, Yhwh is also regarded as the god of the land of Israel, which encompasses different regions and cities and is expressed by the term "heritage/ inheritance" (נחלה). In response to Joab's siege of Abel-Beth-Maacah, the wise woman of that city seeks to protect her city with the following words directed at David's general:

I am one of those who are peaceable and faithful in Israel; you seek to destroy a city that is a mother in Israel; why will you destroy the heritage of Yhwh? (2 Sam 20:19)

With these words, the woman reminds the Israelite general that the remote city of Abel-Beth-Maacah far in the north should also be treated as part of the "inheritance of Yhwh" and thus with respect.

Some of the episodes discussed above in which foreigners invoke Yhwh take place in Israel, while others take place on the border with the territory of the Philistines (in 1 Sam 4 and 29, the Philistines are encamped at Aphek). It is possible, then, that the books of Samuel presuppose a custom whereby foreigners residing in Israel who have a certain association with the god of Israel recognize Yhwh as the "god of the land" and turn to him, for example, in times of need.

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[49] Cf. Caquot/de Robert 1994, 321; Stoebe 1973, 406.

6. The Literary-historical Setting of the "Foreigner-friendly" Passages

In the books of Samuel, foreigners appear in positive and important roles, and some of them even have a relationship to Yhwh, the God of Israel. Here, we may ask how the narrative episodes which reflect a special interest in foreigners fit within the overall literary history of the books of Samuel. Do they belong to the most basic material in the narratives of which they are a part, or are they perhaps the work of later (exilic or postexilic) scribes who expanded the text? In light of the generally accepted late dating of the "foreigner-friendly" books of Ruth and Jonah, a late dating of the "foreigner-friendly" passages in Samuel must also be taken into consideration. In a monograph dedicated to the representation of foreigners who worship or revere Yhwh in the Hebrew Bible, Volker Haarmann dates all of the texts which he investigates – Exod 18:1–12 (Jethro); Josh 2 (Rahab); 2 Kgs 5 (Na'aman); Jon 1 (the Sea Peoples); 1 Kgs 8:41–43; Isa 56:1–8; Isa 2:1–5//Mic 4:1–5; Ruth 1:15–18 – to the postexilic period,[50] although he does not discuss any of the texts in the books of Samuel dealt with here.

The literary-historical background of the passages discussed here cannot, of course, be determined by treating the texts as a unified narrative unit. Each text would need to be investigated independently of the others and in light of its immediate narrative context – a task that cannot be carried out here. In the context of the present study, the following argument with respect to the Philistine city of Gath, which is mentioned frequently in the David narratives, is of particular significance: Archaeological excavations at Tell eṣ-Ṣafi[51] and references in the biblical texts themselves (2 Kgs 12:18) suggest that Gath was destroyed in the late ninth century BCE.[52] In biblical texts that refer to later periods, the city of Gath is never mentioned. Within the Oracles on the Nations in Amos, Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, and Ekron are mentioned, while Gath is not (see Amos 1:6–8); likewise, only the four aforementioned cities appear in Jer 25:20 and Zech 9:5–6.[53] In light of this evidence, I still consider a relatively early date for some of the narratives in the books of Samuel mentioning the city of Gath to be likely.[54] If these stories did not go back to an older tradition (perhaps from the ninth century) but were largely invented at a later time (such as during the postexilic period), their authors would have likely chosen to emphasize another Philistine city belonging to the later Philistine tetrapolis rather than Gath. The possibility mentioned by Stephen Germany that late (post-exilic) authors would still have known of the significance of Gath prior to its destruction in the ninth century and that they invented stories in which Gath played an important role in order to lend a sense of antiquity to the narrative tradition cannot be ruled out.[55] However, this does not seem likely for the following reasons. The specific

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[50] Haarmann 2008, 277.

[51] Cf. Maeir/Ehrlich 2001, 22–31; Maeir 2003, 237–246.

[52] Cf. Maeir/Ehrlich 2001, 27–31; Maeir 2003, 242–246. The excavators draw a link between a major destruction layer dating to the late ninth/early eighth c. and a siege trench from the same period with the biblical report of Hazael's capture of Gath in 2 Kgs 12:18.

[53] See further Schniedewind 1998, 73–75.

[54] See also (among others) Halpern 2001, 69; Finkelstein/Silberman 2006, 277; Koch 2020, 18; Sergi 2023, 184.

[55] Germany, oral communication and Germany 2025.

argument first put forward by Erasmus Gaß and then picked up by Germany that the author of the stories dealing with "David's encounters with an unhappy Philistine king" (i.e. Achish, J.H.) may have been "motivated by a practical desire not to stir up tensions with their Philistine contemporaries" is not compelling.[56] It is contradicted by the story of the Ark's sojourn in the Philistine area (1 Sam 5), in which Ashdod is the main target of the author's mockery (see 5:1–7). Ashdod is in fact the only among the five Philistine cities mentioned by biblical authors of the post-exilic period.[57] The interpretation of the importance of Gath in 1–2 Samuel, as I and others see it, namely that some of the texts in question convey ancient memories on Gath, is prima facie more obvious, especially when the issue is considered in the context of several other toponyms mentioned in the books of Samuel, which do not appear in any late, post-exilic texts but seem anchored in the narrative structure of the books of Samuel. Concretely, one should pay close attention to the references to the cities of Shunem, Bet-shan, and Jabesh-gilead in the context of Saul's final battle with the Philistines (1 Sam 28:4; 31:10–13),[58] to David's alliance with the Aramean kingdom of Geshur (2 Sam 2:3),[59] and furthermore to Mahanaim. Notably, Shunem, Bet-shan, and Mahanaim also appear in the Shoshenq list.[60] Significantly, none of these toponyms are mentioned in exilic and postexilic texts.[61] Nor are they mentioned in the books of Kings (except 1 Kgs 1–2; 4 [Shunem, Bet-shan, and Mahanaim]). As for the theory that later authors had an accurate knowledge of the specific geographical realities of the monarchic era (going back to the tenth c. BCE), it seems unlikely in light of the highly imprecise and flawed "memories" of the much less distant Neo-Babylonian and early Persian eras reflected in Dan 2–6.[62]

On the other hand, there are indications that some of the motifs and texts mentioned, which may come from a relatively old tradition, were taken up by later editors and inspired them to make additions. For example, a closer look at the dialogue between David and Ittai in 2 Sam 15:18b–22 shows that this is very likely a later insertion. The reference to the group of 600 Philistine mercenaries "who had come in his (David's) retinue from Gath" seems bizarre, since the motif of 600 men accompanying David belongs to another period of David's career (see 1 Sam 23:13; 27:2; 30:9); in the relevant texts, however, the mercenaries are Israelites rather than Gittites. Furthermore, it is striking that Ittai, just as Achish in 1 Sam 29:6, swears in the name of YHWH; together, the two shared motifs might hint at the dependence of Ittai's episode on the relevant

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[56] Gaß 2009, 234: "Eine Erzählung, die den Philisterkönig von Gat der Lächerlichkeit preisgab, war ... insofern unproblematisch, als es einen solchen nicht mehr gab." Cf. Germany 2025.

[57] See Neh 4:1; 13:23, 24.

[58] On Shunem, Bet-shan, Jabesh, and other places in northern Israel mentioned in 1–2 Samuel, see Dietrich/Münger 2003, 48–53.

[59] On Geshur, see Kochavi 1989, 15; Maʿoz 1992, 995–996; and the essay on Arameans in the books of Samuel by Stephen Germany and Assaf Kleiman in this volume (pp. 171–205). Archaeological research shows an occupational gap for the time after the conquest of Aram by Tiglath-Pileser III (late Iron Age–Persian period) (see Maʿoz 1992, 996; cf. Kochavi 1989, 15).

[60] See Kitchen 1973, 435–436; Dietrich/Münger 2003, 53 with n. 64.

[61] The references in 1 Chronicles (Mahanaim: 6:65; Bet-shan: 7:29; Jabesh: 10:11) depend on 1–2 Samuel (or other biblical texts).

[62] The Aramaic court stories are often dated to the Persian era.

texts in the narrative of David's rise. As observed by many scholars, there are also close parallels to Ruth's dialogue with her daughters-in-law in Ruth 1; Ittai affirms his loyalty to David with words that echo Ruth's refusal to abandon her mother-in-law Naomi.[63] Does 2 Sam 15:18b–22 depend on this passage? The reverse direction of dependence also seems possible. Furthermore, it is significant that Ittai's name evokes a message; its consonants can be read as *ìttî* = "with me", which makes good sense in the context of the short episode (see the wordplay in v. 19 [־גם תלד למה הגתי אל־אתי המלך ויאמר אתנו אתה] and the appropriate "explanation" of his name in Ittai's speech in v. 21 ["wherever my lord the king may be, there your servant will be, whether for death or for life!"]).[64] This hints to the artificial nature of the short anecdote.[65] Ittai, the foreigner who loyally stays "with" David, most probably was conceived as a foil to the traitor Absalom (the king's own son) and his Israelite followers.[66]

Scholars often suppose that 2 Sam 15:18b–22 depends on and was inspired by Ittai's mention in 2 Sam 18:2, 5, and 12.[67] Yet, the tripartition of the army under the three commanders Joab, Abishai, and Ittai does not seem well anchored in the battle report of 2 Sam 18; the army's division does not have any impact on the issue of the battle. While v. 2 in its entirety might be secondary, in vv. 5 and 12, Ittai's name may have been added. We may note that in the following battle reports in 2 Sam 19–20, Ittai and his mercenary unit are not mentioned anymore.[68]

Like the example of Ittai discussed above, other units among the stories that mention foreigners in the David narrative may also have been inserted later into the original plot.

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[63] See Leonard-Fleckman 2021, 221; Dietrich 2023, 67.

[64] On the evocative nature of the name, see Wright 2016, 103.

[65] אתי (ìTY) is attested as a personal name at Ugarit and Elephantine (cf. Gesenius 18th ed. 116; *HALOT* 102).

[66] See Fokkelman 1981, 179–183; Na'aman 1998, 23–24.

[67] See Leonard-Fleckman 2021, 221; Dietrich 2023, 67.

[68] Significant in this respect is the listing of the contingent in 2 Sam 20:7, which was formed to suppress the rebellion of Sheba: "So Joab's men went out after him, along with the Cherethites and the Pelethites and all the mighty men; and they went out from Jerusalem to pursue Sheba the son of Bichri." Later (v.10b), the reader learns that Joab and Abishai went out together to pursue Sheba, but there is no trace of Ittai and his mercenary troop.

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In Search of Amalek

The Pursuit of an Historical Referent in 1 Sam 30

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The role of the Amalekites in the account of David's retaliatory raid after the sack of Ziklag (1 Sam 30) has raised surprisingly few questions in biblical research. Even though opinions greatly differ on the composition's unity, original context, provenance, and relation to 1 Sam 15, very few have raised any doubts regarding the historicity of the Amalekites themselves,[1] and many are convinced that even if the narrative does not reflect the time of David, it does reflect the realia of raids by camel-riding nomadic plunderers. Here I will explore the possibility that the historical referent of Amalek is not an Iron Age nomadic group, but rather a cypher for Idumea and its inhabitants, and that the animosity towards Amalek in biblical texts is related to the hostile attitude towards Edom in the Prophets and Psalms (e.g., Isa 34:5–6; 63:1; Ezek 25:12–14; 35:2–9; Mal 1:3–4; Ps 137:7–9; Lam 4:21). Thus, I will suggest that biblical Amalek is not a mythic arch-enemy or a specific tribe of nomadic raiders, which has a specific referent rooted in the Persian and Hellenistic period – but a referent that was encoded and retrojected onto the distant past.

1. Mapping the Views on 1 Sam 30

The question of literary unity. Many scholars think that the complete narrative in 1 Sam 30 is a unified composition, and hold that the town list at its end was devised for its context and serves as the point of the whole story.[2] Others hold that various elements, such as the town list (30:27–30)[3] or the etiological "legal midrash" (30:10, 21–25),[4] derive from compositional stages that are separate from the body of the narrative.[5]

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[1] Cf. Dietrich 2019, 135–136.

[2] E.g., McCarter 1980, 437; Van Seters 2009, 193–196, 205–206, 363; Na'aman 2010, 182–183; Auld 2011, 340–343.

[3] For example, Alt 1959, 417–418 held that the town list is an authentic source from the time of David which was employed shortly afterwards by the scribe who wrote the account in 1 Sam 30 (cf. Grønbæk 1971, 203). Fischer 2003 also thinks that the town list and its frame (30:26, 31) are a secondary insertion, but dates the town list to the seventh century.

[4] E.g., Grønbæk 1971, 212–214; Vermeylen 2000, 170–171; Fischer, 2003, 52–55; Klein 2008, 281.

[5] Dietrich 2019, 136–143 identifies different elements of the narrative as separate traditions and sources that first took shape by the ninth century BCE compiler of the cycle dealing with David "the freebooter" and which was again edited at the end of the eighth century BCE by the author of the larger "Court Narrative Cycle."

The narrative's relation to its wider literary context. Recently, many scholars have pointed to different literary and thematic links between the narrative in 1 Sam 30 and its broader context in 1 Sam 27–2 Sam 2, and these links are thought to show that the story is integral to its context. For example, Shimon Bar-Efrat notes the smooth chronology within 1 Sam 29–30. David arrives in Ziklag three days after leaving the Philistine camp (29:10–11; 30:1a). Likewise, the Egyptian slave, who was found by Wadi Besor, was abandoned three days earlier, right after the raid on Ziklag (30:13–14), implying that Ziklag was sacked just as David was leaving the Philistine camp at Aphek (29:11). The day after David's retaliatory raid on the Amalekite camp, he returned to Ziklag, and another three days later an Amalekite messenger brings him the news of Saul's death.[6] Walter Dietrich further identified a series of motifs and expressions that 1 Sam 30 shares with other early pre-Deuteronomistic material in 1–2 Samuel, which he terms the "Court Narrative Cycle" (*Höfischen Erzählkranz*).[7] For Dietrich, this indicates that 1 Sam 30 was put together and placed in its context by the very same author of the "Court Narrative Cycle". However, the validity of such a conclusion is easily called into question. The use of expressions that occur several times in other compositions can hardly be considered a sure mark of common authorship of material within the books of Samuel; all it shows is the extent of vocabulary shared across certain genres and biblical books.[8] Furthermore, shared motifs are not necessarily evidence of common authorship, since they are frequently employed as an editorial device in creating frames and other metastructures, or to ease the insertion of new material, and they can also result from literary assimilation.[9]

On the thematic side, the narrative is thought by many to be anchored into its context by contrasting David's victory over Amalek with Saul's presumed failure in 1 Sam 15, and by explaining how the men of Judah came to support David's bid for kingship in 2 Sam 2. For these reasons, the account of David's raid on the Amalekites is usually considered an integral part of a pre-Deuteronomistic "History of David's Rise", or at least of the Deuteronomistic History.[10]

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[6] See Bar Efrat 1996, 358–359; cf. Fischer 2003, 56–63; Na'aman 2010, 177; Dietrich 2019, 128–129.

[7] These include the mention of David's wives (1 Sam 25:42–43; 30:5); Abiathar and the ephod (1 Sam 22:20; 23:6, 9; 30:7); a double oracular question (1 Sam 23:11; 30:8); division of the band of six hundred into four hundred combatants and two hundred rearguard (1 Sam 25:13; 30:9–10, 21); the Jerahmeelites and Kenites (1 Sam 27:10; 30:29); the verbs צרר (1 Sam 28:15; 30:6); חזק(הת) (1 Sam 23:16; 30:6); סקל (1 Sam 30:6; 2 Sam 16:6); the expressions מר נפש (1 Sam 22:2; 30:6; 2 Sam 17:8); איש בליעל (1 Sam 25:25; 30:22; 2 Sam 16:7, 20:1); and ברכה as a gift of thanks (1 Sam 25:27; 30:26). See Dietrich 2019, 136–138.

[8] E.g., סקל (באבנים) occurs elsewhere in Deut 22:21, 24; Josh 7:25; 1 Kgs 21:13; Isa 62:10; מר נפש occurs also in Judg 18:25; Isa 38:15; Ezek 27:31; Job 3:20, 7:11, 10:1; Prov 31:6; and the *hitpael* of חזק occurs a total of 27 times, only four of which are in Samuel.

[9] Cf. Judg 20:18 // Judg 1:1–2; Judg 21:19 // 1 Sam 1:3; and the motifs shared by Judg 17 and 19, namely, Levites travelling from Bethlehem to Mount Ephraim (17:7–9 // 19:18), and the role of an Ephraimite granting hospitality to a Levite (17:8–10 // 19:16); see Edenburg 2016a, 284–232; Edenburg 2018.

[10] Hertzberg 1964, 226; McCarter 1980, 436–437; Foresti 1984, 102–103; Klein 2008, 284; Na'aman 2010, 182–183; Gaß 2012, 201–202; Dietrich 2019, 134–138.

Some scholars point to the lack of a theologizing tendency in 1 Sam 30 as evidence for its pre-Deuteronomistic origin.[11] However, it is questionable whether earlier texts are necessarily "secular" and later texts are marked by a theologizing tendency. If a text does not reflect core notions of Deuteronomistic theology, it might simply be a late non-Deuteronomistic composition. By contrast, others find that the story is a digression within the broader context, since it disrupts the continuity between 29:11b and 31:1. Accordingly, some conclude that the narrative was originally an independent composition that was inserted into its present context by an editor.[12]

The historical context of the author and their first audience. Most scholars think that the story of the raid on Amalek is part of a comprehensive composition that serves as a foundation narrative for the Davidic dynasty and legitimizes its rule, while undercutting the authority of a non-Judean ruler like Saul. Accordingly, they place its author and intended audience within the period of the monarchy. Even so, a broad range of periods have been proposed, stretching from the late tenth century BCE down to the late seventh century.[13] Only a few have proposed a postmonarchic context, whether as part of a Babylonian- or Persian-period Deuteronomistic layer or as a "post-Deuteronomistic" composition.[14] Although some have based their dating upon historical-geographic considerations, these usually indicate only the *earliest* plausible context, and the possibility that the geographic background in the narrative is drawn from other literary texts is largely ignored. Furthermore, previous studies have not considered whether the linguistic profile of the narrative fits its proposed period of composition.

2. The Literary and Historical Context of 1 Sam 30: Problems and Questions

Within a synchronic reading of 1 Samuel, chapter 30 is undoubtedly a narrative digression. After David has found safe haven from Saul while serving as a vassal of Achish, the narrative mainly focuses on the steps leading up to the demise of Saul and all his line in the battle at Gilboa. David's alibi of non-complicity in Saul's death is already secured in 1 Sam 29:11, which ends with David returning home while the Philistines continue to Jezreel. Nothing prepares readers (or hearers) to expect that dramatic events are transpiring back in Ziklag, far away from the main stage in Jezreel

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[11] For example, neither David nor the narrator are troubled by the escape of four hundred camel-riding Amalekites, and no attempt is made to implement the strictures of *ḥerem*; see Gaß 2012, 201–202; Dietrich 2019, 134–135.

[12] Vermeylen 2000, 173–174; cf. Grønbæk 1971, 201; Kratz 2005, 179; Van Seters 2009, 362–363.

[13] E.g., late tenth/early ninth century: Alt 1959, 417–418; cf. Dietrich 2019, 138–143 (who identifies sources contemporaneous with David and an early narrative of "David the outlaw" presumably from the ninth century); eighth/seventh century: Fischer 2003, 56–63; Na'aman 2010, 182–183; Gaß 2012, 201–202.

[14] Late Dtr: Veremeylen 2000, 173–178; Kratz 2005, 179; post-Dtr: Van Seters 2009, 205–206, 362–363; Auld 2011, 340–343.

and Gilboa.[15] Some have suggested that 1 Sam 27:8–9 provides background for the Amalekites' raid on Ziklag as retaliation for David's raids on them.[16] However, Amalek is but one of David's targets south of Judah, while the others – the Geshurites and the Gezerites (MT: Gerizites) – are subsequently forgotten. In any event, David supposedly left no survivors to retaliate, Amalekite or otherwise (27:9).

   The chronology within 1 Sam 30, which would make the Amalekites' raid on Ziklag take place at the same time that David departed from the Philistine camp (29:11; 30:13–14), has the appearance of a desperate editorial device to *plant* the story within its context. According to 2 Sam 1:1b–2a, David receives word of Saul's death three days after he returned to Ziklag from the Philistine camp, and the narrative here seems completely ignorant of the report in 1 Sam 30:1 that Ziklag had been completely razed and burnt. Only 2 Sam 1:1aβ attempts to resolve the discrepancies between the mutually exclusive accounts by means of the retrospective comment that David had returned from defeating Amalek.

   The widely held view that the list of booty recipients (30:26–31) provides the background necessary to understand why the men of Judah anointed David king in 2 Sam 2:4 is also questionable. The larger context in 1 Sam 18–25 depicts David as a successful warlord who provides protection and extracts tribute, and this in itself provides all the motivation necessary for David to be acclaimed king in Judah. Furthermore, it is difficult to reconcile the distribution of the booty among all of David's band and the account of its redistribution by David among the Judean towns.[17]

   An obvious discrepancy for synchronic readers of the books of Samuel is the fact that there are any Amalekites around at all by this stage. Saul is faulted in 1 Sam 15 with not disposing properly of the Amalekites' livestock which was taken as booty to be offered later in thanks to Yahweh, but the Amalekites themselves *were* put to the ban, with the sole exception of their king, Agag, who later was executed by Samuel (1 Sam 15:8, 32–33). It is thus evident that 1 Sam 30 does not presume an earlier narrative in which the Amalekites are eliminated by Saul and Samuel. Nor has 1 Sam 15 been revised to allow for an Amalekite remnant to reappear later in the book.[18] On the one hand, Fabrizio Foresti already convincingly demonstrated that 1 Sam 15 is a late addition to the original Deuteronomistic account of the history of Saul, and his conclusions support the argument that 1 Sam 30 is an earlier account of a battle against Amalek. On the other hand, 1 Sam 30 might be an *alternate* Midrashic account which counters the story of Saul's supposed failure.[19]

   Many of the proposals regarding the historical context of the composition are based upon circular argumentation. For example, Dietrich's late tenth-century BCE dating of the narrative's separate parts – recovery of captives (30:1–19*), legal judgment (30:9b–

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[15] Cf. Bezzel 2021, 175–176. See also Pseudo-Philo, *LAB* 64–65, which runs straight from the seance at En-Dor to Saul's death at Gilboa.

[16] E.g., Foresti 1984, 110–120; McCarter 1980, 434.

[17] Cf. Fischer 2003, 52–53.

[18] Pseudo-Philo, *LAB* 58, 65 provides a creative midrash to explain how an Amalekite could remain to kill Saul in 2 Sam 1:8, 13.

[19] On alternative accounts and their revisionary purpose, see, e.g., Edenburg 1998; Edenburg 2012, 60–62; Edenburg 2016b, 474–478.

10, 21–25), and town list (30:27–31a) – depends solely on the reasoning that an authentic historical kernel cannot be ruled out,[20] while the combination of these materials in the early ninth century relies upon his thesis that an early story cycle relating David's period as an outlaw (*Erzählkranz vom Freibeuter David*) served as source material for his purported late eighth-century "Court Narrative" (*Höfisches Erzählwerk*). The fact that 1 Sam 30 lacks Deuteronomistic language, themes or ideology provides the primary basis for his dating of the story's redaction, so that lack of Deuteronomism must indicate "pre-Deuteronomistic" composition. The possibility that the story is a late *non*-Deuteronomistic composition that was inserted into the Deuteronomistic edition of Samuel is simply not considered, let alone refuted.

Some other scholars have sought external evidence from the realia of the story and its geographic sphere to support a proposed historical context. For example, Nadav Na'aman points to the relative dearth of camel remains at Negev highland sites, along with the earliest mention of camels in Neo-Assyrian inscriptions in the mid-ninth century BCE.[21] Thus, he suggests that the depiction of camel-riding Amalekites in 1 Sam 30:17 must derive from the reality of the author's own time, long after the time of David. Here, too, Dietrich takes a "maximalist" approach by appealing to the earliest possible point of time.[22] However, when the dromedary was domesticated is not at question, but rather when Judean scribes became familiar with peoples who kept camels, not only as pack animals and a source of protein and wool, but also for riding.[23] More fundamentally, camels are mentioned only once in 1 Sam 30 (in v. 17b), while no camels are numbered among the spoils, which included only flocks and cattle (30:20).[24] Thus, the mention of camels in v. 17b might be a late addition intended to qualify the previous statement that "*none escaped*", so that a remnant of Amalek would survive, the strictures of Deut 25:19 would remain unfulfilled, and Yahweh's war with Amalek could still be waged "throughout the ages" (Exod 17:16). If this is so, then the scribe who described four hundred Amalekites fleeing on camels lived considerably later than what Dietrich and Na'aman suggest.

The town list in 1 Sam 30:27–30 provides another direction for examining the historical reality behind the composition. Albrecht Alt began by positing that the lists, which share some of the same toponyms found in Josh 19:2–8; 1 Chr 4:28–32; and Neh 11:25–30, all directly developed out of Josh 15:21–58, while 1 Sam 30:27–30 is self-sufficient and differs significantly from the other lists in its form and in the number and order of its towns.[25] Alt concluded that 1 Sam 30:27–30 preserves an independent document, composed before the Josian list of Judah's districts in Josh 15. He then leaped to dating the list and its surrounding narrative to David's time or shortly thereafter. Alt, of course, depended primarily upon the biblical texts and could not check his suppositions against findings from excavations and surveys. This line of inquiry was

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[20] Dietrich 2019, 140–143.

[21] Na'aman 2010, 176.

[22] Dietrich 2019, 138: "Eine wichtige Voraussetzung dafür ist die Domestikation des Kamels; diese war um 1100 v. Chr. nachweislich zur 'Tatsache' geworden."

[23] On this, see Heide 2010; Heide/Peters 2021; Sapir-Hen/Ben-Yosef, 2013.

[24] Cf. Hertzberg 1964, 228; Foresti 1984, 105.

[25] Alt 1959, 417–418.

taken up by Alexander Fischer and Nadav Na'aman,[26] and while they differ regarding the relationship of the list to the surrounding narrative, they both agree that the available archaeological evidence indicates that it best reflects the realities of the late eighth–seventh centuries.

The attempt to correlate the town list with the settlement history in the region hinges on the identifications proposed for the different towns, yet these identifications depend in turn upon interpretation. A case in point is Bethel (1 Sam 30:27), which does not fit the geographic scope of the list. Thus, P. Kyle McCarter follows the LXX and reads Beth-zur, while Bar-Efrat identifies it with Bethul (Josh 19:4) in the Simeon town list, and Na'aman proposes that this Bethel is Tel Beersheba, which served as a regional cult center.[27] In any case, data from excavations and surveys can provide, at the best, the earliest likely context for a composition, but the memory of a site might long outlive its heyday. Thus, sites that were completely destroyed, like Gath and Hamath, were still remembered by later generations.[28] In fact, if one leaves aside assumptions regarding the age of 1 Sam 30 in relation to the Deuteronomistic corpus, then we must allow for the possibility that the scribe who drafted the list in 1 Sam 30:27–30 drew upon other literary sources, like the town lists in Josh 15:21–58 and 19:2–8. Finally, although Alt rightly noted that the list in 1 Sam 30:27–30 differs in form and order from the comparable material in Josh 15 and 19, he and most others neglected its similarity in form to the list of conquered kings in Josh 12:9–24, which most likely drew upon all the toponyms included in conquest accounts.[29]

3. The Style and Language of 1 Sam 30

The style and language of 1 Sam 30 provide a line of investigation that has not yet been pursued and that could shed light on the narrative's composition history. The first issue relates to the mostly neglected question of the genesis of the extended third person prose narrative as a literary genre.[30] The historiographic perspective implied by the extended third person narrative differs considerably from the first person narrative of royal inscriptions and fictional autobiography, since it implies that the narrative is the product of later reflection.[31] While oral folktales might have circulated about David, the extended third person account of David's rise represents a literary genre that was the product of long-term developments in scribal erudition and literary craft. This genre is (as yet) unparalleled in the Iron Age Levant, and most likely emerged later than the crafting of extended first person royal inscriptions in the mid-ninth century in Phoenicia,

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[26] Fischer 2003; Na'aman 2010.

[27] McCarter 1980, 434; Bar-Efrat 1996, 366; Na'aman 2010, 180–181.

[28] For Gath, cf. Amos 6:2; Mic 1:10; 1 Chr 8:13; 2 Chr 11:8, and for Hamath, cf. Jer 49:23; Zech 9:2.

[29] Dozeman 2015, 495–496.

[30] Cf. Greenstein 1988, 349; Kawashima 2004, 9; Pioske 2018.

[31] Cf. Na'aman 2009, 342–345. Na'aman, however, holds that the early story of Saul and David was inspired by a genuine antiquarian interest (345).

Moab, and the Neo-Hittite kingdoms.[32] Since the account of the raid on Amalek shares none of the characteristics of folktales, whether oral or written, it must have been composed for its present context within the extended narrative of David's rise. Thus, at least on the basis of genre, it is safe to rule out such an early origin for the story as proposed by Dietrich.

If we further investigate the stylistic-linguistic profile of 1 Sam 30, we may find evidence that challenges some of the notions regarding the chapter's unity and period of composition.

3.1. Possibly Late Use

The use of the infinitive in the initial circumstantial clause (1 Sam 30:1, ויהי בבוא דוד ואנשיו צקלג ביום השלישי) is more consistent with late usage,[33] while Standard Biblical Hebrew (SBH) would prefer a finite verb (ויהי ביום השלישי ויבוא דוד* or *ויהי כאשר בא דוד ואנשיו*). The increased usage of nominal verb forms typical of late style might lie behind the use of the participle נותר in v. 9 as an abstract noun in place of a circumlocutory relative clause like אשר נותרו (cf. Num 33:55; Deut 28:54; 2 Sam 9:1; 1 Kgs 9:21; Ruth 2:18).[34] The idiomatic use of אמר + infinitive construct to express *intent* to do something (v. 6) overwhelmingly occurs in biblical contexts that suggest late composition.[35]

The verb פשט (v. 1) in the sense of "raid" occurs only in late redactional layers of the Former Prophets (Judg 9:33, 44, 20:37; 1 Sam 23:27; 27:8, 10) and other late compositions (Job 1:17; 2 Chr 25:13; 28:18 [*Sondergut*]; cf. variant readings in 1 Chr 14:9, 13 // 2 Sam 5:18, 22 [וינטשו]). The *hithpael* of חזק (v. 6) indicating *steadfast faithfulness* particularly occurs in late texts.[36] Although eight of the 27 instances of בליעל (v. 22) are found in Samuel, its other instances are in late compositions and redactional layers.[37] In fact, most of the passages with בליעל in Samuel have been assigned on other grounds to late redaction of the scroll.

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[32] Narrative prologues of Hittite treaties and edicts might provide precursors of the genre. Such prologues with third-person past narration might have been drafted independently, but they were often transmitted within a document cast in the first person that focused on present and future conditions (cf. the edict of Telepinu, *COS* 1.76; Van Seters 1983, 116–118). The genre of third-person prose narration might have been preserved as scribal lore by scribes of the Neo-Hittite kingdoms – as were the conventions of Hittite treaties (e.g., blessings along with curses) – and diffused by scribes' international contacts during the Neo-Assyrian period.

[33] Qimron 1986, §400.02.

[34] Cf. Edenburg 2016a, 130.

[35] Exod 2:14; Josh 22:33; 1 Sam 24:11; 2 Sam 21:16; 1 Kgs 5:19, 8:12 // 2 Chr 6:1; 2 Kgs 8:19; Jer 18:10; Ezek 20:8, 13, 21; Ps 106:23; 119:57; 1 Chr 21:17; 2 Chr 6:20; 13:8; 28:10, 13. This idiom is already attested in Iron Age Phoenician and Aramaic inscriptions (e.g., Azatiwada, KAI 26 c iv 14–16; Sefire KAI 222, B3:1–3), but it might have entered the Hebrew scribal repertoire through the influence of Aramaic in the sixth–fifth centuries.

[36] 2 Sam 3:6; Dan 10:21; Ezra 7:28; 1 Chr 11:10; 2 Chr 15:8; 16:9; 27:6; cf. Sir 3:12; 42:17.

[37] 1 Sam 1:16; 2:12; 10:27; 25:17, 25; 2 Sam 16:7; 20:1; cf. Deut. 13:14; 15:9; Judg 19:22, 20:13; 2 Sam 22:5 (// Ps 18:5); 23:6; 1 Kgs 21:10, 13; Nah 1:11; 2:1; Ps 41:9; 101:3; Job 34:18; Prov 6:12; 16:27; 19:28; 2 Chr 13:7.

3.2. Stylistic Peculiarities

The *qal* passive is often attributed to an early stage of Biblical Hebrew, and its use diminished and ultimately disappeared as the *niphal* increasingly came to express passive aspects of *qal* verbs.[38] However, an overview of instances in the MT of Hebrew Bible shows surprisingly high frequencies of passive *qal* in compositions that are commonly thought to be postmonarchic.[39] The frequencies of passive *qal* for specific verbs also varies considerably, suggesting that its use might at times be a stylistic preference or a fossilized usage.[40] In 1 Sam 30:3 we find the *qal* passive of שרף, which occurs in only four other places (Num 17:4; Isa 1:7; Ps 80:17; Neh 3:34) compared to more prevalent use of *niphal*.[41]

3.3. Rare or Singular Use

The phrase עד אשר אין בהם כח לבכות in 1 Sam 30:4 is marked by peculiarities.[42] Only here does a negative statement beginning with a temporal עד אשר occur with אין and a substantive. The more common usage would employ לא יכלו followed by an infinitive, a construction that occurs more than three hundred times. Thus, "classical" style would prefer to read here עד אשר לא יכלו עוד לבכות*. Similarly, the construction in v. 14, על אשר + ל- is found elsewhere only in Gen 47:6. The temporal use of למעלה (v. 25) is also rare (cf. 1 Sam 16:13; Hag 2:15, 18); the more common use employs הלאה (Lev 22:27; Num 15:23; 1 Sam 18:9; Ezek 39:22; 43:27). Unique to 1 Sam 30 is the denominative verb פגר (vv. 10, 21).[43] The text also contains a number of expressions recurring only once, twice, or three times elsewhere: narrative use of עדר *niphal* (v. 19; cf. 2 Sam 17:22);[44] the expression *Yahweh's enemies* אויבי ה׳ (v. 26; cf. Ps 37:20; 2 Sam 12:14, *tikkun soferim*); שוב רוח denoting physical recovery (v. 12; cf. Judg 15:19; Job 9:18); the construction *X days and X nights* (v. 12; cf. Jon 2:1; Job 2:13); the noun פלח (v. 12; cf. Song 4:3; 6:7);[45] מי+ל in identity inquiry (v. 13; cf. Gen 32:18; Ruth 2:5); narrative use of the noun נשף for dawn or twilight (v. 17; cf. 2 Kgs 7:5, 7);[46] and צמקים "raisins" (v. 12; cf. 1 Sam 25:18; 2 Sam 16:1; 1 Chr 12:41).

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[38] Joüon/Muraoka 2006, §58; Hendel/Joosten 2018, 1–4.

[39] Compare 136x in Num; 93x in Isa (33x in Isa 40–65); 94x in Kgs; 77x in Deut; 61x in Jer; 57x in Gen; 56x in 1–2 Sam; 55x in Ezek; 28x in Neh; 60x in Chr.

[40] Rezetko/Young 2014, 477.

[41] Gen 38:24; Lev 6:23; 7:17, 19; 13:52; 19:6; 21:9; Josh 7:15; 2 Sam 23:7; Jer 38:17; Mic 1:7; Prov 6:27; 1 Chr 14:12.

[42] It should be further noted that כח followed by infinitive construct is found only in late texts: Deut 8:18; Isa 50:2; Dan 1:4; 8:7; 11:15; Ezra 10:13 (with אין); 1 Chr 29:14; 2 Chr 2:5; 25:8 (with יש).

[43] For the noun, see Gen 15:11; Lev 26:30; Num 14:29, 32–33; 1 Sam 17:46; 2 Kgs 19:35; Isa 14:19; 34:3; 37:36; 66:24; Jer 31:40; 33:5; 41:9; Ezek 6:5; 43:7, 9; Amos 8:3; Nah 3:3; 2 Chr 20:24–25.

[44] Cf. non-narrative use in Isa 34:16; 40:26; 59:15; Zeph 3:5; Sir 42:20. More common in narrative is the *niphal* of פקד; cf. Num 31:49; Judg 21:3; 1 Sam 20:18, 25, 27; 25:7, 21; 2 Sam 2:30; 1 Kgs 20:39; 2 Kgs 10:19.

[45] For the verb, see 2 Kgs 4:39; Ps 141:7; Job 16:13; 39:3; Prov 7:23.

[46] Cf. non-narrative use in Isa 5:11; 21:4; 59:10; Jer 13:16; Ps 119:147; Job 3:9; 7:4; 24:15; Prov 7:9.

3.4. Atypical Use

The verb נהג (vv. 2, 22; cf. v. 20) nearly always comes with an explicit object, as in v. 20, whereas its elliptic use in vv. 2, 22 is paralleled only twice more (2 Kgs 4:24; 9:20). The verb חגג nearly always relates to pilgrimage festivals,[47] and denotes non-sacral celebration only in 1 Sam 30:16 and Ps 107:27.

The form מחרת + ל (v. 17) indicating *on the morrow* is employed only twice more (Jon 4:7; 1 Chr 29:21).[48] More classic use employs a construction with the short form of the noun מחר.[49]

The genitive construct שלל דוד (v. 20) is the sole instance of *spoils* with the *name of the agent* who took them. The usual construct relates spoils with the place or people *from whom they are taken*. In common usage, this should read שלל עמלק and not שלל דוד.

יען אשר in v. 22, is not found elsewhere in Samuel, although it is common in Kings, Jeremiah and Ezekiel.[50] This construction introduces causal clauses voiced usually by Yahweh or a Deuteronomistic narrator to justify a *divine* judgement or reward. By contrast, the causal phrase in v. 22 is voiced by worthless men (כל איש רע ובליעל) who seek to advance their own interests.

The collocation הציל שלל (v. 22) is unusual, since only here does the common verb הציל take *booty* as its object, compared to more than 150 times with a human object. Finally, the formulation of the distribution list (vv. 27–31) is exceptional, since לאשר ב- in combination with a place name is not employed elsewhere in lists.

3.5. Noun-Verb Ratio

Standard Biblical Hebrew tends towards a dynamic style, with short verbal clauses and a small number of nouns in relation to finite verbs. This style either derives from oral precursors or seeks to replicate the manner of oral storytelling. By contrast, nominal clauses, noun chains and subordination are characteristic of a more complex style characteristic of scribal erudition.[51] In general, the narrative in 1 Sam 30 does conform with dynamic style, and yet the sequence of short staccato-like clauses is disrupted by nominal clauses and longer noun chains, as in vv. 3aβ,b, 5, 6aγ, 7aα, 13bα, 14a, 16, 17a, 24b, 26aβ,b, 27–31 and subordinated nominal clauses as in v. 4.

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[47] See Exod 5:1; 12:14; 23:14; Lev 23:39, 41; Num 29:12; Deut 16:15; Nah 2:1; Zech 14:16, 18–19; Ps 42:5.

[48] On the noun form ending תָ, see Joüon/Muraoka 2006, §89m, n; cf. KAI 181.15, 26 (Mesha) מחרתת, שחרת; KAI 27.1, 9 (Arslan Tash) לחשת, אלת.

[49] Cf. למחר (Exod 8:6, 19; Num 11:18; Josh 7:13; Esth 5:12), כעת מחר (Exod 9:18; 1 Sam 9:16; 20:12; 1 Kgs 19:2; 20:6; 2 Kgs 7:1, 18; 10:6), ביום מחר (Gen 30:33; Prov 27:1), and גם היום ומחר (2 Sam 11:12).

[50] Cf. Judg 2:20; 1 Kgs 3:11; 8:18; 11:11, 33; 14:7, 15; 16:2; 20:28, 36; 2 Kgs 1:16; 10:30; 21:11, 15; Jer 19:4; 25:8; 29:23, 25, 31; Ezek 16:43; 21:9; 26:2; 31:10; 44:12.

[51] Polak 1999.

3.6. Result

In conclusion, if we mark out all the different linguistic-stylistic characteristics on the text, we will discover that only a few verses are in purely classical style (e.g., vv. 8, 11, 15, 18), while the rest displays linguistic and stylistic features that developed through a lengthy scribal tradition. Some, like Dietrich, would conclude from this that a genuinely early substratum lies behind the present text, which is the product of later redaction. However, if there is indeed an early kernel in the narrative, then it has been so thoroughly reworked as to make its existence questionable. In any event, the chapter displays no literary or stylistic evidence of Deuteronomistic editing, which makes it unlikely that any of its composition or reworking was carried out as part of the Deuteronomistic History project. In light of the preceding observations, it seems that the scribe who penned the narrative attempted to emulate the style of oral storytelling, but ultimately left tell-tale signs of the scribal erudition of the Persian period.

4. The Problem of Amalek

The problem of Amalek begins with the fact that this group is not mentioned in any extrabiblical sources, nor is its name related to any known toponym. Thus far, all attempts to clarify the etymological derivation of Amalek have failed to generate any degree of consensus.[52] As a result, anything we might say about Amalek is ultimately based upon its representation in biblical sources, where it is mentioned 51 times, almost exclusively in prose, particularly narrative.[53]

   Within 1 Sam 4–2 Sam 8, the primary enemies of Israel are the Philistines, while Amalek is mentioned in a just a few interrelated passages: 1 Sam 15:2–32 and 28:18

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   [52] Cf. Na'aman 2006, 40–41. Knauf 1988, 93 proposed a proto-Arabic derivation for the name, which was not subsequently "Hebraized" in order to preserve its foreign flavor. Görg 1987, 15 suggested that ʿAmalek derives from a divine name and the toponym *ḥmrq* mentioned in the Egyptian Leiden Magical Papyrus I 343 + I 345, but Egyptian *ḥ* does not morph into Hebrew ʿ*ayin* (Becking 1995, 44–45). Recently, Ayali-Darshan (2015) proposed that the *ḥmrq* of the papyrus is actually related to (Mount) Ammarik, the Hurro-Hittite residence of the storm god. If so, then this obscure reference has nothing to do with biblical Amalek. The latest proposal, by Lipiński (2018), suggests a Hurrian derivation for the similar-sounding Akkadian term *ḫameluḫḫi*, which is found in just a few Middle Assyrian texts, where it designates a site or building in Assur. Lipiński's explanation for the Hebrew transcription of the Hurrian loan is not only convoluted, but also lacks a convincing historical context for its diffusion in Hebrew.

   [53] Apart from the 22 instances in the three major narratives featuring Amalek (Exod 17; 1 Sam 15; 1 Sam 30) are instances that depend upon these narratives (1 Sam 27:8; 28:18; 2 Sam 1:1, 8, 13). Elsewhere, Amalek is casually mentioned with other peoples, without actively figuring in the narrative: Gen 14:7 (Amalekites and Amorites); Num 13:29; 14:25, 43, 45 (Amalekites and Canaanites); Judg 3:13 (Ammon and Amalek); Judg 6:3, 33; 7:12 (Midian and Amalek) – these are all probably glosses. The remaining case in narrative is the report that the Simeonites eliminated the remaining Amalekites when they expanded to Seir (1 Chr 4:42–43). Amalek is also mentioned in non-narrative prose (Gen 36:12, 16 [// 1 Chr 1:36]; Deut 25:17, 19; Judg 10:12; 12:15; 1 Sam 14:48; 2 Sam 8:12 [// 1 Chr 18:11]) and in poetry (Judg 5:14; Ps 83:8).

relating to Saul's *ḥerem* of Amalek (to which 2 Sam 1:8, 13 is also likely related);[54] the summaries of Saul's and David's conquests in 1 Sam 14:48 and 2 Sam 8:12, which have been edited to conform to each other;[55] and David's encounters with Amalek while based at Ziklag in 1 Sam 27:8, 30:1–18 and 2 Sam 1:1. The secondary nature of the first two groups of passages is quite evident. Saul's rejection after supposedly failing to fully implement the divine command to eradicate Amalek *and all its possessions* unexpectedly doubles the earlier account of Saul's rejection in 1 Sam 13:6–14, and is awkwardly placed after the regnal summary in 14:47–52.[56] Thus, this alternate account of Saul's rejection due to his conduct with regards to Amalek is actually an appendix to the account of Saul's career. Similarly, the encounter with the witch of Endor (1 Sam 28) slows the narrative progress leading to Saul's demise and is tacked on by a clumsy series of *Wiederaufnahmen* (28:1–2, 29:1–2, cf. 25:1a, 28:3a).[57]

Likewise, the mention of Amalek in the lists of Saul's and David's conquests has the appearance of an afterthought. The remaining mentions of Amalek relate to David's stay at Ziklag (1 Sam 27:8; 30:1–18; 2 Sam 1:1). It seems that both short notices in 1 Sam 27:8 and 2 Sam 1:1 presume the longer narrative in chapter 30. 1 Sam 27:8 anticipates further developments and works to cast the Amalekites' raid of Ziklag as retaliation for David's previous strike against them, even though no motivation is necessary if the Amalekites are being depicted as desert marauders. 2 Sam 1:1 in turn picks up from the end of 1 Sam 30 to remind the reader/hearer that David was far away and otherwise occupied when Saul met his end at Gilboa. Thus, 1 Sam 30 might provide the key to understanding the social-historical context for the Amalek traditions in Samuel.

For the most part, Amalek is associated with southern regions ranging from the Negev to the Arabah and from the wilderness east of Egypt to the Sinai.[58] Biblical tradition widely associates Amalek with southern peoples, such as Esau/Seir/Edom (Gen 36:12, 16; 1 Chr 4:42–43); Midian (Judg 6:3, 33; 7:12) and the Kenites (Num 24:20–22; 1 Sam 15:4–6). The fact that the biblical scribes relate Amalek to different locations in wilderness areas indicates that they viewed Amalek as a non-sedentary group – a characterization furthered by attributing to them possession of camels (Judg 7:12; 1 Sam 15:3; 30:17).

Perhaps the most striking feature in the biblical profile of Amalek is the lack of ambivalence towards them on the part of the biblical scribes, in sharp contrast to Edom, Midian, or the Kenites.[59] In a few instances, Amalek is represented in a dry, "factual"

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[54] 1 Sam 15 further depends upon Deut 25:17–19, which, in turn, interprets Exod 17:8–16 (Foresti 1984, 92–100). So too, 2 Sam 1:8, 13 depends upon 1 Sam 15; see, e.g., Bezzel 2013, 333–338.

[55] Cf. Fischer 2006, 108.

[56] Foresti 1984, 161–169.

[57] Cf. Foresti 1984, 130–136.

[58] Notable exceptions are the mentions in Judges which relate Amalek with Ephraim (Judg 5:14; 12:15) or depict Amalekite penetration from the east to Jericho (Judg 3:13) and to the Jezreel Valley (Judg 6:3, 33; 7:12). In all these instances, Amalek appears as a supplemental gloss.

[59] Esau/Edom shares "brotherhood" with Jacob/Israel and has a privileged place in the Pentateuch (Gen 25; 27; 32; Num 20:14; Deut 2:4; 23:8) although in the Prophets Edom is repeatedly targeted for vengeance (e.g., Isa 34:5–6; Jer 49:7–22; Ezek 25:12–14; 35:2–8; 36:5–7; Joel 4:19; Amos 1:11–12; Obad 1–14; Mal 1:2–5; cf. Ps 137:7–9). Midian is both a foe (Num 31:3–11; Judg 6:1–8:28) and a

fashion, such as in the Esau/Edom genealogy and clan list (Gen 36:9–12, 16), but otherwise it is depicted as Israel's archenemy from the time of the exodus. In the Pentateuch, the animosity towards Amalek grows to mythic proportions. On the basis of one battle, Moses swears that Yahweh will wage eternal war against Amalek (Exod 17:14), and this oath becomes a command for Israel to utterly eliminate Amalek and its very memory (Deut 25:19). Similarly, the Balaam oracle in Num 24:20 foresees Amalek's ultimate extinction.

And yet, apart from the major narratives in Exod 17; 1 Sam 15; and 1 Sam 30, mentions of Amalek are tacked on as an afterthought, within geographic glosses (Gen 14:7; Judg 12:15) and catalogues of adversaries (Num 13:29; 14:25, 43, 45; Judg 3:13; 6:3, 33; 7:12, 10:12; 1 Sam 14:48; 2 Sam 8:12 // 1 Chr 18:11). In Esau's genealogy, Amalek is grafted onto the end of the branch of Eliphaz and is counted as the son of a concubine, Timna (Gen 36:12; cf. MT 1 Chr 1:36, where Timna and Amalek are full *sons* of Eliphaz), while the Amalek oracle in Num 24:20 comes after the proper conclusion of Balaam's oracles (Num 24:17–19).[60] Likewise, the command to "remember" to obliterate the memory of Amalek (Deut 25:17–19) does not smoothly fit its context in Deuteronomy and is tacked on to the end of the *mishpatim*.[61]

Even the major narratives about Amalek do not follow from their context. This was already explained above with regard to Saul's *ḥerem*-war with Amalek in 1 Sam 15. Exod 17:8–16 also is an isolated incident inserted at the final stage of the itinerary leading up to the encampment at Sinai (Exod 19),[62] and while the summary itinerary in Num 33 "remembers" the confrontation with the king of Arad (33:40) and comments that at Refidim there was no water (v. 14), it lacks any knowledge of the battle with Amalek. As for the subject of this investigation, 1 Sam 30:1–31, we should note that there Amalek is mentioned only three times (vv. 1, 13, 18),[63] in contrast to the seven times in Exod 17 and twelve times in 1 Sam 15.[64] Verses 14–17 noticeably speak of "them" and the "band" (גדוד, v. 15), without specifying Amalek. In fact, if the Egyptian slave had not identified his master as Amalekite (v. 13), then nothing after v. 1 and before v. 18 would lead us to specifically identify the raiders as Amalekites. Whether the narrative in 1 Sam 30 is an integral part of the broader narrative of David's rise or not, it is valid to wonder whether Amalek always played a role within the story. Even if

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place of refuge for Moses (Exod 2:15–4:19, 18:1–27). While the Kenites are generally represented as allies living peaceably alongside Israel and Judah (Judg 1:16, 4:11; 1 Sam 15:6, 30:29; 1 Chr 2:55), Gen 15:19 includes them in the list of indigenous nations to be disinherited. The fluctuation in attitudes is not simply resolved by diachronic analysis, since different late texts can display one or the other attitude. Thus, it cannot be ruled out that fluctuating attitudes are related to different groups of scribes or target audiences.

[60] On the late origin of the supplementary oracles in Num 24:20–24, see Levine 2000, 237–238.

[61] Deut 25:17–19 comes right before the first fruits and tithe instructions in 26:1–15 that are followed by a closing peroration in 26:16–19. Here, Deuteronomy conforms with the structure of the Covenant Code by closing its regulations with the first fruits instruction; cf. Exod 23:19.

[62] Van Seters 1994, 198–207. Recently, Jeon (2019) has proposed that the account was added to the Pentateuch at a post-priestly stage of composition.

[63] Cf. Kugler 2021, 10–11.

[64] Exod 17:8–11, 13–14, 16; 1 Sam 15:2–3, 5–8, 15, 18, 20, 32.

we should conclude that the story is older than I tend to think, it might originally have dealt with unknown desert marauders that were secondarily identified as the biblical Amalekites.

In short, Amalek has left no trace in extrabiblical sources, nor has any convincing derivation been proposed for its non-Semitic sounding name. Thus, our knowledge of Amalek is wholly dependent upon the biblical depictions, and these are entirely one-dimensional and designed to paint Amalek as the fiendish enemy to be obliterated for all time. And yet Amalek is not the major foe in the narratives of Samuel, and texts mentioning Amalek can be shown to derive from late redaction, transmissional glossing or even textual errors. All these signs raise the suspicion that biblical Amalek is just as fictive as the biblical depiction of the abhorrent peoples of Canaan who must be eradicated so that Israel can remain faithful to its god in the land Yahweh gives them.[65]

The fictive depiction of Amalek is particularly marked when they are cast in the role of nomadic, camel-riding desert raiders. As a rule, the economy of desert dwellers was based upon more than one branch. Pastoralism required maintaining a symbiotic relationship with settlements that had agricultural surpluses for trade, otherwise they needed to maintain a seasonal base for dry agriculture.[66] Another supplementary mode was to play a part in international trade as intermediaries or guides.[67] Of course, small bands of raiders probably operated in the deserts as well,[68] but it would be far more lucrative to attack a caravan conveying exotic goods than to raid a small frontier settlement or outpost.[69] Furthermore, dromedary camels were usually and most effectively employed as pack animals, particularly for long-distance transport of goods across desert regions.[70] Using camels as mounts for riding would be a waste of their capacity. Even if the four hundred fleeing Amalekites rode the camels tandem – which was unusual – this would presume they had a herd of two hundred, which is vastly inflated when compared to other biblical passages mentioning camels.[71] The tendency of different scholars to accept the depiction of the Amalekites as camel-riding raiders

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[65] Cf. Edenburg 2021.

[66] Finkelstein 1995, 3, 25, 37–38, 156; cf. Koch/Sapir-Hen 2018, 438–439.

[67] Finkelstein 1995, 38, 125, 152.

[68] Finkelstein 1995, 2, 156.

[69] An early eighth-century inscription of Ninurta-kudurrī-uṣur, the governor of Sūḫu and Mari, provides an inverse parallel in which the governor of Sūḫu crosses the Euphrates to raid a peaceful caravan from Tema' and Šaba', numbering 200 camels laden with luxury goods (http://oracc.org/suhu/Q006212/, consulted 30 August 2023).

[70] According to Sapir-Hen/Ben-Yosef 2013, 281, the earliest evidence of domestic camels in Palestine was found in tenth/ninth century BCE contexts at Timna, where they were employed as pack animals. In the Negev, however, they first appear in Iron II; cf. Finkelstein 1995, 127–28, 14; Thareani 2014, 189.

[71] In Gen 24:10, Abraham's servant takes ten camels to Aram Naharaim in order to represent Abraham's wealth; in 2 Kgs 8:9, Hazael brings Elisha forty camel-loads of goods in payment for an oracle regarding Ben-hadad; Ezra 2:64–67 (cf. Neh 7:68) has nearly 48,000 people depart Babylon with 736 horses, 245 mules, 435 camels, and 6,720 donkeys. In texts that mention x *ʾelef* camels, אלף probably indicates heads or herds; cf. Job 1:3; 1 Chr 5:21. Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions mention thousands of camels taken as booty or received in tribute, but these are from Arabian tribal leaders and royalty. In short, even inflated numbers need to be viewed in context and in proportion to other texts.

as part of a historical kernel in the narrative[72] most likely draws upon a "romantic' and possibly Eurocentric view of hordes of barbarian riders coming from the wilderness to raid and torch the towns of the west.[73]

We cannot know whether there ever was a people or tribe named Amalek. Of course, there were various groups inhabiting the desert fringes, and these generally combined pastoralism with seasonal dry farming or traded their surplus products from herds for agricultural products from the settled regions.[74] In difficult times, small groups might have had recourse to raiding, but this was hardly a mode of life. Given the fictive depiction of biblical Amalek, Israel Finkelstein has suggested that Amalek "was a blanket name for all the tribal groups of the South",[75] while others more specifically view Amalek as a biblical designation or cipher for first-millennium BCE Arabs.[76] While some material and epigraphic finds do show some Arabic presence in the Negev and surrounding regions in the late Iron Age, I wonder why such an Arabic or proto-Arabic presence would evoke such hostility on the part of the biblical scribes. Thus, it is necessary to examine the details of the narrative in order to see whether they might better fit another group.

5. The Social and Historical Context of the Composition and its First Audience

The geographical sphere of the narrative centers on the portion of the western Negev that ranges from Wadi Besor to the south and Nahal Gerar to the north. Beyond this area, David's forces pursue the raiders to some point south of Wadi Besor, and afterwards David sends booty as far north as Hebron in the Judean hills. Hence, the focus is on the area of the Negev district of the town list of Judah (Josh 15:21–32), especially the portion overlapping with the Simeon town list (Josh 19:1–9; cf. 1 Chr 4:28–31).[77] This by no means implies that the narrative or the booty distribution list can

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[72] E.g., Dietrich 2019, 135–136.

[73] Cf. Thareani 2014, 190.

[74] Finkelstein 1995, 3, 25. On climate fluctuations in the southern region during the sixth to fourth centuries and their impact upon population movement, economy and administration, see Langgut/ Lipschits 2022, 164–168; Finkelstein 1995, 32–35, 39.

[75] Finkelstein 1995, 125.

[76] See, e.g., Na'aman 2010, 177; cf. Gaß 2012, 205; Knauf 2013, 108 n. 9; Frevel 2020, 215, 222. Earlier, Knauf (1988, 10, 93–94) suggested that Amalek represents a proto-Arabic group in the tenth century BCE.

[77] Ziklag (v. 1; Josh 15:31; 19:5; 1 Chr 4:30); Betul/Betuel (v. 27; Josh 15:30 LXX; 19:4; 1 Chr 4:30); Ramot Negev (v. 27; Josh 19:8; cf. Arad 24.13–20); ʿAroer (v. 28; Josh 15:22 MT: ʿAdʿadah); Hormah (v. 30; Josh 15:30; 19:4; 1 Chr 4:30); ʿAshan (v. 30; Josh 15:42; 19:7; 1 Chr 4:32); ʿAthach/ʿEther (v. 30; Josh 15:42; cf. 1 Chr 4:32 which reads Tochen). Farther north in the mountain district of Judah: Yatir (v. 27; Josh 15:48); Eshtamoa (v. 28; Josh 15:50; 1 Chr 4:17, where it is counted as a Calebite town); Barkal/Carmel (v. 29; Josh 15:55); Hebron (v. 31; Josh 15:54). For discussion of these toponyms and their modern identification, see Na'aman 1980; Na'aman 2005, 343–361; Na'aman 2010.

be dated to the times when the districts listed in Joshua were part of Judah, or that it points to an earlier period than the district system in Judah, as thought by some.[78] On the contrary, it is equally possible that the scribes of 1 Sam 30 were familiar with the district lists in Josh 15 and drew upon them in order to infuse the narrative and the booty list with realistic-seeming details. In this case, we need not focus our search for the historical context of the composition solely upon periods in which the Negev district was under Judah's control. Instead, we also need to consider the aim and purpose of the narrative, as well as the historical-social location of its target audience.

Since the time of Alt, the district list of Judah in Josh 15 has been thought to reflect the historical reality of Josiah's time, and different types of evidence support the view that the entire area covered by the district list was under Judean control at that time.[79] Throughout the time of the Neo-Assyrian empire, when Judah was a client of Assyria, the Negev and the Arabah remained under Judahite/Assyrian control, since the Assyrians had a vested interest in controlling international trade with the Arabian peninsula. The international trade and security fostered by Assyrian rule brought prosperity to the areas around the southern trade routes and provided opportunities to peoples inhabiting the southern frontiers and wilderness regions to play a role as intermediaries and caravanners, bringing them into peaceful contact with the southern towns of Judah.[80] South of the Dead Sea there are no natural borders traversing the Arabah from north to south. Hence, pastoral groups could move freely from the hills of Edom, across the Arabah and further north to the Negev. The prosperity in the region motivated non-Judean groups from farther south and east of the Araba to settle on the southern frontier of Judah, where they could further diversify their economy and perhaps also serve as mercenaries at frontier outposts.[81] Indeed, with the weakening of Assyrian rule towards the end of the seventh century, a line of fortresses was established in the Beersheba and Arad Valleys.[82] From this time, there is documented evidence for the presence in the Negev (and the southern Hebron hills) of people who revered the national god of Edom, Qos, as well as individuals bearing names of Arabian origin.[83] Thus, already at the end of the seventh century, the population of the Negev was multicultural; the region accommodated both sedentary groups and pastoral nomads, and both groups could supplement their economy by providing services to the international trade caravans.[84]

However, Judean hegemony in the southern Hebron hills and the Negev began to erode at the beginning of the sixth century, when the garrisons manning the Negev fortresses were needed to meet the Babylonian threat further north. The collapse of the

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[78] E.g., Na'aman 2010; Dietrich 2019, 133, 138.

[79] Na'aman 2005, 331–361.

[80] Finkelstein 1995, 38, 125, 147–148, 152; Thareani 2014, 188–190; Koch/Sapir-Hen 2018, 431–434; Danielson 2022, 117–118.

[81] Finkelstein 1995, 144; Thareani 2014, 195; Bienkowski 2022, 68–71; Stern 2022, 99–100; Danielson 2022, 119–120; cf. Langgut/Lipschits 2022, 155.

[82] Lipschits 2005, 224–226; Danielson 2022, 120; Langgut/Lipschits 2022, 156.

[83] Finkelstein 1995, 144, 148; Stern 2007; Thareani 2014, 193; Levin 2015, 189–190.

[84] Thareani 2014, 195–196, 201; Koch/Sapir-Hen 2018, 437–438; Danielson 2022, 118, 142.

line of frontier forts was probably due to internal political factors,[85] and they were not restored after the conquest Judah, since the Babylonians had no interest in securing the Arabian trade routes that passed through the Negev. Without the control of a central authority, the equilibrium between the diverse groups in the northern Negev was disrupted. It is likely that pastoralists, who had profited from the Arabian trade, now sought alternate modes to supplement their subsistence, and thus competed with the towns of southern Judah over arable land. In any event, material and epigraphic evidence show that by the end of the sixth century, people affiliated with Edomite and Arabian culture had established their presence north of the Negev, in the Hebron hills, and in the area of the Shephelah that had not recovered from Sennacherib's campaign in 701 BCE.

The advance northwards of Edomite- and Arabian-affiliated groups came to a halt sometime during the transition between the fifth and fourth centuries with the construction of Persian fortresses along the roads running south towards Beth-zur.[86] By the Hellenistic period, the southern frontier of Judea was pushed northwards, leaving the Negev and the Hebron hills outside of Judea, and this area, along with the southern and central Shephelah, had become Idumea.[87]

In historical reality, the population of the geographical sphere represented in the story-world of 1 Sam 30 was comprised of different types of groups of varying origins, which had adapted themselves to different modes of subsistence and economy according to fluctuations in external circumstances.[88] Pastoralists lived in symbiosis with agrarian settlements; pastoralists could become agrarians, and farmers could become pastoralists; and up to the end of the Neo-Assyrian period, both pastoralists and agrarian settlements profited from the Arabian caravans. Throughout the period, at least from the seventh century down to the late second century, the populace in the Hebron hills and the Negev was ethnically and culturally diverse. The interrelations between the groups are hardly expressed by binary qualities like hostile/peaceful or dependency/self-sufficiency. Instead, the groups were socially and economically enmeshed or entangled with each other.[89] This notwithstanding, kinship-based groups tend to foster endogamy in order to prevent the alienation of property, which might have motivated the maintenance of identity boundaries. Thus, multicultural zones have a potential for internal conflict alongside symbiosis.[90] Furthermore, there is potential for tension between the hegemonic centers and the multicultural or socially and economically entangled frontier and peripheral regions.

This survey of the geography of the narrative in 1 Sam 30 provides the background for understanding the purpose of the narrative and the representation of the Amalekites within it. The geography of the story fits conditions that prevailed hundreds of years *after* the time of David, although it is possible that the scribes evoked the *memory* of past conditions by drawing upon literary material available to them (e.g., Josh 15; 19)

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[85] Cf. Lipschits 2005, 224–226; Koch/Sapir-Hen 2018, 441; Langgut/Lipschits 2022, 157–158.
[86] Lipschits 2005, 257–258; Fantalkin/Tal 2012, 161–163; cf. Thareani 2014, 204.
[87] Fantalkin/Tal 2012, 134–135, 143–148; Levin 2015, 189.
[88] Finkelstein 1995, 26, 46, 120, 156; Thareani 2014, 191.
[89] Thareani 2014, 191; Danielson 2022, 118, 128, 142.
[90] Thareani 2014, 202–203.

in order to imbue a fictional narrative with what would appear to its readership as historical background.

The depiction of the Amalekites, however, conflicts with our knowledge of ancient Near Eastern nomadism, and appears to be a literary fiction. Of course, the desert frontiers were populated with groups that practiced pastoralism and different degrees of nomadism, but their mode of life was based on a symbiotic relationship with frontier settlements, and raiding was not an advantageous subsistence strategy. The very foreign (and possibly non-Semitic) name that cannot be verified in extrabiblical sources, along with the uncompromising antagonism towards Amalek, raises the question whether Amalek is not a cipher for a better-known group towards which biblical sources were more ambivalent. If so, then Amalek could be a convenient alter ego that would mask the target group and mark it as totally "other" and abhorrent.

In my opinion, the geographic sphere of the narrative provides the key for identifying the group behind the Amalek mask. Although the towns of southern Judah flourished in the eighth and seventh centuries, the southern Hebron hills and the Negev remained outside the limits of Yehud after the Babylonian conquest and ultimately became Idumea. Idumean ostraca that include personal names with Yahwistic theophoric elements indicate that some Judahite presence persisted within Idumea, but the majority of names documented are "Edomite" and "Arabian" compounded with the Qos theophoric element.[91] Thus, the region that that had been southern Judah became culturally aligned with "Edomite" identity markers.

How was this situation viewed from Jerusalem? Erudite scribes there maintained the memory of both Judah as it was and Judah as it never really had been. Literary monuments of a remembered past – the past as it was imagined and idealized – had already taken shape, and were being reread, revised, and rewritten. New material was appended to the existing narrative of the past to address current concerns, and these were cast as problems that had been resolved already in distant times. The supplanting of Judahite control in the south by Idumea could be reversed on the imaginary plane of the story world, in which David delivers southern Judah from the hands of the Amalekites. Indeed, elsewhere late biblical scribes associated Amalek with Esau/Edom and Seir and grafted Amalek onto the lineage of Esau, father of Edom (Gen 36:12, 16), and even imagined the Simeonites eliminating "the remnant of Amalek" from Seir (1 Chr 4:42–43). In reality, Edom was a proximate Other, represented in certain streams of biblical tradition as a "brother" of Jacob/Israel.[92] But scribes could evoke estrangement by masking their target with an alternate identity, transforming the proximate Other into a wholly alien Other.

Conclusions and Implications

In conclusion, I would like to propose two alternative scenarios for the composition of the account of David's battle with the Amalekites in 1 Sam 30. The first scenario

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[91] Stern 2007; Fantalkin/Tal 2012, 146; Levin 2015, 196–198, 201.
[92] Ben Zvi 2022, 332–335.

presumes that the present form of the narrative in 1 Sam 30 is the result of lengthy and gradual growth, and is based upon form-critical considerations, as well as the general impression of Standard Biblical Hebrew style that runs through the text. Thus, it is possible that the story originated as a legal midrash explicating the origin of the custom for distributing war booty, and this legal midrash came to be attached to David's period in Ziklag. The story acquired the geographic background relevant to the area of Ziklag and was woven into the section dealing with David's desert sojourn so as to prepare the way for his seamless accession to kingship in Judah. Only in the last stage were the raiders identified with Amalek in order to imbue the story with a covert anti-Idumean polemic. This, in turn, necessitated adding supplementary references to Amalek in 1 Sam 27 and 2 Sam 1. Synchronic readings of First Samuel tend to view this account of David's battle with Amalek as a corrective to that of Saul's, thus presuming that 1 Sam 15 was already in place before the addition of Amalek to 1 Sam 30. However, this is not a convincing editorial motive, since David does not carry out Samuel's dictates any better than Saul had (cf. Kugler 2021, 11). Quite the opposite! David allows four hundred Amalekites to escape and takes much booty which is distributed throughout Judah. Furthermore, the impression of the text's style is misleading, since only a few verses are in purely classical style.

   Otherwise, the legal midrash was composed for its present context and was associated with Amalek from the outset. The scribe made a point of emulating classic narrative style, but on occasion late and peculiar expressions slipped into the work. The author was familiar with Samuel's denunciation of Saul for his conduct with Amalek but was not concerned with making David correct Saul's errors, which were eventually remedied only by the Chronicler, who attributes the elimination of the Amalekite remnant to Simeonites in 1 Chr 4:42–43.[93] Instead, the composition of 1 Sam 30 was motivated from the outset by the wish to reverse the hold of Idumea upon what used to be southern Judah, and this was retrojected into the past and attributed to David, the ideal founder of Judah's dynasty. Thus, the narrative serves as a paradigm, or as midrash puts it, מעשה אבות סימן לבנים, "the deeds of the fathers are a signpost for the sons",[94] expressing a hope that what purportedly was accomplished long ago by David would be reenacted in the scribe's own day.

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[93] Cf. Ben Zvi 2019, 430–436.
[94] Cf. Gen. Rab. 48.7; Tanḥ. Lech Lecha 9; Nachmanides on Gen 12:6.

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Copper, Nomads, and Kings

Rethinking the Social and Historical Background of the Books of Samuel

Zachary Thomas and Erez Ben-Yosef

1. Introduction

The dual proposal of a complex nomadic society identifiable with Edom in the Wadi Arabah and adjacent Negev and Transjordanian highlands during the early Iron Age (i.e., Iron Age I–IIA, roughly the mid-twelfth to late ninth centuries BCE), as well the existence of a significant nomadic population within Israel in the same period, is significant in efforts to understand early biblical Israel and its wider Levantine context.[1] Under this proposal, early Iron Age Israel should be considered a polymorphous society, that is a fluid mix of sedentary and nomadic social units, bound together socially and politically through kinship and the organizing principle of the patrimonial household.[2]

This has major implications for the potential understanding of the sociopolitical background to the books of Samuel, in two senses. First, the inability of archaeology to detect nomadic populations in the non-desert regions that the Israelites predominantly occupied, coupled with the oft-disregarded ability of such populations to participate in social complexity, must be taken into account in evaluating and reconstructing the history of the early Israelite monarchy at a general level. It further undermines biblical archaeology's bias towards sedentism and visible evidence of occupational activity alone, and therefore the ability of archaeology to act as an unbiased arbiter in such evaluation and reconstruction. We have explored this elsewhere.[3] Here we explore the second implication, the effect that this proposal has on reading and interpreting various aspects of the books of Samuel. Since the case of early Iron Age Edom is the evidentiary and theoretical prompt to the proposal, as well as relevant to the background of the books of Samuel, we begin with a synopsis of the subject, including a response to recent attempts to cast doubt on the identification of early Iron Age remains in the Wadi Arabah with the Edom of Samuel. Following this, we review a few select case studies from the books of Samuel that demonstrate how their historical interpretation should be reconsidered in light of the proposal that the social makeup of early Israel (in the days of the early monarchy and before) was polymorphous.

[2] See Lemche 1985, 152–153, 198–199.
[3] Ben-Yosef 2021; Ben-Yosef/Thomas 2023; Ben-Yosef/Thomas 2024.

Before proceeding, it is appropriate to briefly reflect on the question of whether portions of the books of Samuel could have been written during (or draw on sources from) the early Iron Age, before the eighth century BCE. This would include the written record of details such as the existence of the "Edom" with whom the Israelites interacted at this time and its recognition as a kingdom, as well as the polymorphous social makeup of Israel more generally. We see no reason to exclude this possibility, and thus no reason to treat references to Edom in Samuel as anachronistic reflections of a late monarchic or exilic reality, as some of our colleagues might. Even skeptics regarding the production of texts in Israel, particularly in Jerusalem, this early, admit that the biblical authors had some knowledge of early Iron Age realities. They knew of the importance of the Philistine city of Gath prior to its destruction by Hazael of Damascus in the late ninth century and of the major shrine at Shiloh in the hill country prior to its destruction during the Iron Age I.[4] Setting aside the slippery matter of oral sources, it has become increasingly evident from epigraphic finds that scribalism was alive in Israel during the early Iron Age, even if not at the floruit it would reach in the late Iron Age (eighth to early sixth centuries BCE). A significant gap in perishable writing media (papyrus and vellum) exists throughout the Iron Age, so the production of an early forms of books such as Samuel, or sources used in its later composition, during the tenth century BCE cannot be excluded. The continued production of such texts at this time is in fact necessary to explain Hebrew scribalism's inheritance of Egyptian scribal practices and terms that could only have been adopted in the southern Levant during the New Kingdom's hegemony there.[5] Certainly, none of this proves the existence of some form of the books of Samuel or sources thereof during the tenth century BCE; however, the tenth century is arguably a more likely context for the references to Edom in Samuel than assigning the Edom encountered by Saul and David to the pen of a much later writer.

2. Early Iron Age Edom

2.1 Textual References to an Early Edom Outside the Hebrew Bible

An entity named "Edom" is mentioned relatively few times in the books of Samuel, but the author(s) clearly portray it as a polity much as they do the early Israelite kingdom under Saul and David, as well as the other neighboring polities (perhaps kingdoms more specifically) with whom Saul battled (1 Sam 14:47–48; 15:31–33) and whom David

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[4] Finkelstein 2007, 17–18. The nature of the shrine at Shiloh can also be related to an early nomadic Israel, but we shall deal with this subject in a future publication.

[5] See Richelle 2016; Rollston 2016; Rollston 2017; Schniedewind 2013, 56–61; Thomas forthcoming; this renders doubtful the argument of Edenburg (this volume) that the characteristic third-person narrative prose of the text could not have been produced early as it is otherwise unparalleled in the Iron Age Levant and differs from the first-person style of known West Semitic/Neo-Hittite royal inscriptions. Due to the gap in surviving epigraphic evidence, this absence of third person narrative prose should not be taken as indicative of what was being produced, certainly in the early Iron Age.

conquered (2 Sam 8:1–14).[6] No mention of a king of Edom is made in Samuel, though a king does appear in other texts that are concerned with the pre-monarchic or early monarchic history of Israel (Gen 36:31–39; Num 20:14; Judg 11:17; 1 Kgs 11:14). Indeed, Gen 36:31–39 is a list of "kings who reigned in the land of Edom before a king reigned over the sons of Israel" (v. 31; our translation). Any discussion of Edom as it appears in Samuel is also relevant for these texts, and most likely Edom was implicitly understood as a kingdom by the author(s) of Samuel.[7]

The earliest reference to Edom occurs in the Late Bronze Age, from the reign of Pharaoh Merenptah in Papyrus Anastasi VI, which mentions "Shasu tribes of Edom (ʾIdm)" bringing their livestock into the eastern Delta. The terms "Shasu" (Egyptian *šꜣsw*) and "land of Shasu" also occur in New Kingdom Egyptian inscriptions in connection with the toponyms "Seir" or "mountain of Seir" (which are both sometimes used as a synonym for Edom in the Hebrew Bible; Gen 32:3, 36:21; Judg 5:4) and quite possibly with the toponym "Punon", a biblical name seemingly located in the "land of Edom" (Gen 36:41; Num 33:44) and reflected in the name of the Wadi Faynan on the eastern edge of the Wadi Arabah.[8] The cumulative evidence supports a characterization of the Shasu as mobile, tent-dwelling pastoral nomads that the Egyptians encountered in, or coming from, the region of the Sinai, the Arabah, and the highlands around the latter. The exact etymology of "Shasu" is itself not settled, although it may come from the Egyptian verb *šꜣs* "to wander, roam", or possibly from the Semitic root שסס/שסה "to plunder".[9] The Egyptian texts do not clearly indicate that the Shasu occupied anything that was recognized as a permanent settlement, although this cannot be ruled out.[10] Revealing is the claim of Ramesses III in Papyrus Harris to have destroyed Shasu who are identified as "Seirites" and to have pillaged their tents (spelled with the Semitic root *ʾhl* [cf. Heb. אהל]) and livestock.[11]

The name "Edom" next appears with certainty in the Nimrud (or Calah) Slab of Assyrian king Adad-Nirari III, an inscription dating to the late ninth or early eighth century BCE.[12] There, Edom (KUR *ú-du-mu*) is included in a list of other known polities, including Tyre, Sidon, the House of Omri, and Philistia (KUR *pa-la-as-tú*) (all otherwise known to be kingdoms, with the possible exception of the latter), who submitted to the Assyrian king. The circumstances of this submission are not stated, though they may very well have followed Adad-Nirari's subjugation of Aram-Damascus, which is also described.[13] Given the other polities in the list, we conclude

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[6] The following discussion is largely based on our previous publications, see (with much further literature) Ben-Yosef 2023; Ben-Yosef/Thomas 2023; Ben-Yosef/Thomas 2024.

[7] While Gen 36:31–39 is often dated relatively late, an early date or source for this list should be considered in the context of the larger reconstruction of early Iron Age Edom, as already discussed in more detail in Ben-Yosef 2020, 45–47.

[8] Kitchen 1992, 26–27; Cooper 2020, 216–217, 245–248; Crowell 2021, 98–105; Knauf 1992.

[9] Giveon 1971; Cooper 2020, 75–76; Hasel 1998, 217–231; Rainey/Notley 2014, 103. References to the Shasu in Egyptian texts are collected and discussed in Giveon 1971.

[10] Sperveslage 2011.

[11] Kitchen 1992, 27.

[12] For the text, see Grayson 1996, 212–213.

[13] Millard 1992.

that Adad-Nirari identified Edom as a recognizable polity as well, rather than as simply a geographical location. Note that the use of the term KUR ("land") does not indicate that the scribes of Adad-Nirari did not recognize Edom as a kingdom more specifically; this term is used for the domains of kings, including Aya-rāmu "of the land of Edom", who paid tribute to Sennacherib in the late eighth century BCE.[14] The New Kingdom references to Edom (including Seir) and this Assyrian reference are several hundred years apart, indicating a persistence of a social and/or political identification based on the name Edom over a long time span that includes the tenth century BCE.[15]

2.2 Correlating These References with Archaeological Finds (or a Lack Thereof)

The only possible instances where Late Bronze or early Iron Age I archaeological remains can be connected with the Shasu appearing in the texts discussed above are where Shasu people had interactions with New Kingdom Egypt. There is no archaeological evidence from the Late Bronze Age in the desert areas where such interactions probably occurred that can be attributed specifically to the Shasu, as one would expect from a tent-dwelling population.[16] Hoffmeier and colleagues propose that the remains of reed huts dating from the early New Kingdom at Tell el-Borg, just outside the eastern Nile Delta, are temporary Shasu dwellings. Though possibly slightly earlier than the nearby fort at the site, the location of these huts may relate to their occupants' interaction with that fort, which formed part of the defenses along the Way of Horus.[17] This suggestion is certainly intriguing in view of the reference to the "Shasu tribes of Edom" in Papyrus Anastasi VI (see above), though there is nothing in the material culture in the huts that necessitates a connection to a pastoral nomadic group. This must therefore remain just a reasonable suggestion.

Archaeological identification of Shasu is possible only when they engaged in specific activities that would have left substantial archaeological remains. In the southern regions, these activities would have been mining and smelting, which is most readily evident in the Timna Valley of the southern Wadi Arabah in Israel (and Wadi Faynan in the northern Arabah). Copper mining in the Timna Valley took place under Egyptian auspices during the Nineteenth and Twentieth Dynasties (thirteenth and early twelfth centuries BCE), though likely on a much smaller scale than had been concluded previously. The presence of Egyptians themselves in Timna is indicated mostly by objects excavated at a shrine in the valley (Site 200). Otherwise, the material culture from this shrine and the few sites where copper smelting was carried out in this period, especially local handmade wares and the Qurayyah Painted Ware tradition originating in the northern Hejaz, indicate that the workers were locals. Given what we know of the people in this general area from Egyptian texts, it is most likely that these local workers were Shasu; indeed, an existing economic relationship between them and the Egyptian

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[14] Grayson/Novotny 2012, 64.

[15] On Edom's possible appearance in the campaign list of Sheshonq I, see below.

[16] Hasel 1998, 232–235; The only possible exception may be some putative Late Bronze–Iron I survey material found at sites in the Wadi Hasa (the biblical Zered), but the identification and dating of this material is insecure; see Bienkowski 1995; Herr 2013.

[17] Hoffmeier/Davis/Hummel 2016.

authorities would help to explain the latter's willingness to assist them, as reported in Papyrus Anastasi VI. No proper residences for workers exist at Timna, so they can only have resided in tents (see further on this below).[18]

As for the Edom of Adad-Nirari III, there is simply no archaeology whatsoever with which it can be associated. The period around 800 BCE is too early for any of the sedentary Edomite sites of the plateau east of the Arabah and of the Negev, and too late for the early Iron Age copper production in the Arabah. This prompted Bienkowski to consider that this Edom may have been a non-settled society (cf. below),[19] which remains the only serious option. The "Edom" of New Kingdom Egypt and of Adad-Nirari III would hardly be the first instance a pastoral nomadic society, even a socially complex one, that is present in the historical record but largely or even fully invisible to archaeological investigation. From the very same region, there is likewise no archaeological record to associate with the tent-dwelling Arabs encountered in the deserts of the southern Levant during the Assyrian campaigns. The earliest Classical references to the Nabateans indicate that they were initially nomadic, even though militarily quite powerful, contradicting attempts to see the early Nabateans only through scant Hellenistic remains at Petra.[20] In any event, there is no reason to expect that the nomadic, tent-dwelling nature of the Edom that Adad-Nirari and his scribes encountered would have been a reason to recognize Edom any differently than settled polities like Tyre; indeed, the Assyrian Kings List, a royal chronicle known primarily from the Neo-Assyrian period but apparently originating earlier, begins with a list of "kings who dwelt in tents".[21]

3. Traces of an Early Iron Age Kingdom of Edom

3.1 A Nomadic Copper-Producing Polity in the Early Iron Age

Following the end of Egyptian hegemony in the southern Levant during the twelfth century BCE, it appears that a polity made up of the existing Shasu expanded copper production onto a large scale in the Arabah, allowing them to become the dominant suppliers of copper to the eastern Mediterranean following the cessation of the Cypriot copper supply at the end of the Late Bronze Age. Copper production in the Arabah eventually ceased during the ninth century BCE, first at Timna, where fuel resources were depleted completely,[22] and then in Faynan, where copper production ended following the campaign of Hazael of Damascus into the southern Levant, his destruction of Philistine Gath (a major outlet for the trade of copper) and the resumption of the copper trade from Cyprus.[23]

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[18] Avner 2014; Yagel/Ben-Yosef/Craddock 2016; Ben-Yosef et al. 2012; Yahalom-Mack/Segal 2018; cf. Rothenberg 1999; and see Levy/Adams/Muniz 2004 for Faynan.

[19] Bienkowski 1990, 103.

[20] Finkelstein 1992b; Pearson 2011, 1–11; *contra* Graf 2013; Graf et al. 2022.

[21] For the text and a translation, see Glassner 2004, 136–145.

[22] Cavanagh/Ben-Yosef/Langgut 2022.

[23] Ben-Yosef/Sergi 2018.

The polity that operated this copper industry can also be linked to two other archaeological phenomena. Iron Age I pottery found in cultivable areas of the Edomite Plateau, where no settlement sites exist in this period, probably indicates agricultural activity of a pastoral nomadic population.[24] The small forts, rough, makeshift dwellings, and animal pens of the early Iron Age in the Negev highlands can also be linked with this polity.[25] These sites are not part of a permanent, year-round settlement phenomenon, with much thinner deposits than those found at proper settlements like those further to the north, and geoarchaeological investigation indicates that they were not used for agriculture.[26] Rather, they are "permanent [structures] of transient dwellers".[27] The assemblage of handmade Negebite ware from these sites was made in the Arabah, tempered with slag from the copper production process.[28] It is possible that these sites have some degree of multilateral origin, from the involvement of people from the copper producing polity of the Arabah (Edom) and those from polities to the north (Philistia, Judah, Israel). But based on the presence of both this Negebite ware and much wheelmade ware from further north at the Negev highlands sites, it is very likely that these sites were constructed for periodic use as sites where the nomads coming from the south could meet with and trade copper with those from the north.[29] It is important to note as well that copper production in both Faynan and Timna existed in the twelfth-eleventh centuries BCE, after the end of Egyptian hegemony but *before* the existence of these sites.

The social complexity of this polity as reflected in the copper industry is quite remarkable. Operating a technologically advanced process and producing a large amount of copper under the harsh environmental conditions of the Arabah required a high level of organization and logistical co-ordination, perhaps first learned under the Egyptians. People and livestock had to be supplied with food and water, from a spring some distance away in the case of Timna. The industry required a constant supply of wood, ore moved from mines to smelting sites, and a supply of tools involved in the process such as ground stones.[30] The aridity of the Arabah has also preserved organics (plant and fish remains) that point to the polity's long distance connections, from as far away as the Mediterranean coast.[31] Of particular importance are textiles dyed with Mediterranean plants and rare examples of Phoenician purple dyed textiles.[32] This was no marginal, simple society of desert fringe dwellers.

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[24] On this, see Finkelstein 1992a; Ben-Yosef 2021.

[25] Even scholars who do not agree with our views presented here nonetheless agree that these sites were closely associated with the copper production of the Arabah; see, e.g., Finkelstein 2020.

[26] On the archaeology of the sites, see Cohen/Cohen-Amin 2004; on the geoarchaeological study of their use, see Shahack-Gross/Finkelstein 2008.

[27] Negev 1979, 34.

[28] Martin/Finkelstein 2013; Martin et al. 2014.

[29] Ben-Yosef 2019, 365–366; Ben-Yosef 2023, 240–243. See also the discussion of the Negev highlands as the trade corridor throughout the ancient history of the region in Ben-David 2022.

[30] Ben-Yosef 2019, 369; Cavanagh 2016; Greener/Ben-Yosef 2016.

[31] Sapir-Hen/Lernau/Ben-Yosef 2018.

[32] Sukenik et al. 2021.

It is important to emphasize here that the society responsible for this early Iron Age copper industry can only have been tent-dwelling pastoral nomads. The copper production sites spread throughout the Timna Valley and the Wadi Faynan area consist largely of slag mounds and associated installations. Some architecture is present, though it seems to have been used for metallurgical activities or was clearly built with defense in mind (such as the fortress as Khirbet en-Nahas in the Faynan) for the time of year when the copper was being produced (see below).[33] There are no proper settlements that housed the population in either area. The population did not live at the copper production sites themselves, as indicated by a lack of domestic paraphernalia there, including storage containers and cooking vessels, and the lack of a complete diet represented in the botanical assemblage.[34] Petrography of the ceramic assemblage indicates that it was overwhelmingly locally made, which nullifies the possibility that a population who came from outside the Arabah, i.e. far to the north, operated this copper industry.[35] The population conducting the mining would have camped near the production sites, but whatever remains they might have left would have been long since removed by natural forces, especially major floods through the wadis of Timna and the Faynan.[36] This does not preclude the discovery of some remains, such as campsites, that might have belonged to this population around the Arabah or adjacent highlands in the future, but even when remains related to nomadic populations are found they can be impossible to date. Some campsites and remains of tents have been found in surveys around the Faynan area, but they did not offer enough evidence for dating.[37]

The population of the copper-producing polity presumably moved seasonally with their livestock between different zones, namely, the Arabah and its copper production sites during the cooler months and the Edomite Plateau and the Negev Highlands during the warmer months, where the population could grow crops. There is no absolute dichotomy between sedentism and nomadism; rather, societies with a nomadic element tend to exist on a continuum between the two extremes.[38] Because the copper-producing polity did make use of some architecture, even if only temporarily, they can be described as at least somewhat polymorphous, and indeed ancient Near Eastern societies could consist of a fluid mix of sedentary and nomadic populations.[39]

3.2 Identifying This Polity with Edom

Edom is clearly the most logical identification for this polity, since no preferable identification known from historical sources exists. Even without the biblical text, it is clear that the social and political identity "Edom" must have existed during the early Iron Age, since the texts discussed above date before and after this period, so it is

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[33] See the various chapters in the main excavation report for the Edom Lowlands Regional Project, Levy/Najjar/Ben-Yosef 2014.

[34] Kleiman/Kleiman/Ben-Yosef 2017; David et al. 2022.

[35] Smith/Goren/Levy 2014.

[36] Ginat et al. 2018; Ben-Yosef 2019, 366.

[37] Knabb et al. 2014.

[38] See, e.g., Cribb 1991, 16–17.

[39] Lemche 1985, 198.

illogical that a polity should exist in the same general region where Edom is otherwise known to have existed but not be Edom itself. Recently, Piotr Bienkowski has challenged the identification of the early Iron Age copper-producing polity of the Arabah with Edom, concluding that it cannot have been an earlier form of the kingdom of Edom as known from Assyrian sources and the late Iron Age archaeology of the Edomite Plateau.[40] His arguments are based primarily on the results from the Faynan sites, with little discussion of Timna. Here we respond to the shortcomings in Bienkowski's arguments, which serve also to reinforce the identification of this polity with Edom.

The main reason for Bienkowski and others to reject the Edomite identification is the gap in archaeological evidence in this area between the late ninth and late eighth centuries, a gap of about one hundred years. However, this gap in archaeological evidence should not be seen as a gap in occupation of the region, but rather as the result of the end of the Edomite copper production enterprise. This activity is in fact the only reason why the early Edomite nomadic society has been archaeologically conspicuous; with the end of this activity, it became inconspicuous until sedentarization gradually started on the Edomite Plateau. The simplistic conflation between oscillations in archaeological visibility and changing degrees of social complexity should be avoided, especially when the society under investigation is nomadic in origin.[41]

Bienkowski accepts that the Arabah may have been regarded as geographically part of Edom at an early date given the Egyptian texts discussed above, though his statement that in those texts "it was the land that was Edom, not the people" is not necessarily correct.[42] In any event, it is agreed that the geographical extent that Edom (including associated Seir) reached in the Late Bronze and early Iron Age should not be limited to the "Edomite Plateau" east of the Arabah simply because this is where the core settlements of the late Iron Age kingdom of Edom, including the capital Bozrah, are located.[43] The New Kingdom period textual references to Seir are not geographically specific, but allow that Seir would include the Arabah and the highlands on its western side, towards the Sinai (nothing otherwise excludes this).[44] A clear indication of Edom's extension into the Arabah itself is the notice in 1 Kgs 9:26 that Solomon built Ezion-geber "on the shore of the Red Sea (ים סוף), in the land of Edom", very close to the Timna Valley. This would provide the most straightforward explanation for the uncommon biblical toponym גיא המלח "Valley of Salt", where Israel and Judah battle with Edom in the accounts of David and Amaziah's reigns, respectively (2 Sam 8:13; 2 Kgs 14:7).[45] Knowledge of the extension of Edom across the Arabah into the Negev appears in the description of Judah's boundary in Numbers 34 and Joshua 15, which record that the boundary abutted that of Edom in the Negev (Num 34:3 [also 20:16]; Josh 15:1). Moreover, there is ample evidence that (Mount) Seir was a toponym that was used for

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[40] Bienkowski 2022.

[41] Ben-Yosef 2021.

[42] Bienkowski 2022, 126 n. 17; following Bartlett 1989.

[43] Cf. Rainey/Notley 2014, 41, 103.

[44] Cooper 2020, 246–248.

[45] For further discussion of the term גיא [ה]מלח, see the chapter by Stephen Germany and Assaf Kleiman in this volume (pp. 171–205, here p. 185).

the highlands of the Negev, as well as the Edomite Plateau to which it is commonly connected (e.g. Deut 1:2, 44; 33:2; Josh 11:6–7).[46] Thus, Bienkowski's concession regarding the extent of Edom immediately undermines his conclusion, which relies on accepting a polity in Edom geographically (Late Bronze-early Iron Age), near to Edom politically (the late Iron Age kingdom), yet somehow not Edom.

In the late Iron Age, there is some evidence of small-scale and relatively low-tech copper smelting in Edom, and Bienkowski takes the difference between these smelting activities and the larger-scale, more technologically advanced activity of the early Iron Age as indicative of two completely different groups. He does not adequately explain why the excavators' conclusion that this resulted from the loss of technological knowledge within the same group of people, or their deliberate choice to not engage in copper mining on a larger scale after the end of the early Iron Age copper production,[47] is not an adequate explanation. Rather, he simply posits a "discrete tribe" that apparently suddenly appeared and took an interest in copper mining.[48]

It should be noted that Bienkowski accepts the likelihood that the reference to Edom in the Nimrud Slab of Adad-Nirari III refers to pastoral nomads, as we do, and more specifically on the Edomite Plateau, when all agree that there was no settlement there yet. His argument that this reference may be "a geographical, not political term, like 'Amurru' in the same phrase" of the inscription[49] is simply a convenient way of avoiding the natural implication that the Nimrud Slab refers to a polity no differently than it does to those others, as mentioned above. While the most straightforward and likely explanation is a continuity of the population of the copper-producing polity in the early Iron Age through to the archaeologically invisible Edom of Adad-Nirari III and then to the late Iron Age settlements of the Edomite Plateau, Bienkowski explains neither what happened to the early Iron Age population nor where the late Iron Age settled population came from.

As such, the early Iron Age nomadic copper-producing polity is located in an area identified with Edom/Seir and slots in between the earlier and later extrabiblical appearances of Edom.[50] Israel Finkelstein has also questioned this identification, asking why the polity could not be identified with "Midian, Amalek, Kedar, Paran, [or] Teman?"[51] While it is true that the polity's identification with Edom is not beyond all doubt, given the sources at hand, most of these suggestions are either not known to have been polities (e.g., Paran) or lack the clear association with the right geographical area that Edom possesses (e.g., Midian).[52] Of these only Amalek is viable, as biblical references do indicate that it was a nomadic group (see further below) and place it

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[46] See Zucconi 2007; Edelman 1995; Rainey/Notley 2014, 41, 121.

[47] Ben-Yosef/Najjar/Levy 2014, 837–838.

[48] Bienkowski 2022, 123.

[49] Bienkowski 2022, 129 nn. 23–24.

[50] It is also worth noting here the possibility that "Edom" appears in Sheshonq I's campaign list of toponyms, nos. 98 and 128 there, though this reading is highly uncertain and also could refer more generically to a "red" place, as per the meaning of Semitic אדום. See Cooper forthcoming; Ritner 2009, 209–210.

[51] Finkelstein 2020, 15.

[52] Ben-Yosef 2020, 42–43.

generally in the Negev and Sinai (Exod 17:8; Num 13:29). References in Samuel locate it towards the northern (that is, the biblical) Negev, however (1 Sam 15:4–7; 27:8), so some sort of connection with the early Iron Age Negev highlands sites is possible, though not necessary.[53] Yet there is no explicit reference in the biblical text to Amalekites in the Arabah. In any event, the biblical tradition of Amalek as part of the lineage of Edom/Esau (Gen 36:12, 16) makes this a somewhat facile suggestion, as it appears that a putative Amalekite involvement in the Arabah coper industry could have been within a larger Edomite polity and that the Amalekites might have been, at certain times, one of the tribes who affiliated themselves with the nomadic Edomite kingdom.[54]

Finkelstein and Bienkowski continue to hypothesize a "desert polity" of "chiefdom" directed from early Iron Age Tel Masos in the northern Negev as controlling the Arabah copper production and Negev highlands.[55] One of us has pointed out that the connection of either of these groups of sites to Tel Masos is nullified by the lack of Negebite ware or any other pottery from the Arabah, as well as the mistaken notion that copper was smelted at this site, when in fact there was only a smithy, typical of many settled sites. The instinct to locate the center of production at Tel Masos is simply a scholarly reflex of the architectural bias, which assumes that complex economic activity and sociopolitical organization can only have been controlled by a sedentary group.[56] If material culture is taken as a guide, the ceramic assemblage of Tel Masos would associate it more with other sites in the northern Negev, Judah, and the Shephelah, not with the Arabah.[57]

4. Reading and Interpreting the Book of Samuel: Some Case Studies

As far as we are concerned, biblical scholars will do well in the future to read the books of Samuel in a general sense against the background of a socially polymorphous Israel during the early Iron Age, applicable even if one considers elements of the composition to only be as early as the ninth century BCE. On the one hand, this is relevant to interpreting the text itself within its social context; as we have discussed in another context, the phrase "each man to his tent" in 2 Sam 20:1, which appears in similar forms elsewhere (esp. 1 Kgs 12:16), should not be considered anachronistic, but in fact reflective of the nature of Israelite dwelling at this time.[58] On the other hand, such a

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[53] On Amalek in the books of Samuel, see the chapter by Cynthia Edenburg in this volume (pp. 129–149). Space precludes a full response to her arguments there. However, in our view there is no reason to deem Amalek a fictive entity, certainly not on the basis of subjective literary arguments or the silence of non-biblical sources regarding Amalek.

[54] See the discussion in Kipfer 2021, 86–92.

[55] Finkelstein 2020, 18–23; Fantalkin/Finkelstein 2006, 24–28; Bienkowski 2022, 128; accepted uncritically by Frevel 2018, 101.

[56] Ben-Yosef 2019, 375–376; Ben-Yosef 2020, 50–51. On the lack of Negebite ware, see also Ben-Dor Evian 2017.

[57] For example, note the connection between the assemblage at Tel Masos with that from the very early Iron IIA at Khirbet er-Raʿi in Thomas/Garfinkel/Keimer 2021.

[58] Ben-Yosef 2023, 251; Ben-Yosef/Thomas 2023b, 515–516; cf. Homan 2002, 187–192.

reading is relevant to evaluating the historicity of the text against the archaeological background of the early Iron Age. For example, it has been claimed that archaeology demonstrates that David would have ruled over much too small a population to enable "state formation" or the conquests that are ascribed to him (esp. 2 Sam 8).[59] But such estimations, if even valid on their own, are based only on early Iron Age settlement sites. Thus, the likelihood that the population of Israel (or even just Judah, if one prefers) remained substantially nomadic, and thus archaeologically elusive, undermines the idea that we can accurately assess the demographics of Israel during the early Iron Age.[60] Below, we consider how a sociopolitical background of a polymorphous Israel affects the reading and interpretation of a few case studies from the books of Samuel.

4.1. The Nomadic Edom of Samuel

As noted above (section 2.1), the entity Edom appears in Samuel as a polity in military conflict with both Saul and David. The most relevant appearance is as one of the polities conquered by David in 2 Samuel 8 (specifically vv. 12–14).[61] As a result of victory over the Edomites in the גיא מלח "Valley of Salt", surely the Arabah, the Edomites become David's vassals, literally עבדים "servants" in the patrimonial language of ancient Near Eastern political relationships.[62] David was therefore able to post נצבים in Edom;[63] the meaning of this title as "officials" stationed over part of the king's realm to enact his political and economic authority is illustrated by the use of the same title in 1 Kgs 4:7–19, the list of Solomon's officials throughout his realm.

Naturally, the question arises as to whether the appearance of Edom here could in fact have its background in David's time (according to the biblical chronology, sometime during the tenth century BCE) or at least the early Iron Age more broadly. The negative critical approach is represented by Christian Frevel, who deems the early history of Edom and its conflicts with Israel portrayed in the biblical text as an anachronistic reflection of Edom in the late Iron Age, judging that it could not be considered a "nation-state" since it remained tribal and nomadic.[64] Compare this view with that of J. Maxwell Miller and John H. Hayes. Writing before the current archaeological evidence from the Arabah was available, they accept the premise of a historical Edom in discussing David's conquests. Yet they resort to the early Iron Age Negev highlands sites as the archaeological anchor for Edom, simply because these sites provide the only architectural remains with which Edom can be identified during this

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[59] Finkelstein 2005, 35; Finkelstein/Silberman 2001, 143.

[60] Ben-Yosef 2023.

[61] On the issue of the *dalet-resh* variation and resulting interchange between "Edom" and "Aram" in the MT, see McCarter 1984, 243, 245 and the detailed discussion in Levin 2009. Note, however, that Levin (2009, 69–70) assumes that there was no historical polity of Edom before its mention by Adad-Nirari III and that this conforms to the archaeological picture current at the time his article was composed, which is now completely outdated.

[62] On this, see generally Schloen 2001.

[63] We are not convinced by McCarter's (1984, 246) correction of the text to the singular in v. 14.

[64] Frevel 2021, 124–127.

period.[65] More recently, David Tsumura has cited the evidence for an early Iron Age copper-producing polity in the Arabah as the archaeological reflex of the Edom conquered and vassalized by David.[66]

Unsurprisingly, our interpretation would align with Tsumura's, and given that there is no foundation for rejecting the identification of this polity with Edom (as argued above), this is clearly the strongest and most straightforward view. As a result, we can offer a historical reading with Edom's background as a nomadic, copper-producing kingdom in mind. It is notable that in the description of David's conquests in 2 Sam 8, no background to David's conflict with Edom is apparent in this text, unlike for most of his other opponents, for whom the source of conflict is apparent in Samuel. In our understanding, it stands to reason that the textual presentation of David conquering Edom without provocation on the one hand and the operation of the eastern Mediterranean's primary copper industry by an early Iron Age polity identifiable with Edom on the other is unlikely to be a historical coincidence. Rather, they indicate a historical scenario in which David conquered and vassalized Edom in order to dominate the copper supply. The appointment of multiple officials (a minimum of two) makes sense given the dispersal of copper production in multiple areas in the Arabah. The notice in 1 Sam 14:47 that Saul had previously defeated Edom could also plausibly have its context in a desire to seize control of the supply and trade of copper. However, the detail provided is much less than for David, so it is hard to know what to do with this notice. It should not, however, simply be written off as ahistorical.

4.2. The Hebrew Term עיר

The term עיר, typically translated in English as "city", appears frequently in the Hebrew Bible, and is certainly well-represented in Samuel. From a sociological or archaeological point of view, one can argue endlessly over the definition of "city", but this is not of immediate concern here, since this translation inevitably conjures the image of a fixed, brick-and-stone settlement. It is certainly true that in many of its appearances in the Hebrew Bible, עיר does refer to a settlement, though from a specifically textual viewpoint this is clearest where the term is modified, as in עיר מבצר "fortified city/settlement". However, "fortified city" sits at one end of a wider semantic range of עיר as this term was used for settlements, as is made clear in 2 Kgs 17:9b: "They [the people of Israel] built *bāmôt* for themselves in all their settlements [עריהם], from watchtower [מגדל נוצרים] to fortified city [עיר מבצר]."[67]

Yet this does not exhaust the apparent semantic range of עיר. It is notable that in his otherwise useful study of the biblical city, Frank Frick paid no attention to how Num 13:19 explicitly includes within the semantic range of עיר both that which is fortified and that which is a מחנה "camp". In view of this verse, it is notable that the cognate

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[65] Miller/Hayes 2006, 183, 351. Miller and Hayes are not incorrect to identify the early Iron Age sites of the Negev highlands (or at least some of them) with Edom, yet to take them as the totality of Edom as it existed in David's day is to fall into the architectural bias common to biblical archaeology; see generally Ben-Yosef 2019.

[66] Tsumura 2019, 156.

[67] See the discussion in Frick 1977, 25–75.

Akkadian term *ālum* (Sumerian URU), can likewise refer to a range of settlements or fixed structures, but could also be used for a group's tent camp. The latter usage occurs in Assyrian records relating to encounters with polymorphous Aramean groups, but can also be seen in the texts of the polymorphous Middle Bronze Age kingdom of Mari.[68] We may take this one step further in observing that in some instances where עיר is used, it does not even appear to be the physical nature of the referent (i.e., stone-and-brick houses or tent camp) that is really in view, but rather the community of persons itself. For instance, כל העיר "all the city" of Shiloh cries out when informed that the Ark has been captured by the Philistines (1 Sam 4:12–13). It seems that the עיר may even have constituted a kind of sub-tribal social unit within the Israelite social structure, insofar as it is used in Samuel; though absent from what is often taken as the classic (but not necessarily very early) tribe-clan-household presentation of Israel's social structure in Josh 7:14–18, in Samuel an עיר can be led by its elders, the heads of its constituent households or clans (1 Sam 16:4), and is directly associated with a particular tribe, as seen in Absalom's question to those coming to Jerusalem to seek the king's justice (2 Sam 15:2). Again, this seems to correspond with how the Akkadian *ālum* behaves as a sociopolitical collective.[69] Keeping these social and semantic aspects of עיר in mind should thus affect how we approach the term throughout Samuel, especially where it is otherwise unmodified.

To take a pertinent instance, let us return to the Amalekites, specifically the עיר עמלק which Saul comes to in order to mount his attack on the Amalekites at the insistence of Samuel himself (1 Sam 15:5). The views of some major commentators who accept the nomadic character of the Amalekites (and see section 3.2 above) are revealing; P. Kyle McCarter, translating עיר as "city", states that "it is surprising to find the desert-dwelling Amalekites associated with a city at all, and we must suspect the accuracy of the tradition if not the text."[70] A. Graeme Auld offers exactly the same view.[71] Tsumura expresses similar surprise again. Though he departs from McCarter and Auld's skepticism somewhat, he still states that עיר in this verse "certainly implies a place more substantial than an encampment" and resorts to explaining עיר עמלק as an unwalled country town.[72] Moreover, the assumption that we are dealing with a "city of Amalek" has prompted a search for a settlement site with which it can be identified, such as (now somewhat ironically) Tel Masos.[73] But it seems that commentators and archaeologists alike would do well to heed the observation of Aharon Kempinski, one of the excavators of Tel Masos, that עיר עמלק need not be understood as a stone-and-brick settlement.[74] We agree with Kempinski that, accepting the nomadic character of the Amalekites as a historical starting point, there is no reason to assume that עיר עמלק was a settled site, as opposed to being a mobile camp that moved seasonally throughout the Negev and

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[68] Kupper 1957, 13–14; Fadhil/Radner 1996; van Driel 2001; Younger 2016, 70–73.
[69] Fleming 2004, 108.
[70] McCarter 1980, 266.
[71] Auld 2011, 163.
[72] Tsumura 2007, 208.
[73] Kochavi 1980.
[74] Kempinski 1981.

further south. We certainly have no guarantee of identifying such a camp archaeologically.

Interpreters would do well in the future to consider whether unmodified instances of עיר in Samuel (and elsewhere) refer to a social unit dwelling in a tent camp, within a larger social landscape of polymorphism. Much about the social world of the biblical authors was below their horizon of significance. Thus, we argue, whether an עיר was a stone-and-brick settlement or a tent camp would not have been something that the biblical authors would have understood as relevant to specify, at least most of the time.

4.3. The Hebrew Term מדבר

מדבר is another highly relevant Hebrew term that occurs several times in Samuel. It is especially associated with David's period of mobility and brigandage in Judah (geographically the Judahite hill country, the Judean Desert, and the Negev) after fleeing from Saul but before his own kingship. David is variously found in a מדבר connected to the toponyms of Ziph (1 Sam 23:14; 26:2), Maon (1 Sam 23:24), En-Gedi (24:1–2), as well as Paran (1 Sam 25:1), which, strictly speaking, is outside of Judah.[75] David also shepherded flocks in a מדבר presumably near or connected to Bethlehem (1 Sam 17:28), and it is also interesting to note the mention of a מדבר connected to Gibeon on the Benjamin plateau (2 Sam 2:24). Here again, the common English translations of this term as "wilderness" or "desert" throughout the Hebrew Bible can be quite misleading, as recently noted by Cynthia Edenburg.[76] The unmodified term refers to open pasturage country outside of settlements and their surrounding agricultural land.[77] Note though that there is no absolute dichotomy between מדבר and dwelling, as we see in references to מדבר ועריו in Isa 42:11, and the Judahite allotment in Joshua includes a district of ערים in the מדבר, that is, the area commonly known as the Judean Desert west of the Dead Sea (Josh 15:61–62).

Yet Edenburg still considers that "David's wanderings in the מדבר are not a desert sojourn, but rather transpired on [the] fringe of civilization…conceptually parallel to Robin Hood's Sherwood Forest – an uninhabited expanse providing refuge."[78] Viewing the prominence of מדבר in this part of the Samuel narrative as unlikely to stem from "narrative necessity", Edenburg goes on to argue that these wanderings as portrayed in 1 Samuel are a secondary literary development within the so-called "History of David's Rise" that served to portray David as transitioning through a liminal space between his service to Saul and his service to Achish of Gath. Edenburg suggests dating the earliest edition of the "History of David's Rise" only to the late Judahite monarchy, and the מדברepisodes even later, in the Babylonian or Persian periods.[79] Pioske, while accepting that the narrative of David's rise does contain much knowledge or memory of the early

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[75] We doubt McCarter's (1980, 388) correction of פארן to מעון "Maon" in this verse on the basis of LXX[B] and in view of the setting on the following encounter with Nabal, given that "Paran" is the *lectio difficillior* (cf. Tsumura 2007, 575).

[76] Edenburg 2021, 294.

[77] Talmon 1997; Allison et al. 2012.

[78] Edenburg 2021, 294.

[79] Edenburg 2021, 294–300.

Iron Age landscape, argues that the references such as "David holing up at the strongholds of En-Gedi (1 Sam 23:29), fit better with a later period when En-Gedi became a significant Judahite settlement for the first time (seventh and sixth centuries BCE)."[80]

Placing the Samuel text against the socially polymorphous background of the early Iron Age renders both of these views unsustainable, or at the very least unnecessary. It is not a surprise to find a proliferation of areas designated as מדבר within the hill country and the Negev of Judah, and indeed perhaps even in the northern hill country (as in the מדבר connected to Gibeon) in such a context, since such pasturage areas would be necessary when a substantial part of the population remains pastoral nomadic, and likely more available within the geography of Judah in the period prior to the substantial increase in settlement sometime in the Iron IIB (late ninth and eighth centuries BCE). The idea that the מדבר and those who inhabit or make use of it are on the "fringe of civilization", as Edenburg puts it, simply continues the classic "desert" and "sown" dichotomy of Near Eastern history that privileges settlement as the civilizational core over the marginal nomad. This dichotomy was continued in the oft-cited work of Michael Rowton and his idea of a historical social dimorphism throughout Near Eastern history (beginning in antiquity), with sedentism and nomadism conjoined but distinct and the former the center of such a society's political complexity.[81] It has become increasingly clear, however, that such dichotomization is an inaccurate characterization of sedentary-nomadic social relations in the ancient Near East, which were in fact much more fluid and deeply entangled. Nor was a sedentary–mobile distinction apparently relevant to the emic understanding of sociopolitical structure.[82] Though we do not know the nature of any occupation at Maon or Ziph during either the early or late Iron Age owing to a lack of excavation, it is probable that their connection to a מדבר came about because the social identities of Maon and Ziph combined both a settlement and related pastoral nomadic families.

Pioske's view similarly falls into the architectural bias in mentioning only the מצדות "strongholds" in En-Gedi, the meaning of which is in any event unclear and could just as easily refer to topographical features (cf. the "Rocks of the Wild Goats" in 1 Sam 24:2) as it could to the late Iron Age settlement there, as Pioske assumes. Just as relevant, if not more so, is that David is in the מדבר connected to En-Gedi (1 Sam 24:1), which can be understood as the pastureland in and around the En-Gedi oasis. The text makes no reference to a settlement in any case, while it does refer to Saul coming to "sheepfolds" (1 Sam 24:3) as he comes in search of David. Overall, we would suggest that the importance of מדבר in the narrative of David's time between his service to Saul and then to Achish can in fact be read as reflective of the social background of polymorphism, and especially the large pastoral nomadic population therein, and that rather than being in a marginal or liminal space, the authors of Samuel had in mind that David and his mobile band of followers were actually hiding from Saul among his pastoral nomadic tribal kin.

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[80] Pioske 2018, 172.
[81] Rowton 1976.
[82] See our discussion and further literature in Ben-Yosef/Thomas 2023; Ben-Yosef/Thomas 2024.

5. Conclusion

Discoveries related to the complex nomadic society of early Iron Age Edom and the implications that have been drawn out of this for the study of early Israel have proven a significant disruption in archaeological research on the southern Levant. But for those with an interest in not just the archaeology but the history of these polities, it is necessary that such archaeological developments be brought into conversation with the Hebrew Bible and the prevailing methodological assumptions within its contemporary study. Here, we have used some pertinent examples to demonstrate that a consideration of the early Iron Age historical landscape populated by a substantial amount of people who were part of polymorphous societies (especially their pastoral nomadic components) complicates any straightforward attempt to make the archaeological record into the arbiter of historical reconstruction. For the books of Samuel, there are several key points at which the incorporation of this historical landscape into the analysis presents new possibilities and problems, beyond the straightforward evaluation by archaeology, in interpreting the historical nature of its details and narrative concerning the social world in which the early monarchy arose.

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Arameans in the Books of Samuel

Literary, Historical, and Archaeological Perspectives

Stephen Germany and Assaf Kleiman

In contrast to the books of Kings, where Arameans play a prominent role in the biblical narrative of the time of the Omrides and Nimshides (1 Kgs 15–2 Kgs 13, corresponding historically to the ninth and early eighth centuries BCE), Aramean groups are mentioned relatively rarely in the books of Samuel. This study will discuss the passages in 1–2 Samuel in which Aram and/or Aramean groups are (potentially) mentioned and will consider the historical background of these passages in light of extrabiblical textual sources and relevant archaeological finds.

The first part of the study consists of a textual analysis of the passages in Samuel in which Arameans are either mentioned explicitly or potentially implied, including an evaluation of the relative dating of these passages within the compositional history of the books of Samuel. The second part will then consider extrabiblical textual evidence that may help to refine the picture gained from the compositional analysis. Finally, the third part will compare these findings with the settlement history of the central Levant during the early first millennium BCE as reconstructed on the basis of archaeological evidence.[1]

1. References to Aram and Arameans in Samuel in Literary Perspective

The term "Aram" (ארם) appears 20 times in the Masoretic text of the books of Samuel (2 Sam 8:5 [2x], 6 [2x], 12, 13; 10:6 [2x], 8, 9, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18 [2x], 19; 15:8). In addition, 2 Sam 8:3–4 refers to a certain Hadadezer, king of Zobah, whom the text seems to portray as an Aramean, at least judging from his name.[2] Likewise, King Toi of Hamath (2 Sam 8:9–10) may also have been understood as an Aramean, given Hamath's location in central Syria, although the text does not explicitly identify him as such. Finally, 2 Sam 15:8 associates the geographical name "Geshur" (גשור) with Aram,

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[1] For methodological reasons, the textual evidence from the Hebrew Bible is intentionally considered in detail prior to the archaeological evidence, since the biblical representation of the past frequently influences the basic research questions that southern Levantine archaeology asks, no matter how objectively it deals with the material evidence itself, as the recent discussion of the history of Geshur has shown (see Pakkala 2010; Na'aman 2012; Pakkala 2013; Sergi/Kleiman 2018; Sergi 2019).

[2] Cf. the references to King Adad-idri of Damascus in the annals of Shalmaneser III (858–824 BCE); for the texts, see Grayson 1996, 23, 36–39, 45–47, 53.

stating that Geshur is "in Aram" (בארם). Thus, six further references to Geshur in the books of Samuel (2 Sam 3:3; 13:37, 38; 14:23, 32; 15:8) should also be taken into consideration here.

In what follows, the occurrences mentioned above will first be analyzed within their immediate textual context with an eye to the literary growth of the narratives in which they are embedded (1.1). In a second step, the results of the diachronic analysis of the passages in Samuel (potentially) mentioning Aramean groups will be considered in light of the broader intertextual connections that these passages have both within and outside the books of Samuel (1.2).

1.1. Literary-Critical Analysis

1.1.1. References to "Aram" in 2 Sam 8 and 10

Explicit references to "Aram" in the Hebrew text of the books of Samuel are concentrated above all in 2 Sam 8 and 10, which have their narrative setting early in David's reign as king of Israel and describe David's wars with neighboring groups.

2 Sam 8 consists of four literary units: (1) a report of David's defeat of the Philistines, Moabites, Hadadezer ben-Rehob, king of Zobah (הדדעזר בן רחב מלך צובה), and Aram-Damascus (ארם דמשק) (vv. 1–6); (2) a report about the spoil that David accumulated from these defeats (vv. 7–12); (3) a report of David's subjugation of Edom (vv. 13–14); and (4) a list of David's high-ranking officials (vv. 15–18). Of these four units, vv. 1–6 most likely constitute the earliest material in the chapter: The statement that "Yahweh gave David victory wherever he went" in v. 6b marks the conclusion of the report, and the repetition of this statement in v. 14b suggests that the materials in vv. 7–14 constitute a series of later expansions.[3] The main interest in 2 Sam 8:3–6 seems to be Aram-Damascus rather than Zobah, since the episode culminates in the Arameans *of Damascus* becoming a vassal to David and paying tribute, comparable to the report concerning the Moabites in v. 2. Thus, on a literary level, David's defeat of Hadadezer of Zobah in vv. 3–4 serves mainly as a catalyst for David's subjugation of Damascus.

Within the later additions in 2 Sam 8:7–12, the emphasis shifts to a detailed description of the precious metals that David brought to Jerusalem from his various military exploits. According to v. 7, David plundered gold shields from the servants of Hadadezer and brought them to Jerusalem, and according to v. 8, David brought back large quantities of bronze from two of Hadadezer's towns (also suggesting, in contrast to vv. 3–4, that David conquered Hadadezer's territory and did not simply defeat him on the battlefield). The motif of precious metals continues in vv. 9–11, which describe how Toi, king of Hamath, voluntarily brought vessels of silver, gold, and bronze to David, which David likewise dedicated to Yahweh.

The last reference to Aram in 2 Sam 8 is found in vv. 13–14, which, in the Masoretic text, state:

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[3] Since 2 Sam 8:15–18 do not mention Aram or the Arameans, the relative chronology of this unit compared to the other three units in the chapter can be left aside here.

[13a] And David made a name for himself when he returned from striking down Aram in the Valley of Salt – [13b] eighteen thousand. [14a] And he put garrisons in Edom – in all of Edom he put garrisons – and all of Edom became David's servants. [14b] And Yahweh delivered David wherever he went.

Although the Masoretic wording of 2 Sam 8:13a refers to the results of David's wars with the Arameans, the reference to the "Valley of Salt" raises the question of whether the text may have originally referred to "Edom" (אדום) (as attested in the LXX and Peshitta) instead of "Aram" (ארם). Nevertheless, an argument in favor of retaining the MT's reading of "Aram" as more original is the fact that the text refers to David returning from defeating an enemy, which fits well with the reference to David's defeat of Aram-Damascus in vv. 5–6.[4] Indeed, the main obstacle to reading "Aram" in v. 13 is not the text-critical evidence but the broader content of the verse, especially the association of the Arameans with the "Valley of Salt" – presumably the Arabah Valley – which one would expect to be more closely associated with Edom (cf. 2 Kgs 14:7).[5] We will return to this problem in the macrocontextual analysis in section 1.2.

The second major group of references to Arameans in the books of Samuel is found in 2 Sam 10–12, which contain two distinct types of material: (1) reports of David's and Joab's wars with the Ammonites and Arameans (2 Sam 10 + 11:1* + 12:26–31) and (2) the story of David and Bathsheba and its consequences (2 Sam 11:2–12:25). Although Arameans are mentioned only in 2 Sam 10, here it is necessary to discuss briefly the composition of 2 Sam 10–12 as a whole in order to contextualize the references to Arameans in 2 Sam 10 more precisely.

Within 2 Sam 10, it is likely that vv. 6–19 – in which the Ammonites summon the military support of the Arameans of Beth-rehov, the Arameans of Zobah, the king of Maacah, and the Men of Tob[6] – are a later expansion to the base narrative, which

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[4] For the preference of the reading ארם, see also Stoebe 1977, 245; Levin 2009, 66–69; Na'aman 2017, 320. Considering that vv. 7–12 are later additions, it is possible that vv. 13–14 once connected directly to vv. 5–6 (cf. Levin 2009, 66), although they would still postdate the base text in vv. 1–6 (cf. Dietrich 2019, 708, 710).

[5] While 2 Sam 8:13 attributes the killing of eighteen thousand Arameans to David, 1 Chr 18:12 refers to *Abishai's* killing of eighteen thousand *Edomites*, which is likely a Chronistic "correction" of 2 Sam 8:13 that seeks to soften the depiction of David as a merciless warlord.

[6] In 2 Sam 10:6 MT, the Aramean groups include (1) Aram Beth Rehob, (2) Aram Zobah (absent in the LXX), (3) the king of Maacah, and (4) the men of Tob. In the parallel passage in 1 Chr 19:6–7 (both MT and LXX), the Aramean groups consist of (1) Aram Naharaim, (2) Aram Maacah, and (3) Zobah, who are paid with a thousand *kikkar* of silver. Here, the text of 4QSam^a agrees in several respects with the text of Chronicles: Both speak of "a thousand *kikkar* of silver", and in 4QSam^a "Aram Maacah" and "Aram Zoba" can be reconstructed as the second and third elements in the list. (The editors of 4QSam^a reconstruct "Aram Rehob" rather than "Aram Naharaim" in the first position; see Ulrich 2013, 300.) This might indicate that some of the variants in Chronicles were already found in the Chronicler's *Vorlage*. However, the figures in 2 Sam 10:6 MT suggest that this verse is, at least in part, older than the readings in 4QSam^a and in Chronicles, since 2 Sam 10:6 speaks of 20,000 infantry from Aram Beth Rehob and Aram Zobah plus 12,000 men of Tob, while 4QSam^a (partially reconstructed) and 1 Chr 19:7 speak of 32,000 chariots, i.e., the sum of the two figures in 2 Sam 10:6 MT (cf. Japhet 1993, 357). Wee 2005, 193–197 notes that it is unusual that the 1,000 men of Maacah should be listed before the 12,000 men of Tob. Thus, he proposes that איש טוב originally referred to the origin of the king of

originally moved directly from Hanun's public humiliation of David's envoys in vv. 1–5 to the brief report of Joab's attack on the Ammonites in 2 Sam 11:1.[7] Indeed, the Ammonites' summoning of Aramean military support in 2 Sam 10:6–19 does nothing to drive the narrative forward, and 2 Sam 10:1–5 connects seamlessly to 2 Sam 11:1 without the intervening Aramean episodes in 10:6–19 (of which vv. 15–19 are likely an even later addition, as has often been noted[8]). In sum, the oldest material in 2 Sam 10 consists of vv. 1–5, which describe a conflict with the Ammonites only. In a second stage of composition, vv. 6–14 were added, which describe how (non-Damascene) Arameans flee from Joab.[9] Finally, vv. 15–19 were added, which recount how (non-Damascene) Arameans become David's subjects.

In the present form of 2 Sam 10–12, the narratives of David's conflicts with the Ammonites in 2 Sam 10*; 11:1; and 12:26–31 serve as a frame for the story of David and Bathsheba in 2 Sam 11:2–12:25, which is itself literarily multilayered.[10] Although many interpreters have concluded that the Ammonite war narratives in 2 Sam 10:1–5 (6–19); 11:1; and 12:26–31 and the story of David and Bathsheba in 2 Sam 11:2–12:25 were originally independent traditions that were later combined,[11] it is doubtful whether an "Ammonite war report"[12] ever existed independently of the story of David and Bathsheba.[13] If the report of David's conflict with the Ammonites was indeed derived from an old source, then why was it not integrated into the report of David's other conquests in 2 Sam 8?

Maacah and that the 12,000 men were originally the men of Maacah; only later did the "men [lit. man] of Tob" become a separate fighting force.

[7] For the observation of a literary seam between 2 Sam 10:1–5, (6a) and 10:6b–19, see also Hentschel 1990, 54; Rudnig 2006, 19 (who underscores the absence of the Arameans in 10:1–5); *contra* Seiler 1998, 231, who regards 2 Sam 10 as a literary unity. On 2 Sam 10:6–19 as a later insertion (or insertions), cf. Flanagan 1972, 175–176 with n. 18. In contrast, Wright 2014, 240 n. 8 suggests that 2 Sam 10:6–15 are part of the original Ammonite war report and that 2 Sam 10:1–5 form a later preface to the story. However, the theory that 2 Sam 10:6–19 was originally independent of 2 Sam 10:1–5 overlooks the fact that the reference to the "city" (העיר) in 2 Sam 10:14 makes little sense without the preceding reference to the "city" (העיר) in 10:3.

[8] See Stolz 1981, 232; Bailey 1990, 70; Hübner 1992, 171–174; Bietenhard 1998, 276–277; Lipiński 2000, 338; Rudnig 2006, 19; Lipiński 2013, 128 n. 48.

[9] Within 2 Sam 10:6–14, Hentschel 1990, 52 regards the list of the Aramean groups that took part in the battle (vv. 6*, 8*) as a later expansion.

[10] For a recent treatment of the internal literary development of 2 Sam 11:2–12:25, see Dietrich 2021, 220–230, with reference to earlier literature.

[11] E.g., Rost 1929, 74–80; Flanagan 1972, 175–176; McCarter 1984, 285; Bailey 1990, 76; Rudnig 2006, 27; Seiler 2008, 235; McKenzie 2010, 157 (although he treats 2 Sam 11:2–12:25 as a *Fortschreibung* rather than an independent source).

[12] The original extent of this hypothetical "Ammonite war report" in 2 Sam 10:1–5 (6–19) + 11:1 + 12:26–31 is also debated. While Hentschel 1990, 55 and Rudnig 2006, 19, 24 propose that 2 Sam 10:1–5 postdate 11:1* + 12:26–31*, Seiler 2008, 235 and McKenzie 2010, 152 conclude that 2 Sam 11:1 cannot be the absolute beginning of a narrative.

[13] Cf. Van Seters 2009, 221, who also sees a fundamental difference between the wars with the Ammonites in 2 Sam 10–12 and the preceding war materials in 2 Sam 8, concluding that 2 Sam 10:1–14; 11:1–12:31 "is integrally related to the David Saga" (i.e., a post-Dtr literary composition).

Once one discards the assumption that 2 Sam 10–12* drew on an early "Ammonite war report", the possibility emerges that 2 Sam 12:26–31 was composed as an epilogue to an earlier version of 2 Sam 10–12* in 2 Sam 10:1–5; 11:1–27; (12:1–15a, 15b–25?), which did not yet portray the Ammonite war as an extension of David's conquests from 2 Sam 8, but simply as the narrative backdrop for the David and Bathsheba story. In contrast, with the addition of 2 Sam 12:26–31, David is portrayed as conquering and plundering the Ammonite capital Rabbah.[14]

For the purposes of the present study, the most important result of the preceding literary-critical analysis of 2 Sam 10–12 is that the references to the involvement of various Aramean groups in David's conflicts with the Ammonites in 2 Sam 10:6–19 are no earlier than the story of David and Bathsheba in 2 Sam 11:2–27.

Considering the distinct narrative styles in 2 Sam 8* and 2 Sam 10–12*, it is unlikely that the most basic material in these two units lies on a single literary level. The likelihood that 2 Sam 10–12* postdates 2 Sam 8* is suggested by the phrase ויהי אחרי כן in 2 Sam 10:1, which seems to presuppose the narrative closure reached in 2 Sam 8.[15] Moreover, the fact that Damascus is not mentioned in the conflicts with the Arameans in 2 Sam 10:6–14, 15–19 suggests that the latter passages were consciously composed as a supplement to 2 Sam 8:3–6, where the Arameans of Damascus have already been subdued but other Arameans groups have not.[16]

1.1.2. References to Geshur in 2 Sam 3; 13–15

Beyond the narratives of David's wars in 2 Sam 8–12, Aramean groups are potentially also in view in several references to Geshur in 2 Sam 3, which recounts a war between the "house of Saul" and the "house of David", and in 2 Sam 13–15, which narrate the deeds of David's son, Absalom (2 Sam 3:3; 13:37 [2x]; 14:23, 32; 15:8).[17] Although

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[14] Cf. Fischer 2004, 305, who regards both 2 Sam 10:15–19a and 12:26–31 as part of a secondary, redactional frame around the David-Bathsheba story.

[15] Cf. Stolz 1981, 232; Hentschel 1990, 56–57. In contrast, Bailey 1990, 69; Halpern 2001, 148–198; Edenburg 2010, 160; Baden 2013, 180; Na'aman 2017, 318–322; and Dietrich 2021, 65 argue that 2 Sam 8:3–8 presupposes the Ammonite and Aramean war narratives in 2 Sam 10–12.

[16] Isser 2003, 74–75 at first seems to adopt such a view as well ("The account of the war against Ammon and its Aramean allies in 2 Sam 10 appears to be an expansion of 2 Sam 8") but then argues that 2 Sam 10 is *not* based on 2 Sam 8 but is an independent narrative.

[17] 1 Sam 27:8 MT also mentions "Geshurites" in the context of a raid by David and his men in the desert to the southwest of Judah against "the Geshurite and the Girzite [Qere: Gizrite] and the Amalekite." In the LXX, however, "Girzite" is missing, and Gr. Γεσιρι is possibly a rendering of Hebr. גשורי "Geshurite", on the basis of the rendering of גשורי with Γεσιρι in Josh 13:2, 11, 13 (cf. Kipfer 2021, 87–88). Yet the juxtaposition of the gentilic "Geshurite" with groups located in the southwestern Negev (Amalekites in 1 Sam 27:8; Philistines in Josh 13:2) does not necessarily confirm the existence of a southern group of "Geshurites." Indeed, the Greek text of 1 Sam 27:8 (LXX[B]) may reflect a Hebrew Vorlage that referred to "Gezerites" (cf. MT Qere גזרי), while the Masoretic plus referring to הגשורי could have been borrowed from Josh 13:2, where the phrase "all the Geshurites" (כל הגשורי) appears immediately after "all the regions of the Philistines" (כל גלילות פלשתים). Yet in Josh 13:2, it is far from clear that the juxtaposition of "Geshurite" with "Philistines" should be interpreted as geographical proximity. Indeed, Josh 13:2 LXX also mentions ὁ Χαναναῖος "the Canaanite", and when "Philistines", "Geshurite", and "Canaanite" are taken together, they could very well imply a group of territories that

most of these references do not give any indication of the geographical location of Geshur, in 2 Sam 15:8 Absalom mentions his sojourn in "Geshur in Aram". It is striking that, of the six references to Geshur in 2 Samuel, only the very last reference provides this additional detail. Before considering the possible historical background of these references, it is first necessary to consider the literary development of the chapters in which they appear. Although a comprehensive reconstruction of the literary history of the so-called "Succession Narrative" or "Court History" in 2 Sam 13–20 + 1 Kgs 1–2 is far beyond the scope of this study, the main contours of its development need to be addressed in order to determine the relative chronology of the references to Geshur in 2 Sam 13–15 with more precision.

Although Leonhard Rost – the first scholar to speak of a "Succession Narrative" – regarded 2 Sam 9–20 + 1 Kgs 1–2 (as well as fragments from 2 Sam 6–7) as largely a unified and independent source (a "Thronfolgequelle"),[18] more recent research has shown that the internal literary development of 2 Sam 9–20 + 1 Kgs 1–2 is highly complex. These chapters can be divided into six main episodes:

(1) David's care for Saul's son Mephibosheth (2 Sam 9),
(2) the Ammonite war and the story of David and Bathsheba (2 Sam 10–12; see above),
(3) Amnon's rape of Tamar and Absalom's revenge killing of Amnon (2 Sam 13–14),
(4) Absalom's revolt (2 Sam 15–19),
(5) Sheba's rebellion (2 Sam 20),
(6) Adonijah's rebellion and Solomon's rise to power (1 Kgs 1–2).

Many commentators have suggested that these materials combine different sources and/or layers of supplementation. Since all of the references to Geshur within 2 Sam 9–20 + 1 Kgs 1–2 occur in the story of Amnon's rape of Tamar in 2 Sam 13–14 (13:37 [2x]; 14:23, 32) and the story of Absalom's rebellion in 2 Sam 15–19 (15:8), the analysis here will first focus on the literary development of these two episodes and then will consider their place within 2 Samuel as a whole.

In both 2 Sam 13–14 and 2 Sam 15–19, the figure of Absalom is essential to the narrative, although there are divergent views regarding the relationship of the two episodes to each other. While some scholars identify a unified Absalom cycle spanning from 2 Sam 13 to 2 Sam 18 or 19,[19] others argue that the story of Amnon and Tamar in

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extended from the far southwest to the far north. Thus, *pace* Kipfer 2021, 87–88, it is uncertain whether הגשורי in 1 Sam 27:8 MT reflects an actual historical group to the southwest of Judah. Rather, this reference may be a late scribal addition that is aware of the juxtaposition of הגשורי with the Philistines in Josh 13:2, interpreting this as geographical proximity. In this respect, the identification of הגשורי in 1 Sam 27:8 with *Aramean* Geshur by Adam 2007, 80 ("das aramäische Geschur") likewise seems too simplistic: In light of the immediate context, 1 Sam 27:8 MT does seem to imagine a group of "Geshurites" in the southwest, but this image is probably a purely scribal construct and does not reflect the historical existence of a "southern Geshur" in any period (for the theory of a "southern Geshur", see further Fischer 2004, 131–139).

[18] Rost 1926, 107. Within 2 Sam 9–20, Rost excludes only 2 Sam 10:6–11:1; 12:7b–12; 12:26–31; 14:25–27; 18:18; and 20:23–26 from this source.

[19] E.g., Aurelius 2004, 401–402, who identifies the most basic narrative thread within 2 Sam 13–20 in 2 Sam 13:1–29, 34a, 37aβ, 38b–39; 14:33aβγb; 15:1–6, 13; 18:1–2a, 4b, 6–9, 15b–18.

2 Sam 13–14 is a later "preface" to the story of Absalom's rebellion in 2 Sam 15–19.[20] Irrespective of the literary relationship of 2 Sam 13–14 to 2 Sam 15–19, both of these episodes reflect multiple stages of composition.

Within the story of Amnon and Tamar, later additions have been identified in several passages,[21] including in the vicinity of the references to Geshur at the end of chapter 13 and in chapter 14. For example, Erik Aurelius has highlighted the fact that 2 Sam 13:34, 37, and 38 state three times that Absalom fled after killing Amnon and even state twice that he went to Geshur. In Aurelius' view, these repetitions are *Wiederaufnahmen* that point to the insertion of additional material, namely, the passage about king David's mourning in vv. 34b–37aα:[22]

13:34a *And Absalom fled*,

> 34b When the young man who kept watch looked up, he saw many people coming from the Horonaim road by the side of the mountain. 35 Jonadab said to the king, "See, the king's sons have come; as your servant said, so it has come about." 36 When he had finished speaking, the king's sons arrived, and raised their voices and wept; and the king and all his servants also wept very bitterly. 37a *Now Absalom had fled*,

and he went to Talmai son of Ammihud, king of Geshur,

> 37b And he mourned for his son day after day. 38 *Now Absalom had fled and went to Geshur*, and he was there for three years. 39 And the heart of the king went out, yearning for Absalom; for he was now consoled over the death of Amnon.

Aurelius' diachronic reconstruction is convincing and indicates that the more detailed reference to Absalom seeking refuge with "Talmai, son of Ammihud, king of Geshur" in v. 37 is compositionally earlier than the more general statement that Absalom "went to Geshur" in v. 38. In Aurelius' view, this more basic report of Absalom's flight to the king of Geshur in 2 Sam 13:34–37* originally connected directly to 2 Sam 14:33*:

… and he [i.e., David] summoned Absalom, and he came to the king and prostrated himself with his face to the ground before the king; and the king kissed Absalom.

According to Aurelius, the remainder of 2 Sam 14 consists of two *Fortschreibungen* to the story of Amnon and Tamar, the first in vv. 1–23, which describe how it was Joab's idea to bring Absalom back from Geshur (thus relieving David of responsibility in Absalom's death), and the second in vv. 24, (25–28,) 29–33aα, which develop an image

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[20] Cf. Adam 2006, 193–194; Schücking-Jungblut 2020, 89; Dietrich 2021, 302.

[21] Within 2 Sam 13, Schücking-Jungblut 2020, 91–96 argues that the rape of Tamar in vv. 1–22 is literarily secondary to vv. 23–39. Within 2 Sam 13:23–39 themselves, Vermeylen 2000, 332–336 regards vv. 23, 28, 29a, 37a, 38b as the most basic material and vv. 24–27, 29b–36, 37b–38a as later additions, while Dietrich 2021, 369–370 regards 2 Sam 13:24–27*, 29b–36 as later additions. Within 2 Sam 14, Würthwein 1974, 46–47 regarded vv. 2–22 as a "sapiential insertion", and others took his suggestion further, identifying multiple stages of composition within these verses (Bickert 1979; Bietenhard 1998, 300; Vermeylen 2000, 338–344). Aurelius 2004, 401 identifies a very minimal base narrative in 2 Sam 13:38b–39 + 14:33aβγb. In contrast, Schücking-Jungblut 2020, 119–129 argues that 2 Sam 14:1–24, 29–33 is a unified narrative. 2 Sam 14:25–27 are almost unanimously regarded as a later addition (see Schücking-Jungblut 2020, 129, with reference to earlier literature).

[22] Aurelius 2004, 400–401.

of tense relations between Joab and Absalom, anticipating Joab's lack of hesitancy in mortally wounding Absalom in 2 Sam 18:14.[23]

Within the story of Absalom's revolt in 2 Sam 15–19, many scholars excise the entire passage relating to David's flight from Absalom and "exile" in Transjordan in 2 Sam 15:14–17:29 as secondary to the earliest narrative thread.[24] However, it is questionable whether a version of the story of Absalom's revolt that did not include David's flight across the Jordan ever existed, since a direct connection between 2 Sam 15:13 and 18:1 is very abrupt, and 19:9a cannot form the absolute conclusion of the story. Rather, the most basic Absalom story perhaps consisted of at least 2 Sam 15:7, 9–10, 12b, 13–16a; 16:14–15a; 17:24a; 18:1, 6–7, (8?), 9a, 15, (16?), 17; 19:9–10, 15, 40a* [EV 39a*]. This narrative, which reflects the theme of "exile and return" from the outset, was later expanded in several stages through a number of additional scenes that deal with subsidiary themes: Ittai the Gittite in 15:19–22; Ziba the servant of Mephibosheth in 16:1–4 + 19:17b–18a, 24–30; Shimei in 16:5–12 + 19:16–17a, 18b–23; Absalom being caught by a tree branch in 18:9b–14; the report of Absalom's death to David and David's mourning in 18:19–19:8; Barzillai the Gileadite in 19:32–39 [EV 31–38]; and Sheba's rebellion in 20:1–2, 4–22.

With respect to the references to Geshur in 2 Sam 13–15, the preceding compositional observations have the following consequences: Given the secondary nature of 2 Sam 13–14 compared to 2 Sam 15–19*, Absalom's reference to his self-imposed exile in "Geshur in Aram" in 2 Sam 15:8, which presupposes at least 2 Sam 13:23–39 and its reference to Talmai, king of Geshur, in v. 37*, is most likely not part of the earliest narrative thread in 2 Sam 15–19*.[25]

1.2. Macrocontextual Analysis

1.2.1. 2 Sam 8 and 10 in Their Wider Literary Context

As discussed above, there is good reason to conclude that the most basic materials in 2 Sam 8 and 2 Sam 10, respectively, stem from different stages in the formation of the books of Samuel. 2 Sam 8:1–6, 15a* serves as a fitting conclusion to the narrative about David's succession of Saul as king of Israel that begins in 1 Sam 9, as is indicated by

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[23] Aurelius 2004, 401.

[24] Kratz 2000, 190 [ET: Kratz 2005, 175–176] identifies the most basic narrative of Absalom's revolt in 2 Sam 15:1–6, 13; 18:1–19:9a; 20:1–22. Fischer 2004, 309; Fischer 2005a, 48–51, 58; and Hutton 2009, 201–211 identify an earlier narrative in 2 Sam 18:1–19:9. Wright 2014, 99–101 identifies the earliest Absalom story in 2 Sam 15:2–6, 7–13* [esp. vv. 10, 12] + 18:2–19:9. Rudnig 2006, 330 identifies the oldest materials in 2 Sam 15:1*, 12b; 17:22*; 18:1a, 6, 9b, 15*, 16a, 17a. In contrast, Schücking-Jungblut 2020, 152–161 makes a compelling case that the earliest exposition to the story of Absalom's revolt is to be found in 2 Sam 15:7, identifying the most basic narrative in 2 Sam 15:7, 9–10, 12–16a, 17b, 18*, 23; 16:5–10, 13–14; 17:24*, 27*, 28–29; 18:1–2a, 4b–17, 19–32; 19:1–9a. Against the trend toward regarding the story of David's flight to Mahanaim as secondary to the earliest narrative of Absalom's revolt, Schücking-Jungblut likewise argues that David's flight to Mahanaim is part of the earliest Absalom narrative (2020, 154, 178).

[25] Cf. Schücking-Jungblut 2020, 89, 153. For the conclusion that 2 Sam 15:8 is a later addition, see also Langlamet 1976, 351–352; Fischer 2004, 148–149; Rudnig 2006, 243.

the summary statement in 2 Sam 8:15a ("and David reigned over all Israel"). In contrast, 2 Sam 8:7–12, 13–14 and 2 Sam 10 belong to later stages in the formation of the books of Samuel that presuppose a literary connection between the Saul-David narrative in 1 Sam 9–2 Sam 8* and the "synchronistic history" of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah in 1 Kgs 12–2 Kgs 25*.[26]

The primary function of David's acquisition of precious metals from Israel's regional neighbors (including the kingdom of Zobah, which is closely associated with Aram-Damascus) in 2 Sam 8:7–12 seems to be to attribute to David an indirect role in the construction of the temple in Jerusalem under Solomon (reflecting a literary horizon extending into the book of Kings). The association of Aram with the Arabah Valley in 2 Sam 8:13 can likewise be understood in light of the inner logic of Samuel–Kings as a whole. Notably, 2 Kgs 16:6 states that, during the time of king Ahaz of Judah and the Syro-Ephraimite war (mid-eighth century BCE), "Rezin, the king of Aram, recovered Elath for Aram[27] and drove the Judeans from Elath; and the Edomites came to Elath, where they live to this day."[28] Regardless of whether Arameans ever controlled the Arabah Valley *historically*, the author of 2 Sam 8:13 seems to presuppose the idea found in 2 Kgs 16:6 that Aram had an "imperial" presence in the Arabah Valley: In order to be able to set up garrisons in Edom, David first had to defeat the Arameans in the south.[29] Thus, unlike the references to Arameans in 2 Sam 8:3–6, which could possibly belong to an independent Saul-David narrative, the reference to Aram in 2 Sam 8:13 presupposes a larger network of references to Arameans extending into the book of Kings.

The episode involving Hanun, son of Nahash, in 2 Sam 10:1–5 (which is presupposed by the remaining material in 2 Sam 10) forms a narrative link with the story of Saul's defeat of the Ammonites in 1 Sam 11,[30] which suggests that 2 Sam 10–12* was conceived from the outset as part of a literary bridge in 2 Sam 9–1 Kgs 2* between the Saul-David narrative in 1 Sam 9–2 Sam 8 and the account of Solomon's reign in the book of Kings. This means that the materials relating to the Arameans in 2 Sam 10–12 – like those in 2 Sam 8:7–12, 13 – presuppose a literary horizon extending into the book of Kings.

Considering that the Saul-David narrative in 1 Sam 9–2 Sam 8* deals intensively with the theme of David as Saul's successor and thereby likely presupposes the fall of

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[26] Traditionally, biblical scholars have identified an independent "History of David's Rise" spanning from 1 Sam 16 to 2 Sam 5 or 8, yet since 1 Sam 16 presupposes the story of Saul from 1 Sam 9–15, it is more fitting to speak of a "Saul-David narrative" spanning from 1 Sam 9 to 2 Sam 8. Likewise, since 2 Sam 9–1 Kgs 2* presupposes the preceding narrative context, it is not possible to speak of an independent "Succession Narrative" in these chapters.

[27] NRSV renders "Edom" here, although there is no manuscript evidence for this emendation.

[28] 2 Sam 8:13 also likely presupposes 2 Kgs 14:7; on this, see Na'aman 2002, 214; Fischer 2004, 199; Fischer 2005b, 108, who regards 2 Sam 8:13–14 as a compilation derived from 2 Kgs 14:7 (for v. 13) and 2 Sam 8:6 (for v. 14).

[29] Cf. Levin 2009, 66–69.

[30] On the parallels between 1 Sam 11 and 2 Sam 10 (as well as with Judg 11), see Bailey 1990, 63, 67. Heinrich 2009, 364 likewise considers that the story of David's war with the Ammonites in 2 Sam 10–12 could be a reflex of Saul's defeat of the Ammonites in 1 Sam 11.

the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 BCE,[31] then the "Succession Narrative" in 2 Sam 9–1 Kgs 2*, like the Saul-David narrative itself, can be no earlier than the late eighth century. In addition, the story of Absalom's rebellion in 2 Sam 15–19 contains indications of possibly stemming from the postmonarchic period. As Alexander Fischer has noted, the story of David's flight and return in these chapters is a retrojection of the exile of part of Judah's population to Babylon onto the beginnings of kingship in Israel.[32] Yet Fischer's observation can be taken even further: Since 2 Sam 15–19 are structured by a pattern of exile *and return*, it is reasonable to assume that these chapters – at least at a stage of composition that included David's flight and return – presuppose not only the exile of part of Judah's population but also the *return* from exile and the beginning of Persian rule. Thus, the story of David's flight and return in 2 Sam 15–19 should be interpreted primarily against the historical background of the Persian period.

1.2.2. The References to Geshur in 2 Sam 3; 13–15 in Their Wider Literary Context

The geographical name "Geshur" (גשור) appears in the following biblical texts:

– Josh 13:13 (part of the list of nations that Israel did not drive out)
– 2 Sam 3:3 // 1 Chr 3:2 (references to Absalom as the son of Maacah, daughter of King Talmai of Geshur)
– 2 Sam 13:37–38; 14:23, 32; 15:8 (references to Absalom's flight to Talmai son of Ammihud, king of Geshur and to his three-year sojourn in Geshur)
– 1 Chr 2:23 (a statement that Geshur and Aram captured Havvoth-jair, Kenath and its villages from Hezron and his descendants Segub and Jair)

In addition, the gentilic "Geshurite" (גשורי) appears in the following texts:[33]

– Deut 3:14 ("Jair the Manassite acquired the whole region of Argob as far as the border of the Geshurites and the Maacathites, and he named them – that is, Bashan – after himself, Havvoth-jair, as it is to this day")
– Josh 12:5 (a reference to the Geshurites and Maacathites as just beyond Israel's territory in Bashan)
– Josh 13:2 (the region of the Geshurites as part of the land that still remains to conquer)
– Josh 13:11 (the region of the Geshurites as part of the territory that Moses gave to the Transjordanian tribes, spanning from Aroer in the south to Mount Hermon and Bashan in the north)
– Josh 13:13 (a statement that the Israelites "did not drive out the Geshurites or the Maacathites; but Geshur and Maacath live within Israel to this day")

In the literary-critical analysis of 2 Sam 15 above (1.1.2), it was observed that the reference to "Geshur in Aram" in 2 Sam 15:8 likely belongs to a later compositional layer within the chapter. This raises the question of why, of all the references to Geshur in the books of Samuel, only this verse explicitly locates Geshur "in Aram". The answer may lie in the possibility that 2 Sam 15, in its received form, seeks to create an intertextual link with the Jacob narratives in Gen 28–31. Here, at least two keyword connections can be identified. First, it is striking that the subject of Absalom's vow is

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[31] For discussion, see Germany 2023 and references to further literature therein.
[32] Fischer 2005a, 65. For a similar conclusion, see Rudnig 2006, 315–317; Wright 2014, 119.
[33] Na'aman 1990, 33–37; Na'aman 2012, 90 argues that a further occurrence of the gentilic "Geshurite" is found in 2 Sam 2:9 (on the basis of the Peshitta and the Vulgate; MT reads אשורי). For further discussion, see Fischer 2004, 76–77; Hutton 2009, 69–70.

quite similar to Jacob's vow in Gen 28:20–22 following the dream and theophany at the beginning of his journey to Paddan-aram:

Gen 28:20–22: Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, ²¹ so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then Yhwh shall be my God, ²² and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house; and of all that you give me I will surely give one-tenth to you."

2 Sam 15:8: For your servant made a vow while I lived at Geshur in Aram: If Yhwh will indeed bring me back to Jerusalem, then I will worship Yhwh [LXX plus: in Hebron]. ⁹ The king said to him, "Go in peace." So he got up, and went to Hebron.

Notably, both passages have to do with a vow to worship Yhwh after returning safely to the central hill country from Aram ("Paddan-Aram" and "Geshur in Aram", respectively). In addition, both passages feature the motif of returning to one's father's house "in peace" (cf. Gen 28:21 and 2 Sam 15:9). In light of these lexical connections, it is perhaps no coincidence that 2 Sam 15:6b refers to Absalom "stealing" (גנב) the hearts of the people; this may be a further allusion to the story of Jacob's sojourn in Aram in Gen 28–31, in which the motif of stealing (גנב) is quite prominent (Gen 30:33; 31:19, 20, 26, 27, 30, 32, 39), and which contains the only other occurrences of the expression "to steal the heart of X" (גנב לב-X) outside of 2 Sam 15:6b (Gen 31:20, 26, which report Jacob's deception of Laban). Thus, it seems that 2 Sam 15:6b and 15:8 are later expansions within 2 Sam 15 that allude to the story of Jacob's journey to and return from Aram in Gen 28–31.³⁴ Given these specific literary aims of 2 Sam 15:8, it is quite possible that the association of Geshur with Aram in this verse has a purely literary *raison d'être* and does not necessarily reflect contemporary historical realities of the author (such as the possible status of Geshur as a region inhabited by Arameans).³⁵

The references to Geshur and the Geshurites in Deuteronomy and Joshua are geographically more concrete than in 2 Sam 3; 13–15, situating Geshur just beyond Israel's own territorial claims in northern Transjordan. According to Deut 3:14, Geshur bordered the region of Argob and the Havvoth-jair; and according to Josh 12:5, the Geshurites and Maacathites were just beyond Israel's territory in Bashan.³⁶ In contrast, according to Josh 13:11, the region of the Geshurites is claimed as part of Israel's territory in Transjordan, extending north as far as Mount Hermon. Evidently, these texts reckon with different idealized conceptions of the extent of the "promised land" in Transjordan. Two further texts in Josh 13 seek to resolve the geographical inconsistency

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³⁴ The shared use of the expression גנב לב-X in 2 Sam 15:6b and Gen 31:20, 26 has occasionally been noted in earlier scholarship (see, e.g., Stolz 1981, 254; McCarter 1984, 356), and the phrase "when I lived in Geshur in Aram" in 2 Sam 15:8 has already been proposed to be a later addition (Edelman 1988, 256; Fischer 2004, 148–149; Adam 2006, 197; Rudnig 2006, 243; Roi 2015, 17–18), yet these two observations have so far not been brought together. According to Roi 2015, 18, the reference to "Geshur in Aram" results from a desire to distinguish this northern Geshur from the "southern Geshurites" mentioned in 1 Sam 27:8 (on 1 Sam 27:8, see note 17 above).

³⁵ If 2 Sam 15:8 indeed presupposes the Jacob narratives in Gen 28–31, then the dating of the latter would have a bearing on the date of the addition in 2 Sam 15:8. For a postmonarchic dating of the theme of Jacob's vow in Gen 28:20–22, see, e.g., Levin 2022, 37–42; see also Wahl 1997 and Na'aman 2014 for a postmonarchic dating of much of the material in the Jacob narratives more generally.

³⁶ Pakkala 2010, 157 considers that Deut 3:14 may be dependent on Josh 12:5.

between Deut 3:14 and Josh 12:5 on the one hand and Josh 13:11 on the other: Josh 13:13 states that the Israelites "did not drive out the Geshurites or the Maacathites; but Geshur and Maacath live within Israel to this day", and Josh 13:2 states that the region of the Geshurites is part of the land "that still remains to conquer".[37]

For the topic at hand, what is important is that these geographical texts locate Geshur roughly between Bashan and the Argob in the south (probably around the present-day Yarmouk River) and Mount Hermon in the north. In other words, the geographical texts in Deuteronomy and Joshua locate Geshur and Maacah fairly precisely in the region to the east of the Sea of Galilee, the Golan Heights, and the upper Jordan Valley.[38] Considering that the geographical texts in Deut 3 and Josh 12–13 (including the references to the Geshurites in Deut 3:14; Josh 12:5; 13:2, 11, 13) belong to a relatively late stage in the formation of the Hebrew Bible, the references to Geshur in 2 Sam 3; 13–15 are typically regarded as older than those in Deut 3 and Josh 12–13.[39]

Given the overall literary dependence of 2 Sam 9–1 Kgs 2* on 1 Sam 9–2 Sam 8* and the likelihood that 1 Sam 9–2 Sam 8* stem from the late eighth century at the earliest, then the references to Geshur in 2 Sam 13–15 are likely no earlier than the seventh century BCE. While this does not negate the theory that the biblical references to Geshur could reflect memories of earlier historical realities,[40] the analysis of the biblical texts indicates that the literary instantiation of this memory in 2 Sam 3; 13–15 could well be later, even stemming from the postmonarchic period.[41]

2. Historical Background

Scholarship has often assumed that the narratives of David's wars in 2 Sam 8 and 10 faithfully reflect events from the time of David (i.e., the tenth century BCE).[42] Nevertheless, in the last several decades, the voices in favor of a later historical context for these passages have increased. Since it is likely that 2 Sam 8:1–6 is the oldest of the war reports in 2 Sam 8; 10–12 (see above), we will turn our attention first to the depiction of Arameans in these verses.[43]

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[37] For further discussion of the geographical texts in Deut 3 and Josh 12–13, see Germany 2021, including the evaluation of Josh 13:9–14 as a late compilation of other materials in Josh 12–13 (p. 153).

[38] The statement in Josh 13:13 that "Geshur and Maacath live within Israel to this day" is also interesting insofar as it suggests that, at the time this text was written, the region of Geshur was perceived as being inhabited by a group that was not "Israelite."

[39] See, e.g., Sergi 2019, 326. In contrast, Pakkala 2010, 158 argues that "there is no evident connection between the two traditions."

[40] See Sergi/Kleiman 2018; Sergi 2019; Kleiman 2022, 216–217.

[41] The possibility that postmonarchic biblical authors had access to some sort of cultural knowledge about Geshur beyond what is found in the received biblical tradition is supported by the fact that the geographical texts in Deut 3 and Josh 12–13 locate Geshur fairly precisely despite their late date.

[42] Stoebe 1994, 246; Halpern 2001, 141; Good 2001, 129. In contrast, Edenburg 2010, 167 concludes that 2 Sam 8 "emulates Neo-Assyrian style."

[43] The historical contextualization of the report of David's defeat of the Moabites in 2 Sam 8:2 cannot be dealt with here. For the view that the conflict between Israel and Mesha during the second half of the ninth century constitutes the *terminus post quem* for 2 Sam 8:2, see Na'aman 2002, 213

2.1. 2 Sam 8:3–6

In the view of Walter Dietrich, the diversity of Aramean polities presumed by 2 Sam 8:3–6 (Hadadezer ben Rehob, king of Zobah; Aram Damascus) likely reflects eleventh- and tenth-century BCE realities,[44] since Damascus' monopoly of power in the region beginning in the second half of the ninth century would have precluded Zobah's regional influence alongside that of Damascus at that time.[45] However, Alexander Fischer has noted that the name Zobah continued to be known in later times, such as in the name of the Neo-Assyrian province Ṣubat.[46] Nadav Na'aman is also skeptical about possible reminiscences of Arameans from the tenth century in 2 Sam 8. Instead, he considers that the biblical figure of Hadadezer in 2 Sam 8 is based on the historical king Hazael of Damascus (second half of the ninth century). Around 840 BCE, Hazael, who had usurped the throne in Damascus, was the most powerful figure in Syria and perhaps even led a campaign beyond the Euphrates.[47] This detail in particular led Na'aman to the conclusion that the reference to Hadadezer setting up a monument "on the river [i.e., the Euphrates]" in 2 Sam 8:3 (בלכתו להשיב ידו בנהר) draws on knowledge of Hazael's hegemony over the entire region to the west of the Euphrates.[48] In addition, Na'aman notes that the numbers of the fallen infantry and cavalry in 2 Sam 8:4 and 10:18 are very close to the numbers found in the annals of Shalmaneser III with reference to Shalmaneser's defeat of Hazael in 841 BCE. Na'aman uses this detail to strengthen the connection that he sees between the biblical figure of Hadadezer during the time of David and the historical figure of Hazael during the ninth century.[49] Indeed, the biblical authors' familiarity with information found in the annals of Shalmaneser III could also explain the use of the names "Hadadezer" (cf. the mid-ninth-century Damascene king Adad-idri)[50] and "son of Rehob".[51]

(although he considers that 2 Sam 8:2 was written "not long after" these events) and (tentatively) Gaß 2009, 146–147.

[44] Dietrich 2019, 718–719.

[45] On the possibility that Zobah and (Beth-)Rehov were synonymous political entities, see Berlejung 2013, 69 with nn. 41–42; Berlejung 2014, 342–343 with nn. 19–20 (with further literature).

[46] Fischer 2005b, 118–119.

[47] On Hazael's dominance over Syria, see Younger 2016, 591–630; Kleiman 2022, 9, 212–216. For discussion of the identification of the river mentioned in Hazael's Booty Inscriptions, see Younger 2016, 629–630 with reference to earlier studies.

[48] Na'aman 1995, 390–391; Na'aman 2002, 208; see further Fischer 2005b, 120; Van Seters 2009, 223. In contrast, Zwickel 2019, 273 interprets "the River" in v. 3 as the Orontes and takes the report in 2 Sam 8:3–5 to be a reliable reflection of tenth-century circumstances.

[49] See Na'aman 1995, 393, although here he still maintains that there was a historical figure of Hadadezer of Beth-rehob who was a contemporary of David. In contrast, Na'aman 2002, 209 is more ambivalent, and Na'aman 2017, 326 seems to have abandoned altogether the notion of a historical "Hadadezer of Beth-Rehob" from the tenth century.

[50] Cf. Na'aman 2017, 326.

[51] For extrabiblical references to Adad-idri of Damascus, see Grayson 1996, 23, 36–39, 45–47, 53. On the reference to a "Son of Ruhubi from Amana" in the annals of Shalmaneser III from 853 BCE, see Grayson 1996, 23; cf. Lipiński 2013, 126; Berlejung 2014: 342 with n. 15. Fischer 2005b, 121 notes that a war between Damascus and Hamath is attested in the inscription of Zakkur, king of Hamath, and argues that the knowledge of this event – dated to 796 BCE – formed the historical background to

In sum, the earliest material referring to Arameans in the books of Samuel – 2 Sam 8:1–6 – refers to a certain Hadadezer ben Rehob, king of Zobah, and, historically speaking, has a *terminus post quem* in the second half of the ninth century BCE. Furthermore, unless one assumes that the report of David's conquests in 2 Sam 8:1–6 belongs to an independent David tradition that predates the composition of the Saul-David narrative,[52] then a date after the fall of the northern kingdom seems most likely.[53]

2.2. 2 Sam 8:7–14

It is now possible to evaluate the later additions to 2 Sam 8 in vv. 7–14, which refer to Toi, king of Hamath (vv. 9–10), and to Aramean involvement in the Valley of Salt (v. 13). The earliest direct reference to the city of Hamath outside the Bible is found in the annals of Shalmaneser (853 BCE)[54] and in the Aramaic inscription of Zakkur (ca. 800 BCE). The city was destroyed in 720 BCE by Sargon II, although the designation "the land of Ḥamātu" continues to appear in Neo-Babylonian texts.[55] According to 2 Kgs 17:24, following the destruction of Hamath, part of its population was settled in Samaria. Considering that the name Toi in 2 Sam 8:9 (תעי; LXX* Θοου; cf. 1 Chr 18:3) might be of Hurrian origin and that his son Hadoram (הדורם, following 1 Chr 18:10) bears a semitic name referring to the Aramean weather god Hadad,[56] it is likely that the author did not simply invent the name, but instead had access to some sort of information on Hamath pertaining to the period between ca. 800 and 720 BCE.[57] Indeed, the semitic name of Toi's son fits well with the fact that Hamath was ruled by a Luwian dynasty until the end of the ninth century BCE and, beginning with Zakkur ca. 800 BCE, was

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the literary fiction of David's defeat of Hadadezer ben Rehob, king of Zobah. Strictly speaking, however, this applies only to 2 Sam 8:9–11, which are likely compositionally later than 2 Sam 8:1–6.

[52] See, e.g., Wright 2014, 35–36, who finds fragments of earlier David traditions in texts such as 1 Sam 23*; 27*; 30* and 2 Sam 2*; 5*.

[53] The plausibility of a date of composition for David's "empire building" in 2 Sam 8:1–6 sometime after the late eighth century is indirectly supported by the widespread nature of the literary motif of imperial expansion in ancient Mediterranean literature from later periods (see Isser 2003, 89).

[54] A slightly older Assyrian text from the time of Tukulti-Ninurta II (885 BCE) mentions a local ruler from the land of Laqe who bore the personal name Hamataya, which hints at the existence of the city of Hamath already in the early ninth century; see Younger 2016, 427.

[55] Na'aman 1993, 110; Lehmann 2011, n.p.

[56] On the Hurrian origin of the name Toi, see McCarter 1984, 250; Stoebe 1994, 244; Hawkins 2000, 400 n. 30; Younger 2016, 146, although Lipiński 2000, 339 and Na'aman 2017, 323 question this interpretation. In the MT of 2 Sam 8:10, Toi's son bears the Yahwistic name "Joram", while in 1 Chr 18:10 he has the name Hadoram (הדורם, LXX: Ιδουραμ), which also seems to be the case for the Hebrew Vorlage to LXX 2 Kgdms 8:10 (Ιεδδουραν). Thus, it seems likely that the more primitive text of 2 Sam 8:10 ascribed a semitic Hadad-theophoric name to Toi's son. Why this name was changed to a Yahwistic name in the proto-Masoretic tradition is unclear (Younger 2016, 146 suggests "theological reasons" but does not elaborate on why a non-Israelite prince would need a Yahwistic name).

[57] Cf. Dietrich 2019, 712–713, who considers that the author of 2 Sam 8 had access to excerpts of annals from Jerusalem. Lipiński 2000, 251 and Bryce 2012, 207 similarly conclude that the reference to Toi of Hamath in 2 Sam 8:9–11 does not reflect tenth-century realities.

thereafter ruled by kings bearing semitic names until the Assyrians' destruction of the city in 720 BCE.[58]

As noted above (section 1.1.1), there is a text-critical question of whether 2 Sam 8:13 originally referred to David's defeat of *Aram* (ארם, MT) or *Edom* (τὴν Ιδουμαίαν, LXX) in the Valley of Salt. If one assumes that the MT, as the *lectio difficilior*, reflects the more primitive reading, then this raises the questions of whether there is a historical situation in which Aram (i.e., Damascus) could have exerted its influence in the area to the south of the Dead Sea. Given the recent evidence that Hazael of Damascus likely had an interest in undermining the city of Gath's control of the copper trade from the Arabah to the Mediterranean Sea,[59] it is at least conceivable that a memory of Damascene military involvement in the Arabah Valley – contemporary with the Damascene destruction of Gath – has been preserved in 2 Sam 8:13, although at present this must remain informed speculation. Another possibility is that the "Valley of Salt" (גיא מלח) is not a reference to the Arabah Valley, but to a region in the vicinity of Damascus. The annals of Shalmaneser III mention a campaign against Hazael in which the Assyrians conquered several fortified cities in the kingdom of Damascus, including the city Malaḫu.[60] Although the precise location of Malaḫu remains uncertain, many scholars locate the city in the Nuqra Plain, east of the Ruqqad River.[61] Thus, it is conceivable that גיא מלח in 2 Sam 8:13 may be drawing on knowledge of Shalmaneser III's defeat of the Aramean city Malaḫu around 838 BCE. Such a possibility may be indirectly supported by the fact that David's killing of 18,000 Arameans is quite close to the figures given at another place in Shalmaneser III's annals for a campaign against Hazael in 841 BCE, in which he killed 16,000 Damascene soldiers at Mount Saniru.[62]

2.3. 2 Sam 10

In addition to the expansions in 2 Sam 8:7–14, two further expansions in 2 Sam 10:6–14, 15–19 also mention Arameans. 2 Sam 10:6 refers to Aram Beth-Rehob and Aram Zobah (reminiscent of the reference to Hadadezer ben Rehob, king of Zobah in 2 Sam 8:3) as well as to the king of Maacah[63] and the "men of Tob", neither of whom appear in 2 Sam 8:3–6. The likely later text in 2 Sam 10:15–19 also refers to two Aramean figures: Hadadezer (cf. 2 Sam 8:3–5, 7–8, 9–12) and Šobaḫ, his general. The place name Helam is also mentioned in vv. 16 and 17, although it is absent in the parallel passage in 1 Chr 19:16–17, which could suggest that the references to Helam were not present in the *Vorlage* of Chronicles.[64]

The place name "Tob" is attested in many periods. The Amarna correspondence from the fourteenth century BCE refers to a city "Ṭubu" (EA 205:3), which is unanimously

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[58] On the political history of Hamath, see Younger 2016, 446–499.

[59] See the discussion in Fantalkin/Finkelstein 2006; Ben-Yosef/Sergi 2018, esp. 461, 472–474.

[60] For the text, see Grayson 1996, 79 (A.0.102.16 line 157′).

[61] See Younger 2016, 560; Kleiman 2022, 8 n. 39, with reference to further literature.

[62] For the text, see Grayson 1996, 48 (A.0.102.8 line 10″).

[63] Dion 1997, 80 notes that Maacah is usually associated with Tall Abil el-Qamh to the west of Dan.

[64] In contrast, Japhet 1993, 361 conjectures that the reading in Chronicles is the result of textual corruption.

identified with the biblical toponym "Tob" and which may have been located at the same place as the modern town of eṭ-Ṭayibeh (ca. 30 km east of Irbid).[65] The "land of Tob" is also mentioned in the Jephthah narrative (Judg 11:3, 5) and 1 Macc 5:13 ("Toubion"; see also the toponyms in 1 Macc 5:26–36). According to these passages, the land of Tob was located south of Maacah and north of Ammonite territory. Although the place names in 2 Sam 10:6–14, 15–19 do not allow for a very precise historical contextualization, the military tactics described in 2 Sam 10:6–14 can be compared to those found in Xenophon's account of the battle of Cunaxa (401 BCE).[66]

2.4. Geshur in 2 Sam 3; 13–15

Prior scholarship has often taken the fact that the kingdom of Geshur is not mentioned after the time of David in the biblical narrative as a sign that the references to Geshur in 2 Sam 3; 13–15 reflect historical realities from the early monarchic period.[67] In contrast, Omer Sergi and Assaf Kleiman have recently proposed that these references do not stem from the time of David but instead were likely composed between the late ninth and early seventh centuries BCE, arguing, *inter alia*, that literary production in Judah did not begin before the late ninth century and that the "detailed description of David's court and court life could hardly be conceived in a post-monarchic era."[68] Considering the complex development of the narratives in question, Sergi and Kleiman's proposed *terminus ante quem* of the early seventh century could be extended down. Indeed, the observation that the references to Geshur in 2 Sam 13–15 belong to a stage of composition of the Absalom narrative that already presupposes the theme of David's "exile and return" would suggest a Persian-period date for the composition of these Geshur texts. One could hypothesize, however, an earlier origin of the received cultural knowledge about Geshur that is reflected in the texts. As for the arguments in favor of a *terminus post quem* in the late ninth century, it is necessary to turn to the archaeological evidence for the settlement history of the Sea of Galilee region.

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[65] Na'aman 2017, 314.

[66] See Van Seters 2009, 289, with reference to Waterfield 2006, 1–19. On the biblical portrayal of the Arameans as forces for hire who can be called upon for military assistance, cf. the depiction of Asa's reign in 1 Kgs 15:16–22, which was written no earlier than the late eighth century BCE (cf. 2 Kgs 16:5, 7–9). If the notion of the Arameans as forces for hire in 2 Sam 10:6 is indeed derived from 1 Kgs 15:16–22, then this would reinforce a *terminus post quem* for 2 Sam 10:6–19 in the late eighth century.

[67] See, e.g., Zwickel 2017, 252 (Geshur is "not mentioned in any reliable historical biblical or extra-biblical texts younger than the 10th century BCE"); Zwickel 2019, 273 ("Geshur is no longer mentioned after the death of David"); Dietrich 2021, 366 ("Es fällt auf, dass Geschur nach der Davidzeit nirgendwo nehr erwähnt wird – weder in der Bibel noch etwa in assyrischen Quellen. Das könnte darauf weisen, dass es als eigenständige politische Einheit nach David nicht mehr existierte"); Lemaire 2019, 249.

[68] See Sergi/Kleiman 2018, 11–12; Sergi 2019, 322–325.

3. The Archaeological Evidence

The literary and historical analyses of the references to the Arameans in the books of Samuel, as presented above, overwhelmingly suggest a strong focus on diplomatic relations (e.g., 2 Sam 3:3; 13:37–38) and military clashes (e.g., 2 Sam 8:3–13; 10:6–19) between the Israelites and their northern neighbors which were attributed by the biblical authors to David's reign.[69] Apart from Aram-Damascus, Israel's traditional adversary in the north during the monarchic period (e.g., 2 Kgs 6:8; 8:12; 13:3), these accounts, which feature a very complex redaction history, also refer to a group of seemingly minor and historically poorly attested polities, most of which were ruled by royal dynasties of Aramaean origin. Among the listed kingdoms are Aram-Ṣobah, Aram Beth-Rehob, Aram-Maacah, and Tob.[70] Additionally, the texts highlight the intentional relations of David's court with the royal dynasties of two kingdoms: Hamath (2 Sam 8:9–10) and Geshur (e.g., 2 Sam 13:37–38). The former was governed by Aramean rulers only from the late ninth century BCE, with the rise of Zakkur,[71] and the latter is usually considered an Aramean polity, although the evidence for this ethnic classification is mostly implicit (e.g., Gen 10:23; 2 Sam 15:8; for the archaeology, see below).[72] Both kingdoms, however, are mentioned in conjunction with the Aramean polities listed above.[73] Collectively, the details and style of these narratives indicate that they may represent early conquest traditions which later redactors, perhaps even in post-exilic times (as proposed in the literary-critical analysis above), reworked to create a glorified representation of the early years of the Israelite monarchy.[74]

Archaeology cannot corroborate the specific events mentioned in the books of Samuel, such as the battle between the Israelites and the Arameans at Helam mentioned

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[69] The question of the existence of the United Monarchy has been discussed extensively in prior research and is beyond the scope of the current study. For our purposes, suffice it to say that even if Jerusalem was the hub of a small kingdom already in the early tenth century BCE (e.g., Sergi 2019; Mazar 2020), there is still no justification to assume its control over remote regions as far as the fringes of Hamath and Aram-Damascus (more below).

[70] No historical information is available on Tob, and thus it is impossible to know the origin of its royal family. On the place name "Tob", see the discussion in section 2.3.2 above.

[71] For the history of the kingdom of Hamath in the early first millennium BCE, see Niehr 2019.

[72] Albright 1956; Na'aman 2012, 89; *pace* Pakkala 2010, 89–91. In general, the traditional division of the territorial kingdoms, or city-states, of the northern Levant between Neo-Hittite/Luwian (e.g., Bryce 2012) and Aramean groups (e.g., Lipiński 2000) has been heavily criticized in recent years (Osborne 2020). The case of the Kingdom of Hamath is a prime example. It is well-known that this kingdom was ruled by a Luwian dynasty until the late ninth century BCE, then, it was replaced by a series of kings of Aramean origin (Niehr 2019). No significant changes were observed in the capital of the kingdom at this time, and moreover, the structures revealed in the royal quarter of the city remained in use. For a useful summary of the excavations carried out in the Hama Citadel, see Buhl 1992.

[73] Geshur's absence from the list of kingdoms hired by Ammon (2 Sam 10:6–19) led several scholars to speculate that it made an alliance with the kingdom of Israel prior to the battle; see, e.g., Kraeling 1918, 41–42; Mazar 1961.

[74] See Na'aman 2017.

in 2 Sam 10:16–17.[75] Nor can it help to illuminate the ethnic composition of the involved polities as fully or partially Aramean based on the material culture alone, as the ambiguity surrounding the kingdom of Geshur illustrates well.[76] While ethnicity was a major concern for archaeologists until the early 2000s,[77] anthropological and archaeological studies from the last two decades have constantly and convincingly demonstrated that the crystallization of group identity was a multifaceted process and, most importantly, that multiple perceptions of identity could have existed simultaneously and also transformed over time under shifting circumstances.[78] The case of the Arameans in the ancient Near East was no different, and their own understanding of their identity was similarly influenced by numerous factors, from subsistence strategies to political structures, which were in a constant state of change since the first appearance of the Arameans on the stage of history in the twelfth century BCE.[79]

All of these reservations do not mean that archaeology has nothing to contribute to the discussion. On the contrary, the data from the field can provide information concerning the emergence, deterioration, and disappearance of at least some of the minor polities mentioned in the textual accounts considered here, and specific archaeological finds may illuminate the socioeconomic contacts of the local residents with other regions in a more nuanced manner. In light of this, two major questions emerge for an archaeological inquiry concerning the references to Arameans in the books of Samuel. Firstly, can we identify the emergence of minor polities in the central Levant during the first millennium BCE? And secondly, what is the earliest evidence for socioeconomic contacts between elite groups in the highlands of Canaan and local clan leaders in this region? In this case, it must be admitted that the archaeological information on the territories controlled by Aram-Ṣobah and Aram Beth-Rehob (i.e., the Lebanese Beqaa[80]) and in the heartland of Aram-Damascus (i.e., the Damascus Oasis), is too limited at the moment. Even the cumulative data from these regions do not allow any adequate reconstructions of the political and social structures of the local kingdoms of the first millennium BCE or even the socioeconomic relations of the local populations

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[75] Helam is commonly identified with modern Elmah, ca. 18 km to the northeast of Darʻa (e.g., Naʼaman 2017, 313). Currently, however, no Iron Age remains are known from the site, so this identification remains hypothetical.

[76] See, e.g., Hafthorsson 2006, 244–246; Arav 2013, *passim*; Sugimoto 2015, 97–105.

[77] E.g., Faust/Bunimovitz 2002; Dever 2003; Killebrew 2005.

[78] E.g., Maeir/Hitchcock/Horwitz 2013; Maeir 2017, 58–60. In this respect, the search for the material culture of the Arameans is no different from that of the Israelites, which was highly criticized in numerous studies. For the most recent summary of the issue, see Maeir 2021 (reprinted in this volume, pp. 9–46) with an extensive bibliography. Recently, it has been shown that the material culture of the central Levant is very similar to that of the southern Levant (Rohmer 2020; Kleiman 2022), and thus differences in material culture may reflect regional variants rather than different ethnic groups.

[79] On the methodological problems in defining Aramean identity, see, e.g., Bunnens 2019.

[80] The location of biblical Aram-Beth-Rehob in the Beqaa Valley is suggested by Shalmaneser III's reference to "Baʻasa, son of Ruhub of Mount Amana" (in the Anti-Lebanon mountains); see Berlejung 2014, 342 n.15. For the possible location of Zobah, Betah, and Berothai, the cities of Adad-Idri of Aram-Zobah, see Lipiński 2000, 322–326.

with other regions.[81] Furthermore, the exact location of the capitals of two of the polities mentioned in the books of Samuel, Aram-Ṣobah (Assyrian Ṣubat/Ṣupitu) and Beth-Rehob, remains unknown, and substantial remains from pre-Hellenistic Damascus or its vicinity have thus far not come to light.[82] On the positive side, the archaeological data retrieved from the territories assumed to be controlled by the kingdom of Geshur, one of the main Aramean or Aramean-affiliated entities featured in the books of Samuel (e.g., 2 Sam 13:3), has significantly expanded in recent years, allowing us to reconstruct the emergence and collapse of this minor polity in light of the evidence from the field, as well as to explore possible clues for diplomatic contacts between the locals and royal families in the highlands.[83]

Figure 1: Map of Select Iron Age Sites near the Sea of Galilee

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[81] For the limited information from the Lebanese Beqaa and southern Syria, see Marfoe 1995 and Rohmer 2020, respectively. See also the concise summary in Kleiman 2022,19–38, 96–131.

[82] One exception to this rule is the famous winged-sphinx orthostat that was exposed in secondary use during renovations in the Great Mosque of Damascus (Abd el-Kader 1949; Younger 2016, 554).

[83] For recent studies that deal with the history of the kingdom of Geshur, see Pakkala 2010; Na'aman 2012; Sergi/Kleiman 2018; Frevel 2018, 215–216; Arav 2020; Kleiman 2022. In the last few years, the capital of Abel Beth-Maacah has been extensively excavated. Thus far, the excavations have revealed substantial remains dating from the Late Bronze Age II, Iron Age I, and Iron Age IIA, which confirm that the site was the hub of a Canaanite city-state that continued to exist in the early first millennium BCE (Yahalom-Mack et al. 2018 with lit.). Surprisingly, occupational layers from the Iron Age IIB, i.e., the eighth century BCE, were not found to date, although Abel Beth-Maccah is mentioned among the cities that were destroyed by Tiglath-Pileser III in ca. 732 BCE (2 Kgs 15:29). As the excavations of this important site are still ongoing, we will not deal with the case of Abel Beth-Maacah here.

The location of the kingdom of Geshur in the vicinity of the Sea of Galilee is generally accepted (cf. the textual evidence in section 1.2.2 above).[84] Its capital, the home of King Talmai and his dynasty (2 Sam 3:3; 13:37), is usually identified by scholars in the archaeological site of et-Tell/Bethsaida, an impressive mound located northwest of the Sea of Galilee, east of the Jordan River. Indeed, this common identification was not established through the preservation of any ancient toponym, as noted correctly by Juha Pakkala,[85] but exclusively on the large size of et-Tell/Bethsaida and the extensive archaeological remains unearthed there, including massive basalt-built fortifications. These finds also fit the possible meaning of גתר (Gether, Gen 10:23), presumably the original pronunciation of the name Geshur by Aramaic speakers, as "stronghold" or "fortress".[86] Yet it must be remembered that the overall number of large-scale and strategically-located mounds that could be the location of a political hub around the Sea of Galilee or in the Golan Heights is limited,[87] and thus the scholarly focus on et-Tell/Bethsaida is very reasonable in this case. From a *longue durée* perspective, however, it must be stressed that the traditional political hub of the Sea of Galilee was not et-Tell/Bethsaida but rather Tell el-'Oreimeh, the only other large mound in this region. It is unanimously identified as the location of ancient Kinnereth (Josh 19:35).[88] Understanding the shifting balance between the two cities is, therefore, crucial for determining the possible *realia* behind the biblical accounts that describe diplomatic ties between Geshur and Israel.

Excavations at Tell el-'Oreimeh/Kinnereth have demonstrated that after a long occupational gap in the Late Bronze Age (ca. 1450–1150 BCE),[89] the settlement recovered in the Iron Age I, around the eleventh century BCE (Strata VI–V). At this time, well-planned domestic quarters were constructed in the lower settlement, southeast of the summit of the mound, and the Bronze Age fortifications of the site were renovated and reused. Stefan Münger, who studied the material culture of the site in-depth, argued that it could be defined as a "late Canaanite blend" with some north-Levantine influences.[90] Additionally, stylistic and provenance studies of the pottery from the excavations of Tell el-'Oreimeh/Kinnereth and Tel Hadar (a small town located on the eastern side of the lake) revealed the long-distance contacts of the residents of

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[84] Mazar 1961; Na'aman 2012; Sergi/Kleiman 2018 *pace* Pakkala 2010, who downplays the value of the geographical information concerning the kingdom of Geshur in the Hebrew Bible.

[85] Pakkala 2010, 236, with a critical overview of the history of research of the kingdom of Geshur.

[86] Lipiński 2000, 336; Na'aman 2012, 89. Pakkala's (2013, 241–243) comments did not exclude this possibility.

[87] Kleiman 2022, 63–95.

[88] For the excavations carried out at Tell el-'Oreimeh, see Fritz 1993; Münger et al. 2011; Münger 2013. In the Early Bronze Age, the largest site in the region was Tel Beth-Yerah, but around the mid-third millennium, it lost its importance and was abandoned (Greenberg et al. 2012).

[89] Benjamin Mazar (1961) proposed that the toponym *garu* mentioned in EA 256 is a scribal error of the name Ga-[šu-]ru, a suggestion that was adopted by many scholars (e.g., Kochavi 1989, 3; Arav 2020, 104, and many others). Apart from the linguistic issues relating to this suggestion (Pakkala 2010, 159–167; Na'aman 2012, 91–92), most of the sites allegedly belonging to this early polity are very small or were not settled in the Late Bronze Age IIA–B, specifically not in the Amarna period (Kleiman 2022, 94–95).

[90] Münger 2013, 150.

the two sites, who were engaged in commercial networks with all of the surrounding regions, from the Golan Heights to the Phoenician coast.[91] A rare proto-geometric vessel found at Tel Hadar and produced in Euboea even hints that the locals were connected to the international trade in the Eastern Mediterranean.[92] In contrast to this evidence, no clue of any commercial contact with the highlands of either Samaria or Judah is visible in the archaeological record during the Iron Age I. In light of the impressive finds from Tell el-'Oreimeh/Kinnereth, most scholars assumed that the settlement was the center of an Iron Age I city-state or small territorial polity that inherited the southern territories of Canaanite Hazor,[93] controlling various communities in the Sea of Galilee and adjacent regions.[94] Of particular importance to our discussion is the fact that the settlement at et-Tell/Bethsaida (Stratum VI), which is identified by many scholars as the capital of the kingdom of Geshur (see above), was just another town in this sociopolitical formation,[95] along with many other small-scale settlements that were built throughout the Iron Age I around the lake, such as Tel Hadar, Tel 'Ein Gev, Tel Soreg, and Tel Dover.[96] The prosperity of the Sea of Galilee region in the Iron Age I came to an end around the mid-tenth century BCE, when all the settlements around the Sea of Galilee, including Tell el-'Oreimeh/Kinnereth and et-Tell/Bethsaida, were violently destroyed.[97] Such events were not unique to the region of the Sea of Galilee but were also observed in other urban centers in the southern Levant, signifying, in the view of many scholars, the "decisive watershed in the history of the country".[98] In any case, our review of the evidence plainly demonstrates that the sociopolitical organization around the Sea of Galilee in the eleventh and first half of the tenth centuries BCE was utterly different from the one portrayed by the authors of the books of Samuel. Kinnereth, for instance, clearly the largest and most central urban center of the region, is not mentioned

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[91] For studies of the Iron Age I pottery of Tel Kinrot, see Münger 2013; Tynjä 2017, with petrographic results in Erazo 2016; for Tel Hadar, see Kleiman 2019a, 89–153, with petrographic results in Shoval et al. 2006.

[92] See Kleiman 2022, 168–169, with reference to earlier literature.

[93] For detailed discussions of the destruction of Canaanite Hazor, see Ben-Tor 2016, 118–126; Bechar et al. 2021. For the possibility that 'Ashtaroth in the Hauran inherited the territories of Hazor at first, see Kleiman 2019b.

[94] Finkelstein 2013, 30; Sergi/Kleiman 2018, 2–3.

[95] In the most recent preliminary report, Arav (2020, 97) proposed that the city of Stratum VI was surrounded by a zigzag wall built of basalt. He correctly noted the absence of such fortification systems in the southern Levant and therefore suggested that it was influenced by the architectural style of northern Syria, allegedly the origin of the local inhabitants of the site in the early first millennium BCE. Currently, the evidence for this zigzag was exposed in only two excavation squares, so any conclusions concerning the fortification must await further excavations.

[96] Münger et al. 2011; Finkelstein 2017; Sergi/Kleiman 2018. For the excavations of Tel Hadar, Tel 'Ein Gev, Tel Soreg, and Tel Dover, see Kleiman 2022, 69–72; Sugimoto 2022; Kochavi 1993; and Golani/Wolff 2018, respectively.

[97] As noticed already by Finkelstein and Piasetzky (2007), the destruction of the Iron Age I settlements around the Sea of Galilee occurred a few decades after the destruction of the city-states of the Jezreel Valley (e.g., Stratum VIA at Megiddo or Stratum XVII at Tel Yoqne'am). For the radiocarbon studies, see Sharon et al. 2007; Scott et al. 2007.

[98] See, e.g., Finkelstein 2013, 36; Faust 2021; Kleiman et al. 2024.

at all in the account of Absalom's flight to Geshur (2 Sam 13:37–38), and the violent destructions of all the settlements around the Sea of Galilee (not to mention of other cities) are similarly not reflected at all in the text. All of this already provides strong support for a post-tenth century BCE dating of any historical memories that could have been embedded within the narratives that deal with David's diplomatic relations with the kingdom of Geshur and, naturally, for their composition.[99]

In the late tenth and ninth centuries BCE, after the destruction wave of the Iron Age I, the sociopolitical organization around the Sea of Galilee and in the Hula Valley drastically changed. In contrast to the situation in other parts of the country, where new Iron Age IIA settlements were built above the ruins of the Canaanite cities (e.g., Stratum V at Megiddo or Stratum S-1 at Tel Beth-Shean), the region around the Sea of Galilee experienced a relatively long occupational gap of nearly a century, covering both the early and late phases of the Iron Age IIA, i.e., the reigns of almost all of the early northern Israelite kings, from Jeroboam I to Joram (ca. 931–842 BCE). A similar occupational gap also seems to characterize the northern margins of the Hula Valley, especially at Tel Dan, although the situation in the adjacent Tel Abel Beth-Maacah is still uncertain.[100] Hitherto, the only settlement in northeastern Israel that can be dated with a high degree of confidence to the late tenth and first half of the ninth centuries BCE is Hazor (Strata X–IX), located in the southern margin of the Hula Valley, roughly halfway between Tell el-'Oreimeh/Kinnereth and Tel Abel Beth-Maacah.[101] The new city of Hazor was built above the remnants of an Iron Age I village (Stratum XII/XI) and the Late Bronze Age metropolis (Stratum XIII). It differed from past cities built in this location in many aspects, primarily in its limited size (only 6 hectares), but also in the construction of a new ashlar-built defense system with a casemate wall and a six-chambered gate and completely new ceramic repertoire, including jars that were produced and imported from eastern Samaria.[102] The use of ashlar stones made from limestone, rather than the abundant local basalt stone, in the construction of the public architecture of the site is instructive and serves as another possible link to the architectural traditions of the kingdom of Israel.[103] The current excavators of Hazor date

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[99] See also Sergi/Kleiman 2018, 11; Sergi 2019.

[100] The identification of Tell Abil el-Qameh with biblical Abel Beth-Maacha (e.g., 2 Sam 20:14–22) is generally accepted in research (Na'aman 2012, 95; Yahalom-Mack et al. 2018, 145 *pace* Lipiński 2000, 372, who identified the site as the location of biblical Dan). For the occupational gap at Tel Dan in the late tenth and first half of the ninth centuries BCE, see Arie 2008; *pace* Thareani 2019, who maintains an earlier date for the resettlement of the site. The excavators of Tel Abel Beth-Maacah argued on serval occasions that the city was settled in the ninth century BCE (e.g., Yahalom-Mack et al. 2018; Yahalom-Mack et al. 2023). The question is, however, whether the site was constructed in the early or late phases of that century. If the latter scenario is correct, then Abel Beth-Maacah flourished under the hegemony of Aram-Damascus as argued for the kingdom of Geshur (Sergi/Kleiman 2018; Kleiman 2019b, and see more below).

[101] For a concise summary of the Iron Age IIA remains exposed at Hazor, see Ben-Tor 2016, 130–146.

[102] Aznar 2005. For the definition of the 'hippo' jar and its function as part of the royal administrative system of the kingdom of Israel in the ninth–eighth centuries BCE, see Alexandre 1995; Gal/Alexandre 2000, 44–48; Kleiman 2017.

[103] See, e.g., Ussishkin 1990, 77.

the construction of Stratum X, the earliest phase of the Iron Age IIA at the site, to the tenth century BCE and interpret these remains against the background of the monumental construction works of David and Solomon's empire.[104] And yet, the construction of this city cannot be dated earlier than the late tenth/early ninth century BCE, as noted by many scholars.[105] This means that the rebuilding of Hazor – in the midst of an abandoned territory – reflects the territorial expansion of the kingdom of Israel into the central Levant a few decades after the fall of the Canaanite city-states of the Iron Age I (e.g., Tell el-'Oreimeh/Kinnereth). This reality also does not match the narratives portrayed in the books of Samuel. First, the region around the Sea of Galilee was not the focal point of a small territorial kingdom such as Geshur at the time when Hazor was rebuilt (in fact, this area was not occupied by sedentarized communities), and second, Hazor, unquestionably the key site in the political reorganization of the central Levant in the late tenth and first half of the ninth centuries BCE, is not mentioned in the books of Samuel at all. We must presume that if the accounts mentioned above have any historical kernel embedded within them, they must reflect a reality that is later than the Omride period (ca. 884–842 BCE), a conclusion also supported by the literary and historical analyses presented above, which mark the late eighth century BCE as the earliest possible date for the composition of the narratives in question.

In the second half of the ninth century BCE, settlement activity around the Sea of Galilee, our primary focal point of attention, resumed. Contrary to the situation in earlier periods, et-Tell/Bethsaida became then, and probably for the first time in history, the most significant settlement around the Sea of Galilee (Stratum V), with only fragmentary remains from this timeframe found at Tell el-'Oreimeh/Kinnereth (Stratum III).[106] Other sites on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, such as Tel Hadar (Stratum III–II/I) and Tel 'Ein Gev (Strata KIII–II), were similarly resettled in this period. This shift of the political hub from west to east signifies an unprecedented change that must be related to the changing historical circumstances in the late ninth century BCE, most likely the dominance of Aram-Damascus over the Iron Age Levant following the temporary ebb in Assyria's military campaigns to the west.[107] Excavations at et-Tell/Bethsaida exposed a sophisticated defense system that included a four-chambered gate and a solid fortification wall with several towers. Similar architectural elements are known from Tel Dan (Stratum IVA–III), which was indisputably controlled at that time by Aram-Damascus, as evidenced by the royal stele set up there by an Aramean king,

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[104] Yadin 1972; Ben-Tor 2016, 132.

[105] Finkelstein 1999; Herzog/Singer-Avitz 2006, 178–181; Sergi/Kleiman 2018, 4 n. 9; Kleiman et al. 2019, 595 n. 95; Shochat/Gilboa 2019. Whether Hazor was constructed by Baasha or by one of the Omride kings matters less for our discussion (for the former option, see Finkelstein/Kleiman 2019, 290).

[106] In his most recent publications, Rami Arav (2020, 97) dates the settlement of Stratum V at et-Tell/Bethsaida to ca. 875–850 BCE. Based on the pottery and various historical considerations, Sergi/Kleiman 2018 propose the late ninth century BCE as a more plausible date for the resettlement of sites around the Sea of Galilee.

[107] For the period of Damascene hegemony over the southern Levant, see Younger 2016, 591–630.

almost certainly Hazael of Damascus.[108] Near the city gate of et-Tell/Bethsaida, a monumental structure, which most scholars identified as the ruler's palace, was revealed.[109] The city's material culture at that time appears to reflect central Levantine traditions, distinct from those that prevailed in the kingdoms of the northern Levant (such as the kingdom of Hamath).[110] Several Aramaic inscriptions found in settlements around the Sea of Galilee (e.g., Tel 'Ein Gev and Tel Hadar)[111] point to the presence of Aramaic speakers in this region, although they do not prove that the local populations were necessarily Arameans.[112] Of key importance among the inscribed finds is a stamped jar handle with the north-Israelite name *zkryw* found at et-Tell/Bethsaida, which, according to petrographic studies, was produced from clay sources found in eastern Samaria.[113] A comparable stamped handle was also found at Tel Dan.[114] Such stamped jars seem to be a development of earlier administrative traditions of mass-produced jars, some of which had inscribed clan names (e.g., Nimshi), in the kingdom of Israel; they most likely reflect the allocation of certain quantities of shipments to specific clans under royal supervision during the ninth and eighth centuries BCE.[115] Against this background, the stamped jar handle from et-Tell/Bethsaida is possibly the earliest and the most tangible evidence of diplomatic contact between Israel and Geshur. However, the fact that only a single stamped jar was found at et-Tell/Bethsaida suggests that these contacts were not very intense and may not have lasted long.

Despite the intensive investment in the fortifications of et-Tell/Bethsaida, it was violently destroyed together with other nearby settlements such as Tel Hadar and Tel 'Ein Gev (although evidence of destruction at these sites is more limited).[116] The date of these events, as well as their historical background, is debated. Rami Arav, the excavator of et-Tell/Bethsaida, argued on several occasions that et-Tell/Bethsaida was destroyed during the military campaigns of Tiglath-Pileser III in 734–732 BCE.[117] In contrast, David Ilan and Assaf Kleiman, who independently discussed the pottery traditions of the site, noted the strong differences between the ceramic assemblages found in the destruction layers of et-Tell/Bethsaida, Tel Hadar, and Tel 'Ein Gev and those of Stratum V at Hazor (located only ca. 13 km to the northwest); the latter layer is assumed by nearly all scholars to have been destroyed by the Assyrians in the late

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[108] Arie 2008; Kleiman 2022, 188–189; *pace* Thareani 2019, who maintains an earlier dating for the resettlement of Tel Dan, more or less following the conclusions of the original excavator (Biran 1994).

[109] Arav/Bernett 2000. For an alternative view, see Lehmann/Killebrew 2010. It is clear, however, that the architectural plan of the building does not follow the classical Bit-Hilani model, but rather was influenced by southern Levantine traditions as attested at other sites (Sharon/Zarzecki-Peleg 2006).

[110] Kleiman 2022, *passim*. Some scholars defined peculiarities in the local material culture as Aramean (e.g., Sugimoto 2015; Arav 2020, 97, 102), but this brings us back to old notions of ethnicity.

[111] Kleiman 2022, 191–201, Appendix B.

[112] E.g., Arav 2013, 3; Sugimoto 2015, 102.

[113] Brandl 2009, Fig. 4.1 with detailed discussion. Cf. Avigad/Sass 1997, No. 669.

[114] Biran 1994, Fig. 213; Avigad/Sass 1997, No. 669; Brandl 2009, Fig. 4.2, b.

[115] Kleiman 2017. For the inscriptions with the name Nimshi in the Beth-Shean Valley, see Ahituv/Mazar 2013.

[116] For the Iron Age II remains at Tel Hadar and Tel 'Ein Gev, see Kleiman 2022, 69–72; Sugimoto 2022.

[117] Arav 2009; Arav 2020, 104; cf. Sugimoto 2022, 382; Hasegawa 2019, 224.

eighth century BCE (based on 2 Kgs 15:29).[118] Based on the earlier date of the events, it has been proposed that it was northern Israelite kings (Joash or his son Jeroboam II) who destroyed et-Tell/Bethsaida, Tel Hadar, and Tel 'Ein Gev as part of their war against Aram-Damascus and its allies (see, e.g., 2 Kgs 13:14–19, 25).[119]

At any event, after the destruction of et-Tell/Bethsaida, the political hub of the region shifted back to Tell el-'Oreimeh/Kinnereth, where the excavations revealed the remains of a fortified compound.[120] It was destroyed in the late eighth century BCE (Stratum II), in parallel to other cities in the kingdom of Israel; this was probably the result of the military campaigns of the Assyrians in the days of Tiglath-Pileser III, which eventually led to the collapse of the kingdoms of Hamath, Aram-Damascus, and Israel. Following this destruction of the fortified compound, a massive fortress was built at Tell el-'Oreimeh/Kinnereth (Stratum I). Recently, Lily Singer-Avitz has proposed to date this fortress to the first half of the seventh century BCE.[121] It is also possible that a large Assyrian-style structure, which was uncovered on a terrace near the gate of the Stratum II fortress, was built around that time and functioned until the Neo-Babylonian or Persian period. Still, no finds could be associated with its floors, and thus its exact dating remains hypothetical. At the same time, in the late eighth to sixth centuries BCE, settlement activity on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee moderately declined. Tel Hadar was deserted and never used again for dwelling, but Tel 'Ein Gev experienced a short occupational gap and was partially resettled in the Persian period.[122] The situation at et-Tell/Bethsaida is more difficult to assess, since the preservation of the remains is relatively low (Strata IV–III). And yet, Rami Arav has suggested that structures at the site, such as the so-called Bit-Hilani near the city gate, remained in use until the Hellenistic period.[123] Some sherds, coins from the fifth and fourth centuries BCE, and even Assyrian-style and Achaemenid seals were unearthed there, raising the possibility of renewed administrative activity at the site.[124] In the current state of affairs, we cannot exclude the possibility that following the final abandonment of Tell el-'Oreimeh/Kinnereth in the Persian period, the political hub shifted back to et-Tell/Bethsaida, especially as settlement activity seems to be resumed in some sites on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee (e.g., Tel 'Ein Gev and Tel Soreg) and in other locations in the southern Golan.[125] The resumption of settlement activity in the territory formerly controlled by the kingdom of Geshur, and perhaps even the recovery of local

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[118] Ilan 2019, 127–129; Kleiman 2022, 67 (for the earlier date); Arav 2013, 14–15 (for the later date).

[119] See already Hasegawa 2012, 72 (who also considers Adad-Nirari III as a possible agent of the destruction).

[120] For the Late Iron Age and Persian period remains unearthed during the excavations at Tell el-'Oreimeh/Kinnereth, see Fritz 1993, 197–203.

[121] Singer-Avitz 2014, 135–136.

[122] Sugimoto/Wachtel/Kansha 2022, 56–57, 59.

[123] Arav 1999, 15; Arav/Bernett 2000, 52.

[124] Arav 1999, 102, Pl. IV: 14; Brandl 1999, 230–236; Kindler 1999, 250. For a seal with some Neo-Assyrian influence found in a cave in Har Beriniki, south of Tell el-'Oreimeh/Kinnereth, see Ornan 1998, 303.

[125] Kochavi 1993, 1410; Hartal 2014, 83; Sugimoto 2022, 388.

kingship, might explain references to this region in late biblical texts such as in Josh 13:13 (see above) and perhaps also in 2 Sam 13–15 (assuming a potentially postmonarchic dating of the relevant passages in these chapters).[126]

To sum up the archaeological section of this study, our review of the evidence makes it clear that the settlement history of the Sea of Galilee region – the presumed territory of the kingdom of Geshur – was very fragmented, with periods of prosperity following periods of decline. Moreover, in the Bronze and Iron Ages, the traditional center of the region was nearly always located at Tell el-ʿOreimeh/Kinnereth; it is unsurprising, then, that this city also gave its name to the lake and the surrounding valleys.[127] Only one time in the pre-Hellenistic period did the political power of this region clearly shift eastwards to et-Tell/Bethsaida (the presumed capital of the kingdom of Geshur), namely, in the late ninth century BCE, when the entire region came under Damascene domination.[128] This situation, together with some of the finds discovered at et-Tell/Bethsaida, offers an exceptionally narrow timeframe in which a minor polity with its center located to the east of the Jordan River would have emerged around the Sea of Galilee and diplomatic relations between Israel and the kingdom of Geshur might have been established.

4. Conclusion

The present study has sought to bring a fresh approach to the study of Aramean groups, both in the biblical portrayal of the early monarchic period as found in the books of Samuel and in historical perspective. Until relatively recently, the depiction of Aramean groups in the books of Samuel has been used fairly uncritically in the reconstruction of early first-millennium historical realities in the central Levant. In more recent scholarship, however, the likelihood that the narratives in Samuel containing references to Arameans were composed hundreds of years after the events depicted raises the question of what types of historical conclusions can be drawn from the texts in question. In this study, we have chosen to begin with an analysis of the texts themselves (part 1), then to integrate extrabiblical textual evidence (part 2), and finally to consider the archaeological evidence (part 3).

The textual analysis focused on the references to Aramean political entities in 2 Sam 8:1–14; 10:6–19 as well as the references to Geshur in 2 Sam 3; 13–15. Based on a diachronic analysis of these passages, the compositionally earliest references to Aramean political entities in the books of Samuel are most likely found in 2 Sam 8:1– 6, which recount David's defeat of a certain Hadadezer, king of Zobah (which the text does not explicitly identify as Aramean) and of "Aram-Damascus". The references to

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[126] Note, however, the absence of a comprehensive study of the history and archaeology of this territory after the Iron Age IIB. For instance, the region of the Sea of Galilee was not included in Stern's (1982) detailed overview of the Persian period in the southern Levant, probably because he had too little archaeological data to work with. For further discussion of southern Syria in the Neo-Babylonian and Persian periods, see Rohmer 2020.

[127] Sergi/Kleiman 2018, 11 with earlier references.

[128] As noted above, we do not exclude the possibility of renewed activity at et-Tell/Bethsaida in the Persian period.

David's defeat of Aram in the Valley of Salt in 2 Sam 8:13 and to the Arameans' coming to the aid of the Ammonites in 2 Sam 10:6–19 can be evaluated on internal grounds as expansions within their surrounding narrative contexts. The same is true of the explicit location of Geshur "in Aram" in 2 Sam 15:8 but also of the other references to Geshur in 2 Sam 3:3; 13:37; 14:23, 32. Even before attempting to deduce the historical context(s) in which the authors of the passages in question were operating through comparison with extrabiblical textual evidence, it is possible to begin narrowing down the date of these passages' composition on the basis of their respective literary horizons:

(1) The references to David's conquests in 2 Sam 8:1–6 possibly belong to the conclusion of a Saul-David narrative in 1 Sam 9–2 Sam 8 that is likely no earlier than the late eighth century BCE.

(2) The additions in 2 Sam 8:7–12 can likewise be no earlier than the late eighth century, and they also presuppose a larger literary horizon, namely, the literary connection between the books of Samuel and Kings.

(3) The reference to David's defeat of Aram in 2 Sam 8:13 also presupposes the literary connection between the books of Samuel and Kings and specifically the text of 2 Kgs 16:6, which reinforces a date of composition in the late eighth century at the earliest.

(4) The narrative of the Arameans' military assistance of the Ammonites in 2 Sam 10:6–19 comprises two later expansions of the David-Bathsheba narrative in 2 Sam 10:1–5; 11:1–27; (12:1–15a, 15b–25?), which, like 2 Sam 8:7–12 and 2 Sam 8:13, also presupposes the literary connection between Samuel and Kings.

(5) The references to Geshur in 2 Sam 13:37 [2x]; 14:23, 32 are part of a later expansion of the Absalom narrative, which, already in its earliest form, contains the motif of David's "exile and return", possibly projecting Judah's exile and return in the sixth century BCE onto the biblical biography of David. The reference to "Geshur in Aram" in 2 Sam 15:8 is even later than the references to Geshur in 2 Sam 3:3 and 13–14 and presupposes the theme of Jacob's vow in Gen 28, itself a postmonarchic passage.

Comparison of the references to Aramean polities (or potentially Aramean polities) in 2 Sam 8:1–6, 7–12, 13; 10:6–19 and 2 Sam 3; 13–15 with extrabiblical textual sources reinforces the conclusion from the internal textual analysis that these references reflect historical realities later than the time in which the narratives are set. The fact that 2 Sam 8:4 and 10:18 (and possibly also 8:13) seem to be (at least indirectly) familiar with information reflected in the annals of Shalmaneser III indicated a *terminus post quem* for these texts in the second half of the ninth century. In addition, the details in 2 Sam 8:9–10 concerning Toi, king of Hamath, suggest that the author of these verses had access to some kind of historical information on Hamath from the eighth century. In 2 Sam 10:6–14, the military tactics described are comparable to those familiar to Xenophon during the Persian period, which reinforces the plausibility of the late dating of this passage (and, by extension, of 2 Sam 10:15–19) suggested already by the internal analysis of the biblical text.

    In bringing the archaeological evidence into the picture, we have chosen to focus on shifting political power between Tell el-ʿOreimeh/Kinnereth and et-Tell/Bethsaida during the Iron Age, as an indication for the period in which a new local polity developed directly to the east of the Jordan River, to be identified with Geshur (on the basis of texts in Deuteronomy and Joshua). It seems that the settlement hierarchy of sites around the Sea of Galilee in the Iron Age I, when the region was dominated by Tell el-

'Oreimeh/Kinnereth, was apparently unknown to the authors of Samuel. Following the destruction of all the Iron Age I sites around the Sea of Galilee, the region experienced an occupational gap that extended into the second half of the ninth century, until et-Tell/Bethsaida (conventionally identified as the capital of the kingdom of Geshur) became the most significant site in the area. This shift of the political center of the region from the western side of the Sea of Galilee to the east likely reflects the influence of Aram-Damascus on the local settlement structure during this period. Similarly, the architectural traditions of et-Tell/Bethsaida show connections to the architecture found at the Damascus-controlled site of Tel Dan. In contrast, the epigraphic finds from et-Tell/Bethsaida and Tel Dan from the late ninth/early eighth century also attest to diplomatic contact between these sites and the kingdom of Israel. Both et-Tell/Bethsaida and Tel el-'Oreimeh were destroyed sometime in the eighth century (who destroyed et-Tell/Bethsaida is uncertain), although settlement activity at Tell el-'Oreimeh/Kinneret was renewed during the Assyrian Empire, and the site possibly remained occupied until the Persian period. Likewise, et-Tell/Bethsaida shows evidence of use into the Persian and Hellenistic periods.

Combining the three types of evidence treated here – the internal biblical evidence, extrabiblical textual sources, and archaeology – in order to arrive at a more precise historical contextualization of the texts relating to Arameans in the books of Samuel requires letting the evidence stand on its own while also being informed by the other types of evidence. Both extrabiblical texts and the archaeological evidence from the Sea of Galilee region suggest that the authors of the books of Samuel had access to knowledge about the region extending back to the late ninth century (and likely not earlier) and knowledge of an *inhabited* Sea of Galilee region as late as the Persian and Hellenistic periods. Parallel to this, the analysis of the biblical texts themselves suggests that the specific passages in Samuel referring to Arameans were composed sometime between the late eighth century and the Persian period. In order to account for the difference between the *terminus post quem* suggested by the extrabiblical evidence and that suggested by the biblical texts themselves, one is almost inevitably faced with the necessity of postulating the reception of earlier "traditions" in the passages in question. Yet contrary to earlier scholarship, which would regard these as traditions *about David*, a more parsimonious conclusion would be that the authors of Samuel had access to fragments of information (such as from Neo-Assyrian annals or copies of inscriptions from neighboring regions) that originally had nothing to do with David and then applied these to the David narratives at the time of writing.

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The Long Shadow of the Gibeonites in the Account of Saul's Post-mortem Rejection and Restitution (2 Sam 21:1–14)

Walter Bührer

The Old Testament has an ambivalent relationship to Israel's first king, Saul. In several narratives it deals with Saul's failure and rejection. Assuming that Saul is a historical figure, this happens not only long after Saul's death, but in the case of 2 Sam 21:1–14 also long after the narration of Saul's death in 1 Sam 31. Saul's failure, though always caused by his misbehavior towards God, consistently appears in contexts in which other nations are mentioned. This also applies to 2 Sam 21:1–14, where the Gibeonites, who are otherwise not mentioned in the books of Samuel, in some way decide the final fate of the already dead Saul. The narrative in 2 Sam 21:1–14 begins with a kind of post-mortem rejection of Saul and ends with his post-mortem restitution. Why the one leads to the other is not readily apparent, since the text contains numerous narrative gaps. John Van Seters thus called the story "so contradictory that it makes no sense at all"[1] and concludes his nearly 20-page essay on the episode with the following remarks:

> The story seems to be nothing more than an exercise in creating a short narrative about the time of David, based on bits and pieces of information gleaned from the earlier collection of texts. […] From a literary point of view, it has so little merit that perhaps the less that is said about it, the better.[2]

I do not share this assessment. Rather, in what follows, I will discuss the tensions in the text with regard to their historical and theological presuppositions and will propose a reading of the difficult text that is as coherent as possible.

   This study begins with a retelling of this extraordinary story about Saul and David. In the second part, I will discuss the compositional history of the story. In the third part, I will interpret the narrative on the basis of the preceding steps.

1. Text and Context of 2 Sam 21:1–14

The story begins with a three-year famine during David's reign (21:1). When exactly during David's kingship this famine occurred is not clear from the narrative. The story is just as little connected with the context of the books of Samuel in general and the

   [1] Van Seters 2011, 551.
   [2] Van Seters 2011, 551.

Succession Narrative (2 Sam 9–20; 1 Kgs 1–2) in particular as it is with the other texts in the so-called appendix to the books of Samuel in 2 Sam 21–24.[3]

Since famines do not come by chance, David consults YHWH.[4] The oracle points to the past, to the long deceased Saul. Even if the oracle remains somewhat enigmatic – and the ancient reception of the passage felt compelled to clarify it[5] – the most important aspect seems clear: Saul and his behavior toward the Gibeonites is the cause of the famine, "because he [/it] had killed the Gibeonites" (עַל־אֲשֶׁר־הֵמִית אֶת־הַגִּבְעֹנִים).

The city of Gibeon, Tell el-Jib, is located in Benjamin and thus in the tribal area of the former king Saul. However, 2 Sam 22:2 explicitly states that Saul did not want to kill his Benjaminite brothers; rather, the text portrays Gibeon as primarily inhabited by non-Israelite Gibeonites, remnants of the Amorites.

The first and most important biblical reference to Gibeon is in Josh 9(–11).[6] In this story, the Gibeonites deceive Joshua and his men by pretending to be strangers in the promised land in order to obtain a peace treaty with the Israelites. This peace treaty and the subsequent oath protects the Gibeonites from the execution of the ban on the inhabitants of Canaan by Joshua and his soldiers (cf., e.g., Deut 7:1–2; 20:16–18). The oracular saying in 2 Sam 21:1 and even more so the clarification in v. 2 thus accuse Saul *ex post* of his ignorance of history: Despite the peace treaty and the oath between Israel and the Gibeonites, Saul has transgressed against the Gibeonites.

The Old Testament tells nothing of such an action by Saul against the Gibeonites. This post-mortem condemnation, however, recalls several stations in Saul's life:

In 1 Sam 13 and 1 Sam 28, Saul does everything in his power to defeat the Philistines;[7] in 1 Sam 15, he does everything to defeat the Amalekites. In all of these cases, however, he fails in his actions by not sufficiently listening to God and his prophet Samuel. Accordingly, he is rejected (1 Sam 13:13–14; 15:10–11, 22–23, 26, 28–29, 35;

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[3] On 2 Sam 21–24, see Dietrich/Naumann 1995, 157–168. Although the texts in this "appendix" tend to be later than the other texts in the books of Samuel, at least the notice about Elhanan's – and not David's – victory over Goliath in 2 Sam 21:19 is older than the more famous David-Goliath narrative in 1 Sam 17.

[4] For David's oracle inquiries, see 1 Sam 22:10, 13, 15; 23:2, 4; 30:7–8; 2 Sam 2:1 (with שאל ב-), 1 Sam 23:9–12 (with the ephod), 2 Sam 12:16; 21:1 (with בקשׁ); for Saul's oracle inquiries, see 1 Sam 14; 28. Cf. Bührer 2017b.

[5] For the Masoretic אֶל־שָׁאוּל וְאֶל־בֵּית הַדָּמִים "[It is] for Saul and for the house of bloodguilt" in 2 Sam 21:1bα the Antiochene text (Ant) reads Ἐπὶ Σαοὺλ καὶ ἐπὶ τὸν οἶκον αὐτοῦ ἡ ἀδικία, διὰ τὸ θανάτῳ αἱμάτων "On Saul and on his house (lies) the iniquity because of bloodguilt …" and the Kaige-recension reads Ἐπὶ Σαοὺλ καὶ ἐπὶ τὸν οἶκον αὐτοῦ ἀδικία διὰ τὸ αὐτὸν θανάτῳ αἱμάτων "On Saul and on his house (lies) iniquity because of his bloodguilt…." For the Antiochene text, see Fernández Marcos/Busto Saiz 1989, for the text of the Kaige-recension, see Brooke/McLean/Thackeray 1927. The Masoretic text is followed, e.g., by Hutzli 2011, 85–86; Bezzel 2014, 202–206, 208–209 (on his interpretation of the oracle, see below with n. 37) and by many other scholars without further discussion; the Greek tradition is followed, e.g., by Wellhausen 1871, 208–209; Budde 1902, 306; Thiel 1994, 254 and by many other scholars without further discussion.

[6] See Josh 9:3, 17; 10:1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 10, 12, 41; 11:19. On Josh 9 see below, n. 18.

[7] This, in fact, corresponds to his God-given mission according to 1 Sam 9:16.

28:16–19).[8] The post-mortem identification of Saul's failure in 2 Sam 21:1–14 is thus grounded in other reports about Saul.[9] Here, too, Saul ultimately appears as a tragic figure, since his actions are motivated by his zeal for Israel and, anachronistically, Judah (v. 2b). Saul is thus rejected once again because he did not follow the divine law. Or, to put it somewhat differently: Even the dead Saul is accused of an infamous deed that would have disqualified him from being king during his lifetime.

David, during whose reign the killing of the Gibeonites by Saul causes a famine, immediately sends for the Gibeonites and wants to make atonement (2 Sam 21:2–3). Two things can be deduced from this. First, David acts in an exemplary manner. Second, Saul himself has failed even in his failure, because obviously there are still Gibeonites.

The discussion between David and the Gibeonites in 2 Sam 21:2–6 leads to an act of vengeance against the descendants of Saul: Seven of his descendants are to be executed on his behalf. The meaning of the word used for the execution – יקע *hiphil/hophal* (vv. 6, 9, 13) – is not completely clear. The context of our narrative and the further attestations of this word in the Old Testament suggest that most probably "setting out with broken limbs" is meant and *not* "impaling", "hanging up", "crucifying" or the like, as is found in most Bible translations and in the visual arts. In any case, v. 10 assumes a placement of the corpses on the ground where the animals of the field have access to them. The only other attestation of this type of punishment in the Old Testament (Num 25:4) shows only that death occurs within a day.[10] Two things are striking about the discussion between David and the Gibeonites. First, that so many of Saul's descendants are alive at all comes as somewhat of a surprise to readers of the books of Samuel. The rise of David as king was accompanied not only by the downfall of Saul himself, but also by the death of prominent Saulides. Only Mephi-Bosheth (and his son Micah) is mentioned as a survivor in 2 Sam 9. This is explicitly recalled in 2 Sam 21:7. Secondly, although David never had a direct hand in the violent downfall of the Saulides, he is always clearly portrayed as the one who profited from it.[11] Against this background, David's actions in 2 Sam 21:1–14 appear quite ambivalent: In v. 4 (מָה־אַתֶּם אֹמְרִים אֶעֱשֶׂה לָכֶם "What you say, I will do for you"), he clearly acquiesces to the will of the Gibeonites. While he still had control of the situation when he summoned the oracle and went to the Gibeonites to achieve atonement, he now puts himself in a subordinate role and lets the further course of events be dictated by the Gibeonites rather than by YHWH.

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[8] Although 1 Sam 22:6–23 is another example of Saul's bloody deeds, he does not act here against a prophet's or God's word given to him; the already rejected one is (therefore?) not rejected again here.

[9] See Exum 1992, 115–116; Chavel 2003, 40–41; Van Seters 2011, 544.

[10] In Gen 32:26, יקע *qal* denotes the dislocation of Jacob's hip. Jer 6:8; Ezek 23:17, 18 use יקע *qal* in a figurative sense. See Kapelrud 1955, 204; Stolz 1981, 279–281; Thiel 1994, 255–256; Hartenstein 2008, 133 n. 41, 140–141; Schnocks 2012, 205–206, 212. Cf. also the discussion in Hentschel 1994, 94, 95–97, who ultimately translates with "to dismember."

[11] See, e.g., (though with sometimes [too] far-reaching consequences for the interpretation of 2 Sam 21:1–14) Kapelrud 1955; Vanderkam 1980, 537–539; Chavel 2003, 41–44, 47–48, 51.

2 Sam 21:8–9 then report the surrender and execution of the seven Saulides. The execution takes place in Gibeah (probably Tell el-Ful; v. 6), that is, the former center of Saul's power, only a few kilometers southeast of Gibeon.[12]

Then, in 2 Sam 21:10, a new character enters the scene and changes everything: Rizpah, Saul's concubine (v. 11; cf. already 2 Sam 3:7), whose two sons have been executed (v. 8), prevents the desecration of the corpses by animals. Without saying a single word,[13] Rizpah's act ultimately makes David re-think (vv. 11–14): He has the bones of Saul and Jonathan (which until then had been kept in Transjordanian Gilead) and the bones of the executed Saulides collected and buried in the family tomb in Benjamin. In the Masoretic text of v. 14, only the bones of Saul and Jonathan are explicitly said to be buried, but the bones of the executed Saulides can be included here as well.[14] The Greek translation makes this explicit.[15]

Now, and only now, the narrative ends with the termination of the famine that provoked everything: God allows himself to be asked again for the land (v. 14b).

My retelling of 2 Sam 21:1–14 was intentionally brief in the second part of the story, because it presupposes an interpretation of the narrative and of its compositional history, which will be the subject of the following two sections.

2. The Formation of 2 Sam 21:1–14

The narrative in 2 Sam 21:1–14 is basically consistently structured. Various narrative gaps in the text complicate its interpretation, but not a consistent reading. Only in two

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[12] With Exum 1992, 114, "the cruel irony of the Masoretic text should not be too readily dismissed" (cf., e.g., Lefebvre 2002, 238–239; Chavel 2003, 28 n. 14; Hutzli 2011, 85, 87–88). It is therefore not necessary to change the Masoretic text in 2 Sam 21:6 (against, e.g., Wellhausen 1871, 209; Budde 1902, 307; Thiel 1994, 253, 255; Hentschel 1994, 93 with n. 2; Day 2007, 129–130; Hartenstein 2008, 131, 140; Na'aman 2009, 104). Against the latter scholars it should be noted that "on the mountain before YHWH" (בְּהַר לִפְנֵי יְהוָה; 2 Sam 21:9) does not mean the same thing as "on the mountain of YHWH" – a phrase that, moreover, is not attested in any textual witnesses. It should also be taken into account that executions attested in iconography tend to be located at the site of the executed, not at the site of the executioners; see Berlejung 2009, 217.

[13] The same is true for the first and only other mention of Rizpah in the Old Testament in 2 Sam 3:7(–11), where Rizpah is depicted as entirely passive yet is also situated at a crucial point in the dispute between the Saulides and David.

[14] The gathering (אסף) of the bones or of the dead is variously related to their burial or refused burial (cf. Ezek 29:5) or with funeral or burial terminology in the surrounding context (2 Kgs 22:20 // 2 Chr 34:28; Jer 8:1–3; 25:33); see Darshan 2013, 642 n. 11. Cf. Budde 1902, 309: "Nur die Gebeine Sauls und Jonatans werden genannt, weil der letztere im Vordergrunde des Interesses steht; vergleichen kann man, wie [1 Sam 31:10] nur die Gebeine Sauls in Bêt-šan ausgesetzt, dagegen in [31:12] die seinigen und die seiner Söhne herabgenommen werden." Wellhausen 1871, 209 assumes textual omission, referring to 2 Sam 21:13 and the Greek tradition.

[15] Kaige: καὶ ἔθαψαν τὰ ὀστᾶ Σαοὺλ καὶ τὰ ὀστᾶ Ἰωναθὰν τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ καὶ τῶν ἡλιασθέντων "And they buried the bones of Saul, and the bones of Jonathan his son, and of them that were hanged in the sun"; Ant: καὶ ἔθαψε τὰ ὀστᾶ Σαοὺλ καὶ Ἰωναθὰν καὶ τὰ ὀστᾶ τῶν ἐξιλεασθέντων "And he buried the bones of Saul and Jonathan and the bones of them that were hanged in the sun."

places is the narrative interrupted by narratorial comments: v. 2b gives background information about the Gibeonites, and v. 12aβb gives background information about the location of Saul's and Jonathan's bones. As always with such narratorial comments, the question arises whether this information belonged to the narrative from the outset or was added to it only later. And as always, this question cannot be answered with certainty without further evidence. In the present case, however, there are two further indications at both places that suggest a later addition.

First, in both places, the background information has been integrated into the narrative flow by a resumptive repetition of the immediately preceding text: Verse 2b interrupts David's address to the Gibeonites in v. 2a; accordingly, he addresses them again in v. 3aα.[16] Likewise, after the comment on the location of Saul's and Jonathan's bones in v. 12aβb, David again takes "the bones of Saul and the bones of Jonathan his son" in v. 13a after having done so already in v. 12aα.[17]

The second indication besides the resumptive repetition is the intertextual connection that each text makes. In both pieces of background information, we find allusions to other texts in the Former Prophets: 2 Sam 21:2 recalls the account of Israel's oath to the Gibeonites in Josh 9, as already mentioned above.[18] Beyond 2 Sam 21:1, this addition makes explicit why the killing of the Gibeonites is to be regarded as bloodguilt.[19] Moreover, v. 12 recalls the account of Saul's and his sons' death and burial in 1 Sam 31.[20]

Compared to other theories for the compositional history of a given text, the assessment of the two additions discussed so far (2 Sam 21:2b–3aα and 12aβb–13a) as later connections of 2 Sam 21:1–14 with the literary context of the Former Prophets thus

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[16] See, e.g., Veijola 1975, 106–107; Veijola 1978, 351–352; Thiel 1994, 254–255; Hentschel 1994, 104; Hartenstein 2008, 131–132, 140; Na'aman 2009, 103; Edenburg 2014, 173–174; Bezzel 2014, 201.

[17] See, e.g., Budde 1902, 308–309 (taking 2 Sam *21:12 [only וַיֵּלֶךְ דָּוִד יָבֵישׁ גִּלְעָד "then David went to Jabesh Gilead"], 13 as original text); Na'aman 2009, 103 (only for 21:12aβb). In contrast, see, e.g., Hartenstein 2008, 131–132, 141; Bezzel 2014, 201, 209–120. Note the different verbs – לקח "to take" in 21:12 and עלה *hiphil* "to bring up" in 21:13 – after making explicit the geographical difference between the Transjordanian Jabesh Gilead and the Benjaminite mountains as the destination of the bones.

[18] Josh 9, for its part, is not a literary unity. The connection between Israel and the Gibeonites, for instance, is reported differently: On the one hand, Joshua makes a covenant with them (v. 15a), on the other hand, the leaders of the congregation swear to spare them (v. 15b). Both motifs are unconnected, so that also the appointment of the Gibeonites as hewers of wood and drawers of water is reported twice (v. 21 and vv. 23, 27). The oath of the leaders, as well as the stylization of the action of the Gibeonites as a ruse, most probably serve the subsequent exculpation of Joshua, which became even clearer in the textual tradition. On Josh 9 in the context of Josh 9–11 see, e.g., Berner 2017; Germany 2017, 412–421. What seems clear is that 2 Sam 21 presupposes Josh 9 in its editorially reworked form.

[19] That 2 Sam 21:1 does not make explicit the problem in Saul's killing the Gibeonites does not prove that v. 2 is an original (and necessary) component of the narrative (for this line of argumentation, see, however, Hutzli 2011, 91; Hutzli 2014, 157; cf. Malamat 1955, 9; Chavel 2003, 26–27 n. 11; Van Seters 2011, 538–539). 2 Sam 21:1 is not about the fact that "Saul has killed many people of different nations" (Hutzli 2014, 157), but precisely about the fact that the killing of the Gibeonites was the reason for the famine. That Josh 9 is already in the background of 2 Sam 21:1 is possible, but cannot be proven.

[20] On 1 Sam 31, see esp. Bezzel 2014, 190–199.

seems comparatively safe. One could even consider these as "textbook examples" of composition-historical processes.

Somewhat more uncertain, but in my opinion nevertheless plausible, is the assumption that also 2 Sam 21:7 is a later addition.[21] This verse, which deals with the exemption of Saul's grandson Mephi-Bosheth, slows down the flow of the narrative: David has promised in v. 6 to give up the seven requested Saulides, and he does so in vv. 8–9. The interruption of this connection by v. 7 is unnecessary insofar as the number seven, even if it signals totality,[22] does not exclude that other Saulides were not handed over – especially due to the naming of seven specific Saulides. Rather, v. 7 recalls the account of Mephi-Bosheth's exemption in 2 Sam 9.[23] This verse, like the two additions discussed above, thus has a broader intertextual scope than the rest of the narrative.[24] The insertion serves primarily to contrast David and Saul with respect to their keeping or not keeping of oaths: Unlike Saul, David keeps his oath to Jonathan to extend grace to his family (1 Sam 18:3; 20:8, 12–17, 42; 23:17–18) and his oath to Saul not to wipe out his descendants and thus Saul's name (1 Sam 24:22–23).

Further literary-critical operations are, in my opinion, not called for.[25] The three additions discussed above (2 Sam 21:2b–3aα, 7, 12aβb–13a), like so many other

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[21] See, e.g., Veijola 1975, 108; Veijola 1978, 351; Thiel 1994, 253 n. 9; Hentschel 1994, 104–105; Hartenstein 2008, 131–132; Edenburg 2014, 168, 173; Bezzel 2014, 201–202. In view of the precise genealogical information in 2 Sam 21:8 and 21:7, it is unlikely (contra Bezzel) that the addition serves to differentiate between Mephibosheth (מְפִבֹשֶׁת), the son, and Mephi-Bosheth (מְפִי־בֹשֶׁת), the grandson of Saul.

[22] In addition, the wordplay between שבע "seven" and שבע "to swear" could also be a reason for the number chosen here.

[23] The fact that David does not know Mephibosheth in 2 Sam 9 (here written without *maqqef*, unlike in 2 Sam 21:7) makes the old thesis of the original position of 2 Sam 21:1–14 before 2 Sam 9 (still advocated, e.g., by Wacker 2003, 565–566 n. 60; Day 2007, 125) superfluous – a thesis, which, moreover, was never able to explain why and when this transposition came about (see also Veijola 1975, 106 n. 2; Edenburg 2014, 168–169). Similarly, Shimei's curse in 2 Sam 16:7–8 is also sufficiently understandable from its canonical context and does not need the narrative of 2 Sam 21:1–14 as background (against, e.g., Wacker 2003; Day 2007). It is difficult to understand why Edenburg 2014, 174 assumes Saul's massacre of the priests of Nob in 1 Sam 22 (albeit in a not further defined "different version") as background for 2 Sam 21:1 (cf. Day 2007, 125–126; Van Seters 2011, 551 with n. 35). Finally, also the opaque information in 2 Sam 2:12–13 (see, e.g., Stolz 1981, 280), 2 Sam 4 (see, e.g., Malamat 1955, 10–11; Hentschel 1994, 110; Day 2007, 125; Na'aman 2009, 104–105; Schnocks 2012, 210 n. 16) or 1 Chr 8:29; 9:35 (see, e.g., Bezzel 2014, 205; see below, n. 37) are hardly suitable as reference points for Saul's bloodguilt in 2 Sam 21:1–14.

[24] The rest of the narrative presupposes the books of Samuel in general, but has no clear textual references to it. It even seems to ignore (consciously or unconsciously?) various details of the preceding narrative: (1) After 2 Sam 9, the existence of Saul's sons and grandsons along with Jonathan's son Mephibosheth presents a real tension (cf. Van Seters 2011, 540–541). (2) Also the mention of Michal in 2 Sam 21:8 is astonishing: In view of 1 Sam 18:17–19 MT (Merab is given to Adriel) and 2 Sam 6:23 (Michal, as David's wife, remained childless), Michal's older sister Merab (cf. 1 Sam 14:49) is meant here (cf., e.g., Thiel 1994, 257 n. 22). (3) 2 Sam 21:12aα, 14aα (and the supplement in v. 13a based on it) pass over Abinadab and Malkishua, the two other sons of Saul who fell with Saul and Jonathan according to 1 Sam 31 (on the sons of Saul, see Bezzel 2014, 190).

[25] In contrast, Bezzel 2014, 201–202 sees also in David's two questions in 2 Sam 21:3 and 21:4 an indication of editorial growth and perceives v. 4 (like v. 7) as a "gloss that exonerates David from

additions in the Old Testament, interweave a text with its larger literary context and thus make explicit what is implicitly already considered to be present in the original text.

That such a reconstruction of the compositional history of the text has implications for its interpretation is obvious. In order to cross-check my reconstruction, I would like to discuss two different reconstructions and interpretations. In my reconstruction, the famine, the execution of the Saulides through the Gibeonites, the deed of Rizpah and the burial of Saul and the Saulides through David represent a unity – a unity which remains to be explained. In contrast, there are reconstructions that focus on the killing of the Saulides or Rizpah's deed, and reconstructions that focus on David's burial of the bones of Saul and Jonathan, each excluding the other topic(s).[26] As a representative of the first reconstruction I have chosen an essay by Friedhelm Hartenstein,[27] and as a representative of the second an essay by Hannes Bezzel.[28]

Hartenstein, admittedly, is not primarily interested in reconstructing the compositional history of 2 Sam 21:1–14, but rather in a detailed comparison of this narrative with the Antigone myth, in which Antigone, contrary to Creon's prohibition, wants to bury her deceased brother Polynices. For Hartenstein, vv. 11–14, that is, David's burial of the Saulides, are altogether "(editorial) theological work on the tradition".[29] According to him, the initial famine already comes to an end with Rizpah's wake, for this is timed "from the beginning of the harvest until water fell on them from heaven" (מִתְּחִלַּת קָצִיר עַד נִתַּךְ־מַיִם עֲלֵיהֶם מִן־הַשָּׁמָיִם; v. 10). The rain thus marks the end of the famine. Rizpah's "solidarity with the dead" is comparable to Antigone's insofar as both regard death as the limit of punishment.[30]

I share parts of Hartenstein's interpretation. However, I see two difficulties in his reconstruction of the compositional history of the text. Firstly, there is no literary-critical tension between v. 10 and v. 11. Therefore, one would need very good arguments if one wanted to distinguish two layers here. Secondly, the rain is not appropriate to mark the end of the famine, since, in the transmitted text, the end of the famine is stated

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potential accusations" (Bezzel 2014, 210). The dialogue between David and the Gibeonites can, however, also be read as a dramaturgical climax.

[26] Still other models assume two formerly independent narratives (see, e.g., Hentschel 1994, 104–108; Chavel 2003; Darshan 2013). However, regardless of the general question of the plausibility of a two-source or two-fragment model here, such "reinterment stories" (2 Sam 21:12, 13a, 14aα according to Chavel, who reads a singular with the Antiochene text in v. 14aα) seem to be completely unmotivated and such "famine/Gibeonite stories" (vv. 1–11, 13b, 14aβb according to Chavel, who identifies the Gibeonites as the subject of the plural verbs in vv. 13b, 14aβ) seem to be unfinished. Moreover, the change between singular and plural forms in vv. 12–14 does not constitute a sufficient literary-critical argument, since it is the unity of action of the king and his executors that is at issue here.

[27] See Hartenstein 2008.

[28] See Bezzel 2014, 199–206, 209–210.

[29] Hartenstein 2008, 124: "(redaktionelle[]) theologische[] Arbeit an der Überlieferung"; cf. Wacker 2003, 564–567 (with 2 Sam 21:1, *3–6, 8–9, *14 as the basic layer, that is, a text lacking also Rizpah; Wacker refers to Josephus, *Ant*. VII 12, where the execution of the seven Saulides immediately leads to the rain ending the famine); Lee-Sak 2019, 124–128.

[30] See Hartenstein 2008, 135.

only in v. 14.[31] Verse 10 instead focuses on the long duration of Rizpah's wake: It begins in the early harvest season, which, in view of the famine, simply situates the events within the agricultural course of the year, and ends accordingly with the autumn rain. Rizpah's wake thus lasts from April/May to September/October.[32] Thus, v. 10 does not represent the narrative's closure. Rizpah's wake achieves its goal only through the burial of the dead.[33]

The second reconstruction, which sees the origin of 2 Sam 21:1–14 in David's burial of Saul's and Jonathan's bones, is represented by Hannes Bezzel. Bezzel's overall concern is to demonstrate "chronistically influenced corrections to the image of Saul in the books of Samuel".[34] According to Bezzel, the basic layer of our narrative is comparatively brief and deals with the piety of David, who resolved the famine by reburying the bones of Saul and Jonathan, previously buried in Gilead, in Benjamin (vv. 1abα, 12, 13a, 14). The basic layer thus makes no reference to Rizpah or to the Gibeonites. Bezzel justifies this stratification by his analysis of 2 Sam 21:1: The oracle justifies "doubly and – also syntactically – differently":[35] "(It is) *for* Saul and *for* the house of bloodguilt" (אֶל־שָׁאוּל וְאֶל־בֵּית הַדָּמִים) and "*because* he (/it) had killed the Gibeonites" (עַל־אֲשֶׁר־הֵמִית אֶת־הַגִּבְעֹנִים). According to Bezzel, the "second explanation", introduced with a different conjunction, subsequently "explains the first one".[36] The oracle, then, was not originally about the Gibeonites: Bezzel interprets the "house of bloodguilt" as "bloodguilt *against* the house of Saul", taking the hitherto neglected burial in the family grave as bloodguilt. This still pre-chronistic pro-Saulide narrative was then post-chronistically reinterpreted with an anti-Saulide slant, and the "bloodguilt *against* the house of Saul" was turned into the "bloodguilt that the house of Saul committed against the Gibeonites".[37]

I share Bezzel's relatively late dating of the story.[38] However, I see two difficulties in this reconstruction of the compositional history of the text. First: It is undoubtedly true that the second explanation explains the first in the oracle in 2 Sam 21:1b. However, this observation does not necessitate a diachronic evaluation: Precisely the change of the conjunction shows the difference between the naming of the guilty (Saul and the

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[31] Also *contra* Thiel 1994, 260–262; Wacker 2003, 557–559; Van Seters 2011, 549; Darshan 2013, 644 (regarding his "impalement story"); cf. Exum 1992, 116–118.

[32] See Day 2007, 127; Na'aman 2009, 104; Hutzli 2011, 92; Schnocks 2012, 206 n. 6, 213 and also Hartenstein 2008, 134. Cf. Dalman 1928a, 115–130; Dalman 1928b, 413–418.

[33] If we take 2 Sam 21:14 as the original end of the narrative, a remarkable parallel to Sophocles' *Antigone* arises: The cultic communication with the gods remains disturbed in Thebes as long as Polynices is not properly buried (fifth appearance, appearance of Tiresias). Cf. Hartenstein 2008, 130–131.

[34] See the full title of Bezzel 2014: "Chronistisch beeinflusste Korrekturen am Bild Sauls in den Samuelbüchern?" Besides 2 Sam 21:1–14, Bezzel treats also the different textual forms of 1 Sam 14:47 and evaluates the Masoretic text as a correction influenced by 1 Chr 10:13–14 (Bezzel 2014, 188–190); furthermore, he draws a comparison between 1 Sam 31 and 1 Chr 10 (Bezzel 2014, 190–199).

[35] Bezzel 2014, 202: "doppelt und – auch syntaktisch – unterschiedlich begründet."

[36] Bezzel 2014, 202: "Die zweite Erklärung erklärt die erste." Cf. Chavel 2003, 26 n. 10.

[37] See Bezzel 2014, 202–206. Based on 1 Chr 9:35 (cf. 8:29), Bezzel assumes an "(aggressive) land grab" (Bezzel 2014, 205) by Saul's grandfather Jeiel in Gibeon as bloodguilt against the Gibeonites.

[38] Cf. Van Seters 2011; Hutzli 2011; Hutzli 2014, 147, 156–163; Edenburg 2014; Lee-Sak 2019.

house of bloodguilt) and the naming of the guilt (the killing of the Gibeonites). The Gibeonite theme can thus already be part of the basic layer. Second: The interpretation of the bloodguilt as "bloodguilt *against* the house of Saul" is not convincing: After all that the books of Samuel report about Saul, it did not need a post-chronistic author to depict Saul merely as the subject of bloodguilt. Already for the books of Samuel, this interpretation is the more natural and therefore preferable one: Saul is regularly portrayed as a perpetrator, but not as a victim. There are also syntactic arguments against Bezzel's interpretation, as another instance of bloodguilt in the books of Samuel shows: 2 Sam 16:7–8, the cursing of David by Shimei.[39] Shimei calls David a man of bloodguilt (vv. 7, 8b: אִישׁ דָּמִים / אִישׁ הַדָּמִים), upon whom YHWH brought the bloodguilt of the house of Saul (v. 8a: כֹּל דְּמֵי בֵית־שָׁאוּל), in the context of Absalom's rebellion. In these three references, there is a clear syntactical distinction between the perpetrator of the bloodguilt, David, and the victim of the bloodguilt, the house of Saul, by using bloodguilt in the first case as *nomen rectum* (i.e., as a genitive in the construct chain),[40] and in the second case as *nomen regens* (i.e., as the first element in the construct chain).[41] In 2 Sam 21:1b, as in the first case of Shimei's curse (2 Sam 16:7, 8b), bloodguilt is used as a *nomen rectum*, so that the "house" associated with Saul is clearly the perpetrator and not the victim of bloodguilt. In these and many other passages, Hebrew thus clearly distinguishes between victims and perpetrators of bloodguilt.

My reconstruction of the compositional history of 2 Sam 21:1–14 has thus shown that all of the narrative strands in this unit already belonged to it from the outset, and that only individual explications were added to it later (vv. 2b–3aα, 7, 12aβb–13a). How, then, are the narrative strands related to each other?

3. Theological Interpretation

The famine marks a disruption of the world order. The cosmic balance between God, Israel, and the earth or the land of Israel is disrupted because of an incident in the past. Saul's violation of the oath by violent bloodshed represents itself a disruption, which is now punished by the deity of the oath, YHWH, at the time of David's reign:[42] Spilled blood cries out to YHWH (cf. Gen 4:10) and defiles the land (cf. Num 35:33–34). In his oracle, YHWH does not say how exactly the disruption is to be resolved. David, in his attempted redemption, refers to the bloodguilt against the Gibeonites and offers them compensation so that YHWH's inheritance may prosper again: In his view, the once harmed Gibeonites can turn the present harm to Israel back into blessing (2 Sam 21:3).

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[39] Bezzel 2014, 203–204 himself refers to this text. Also for Shimei's cursing of David it holds true that after all that has been said in the books of Samuel about the relationship between David and Saul (to whose clan Shimei belongs [2 Sam 16:5] and thus is to be called biased) there is no need for an explanation. See above, n. 23.

[40] Cf. Ps 5:7; 26:9; 55:24; 59:3; 139:19; Prov 29:10; Ezek 22:2; 24:6, 9; Nah 3:1.

[41] Cf. 2 Chr 24:25 (bloodguilt [of Joash] against the sons of Jehoiada); Hos 1:4 (bloodguilt [of the house of Jehu] against Jezreel).

[42] On the well-known comparison with the plague prayers of Muršili II, see Malamat 1955; Hartenstein 2008, 132–133.

The Gibeonites, however, do not choose a financial compensation, but the vicarious killing of the seven Saulides, that is, the posthumous blood revenge on Saul (2 Sam 21:6, 8–9).[43]

However, the Gibeonites are not satisfied with the execution of the Saulides alone. Their corpses are to remain exposed beyond death and ultimately consumed by the birds of the air and the beasts of the field (2 Sam 21:10b).[44] They are denied a burial[45] and with it everything that, according to the Old Testament, belongs to a dignified death and afterlife, namely, post-mortem family solidarity:[46] They are not gathered (אסף *niphal*) to their fathers (אָב) or ancestors (עַם),[47] cannot lie down (שכב) with their fathers,[48] and are not buried (קבר) in the graves (קֶבֶר) of their fathers or with their fathers.[49]

This, however, creates a new disruption, the violation of the honor of the dead,[50] and it brings Rizpah on the scene. The concubine of Saul maintains solidarity with her husband's family by keeping the animals away from the corpses for months, thus holding open the possibility for a dignified burial.[51] Comparable to Antigone, yet with a different procedure, Rizpah prevents the dead from being killed again[52] through the social death of oblivion after their physical death.[53] Rizpah thus makes possible the continued existence of the dead in the underworld, since only those who are buried and whom posterity remembers can continue to exist post-mortem, thanks to the care for the dead by their descendants.[54]

The persistence of the dead in memory and in the underworld represents the connection between the fate of the bones of Saul and Jonathan and the fate of the executed Saulides – and thus the connection of the different parts of the narrative as a whole. The post-mortem destruction of the killed Saulides aims at the radical erasure of

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[43] According to Num 35:30–34, a murderer cannot be redeemed by expiatory payments; the defilement of the land by blood can only be atoned for by the blood of the defiler.

[44] Cf., e.g., Deut 28:26; 1 Sam 17:44, 46; 1 Kgs 14:11; 16:4; 21:19, 23, 24; 2 Kgs 9:10, 30–37; Jer 7:33; 16:4; Ezek 29:5; 32:4–5; 33:27; 34:5, 8; 39:4–5, 17–20; Ps 79:1–3.

[45] Cf., e.g., Isa 14:19; Jer 8:1–3; 14:16; 16:4–7; 22:18–19; 25:33; Ezek 39:5; Ps 79:1–3.

[46] On the following texts, see, e.g., Krüger 2009. The vital importance of family ties for our narrative is also expressed by the detailed information on the family connections of the Saulides whenever they are mentioned; cf. Exum 1992, 114–115; Hutzli 2011, 92. To this end, the Antiochene text has already referred to Rizpah in 2 Sam 21:10 as ἡ παλλακὴ Σαούλ "the concubine of Saul" as in v. 11.

[47] Cf. Judg 2:10; 2 Kgs 22:20 (אסף *qal*) // 2 Chr 34:28 (אסף *qal*) for being gathered to the fathers (cf. Gen 15:15 with בוא and 1 Chr 17:11 with הלך) and Gen 25:8, 17; 35:29; 49:29, 33; Num 20:24 (26); 27:13; 31:2; Deut 32:50 [2x] for being gathered to the ancestors.

[48] Cf. Gen 47:30; Deut 31:16; 2 Sam 7:12; 1 Kgs 1:21; 2:10; 11:21, 43; 14:20, 31; 15:8, 24; 16:6, 28; 22:40, 51; 2 Kgs 8:24; 10:35; 13:9, 13; 14:16, 22, 29; 15:7, 22, 38; 16:20; 20:21; 21:18; 24:6; 2 Chr 9:31; 12:16; 13:23; 16:13; 21:1; 26:2, 23; 27:9; 28:27; 32:33; 33:20.

[49] Cf., with different wording in detail, Gen 47:30; 49:29; Judg 8:32; 16:31; 2 Sam 2:32; 17:23; 19:38; 1 Kgs 13:22 (denied, as a punishment); 14:31; 15:24; 22:51; 2 Kgs 8:24; 9:28; 12:22; 14:20; 15:7, 38; 16:20; (23:30); 2 Chr 9:31; 21:1; 25:28; 26:23; 35:24 – and 2 Sam 21:14.

[50] On the honor of the dead, see Dietrich 2017, 44–50.

[51] Cf. Wacker 2003, 562–563; Hartenstein 2008, 134–135; Schnocks 2012, 213–214, 217–218.

[52] Cf. Thiel 1994, 257 and the literature mentioned in the previous note.

[53] Cf. Dietrich 2015, 229–232 (on social death during one's lifetime).

[54] On the memory of posterity, see Kühn 2009; Bührer 2017a; on the care of the dead, see Schmitt 2009.

the memory of Saul. By not only killing his descendants and thus preventing them from commemorating their father and grandfather, but also preventing them from being remembered themselves, the Gibeonites aim at a complete *damnatio memoriae* for Saul's family.[55] There should be no room for them in Israel and no room in the social and cultural memory.[56] According to 2 Sam 21:1–14, at least in its basic layer (without, *inter alia*, v. 7), Saul's family would have been completely and permanently extinguished, since there was no longer a male descendant who could continue the line and perpetuate Saul's name.

David is not able to do that either. But Rizpah's deed reveals to him the true intention of the Gibeonites and thus makes him realize that Saul himself is still not buried in the family tomb. The very difference to Antigone's hasty burial of Polynices – which would have been all the more possible for Rizpah due to the lack of intervention of David and the Gibeonites! – shows that our narrative cannot end with the issue of the Gibeonites and Saulides: A possible burial of the killed Saulides alone was not enough to end the famine, because Saul and his sons were also denied a part of their honor for the dead until now: the reunion with their ancestors. According to the Masoretic text, David himself went to collect the bones of Saul and Jonathan, and his men collected the bones of the killed Saulides and buried them all[57] in the land of Benjamin, in the tomb of Saul's father Kish (2 Sam 21:14). Saul, the anointed of YHWH, by which title even the Gibeonites call him (v. 6 MT),[58] is thus restituted post-mortem.[59]

Saul's bloodguilt *and* his post-mortem existence beyond the family tomb in Israel pose a theological problem of justice. Justice is restored only when all have received their rights. Only now can God be petitioned again for the land (21:14b). Now also the famine can end.

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[55] On *damnatio memoriae*, cf. Bührer 2017a, 488–489. On *damnatio memoriae* in relation to Saul, reference can be made to the praise of the fathers in Ben Sira, where several events from the life of Saul are mentioned only in the context of the memory of Samuel; the king, however, is never mentioned by name: Sir 46:13–20. The remembrance of Samuel is immediately followed by the remembrance of David (and Nathan): Sir 47:1–11. On the early reception history of Saul, see Bezzel 2015, 8–81.

[56] On the relationship between social and cultural memory, see Grund 2007; Dietrich 2015, 235–237.

[57] See above with nn. 14–15.

[58] On this, see the literature mentioned in n. 12 above.

[59] Cf. Schnocks 2012, 218: "Gemessen am Maß der angestrebten sozialen Austilgung kommt daher die durch die Bestattung erreichte Rehabilitierung einer Auferstehung aus dem Tod des kulturellen Vergessens gleich."

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Shifting Trends in the Study of Non-Israelite Groups in the Books of Samuel

Benedikt Hensel and Stephen Germany

One of the most prominent themes in the books of Samuel is Israel's relations with neighboring groups, and this in several respects. Within the narrative world of the books, as is well known, the decisive historical and political step of adopting monarchic rule in Israel is derived from the existence of just such a thing among the other nations (1 Sam 8:5). From then on, the books recount the story of Israel's early kingship under Saul and David, including their various contacts, conflicts, and coalitions with neighboring groups such as the Ammonites, Philistines, Edomites, Arameans, and Amalekites at various points in their reigns. The Philistines, in particular, accompany the kingship of both Saul and David from the very beginning (1 Sam 4–6; 13; 14; 17). At the end of the literary unit which has traditionally been called the "History of David's Rise" in 1 Sam 16–2 Sam 5 (the existence of which is, however, now much debated[1]), the Philistine threat to Israel is finally overcome: David defeats the Philistines in several battles (2 Sam 5:17–25), and not least because of this he can take up his residence as king in Jerusalem. Other hostile nations, such as the Arameans, Edomites, and Ammonites are also ultimately defeated by King David (2 Sam 8–12), thus strengthening his power as *the* great king of Israel within the literary world of the books of Samuel.[2]

Beyond this large-scale political theme, which revolves around the emergence of kingship for "all Israel", other groups and nations also play a role on a more individual level. A peculiarity of the books of Samuel – in contrast to most of the accounts in the books of Kings – is their strong interest in individual human relationships.[3] Not only do fateful events in the lives of individuals come into view, but readers are also given detailed information about the personal contacts of the main characters (see, e.g., the relatively long family trees of Samuel and Saul as well as the names of David's officials and elite warriors). If one surveys all the main and secondary characters appearing in the narratives and in the lists, it is notable that numerous "foreigners" (Philistines, Ammonites, Moabites, Hittites, etc.) are among them, especially in the narratives dealing with David. These include various leaders from surrounding tribal areas and kingdoms such as Moab, Gath, Geshur, and Tyre. According to 1 Sam 22:3–4, David's parents find refuge with the king of Moab during the time of Saul's pursuit of David. According to 1 Sam 27:1–28:2 (cf. 1 Sam 29), David finds refuge from Saul with the Philistine prince Achish of Gath, who welcomes David and entrusts him with the city

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[1] See, e.g., the essays in Bezzel/Kratz 2021.

[2] On the biblical depiction of the Philistines compared to recent historical reconstructions of the early Iron Age Philistines, see the compact overview in Hensel 2023.

[3] Westermann 1994, 58–59.

of Ziklag. According to 2 Sam 3:3, David has married Maacah, the daughter of King Talmai, who presides over the small Aramean kingdom of Geshur. Later in David's reign, Shobi, a son of the Ammonite king Nahash, together with Machir from Lo-Debar and Barzillai the Gileadite, brings a large amount of aid for the fleeing David and his men (2 Sam 17:27). In 2 Sam 21:1–14, David fulfils the desire of the Gibeonites directed against Saul. According to 2 Sam 21:2 and in accordance with Josh 9, the Gibeonites are considered non-Israelites ("Amorites"). In numerous places, the David narratives also report on David's relations with foreigners who reside in Israel and serve the mercenary leader or the king in important positions, such as Obed-Edom the Gittite, who plays an important role in bringing the ark to Jerusalem. After the fatal incident with the ark-bearer Uzzah, the Ark stays in Obed-Edom's house for three months (2 Sam 6:10–12).[4]

In light of the prominent place of Israel's regional neighbors in the texts mentioned above, it is all the more striking that the major empires that so strongly influenced the political history of the Levant beginning in the ninth century BCE do not play a role in the narrative world of the books of Samuel. In terms of their compositional history, the books of Samuel were written – at least in part – "in the shadow of empires", but these are not explicitly made a subject of discussion. The Assyrians, Egyptians, Babylonians, Persians, and Hellenistic kingdoms, which are relevant for the periods in which the books of Samuel were written, are not explicitly mentioned. And yet, as recent Samuel research has been able to show, texts, traditions, and redactions in the books of Samuel often seem to be strongly influenced in their overall message by these empires and the attitude of the biblical authors toward them. There is much to suggest that the overarching framework of the books of Samuel was created, using older traditions, in the eighth–seventh centuries BCE, the heyday of Neo-Assyrian influence in the southern Levant, probably reflecting and indirectly commenting on it in a variety of ways.[5] Especially for the literary representation of the Philistines as the arch-enemies of Israel, it can be assumed with good reason that they served the biblical authors of the late eighth and seventh centuries as a reflection of Assyrian imperial policy, the "godnapping" theme in 1 Sam 5 suggests. Here, a political practice for which the Neo-Assyrians were well known – in particular in the eighth and seventh centuries in the southern Levant – is taken *ad absurdum*.[6] The criticism of the Philistines in the world of the text thus reflects an underlying polemic against the Assyrians. Later, during the successive Deuteronomistic revisions of the book (in connection with the books of Kings and then also the various editions of the so-called Deuteronomistic History[7]), reflections on the situation of exile caused by the Babylonians can also be identified in the text.[8] The remaining question – on which there is hardly any consensus at present – is of course the scope of the pre-722, post-722, and post-586 BCE layers in the books of Samuel,

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[4] For further details and examples see, among others, Hutzli 2011 (updated English version in this volume, pp. 111–127).

[5] Nihan/Nocquet 2013, 341–347; Dietrich 2014, 243–251.

[6] For this thesis, see Hensel 2022, 163–191.

[7] See, e.g., Schmid 2021, 105–113, 155–157; Dietrich 2014, 236–242.

[8] See, e.g., Fischer 2005; Edenburg 2020.

which raises the question of which imperial settings the various texts, traditions, and redactional stages of the books of Samuel actually reflect. Current views on the historical context(s) in which the books of Samuel were written can diverge widely. There are multiple reasons for this fact, which are discussed briefly below.

Literary history: Methodologically, the close interweaving of the different historical questions one asks in relation to the texts is precisely the current problem of the debate, since various levels of analysis are often mixed together in an uncritical manner. Different lines of current research differ significantly in their historical evaluation of the references to Israel's and Judah's neighbors in the books of Samuel. The portrayal of the Philistines in the Ark Narrative (see esp. 1 Sam 5–6) may serve as another example, whose dating by different scholars varies between the tenth century,[9] ninth-eighth century,[10] eighth-seventh century[11] and into the postmonarchic period (sixth century and later).[12] The passages that place Edom in a specific relationship to Judah/Israel (1 Sam 14:47; 2 Sam 8:13–14) also oscillate in the same historical range.[13] Both dating spectrums ultimately hinge on the question of how to understand the Philistines or Edomites historically. Literary-historical research has produced very different, and sometimes quite divergent, interpretations of the roles of non-Israelite groups in the books of Samuel and of the relationship between the textual world and historical reality.[14] Here, it is sufficient to point out once again that current research generally presumes a long period of development of the books of Samuel, ranging from the first overarching composition (presumably in the eighth/seventh century) to its late additions up to the third/second century BCE.[15] At present, the existence, extent, and nature of the "classic" sources presumed to underlie the books of Samuel, such as the Ark Narrative, the History of David's Rise, and the Succession Narrative, as well as the extent and aims of Deuteronomistic editorial activity in Samuel (also in the context of the books of Kings, the Deuteronomistic History, and the Enneateuch) are particularly debated. Thus, the assessment of the role of the respective peoples mentioned in the various parts of the books of Samuel depends strongly on one's respective literary-historical evaluation. On the positive side, however, this also means that current research has arrived at a much more differentiated and sophisticated assessment of the genesis of the books of Samuel.[16]

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[9] See, e.g., Ahlström 1984, 141.

[10] See, e.g., Dietrich 2014, 256.

[11] See Hensel 2022; Finkelstein/Römer 2019.

[12] See, e.g., Porzig 2009.

[13] See most recently Na'aman 2015; Ben-Yosef/Langgut/Sapir-Hen 2017 (tenth/ninth century); Germany 2022 (in large part postmonarchic).

[14] See the overviews of research in Dietrich 2014, 232–260 and Nihan/Nocquet 2013.

[15] For an eighth-century date of the first overarching composition of Samuel, see Dietrich 2014, who considers that this composition incorporated many older (oral) sources. On the presence of additions extending into the Hellenistic period, see Nihan/Nocquet 2013, 340–351.

[16] See, e.g., Bezzel/Kratz 2021 on the so-called "History of David's Rise"; Römer/Finkelstein 2018 on the "Ark Narratives"; Bezzel 2015 on the Saul tradition; Krause/Sergi/Weingart 2020 on the origins of the monarchy of Israel and its early textual traditions; and Kipfer/Hutton 2021 for a wide-ranging anthology on the political identity of Israel over time and as reflected in the books of Samuel, to name just a few current examples.

The significance of Israel's and Judah's neighbors in Samuel: The progress made in historical research on the population groups mentioned in the books of Samuel is even more significant. One of the basic insights of modern Hebrew Bible research is that the cultural and religious development of Israel and Judah can only be adequately described in the context of neighboring cultures and religions. However, it is only relatively recently that research on the significance of neighboring cultures for the history of Israel and Judah in the small-state matrix of the southern Levant has become more differentiated. It was not only the major imperial powers that contributed to shaping politics, religion, and culture in the southern Levant,[17] but also the spectrum of small states and cultures within the southern Levant itself.[18] In light of recent research and excavations, a more precise historical description of certain groups mentioned in the books of Samuel, including the Philistines, Edomites, Arameans, and Amalekites, is currently possible.[19] The Philistines in particular are part of a one-sided biblical representation as Israel's and Judah's quintessential enemies.[20] Historically speaking, however, the Philistines were not a culturally uniform group.[21] The image of a united Philistine "pentapolis" projected by 1 Sam 5–6, for example, is artificial. These five cities show differences in their ceramic repertoire, which is referred to as "Philistine pottery".[22] The so-called "Late Philistine Decorated ware" of Iron Age IIA–B shows clear local differences between the pottery of inland (Ekron, Gath) and coastal sites (Ashdod, Yavneh).[23] And contrary to the biblical picture, in which the Philistines are most often described as overpowering opponents of Israel, there seem to have been close trade relations between Judeans and the coastal plain, especially in the trade of oil and wine.[24] During the Iron Age IIA–B, some ceramic types were used both in "Philistine" cities and in the Judean Shephelah.[25]

As stated already in the introduction, the aim of this volume has been to understand better the portrayal of Israel's and Judah's relations with neighboring groups in the books of Samuel from both literary and historical perspectives. In order to reach a historically sound interpretation of the books of Samuel, it is crucial to distinguish clearly between different levels of interpretation and methodological approaches. The contributions in this volume treat different types of evidence – biblical texts, extrabiblical texts, and archaeology – which have not always been adequately

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[17] This is already suggested by current archaeological and ancient Near Eastern research in Iron Age II Cis- and Transjordan; see, e.g., Tyson/Herrmann 2019.

[18] Oeming 2019; Knauf/Niemann 2021, 264–270).

[19] For recent studies on the Edomites, see Ben-Yosef 2019; Crowell 2021; Hensel 2021; Hensel/Ben Zvi/Edelman 2022. On the upheavals in current research on the Arameans, see, among others, Sergi/Kleiman 2018; Berlejung 2019; Maeir/Berlejung 2019. On the Amalekites, see Levin 2021.

[20] On the image of the Philistines as opponents in biblical literature and on the complex historical relations between Philistia, the Shephelah, and Judah, see Niemann 2013, 243–264. On the depiction of the Philistines in the Bible, see Ehrlich 1996; Finkelstein 2002; Germany 2025.

[21] Killebrew 1996, 51–92; Hensel 2023.

[22] Mountjoy 2010.

[23] Ben-Shlomo/Shai/Maeir 2004.

[24] On the findings for the Iron Age IIB, see Vieweger 2019, 117–123.

[25] Gitin 2015, 258–259.

distinguished from each other in previous research. They reflect the distinct areas of expertise of their authors, and at certain points, the historical conclusions reached by text-focused scholars on the one hand and by archaeologists on the other are not easily reconciled. This state of affairs, however, is not necessarily to be lamented, since it cautions against overly simplistic assumptions such as the idea that the antiquity of the narratives in Samuel can be confirmed by archaeological evidence, or, conversely, the idea that the narratives are purely a reflection of later times without reflecting any received knowledge about the early monarchic period in Israel. In this respect, the present volume reflects some of the tensions that continue to exist at the interface of the increasingly specialized fields of textual interpretation and archaeological research, both of which rightly stand on their own methodologically but which, in our view, can continue to be sharpened and nuanced by remaining in dialogue with the current discussion in the respective complementary field.

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