CHRISTOPH UEHLINGER

The «Canaanites» and other «pre-Israelite» peoples in Story and History
(Part I)*

1. Introduction

1. Historiography at a turning point?

Both Jews and Christians have a long tradition of perceiving the history of the Holy Land during the later 1st millennium BCE essentially along the lines of the biblical text, taking the latter as one text (or one story) in spite of its numerous contradictions and composite nature. Ever since the Hellenistic period, and particularly in the Western (i.e. European) tradition, the biblical books from Genesis to Kings supplemented by Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah and Maccabees have been read as so-called «historical books». Epitomized by the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus through his monumental Jewish Antiquities, which were written in Rome for imperial consumption towards the end of the 1st cent. CE, the historicist approach to the Bible, and particularly to its historiographical parts, attained its fullest impact with the development of modern European historiographic criticism.

* This article is based upon a paper presented at an international symposium on «Theology in the Palestinian Contexts», held in Bethlehem on October 1–7, 1995. Its publication has since been delayed for a number of reasons beyond my control. An earlier draft was offered in 1997 as a contribution to an informal Festschrift for Manfred Weippert on his 60th birthday. I am grateful to the editors of the Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie for the opportunity to publish it now in a slightly revised and updated version. – I am grateful to a number of friends and colleagues for having commented on early drafts, especially Klaus Bieberstein, Christian Frevel, Ulrich Hübner, Othmar Keel, Ernst Axel Knauf, Adriano Schenker, Silvia Schroer and Thomas Staubli. Thanks are also due to Benedict T. Viviano who checked and improved my English. None of them should of course be held responsible for opinions expressed in the article.

However, the advent of historical criticism in the wake of the European enlightenment also led scholars to raise occasional doubts about the Bible's historical trustfulness. The development of a so-called historical-critical methodology allowed biblical scholars to differentiate among earlier and later layers of tradition in the biblical record. Internal tensions and contradictions among different textual traditions relating to one historical process or period1 as well as a growing corpus of so-called external evidence produced by archaeological excavations, which sometimes was in clear contradiction to the biblical text2, has given way in our cent. to a stream of increasingly subtle scholarship concerned with the task of re-writing the «History of Israel». Still, much of this scholarship amounts to adapting the biblical story to new findings and interpretative models, and thus remains heavily Bible-centered until the present. One reason for this state of affairs is the fact that most authors are trained in biblical exegesis, divinity or theology but neither in historical methodology nor in archaeology. Another reason is the fact that Biblical studies, history and archaeology have long evolved side by side, being practised by the same people claiming – for good or for bad – equal competence in all three fields. A third reason may be that not only biblical scholars, but archaeologists and professional historians alike, usually consider texts to form the backbone of any attempt to history writing. When historians talk about sources, they most often consider texts. However, since the archaeology of Palestine has never produced a corpus of historiographically relevant texts (e.g., display inscriptions, annals or chronicles)3 that could be compared to that of the greater

1 E.g., the arrival of the Patriarchs is described as an essentially peaceful settlement in Canaan; the book of Joshua presents the Israelites' arrival in the Land of Canaan in terms of military conquest; while the book of Judges shows co-existence of tribal Israelites with urban Canaanites. The apparent contradiction between the three models is solved by the biblical redactors by organizing the three models in terms of successive historical periods.

2 As in the well-known case of Jericho and 'Ai/et-Tell where no walled settlement existed at the time of Joshua's presumed conquest.

3 Display and building inscriptions by local rulers from Iron Age Palestine are attested but rare. Major finds include the Moabite inscription of king Mesha, from Dhiban (mid-9th cent. BCE), fragments of an Aramaic inscription from Tel Dan, probably of king Hazael (second half of 9th cent. BCE), and a short Philistine building inscription from Ekron of king Akitar/Ikassu (first half of 7th cent. BCE). Except the Siloam tunnel inscription from Jerusalem which misses a royal referent (c. 700 BCE or slightly later), only fragments are known of Israelite and Judahite
centers of Mesopotamia or Egypt, and since the Mesopotamian and Egyptian textual sources, while containing quite numerous references to ancient Palestine/Israel, remain mute or at best anecdotal with regard to late 1st-/early 2nd-millennium Palestine, the Bible has continued to provide the master story, upon which even critical historians and archaeologists heavily rely when writing about the history of that period. As a result, we have today an impressive collection of textbooks which all claim to expound the «History of Israel» but read like rationalized paraphrases of the Bible's putatively historiographical books. This phenomenon has been aptly termed «sub-deuteronomic historiography» by Manfred Weippert, a leading authority in the field. The most radical recent contribution to this debate contends that the «invention» of Ancient Israel by biblical historiography ancient and modern has led to a reciprocal «silencing of Palestinian history». This inscriptions from state monuments: cf. J. Renz/W. Röllig, Handbuch der althebräischen Epigraphik, Bd. II/1, Darmstadt 1995, 3.

To some but a few which have been more influential, the works of William F. Albright, John Bright, Roland de Vaux, Henri Cazelles, Benjamin Mazar, besides the German tradition best represented by Albrecht Alt, Martin Noth, Siegfried Herrmann, Manfred Metzger and Herbert Donner. Albright, Noth and de Vaux (the founding fathers, to speak) dealt extensively with matters of methodology and certainly converged on numerous issues. Two generations later, they look much closer to one another than their students could have imagined at the time.

The term itself is misleading. More recent works tend to prefer the title «History of ancient Israel and Judah» which comes closer to the topic. In fact, they try to cover the history of ancient Palestine (or southern Levant, as a regional term). This is acknowledged in G.W. Aihstrom's History of Ancient Palestine from the Paleolithic Period to Alexander's Conquest (JSOT 146), Sheffield 1993. 6 M. Weippert, Geschichte Israels am Wendepunkt: Tdr 58 (1993) 71–103, esp. 73), but see already M. Liverani, Memorandum on the Approach to Historiographical Texts: Or. n.s. 42 (1973) 178–194 and the article mentioned below, n. 19.

K.W. Whitelam, The Invention of Ancient Israel – The Silencing of Palestinian History, London 1996. According to Whitelam, not only has research on the history of ancient Palestine been the hostage of biblical studies throughout our century, but as it evolved along the contemporary realities of the Zionist settlement, the creation of the State of Israel and the parallel elaboration of its quasi-mythological foundations in biblical history, the «History of Israel» invented by the scholars according to their own present constantly mirrored 20th-century politics. Whitelam's book obviously has its own contextual agenda. See most recently id., The Search for Early Israel: Historical Perspective, in: Sh. Ahituv/E.D. Oren (eds.), The Origin of Early Israel – Current Debate. Biblical, Historical and Archaeological Perspectives (Beer-Sheva 12), Beersheva & London 1998, 21–41.

The general thesis is right insofar as the origins and history of Israel have largely dominated the agenda of research on ancient Palestine/Israel. On the other hand, it too easily dismisses decades of study, not least by distinguished Israeli scholars, on the general history and archaeology of the region, including the history of the Philistines and pre-Islamic Arabs in Palestine.

It may be that a shift in paradigm is presently underway. The last two decades have seen the rise of what Marc Z. Brettler has termed «New Biblical Historiography». At the same time, more and more scholars engaged in research on the history of late-1st-/early 2nd-millennium Palestine argue for the adoption of a new historiographical methodology that could help them leave the Procrustean bed of the Bible's master story. Their new historiography should be foremost based on the findings of archaeology (i.e. material culture, texts and iconography). This «primacy» may be considered to contain a more immediate record of the past than the corpus of biblical texts which has demonstrably grown over many centuries and displays a picture of «Israel»'s past that is largely conditioned by a particular religious and political ideology and out of a considerable distance of time. The change in paradigm will offer a necessary and welcome opportunity to look at the history of ancient Palestine (including the history of Israel and Judah) in a novel way. Still, one should not ignore one major difficulty of such an approach: As a matter of fact, archaeology is not per se a more objective undertaking than conventional history writing, and its agenda has often been defined by imperialist and nationalist ideologies. 10 In Palestine/Israel, archaeology has

8 The term is M.Z. Brettler's, The Creation of History in Ancient Israel, London 1995, esp. 2–7. One should restrict its use to studies specifically concerned with biblical historiography as displayed in the so-called historical books of the Bible, i.e. their literary characteristics, ideological outlook and socio-historical setting.


long served the interest first of the Zionist returnees', then of the new state's claim for the land. To uncover the stones of Israel's past was to spread the roots of the modern state of Israel. Consequently, the 'new historiography' based upon archaeology will be new only insofar as it implies the prior option for a non-nationalist (regional) perspective. Such an inclusive archaeology is clearly nascent today together with new political developments, and it is probably already aimed at in most Middle Eastern archaeology departments. However, much more cooperation of, e.g., Israeli and Palestinian institutions and individuals is still needed, and many Palestinian citizens will need to take their time before considering archaeology as something else than an instrument of occupation and expropriation.

To come back to the biblical text, it is indisputable that its very inception and tradition represents a major cultural and religious achievement in the history of ancient Palestine (particularly, Judah). However, this text needs to be displaced and re-located (i.e. put at its right place) with regard to ancient history and both ancient and modern historiography. This is not an easy matter in scholarly discussion, and it may be even more difficult for the general public. The Bible will long represent a basic myth, a master story and essential guideline for scholars and non-scholars alike, be they Israelis, Palestinians


or citizens of another state, Jews, Christians, Muslims or agnostics, when they re-imagine and re-write the history of ancient Palestine. 12

For people aiming at a Christian theological reflection in the Palestinian context or reflection about this context from a Western perspective, it is all the more important to consider their habits in reading and practising history since they are related in a very particular way to the foundational myth of the Bible's so-called 'historical' books. Talking about the history of ancient Palestine, they will always have to deal at the same time with the 'history of Israel': the latter is not only an integral part of the history of Palestine but also an essential part of their religious heritage and thus identity. 13

2. The problem: an antagonism of the past re-enacted in the present?

The following remarks will concentrate upon two related issues in the history of ancient Palestine: the way the antagonistic relationship of «Canaanites» and «Israelites» is considered in the Bible, and the way we may today look at and possibly deconstruct the biblical portrait of this relationship.

Many of our contemporaries are deeply marked by the biblical tradition which defines Israel's relationship to the promised land roughly in the following terms:

a. Israel's ancestors (Abraham, the immigration or conquest generation) are not indigenous to the land which they settle, but come from outside (Ur in Babylonia, Egypt). This memory of external origins will always be upheld. 14

b. In contrast to their large practical ignorance with regard to the land to be settled, the «children of Israel» of the conquest generation arrive at the land's borders with a clearly defined religious knowledge: they know that they (or their fathers) have been called by YHWH, who is the only God whom


14 The generations of the return to Zion after the exile equally come from outside, leaving behind Babylonia in order to initiate a new existence in a land they claim to be their fathers' without having lived there themselves. Whatever they could know of this land was part of their religious tradition, not practical experience. That there is an obvious analogy between these returnees and the patriarchal model should become clear as we move along this paper. For the meantime, we shall be concerned only with the model, i.e. Israel's early ancestors and pre-history.
they should adore; they know that He is prepared to give them the land under the strict condition that they shall not adore the land's «other gods» nor follow the manners and customs of the land's inhabitants.

c. The story of the settlement, of the rise of an Israelite state, of two co-existing monarchies until the fall of Jerusalem will give a number of examples of religious apostasy leading to divine abandonment or punishment, which reinforce the doctrine already taught to the Exodus generation not to follow the sites and rules of the land's original inhabitants.

For convenience and in accordance with numerous biblical texts (see below), let us call this land the «land of Canaan» and its inhabitants the «Canaanites» (although we shall question the historical significance of such terminology below). As a starting point to our discussion we may state that the contrast of Israel and Canaan, of Israelites and Canaanites, of the one true God of Israel and the many false «other gods» (including goddesses and idols) of Canaan seems to be a concept of fundamental importance for the Bible's putatively historical books.

There is no need to underline the fact that this dichotomy which opposes two groups of people claiming the same land and apparently representing two opposed cultures, distinct religious symbol systems and eventually two contradictory concepts of the divine has exerted and continues to exert a very strong influence on the modern and contemporary relationship between Israelis and Palestinians. To many people among the public, the biblical antagonism even seems to be at the very root of the modern antagonism. It has undoubtedly contributed to shape Israeli-Palestinian relations and mutual perceptions since 1948 even if we should assume that the model's impact took new forms according to changing political constellations. Moreover, as the biblical antagonism defines a powerful mythical paradigm, it functions as a cultural and political matrix which continues to shape continuing antagonisms, their perception, interpretation and practical behaviour until today.  

3. How to proceed?

How then should Christians or Jews, who are both inevitably linked to the foundational testimony of Scripture, relate to this biblical antagonism? The following remarks are by no means intended to give a definite answer to this very complicated issue. On the contrary, their scope remains much more limited because of the very epistemological basis of my argument: presuppositions rooted in the European enlightenment tradition of historical-critical exegesis, and as such closely related to a very specific intellectual and socio-cultural context. I shall address problems which would not even arise if we were to read the Bible either in an a-historical or in a historicist way (a-historical being a flat and purely synchronic reading ignoring the historical contexts which gave rise to the biblical texts; historicist being a more or less fundamentalist reading which assumes a priori that events related in the Bible actually happened in exactly the way they are described). While I cannot address the latter problem of fundamentalist historicism in the limits of this paper, I readily admit that I consider an a-historical (or canonical) reading of the biblical text, as not only possible but wholly legitimate — as long as it does not consider the texts uncritically as providing re-enactable models —, all the more since such a reading is de facto practised by millions of faithful Jews and by the great majority of, particularly non-European Churches and Christians all over the world. It would be pure culture-centric arrogance to consider a European historical-critical approach to the biblical texts as essentially superior to an a-historical, canonical reading. I shall myself devote a section of this paper to a synchronic overview in order to highlight the story's modeling power. However, in the context of a conflict where present-day claims are often explicitly linked to the past, to biblical claims, rights and promises, and with our specific topic in mind, it seems useful and necessary for us to go the way of historical analysis unless we deliberately choose to confine ourselves to stubborn exchanges of imagination and pure ideology. Historical reasoning may help to bring the texts at a certain distance from where to get a more dispassionate perception.

For the sake of convenience and clear terminology, I shall henceforth distinguish between Story (i.e. the biblical narrative, particularly texts from the so-called historical books), and History (i.e. the con-

\[\textit{15} \text{ To mention but one example, Kempinski refers to the war of 1947/48 as «Erlebnis der Landnahme» (op. cit. [n. 11], 6). According to Kempinski, the parallelism was stressed by David Ben Gurion himself (ibid., 11).}]

\[\textit{16} \text{ In the immediate context of our symposium, we could not avoid thinking of the so-called bypass highways then under construction as a result of the Oslo II agreements. While security reasons are the obvious and explicit motivations of such constructions, they are themselves related to prior identity concepts.}]

\[\textit{17} \text{ Even if considerable parts of the above-mentioned biblical books aim at real historiography within the cultural and material constraints of their own spe-} \text{\textit{\ldots}}} \]
trolled representation or reconstruction of ancient realities factual, material and/or mental such as we may understand them through critical analysis of sources and documentary evidence). My paper will proceed in the following way: After an overview of some earlier attempts to deal with «Canaanites» and «Israelites» (sect. 2), I shall summarize the portrait of Canaan and Canaanites as it appears to a synchronic, cursory and canonical reading of the biblical account on Israelite origins (sect. 3: the Story). I shall then consider what we know today about Canaan and its inhabitants from the point of view of history, i.e. mainly according to extra-biblical historical sources presently available (sect. 4). From this it should become clear that there is no way of reconciling Story and History on the factual level, except by admitting that the Story seems to be largely fictitious and marked by stereotypes which do not conserve actual memory regarding «pre-Israelite» populations of late-IInd- and early-Ist-millennium BCE (or Late Bronze to early Iron age) Palestine.

Once it is demonstrated that the biblical portrait does not match late-IInd- and early-Ist-millennium BCE realities, we are faced with a new historical problem, namely how to understand the Story, not as an immediate window to factual history, but rather as a mirror of another history and as an object of historical inquiry itself: Why, at what time and under what circumstances was the Story so conceived, and what may thus be said about the Story’s place in History (sect. 5)? I shall conclude with a few observations on the use and implications of historical-critical analysis for a new look at the history of ancient Palestine, which should also be relevant for a Christian theology in the Palestinian context.

II. Canaanites and Israelites: their antagonism in earlier studies on Israelite origins, society, culture and religion

The understanding of Canaanite-Israelite relations in history is closely related to the discussion of Israelite origins in general, an area of research that has witnessed tremendous debate since the middle of this century. An outsider observer of this intense and sometimes heated debate could assume Israelite origins to be the most important if not specific historical context, the term «historical books» is misleading because of its different modern use. One would better name them «external books», which would account for the essentially narrative character of biblical historiography and remind us of the difference between Story and History.

the only really problematical issue of the history of ancient Israel. From an insider’s point of view, this is not necessarily the case, since many other questions and rather more important problems regarding the history of Israel and Judah spanning the entire 1st millennium BCE remain without a satisfactory answer. Even if we had very precise ideas about Israelite origins, these would be of almost no use for answering most questions and problems concerning later periods.18 Why then did scholarly discussion of the «history of Israel» concentrate so much on the problem of origins during the second half of the 20th century?19

Among several reasons, let us point out the following: First, origins always have a special appeal of their own. Second, they are often considered normative, an opinion incidentally shared by numerous biblical texts and otherwise critical historians.20 Third, since according to the biblical presentation Israel’s history does not go back to times immemorial but starts either with Abraham (in terms of calling and promise) or with the Exodus (in terms of a people’s history), the Bible itself puts the question of Israel’s origins on the historian’s agenda. Fourth, the rise of a new political and national reality called «Israel» in 20th-century Palestine — a reality implanted by immigrant settlers and late-colonial powers — have generated a particular interest in Israelite origins unparalleled in earlier centuries. For the Jewish state, it was necessary to gain a clear vision of its ancient roots in the newly-

18 The time has gone when it was possible to define ancient Israel’s spiritual particularities ab origine and then consider them at work throughout the movements of 1st-millennium history. As a matter of fact, the procedure itself was again a reflection of the Biblical master story which has God shape Israel’s identity as a people in the desert, giving him all the necessary equipment for successful life in Canaan (the law from Sinai) before even approaching the land.
20 «The first moment of true civilization», as Dhardwaker has pointed out, takes on a crucial significance in the history of any people. It is historically and historiographically the key moment which, if understood in its totality, provides the basis for understanding all subsequent history» (Whitelam, op. cit. [n. 7], 234). On the level of traditional historiography this statement is a truism since most peoples and nations privilege inception and origins in their collective memory; on the level of history, however, the validity of Dhardwaker’s principle is almost nil.
chosen land. The interest in the origins of old could serve the need of the modern, cosmopolitan state for national identity and cohesion.21

1. Israelite origins: neither conquest nor social revolution

Let us now briefly summarize a number of scholarly attempts to understand Israelite origins in general, the encounter and relationship of Canaanite and Israelite culture in particular. We shall group these attempts according to their basic assumptions: Three major models which were developed during this cent. considered Israelite origins in terms of either peaceful infiltration, belligerent invasion and military conquest, or social revolution. Each theory was based on a different sociological definition of incipient Israel.

a. The German historian Albrecht Alt22 considered the Israelite settlement in Canaan in terms of a sociological dichotomy between sedentary, mostly urban Canaanites and semi-nomadic, pastoral Israelite families who visited the land along the all-yearly seasonal cycle, looking for pasture for their flocks. According to Alt, it was in the course of decades and generations that these families slowly settled in highland areas. Based upon intimate acquaintance with early 20th-century Palestine and its inhabitants23, the model of peaceful infiltration is also strongly reminiscent of the Patriarchal narratives of the book of Genesis.24 While Alt did not exclude occasional clashes of early Israelites with Canaanite city-dwellers at a later stage of the settlement process, he postulated late monarchical or even excilic and post-exilic origins for most of the belligerent traditions of Judges and Joshua, a position further developed by his German colleague Martin Noth within a general theory on the so-called deuteronomistic historiography.

b. American scholars led by William F. Albright25 considered the picture of invasion and conquest drawn in the books of Joshua and Judges as essentially historical, supporting their claim with so-called external evidence, mainly 13/12th-cent. BCE destruction layers documented by archaeological excavations tells situated in the coastal plain and lower hill country. Since such destruction could not be the result of pastoral-nomadic extended family groups, Albright thought of conquering Israel in terms of tribes or rather the biblical tribal confederation. His model of tribal invasion long prevailed among American scholars. It became part of a much larger, theoretically motivated Biblical Archaeology movement which used archaeology as a way to prove the historical trustworthiness of the Bible in an often fundamentalist way.

c. Theological presuppositions were an ever-important ingredient to the debate in Europe and in the United States. However, both models had major proponents also among Israeli scholars who were less influenced by theology rather than by political creed. Most famous among the Israeli conquest proponents was the general and some time minister of defence Yigael Yadin, who directed the excavations of Hazor during the late 50's and early 60's. That a military and political career as Yadin's should lead him to consider the book of Joshua's description of an Israelite conquest as historically correct will not surprise anyone aware of the issue of contextuality.26 Yadin used Hazor as the paradigm for the conquest model, interpreting the late 13th-cent. BCE destruction of the Late Bronze age city and its successor, a much smaller, village-like settlement of the 12th cent. BCE, in terms of the Israelite-Canaanite cultural antagonism.

Against Yadin and others, archaeologist Yehanan Aharoni favoured the historical approach of Alt, supporting its plausibility first by extensive surface exploration in Upper Galilee where he located a number of village remains which he dated to the early Iron age (12th-11th cent. BCE), second by excavations in the Beersheba valley where the simultaneous occurrence of various building traditions at one and the same place and other material re-

21 See bibliography cited above, n. 7 and 11.
23 Whitelam's critique that Alt's model was a construction of the past, an invention of Israel, which mirrors perceptions of contemporary Palestine of the 20s at a time of increasing Zionist immigration (op. cit. [n. 7], 74) is not very plausible when put against a map showing the Zionism's settlement pattern.
26 Kempinski (n. 11), 11–12 provides a very condensed account of the issue. N.A. SILBERMAN's biography of Yadin unfortunately was not available to me: A Prophet From Amongst You. The Life of Yigael Yadin: Soldier, Scholar and Mythmaker of Modern Israel, New York 1993.
mains were interpreted in terms of a peaceful co-existence of various populations (Egyptians, Canaanites, Israelites, and Amalekites) during the same period. 27

d. In the 1960's a third model emerged again from strong theological presuppositions defined by American protestantism. «The Hebrew conquest of Palestine», as George E. Mendenhall termed it, 28 was thought to be the result of a movement of peasants withdrawing from the oppressive Canaanite city states in the coastal plain to the less controled highlands under the flag of egalitarian Yahwism. Mendenhall's model relied heavily on theological premises since it considered the covenant based upon faith in Yahweh to have been the essential motor of the process. His approach was idealistic and per se difficult to square with archaeological evidence. 29

Norman K. Gottwald 30 redesigned the theory by adding a heavy load of Marxist social analysis and technological arguments, hypothesizing that the peasants’ withdrawal to the highlands had been possible only because of inventions such as the building of agricultural terraces, the creation of waterproof lined cisterns and new iron technology. The latter observation had already been made by Albright, but Gottwald brought the argument to a higher level of sociological modeling. His theory certainly fostered the quality of the debate on Israelite origins which had hitherto been too confined to theology, bent layer stratigraphy and isolated observations on technological data. However, Gottwald’s social revolution hypothesis obviously depended on its own, very specific context. It was developed during a period of tough guerilla experiences within people’s armies withdrawing to the countryside all over the world. The United States were then actively engaged in various countries (think first of Vietnam, later of Central America), and many of these combats had a great impact on North American political consciousness. Conversely, Gottwald’s study «The tribes of Yahweh» found much response among Liberationist theologians and exegetes in Latin America and Asia. I do not know whether it has been used by Palestinian Christians and theologians during the Intifada.

While the social revolution hypothesis certainly helped to disclose the debate and bring it down to issues of historical, political, social, economical, ideological and religious reality, it remains highly unsatisfactory from an historian’s point of view. There are various reasons for this, the most notable being the total lack of sources attesting to the postulated peasants' revolt or to any kind of egalitarianism (even domestic) in the rural societies of early Iron age Palestine. 31 One should also be aware that in a rather particular way, Mendenhall and Gottwald actually followed the track of the conquest model and thus were inevitably caught in the same trap: Aiming at an understanding of an historical process of the 13th–11th cent. BCE, they relied too heavily on the biblical books of Joshua and Judges and adopted the latter’s particular religious ideology instead of trying to put »Israel-related phenomena into the larger context of late IInd-millennium history of the Middle East.

Clearly, «the welter of competing claims, the cacophony of methods, betrays the cumulation of the decades.» 32 Given the strength of the biblical matrix outlined above and the political and intellectual context in which the conquest and social revolution models developed, one is not surprised to note that all authors perceive the issue of »Canaanite and »Israelite« culture as one of essential difference and antagonism.

2. Israelite origins: towards a new consensus

Only in recent years has it become possible to envisage alternative models and imagine the emergence of an autochthonous Israel in late IInd- to early ISt-millennium Canaan in terms less antagonistic and less »anti-Canaanite«. One may safely maintain that this latest development in scholarly discussion is again directly related to the changing political context, although we may note a certain paradox: the new archaeological perception of the Late Bronze to Iron age transition and the new historical perception of the Israelite origins in Canaan are a direct outcome of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank since 1967, which allowed dozens of archaeological excavations and intense surface exploration all over the Palestinian highlands. 33 This

29 For a polemical but well-reasoned critique of Mendenhall’s model which is said to have »parachuted a Protestant paradise onto Israelite earth«, see B. Halpern, Sociological Comparatism and the Theological Imagination: The Case of the Conquest, in: Sha’arei Talmon. Studies in Honor of Sh. Talmon, Winona Lake, IN, 1992, 53–67 (cit. 65).
32 Halpern (n. 29), 64.
confirms once more that context is always at work — not only in theology and history writing, but also in archaeology — although at times in more subtle or even surprising ways. Not surprisingly, thus, the most significant contribution to the new debate has been made by Israeli scholars of a new generation, among them Israel Finkelstein and Nadav Na'aman, while European and North American scholars have engaged in debates on methodology that strongly bear the stamp of their forefathers' ideology, whether upheld or rejected by the sons and epigones.

Today no serious scholar maintains the idea of an Israelite conquest, let alone a 12th-century BCE pan-Israelite invasion into Canaan. True, there are signs of destruction and abandonment at various urban sites all over the country, but they span over more than a century and may not be generally related to military attacks and conflagrations brought about by an invading people, let alone identifiable Israelites. The reasons for the decline of the Late Bronze age city states of Palestine are multiple and much more complicated than was imagined by the immigration, conquest or social revolution models. They are part of a historical process which extended over the whole Eastern Mediterranean. The local phenomena — destruction and abandonment, at times only slow decline of urban centers, settlement processes in fringe areas and highlands which may only partly be attributed to clans of previously pastoral or nomadic background, gradual cristallization of settled groups with the emergence of new centers, ultimate appearance of territorial states — should not be viewed in isolation but in relation with similar phenomena in neighbouring areas (e.g., Transjordan and Syria) and also in other periods of long-term history.


35 For an overview, see H. WEISSPFELT, Palästina in vorhellenistischer Zeit (Handbuch der Archäologie: Vorderasien II/1), München 1988, 352–353.

36 See Sh. BUNIMOYVITZ, Socio-Political Transformations in the Central Hill Country in the Late Bronze — Iron I Transition, in: FINKELSTEIN/NA'AMAN (n. 34), 179–202; I. FINKELSTEIN, The Emergence of Israel: A Phase in the Cyclic

There is nowadays a growing consensus among historians that what ultimately became ancient Israel grew out of Canaan and represented an indigenous element of the country's population of the 13th–11th centuries BCE. When first used in an inscription of the Egyptian king Menephtah in ca. 1208/7 BCE, the term «Israel» denotes a clanlike group of people living on the fringe of the central hill country of Palestine. There is no historical evidence that this group named «Israel» ever came from anywhere else at an earlier period. At the same time, recent archaeological research has demonstrated that the settlement process in the fringe areas and the hill country is to be viewed as a multi-faceted historical reality with very different developments taking place in each region according to its own particular ecological, economic and demographic background. The primary agents of this development, i.e. the pastoral and rural populations involved in the settlement process, may by no means all be identified as «Israelites» on grounds of political and religious terminologies and of an ethnic (or para-ethnic) consciousness which developed much later and even then only gradually. Consequently, one should abandon the unilateral and misleading label «period of the Israelite settlement» when discussing the 13th–11th centuries BCE transitional process. Totally outdated are the terms «Canaanite period» and «Israelite period» still used by some conservative Israeli archaeologists and museums for the Late Bronze and Iron ages respectively.

According to Finkelstein and Na'aman, «combination of archaeological and historical research demonstrates that the biblical account of the conquest and occupation of Canaan is entirely divorced from historical reality. (...) The biblical descriptions of the origin and early history of the people of Israel are not dissimilar from narratives on the origins of other peoples, which likewise do not withstand the test of historical criticism.»60 The present contribution should confirm this evaluation and consider some implications for a new approach.
proach to the history of ancient Palestine and for a contextual Palestinian theology.

3. Canaan and Israel: a permanent antagonism of contrasting societal models?
According to Judges 1, the Israelite settlement in Canaan did not lead to a complete replacement of the earlier «Canaanite» population by the intruding «Israelites», but the two peoples lived side by side and co-existed over generations or even centuries. As the text puts it, the urban «Canaanites» continued to live in fortified cities while the Israelite tribes settled in the land which remained in between. In a slim monograph by Walter Dietrich published in 1979, this momentous picture has been stretched out to extend over the whole pre-exilic history of Israel from the settlement down to the end of the Judahite state.41 Designed as a study in social history, Dietrich's book – which incidentally appeared the same year as Gottwald's – represented a welcome addition to all the too many historical textbooks concentrating on problems of political history. His condensed treatment certainly helped a number of German-speaking biblical scholars, who would have rejected the Marxist referents of Gottwald's social revolution model, to become more aware of social tensions and conflicts in the history of ancient Israel and Judah. Unfortunately, however, this study's plausibility too rises and falls with its leading concepts. To Dietrich, the terms «Israel» and «Canaan» point to an highly explosive opposition of strongly diverging social, ethnic and cultural structures.42 As many others before him, he thought that the roots of this opposition should be looked for in the Late Bronze to Iron age transition.

Among the major difficulties in Dietrich's, one should first stress the untenable assumption of an ethnically defined entity termed «Canaanites» as opposed to «Israelites».43 It is more than doubtful that something like a «Canaanite» ethnos or ethnic identity ever existed in Late Bronze to Iron age Palestine (see below). Consequently, the terms «Canaanite» and «Israelite» define neither distinct nor mutually opposed ethnic identities in the Bronze and Iron ages. Second, and contrary to long-held opinions, it is impossible to relate particular features in the material culture (such as specific types of pottery or architecture) to «Canaanites» or «Israelites» (the so-called «pots-and-people» issue)44, the only possible exception being remains of distinctive foodways.45 Finkelstein, who in 1988 still understood the settlement process of Iron age I as «the Israeliite settlement», freely acknowledges today that «the equation of Iron I highlands material culture with an Israeliite ethnic identity is dubious» since ethnic affiliations emerged only later in the context of new political frameworks, namely the territorial states of the later Iron age.46 Third, one cannot

41 W. DIETRICH, Israel und Kanaan. Vom Ringen zweier Gesellschaftssysteme (Stuttgarter Bibel-Studien 94), Stuttgart 1979.
46 FINKELSTEIN/NA'AMAN (n. 34), 13; see further I. FINKELSTEIN, The Great Transformation: The Conquest of the Highlands Frontiers and the Rise of the
follow Dietrich when he imposes the putative (but ill-founded) ethnic distinction of «Canaanites» vs. «Israelites» upon the socio-economic dichotomy of cities and villages, as if all city-dwellers had by definition been merchant Canaanites and administrators or all villagers Israelite peasants. Fourth, Alt/Dietrich’s postulate that a permanent Canaanite ethnic entity survived in the midst of Israel-governed Iron Age cities throughout the monarchical period is dubious. No doubt there were social tensions between various societal segments during the history of Israel and Judah in the 1st millennium BCE, and biblical texts explicitly refer to some of these. However, they should first of all be considered as inter-societal (Israelite, Judahite etc.) conflicts and not be attributed to a putative ethnic antagonism between «Canaan» and «Israel». As a case in point, Jehu’s coup d’état which Dietrich and other biblical scholars tend to understand in terms of this antagonism was not directed against «Canaanites» – not even according to the biblical sources! It mirrors a conflict between two leading factions of the Israelite political establishment.

Finally, and most important for our purpose, Dietrich’s attempt to inflate ethnic and socio-economic distinctions up to an over-arching cultural, social and religious dualism is totally unacceptable. In his book, while things Canaanite may at times be considered to represent high cultural achievements they ultimately stand for oppression, exploitation, domination etc. Time and again the adjective «Canaanite» functions as a value judgment and labels a society and culture that is thought to have been, as a whole, full of dangerous contradictions, while the label «Israelite» somewhat romantically stands for simple rural life and subsistence, freedom and justice etc. It is quite apparent that this socio-historical typology ultimately rests on non-historical, theological and philosophical premises. It thus calls for the same kind of criticism as Gottwald’s: Affected by religious prejudices which are themselves clearly rooted in biblical (particularly in deuter-
onomistic) historiography, they double the polemical stance of biblical self-perception instead of leading modern readers towards a critical historical interpretation, contextualization and deconstruction of the too obviously one-sided biblical presentation.

4. Canaanite culture and religion, or «Analyzing the Abominable»

Our brief and necessarily selective review of opinions would be narrow-minded without referring to the study of Canaanite religion. As a matter of fact, biblical texts reject the Canaanites foremost because of custom and religion. It is thus only natural that scholars trained in theology and biblical exegesis run into epistemological embarrassment once they should address issues of Canaanite religion from an historical point of view.

The discovery of religious texts in the ruins of Ras Shamra/Ugarit since the late 1920’s has produced an incredibly rich discussion on ancient Syrian (or «Canaanites») religion and its historical relationship to the religion of the Bible. This is not the place to summarize even the most significant issues in this debate, but only to draw attention to the curiously ambiguous attitude with which some of the leading authorities, among them W.F. Albright, studied and evaluated the newly-discovered documents. Delbert R. Hillers, himself a student of Albright’s, has called attention to the fact that while «Biblical scholars have a special reason to be interested in Canaanite religion and are specially qualified to deal with it» (since the words and the very conceptions of biblical religion often come from the rival religions or were framed with reference to it), in other ways they «have proved singularly ill-suited to deal with the subject» because of the Bible’s polemical stance against Canaanite religion. Biblical, and particularly Western scholars studying Canaanite religion commit themselves, so to speak, to «analyzing the abominables». In order to arrive at a real understanding of Canaanite religion from within, they have to free themselves from the two sources of prejudice which are the biblical view on Canaanite religion and the Graeco-Roman conviction that Near Eastern paganism is «something alien, backward, and a little obscene» to the westerner. Generally thinking of history, including the history of religion, in linear, evolutionary and teleological terms (recall the title of one of Albright’s most famous books: «From Stone

50 D.R. HILLERS, Analyzing the Abominable: our understanding of Canaanite religion: IQR 75 (1985) 253–269; see also LONG, op. cit. (n. 25).
Let us now turn to the biblical foundations of the «Canaanites» vs. Israelites antagonism and consider how Canaan and the «Canaanites» (as well as related pre-Israelite peoples such as the «Amorites», «Hittites» etc.) are portrayed (one might say: construed) in biblical texts relating to Israelite origins throughout the books of Genesis to Judges. As was mentioned in the introduction, this section will proceed as a cursory, synchronic reading alongside the biblical books.53

1. Origins (Genesis)

The very first story about Canaan ends up with a curse, and is related to matters of honour, shame and sex. According to Gen. 9:18 Noah, the father of post-divulged humanity, had three sons: Shem, Ham and Japhet (who, roughly speaking, stand for Asia, Africa and Europe). Canaan, the son of Ham, is also mentioned because of the particular outcome of the following story: Noah lies naked and drunken in his tent. Ham looks at his father’s nakedness and, instead of covering the father, tells his brothers who behave more honourably. Clear-headed again, Noah curses Canaan — not Ham — to become a slave among his brothers, and he blesses Shem and Japhet. Curse and blessings define a three-storied hierarchy among humans: Shem at the top (with YHWH being called «the God of Shem»), Japhet second being allowed to live in Shem’s tent; Ham viz. Canaan lowest and a slave to both.54 Canaan thus represents from the beginning an almost tragic char-

53 N.P. LEMCHE, The Canaanites and Their Land. The Tradition of the Canaanites (JOTS 110), Sheffield 1991, also calls for a synchronic approach but does not follow the text in reading direction.

54 According to the extant text, it is really Canaan who is cursed instead of his father, although he was not even implied in the Noah incident. A more original version of the story either knew Sem, Japhet and Canaan as brothers or had Noah curse Ham, not Canaan, and declare him, not Canaan, a slave of his brothers. This latter reading was used until recently to legitimate racist disdain for Black African people, e.g. in South African apartheid theologies. Theologically speaking, there is of course a strong communion of suffering between the Palestinian and Black South African people. On the relationship of OT interpretation and racism, note C.H. FELDER, Race, Racism, and the Biblical Narratives, in: id. (ed.), Stony the Road We Trod. African American Biblical Interpretation, Minneapolis 1991, 127–145; F. DEIST, The Dangers of Deuteronomy. A Page from the Reception of the Book, in: F. Garcia Martinez et al. (eds.), Studies in Deuteronomy (PS C.J. La- buschagne; SVT 53), Leiden 1994, 13–30.

55 Ham is not mentioned anymore in the story, so that Canaan really takes his father’s place. Reading further on the genealogy of Ham’s sons (Gen. 10:6ff.), where Canaan is said to be Ham’s fourth son after Cush, Egypt and Libya, one may conclude from the phrase «Let him be the lowest slave among his brethren»
acter in a play that calls him on stage only to be submitted to the permanent fate of slavery.

But whose eponymous ancestor is Canaan? According to the genealogy of Gen. 10:6ff, he was the father of

«Sidon, his first-born, and Heth, and the Jebusite(s)», the Amorite(s),
the Arvadite(s), the Zemarite(s) and the Hamathite(s).»

Canaan thus represents a number of people, inhabitants of Phoenician cities such as Sidon, Arvad, Zemar and Hamath alongside peoples which otherwise belong to a standard list of pre-Israelite inhabitants of the land: Heth (otherwise called the «Hittite»), the Jebusite(s) who are generally connected to pre-Israelite Jerusalem, the Amorite(s) etc. Gen. 10:19 adds a note on the extent of Canaanite territory, in which the areas of Sidon and Gaza represent the northern and southern limits respectively while Gerar is situated at the north-eastern and Sodom, Gomorrah, Adma and Zeboim at the south-eastern border.

2. Abraham and his sons among Canaanites, Amorites and Hittites

The genealogies of Gen. 11 lead up to Terach and his son Abra(ha)m. Leaving the Babylonian city of Ur in order to wander to «the land of Canaan», Terach settles in North Syrian Haran, i.e. in an Aramean environment, where he dies. Abra(ha)m is then called to go further and arrives in «the land of Canaan». He stops at a holy place of divination near Shechem. At this point of the story, we are told by a narrator's off-voice that «at that time the Canaanite(s) was/were in the land ...» (Gen. 12:6).

The comment implies that the holy place once belonged to the Canaanites but that such is no more the case in the narrator's own time. YHWH appears to Abra(ha)m at this holy place and promises for the first time to give «this land» to his descendants. Abra(ha)m builds an altar in recognition but then continues to wander southwards, building another altar near Bethel. Still further south, a famine has him leave for Egypt just to return almost immediately: the narrative makes plain for the first time that Egypt is not a place to stay for a patriarch.

that Canaan is not only considered to be a slave to Shem and Japhet but even to his own brothers.

56 Modern translations of the Bible put these ethnonyms in the plural, but in the Hebrew text they more often take singular verb forms, being apparently considered as collective nouns.

57 The apparent tension between 10:18 mentioning Arvadite(s), Zemarite(s) and Hamathite(s) and Sidon as northern border of Canaanite territory may be resolved by the observation that 10:18 refers to itinerant merchants and displaced colonists rather than the inhabitants of the respective cities themselves.

Back to Bethel, Abraham separates from Lot because the place is too small to be shared between them together with the Canaanite(s) and Perizite(s) (Gen. 13:7). It is there that YHWH shows Abra(ha)m the land that he shall inherit, which roughly corresponds to the hill-country of Judah. The patriarch logically leaves south and arrives at another holy place called Mamre (Gen. 13:18), before meeting Melchisedek of Jeru(Salem in chap. 14. In chap. 15, a new promise of the land is given and confirmed by YHWH: Abra(ha)m shall live long and be buried in the land. But only his descendants shall actually occupy the land after a period of enslavement:

«The generation (viz., of Abraham's enslaved descendants) shall return here, for the guilt of the Amorite(s) is not full until then» (Gen. 15:16).

The Amorite(s) are already known to us as descendants of Canaan (10:18). Here the story anticipates that Abra(ha)m's descendants will inherit the land as a consequence of Amorite guilt (cf. Lev. 18:24ff.; 20:22ff.; Deut. 9:4ff.; 1 Kings 14:24), which is thought to gradually accumulate but for the time being remains unspecified.

«To your descendants I give this land from the River of Egypt to the Great River, the river Euphrates, the Kenite(s), the Kenizzite(s), the Kadmonite(s), the Hittite(s), the Perizzite(s), the Rephaim, the Amorite(s), the Canaanite(s), the Girgasite(s) and the Jebusite(s)» (Gen. 15:18-21).

Once again the lack of precision is deplorable: neither do the limits of the land promised here fit the extent of Canaanite territory as described earlier (in Gen. 10) and later (in Num. 34, on which see below), nor is the list of inhabitants homogeneous, since it mixes up tribal (nomadic) groups which later continued to live alongside Israel without challenging it territorial rights, with the standard list of seven pre-Israelite peoples. Among these, the Amorite(s), the Hittite(s) and the Jebusite(s) will play a considerable role later on.

It is from the Hittite(s) that Abraham purchases the Machpelah burial place, situated between Hebron and Mamre according to the biblical text, in order to bury his wife (Gen. 23). This beautiful chapter depicts Abraham as a foreigner acting with great respect for the autochthonous inhabitants, asking politely for a place to buy and insisting on giving a correct price for the burial field. Vice versa, the «sons of He» repeatedly honour the patriarch.

58 Clearly he is meant to have thus visited the major cult centers known by the narrator in the central hill country.

59 Such variations present a major obstacle to an exclusively synchronic reading. The extent of Gen. 15's «greater Israel» is clearly related to the boundaries of Solomon's empire according to 1 Kings 5:1 (which is itself a historical fancy of the Persian period). As for Num. 34, it is often thought that this text ultimately reflects the boundaries of the once Egyptian province of Canaan, but see sect. 4.
The text's insisting on mutual honouring and Abraham's regular payment instead of the Hittites' readiness to leave the field for nothing is conspicuous. We might suspect that these issues would have been a source of conflict and embarrassment in the narrator's time.

In the following chapters, Canaanites and Hittites play a role insofar as they are considered unfit for marriage with a descendant of Abraham. The aged Abraham has his servant take an oath that he would not marry Isaac to a Canaanite daughter (Gen. 24) and he sends him to old Aramaean relatives in order to bring back a suitable relative as a wife for his son. Similarly, Isaac will exhort Jacob not to marry a Canaanite (Gen. 28). Esau who had already taken two Hittite daughters into his house (26:34) then marries an Arab woman (28:8): all three are called «Canaanites» in Gen. 36:2. Conflict is avoided since Esau then leaves «the land of Canaan» and settles in Seir/Edom with all his family, which leaves Canaan as an inheritance for Jacob/Israel alone who, however, will never occupy it in its entirety.

3. A snare towards idolatry (Exodus to Leviticus)

Another story of Israelite origins has its start in Egypt. Having called Moses to the burning bush, YHWH promises him to take his enslaved people out of Egypt and to bring it into a good and wide land, «the place of the Canaanite(s), the Hittite(s), the Amorite(s), the Perizzite(s), the Hivite(s) and the Jebusite(s)» (Exod. 3:8, cf. v. 17; in Exod. 6:4 this is simply called «the land of Canaan»).

Once the fugitive Israelites arrive at the mountain of YHWH, the references to Canaan and «Canaanites» take a specifically cultic significance: «When my angel going before you will lead you into the land of the Amorite(s), the Hittite(s), the Perizzite(s), the Canaanite(s), the Hivite(s) and the Jebusite(s), when I will make them disappear, you shall not bow down before their gods nor serve them. You shall not make cultic objects as they make them, but destroy them and break down their holy pillars» (Exod. 23:23ff., cf. 33:2).

In order not to turn the land into a lions' nest, YHWH will not chase all the pre-Israelite inhabitants of the land immediately but make them disappear little by little out of growing panic (cf. Deut. 7:22–24). Israel is therefore exhorted not to conclude any covenant with them since they could induce the Israelites to idolatry. «This would become a snare for you ...» (Exod. 23:33). «Be careful not to make a covenant with the natives of the land against which you are going, or they will prove a snare in your midst» (Exod. 34:12). Such indictments amplified by detailed prohibitions of Canaanite ritual and cultural practices are found in more than one passages relating the giving of the great Torah (cf. the so-called cultic decalogue

4. Exploring and blueprinting the land (Numbers)

Leaving the mountain and approaching the land, one comes to wonder what «the land of Canaan» and its people will finally look like. Spies are sent out in Num. 13 and report how beautiful the country is, but also that its inhabitants are very strong and some even appear to be descendants of giants: «Amalek who lives in the Negev, the Hittite(s), the Jebusite(s) and the Amorite(s) who lives (sic 61) in the highlands, and the Canaanite(s) who lives by the sea and along the Jordan river» (Num. 13:29).

While Caleb remains confident that the Israelites will manage to occupy the country, other spies discourage the people: «The land shall swallow whoever wants to live there ...». In Num. 16 some people will even wish to go all the way back to Egypt, considering that Egypt, not Canaan, were «a land of flowing milk and honey» (16:13). Of course, this is not the author's position for whom, once again, Egypt is not the place to stay for an Israelite.

In Num. 34 YHWH orders Moses to give the Israelites clear instructions about the extension and borders of the land to be inherited: This is the most detailed border description for the land of Canaan» found in the Bible, conceived in much more restrictive borders than the territory between the brook of Egypt and the Euphrates promised earlier to Abraham (Gen. 15). Unfortunately, we are not told by the biblical authors how we should understand such differing territorial claims. It seems obvious that the variety of descriptions corresponds to various authors with as many differing concepts, but one should probably consider the different context as well: the eponymous concept of Abraham is larger than that of Israel.

5. Extermination, or what? (Deuteronomy)

It is with the book of Deuteronomy that the Canaanite-Israelite antagonism reaches its climax, as far as ideology and language of antagonism and exclusion are concerned. Deuteronomy is a speech addressed in the plains of Moab to the generation which will finally enter the land. Chap. 7 foresees a conquest that will ultimately lead to extermination:

61 See above, n. 56.
62 See above, n. 59.
«When YHWH your God brings you into the land which you are entering to occupy and drives out many nations before you – the Hittite(s), the Gergashite(s), the Amorite(s), the Canaanite(s), the Perizzite(s), the Hivite(s) and the Jebusite(s): seven nations more numerous and powerful than you – when YHWH your God delivers them into your power and you defeat them, you must put them to death. You must not make a covenant with them or spare them. You must not intermarry with them, neither giving your daughters to their sons nor taking their daughters for your sons; if you do, they will draw your sons away from me and make them worship other gods. Then YHWH will be angry with you and will quickly destroy you. But this is what you must do to them: pull down their altars, break their sacred pillars, hack down their sacred poles and destroy their idols by fire, for you are a people holy to YHWH your God. YHWH your God chose you out of all nations on earth to be his special possessions» (Deut. 7:1–6, cf. v. 7–26).

The leading motive behind this violence is again the fear of getting «ensnared» in the ways of the «pre-Israelite» peoples – a motive already noted in Exod. 34 but increasing almost to paranoia in Deuteronomy. As a matter of fact, Israel is exhorted not to succumb to the ways of the nations even after the latter’s physical elimination:

«When YHWH your God exterminates, as you advance, the nations whose country you are entering to occupy, you shall take their place and settle in their land. After they have been destroyed, take (still) care that you are not snared into their ways…» (Deut. 12:30).

In comparison to that, Deut. 20 sounds somewhat more rational:

«In the cities of these nations whose land YHWH your God is giving you as a patrimony, you shall not leave any creature alive. You shall annihilate them – the Hittite(s), the Amorite(s), the Canaanite(s), the Perizze(s), the Hivite(s) and the Jebusite(s) – as YHWH your God commanded you, so that they may not teach you to imitate all the abominable things that they have done for their gods and so cause you to sin against YHWH your God» (Deut. 20:16–18).

It is of utmost importance not to isolate this rhetoric of annihilation from its storical context but to situate it correctly in the larger framework of the whole narrative, i.e. as a rhetorical climax addressed in the fields of Moab to the conquest generation, a high point in a drama which will neither stop at this point nor lead to complete fulfillment. As a matter of fact, the incitements to extermination contained in Deuteronomy will never be followed completely but find only a limited realization as we read along the actual conquest narratives in the book of Judges. Moreover, we should bear in mind that the conquest narratives form the background to the later «history of Israel» which will be told in the books of Samuel and Kings. 2 Kgs ultimately ends with the total loss of Israelite/Judahite territorial control in Canaan/Palestine. In the larger context of this so-called Deuteronomistic History, we should understand Deut. 7:12 and 20 as part of a subjunctive rhetoric trying to justify through an utterly extremist command – never realized in actual history nor even accomplished in its in narrated story – the causes of Israel’s ultimate exile and the conditions of its return (cf. Deut. 4:29ff., 30:1–5). Obviously, such a rhetoric only makes sense if we postulate a post-exilic context, far removed from the imagined conquest situation, for the

63 The terminology used here is that of the so-called «ban» (berem). It refers to a practice attested outside Israel, most conspicuously in an inscription of the Moabite king Mesha, (mid-9th cent. BCE). See M. WEINFIELD, The ban on the Canaanites in the Biblical codes and its historical development, in: LEMAIRE/OTZEN (n. 42–160). Originally a ritual killing of vanquished foes, the term became somewhat more general in later periods. According to G. MITCHELL, Together in the Land. A Reading of the Book of Joshua (JSOTS 134), Sheffield 1993, 15f., 117, the term should here be understood only «as a literary device for advocating a strict separation from the nations» (117), while Lohfink (op. cit. [n. 13]) has suggested that the incitements to extermination should be read as a «narrative symbol for radical faiths rings like an exercise in apologetics. In any case, the recognition of a literary device does not per se alter the violence implied in the phrasing. As faithful readers inspired by Deuteronomy and Joshua have demonstrated, and again from the Hasmonaeans to Yigal Amir (or from Spanish conquistadores to the Boers), radical faith based on the language of violence can all too easily turn into real violence. If Joshua’s concept of faith is really what Lohfink thinks – «die gläubige Unmittelbarkeit mit Gottes, ibid. 13 –, then this should be rejected on moral grounds. – Note that the biblical berem could be reinterpreted in terms of expulsion and confiscation of property in late Second Temple times, cf. W. HORSBURY, Extermination and Excommunication. VT 35 (1985) 19–38. This would seem to contradict a purely spiritual reading.

64 Cf. G. BRAULIK, Die Völkervernichtung und die Rückkehr Israels ins Verheissungsland. Herrnhuterische Bemerkungen zum Buch Deuteronomium, in: M. VERVENNE/J. LUST (eds.), Deuteronomy and Deuteronomistic Literature (FS C.H.W. Brekelmans/BETHL 133), Leuven 1997, 3–68; LOHFINK, op. cit. (n. 13). Both authors rightly insist that the incitements to extermination are exclusively and specifically addressed to the conquest generation and do not envisage extermination for the post-exilic return to Zion. However, the fact that the incitement is addressed to the past does not make it morally more acceptable. The reason for its limitation to the past is not growing recognition for Canaanites. It simply has always been easier to hold extremist views on a long gone foundational past than regarding on the usually more complicated present.
narrator and his audience. We shall return to this point in the last part of this paper. Here it shall suffice to recall that when moving along in the biblical story, we should really try to read the story as such before projecting it onto a factual historical screen.

6. Conquering and settling the land (Joshua)

The book of Joshua relates how the Israelite tribes entered the land west of the Jordan river and conquered the towns of Jericho and Ai before campaigning first in the south, later in the north of the country. There is clearly one tendency in the text that wants us to believe that the Israelites took control over the entire land (e.g. Josh. 10:40–42; 11:23),

«over the highlands and the lower hill country, the Arabah and the flanks of the hills, the steppe and in the Negev; the Hittite(s), the Amorite(s), the Canaanite(s), the Perizzite(s), the Hivite(s) and the Jebusite(s)» (Josh. 12:8),

since Joshua slaughtered all the kings of the land (Josh. 12:7.9–24). Consequently, when all the land has been allotted to the tribes, one voice declares that all promises given by YHWH to the house of Israel were now fulfilled (Josh. 21:43–45).

Another line, however, runs contrary to this assertion: First of all, there is the curious story about a treaty which the people of Gibeon were able to conclude with the Israelites thanks to a clever ruse (Josh. 9). Second, there is a notion of some land which remained to be conquered particularly in the coastal areas of Philistia and Phoenicia (Josh. 13:1–6; 23:1–16; cf. Judg. 3:1–6) considered to have remained «Canaanite» or «Amorite». Third, there are cities in the midst of conquered territory where «Canaanites» are said to have remained, such as in Gezer (Josh. 16:10 = Judg. 1:29), Beth-Shean, Yiblaim, Megiddo, Taanak and Dor (Josh. 17:11ff. = Judg. 1:27ff.).

7. The snare becomes a test (Judges)

The latter line continues into the book of Judges, which opens with the Israelites' attempt to fight remaining Canaanites after Joshua's death. The tribes are now said to have acted individually or in small coalitions, not succeeding, however, in completely eliminating the local inhabitants. This is particularly the case for territories in northern Palestine (Judg. 1:30ff.). But Gaza, Ashkelon and Ekron are also said to have remained uncontrolled, so that the tribe of Judah had to limit its claim for the hill country (Judg. 1:18f.). Even if Judah is said to have destroyed Jerusalem (Judg. 1:8), the tribe of Benjamin was unable to drive out the Jebusites living there (Judg. 1:21). In narrative terms, this double treatment of Jerusalem is surely related to 1 Sam. 5:6–8, the Benjaminites house of Saul will have to wait for the Judahite house of David, and only David, then king of Judah and Israel, will ultimately succeed and bring Jerusalem under his control.

Still another line ties together the recognition of remaining land and remaining «Canaanites», «Amorites» etc. with the religiously-motivated rhetoric of Deuteronomy and Josh. 23–24. Judg. 2–3 explain that the Israelites did not adhere wholeheartedly to the divine commandments transmitted by Moses and followed other gods of the peoples living around them (or rather, in their midst). YHWH therefore decided not to expel any more inhabitants out of the country but to let them live amidst the Israelites as a permanent temptation (Judg. 2:20–23).

«These are the nations which YHWH left as a means of testing all the Israelites who had not taken part in the battles for Canaan (...) the five lords of the Philistines, all the Canaanite(s) and the Sidonite(s) and the Hivite(s) who live in Mount Lebanon from the mountain of Baal-Hermon to Lebo-Hamath. His purpose was to test whether Israel would obey the commands which YHWH had given to their forefathers through Moses. Thus the children of Israel lived among the Canaanite(s), the Hittite(s), the Amorite(s), the Perizzite(s), the Hivite(s) and the Jebusite(s). And they took their daughters in marriage and gave their own daughters to their sons, and they worshipped their gods» (Judg. 2:13–6).

Ostensibly, this situation is in tension with Deut. 7, or rather it represents the reversal of the latter text's rhetoric of annihilation. As we have noted, this rhetoric does not reflect a historical reality but rather an extreme hypothesis implying that Israel's history would have taken another course if Israel had followed the ways once prescribed by YHWH to the conquest generation. Moving on from Deuteronomy to Judges, we now understand that Israel chose other ways, as is most


explicitly stated in Judg. 2. At this point, Deuteronomy's incitement has vanished in utopia and leaves the stage to a more ambiguous a\textit{storicab} reality, which should be experienced by Israel as a test how to live with permanent temptation. Once again, this outlook does not stand historical illusions: V. 6 makes clear that the narrator knows very well that Israel ultimately failed to pass the test, connubium having lead to apostasy. As it stands at the opening of a book that relates the story of Israel by now settled in the land of Canaan, the text again foreshadows Israel's ultimate loss of the land because of its mixing up with the pre-Israelite inhabitants.\footnote{See most recently P.D. Guest, Dangerous Liaisons in the Book of Judges: S\textit{JOT} 11 (1997) 241–269.}

8. No permanent inheritance rights

The land theology embedded in our story is not the main focus of this paper. Nevertheless, a word of caution seems at order: According to the Deuteronomistic History YWHH repeatedly promised to Abraham, to the Exodus and to the conquest generation the inheritance of the land of Canaan from its previous inhabitants. As we have seen, this promise is not always delivered in the same phraseology. As a matter of fact, and as the above reading may have recalled, the promise has a story of its own within the evolution of the larger narrative. The promises extended in Gen. 17 in the context of an «everlasting covenant» are crucial for land theology. In v. 8 YWHH promises that He shall give to Abraham and his descendants «the land of your sojourn (i.e. the land where Abraham then sojourns as a resident alien), the whole land of Canaan, for an everlasting heritage». This promise clearly implies the concept of a permanent right of sojourn and settlement for Abraham's descendants in the limits of «the land of Canaan» (on which see below, Num. 34). However, this does not mean exclusive right to ownership as the example of Abraham himself, who will never become a ruler of all Canaan of any sort, plainly shows.

The more the story of the promise moves on, the more it becomes restricted. Sure, the story considers the later generations to be Abraham's descendants, but they are not Abraham himself. Rather they are thought to have later got their own promise, which was not exactly the same. The descendants should thus not claim for themselves what had once been promised to Abraham, and certainly not more than that. They will rather be considered on their own merits or failings.

The biblical story does not want us to consider later generations of faithful Jews as plain inheritors of earlier promises. For the biblical historians there was a time when God repeatedly promised the land to Israel. But this time had gone with the earlier generations of the Exodus, with the conquest as well as with generations of kings who led Israel's history towards a failure. At no point is the Pentateuchal story of Israel's origins and settlement in the land designed to legitimize a permanent claim for exclusive ownership of the land, not to speak of a new conquest and settlement in a later historical period.\footnote{We are not concerned here with prophetic approaches to the issue of living again in the land. Note, however, that the post-exilic return is not generally considered in military terms let alone in terms of extermination.} True, the books of Ezra-Nehemiah describe the exiles' return from Babylon and, as we shall see later, draw again upon the antagonism of Canaanites and Israelites in order to legitimize their rejection of connubium. Still, they do not consider the story of Israelite origins and the original promises simply to legitimize their own claims on property rights. Persian-period biblical editors clearly distinguished between a foundational story of the past (the story of what once could have happened in the wished-for ideal but ultimately did not happen because of various failures) and what seemed possible under the very different conditions of their own present under the conditions of Persian lordship (see especially Neh. 9–10).

Now, if such a realistic distinction between an imagined past and the differently-conditioned present is already drawn within the canonical text, it would seem to be abstruse to legitimize the modern history of the Jewish return to Palestine and the establishment of the State of Israel in terms of a fulfillment of earlier promises to Abraham, Moses or Joshua.\footnote{On this, see again Lowy, op. cit. (n. 13).} That this distinction became blurred since antiquity may be due particularly to the Hasmonean rule over large parts of Palestine in the 2nd and 1st cent. BCE and to subsequent ideological re-readings of the biblical promises in Jewish tradition (e.g., the Mishna, or Nahmanides, but not Maimonides). From the standpoint of the Bible alone, however, no text can lay the foundation of a permanent right for Jews to exclusively possess and control the land promised to Abraham and his descendants.
We may leave the Story at this point where it acknowledges a reality (the problematical co-existence of Israelites and remaining Canaanites) rather than an ideal (be it annihilation or total separation). Interestingly, it is as if the admission of these nations' continuing existence in the land had broken the biblical authors' illusions about Israel's own non-Canaanite nature—and as if «Canaanites», «Amorites» etc. faded together with such illusions. Although we just learnt from Joshua and Judges that the indigenous peoples of the land remained in the midst of the Israelite tribes, the later historical books contain only occasional and rather dispersed references to Canaanites and other pre-Israelite peoples. After a memorable battle (Judg. 4–5), the Canaanites and their pair disappear from the stage as leading players. From now on, the Israelites are said to have been confronted with new and different enemies: Aramaeans, Moabites, Ammonites, Midianites or Philistines, i.e. peoples with a distinct historical profile (however un-historical many of the stories may be). When new politics appear on the stage, the old inhabitants of the land remain only as a rather amorphous, anonymous population, a kind of periastrum of the land's population. Only the «Jebusites» sitting in Jerusalem will have to wait for David's conquest of Jerusalem (2 Sam. 5:6–8) before being released from the story. Generally speaking, one may conclude that the biblical historiographers considered «Canaanites», «Amorites» and the like as essentially a problem of the past.

(To be continued)

Peaceful relations between Israelites and Amorites are considered in 1 Sam. 7:14. Individual Hitites are mentioned as soldiers in David's entourage (Ahiëam in 1 Sam. 26:6, Uria in 2 Sam. 11–12). Jerusalem is said to have been taken from «the Jebusite(s)» by David (2 Sam. 5:6–8). It is from a Jebusite named Araunah that David bought a threshing floor in order to build an altar (2 Sam. 24). «Hivite(s)» and «Canaanite(s)» are mentioned together in 2 Sam. 24:7 as inhabitants of southern Lebanon. «Canaanites» living in the city of Gezer are said to have been killed by an Egyptian pharaoh who gave the town as a present to Solomon (1 Kings 9:16). The whole populace of «the Amorite(s)», the Hitite(s), the Perizzite(s), the Hivite(s) and the Jebusite(s) purportedly served as corvée workers for Solomon's monumental building projects and kept this status until the present days (1 Kings 9:20–21). These references, which are not exhaustive, demonstrate the rather spurious interest of the biblical historiographers in Canaanites outside the antagonistic settlement framework.

Given the enormous scholarly literature concerned with the so-called Canaanite antecedents and traditions of Jerusalem, it is notable that not one single biblical text identifies pre-Israelite or later inhabitants of Jerusalem as «Canaanites».
CHRISTOPH UEHLINGER

The "Canaanites" and other "pre-Israelite" peoples in Story and History
(Part II)*

Looking back

Our re-lecture of Israelite-Canaanite relations according to the biblical books from Genesis to Judges should have demonstrated that "Canaanites" and related "pre-Israelite" peoples first and foremost fulfil a narrative role along the Story of Israel's origins. They are designed to function as stereotypical characters in a play which is exclusively concerned with Israel. All along the story, they serve as anti-stereotypes for shaping the identity of what is described as nascent Israel. In terms of genealogy, Israel is far removed from Canaan — the common denominator could not possibly be smaller.¹ While the Patriarchal narratives may consider essentially peaceful relations between Israel's ancestors and the inhabitants of Canaan with the ancestors discovering YHWH at the ever-holy places of the land, the subsequent story starting with the Exodus from Egypt clearly tries to disconnect "Israelites" and "Canaanites" as not-to-be-related entities.² Israel is now called to keep apart from the "Canaanites", and the more strictly it would do so, the more decidedly God would make the "Canaanites" disappear from the land. We should stress, however, that according to the Story itself this remains an hypothetical

* Continued from FZPeTb 67 (1999) 546–578.
¹ Noah is the only common ancestor, which is just to acknowledge humanity to both Israel and Canaan but serves to separate the two as far as possible. Cf. Part I, 567f. and E.T. MULLIN, Ethnic Myths and Pentateuchal Foundations. A New Approach to the Formation of the Pentateuch (SBL Semera Studies), Atlanta GA, 1997, esp. 119.
² On the separate origins of the two etiologies of Israel (Patriarchal narratives and Exodus tradition), see now K. SCHMID, Erzväter und Exodus. Untersuchungen zur doppelten Begründung der Ursprünge Israels innerhalb der Geschichtsbücher des Alten Testaments (WMANT 81), Neukirchen-Vluyn 1999.
scenario, since Israel fails to keep apart and thus proves unable to keep the promise at work.

Clearly, the biblical anti-stereotype of the «Canaanites» serves to remove and disconnect Israel from the other inhabitants of the land as far as possible. Israel’s identity is shaped by the negation and repression of anything «Canaanite». The story underlines Israel’s essential (if not real) otherness, denying as it does any common root. The rhetorical violence and the imagined violence of stoticar repression should make it obvious that we cannot rely on biblical descriptions of anything «Canaanite» when inquiring into the real history of the region at the turn from the 11th to the 1st millennium BCE. However, having read the story, we may have recognized here and there bits and pieces of the scholarly hypotheses on «Canaanite» culture, society and religion as summarized above (Part I, sect. II). If we aim at a really historical understanding of these latter issues, and not just a new paraphrase or re-telling of the story, we have to consider the proper historical sources.

IV. The History: primary sources on Canaan, Canaanites and other inhabitants of Bronze and Iron age Palestine

We shall now consider what we may reasonably know today about «Canaan» and «Canaanites» from extra-biblical sources. It goes without saying that the following section is not the place for a detailed source analysis but only allows for a very short synopsis. Since we address our

1. 11nd-millennium BCE textual sources

The terms «Canaan» (of still disputed etymology) and (much more rarely attested) «Canaanite(s)» occur in a number of written documents of the 11nd-millennium BCE retrieved by archaeological excavations on various Levantine sites. Even if the picture drawn by these documents dating from ca. 1780 (Mari) to the middle of the 12th cent. BCE (Egypt) remains incomplete, they should be regarded as the primary sources for the critical historian, much more important than the biblical texts which are at any rate much later.

Among the Mari cuneiform letters, one letter uses the term «Canaanite» (knah) as a designation for people living in a town called Riḥisum, situated south of Qatna, while other letters seem to use the same term for inhabitants of the Beqa’ valley. These letters imply a rather precise notion of a territorial entity called Canaan, as do some slightly later documents from Alalakh. The 15th-cent. BCE inscription of Idrimi, king of Alalakh, mentions a town called Ammiya in the «land of Canaan» (knabb), which is usually identified with modern ‘Amyyn near Tripolis. According to these earlier documents, therefore, «Canaan» seems to be the name of a well-defined geographical area embracing a considerable part of modern Lebanon, including the Beqa’ valley and what was later to become the Phoenician coast.

The situation changes only slightly with the 14th-cent. BCE sources from the Amarna archive and Ugarit. Precise toponyms related with Canaan still include Byblos and Tyre, but also Hinnatuna and Hāzor in Galilee, i.e. they remain centered on the Lebanese area. To judge from lists which mention people from Ugarit or Ashdod alongside «Canaanites», these two coastal towns in northern Syria and southern Palestine were considered not to belong to «Canaan» proper by local Lebanonese and Ugaritic scribes.

The Textual Evidence: BASOR 304 (1996) 1-15 (reply by Lemche on EA 151), BA-
The more international correspondence of Babylonian or Mitannian kings, however, being less interested in local boundaries than in the regional division between various spheres of influence and vassalship, uses the term «Canaan» to designate a broader area. Since at that time the whole Levantine territory from northern Lebanon to Gaza was under Egyptian hegemony, the scribes of the greater powers took the name of the northernmost area under Egyptian control, i.e. «Canaan», pars pro toto as a term for the southern Levant. 6 The Egyptians themselves followed the same international standard; for them, «Canaan» was the name of their Levantine province. However, since their outlook was one from the south, they did not even hesitate to call the town of Gaza, which served as an administrative center for the whole province at least from the 13th. century BCE onwards, «the Canaan». 7 The extension of the territorial concept «Canaan» to the southern Levant as a whole is clearly an outcome of Late Bronze age imperialism. At the same time, it is important to note that the more extensive use of the term by the greater powers did not rule out nor totally replace the more precise and better informed limited use by locals. 8

More important for our concern, we should be aware of the fact that «Canaan» was first of all a term for a geographical area, while «Canaanite(s)» is a secondary term deduced from the former in order to designate the (mostly urban) inhabitants of that area. Interestingly, the term «Canaanite(s)» may appear in North-Syrian sources, but only rarely in

6 Most explicitly in a kind of latters-passer delivered by king Tushratta of Mitanni to one of his messengers and asking the kings of Canaan, servants of my brother (i.e. the king of Egypt) to provide safe entry to Egypt to his messenger (EA 30). Complaining that a caravan of his had been robbed in Galilee, the Babylonian king Burnaburishu writes in a letter addressed to the Egyptian king Akhenaten: «Canaan is your country, and [its] kings [are your servants]. In your country I have been despoiled» (EA 8). Note, however, that this latter document is concerned with Galilee and does not make the extension of the territorial concept «Canaan» explicit. Similarly, EA 9 which refers to a planned revolt of «all the Canaanites» at the time of king Kurigalzu (ca. 1380 BCE) remains somewhat ambiguous.

7 Similarly, the way from Gaza to Egypt could be called the end of the land of Canaan (ANET 478b).

8 It is for this very reason that different uses of the territorial concept «Canaan» in the sources should not be taken to prove that the concept itself was imprecise for the scribes who used it (see Lemsch who claims that evidently the inhabitants of the supposed Canaanite territory in Western Asia had no clear idea of the actual size of Canaan, nor did they know exactly where Canaan was situated [op. cit. (n. 5), 39, cf. 51 etc.]).

9 Two Egyptian references to «Canaanites» are exceptional in this respect: A booty

list of Amenophis II mentions «640 Canaanites», possibly palace officials, among other Syro-Palestinian aristocrats as prisoners of war (ANET 246b), and a 13th-century

papyrus lists «Canaanite slaves from Hurra (i.e. Syria)». Still, this does not make the

term an ethnonym, let alone one used by the local population themselves. See LEMSCH, op. cit. (n. 5), 43-46.

10 See the different opinion expressed by Na’aman, loc. cit. (n. 5).


12 Note that Thutmose III’s report on a battle against a coalition of Syro-Palestinian kings at Megiddo (ANET 234f.) never identifies these enemies as «Canaanites».
anachronism based on a construct of ethnicity and territorial state which has no basis in late-IInd-millennium BCE realities.\footnote{Notwithstanding the possibility that biblical Yabin may preserve the name of a IInd-millennium king of Hazor, such as Ibi-Addu attested in Mari documents, who may become a quite legendary figure in the centuries following the collapse of Bronze age Hazor.}

Finally, we should stress that Late Bronze age Canaan was not even united by common religious beliefs and practices.\footnote{For an overview of some major tendencies in the religious symbolism of Late Bronze age Canaan, see O. KEEL/CH. UEHLINGER, Gods, Goddesses and their Symbols, Minneapolis-Edinburgh 1997, chap. IV.} This last point is particularly important when considered against the strongly anti-Canaanite religious polemics which we found in the Bible and because of the enormous scholarly literature devoted to «Canaanite religion». Archaeological remains of cultic or religious significance dating to the Late Bronze and early Iron ages provide ample evidence of a multi-faceted religious life where local and regional indigenous traditions as well as foreign influences (mainly related to the impact of Egyptian imperialism) combined to almost as many local combinations as there were city-states. Given such a cosmopolitan plurality, and since Ugarit anyway was outside the territorial extent of Canaan, it is extremely hazardous to build a reconstruction of Late Bronze age Palestinian religious history almost entirely on mythological texts from Ugarit (or, for that matter, Emar on the Euphrates). On the other hand, while it is certainly possible to discern common traits cutting across the various urban panthea and local cults, these traits do not stop sharply at the (as we have seen, rather well-defined) borders of Canaan. Therefore we cannot consider them to be distinctively «Canaanite».\footnote{The same, by the way, could be said of «Canaanite language which, as Frederick H. CRYER (Copenhagen) has reminded me, is a misnomer. Borrowing the term from Is. 19:18, we have come to label so a number of languages which share some common features (such as a prepositioned definite article $a$). However, the distribution of these languages does not fit the boundaries of «Canaan», whether in the Late Bronze or in the Iron age.} The latter is all the more impossible since the nomen gentilicium «Canaanite» is never related to anything particularly religious in extra-biblical sources which, to the best of my knowledge, know nothing of «Canaanite gods», «Canaanite rites» or the like.\footnote{The geographical name «Canaan» occurs twice in relation to religious issues: (1) A reference to the Storm God of Canaan ("IM la ki-if") has recently been identified in a ritual text from Late Bronze age Emar on the Middle Euphrates (D.E. FLEMMING, «The Storm God of Canaan» at Emar: UF 26 [1994, publ. 1995] 127–130). The reference is, however, not unequivocal since it lacks the determinative KUR/mit. (2) A Ramesseide papyrus refers to a temple of the god Amun in «the Canaan» (i.e. Gaza) more probably than Beth Shean; cf. CH. UEHLINGER, Der Amun-Tempel Ramses’ III. in p3-Ka’n, seine südpalästinaischen Tempelpaare und der Übergang von der Ägypten-zur Phönizier-Herrschaft: ein Hinweis auf einige wenig beachtete Skarnester: ZDPV 104 [1988] 6–25). However, everything here (the text, the god, the temple name, its administration and even the specifically determined place name) is Egyptian. What might be considered «Canaanites lies undersea: a certain temple in Gaza which housed an indigenous deity who came to be identified with the Egyptian Amun in the 13th or 12th cent. BCE. If we extrapolate from later Biblical references such as Judg. 16:23f., cf. 1 Sam. 3, the indigenous deity may well have been Dagon (biblical Dagon). However, since Dagon is attested centuries earlier in various parts of Northern Syria, this god has nothing specifically «Canaanite» but is a general West Semitic deity. It is only his blending with the Egyptian god Amun (cf. the analogous South Palestinian blending of Ba’al with Egyptian Seth) which might be considered as a particularly «Canaanite feature. Note however that such terminology would be our: it is not attested as such in ancient sources.} In particular, religious practices such as those listed in Exod. 34 or sexual practices such as described in Lev. 18, which are both considered to be distinctively «Canaanite» or else «pre-Israelite» by the Biblical texts and many modern interpreters, are either not attested at all for the Canaanite area by late-IInd- or early-Ist-millennium BCE primary sources or, if attested, not limited – be it in space or time – to Late Bronze age Lebanon and Palestine. From a historical point of view, neither of them may thus be considered «Canaanite».

2. Concepts and terminology: some practical suggestions

We may conclude from the above overview that the historical primary sources (including texts, iconography, archaeology) of the IInd-millennium BCE do not confirm the biblical concept of a «pre-Israelite» ethnic entity called «Canaanites» – and even less what modern commentators have made out of this concept –, neither with regard to the ethnic notion itself nor with reference to specifically «Canaanite» cultural, religious, or social traits. As a rule, the «pre-Israelite» Canaanites of the Bible’s so-called historical books are to be considered as a pure historiographical fiction of much later times.

Taking into account the strong anti-Canaanite bias and the concept of a fundamental antagonism between Canaanites and Israelites prevalent in biblical historiography, I would make the following suggestions regarding concepts and terminology to be used in future studies:

a. As historians, biblical scholars and theologians alike, we should as a principle refrain from retrofitting the biblical Canaanite-Israelite antagonism, whether understood in ethnic, cultural, social or religious terms, into the history of Late Bronze – early Iron age Palestine because of «the extremely inaccurate and
tendentious ways in which biblical authors used these names (i.e., «Canaan» and «Canaanites» for their own historiographical and theological objectives»).

b. If we are concerned with a territorial entity called «Canaan» in the Late Bronze age (i.e., an undisputable historical reality), we should always make clear whether we deal with a limited region in Lebanon and Galilee or with the more extensive concept of Canaan including southern Palestine (i.e., the Egyptian province).

c. When dealing with the political, cultural or religious history of the southern Levant (or Palestine) as a whole (and not just in the Late Bronze age), we should bear in mind that the term «Canaan» does not include Transjordanian territories which, in terms of geography and cultural history, are an integral part of the region.

d. Should we, despite all historical (and theological) reservations and be it only for convenience, maintain the term «Canaanite(s)» for the inhabitants of Late Bronze age (urban) Palestine in accordance with a few 11th-millennium documents, we would have to make clear that:

1. We do not consider these «Canaanites» to have represented an ethnically definable entity.
2. We consider the coexistence of urban «Canaanites» and «nomadic», cattle-breeding Shasu populations in Canaan, as documented by Egyptian sources, a socio-economic rather than an ethnic distinction within a basically dimorphic society.\(^{19}\)
3. We do not consider the early Iron Age villagers related to the settlement process in fringe areas and highlands (among which we may presumably locate some «Proto-Israelites») to have been ethnically divorced from either Canaanites (i.e., per definition, urban inhabitants of greater Canaan) or Shasu. Whether

\(^{17}\) Na'aman, loc. cit. (n. 5), 413.

\(^{18}\) Following the lead of K. ENGELKEN (Kanaan als nicht-territorialer Terminus: BN 52 (1990) 47–63), Lemeche has suggested to explain a putative pre-monarchical and monarchical antagonism between Israelites and Canaanites in terms of a socio-political dichotomy between traditional tribal and centralised state entities and to identify the «Canaanites» as administrators (City-Dwellers or Administrators). Further Light on the Canaanites, in: A. LE MAIRE/B. OTZEN [eds.], History and Traditions of Early Israel (JS E. Nielsen; SVT 50), Leiden 1993, 76–89. It is unclear to me how this relates to Lemeche's earlier monographic treatment (op. cit. (n. 5) where he considered all biblical texts as unif sources for the pre-monarchical or early monarchical period. The whole issue of an *antagonism* between Israelite(s) and Canaanite(s) is one of biblical texts and modern interpreters, not of the historical primary sources. Extra-biblical sources of the later 12th and of the 1st millennium BCE are completely silent about and apparently unaware of this antagonism. Lemeche's new suggestions are thus not based upon relevant sources but elaborate upon assumptions, unproven statements and speculations. While a dichotomy between leaders of the traditional society and state officials may have existed in the Late Bronze age and probably existed during the monarchical period, i.e. from the 9th cent. BCE onwards, there is no reason to connect such an «early» dichotomy with the antagonism of Israelites and Canaanites since no single source warrants us to do so. Although purportedly better informed on matters of anthropology, Lemeche's suggestions fall back on positions similar to Dietrich's (Part I, n. 41 and pp. 362ff., n. 47) in content as in method.

\(^{19}\) See M.G. HASSEL, Israel in the Merenepth Stela: BASOR 296 (1994) 45–61. Recent discussions as to whether early Israelites may be identified on pictorial representations from the time of Merenepth at Karnak should be ignored, although a thorough discussion remains necessary in order to dismiss them correctly. The beliefs in question are very common, and even «Palestinian» or «Israelite» at all, neither Canaanite nor Shasu.


\(^{21}\) See LEMCHE, op. cit. (n. 5), 53–62.

The «Canaanites» and other pre-Israelite peoples
that following the demise of the Late Bronze age Egyptian province, the name «Canaan» lost any political contour and was reduced to its earlier, mere geographical sense. At first look, this seems to converge with our earlier observation that biblical historiographers considered «Canaanites» to be an entity of the past.

V. The Story in history: cracking the code

1. Geographical and ethnic terminology

Let us recall, however, that 1 Kings 9:20–21—a text which cannot have been written prior to the late monarchical period and may well be post-exilic—claims that «the Amorite(s), the Hittite(s), the Perizzite(s), the Hivite(s) and the Jebusite(s)» remained corvée workers in Israel «until the present day» (see similarly Josh. 16:10, Judg. 1:21). This formula points to the time of the author who apparently had some contemporaneous reality in mind when referring to these «pre-Israelite» peoples. What reality? In order to understand, we shall have to abandon the holistic and exclusively synchronic approach to the biblical story followed above in section III.

First of all, let us note some terminological differences among the biblical texts: While some use the terms «Canaan» or «the land of Canaan» more or less consistently as a geographical designation, others clearly prefer the (pseudo-)ethnic term «Canaanite(s)». Among the latter, some speak of «the Canaanites living in the land» (i.e. Palestine, generally speaking) while others have the mixed form «the land of the Canaanite(s)». The attentive reader should resist the temptation to reduce such differing formulations to one single ethno-geographical concept, but recognize instead that they might betray different concepts which probably reflect different scribal traditions but first of all represent various strands of biblical historiography (and related historical geography).

Exercitum: The «Land of Canaan»

More than half of the biblical references to «the land of Canaan» occur in the book of Genesis, with approximately one quarter in the ancestor narratives and the other in the Joseph story. Of these, not one occurrence may be dated before the 7th cent. BCE (to say the least). Most of them and all references in the remaining books of the Pentateuch are usually attributed to the so-called Priestly

23 «Canaanites» may be missing in this list because they are said to have been killed by an Egyptian king a few verses earlier (9:16).

writer. The label does not imply an individual author, but a stratified tradition about the story of Israel’s origins composed in the late 6th and 5th cent. BCE. This tradition extends into the book of Joshua (e.g., 5:12, 14:1, 21:2). One striking feature of the concept of «the land of Canaan» is that it includes southern Palestine as a whole (coastal plain, hill country and highlands) but excludes Transjordanian territory (see esp. Num. 34; 35:10, 14; Deut. 32:49; Josh. 22:10, 32; Judg. 21:12).

The problem of dating the concept of «the land of Canaan» is rather tricky.24 It is often maintained that the border description of Num. 34 ultimately depends on the limits of the Late Bronze age Egyptian province of «Canaan».25 However, such an explanation inevitably raises the question what interest could motivate 1st-millennium BCE Israelite or Judahite scribes to handle down an obsolete list during centuries: the necessary postulate of tradition for such an hypothesis is intrinsically improbable. More decisive, historical geography does not support the theory: As a matter of fact, the northern border does not fit the extent of Israelite dominion in any period in the history of Israel. With regard to the eastern border, the Jordan river did not constitute a border line in the late 11th-millennium BCE, but during the late 8th and possibly the 7th cent. at the earliest, and again in the Persian period. The southern border reference to Qadesh-Barnea implies a 7th/6th-cent. BCE terminus a quo since Qadesh-Barnea was not settled earlier. Taken together, these considerations seem to exclude the Late Bronze age provenience of Num. 34 or its source.

Interestingly, the close parallel to this border description in Ez 47:15–18 (and see 48:1) does not mention the name «Canaan» but simply the lands which the Israelite tribes should inhabit – «after the exiles»: More contemporaneous names appearing in the Ezekiel text, such as Hamat, Damascus, Hauran and Gilead, seem to indicate that the northern border line common to both Num. 34 and Ez 47, (and rather close to Josh. 13:4–6a as well) was still (or again) of some territorial significance in the Persian period (perhaps the border between the zones of influence of Sidon and Byblos on the one hand, and Arvad on the other?). Now it is obvious that «the land of Canaan» did not reflect a political-territorial reality in the Persian period. However, the same might be said regarding the later concept of «the land of Israel» as defined by rabbinical texts or the Tanamite border list.26 The latter did not correspond to a political reality in the Roman and Byzantine periods but was exclusively concerned with matters of cultic offerings, calendar validity, festal and ritual regulations etc. Later Rabbinical tradition considered Num. 34 to define the area from which Jews had to bring regular offerings to the temple of Jerusalem. I am inclined to suppose that the border description of Num. 34 ultimately had a comparable legal aim, namely to define the area in which Jews of the Persian period would be considered to be able to regularly relate to Jerusalem in terms of pilgrimage obligations, of

24 KEEL/KÜCHLER/UEHLINGER, op. cit. [n. 4], 245–250.
25 See recently NA’AMAN, loc. cit. (n. 5), 469–473.
ferings, purity regulations, marriage rules and possibly Temple jurisdiction—or, turned otherwise, until where Priestly writers would consider them not to live under particular diaspora conditions. Take one very practical example to illustrate this point: Until where would you get in conflict with Deut. 7:3 when marrying a non-Israelite woman? Until where would you risk meeting a Canaanite woman? Num. 34 would provide a basis for a rather straightforward answer to such a question. While the exclusion of Transjordan poses a problem for this explanation, one could argue that the Priestly writer here considered Transjordanity to be per se situated outside the borders of the promised land and as such unfit for Jewish settlement. The Nehemiah-Tobiah antagonism plainly demonstrates that this was a matter of conflicting opinions in the 5th century.

In sum, interpreters who consider Num. 34 to be a historical reflection of a late 11th-millennium BCE territorial order should ask themselves how the Priestly writers would have been able to consult and why they would have bothered to copy such a list of old (Na‘aman and many others do not address the problem). Those who consider the text to be unrelated to an 11th-millennium BCE order still have to face the issue of its practical and literary function within the Torah (an issue which is not addressed by Lemche). It is not sufficient simply to declare a text to be an ideological construct. One still must ask: what ideology, to what purpose?

2. Various ethno-geographical concepts

The geographical entity named the land of Canaan should not be confused with the land of the Canaanite(s). The latter form is attested eight times in the Bible; the eight cases fall apart into at least three different categories:

a) one which considers the land of the Canaanite(s) to be situated in northern Palestine (Deut. 1:7), namely Sidonian territory towards southern Lebanon (Josh. 13:3f).²²

b) another one which we might call harmonistic since its territorial concept seems to coincide with the notion of greater Canaan (Exod. 13:11) of mixed population (among them Amorites and Hittites, Ex. 16:39), a notion also met with in the Priestly writer naming the land of Canaan:

c) a third one which we may loosely term date Deuteronomistic. This group has the form the land of the Canaanite(s) connected to a list of several other pre-Israelite peoples without defining a precise territorial notion in the immediate context. It should be noted that these items in this category are not of the same hand since each displays a slightly different list of peoples (Exod. 3:17; 13:5; Neh. 9:8).²⁰

All these texts are undeniably post-exilic (or, at the very best, exilic) date.²¹ The same holds true for the remaining ca. 20 occurrences of one or another form of the list of pre-Israelite peoples found in the historical books of the Hebrew Bible.²² Generally speaking, a greater number of occurrences mentions six peoples (the Canaanite(s), the Hittite(s), the Amorite(s), the Perizzite(s), the Hivite(s), the Jebusite(s)) (e.g., Exod. 5:18, 17), and one may consider the six-peoples list to represent a more or less fixed concept in spite of variations in its internal ordering. Moreover, since the Canaanite(s), the Hittite(s) and the Amorite(s) stand at the head of all but one six-peoples lists (and of some others), these three represent a kind of stable nucleus, attested as such in Ex. 16:3. An interesting geographical distribution is advocated by Num. 13:29:

«Amalek lives in the Negev, the Hittite(s), the Jebusite(s) and the Amorite(s) lives (l) in the highlands, and the Canaanite(s) lives by the sea and along the Jordan river.»


²³ Deut. 1:7, obviously post-exilic and composite (L. PERLITT, Deuteronomion [BK V 1]), Neukirchen-Vluyn 1990, 35–49), distinguishes between the highland of the Amorite(s) and the neighboring areas, mentioning the land of the Canaanite(s) between the Palestinian coastal plain and the Lebanon. Josh. 13:3f. distinguishes between yet unconquered Philistine and Amorite territory in the south, the land of the Canaanite(s) in Sidonian neighbourhood distinct from Amorite territory and not belonging to Byblos nor to the slopes of Lebanon (cf. Part I, n. 65).

²⁰ Note that in contest to Deut. 16:3, v. 45 only mentions Jerusalem’s Hittite and Amorite parents but not their Canaanite territorial roots.

²¹ Common to all three is the initial series Canaanite(s) – Hittite(s) – Amorite(s) first attested in Deut. 16:3 and which also leads the list in Exod. 3:8 (there connected to the term places, not lands).

²² Without a detailed textual analysis, which cannot be argued here, this statement is somewhat unsatisfactory. One might of course argue that Deut. 16:3 is potentially post-exilic, but this would not lead us further up in time than the early 6th cent. BCE. In Exod. 3:17 the reference to the land of the Canaanites etc. may be a secondary insert.

According to the context the land is well considered to be one but none the less divided into three different zones (steppe, highlands and plains) each of which is said to be inhabited by different peoples. This is an astute editorial device to account for the terminological differences in the various conquest traditions brought together in the book of Joshua which is here anticipated. At the same time it roughly outlines the imaginary ethnography of post-exilic Deuteronomists.

Another distribution is found in Josh. 11:1–3 where precise toponyms, individual kings and various peoples of the northern parts of the country are mixed together in a call to arms by Yabin, the king of Hazor. Among them we find

«the Canaanite(s) to the east and to the west, the Amorite(s), the Hittite(s), the Perizzite(s) and the Jebusite(s) in the highlands, and the Hivite(s) below Mt. Hermon in the land of Mizpah.»

Again «the Canaanite(s)» are so to speak considered to embrace the Amorite, Hittite and Jebusite highlanders. However, such texts displaying a discernibly territorial representation in relation to the lists of pre-Israelite peoples are rare – and, as the example shows, at least partly contradictory. The overall variations and the contradictions among the whole corpus of lists as well as their mostly Deuteronomistic environment if not tertiary glossing nature makes their post-exilic origin undisputable. In consequence, these lists and related concepts can have no bearing whatsoever on the history of the region in the late 2nd-millennium BCE.

33 We should probably understand the inner segment of the picture to proceed from south to north, with the «Hittite(s)» thought to have lived in the southern highlands (i.e. Judah), the «Amorite(s)» in the northern highlands, and the «Jebusite(s)» in the area of Jerusalem in between, a distribution which is supported by some texts (such as Gen. 23) but contradicted by others (e.g., the tradition of the five «Amorite» kings related in Josh. 10).

34 M. WEINFELD (The ban on the Canaanites in the Biblical codes and its historical development, in: LEMAIRE/OTZEN [n. 18], 142–160) has recently suggested that the origin of the laws of expulsion and dispossessing of pre-Israelite peoples should be looked for in the period of king Saul. In historical terms, this is impossible since no relevant texts dates so far back in time. Weinfield rightly states that the herem externization envisaged by Deuteronomy is unrealistic and goes on by presenting his own assessment: «What did in fact happen was the expulsion and clearing out of the pre-Israelite inhabitants, and even that was, taken as a whole, not a one-time event, but an on-going process» (155). As a matter of fact, that picture is not much more realistic than Deuteronomy's but it dramatically highlights the burden of biblical stereotypes when such a most distinguished biblical scholar turns to history.

35 How long a papyrus or a leather scroll would last under the climatic conditions of Palestine has to my knowledge never been tested by experiment. Prof. L.W. Hurstado (University of Manitoba) has drawn my attention to T.C. Skeat, Early Christian Book-Production: Papyri & Manuscripts, in: Cambridge History of the Bible, vol. 2, Cambridge 1969, 59–60, who notes examples of papyrus manuscripts already 250 years old which were used again for new documents in the 1st-cent. BCE. Closer to our texts and their world, one may of course refer to Jer. 32:9–14 on which Y. Nadelman (Israel Antiquities Authority, Jerusalem) commented: «We can infer that important documents (though it is not clear if this particular deed was written on parchment or papyrus) were carefully stored in pottery jars (as also found in Qumran) and not necessarily just stored on a shelf» The open copy was the less authoritative one: while it could be read and copied at will, the sealed authoritative copy could not be tampered with. In theory the open copy could wear out and the sealed copy opened. This would present a relative pristine original document, extending the life span of the actual original document.»
peoples mentioned most often in the lists: The terms «Amorite(s)» and «Hittite(s)» were borrowed from Assyro-Babylonian geographical terminology where Amurr and Hatti (leftovers of long-gone political realities of the 1nd-millennium BCE) designate the whole area of Syria and Palestine down to the 6th-cent. BCE. «The Perizzite(s)» derive from a formerly sociological or «socio-ecological» designation for rural folk living outside an urban environment in fringe area villages as peasants and pastoral nomads. «The Jebusite(s)» present a tricky case and it remains somewhat hypothetical to pinpoint the precise origin of this pseudo-ethnic term. The following scenario is plausible although impossible to prove: «The Jebusite(s)» became associated with Jerusalem because of a conspicuous topographical feature near the town which was called «the shoulder of the Jebusite» (Josh. 15:8, 18:16). The latter must have been a conspicuous man from the small town of Jebus situated in Benjaminite area somewhat north of Jerusalem (Josh. 18:28, Judg. 19:10). Only very late glosses identify Jebus or «the city of the Jebusite(s)» with Jerusalem (Judg. 19:10, 1 Chr. 11:4f). But no ethnically distinct Jebusite people ever inhabited the city of Jerusalem and its surroundings, and the city was never called «Jebus» in actual history. Neither the so-called Succession story (2 Sam. 9–11, Kgs. 2) nor the book of Kings nor any potentially «pre-exilic» prophetic tradition (Ez. 16:3, 45) know anything about Jebusites in Jerusalem.

There remain «the Canaanite(s)». The use of this term in biblical historiography is far better explained by the persistent use of the geographical term «Canaan» for either Sidonian surroundings or the country as a whole (see above) than by far-fetched references to isolated 1nd-millennium BCE texts mentioning «Canaanites» here and there without attaching a definitely ethnic meaning to the term. However, how should we understand (a) the renewed extension of the term «Canaan» to the country as a whole, including southern Palestine, and (b) the strong anti-Canaanite strive of many texts? To my understanding, the answers to both questions lie in the political and social history of the region during the early Persian period.

4. «Canaanite» (Phoenician) commercial expansion during the early Persian period

The biblical extension of the term «Canaan» from Sidonian territory to all Palestine west of the Jordan river parallels the gradual expansion of the Phoenician-Philistine trade network and territorial control over considerable parts of coastal Palestine and the Jordan valley from the 7th to the 4th cent. BCE. While in the 7th cent. the city of Tyre controlled the northern Palestinian coast and the province of Dor, Sidonian control in the 5th cent. reached down to the province of Jaffa including the whole Sharon plain. The remaining territories to the south belonged to the cities of Ashdod, Ashkelon and Gaza. Ashdod and Gaza are old Philistine towns which retained their autonomy during the Persian period. In contrast, Philistine Ashkelon was largely destroyed by the Babylonians in 605 BCE, but founded anew by Tyrian colonist merchants probably in the late 6th cent. BCE. Although Sidonian, Tyrian and «Philistine» merchants were practically engaged in a strong commercial competition, they could all be considered «Canaanites» of the same ilk from a more removed Judean perspective. Zeph. 2:5 simply terms «Canaan» the land of the Philistines because of its commercial activities.

«Canaan» is associated with treacherous scales in Hos. 12:8, which is probably the oldest «socio-cultural» anti-Canaanism in the Bible (see also Is. 23:11). In a number of texts «Canaanites» just means «merchants» (see Is. 23:8 Tyre, Job 40:30; Prov. 31:24), similarly «people of Canaan» (Zeph. 1:11, where Philistines might be concerned). In Judean perception, the gradual development of a Phoenician-driven commercial network all over the country crystallized in the shaping of an imaginary collective identity («Canaanites» = «Philicians» = «merchants» = «prostitutes» = «Canaanites»). The gradual expansion of Phoenician commercial activity was gradually perceived as «Canaanites» presence all over the coastal strip of Palestine and, to a lesser extent, in the Jordan valley. The impossibility of the Jeru-

36 H.M. NIEHMANN, Das Ende des Volkes der Perizieten. Uber soziale Wandlungen Israels im Spiegel einer Begriffsgruppe: ZAW 105 (1993) 233–257. Gen. 13:7 perceives the country's population to be composed of (urban) «Canaanites» and (non-urban) «Perizitites», a division reminiscent of the Late Bronze age perception of urban inhabitants of Canaan and non-urban Shasu. This remark does not claim either direct sociological or (obviously) ethnic continuity between Shasu and «Perizitites» but draws attention to the recurrence of stereotyped categorization.


39 Deut. 16:29; 17:4 may even call Babylonia a land of Canaan (i.e. a merchants' land).

40 A Swiss citizen may experience the reality of such collective identities when traveling abroad, since Swiss people are easily considered to be farmers and (I) bankers. It is not always recognized that in 1995 half a million inhabitants of Switzerland who are neither farmers nor bankers depended on social welfare. Jewish people are particularly aware of such collective stereotyping.
salemite establishment to compete with this «Canaanite» network probably fostered a growing anti-Canaanite aversion in Judah and particularly in Jerusalem. The antagonism may have been rooted in a socio-economic and cultural conflict, it was at the same time perceived in religious terms (see, e.g., the Sabbath incident related in Neh. 13:16–22).

In such a context neither the emergence of a pseudo-ethnonym «Canaanites» in Persian period Judah nor its use in contemporary biblical historiography should come as a surprise. A canaan is however in order: As we have seen, biblical historiography considers to a large extent the Canaanite(s) to be a phenomenon of the past. Moreover, the Canaanite(s) as we meet them in biblical historiography are not described as merchants but in rather general terms as urban citizens. Thus we have to look for complementary arguments in order to account (a) for the specifically historiographical connotation of Canaanites as pre-Israelite inhabitants and (b) for the religious polemics against the rituals and practices of the Canaanite(s) and other pre-Israelite peoples.

5. «Canaanite» religious practices?
We have found anti-Canaanite religious polemic in Exod. 34:12ff., Deut. 12, and Lev. 18. This is not the place to undertake a detailed historical study of all the rituals and practices mentioned in these texts. A reference to Ez. 16 might suffice to underline that the polemic against the so-called pre-Israelite «abominations» is first and foremost a witness to an inner-Judahite religious conflict which may have started in the later 7th cent. but certainly lasted throughout the Persian period. This process witnessed the gradual development of a rhetoric of exclusion which projected an actual inner-Judean conflict onto a historiographical screen which mirrored the conflict in terms of a pre-historic/antagonism between Israel and Canaan.41

I would not dare to maintain that all the «abominations» were in fact current practice among 7th–5th-cent. inhabitants of Judah. We should probably distinguish between the mostly sexual taboos listed in Lev. 18, the cultic regulations of Exod. 34 and Deut. 12 and the prohibition of marriage with pre-Israelites in Deut. 7:3ff. According to current histori-

cal evidence and general anthropological considerations, most of the practices prohibited in Lev. 18 must have been as exceptional in Egyptian as in Palestinian culture and equally exceptional in Judah. The reference to Egyptians and pre-Israelite inhabitants of Canaan simply serves to reinforce a list of traditional taboos. In contrast, most cultic practices mentioned in Exod. 34 and Deut. 12 were traditional cultic behaviour followed from centuries ago all over the Levant. From a historical point of view, they are neither specifically «Canaanite» nor specifically «Israelite» but simply traditional Syro-Palestinian practices. To declare them «Canaanite», pre-Israelite or characteristic of the non-Israelite inhabitant of the land (Exod. 34:12, 15) is a rhetorical device of Judean historiographers and propagandists whose aim was to legitimate their own, particular socio-religious program.

What program? The claim of post-exilic returnees from Babylon for the land of Judah (Yehud) under the exclusive lead of the Jerusalem temple administration, and their claim for the inheritance of «Israel» is most probably the historical constellation which generated the matrix of biblical anti-Canaanite cultural and religious polemic.42

6. Post-exilic restoration in Judah
Many details of the complex history of the return of Judean exiles from Babylonia to Judah during the Persian period remain to be elucidated. The general outline of the process is however clearly discernible from the biblical texts, which for this period contain most relevant source material: The Babylonian destructions and successive exiles of 598, 587 and 582 BCE had impoverished but never emptied the land of Judah.43 When descendants of the exiles returned to Jerusalem in several movements from the late 6th until the end of the 5th cent. BCE under the protectorship of the Achaemenid kings, most of them had no personal acquaintance with the land and its customs but a rather clear religious identity shaped in the Babylonian diaspora which entitled them to a claim for leadership in Jerusalem or, at least, for the right to settle freely


42 This had already been noted by J. VAN SETERS, The Terms «Amorites» and «Hittites» in the Old Testament: VT 22 (1972) 64–81, esp. 68; see now BEN ZVI, Inclusion (n. 3).

in Judaean territory. After a para-monarchical experiment under Zerubabel towards the end of the 6th cent. BCE⁴⁴, Jerusalem witnessed to the rise and establishment of a new polity which scholars have come to term a "citizen-temple community" by analogy with other, comparable polities of the time.⁴⁵ The protagonists of this community found themselves confronted with competing claims (descendants of Israel) in the northern part of the country, particularly in Samaria, inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem whose forefathers had never left the country. Against these indigenous who had not gone the way of exile the returnees claimed to be the real inheritors of the divine promises to Israel (cf. Ez. 11:14ff., Jer. 24). They also had to overcome considerable economical difficulties with their project of restoring Jerusalem and its temple (cf. the books of Haggai and Ezra), not least against the Phoenician commercial interests meanwhile netted over the country, but also against indigenous people less enthusiastic or openly hostile to the centralizing restoration project. It was thus felt necessary to focus all the energies upon what was designed to be the religious and economical center of the new polity: Jerusalem and its temple.

It comes as no surprise that the god who had chosen that place to put his name there claims himself not to have anything in common with the gods of the country - and least with its goddesses - in the rhetoric of Deuteronomist historiographers and propagandists. To the protagonists of the new polity, the local sanctuaries they met would only distract the members of the families related to the "citizen-temple community" from their exclusive bounds with YHWH and the Jerusalem temple. By consequence, these sanctuaries and cult places had - if possible - to be destroyed, alternatively, to be avoided together with all indigenous cults, rituals and oracular practices. It may well be that some of the respective practices looked rather primitive and outdated to the more enlightened theologians among the returnees⁴⁶, although we may safely doubt that the latter's call to banishment was primarily motivated by theology.

⁴⁵ See now C.C. CARTER, The Emergence of Yehud in the Persian Period. A Social and Demographic Study (JLOT: S 294), Sheffield 1999, with critical comments on the "citizen-temple-community" model (which is here retained for convenience only, since Carter does not provide an alternative shorthand).
⁴⁶ An ever interesting feature of Deuteronomy is the simultaneous use of a explicit Exodus rhetoric as a foundation of religious exclusivism (ad extremum) and intra-communal (brotherhood) solidarity (ad interum). The contemporary reader cannot avoid thinking of the Muslim brothers as an analogue.

7. Looking back from the Ezra experience

The plausibility of this suggested background to Deuteronomistic anti-Canaanite polemic may perhaps be confirmed by a reference to a famous incident which is said to have occurred in the context of Ezra's reform. Ezra was of course another well-known returnee from Babylon. Chap. 9 of the book of Ezra opens with the statement that the returnees (lay people, priests and levites) had mixed up with the indigenous population:

"The people of Israel, including priests and Levites, had not kept themselves apart from the foreign population and from the abominable practices of

⁴⁸ "In den allermeisten Fällen sind die Gebote bsw. Aussagen über eine Vernich- tung der Landesbewohner ausdrücklich auf die Landerverzugszeit unter Mose bzw. Josua fixiert. Sie gelten nur für diese Periode und gehören für die eigentlichen Leser zur erschienen und einzutretenden Urzeit" (ibid. 13c). The problem remains that the "eigen- lichen Leser" are not the only, and no more the actual readers of the texts (cf. Part I, n. 64). According to W. HORBURY, Expropriation and Excommunication: VT 35 (1985) 19–38, the biblical bērem could be re-interpreted in terms of expulsion and confiscation of property in late Second Temple times.
The «Canaanites» and other «pre-Israelite» peoples

The «Canaanites» and other «pre-Israelite» peoples

The Canaanite(s), the Hittite(s), the Perizzite(s), the Jebusite(s), the Ammonite(s), the Moabite(s), the Egyptian(s), and the Amorite(s). They have taken women of these nations as wives for themselves and for their sons, so that the holy seed has become mixed with the foreign population; and the leaders and magistrates have been the chief offenders» (Ezra 9:11). 

Ezra reacts with ritual penance, and his prayer repeats the already well-known prohibition:

«We have neglected the commands which thou gavest through thy servants the prophets, when thou saidst: The land which you are entering and will possess is a polluted land, polluted by the foreign population with their abominable practices, which have made it unclean from end to end. Therefore, do not give your daughters in marriage to their sons, and do not marry your sons to their daughters, and never seek their welfare or prosperity. Thus you will be strong and enjoy the good things of the land, and pass it on to your children as an everlasting possession» (Ezra 9:11-12).

The argument is limpid: Either the pollution remains, in which case Israel would again lose the land; or the polluting arrangements are canceled in the interest of keeping the «rest of Israel» alive in the country. Ezra is joined by a very great crowd, and hope arises from a renewal of the covenant with YHWH and the sending away of all the foreign women together with their children.

Deut. 7 in all probability predates Ezra 9-10 and may be considered as the latter text’s ideological starting point. The cultical-ideological term «holy seeds» is as unknown to Deuteronomy as Ezra’s (more Priestly) pollution ideology. Interestingly, the Ezra list mixes peoples known from the past with peoples of the present (the Ammonites, Moabites and Egyptians). Among the peoples living in Palestine at that time, one would expect the Idumaeans/Edomites and the Philistines to be equally mentioned. Since this is not the case, we may have to conclude that the peoples of the (imagined) past were still considered to be present, so that the Philistines might be included among the Canaanites and the Edomites among the Hittites. At the same time, it is clear from the context that Israel’s earlier laxist attitude towards the peoples of the past is thought of as a model not to imitate (a storical anti-paradigm).

The parallel story of Neh. 9-10 shows rather clearly that the reasons for the Judean «citizen-temple community» to dissociate itself from the indigenous population were economical and perhaps political as well as religious or ideological. Given the claim of the new polity, the antagonism was almost inevitable. While the practical implementation of disassociating measures served the needs of the new polity’s structural consolidation, the ideology of essential otherness and separation contributed to shape post-exilic «Israel»’s collective identity. We now may conclude that the fictitious historiographical concept of «the Canaanite(s)» and other «pre-Israelite» peoples was one of the most important pieces serving this clear-cut self-definition of post-exilic «Israel».

VI. Conclusions

As historians, Bible scholars or theologians, it is not our duty either to condemn or to legitimate the past – nor, of course, to use the past for legitimating the present –, but to understand or rather to interpret it with the ultimate aim of contributing to the humanization of the present and the future. It is hoped that studies such as the above might contribute, be it only a little, to that aim. I shall therefore conclude by stating a few implications of this paper’s argument for the questions and problems outlined in the introduction.

It should have become clear that new approaches to the history of ancient Palestine are urgently needed. Too obviously, the biblical master story has had its time for shaping the essence of that history but should today be considered first and foremost for what it essentially is, namely a historiographic construct of the Persian period. As such, we certainly deal with a most valuable and indispensable source for understanding the formation of nascent Judaism but should not expect any longer – unless tight argument would prove otherwise for one or another particular textual segment – that this source might tell us much about early 1st-millennium, let alone 1IInd-millennium BCE Palestine.

As we have seen, scholars have long considered the history of late 1IInd-millennium and 1st-millennium BCE Palestine as a dominion of the biblical master story. One may reasonably affirm that by doing so they have to a considerable extent invented Ancient Israel along the master

49 The reference is to Lev. 18:24 and Deut. 7:1-4, 11:8f., 23:4-7 and considers Moses as the first of the (dtr) prophets, but see also Deut. 36:17ff.

50 If Yehud was as small and as poor as the archaeological data suggest, and if members of the gēlab community found themselves in some cases residing within other provinces of the Persian empire, then the need for both ritual purity and ethnic boundaries became all the more imperative. The texts of the Priestly source/editor, the Holiness code, and Ezra–Nehemiah reflect a reality of survival by self-definition (CARTER, op. cit. [n. 45], 315).

51 On this issue, see BEN ZVI, op. cit. (n. 3).
story's scenario.52 Once this is recognized, one further step could be to maintain - as has been done recently by K. Whitelam53 - that the invention of Ancient Israel during a century of scholarship has led to a partial silencing of the Palestinian past. To recognize the biblicalist bias of much of 20th-century historiography on Ancient Israel and related archaeological research does not mean that one should have to subscribe to all of Whitelam's claims regarding the political contexts and implications of that scholarship. It is enough honesty just to admit that contemporary historical research needs a thorough re-orientation, both in method and scope.

With the rise of a Palestinian national entity and the subsequent establishment of a Palestinian state, no doubt we shall observe among other things the elaboration of various alternative histories of the region. One may expect and fear the offshoot of counter-histories which will simply exchange one nationalistic ideology for another. As a matter of fact, such counter-histories have already a long existence in the country, although rarely written or published, inaccessible for most Western scholars. Today the claim for a counter-history and archaeology without the Bible54 is raised with growing emphasis. This should not be confused with the naive claim of less-inspired Palestinian nationalists who would deduce their nation's right to live in the land from a priori priority of Philistine settlement in the area, an argument which cannot, of course, be of any weight either in the historical or in the political debate. Inverting names will definitely not change the game.

From the somewhat detached point of view of a scholar, it goes without saying that the alternative history we should look for is not simply a, say, Philistine-centered version of the story. Writing a history of the Philistine city-states of the southern coastal plain would certainly be a very worthwhile undertaking, all the more since recent archaeological and historical research has considerably added to our knowledge of this particular history.55 But as long as we do not think through the funda-

52 For a thorough critique of this approach, see P.R. DAVIES, In Search of Ancient Israel (JSOT S 148), Sheffield 1992.


55 T. and M. DOTMAN, People of the Sea. The Search for the Philistines, New York 1992. The title of this synthesis takes over an Egyptian term used for a coalition of various invading groups, including the Philistines. It stresses the foreign origins of the Philistines although the book not only deals with origins but largely with the Philistines' later history in the southern coastal plain of Palestine. The problem is not dis-

mental methodological issues at stake, a Philistine history alongside the traditional model will result not so much in a different history, but simply in another version of the ever-known master story. If a Philistine history be written in our days56, it should at the same time participate in the new historiographical re-orientation57 such as is beginning to take shape with the recent publication of monographs on, e.g., Edomite58, Moabite59, Ammonite60 and early Arab history.61

What remains to be called for is an integrated regional history of a broad scope62, which would take into account Palestine as a whole, albeit generally fragmented and rarely unified, and eventually consider the land itself as the subject of history in the terms of Fernand Braudel's longue durée.63 Such a shift would lead us from an essentially nationalist, since nation-oriented, model to a truly alternative, eco-geographical paradigm of history-writing. To be sure, such a history of Palestine will never be written without the Bible, but it will put the Bible in its proper context and perspective.

similar to that of Israelite origins and history: the Philistines, too, would merit to be considered more than just foreign invaders, since the bulk of the Philistine population was probably as indigenous in Palestine as the Israelite and Judean peoples, too. Cf. the studies by SUNDBERG and STONE mentioned in Part I, n. 43.


62 To some extent, such a history may be discerned in H. WIEBBERT's monumental handbook on the archaeology of the region: Palästina im vorhellenistischen Zeit (Handbuch der Archäologie), München 1988.

63 F. BRAUDEL, La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II, Paris 1949, 1990.
For the present, there still remains the more immediate task, to deconstruct and oppose ideologies which claim all the land for one nation alone. Exegetes and theologians, whose job it is to investigate and explain the meaning of biblical texts to present-day believers and skeptics alike, have a moral duty to re-contextualize the biblical portrait of the purported pre-Israelite peoples and to make clear its fundamentally ahistorical and ideological nature.\(^{44}\) One may wish that the re-contextualization of the biblical master story might contribute to a better understanding of the region's historical past and further the conviction that today's problems and antagonisms are not the ones fixed up in biblical stereotypes.