

**Zeitschrift:** Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie = Revue philosophique et théologique de Fribourg = Rivista filosofica e teologica di Friburgo = Review of philosophy and theology of Fribourg

**Band:** 46 (1999)

**Heft:** 3

**Artikel:** The "Canaanites" and other "pre-Israelite" peoples in story and history (Part I)

**Autor:** Uehlinger, Christoph

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-761236>

### **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

### **Conditions d'utilisation**

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

### **Terms of use**

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

**Download PDF:** 22.01.2026

**ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>**

CHRISTOPH UEHLINGER

# The «Canaanites» and other «pre-Israelite» peoples in Story and History

(Part I)\*

## *I. 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 II<sup>nd</sup> and the I<sup>st</sup> 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 1<sup>st</sup> cent. CE, the historicist approach to the Bible, and particularly to its historiographical parts, attained its fullest impact with the development of modern European historical criticism.

\* This article is based upon a paper presented at an international symposium on «Theology in the Palestinian Context», 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 60<sup>th</sup> 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, Adrian 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 adventure 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 period<sup>1</sup> as well as a growing corpus of so-called external evidence produced by archaeological excavations, which sometimes was in clear contradiction to the biblical text<sup>2</sup>, 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)<sup>3</sup> that could be compared to that of the greater

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> 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 Akish/Ikausu (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 IIInd-early Ist-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<sup>4</sup> which all claim to expound the «History of Israel»<sup>5</sup> but read like rationalized paraphrases of the Bible's putatively «historical books». This phenomenon has been aptly termed «sub-deuteronomistic historiography» by Manfred Weippert, a leading authority in the field.<sup>6</sup>

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».<sup>7</sup> This

inscriptions from state monuments: cf. J. RENZ/W. RÖLLIG, *Handbuch der althebräischen Epigraphik*. Bd. II/1, Darmstadt 1995, 3.

<sup>4</sup> To name 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, so to speak) dealt extensively with matters of methodology and certainly diverged on numerous issues. Two generations later, they look much closer to one another than their students could have imagined at the time.

<sup>5</sup> 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. AHLSTRÖM'S *History of Ancient Palestine from the Palaeolithic Period to Alexander's Conquest* (JSOT.S 146), Sheffield 1993.

<sup>6</sup> M. WEIPPERT, *Geschichte Israels am Wendepunkt: ThRu* 58 (1993) 71–103, esp. 73), but see already M. LIVERANI, *Memorandum on the Approach to Historiographic Texts: Or.* n.s. 42 (1973) 178–194 and the article mentioned below, n. 19.

<sup>7</sup> 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 cent., 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-cent. 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, 41–64.

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 a «New Biblical Historiography»<sup>8</sup>. At the same time, more and more scholars engaged in research on the history of late-IIInd- to Ist-milennium Palestine argue for the adoption of a new historiographical methodology *tout court* which could help them leave the Procrustean bed of the Bible's master story.<sup>9</sup> Their new historiography should be foremost based on the findings of archaeology (i.e. material culture, texts and iconography). These «primary sources» 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.<sup>10</sup> In Palestine/Israel, archaeology has

<sup>8</sup> The term is M.Z. BRETTLE'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.

<sup>9</sup> E.A. KNAUF, *From History to Interpretation*, in: D. Edelman (ed.), *The Fabric of History. Text, Artifact and Israel's Past (JSOT.S 127)*, Sheffield 1991, 26–64 is essential reading for matters of methodology.

<sup>10</sup> For a general framework, see B. TRIGGER, *Alternative archaeologies: nationalist, colonialist, imperialist: Man* 19 (1984) 355–370. The Middle Eastern issue is exposed in detail by N.A. SILBERMAN, *Between Past and Present. Archaeology, Ideology, and Nationalism in the Modern Middle East*, New York 1989; more recently see also *id./D. SMALL* (eds.), *The Archaeology of Israel. Constructing the Past, Interpreting the Present (JSOT.S 237)*, Sheffield 1997; L. MESKELL

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.<sup>11</sup> 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 undisputable 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

(ed.), *Archeology Under Fire. Nationalism, politics and heritage in the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East*, London-New York 1998.

<sup>11</sup> N.A. SILBERMAN, *Power, Politics and the Past: The Social Construction of Antiquity in the Holy Land*, in: T.E. Levy (ed.), *The Archaeology of Society in the Holy Land*, London 1995, 9–23 sketches the shift from imperial to nationalist interests. On the latter, see further M. BROSHI, *Religion, Ideology, and Politics and their Impact on Palestinian Archaeology: The Israel Museum Journal* 7 (1987) 17–32; Y. SHAVIT, «Truth Shall Spring Out of the Earth»: The Development of Jewish Popular Interest in Archaeology of Eretz-Israel: *Cathedra* 44 (1987) 27–54; A. KEMPINSKI, *Die Archäologie als bestimmender Faktor in der israelischen Gesellschaft und Kultur: Judaica* 45 (1989) 2–20; N.A. SILBERMAN, *The Politics of the Past: Archaeology and Nationalism in the Eastern Mediterranean: Mediterranean Quarterly* 1 (1990) 99–110; ID., *Desolation and Restoration: The Impact of a Biblical Concept on Near Eastern Archaeology: BA* 54 (1991) 76–86; A. ELON, *Politics and Archaeology*, in: SILBERMAN/SMALL (n. 10), 34–47; Y. SHAVIT, *Archaeology, Political Culture, and Culture in Israel*, in: *ibid.*, 48–61. It would be unfair to consider Israeli archaeology exclusively as an instrument of Jewish nationalism. The silencing of (non-Israelite) Palestinian past is above all a product of Western Christian theologians.

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

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.<sup>13</sup>

## 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.<sup>14</sup>
- 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

<sup>12</sup> Cf. A. DE PURY, Landesbesiedlung und Landanspruch im Gelobten Land. Historische Erwägungen zu einem territorialen Konflikt der Gegenwart: *Zeitschrift für Mission* 8 (1982) 18–30; F. SMYTH-FLORENTIN, Les mythes illégitimes. Essai sur la «terre promise» (Entrée libre, 30), Genève 1993.

<sup>13</sup> See N. LOHFINK, Landeroberung und Heimkehr. Hermeneutisches zum heutigen Umgang mit dem Josuabuch: *JBTb* 12 (1998) 3–24.

<sup>14</sup> 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 sack 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 rites 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<sup>15</sup> 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.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> 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).

<sup>16</sup> 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.



### 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 culturo-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»<sup>17</sup>), and *History* (i.e. the con-

<sup>17</sup> Even if considerable parts of the above-mentioned biblical books aim at real historiography within the cultural and material constraints of their own spe-

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-IIInd- 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-IIInd- 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 cent. An outside observer of this intense and sometimes heated debate could assume Israelite origins to be the most important if not

cific historical context, the term «historical books» is misleading because of its different modern use. One would better name them «*storical* 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.<sup>18</sup> 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?<sup>19</sup>

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.<sup>20</sup> 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-

<sup>18</sup> 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.

<sup>19</sup> For a dissenting Italian voice that remained almost unheard, see M. LIVERANI, *Le «origine» d'Israele: progetto irrealizzabile di ricerca etnogenetica: RivBibIt* 28 (1980) 9–31.

<sup>20</sup> «The «first moment of true civilization», as Dhardwadker 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.<sup>21</sup>

### *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 Alt*<sup>22</sup> 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 inhabitants<sup>23</sup>, the model of peaceful infiltration is also strongly reminiscent of the Patriarchal narratives of the book of Genesis.<sup>24</sup> 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 monarchic or even exilic 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.

<sup>21</sup> See bibliography cited above, n. 7 and 11.

<sup>22</sup> *Die Landnahme der Israeliten in Palästina* (1925), in: *id.*, *Kleine Schriften zur Geschichte Israels I*, München 1953, 89–125 = *id.*, *Zur Geschichte des Volkes Israel. Eine Auswahl aus den «Kleinen Schriften»*, München 1979, 99–135 (Engl. translation in: *id.*, *Essays on Old Testament History and Religion*, Oxford 1966, 135–169); *id.*, *Erwägungen über die Landnahme der Israeliten in Palästina* (1939), in: *Kleine Schriften I*, 126–175 = *Zur Geschichte* 136–185. On Alt as a scholar, see R. SMEND, *Albrecht Alt (1883–1956): ZThK 81* (1984) 286–321 = *id.*, *Deutsche Alttestamentler in drei Jahrhunderten*, Göttingen 1989, 182–207, 316–321.

<sup>23</sup> 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 1920s at a time of increasing Zionist immigration» (op. cit. [n. 7], 74) is not very plausible when put against a map showing the Zionist immigration's settlement pattern.

<sup>24</sup> For a thorough critique of Alt's theory on patriarchal religion, see M. KÖCKERT, *Vätergott und Väterverheißungen. Eine Auseinandersetzung mit Albrecht Alt und seinen Erben (FRLANT 142)*, Göttingen 1988.

b. American scholars led by *William F. Albright*<sup>25</sup> 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, theologically 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.<sup>26</sup> 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 *Yohanan 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-

<sup>25</sup> On this most influential scholar, one should consult the collection of articles «Celebrating and examining W.F. Albright»: *BA* 56 (1993) 3–45 rather than hagiographies such as L. GLIDDEN RUNNING/D.N. FREEDMAN, *Albright – a Twentieth-Century genius*, New York 1975. See also G. VAN BEEK (ed.), *The scholarship of William Foxwell Albright: an appraisal*, Atlanta, GA 1989; B.O. LONG, *Historical Imaginings, Ideological Gestures: W.F. Albright and the «Reasoning Faculties of Man»*, in: SILBERMAN/SMALL (n. 11), 82–94; *id.*, *Planting and Reaping Albright: Politics, Ideology, and Interpreting the Bible*, University Park, PA 1997.

<sup>26</sup> 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.<sup>27</sup>

*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<sup>28</sup>, 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.<sup>29</sup>

*Norman K. Gottwald*<sup>30</sup> 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 limed 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 all too confined to theology, burnt 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 with «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 Ame-

<sup>27</sup> See Y. AHARONI, Nothing Early and Nothing Late: Re-Writing Israel's Conquest: *BA* 39 (1976) 55–76; his approach was still basically followed by A. KEMPINSKI, How profoundly «Canaanized» Were the Early Israelites? *ZDPV* 108 (1992) 1–7. On Aharoni, note the biographical sketch by O. KEEL in: *Judaica* 32 (1976) 70–75, 113–118.

<sup>28</sup> The Hebrew Conquest of Palestine: *BA* 25 (1962) 66–87 = *Biblical Archaeologist Reader* III (1970) 100–126; *id.*, *The Tenth Generation*, Baltimore 1973.

<sup>29</sup> 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 Comparativism 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).

<sup>30</sup> *The Tribes of Yahweh. A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250–1050 B.C.E.*, Maryknoll 1979.

rica 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.<sup>31</sup> 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 IIInd-millennium history of the Middle East.

Clearly, «the welter of competing claims, the cacophony of methods, betrays the cumulation of the decades.»<sup>32</sup> 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 IIInd- 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.<sup>33</sup> This

<sup>31</sup> See the convenient summary in: E.A. KNAUF, *Die Umwelt des Alten Testaments* (Neuer Stuttgarter Kommentar – Altes Testament 29), Stuttgart 1994, 68–71.

<sup>32</sup> HALPERN (n. 29), 64.

<sup>33</sup> M. KOCHAVI (ed.), *Judaea, Samaria and the Golan Archaeological Survey 1967–1968*, Jerusalem 1972; I. FINKELSTEIN, *The Archaeology of Israelite Settle-*

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*<sup>34</sup>, 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 epigons.

Today no serious scholar maintains the idea of an Israelite conquest, let alone a 12th-cent. 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.<sup>35</sup> 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.<sup>36</sup>

ment, Jerusalem 1988; *id./Z. LEDERMAN*, Highlands of Many Cultures. The Southern Samaria Survey. The Sites (Tel Aviv University. Sonia and Marco Nadler Institute of Archaeology. Monograph no. 14), Tel Aviv 1997; A. ZERTAL, The Manasseh Hill Country Survey: The Shechem Syncline, Haifa 1992 (Hebrew); *id.*, The Manasseh Hill Country Survey: The Eastern Valleys and the Fringe of the Desert, Haifa 1996 (Hebrew).

<sup>34</sup> I. FINKELSTEIN/N. NA'AMAN (eds.), *From Nomadism to Monarchy. Archaeological and Historical Aspects of Early Israel*, Jerusalem & Washington, DC, 1994.

<sup>35</sup> For an overview, see H. WEIPPERT, *Palästina in vorhellenistischer Zeit* (Handbuch der Archäologie: Vorderasien II/1), München 1988, 352–363.

<sup>36</sup> See Sh. BUNIMOVITZ, *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.<sup>37</sup> When first used in an inscription of the Egyptian king Merneptah 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 cent. BCE transitional process.<sup>38</sup> 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.<sup>39</sup>

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.»<sup>40</sup> The present contribution should confirm this evaluation and consider some implications for a new ap-

History of Canaan in the Third and Second Millenia BCE, *ibid.*, 150–178; *id.*, The Rise of Early Israel: Archaeology and Long-Term History, in: AHITUV/OREN (n. 7), 7–39.

<sup>37</sup> B. HALPERN, *The Emergence of Israel in Canaan*, Chico, CA 1983; D.V. EDELMAN (ed.), *Toward a Consensus on the Emergence of Israel in Canaan* (SJOT 1991,2), Aarhus 1991.

<sup>38</sup> In this respect, the title of Finkelstein's seminal work cited in n. 33 reflects obsolete terminology.

<sup>39</sup> On the issue of terminology, note WHITELAM (n. 7), 37ff.

<sup>40</sup> FINKELSTEIN/NA'AMAN (n. 34), 13.

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 monography 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.<sup>41</sup> Designed as a study in social history, Dietrich's book – which incidentally appeared the same year as Gottwald's – represented a welcome addition to the all 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 «a highly explosive opposition of strongly diverging *social, ethnic* and *cultural* structures»<sup>42</sup>. 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».<sup>43</sup> It is more than doubtful that

<sup>41</sup> W. DIETRICH, *Israel und Kanaan. Vom Ringen zweier Gesellschaftssysteme* (Stuttgarter Bibel-Studien 94), Stuttgart 1979.

<sup>42</sup> *Op. cit.*, 7 (emphasis added).

<sup>43</sup> On ethnicity, see F. BARTH, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*, Boston 1969; W.W. ISAJIW, *Definitions of Ethnicity: Ethnicity 1* (1974) 111–124; C. KEYES (ed.), *Ethnic Change*, Seattle 1981; R. AUGER et al. (eds.), *Ethnicity and Culture*, Calgary 1987; M. BANKS, *Ethnicity: Anthropological Constructions*, London 1995. On ethnicity, culture and archaeology, see S.J. SHENNAN (ed.), *Archaeological Approaches to Cultural Identity*, London 1989; M. WENDOWSKI, *Archäologische Kultur und Ethnische Einheit. Möglichkeiten und Grenzen der Identifikation* (Arbeiten zur Urgeschichte des

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-peoples» issue)<sup>44</sup>, the only possible exception being remains of distinctive foodways.<sup>45</sup> Finkelstein, who in 1988 still understood the settlement process of Iron age I as «the Israelite settlement», freely acknowledges today that «the equation of Iron I highlands material culture with an Israelite 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.<sup>46</sup> Third, one cannot

Menschen, 19), Frankfurt am Main 1995; S. JONES, *Archaeology and Ethnicity. A Theoretical Perspective*. London-New York 1996; *id.*, *The Archaeology of Ethnicity. Reconstructing Identities in the Past and Present*, London 1997. For studies exclusively concerned with Palestine, see K.A. KAMP/N. YOFFEE, *Ethnicity in Ancient Western Asia During the Early Second Millennium B.C. Archaeological Assessments and Ethnoarchaeological Prospectives: BASOR* 237 (1980) 85–109; Sh. BUNIMOVITZ, *Problems in the «Ethnic» Identification of the Philistine Material Culture: Tel Aviv* 17 (1990) 210–222; B.J. STONE, *The Philistines and Acculturation: Culture Change and Ethnic Continuity in the Iron Age: BASOR* 298 (1995) 7–32, and literature mentioned in the following note. For comparison, see J.M. HALL, *Approaches to Ethnicity in the Early Iron Age of Greece*, in: N. SPENCER (ed.), *Time, Tradition and Society in Greek Archaeology: bridging the «great divide»*, London-New York 1995, 6–17.

<sup>44</sup> On this debated issue, see D.L. ESSE, *The Collared Pithos at Megiddo: Ceramic Distribution and Ethnicity: JNES* 51 (1992) 81–103; W.G. DEVER, *Cultural Continuity, Ethnicity in the Archaeological Record, and the Question of Israelite Origins: ErIs* 24 (1993) 22\*–33\*; *id.*, «Will the Real Israel Please Stand Up?» Part I: *Archaeology and Israelite Historiography: BASOR* 297 (1995) 61–80; *id.*, *Ceramics, Ethnicity, and the Question of Israel's Origins: BA* 58 (1995) 200–213; Sh. BUNIMOVITZ/A. YASUR-LANDAU, *Philistine and Israelite Pottery: A Comparative Approach to the Question of Pots and People: Tel Aviv* 23 (1996) 88–101; I. FINKELSTEIN, *Ethnicity and Origin of the Iron I Settlers in the Highlands of Canaan: Can the Real Israel Stand Up?: BA* 59 (1996) 198–212; *id.*, *Pots and People Revisited: Ethnic Boundaries in the Iron Age I*, in: SILBERMAN/SMALL (n. 10), 216–237.

<sup>45</sup> B. HESSE, *Pig Lovers and Pig Haters: Patterns of Palestinian Pork Production: Journal of Ethnobiology* 10 (1990) 195–225; *id.*/P. WAPNISH, *Can Pig Remains Be Used for Ethnic Diagnosis in the Ancient Near East?*, in: SILBERMAN/SMALL (n. 10), 238–270.

<sup>46</sup> 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<sup>47</sup> 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 *inner-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.<sup>48</sup>

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.<sup>49</sup> 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-

Territorial States, in: T.E. Levy (ed.), *The Archaeology of Society in the Holy Land*, London 1995, 349–367.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. N.P. LEMCHE, *City-Dwellers or Administrators. Further Light on the Canaanites*, in: A. LEMAIRE/B. OTZEN (eds.), *History and Traditions of Early Israel* (FS E. Nielsen; SVT 50), Leiden 1993, 76–89.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. recently T.J. SCHNEIDER, *Rethinking Jehu: Biblica 77* (1996) 100–107; W.M. SCHNIEDEWIND, *Tel Dan Stela: New Light on Aramaic and Jehu's Revolt: BASOR 302* (1996) 75–90.

<sup>49</sup> As a matter of fact, these label valuations are clearly transparent for the author's perception of his own, 20th-century socio-economic context.

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 «Canaanite») 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 abominable». 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.<sup>50</sup> 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

<sup>50</sup> D.R. HILLERS, *Analyzing the Abominable: our understanding of Canaanite religion*: *JQR* 75 (1985) 253–269; see also LONG, *op. cit.* (n. 25).

Age to Christianity)), Bible-trained scholars and theologians face obvious difficulties when approaching religions which the Bible considers to be abominable or obsolete.

Time and again these difficulties have led scholars to posit numerous fundamental oppositions between Canaanite and Israelite religion, such as «myth» vs. «(salvation) history», «nature- or fertility-oriented» vs. «society- or moral-oriented», «static» vs. «dynamic», «primitive or savage» vs. «humanistic or enlightened», «depraved» vs. «developing or developed», «oppressive» vs. «liberating» etc. Interestingly, these oppositions fall back on the scholarly perception of biblical texts themselves. They lead to circular argument whenever scholars distinguish *a priori* between «Canaanite» religious concepts and practices (e.g., sexual and fertility rites, human sacrifices, ancestor cults and divination by magical means) even when these are not explicitly (or at least, not exclusively) termed as such in the biblical texts, and other concepts and practices which they declare to be «truly Israelite». To take but one example, the book of the prophet Hosea contains numerous polemical passages against religious rites and practices. However, not once do the terms «Canaan» or «Canaanite» appear in this book in relation to specifically religious or ritual issues. Nevertheless, many scholars consider the prophet's polemics to be directed against Canaanite religious practices. A historical-critical reading of the book of Hosea should instead dispense itself with the label «Canaanite» (since this leads to an incorrect ethno-religious characterization of the conflict) and consider Hosea's religious polemics as a witness to an inner-Israelite conflict.<sup>51</sup> What biblical exegetes and historians of religion have long interpreted in terms of «Canaanite» religious beliefs and practices is today more and more understood as part of traditional *Israelite* and *Judahite* religion.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Cf. M. WEIPPERT, Synkretismus und Monotheismus. Religionsinterne Konfliktbewältigung im alten Israel, in: J. ASSMANN/D. HARTH (eds.), Kultur und Konflikt (ed. suhrkamp 1612 = ed. suhrkamp N.F. 612), Frankfurt a.M., 143–179 = *id.*, Jahwe und die anderen Götter. Studien zur Religionsgeschichte des antiken Israel in ihrem syrisch-palästinischen Kontext (FAT 18), Tübingen 1997, 1–24.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. S. ACKERMAN, Under every green tree. Popular religion in sixth-cent. Judah (HSM 46), Atlanta, GA, 1992; O. KEEL/Ch. UEHLINGER, Göttinnen, Götter und Gottessymbole. Neue Erkenntnisse zur Religionsgeschichte Kanaans und Israels aufgrund bislang unerschlossener ikonographischer Quellen (QD 124), Freiburg i.Br. 1992, 41997 (engl. Gods, Goddesses and the Image of God, Minneapolis & Edinburgh 1998).

### III. *The Story: Canaanites from Genesis to Judges*

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.<sup>53</sup>

#### 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-diluvial 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<sup>54</sup>! – 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.<sup>55</sup> Canaan thus represents from the beginning an almost tragical char-

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

<sup>54</sup> 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 Tread. African American Biblical Interpretation*, Minneapolis 1991, 127–145; F. DEIST, *The Dangers of Deuteronomy. A Page from the Reception of the Book*, in: F. García Martínez et al. (eds.), *Studies in Deuteronomy (FS C.J. Labuschagne; SVT 53)*, Leiden 1994, 13–30.

<sup>55</sup> 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)<sup>56</sup>, the Amorite(s), the Girgashite(s), the Hivite(s), the Arkite(s), the Sinite(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<sup>57</sup> while Gerar is situated at the north-eastern and Sodom, Gomorrah, Adma and Zeboyim 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 Harran, 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.

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

<sup>57</sup> The apparent tension between 10:18 mentioning Arvadites, Zemarites and Hamathites and Sidon as northern border of Canaanite territory may be resolved by the observation that 10:18 refers to itinerant merchants and displaced colonies 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 Perizzite(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.<sup>58</sup> 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 fourth 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. 9:4f.; 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 Gergashite(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)<sup>59</sup>, nor is the list of inhabitants homogeneous, since it mixes up tribal (nomadic) groups which later continued to live alongside Israel without challenging its 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 Heb» repeatedly honour the patriarch.

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

<sup>59</sup> 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 never 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. 23:23f., 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)<sup>60</sup>: 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

<sup>60</sup> For the snare topos, see further Deut. 7:16, Josh. 23:13, Judg. 2:3, Ps. 106:36.

Exod. 34, the sacrificial regulations Deut. 12 or the list of sexual taboos in Lev. 18).

As the story goes on, Israel will eventually be ensnared, but as attentive readers we are presumed to distinguish between God's commandments to Israel on the one hand, and various abominable practices on the other which the story ascribes to the sinful peoples of the land.

#### 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*<sup>61</sup>) 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 will 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<sup>62</sup>, but one should probably consider the different context as well: the eponymic 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:

<sup>61</sup> See above, n. 56.

<sup>62</sup> 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 Girgashite(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.<sup>63</sup> 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 possession» (Deut. 7:1–6, cf. vv. 17–26).

The leading motor 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

<sup>63</sup> The terminology used here is that of the so-called «ban» (*herem*). It refers to a practice attested outside Israel, most conspicuously in an inscription of the Moabite king Mesha, (mid-9th cent. BCE). See M. WEINFELD, The ban on the Canaanites in the Biblical codes and its historical development, in: LEMAIRE/OTZEN (n. 53), 142–160. 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 incitement to extermination should be read as a «narrative symbol for radical faith» 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 phraseology. As faithful readers inspired by Deuteronomy and Joshua have demonstrated time and again from the Hasmoneans 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 Gott», *ibid.* 13 –, then this should be rejected on moral grounds. – Note that the biblical *herem* could be reinterpreted in terms of expulsion and confiscation of property in late Second Temple times, cf. W. HORBURY, *Extirpation and Excommunication: VT 35* (1985) 19–38. This would seem to contradict a purely spiritual reading.

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 Perizzite(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<sup>64</sup>, 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 toto* 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

<sup>64</sup> Cf. G. BRAULIK, Die Völkervernichtung und die Rückkehr Israels ins Verheissungsland. Hermeneutische Bemerkungen zum Buch Deuteronomium, in: M. VERVENNE/J. LUST (eds.), Deuteronomy and Deuteronomic 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».<sup>65</sup> 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, Yibleam, Megiddo, Taanak and Dor (Josh. 17:11ff. = Judg. 1:27f.).

#### *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 coalition, not succeeding, however, in completely eliminating the lo-

<sup>65</sup> R. SMEND, *Das uneroberte Land*, in: G. Strecker (ed.), *Das Land Israel in biblischer Zeit (GTA 25)*, Göttingen 1983, 91–102 = *id.*, *Zur ältesten Geschichte Israels. Gesammelte Studien Bd. 2 (BevTh 100)*, München 1987, 217–228.

cal inhabitants.<sup>66</sup> This is particularly the case for territories in northern Palestine (Judg. 1:30ff.). But Gaza, Ashkelon and Ekron are also said to have remained unconquered, 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 Benjaminite 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 lives in Mount Lebanon from the mountain of Baal-Hermon to Lebo-Hamat. 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. 2:1.3–6).

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

<sup>66</sup> On this, see A.G. AULD, Judges 1 and History: a Reconsideration: VT 25 (1975) 261–286 = *id.*, Joshua Retold. Synoptic Perspectives, Edinburgh 1998, 70–101.

explicitly stated in Judg. 2. At this point, Deuteronomy's incitement has vanished in *utopia* and leaves the stage to a more ambiguous «historical» 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 led 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.<sup>67</sup>

#### 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 YHWH 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 YHWH 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

<sup>67</sup> See most recently P.D. GUEST, *Dangerous Liaisons in the Book of Judges: SJOT* 11 (1997) 241–269.



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 inheritants 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.<sup>68</sup> 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 legitimate their rejection of conubium. 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 overlordship (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 fulfilment of earlier promises to Abraham, Moses or Joshua.<sup>69</sup> 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.

<sup>68</sup> 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.

<sup>69</sup> On this, see again LOHFINK, *op. cit.* (n. 13).

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.<sup>70</sup> 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 polities appear on the stage, the old inhabitants of the land remain only as a rather amorphous, anonymous population, a kind of paria substratum 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.<sup>71</sup> 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)

<sup>70</sup> Peaceful relations between Israelites and *Amorites* are considered in 1 Sam. 7:14. Individual *Hittites* are mentioned as soldiers in David's entourage (Ahimelek in 1 Sam. 26:6, Urija 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 Arauna 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 Hittite(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 day» (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.

<sup>71</sup> 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».