CHAPTER 2

ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDS

2.1   Introduction

Archaeology is 'the study of the material remains of man's past'.[1] This includes all tangible manmade matter, such as texts written in ancient languages and iconography on, inter alia, stone, clay and papyrus, as well as buildings, sculpture, weapons, household items, religious artefacts and other.[2] The word means the analysis of everything ancient. In classical Greece it meant the study of ancient history. Chronicles of history on written records often need more specialised research to supplement the documentary evidence. Archaeology, covering a vast area of exploration, could be an auxiliary of history.[3]

Scholarly curiosity and the search for knowledge is a motivation for excavation.[4] Archaeology establishes the possibility for new images and a new concept of history. During the past century it furthermore contributed to a new Jewish tradition whereby its old sacred texts are interpreted and reinterpreted. Biblical and post-biblical archaeology is accepted by the Jewish public in Israel as a sanctioned and valuable discipline. Ancient excavated sites even became 'objects of secular-national pilgrimage'.[5] Israel itself has one of the longest excavation and subsequent scholarly research traditions. Apart from the critical analysis of research data, some of the basic questions regarding the interaction between material culture and historical texts have to be addressed. Clear correlations in this regard should be established between ethnicity and material-culture features. Scholars have observed that many artefacts, initially typified with the Israelites, could likewise be linked to neighbouring societies, demonstrating that the same items could have been used in different communities. Discussions on the methodology of effectively integrating textual and archaeological data have recently raised interest amongst concerned scholars.[6] William Dever,[7] however, is of the opinion that many biblical scholars refrain from referring to archaeological data. He takes a brief look at relatively recent publications of, inter alia, Gerstenberger,[8] Van der Toorn[9] and Ackerman.[10]

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[1] Van Beek 1962a:195.
[2] Van Beek 1962a:195. Archaeological artefacts are also known as "finds".
[3] Charles-Picard 1983:9.
[4] Biran 1994a:21.
[5] Shavit 1997:49-52.
[6] Silberman & Small 1997:17, 21, 25-26.
[7] Dever 2005:38, 43, 47, 51.
[8] Gerstenberger 2002.
[9] Van der Toorn 1994.
[10] Ackerman 1992.

Dever[11] observes that although Gerstenberger 'focuses admirably on family, clan, tribe … and on common social structure … he makes only minimum use of actual archaeological data'. Likewise, Van der Toorn 'adduces almost none of the rich archaeological data that we now possess', in contrast to 'Ackerman's treatment of both the textual and the archaeological evidence'. Dever thus comes to the conclusion that biblical scholars generally do not realise the "revolutionary potential" of archaeology. Similarly, not so many scholars are probably familiar with less sensational – but nevertheless significant – discoveries during the nineteenth century.[12]

Striking analogies between archaeological data and folklore[13] in the biblical texts indicate that the actual remains of early Israel have been revealed, disclosing a completely different picture to that which is generally accepted of the origins and early development of Israel.[14] The historicity of biblical accounts depends to a great extent on the aims of the compilers and editors.[15] In the reconstruction of biblical history the relation between text and artefact should be determined.[16] Yet, at the same time, it should be borne in mind that archaeology cannot "prove" the Hebrew Bible.[17] The first task of a biblical scholar in his or her research should be to focus on the primary data.[18] As a "legitimate component" of history, archaeological data are often all we have for understanding textual remains.[19] However, according to Zertal,[20] although archaeology uses modern technologies, 'many of its conclusions are drawn on the basis of intuition, rather than on objective measure'. In addition hereto, Halpern[21] indicates that text and artefact "encode intention". The contents of history can only be conjectured. Textual scholars have less access to the technologies for analysing ceramics than the archaeologists have for analysing text. They often rely on text to interpret their excavated data.

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[11] Dever 2005:62.

[12] The importance of Assyriology was widely acclaimed after the sensational announcements of George Smith, who read a paper to the Society of Biblical Archaeology in December 1872. In this paper he gave translations of a cuneiform account of the Flood. In a letter to the London *Daily Telegraph* in March 1875 he identified fragments of a creation account (Cathcart 1997:81). Assyriology is the scholarly study of the Assyrian literature, history and culture (Deist 1990:23). Cuneiform script is the wedge-shaped writing system on clay tablets, originally developed by die Sumerians in Mesopotamia from approximately 3000 BC (Kenyon 1987:184).

[13] Folklore: the beliefs, customs and anecdotes of a community that are passed on from one generation to another (Deist 1990:98).

[14] Dever 1997a:21, 27.

[15] Bartlett 1989:91.

[16] Silberman & Small 1997:17.

[17] Dever 1997b:301.

[18] Davies 1994c:25.

[19] Drinkard 1998:175.

[20] Zertal 1991:30.

[21] Halpern 1997:331.

Dever[22] points out that it is an illusion to infer that the explicit meaning of a text can be determined since, in archaeology, everything ultimately depends on context.

Serious biblical scholars acknowledge the late post-exilic final redaction of the Hebrew Bible. Israelite historiography is currently in a crisis, the question being whether, in principle, biblical sources are of secondary value and what role archaeology plays in writing a history of ancient Israel. It is important that the relation between text and artefact be redetermined.[23] Jamieson-Drake[24] indicates that, due to an unwarranted backlog, excavation data are either unreported or inadequately reported. Financial constraints are one of the key issues in the present situation. It is essential that excavation results be systematically researched. For biblical scholars and scholars of Ancient Near Eastern studies, decipherment of Egyptian and cuneiform inscriptions was one of the most significant developments in the apposite field.[25] Apart from inscriptions and artefacts, Ancient Near Eastern iconography is of paramount importance as pictures (symbols) are "more evocative of the past" than texts. An image would be the gateway to some "invisible, abstract reality".[26]

Unless a positive correlation can be established between biblical and archaeological descriptions of Iron Age Palestine, Davies[27] regards biblical Israel as a literary creation and he proposes that, until such a correlation is evident, archaeological data be accepted as primary. Carter[28] is concerned that Syro-Palestinian archaeologists commit themselves to the uncovering of textual and artefactual data primarily concerning monarchical and prophetic Israel, whereas the Persian Period has been grossly neglected. Ehrlich[29] points out that, although minimal sources from the Persian and Hellenistic periods are available, minimalists[30] reconstruct an "ideological history" of that period on the basis of some biblical texts. In contrast, the maximalists[31] endeavour to coalesce the biblical and extra-biblical material without duly

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[22] Dever 2005:15, 54.
[23] For key issues in the current debate and the role of archaeology, see Dever (1997b:297-307).
[24] Jamieson-Drake 1991:46.
[25] See Cathcart (1997:81-95) for aspects on the development of Ancient Near Eastern decipherment.
[26] Dever 2005:54.
[27] Davies 1994c:25.
[28] Carter 1994:106.
[29] Ehrlich 2001:65.
[30] For a discussion on minimalistic (or revisionistic) views on the historicity of the Masoretic Text, see § 8.9. A newer generation of biblical scholars style themselves as minimalists, revisionists, or even new nihilists. They negate the historical reliability of biblical texts and seldom acknowledge an historical Israel in the Iron Age (Dever 2001:23, 47).
[31] The maximalists or credulists are opponents to the minimalists (Dever 2001:34).

considering the respective components individually. Contrary to the majority of the preceding arguments, Holladay[32] rather explicitly contends that 'ninety-nine percent of archaeology deals with the interpretation of shreds and tatters of ancient garbage and destructive episodes'.

On the whole it is evident that archaeology contributes extensively to the comprehension of biblical and Ancient Near Eastern history and culture. The excavation of numerous texts and ensuing recovery of Ancient Near Eastern languages has major consequences for biblical research. Apart from the biblical text being more lucid, previously obscure social customs, religious practices and laws, and their significance in ancient times have been clarified to a large extent. In some instances, extra-biblical material corroborates biblical textual details. This research acknowledges the intrinsic value of archaeological data; however, considering the particular emphasis herein, a detailed deliberation of archaeological material cannot be justified. Nonetheless, a number of relevant archaeological finds are briefly discussed.

2.2   Radiocarbon dating, palynology and remote sensing

Radiocarbon dating

'Radiocarbon[33] (carbon 14)[34] dating is a method of estimating the absolute age of a carbon-bearing material by comparing its radioactivity with that of a modern sample.'[35] Substances up to seventy thousand years old can currently be dated. This science has revolutionised the research on prehistory and furnishes important information on archaeological remains. Radiocarbon dating has been invaluable to establish the absolute chronology of Palestine as from the period ca 50 000 BC up to the end of the fourth millennium BC. Most carbon-containing substances are acceptable for dating purposes. A piece of linen cloth – presumably used as a wrapping for one of the Qumran scrolls – was the first Palestinian carbon-14 sample dated, while the first of a series of carbon-14 datings was from a group of nine radiocarbon results from excavations at Jericho. Since the 1970s a large amount of radiocarbon materials from the southern Levant were processed and the results published. If archaeological or historical methods cannot give a precise date of an event, it is worthwhile to collect and process a carbon-14 sample. However, most cultural remains and stratigraphic phases later than

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[32] Holladay 2001:136.

[33] 'Radiocarbon is produced in the upper atmosphere by the collision of cosmic particles with nitrogen atoms. Newly formed radiocarbon atoms revert back to nitrogen atoms in time because they are unstable. We can use the decay of radiocarbon to determine the age of a material because the average rate of the reaction is constant and has been determined empirically' (Rech 2004:214).

[34] Known as 14C.

[35] Weinstein 1988:235.

ca 2000 BC are more accurately dated by archaeological and historical evidence than through carbon-14 dating.[36]

Walls, floors, roads and aqueducts were constructed of mortar and plaster[37] in the Ancient Near East. Plaster technology appeared since the seventh millennium BC with the establishment of large towns. Recently some component materials in lime plasters have been successfully radiocarbon dated.[38] This technique has a great potential to determine the age of partially exposed structures. One of the main limitations of this process is the cost involved.[39] It is more commonly cited for prehistoric than for historic periods.[40]

Palynology

Palynology[41] is a science that has only relatively recently been applied to archaeology. The discipline mainly involves pollen grains, as well as 'some other microscopic fossils and organisms that remain in an analyzed sample after the extraction of the pollen'.[42] Palynology is divided into three categories.[43] Regarding the field of archaeology, palynological techniques can yield useful information on aspects of the natural environment.[44] The interpretation of pollen-analysis results in excavations is, however, a serious problem that archaeologists and palynologists encounter. Due to human activities – such as fire or deforestation – the excavation site can hardly yield a complete "continuous sequence", crucial for the examination of the natural environment. Nevertheless, pollen analysis could also be applied to other excavated materials, such as the contents of containers.[45]

Although the process is not so "new" anymore, palynology is often referred to as "new archaeology". Human activity is dynamic and in a continual process of evolution. Proponents

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[36] Weinstein 1988:236, 242-245. For information on the principles, methodology and calibration of radiocarbon dating, see Weinstein (1988:236-242).

[37] Mortar is a mixture of lime, sand and water, to keep bricks and stone together; plaster is also a mixture including lime and sand, for coating of walls and other structures (Hanks 1992:314, 365).

[38] Plaster samples from the Siloam Tunnel in Jerusalem and from Khirbet Qana in the Lower Galilee, have been successfully dated (Rech 2004:212). Khirbet, the Arabic word for ruin, refers to an ancient site where there are visible ruins on the surface. In contrast to a "tell" with many occupation levels, Khirbet usually refers to a site with only a few occupation levels (Drinkard & Gibson 1988:466).

[39] Rech 2004:212, 218.

[40] Kenyon 1987:184.

[41] The word palynology is derived from the Greek word meaning "dust" (Horowitz 1988:261).

[42] Horowitz 1988:261.

[43] The categories are: the study of pollen grains (which is the field of botanists), the study of fossil pollen grains, and the study of fossil pollen grains which are too old to allocate with certainty and are often from extinct plants (Horowitz 1988:261).

[44] For a discussion on palynology as background for an archaeologist, see Horowitz (1988:262-271).

[45] Horowitz 1988:275-278.

of the "new archaeology" attempt to 'explain why, rather than simply to describe the ways that human activity has taken particular forms'.[46] Palynology facilitates the appreciation by archaeologists for the response of human activity to the environment and the subsequent modification thereof. It has become one of the most significant techniques in the reconstruction of the palaeo-environment. However, due to the soils and sediments in Israel which are mainly procured from the natural limestone bedrock, palynology is a complex venture in this country.[47] Dever[48] indicates that the newer approaches of the "new archaeology" are regarded by some scholars as revolutionary. As such, Syro-Palestinian archaeology has visibly undergone changes that 'constitute at least a revolution in the making',[49] and has become an independent discipline of biblical archaeology. Dever[50] furthermore states that, although there 'is a consensus on the major emphases' of this intellectual movement in American archaeology, it is 'too diverse and still too controversial to be readily characterized.'

The authenticity of the Shroud of Turin[51] has been debated for decades on end. Some devotees believe the shroud to be genuine and results from any attempt to examine it scientifically are either accepted – when in the affirmative – or met with scepticism, as when it was radiocarbon dated as from the Medieval Age. During the 1980s small portions of the shroud were sent to different independent laboratories for radiocarbon dating. Three of these laboratories dated it between AD 1322 and AD 1340, with a tolerance of fifty to sixty-five years. These test results were immediately challenged. Pollen grains gathered from the shroud were also examined.[52]

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[46] Longstaff & Hussey 1997:151.

[47] Longstaff & Hussey 1997:151, 153-154. For a discussion on a selected sample from Sepphoris in the Galilee, see Longstaff & Hussey (1997:154-162). Sepphoris was an important town in the Lower Galilee during the Hellenistic Period. Herod Antipas [tetrarch of Galilee, 4 BC – AD 39] fortified the city and made it the capital of the Galilee. After the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem (AD 70), it became an important Jewish centre (Negev & Gibson 2001:454).

[48] Dever 1988:338.

[49] Dever 1988:338.

[50] Dever 1988:340-341.

[51] The Shroud of Turin is alleged to have been the burial cloth of Jesus of Nazareth. Full-length front and back images, of what seems to be a crucified man, appear on the fine linen cloth. In AD 30, Eusebius – a Christian historian – was the first to report on "a cloth with an image on it". From Edessa (in modern Turkey) the shroud found its way to France and eventually to Turin where it has been kept since 1578 in the Cathedral of Saint John the Baptist (Bryant 2000:36-38).

[52] Bryant (2000:36, 38-41) – a botanist and palynologist – however, is sceptical 'of pollen data that are not derived from multi-species comparisons', and therefore, is not convinced 'that current pollen studies can be used to authenticate the shroud'. Recently, significant questions have been put forward, such as the possibility that the radiocarbon sample was chosen from a rewoven area and not from the original shroud (Govier 2004:56).

Apart from pollen, faunal remains are also recovered from sites and analysed. For instance, faunal remains found at the site Jebel el-Jill,[53] included those of cattle, gazelle, sheep and goat, representing primarily animals hunted for food by the inhabitants.[54]

Remote sensing

By remote sensing and advanced computer analysis archaeologists are equipped with expeditious, inexpensive methods for acquiring and analysing data; a possibility for research archaeologists were unaware of up to now. The technological advancement of remote sensing furnishes reliable information that can be successfully applied to archaeological and ethnographic[55] explorations. A wide range of the electromagnetic spectrum is covered by remote sensing instruments, advancing unlimited possibilities for archaeological research. Information undetected by the human eye or conventional photography is observed by these instruments, supplying surface data of a large region. Surface cover, such as desert sand, could, furthermore, be penetrated by radar[56] microwave signals. Archaeologists can be instrumental in the development of a technology with unlimited possibilities.[57]

2.3   Ebla archives

Tell[58] Mardikh-Ebla is situated in northern Syria between the modern cities Hama and Aleppo. Since excavations started at the site it was evident that Tell Mardikh-Ebla – later attested as the capital of an immense empire – had been an outstanding centre in antiquity.[59]

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[53] Jebel el-Jill is a Timnian site in the vicinity of the village of Ras en-Naqb, in southern Jordan (Henry & Turnbull 1985:45-46, 60). Timnah is a short distance north of the Gulf of Elath, enclosed on three sides by the Zuqe Timnah mountain range (Negev & Gibson 2001:507).

[54] Henry & Turnbull 1985:50, 60.

[55] Ethnography could be a synonym for ethnology or cultural anthropology, thus describing, inter alia, habits, customs and social organisation of a particular society (Deist 1990:87).

[56] Radar – Radio Detection and Ranging – makes use of microwave energy, rather than light energy to image an object (Sever 1988:295).

[57] Sever 1988:279-281, 294, 299.

[58] A tell (alternately written as "tell" or "tel") is 'an artificial mound formed by the overlying debris from the settlements and ramparts of ancient cities, each which has been built on top of the preceding ones' (Negev & Gibson 2001:497). Many such mounds are to be found in large regions of the Near East.

[59] The city Ebla was occupied during the period 3000-2000 BC. It repeatedly came into conflict with the Mesopotamian empire of Akkad and was eventually destroyed by either Sargon or Naram-Sin of Akkad (Wiseman 1982a:295). In ca 2350 BC the city was set on fire (Milano 1995:1221). According to the Ebla texts, the urban city had a population of approximately twenty-six thousand (Cornelius & Venter 2002:113), while – obviously referring to the Greater Ebla –the estimate was two hundred and sixty thousand people. The city was divided into an acropolis and a lower city. Four administrative centres – which included the palace of the king – were situated on the acropolis (Pettinato 1976:47). The royal palace was the culmination of a process of "secondary urbanisation" which pertains to a powerful growth during the middle of the third millennium BC (Milano 1995:1219). With reference to its geographical dimensions alone, the ancient empire of Ebla could be regarded as one of the greatest powers in the Ancient Near East during the third millennium BC. Its influence was far-reaching, including places such as Palestine, Sinai, Cyprus and Mesopotamia (Pettinato 1976:45-46).

The first significant discovery was a dedication to the goddess *Eštar*,[60] inscribed on the statue of king Ibbit-Lim.[61] Thereafter, the first archive – serving a common purpose[62] – was excavated, followed shortly by the uncovering of the royal archives of Ebla of the third millennium BC. This historical discovery enabled Pettinato[63] to identify a very ancient North-West Semitic language that he classified as Paleo-Canaanite. The archive yielded approximately eighteen thousand texts, dated ca 2300 BC. These texts are important for, inter alia, an historical background for the Genesis narratives.[64] Adam – attested as a North-West Semitic personal name – has comparable forms in Amorite and in texts from Ebla.[65]

Most of the documents on the tablets are of an economic-administrative nature, giving an indication of how enormous this empire had been.[66] The name Haran [Harran] – a northern Mesopotamian city – appears for the first time in the late third millennium BC administrative texts from Ebla. These texts mention gift exchanges and trade with Haran. The name of the city appears frequently in Genesis in the Hebrew Bible, in connection with the patriarchs.[67]

Pettinato[68] explains that texts with a mythological background refer to Mesopotamian deities such as *Enki*,[69] *Enlil*,[70] *Utu*[71] and *Inanna*.[72] Around five hundred gods are attested at Ebla. Literary texts also include incantations, proverbs and hymns to divinities. In a curse formula

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[60] *Eštar* was mother goddess and deity of the stars and planets. She was worshipped by Semitic-speaking people in Ebla. *Eštar* is the old Akkadian form of *Ištar* (Ann & Imel 1993:329).

[61] Ibbit-Lim was lord [king] of the city of Ebla; a dedicatory inscription was discovered during excavations in 1968 (Pettinato 1976:44).

[62] This archive contained forty-two tablets, which dealt mainly with administrative aspects regarding metal, wood and textiles, as well as 'a school tablet listing personal names attested at Ebla' (Pettinato 1976:45).

[63] Pettinato 1976:44-45.

[64] One of the great ruling kings at Ebla was Eb(e)rum, frequently compared with Eber (עבר Gn 10:24). More than five hundred listed place-names incorporate cities such as Lachish, Hazor, Megiddo and Gezer, while personal names include *Išra'el*, *Išma'el*, *Abarama and Mika'el*. There is, however, no proof that these personal names are to be identified with similar biblical names. Nevertheless, these texts are valuable for our perception of the Patriarchal Age (Wiseman 1982a:295).

[65] In Ebla, *a-da-mu* has been confirmed as a one-word personal name and also as an element of a compound personal name, such as *a-dam-ma-lik*. The Amorite *a-da-mu* has been established elsewhere (Layton 1997:22).

[66] Pettinato 1976:45.

[67] Holloway 1995:279. The name Haran appears in, inter alia, Genesis 11:31; 12:4-5; 28:10; 29:4.

[68] Pettinato 1976:45, 48-50.

[69] The Sumerian deity *Enki* (known as the Assyro-Babylonian *Ea*) was the god of the *Apsu*, and thus principal divinity of the waters; the *Apsu* was the personification of an abyss filled with water, which encircled the earth (Guirand 1996:49, 56, 61).

[70] The Sumerian *Enlil* symbolised the forces of nature. From early times he was considered god of the hurricane with the deluge as his weapon. Earthly kings were representatives of *Enlil*. He was involved in events on earth and was regarded to be in control of man's fate (Guirand 1996:55).

[71] The Sumerian and Mesopotamian *Utu* [*Uttu*] was goddess of the earth and nature, vegetation and weaving. After consorting with *Enki* she gave birth to the plants (Ann & Imel 1993:353).

[72] *Inanna*, from Sumer and Mesopotamia, was also known as *Queen of Heaven*. She was ruler of the sky, earth and fertility and had power over death and rebirth (Ann & Imel 1993:333). See also § 3.4.

addressed to an Assyrian king the 'god Sun, the god *Adad*,[73] and his own personal god' are invoked. Abundant data about the principal deities of Ebla and their cult are supplied. The term *Il*, which refers to a specific Ugaritic divinity *Il/El*,[74] is also a generic term for "god", while *Ya(w)*[75] could be understood as a hypocoristicon.[76] Matthiae[77] indicates that the literary texts present versions of religious perceptions on two different levels. Examples of exorcisms are conserved in an ancient traditional and popular belief, while 'myths seem to be the fruit of theological speculation by an educated priesthood'.[78] These genres are both Sumerian in origin and, interestingly enough, leading characters in Eblaite myths are Sumerian great gods. It seems that *Dagan*[79] – otherwise known as "The Lord of the Land" – was the principal deity. *Dagan* was probably worshipped in many manifestations, representing the local gods of major cities. Phonetic difficulties have to be clarified before the interpretation "*Dagan* of Canaan",[80] can be accepted for the name *Dagan kananaum*.[81] Other noteworthy divinities include *Rasap* (the *Rešef* of later documents), *Šipiš* or *Šamaš*, *Aštar* – a masculine divinity, unlike the Mesopotamian female counterpart – *Astarte*,[82] *Adad*, *Malik*, *Kašalu*,[83] *Asherah*[84] and *Kamiš*,[85] as well as the Hurrian gods *Adamma* and *Aštabi*. Texts attest the existence of temples for *Dagan*, *Aštar, Kamoš* and *Rasap*. Correspondence between the Mesopotamian and Syrian divinities bears witness to possible syncretism between the cultures of Ebla and Mesopotamia. In the correspondence, certain gods were equated although, curiously enough,

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[73] *Adad*, the Assyro-Babylonian storm god, was usually represented standing on a bull with thunderbolts in both hands. He was god of lightning and the tempest, letting loose the thunder and storm. *Adad* also had a beneficial side, being responsible for rains and fertility (Guirand 1996:60). For further discussion, see § 3.5.

[74] See § 3.7.

[75] See § 4.3.2 for a discussion of the extra-biblical reference to *Ya(w)*.

[76] A hypocoristicon or hypocoristic name is the shorter form of a compound name, normally a theophoric name; the latter being a proper name containing the name of a deity (Deist 1990:118, 259).

[77] Matthiae 1980:189.

[78] Matthiae 1980:189.

[79] Also known as *Dagon*.

[80] The title recalls the well-known *"Dagan* of the Philistines". The ethnic term "Canaanite" is thus much older than generally believed (Pettinato 1976:48). *Dagan* (which became *Dagon*), the Phoenician grain god, was originally a fertility god worshipped in the Euphrates Valley. In the Ugaritic epics he is referred to as the father of *Ba'al* (Albright 1968:124, 143). See § 2.8: Ugarit and § 3.5: *Ba'al*.

[81] Matthiae 1980:187, 189.

[82] See § 3.3.

[83] *Košar* of the Ugarit texts (Pettinato 1976:48).

[84] See § 3.2.

[85] Probably the *Kamoš* of later texts; the form *kěmiš* of the biblical text suggests that the Masoretes had very ancient documents at their disposal (Pettinato 1976:48). 'Kamish, is certainly an archaic form of *Kemosh*' (Matthiae 1980:187). *Kemoš* was the name or the title of the god of the Moabites. He was also known as father of Mesha, king of the Moabites. Solomon built a sanctuary for *Kemoš* 'on the mountain east of Jerusalem' (1 Ki 11:7). In the Mesha-inscription (see § 4.3.8) *Kemoš* is synthesised with the Venus Star, *Athtar* (a masculine divinity). It can thus be deduced that *Kemoš* was the manifestation of this astral deity (Gray 1962a:556).

Enlil was not equated with any West Semitic god.[86] The earliest allusions to the goddess *Asherah* seem to be in the Ebla texts where she appears as a 'lesser but well-attested deity'.[87]

Although Ebla was destroyed by the Akkadians ca 2300 BC, the city was rebuilt and continued its widely-known trade relations.[88] During the period 1800 BC to 1650 BC Ebla produced small pottery jars of which a limited number are prominent therein that they are decorated with human or animal figurines not comparable outside Ebla. Characteristic of these decorations are "tightly-packed row(s) of super-imposed bird heads". The birds face to the front with outstretched wings, fan-shaped tails and large applied buttons for eyes. Some specimens have birds with two heads. More elaborate motifs include naked female figurines. These have "grotesque" faces and button-shaped breasts. The bird-figurines are allegedly doves that can be associated with the cult of *Ishtar*.[89] Frequently-portrayed naked female figurines – facing to the front – are a clear indication of *Ishtar*'s realm. These small jars were most likely a symbol of the popular, rather than official, religious activity of the Eblaites.[90] Sculptures of the nineteenth century BC represent a type of royal tiara, decorated by a pair of horns,[91] which is characteristic of the Eblaite king.[92] A temple and sacred area of *Ishtar* was in the lower town of Ebla while another temple dedicated to her stood on the acropolis. '*Ishtar* was the great patron deity of Old Syrian Ebla.'[93] The number of Eblaite gods with Semitic names is significant, notably deities such as *Ishtar*.[94] A temple close to the royal necropolis[95] was probably dedicated to the cult of *Resheph*, deity of the Netherworld.[96]

The Ebla archives confirm a relationship between the language of Ebla and the Canaanite languages of the second and first millennium BC, thus supporting the classification "Paleo-Canaanite". In this regard the phenomenon of Eblaite bilingualism should be noted. The

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[86] Pettinato 1976:48-49.
[87] Day 1986:385.
[88] In the eight hundred years between ca 2400 to ca 1600 BC – when it was finally destroyed – Ebla was a flourishing empire. Apart from brief interruptions it sustained its political and cultural leadership position (Matthiae 1980:56).
[89] See § 3.4.
[90] Pinnock 2000:122, 124, 126, 128.
[91] In the apocalyptic application of horns in Daniel 7 and 8, the horns on the creatures represent individual rulers of world empires. Horns symbolised power, as in Zedekiah's prophetic action (1 Ki 22:11) and in the prophet Zechariah's vision (Zch 1:18-21) (Taylor 1982:491). Zedekiah was one of four hundred court prophets under king Ahab of Israel [874-853 BC] (Baker 1982:1277). See footnote on "horns" in § 2.14.3.
[92] Matthiae 1990:347-348.
[93] Pinnock 2000:121.
[94] Milano 1995:1225.
[95] Necropolis: burial site.
[96] Matthiae 1990:349.

cuneiform system of writing in which all the documents of Ebla were constructed was introduced from Sumer. Personal names attested at Ebla illustrate the relationship of this world to the biblical milieu of a later period. Ebla, furthermore, affords the "oldest vocabularies of recorded history". The existence of an important scribal school at Ebla is attested. Texts mention Mesopotamian scribes at this school. Encyclopedic lists and many more texts are identical with texts found at the Mesopotamian cities of Sumer, Fara and Abu Salabikh. Valuable data are a clear indication that Ebla was a productive centre of notable significance. Reciprocal duplicating of Eblaite and Sumerian texts indicates a cultural exchange that existed in the Ancient Near East during the third millennium BC.[97]

Matthiae[98] mentions that Ebla 'has been revealed first of all as one of the critical, early turning points in the spread of city civilisation to the West … . The discoveries at Ebla answer certain questions but those they ask are just as fundamental'.

2.4   Mari documents

Mari, one of the largest ancient cities in Syria, is presently known as Tell Hariri. The city was situated on the bank of the Euphrates River, at the intersection of two caravan roads: the one crossing the Syrian Desert linking the city with the Mediterranean coast, and the other leading to Mesopotamia, as one of the main highways between Assyria and Babylonia.[99] Mari was a "roaring trade centre".[100] Excavations started soon after Bedouins unearthed a headless stone statue in 1933. Inscriptions found during the excavations identified the city. Reference to a city "Mari" was previously known from records of the campaigns of Sargon,[101] as well as from cuneiform texts found at Nippur[102] and Kish[103] and in letters from Hammu-rapi.[104]

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[97] Pettinato 1976:50-52.
[98] Matthiae 1980:226-227.
[99] Lewy 1962:264.
[100] Cornelius & Venter 2002:12.
[101] Sargon, also known as Sargon the Great and founder of the Dynasty of Akkad (2334-2279 BC) (Bodine 1994:33).
[102] Nippur, a city in southern Mesopotamia, was founded ca 4000 BC. Although it was never a dynastic capital or held any political power, it was Sumer's "undisputed religious and cultural centre". It held an important academy where myths and hymns were composed. Among the most important finds are nearly four thousand tablets and fragments inscribed with Sumerian literary works, as well as thousands of inscriptions invaluable for Sumer's political history (Kramer 1962:553-554).
[103] Kish, the capital of a city-state in southern Mesopotamia, flourished ca 3200-3000 BC. According to Sumerian tradition, Kish was the first dynasty to rule after the Flood. Apart from finds of early palaces and tablets at Tell el-Ukheimer, a major flood deposit level dated ca 3300 BC was established (Wiseman 1982c:665).
[104] Hammu-rapi was the sixth king of the First Dynasty of Babylon (1792-1750 BC). Hammu-rapi, a theophoric name, appears in Mari texts as a royal name. A selection of his legal judgements, the "Code of Hammu-rapi", is inscribed on a stele found at Susa (Oppenheim 1962a:517-519). These laws of Hammu-rapi are a representation of the common law and order throughout much of the Ancient Near East. Although a direct comparison with legal aspects in the Masoretic Text – such as in Exodus and Deuteronomy – is not possible, many similarities can be determined, even in the wording (Wiseman 1982b:451).

Approximately twenty-five thousand cuneiform tablets were found in the archives of the palace of Zimri-Lim.[105] The excavated documents – comprising economic, legal and diplomatic texts – are exceptionally important, indicating a flourishing kingdom at the beginning of the second millennium BC, with diplomatic ties with kings, royal families and ambassadors of neighbouring countries. These texts, furthermore, shed light on the history of the Ancient Near East, as well as on that of the early Hebrews.[106]

Some fifty prophetic texts are among the numerous documents found in the Mari archives. Mari prophecy is significant for the origins of Ancient Near Eastern and biblical prophecy, as well as for its relation to biblical prophecy.[107] These texts were normally constituted of a regular pattern of five form-elements.[108] According to the prophetic letters, most of the oracles in Mari were originally communicated verbally, which is in agreement with the form of communication by the prophets of the Hebrew Bible. Scholarly awareness of 'the transformation from oral to written form represents an important shift in the transmission of prophetic oracles'.[109] So far – in cuneiform literature – these Mari texts represent the nearest parallel to biblical prophecy.[110] As in the Hebrew Bible, we find examples of Mari prophets who aspire to influence the foreign politics of a state.[111] The example described in 1 Kings 20 (see previous footnote), is probably dealing with "fictitious prophecy" composed much later in a written form to 'transmit a theological message'.[112]

A tribe named *TUR-meš-ia-mi-na* – meaning "sons of the South" – is frequently mentioned in texts from the royal archives. This tribe had settled in towns and villages and was renowned for its military ability. These peoples were not ruled by kings, but were headed by chieftains and elders. The names of the tribesmen are West Semitic. These names include a large number of theophoric names alluding to the moon god *Eraḫ* or *Sîn*, the grain god

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[105] During the reigns of Iahdun-Lim and Zimri-Lim the city of Mari was very prosperous. In their time they restored the city, but unfortunately it was later destroyed by Hammu-rapi (Negev & Gibson 2001:317). Initially Hammu-rapi and Zimri-Lim had a good relationship of mutual trust and co-operation, even exchanging troops. Hammu-rapi, however, later turned his back on Zimri-Lim and in 1759 BC destroyed the walls of Mari (Arnold 1994:49).

[106] Negev & Gibson 2001:317.

[107] Anbar 1994:41.

[108] The elements are: name of the addressee and sender, and the relationship between them; introductory remarks; presentation of the prophet, inter alia title, name, status; statement of the prophet – divine message, oracle, vision, dream; statement of the sender concerning the prophet and appeal to the king to make a decision (Schart 1995:76).

[109] Schart 1995:75, 89.

[110] Schart 1995:75.

[111] For a discussion of an example in the Mari history and, in comparison, the events described in 1 Kings 20, see Anbar (1994:41-48).

[112] Anbar 1994:47.

Dagon, and others.[113] The *ḫabiru*[114] and the tribe of the Benjaminites are mentioned in some of the texts. Scholars link both these groups to the early Hebrews.[115] According to Lewy,[116] the relation of the tribe *TUR-meš-ia-mi-na* to the Israelite tribe of Benjamin is obvious. The Benjaminites possibly migrated from Mesopotamia and Haran[117] to Palestine, taking with them traditions as reflected in the patriarchal narratives. Movements of nomadic peoples in the vicinity of Mari are described in the Mari texts. This information in the texts is important for the understanding of the Patriarchal Period. Some nomads, as well as citizens of Mari, had names corresponding to names in Genesis, such as Abram, Ishmael, Jacob, Rebekah and Laban.[118] Pitard[119] mentions that the Aramaeans were portrayed in early sources as 'large, tribally orientated groups' – a description corresponding to that of large nomadic tribes as known from the Mari archives – although a considerable number of tribal members lived in towns and villages. Albright[120] indicates that the Mari texts are 'yielding authentic information about the Patriarchal Age'.

The most important buildings uncovered during excavations at Tell Hariri were – apart from palaces – temples of *Ishtar,*[121] *Shamash,*[122] *Ninhursag,*[123] *Ishtarat,*[124] *Ninni-Zara*[125] and *Dagan,*[126] as well as a *ziggurat.*[127] Apart from the normal cult practices, the peoples of the

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[113] Lewy 1962:266.

[114] *ḫabiru:* the name of a group of people. The earliest reference is from texts from Ur, ca 2050 BC. In some instances they appear to be a social class but, according to texts from Alalakh and the Amarna Letters (see § 2.5), they emerge as a separate ethnic group. In the lists of social classes they are mentioned with the lower classes. Texts from Mari mention *ḫabiru* operating in hordes of semi-nomads in the regions of the Baliḫ and Euphrates rivers. The term may also denote a soldier or officer; *ḫabiru* is probably an Akkadian form related to Hebrew, and presumably the Hebrews were a branch of the *ḫabiru* (Haldar 1962:506).

[115] Negev & Gibson 2001:317.

[116] Lewy 1962:266.

[117] Also known as Harran.

[118] Arnold & Beyer 2002:207.

[119] Pitard 1994:209.

[120] Albright 1960:236.

[121] See footnote on *Eštar in* § 2.3.

[122] *Shamash,* the Assyro-Babylonian solar deity, comes forth every morning from the Mountain of the East, with luminous rays emitting from his shoulders. In his role as judge, he was seated on a throne holding the sceptre and ring in his right hand (Guirand 1996:57-58).

[123] The Sumerian *Ninhursag* was mother goddess, creator and consort of *Enki* (see footnote on *Enki* in § 2.3). Her shrine dated from ca 4000-3500 BC. She had various names, but became *Ninhursag* as mother of the earth and its vegetation (Ann & Imel 1993:341).

[124] A form of *Ishtar*, Mesopotamian *Queen of the Stars*. She was *Ashtoreth* in the *Book of Kings*, *Aphrodite* from Greece and perhaps equivalent to *Astarte*, *Athyr*, *Athor* or *Hathor* (from Egypt) (Ann & Imel 1993:334). See footnote on sphinx and *Hathor* in § 2.13, subtitle "Taanach".

[125] Alternate forms of *Ninni/Nini* are *Inanna*, *Ininni*, *Innin, Ama Usum Gal Ana* and *Ishtar*. The Mesopotamian and Sumerian *Inanna* was also known as "*Queen of Heaven*". She presided over fertility, life and death (Ann & Imel 1993: 333, 341). See also § 3.4.

[126] *Dagan* or *Dagon* was the god of corn and fertility, worshipped in both Canaan and Mesopotamia. A number of kings in Akkad and Babylonia regarded themselves to be the sons of *Dagan* (Storm 2001:28). See also footnote in § 2.3.

[127] A *ziggurat*, or temple tower, was a huge type of stepped pyramid structure with a temple at the top. It normally had three – some even more – storeys connected by external staircases. The *ziggurat* at Ur is the best

Ancient Near East probably were involved in some form of divination.[128] It was considered to be the most dependable method of divine communication. Omens were deemed to be more reliable than direct contact. Excellent examples were found in the royal library of Mari.[129] Texts from the Mari archives, furthermore, refer to the North Mesopotamian city Haran as a religious centre for the West Semitic tribes. Haran played an important role in the patriarchal traditions.[130] The moon god *Sîn* was worshipped there.[131] It is unlikely that the gods of Mari, being also represented in the pantheon of Haran, were unknown to Terah[132] and his family. In Joshua 24:2 Israel is reminded of the "other gods" served by Terah and his kin.[133] The first time the name of the city Haran appears, is in administrative texts from Ebla, while the Mari archives are the first to attest to the cult of *Sîn* of Haran.[134]

2.5   Amarna Letters and the *ḫabiru*

Akhetaten – or el-Amarna,[135] as it is known – was occupied only during the time when it was the capital city of pharaoh Akhenaten.[136] The royal archive – containing tablets including the so-called el-Amarna Letters – was discovered in one of the royal residences next to the

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preserved example. It was built by the Sumerian king Ur-Nammu (2112-2095 BC). This *ziggurat* dominated the city of Ur. It symbolised the sacred mountain of the deity *Nanna*, the moon god (Oliphant 1992:10). Offerings were made in the temple at the top. It was accepted that the deity descended to communicate with the devotees. The Babylonian *ziggurat* of *Marduk* was seven storeys high and probably inspired the biblical story of the Tower of Babel (Storm 2001:48). See footnote on *Marduk*, § 2.14.6.

[128] 'Divination is a process by which the will of the gods is determined by observing nature' (Negev & Gibson 2001:142).

[129] Ecstatic prophetic messages, which often originated among lay people, were concerned with king Zimri-Lim's military campaigns against Hammu-rapi. The messages on clay tablets, accompanied by hair and a piece of garment of the messenger, were sent to the king. This person claimed to be a representative of the god (Negev & Gibson 2001:142).

[130] Genesis 11:31; 24:4, 10; 28:10.

[131] Negev & Gibson 2001:217.

[132] Terah, father of Abram, Nahor and Haran (Gn 11:27). He is normally associated with the moon god *Sîn*. Terah settled in Haran after emigrating from Ur of the Chaldeans (Gn 11:31). Joshua refers to him as an idolater (Jos 24:2) (Charley 1982:1175).

[133] Wiseman 1982d:737.

[134] Holloway 1995:279.

[135] The name of the city, Akhetaten, means "the horizon of the sun-disc". The city stretches along the Nile, approximately hundred and ninety kilometres north of Thebes and hundred and twenty kilometres south of the Nile Delta. Its temple complex had seven hundred and fifty altars. The motivation for Akhenaten (see next footnote) to build this city was probably to escape the powerful priesthood of *Amon-Re* in Thebes (Negev & Gibson 2001:154-155). *Amon-Re* (also known as *Amon-Ra*) was worshipped as fertility god at Thebes in Upper Egypt. When *Amon* became the national god during the second millennium, his name was fused with that of *Re*, the supreme solar deity. By this fusion hidden powers were conferred on him to create the gods (Willis 1993:39).

[136] Pharaoh Amenhotep IV took on the name Akhenaten early in his reign (1350-1334 BC). His promotion of the cult of the sun-disc *Aten* to supreme status in the Egyptian religion led in a new period in the Egyptian history. See *Excursus 4* for a discussion of the Akhenaten monotheism. He, furthermore, introduced a new art style in this period known as the Amarna Age, or Amarna Interlude (Clayton 1994:120). Akhenaten means literally: "it is pleasing to *Aten*" (Negev & Gibson 2001:154).

temple.[137]   Among the texts in the archive were official diplomatic letters[138] sent by the pharaohs Amenophis III,[139] Amenophis IV[140] and Tutankhamun.[141]   These letters, written in Akkadian – the economic and diplomatic *lingua franca* of the Ancient Near East – were Egyptian correspondence with Palestinian vassals, as well as – among others – Babylonian and Assyrian rulers.[142]   Although written in cuneiform, the letters often reflect the local Canaanite dialect,[143] and seem to describe circumstances just before the events as recounted in the books of Joshua and Judges.[144]   Many of the letters received in the Amarna "Foreign Office" were from minor chieftains under attack from Egypt's enemies.[145]   They promised continued loyalty to the Egyptian crown for as long as gold and other supplies could be sent to them.   The Egyptian king, however, was far too involved in the explication of his new religion, to heed any of these requests.[146]   Correspondence between Egypt and the rulers of the great powers indicated their equal status in contrast to the letters to the vassals in which the pharaoh proclaims that he is their lord.   Apart from information on international relations during this period, these letters 'give insight into the structure of the Egyptian empire in Palestine' at the time.[147]   'The Amarna tablets rank first among archaeological finds bearing on the topology and history of the biblical lands in the latter half of the second millennium BC.'[148]

Many letters are fragmentary, disclosing neither the origin nor name of the correspondent.   In some instances the whereabouts of a city is either disputed by scholars or unknown.   A century of research clarified some of these problems.   A new approach by mineralogical and chemical analysis of these clay tablets identifies, and thus resolves, the geographic provenance.[149]   The Canaanite city Megiddo was mentioned for the first time in the annals of

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[137] In 1887 Egyptian peasants discovered these tablets in the ruins of el-Amarna (Lambdin 1962:532).

[138] The majority of the three hundred and eighty-two el-Amarna documents were letters (Arnold & Beyer 2002:166).

[139] Also known as Amenhotep III, dated 1386-1349 BC (Clayton 1994:112).

[140] Also known as Amenhotep IV or Akhenaten, dated 1350-1334 BC (Clayton 1994:120).

[141] Dated 1334-1325 BC (Clayton 1994:128).

[142] The correspondence furthermore included letters to independent states, such as Hatti, Mittani and Alashiya, as well as to rulers of city-states – under Egyptian jurisdiction – inter alia, Damascus, Byblos, Acco, Hazor, Shechem, Megiddo, Gezer, Ashkelon and Jerusalem (Goren et al 2002:196).

[143] Negev & Gibson 2001:154-155.

[144] Arnold & Beyer 2002:166.

[145] The Egyptian empire in the Syrian area was rapidly weakening (Clayton 1994:126).

[146] Clayton 1994:126.   Akhenaten and his *Aten* religion.

[147] Negev & Gibson 2001:155.

[148] Lambdin 1962:532.

[149] Goren et al 2002:196-197.   The examination of a number of letters disclosed that the tablets, in most cases, were not made from Nile clays normally used in standard pottery production.   Mineralogical and palaeontological analysis indicated that the clay corresponds with the Esna shales of Upper Egypt.   Petrographic and chemical analyses have been applied to four Alashiya letters from Amarna, as well as to a letter, presumably to the king of Ugarit from the king of Alashiya.   The investigation indicates that the fourteenth to thirteenth century BC political centre of Alashiya should be sought in southern Cyprus.   The development of a new technique, Scattered Petrographic Analysis, facilitates the appropriation of a smaller sample size (Goren et al 2002:197-198, 201);

Thutmosis III.[150] The importance of this city during the fifteenth and fourteenth centuries BC is apparent in the Amarna Letters, as well as from evidence of the Taanach tablets.[151] It is listed as one of the cities not conquered by the Israelites.[152] Accounts from the Amarna Letters imply that Late Bronze Canaan comprised of independent city-states, essentially using chariotry to defend themselves.[153] These letters furthermore disclose significant social and political turmoil in these city-states,[154] as well as political fragmentation. Due to the absence of a "territorial defence system", the Canaanites made no effort to prevent the Israelites from crossing the Jordan.[155]

The name *ḥabiru*[156] figures prominently in the Amarna texts.[157] In a letter[158] to the king, Abdi-Heba mentions 'why do you love the Apiru but hate the mayors? … . The Apiru has plundered all the lands of the king,' and in another letter[159] written by the same person: ' … who have given the land of the king to the Apiru.'[160] The name *ḥabiru*[161] was given in the second millennium BC by some of the influential nations in the Ancient Near East – such as the Assyrians – to a group of nomads in pursuit of new territories where they could settle. They were mainly mercenaries or labourers and were never considered to be citizens of their new countries. During the first half of the fifteenth century BC there were numerous *ḥabiru* settlers in Syria and Palestine. In the Amarna Letters kings of city-states accused each other of commissioning the *ḥabiru* as mercenaries, thereby rebelling against the pharaoh.[162] Being propertyless and rootless, without any legal status, the *ḥabiru* stood outside the social order. According to the Amarna Letters, they were mostly involved in military pursuits. They were 'unruly, disruptive elements operating in Canaan, which contributed to destabilizing the social order'.[163] They have been, furthermore, described as 'uprooted individuals of varied origins,

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palaeontology is the study of fossils (Wehmeier 2005:1051). Palaeography is the study of ancient writing systems (Deist 1990:182). Petrography is the scientific description of the composition and formation of rocks; analysis of mud-brick, plaster, metals (Negev & Gibson 2001:391).

[150] Thutmosis III ruled during the Eighteenth Dynasty in Egypt; he is dated 1504-1450 BC (Clayton 1994:104). He defeated a Canaanite army in 1468 BC near Megiddo (Negev & Gibson 2001:327).

[151] See § 2.13, subtitle "Taanach", for archaeological finds at Taanach.

[152] Negev & Gibson 2001:327. Judges 1:27.

[153] Zevit 2001:95.

[154] Gottwald 1993:170.

[155] Malamat 1982:28.

[156] Also written as *'apiru*.

[157] Newman 1985:171.

[158] Amarna Letter 286 (Arnold & Beyer 2002:166-167).

[159] Amarna Letter 287 (Arnold & Beyer 2002:167).

[160] Arnold & Beyer 2002:166-167.

[161] See also § 2.4.

[162] Negev & Gibson 2001:212.

[163] Newman 1985:171.

without tribal or family ties, who joined in bands which could be hired as soldiers by organized states, or acted on their own.'[164] This portrayal of the activities of the *ḥabiru* in Canaan supports the social revolt concept as expounded mainly by Mendenhall and Gottwald.[165] Mendenhall furthermore identifies the biblical Hebrews with the *ḥabiru*, and postulates the emergence of Israel from movements – such as the *ḥabiru* – being unified ca 1200 BC under the patronage of the *Yahweh* faith.[166] Ramsey[167] notes that scholars have frequently challenged Mendenhall's simple equalisation of the Israelites and *ḥabiru* and is of the opinion that such identification is untenable.

According to Bezuidenhout,[168] the *ḥabiru* were marginalised groups who operated from inside as well as from outside Canaan. Some scholars surmise a possible semantic link between the words *ḥabiru* and עברי (Hebrew), as well as a connection between the *ḥabiru* and the establishment of an Israelite nation. Should such intimation be justifiable, the contents of the Amarna Letters – referring to *ḥabiru* – are markedly significant. In the light of my hypothesis and proposal that marginal groups played a prominent role in the development of the Yahwistic faith, Mendenhall's identification could be reconsidered.

2.6   Egyptian records

In Papyrus Anastasi VI[169] the earliest known reference to the land Edom is recorded.[170] The inhabitants were called the *Shasu*[171] tribes of Edom.[172] The Hebrew Bible refers to Edom either as a country or to the Edomites in an ethnic sense.[173] The name Edom means red region[174] and probably alludes to the red Nubian sandstone,[175] a remarkable characteristic of

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[164] Ramsey 1981:90.

[165] See § 7.4 for a brief discussion of the different settlement hypotheses.

[166] Ramsey 1981:90-91.

[167] Ramsey 1981:96.

[168] Bezuidenhout 1996:594.

[169] Papyrus Anastasi VI is 'one of four unique scribal exercises compiled in a single papyrus' (Hallo & Younger 2002:16). Although the "opening protocol" of the papyrus alludes to the reign of Seti II, the regal year mentioned therein was probably that of his predecessor Merenptah (see § 2.7) (Hallo & Younger 2002:16). Seti II is dated 1199-1193 BC (Clayton 1994:156).

[170] The letter mentions the arrival of the *Shasu* tribes and their flocks at one of the Egyptian border fortresses which had been constructed during the Ramesside Period: '4.13 Another information for my lord that we have just let the Shasu tribes of Edom pass the Fortress of Merneptah-hetephermaat, … in order to revive themselves and revive their flocks from the great life force of Pharaoh, … .' (Hallo & Younger 2002:16-17).

[171] Also known as *Shosu*.

[172] Bartlett 1989:37-38.

[173] Reference to Edom as a country: 2 Samuel 8:14; 1 Kings 11:15; Jeremiah 40:11; in a derived ethnic sense: Genesis 36:1, 8, 19; Numbers 20:18-21; 2 Kings 8:20, 22; Amos 1:11; denoting both land and people: Ezekiel 25:12-14.

[174] Cohen 1962b:24.

[175] Vicinity of the remarkable Nabatean "rose-red" city Petra, which is built in the red rock formation. The earliest mention of the Nabateans (312 BC) goes back to the Hellenistic Period (Negev & Gibson 2001:384).

southern Edom and partly of northern Edom.[176]   Additional Egyptian evidence from Ramesses II[177] and Ramesses III[178] connects the "land of the *Shosu*" and Mount Seir.[179]   During the early fourteenth century BC, Abdi-hiba of Jerusalem writes to the pharaoh referring to the "lands of Seir".[180]   These three passages refer to "Seir", without mentioning Edom. Although the aforementioned Egyptian evidence nowhere identifies Edom with Seir, it is apparent that both regions are peopled by *Shasu*. However, a link between Edom and Seir is based on a strong tradition which is probably earlier than the connection between Esau and Edom.[181] The Hebrew Bible frequently links the two regions.[182] A deliberate editorial link might have been created between Seir and Esau.[183]

According to De Moor,[184] the word *Shosu* – which is attested in Ugaritic – means robber, but it does not imply that all *Shosu* were bandits. He furthermore indicates that they resembled the ḫabiru[185] in many aspects and it is thus unlikely that these terms refer to different groups. Attacks by twelfth century BC *ḫabiru* in Canaanite city-states contributed to their collapse. The warriors of *Yahweh* were marauding bands of *ḫabiru* who went out to raid 'when the thunder resounded over the mountains'.[186] Zevit[187] observes that the *Shasu* were unruly people, disrupting the peaceful mountain regions of Canaan. They were identified as coming forth from Edom in southern Transjordan. According to Egyptian sources, they were widespread – south into the Egyptian region and northwards to the Mesopotamian borders. The assumption that some of the *Shasu* had moved into Transjordan would account for the

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[176] Bartlett 1989:38.

[177] During the thirteenth century BC pharaoh Ramesses II [1279-1212 BC] was described as 'a fierce raging lion, who has laid waste to the land of the Shosu, who has plundered Mount Seir with his valiant arm' (Bartlett 1989:41-42).

[178] In the twelfth century BC Ramesses III [1182-1151 BC] boasts that 'I brought about the destruction of Seir among the Shosu tribes. I laid waste their tents with their people, their belongings, and likewise their cattle without number' (*ANET*[3] 262) (Bartlett 1989:42).

[179] Seir, meaning "rough" and "hairy", describes the wooded eastern slopes of the Wadi ˁAraba (Bartlett 1989:41).

[180] Amarna Letter 88 mentions: 'The land of the king is lost; in its entirety it is taken from me; there is war against me, as far as the lands of Seir (and) as far as Gath-carmel! All the governors are at peace, but there is war against me' (*ANET*[3] 488) (Bartlett 1989:41).

[181] Bartlett 1989:41-42, 178.

[182] For example: Numbers 24:18; Judges 5:4.

[183] Esau's descendants are listed in Genesis 36. The same wording is used in connection with the sons born from Esau's wives Adah and Basemath (Gn 36:10-13). Different wording describes the descendants born from his wife Oholibamah (Gn 36:14). Oholibamah was the daughter of Anah (Gn 36:25), the son of Seir the Horite (Gn 36:20). This could, therefore, be an intentional editorial link (Bartlett 1989:89).

[184] De Moor 1997:117, 123.

[185] See § 2.4 and § 2.5.

[186] De Moor 1997:177. Joel 2:11; Psalm 29.

[187] Zevit 2001:118.

persistently preserved Israelite traditions regarding their foreign origin.[188] De Moor[189] agrees that many ḫabiru and Shasu probably crossed the Jordan River.

During the twelfth century BC drought and consequential famine in parts of western Asia ended Egyptian political domination. International trade dwindled while Aegean and Anatolian people moved to the South. As a result thereof Canaanites, Shasu and other groups moved into the central highlands and Judean hills. Traditional kin-based groups settled in small isolated villages. The central highlands later became the centre of the Israelite Monarchy. Although the Hebrew Bible claims that a large part of the Galilee belonged to the Israelites, the question remains whether these groups could be described as Israelites.[190] The Shasu, fully integrated into the Canaanite culture, possessed gold, silver and precious stones which they presented as a tribute to the Egyptian supreme deity, Amun-Re.[191] The Proto-Israelites were part of the despised groups of Shasu and ḫabiru. They served the city rulers in Bashan[192] as manual labourers, cattle breeders and mercenaries.[193] Besides Papyrus Anastasi VI referring to Shasu as pastoralists, Israelite traditions also describe their Late Bronze ancestors as pastoralists.[194] While it is normally difficult to find archaeological "traces" of semi-nomadism, several such remains have been left in the Negeb and Sinai.[195] Archaeological data, as well as extra-biblical literature, all indicate that the early Israelite community was a heterogeneous group, probably including ḫabiru who later 'became Israelites for ideological reasons'.[196] This Israelite community comprised of groups like peasant farmers, refugees from Canaanite city-states and adventurers of many sorts. These groups may have incorporated a few pastoral nomads, such as the Shasu-Bedouins from southern Transjordan and some escapees from Egypt. It was, presumably, displaced Canaanites who eventually called themselves Israelites.[197]

It is significant that the Shasu is placed in southern Transjordan, specifically with reference to Seir and Edom. The Topographical List of Amenhotep III[198] provides the earliest evidence

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[188] Examples of the foreign origin of the Israelites: Genesis 17:8; 19:9; 23:4; Exodus 2:22 (Zevit 2001:118).
[189] De Moor 1997:120.
[190] Nakhai 2003:140-141.
[191] De Moor 1997:70, 177. Attested as early as Seti I (1294-1279 BC).
[192] Region east of the Jordan River, bounded by Mount Hermon in the north.
[193] De Moor 1997:370.
[194] Zevit 2001:118. Genesis 13:5-7; 24:34-35; 29:9-10; 31:4; 37:12-14.
[195] Zevit 2001:91.
[196] Dever 1997a:40.
[197] Dever 1997a:40.
[198] The Topographical List from Soleb in Nubia is dated early fourteenth century BC (Nakhai 2003:141). Amenhotep III is dated 1386-1349 BC (Clayton 1994:112).

for the god *Yahweh*, noting "*Yhw* in the land of the *Shasu*".[199]   In this list *Yahweh* is linked with these nomadic people.   The origin of *Yahweh* worship must thus be searched for among the *Shasu* of Edom – a major component of later Israel – as early as the end of the fifteenth century BC.[200]   Hasel,[201] however, indicates that it is not conclusive that the topographical reference "Land of the *Shasu*" refers to a city, region or mountain.

2.7   Merenptah's inscriptions and reliefs

Inscriptions accompanying the reliefs on the wall at Karnak[202] as well as those on a "Victory Stele", include *cartouches*[203] containing the name of Pharaoh Merenptah.[204] He was one of the rulers of the Nineteenth Dynasty (1293-1185 BC) of the New Kingdom (1570-1070 BC).   He succeeded his powerful and successful long-reigning father Ramesses II.[205]   Merenptah's[206]

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[199] See § 4.3.4 for a discussion on the implications of the reference to *Yhw*.

[200] Nakhai 2003:141.

[201] Hasel 2003:29.

[202] The modern town of Luxor – situated on the east bank of the Nile – is adjoined by the ancient village of Karnak and other localities, which form the site of Thebes, the southern capital of Egypt during the New Kingdom [1570-1070 BC] (Aldred 1998:35).

[203] The ancient Egyptian kings had an elaborate titulary, consisting of their names, titles and epithets.   As from the Old Kingdom [from 2686 BC] onwards, each king had five names.   Three of these names were common on monuments and comprised the king's "*Horus*" name and the praenomen and nomen in the *cartouche*, a typical oblong name-ring with rounded corners, indicating a royal name.   The praenomen – or first *cartouche*-name – is assigned to the king on his accession, followed by the title "king of dualities", referring to his rule over Upper and Lower Egypt.   The nomen – or second *cartouche*-name – is the king's own name and might be common to other members of the dynasty.   The nomen is typically introduced by the title "son of *Re*", thus referring to the king as the heir of the sun god *Re* (Collier & Manley 2003:20).

[204] Merenptah is often read as Mernepath.   The name means "Beloved of *Ptah*".   Hieroglyphic signs do not indicate vowels and the name could, therefore, be read either way.   Yurco (1990:24), who studied the inscriptions extensively, is of the opinion that the first reading (Merenptah) is the more likely vocalisation.   The original *cartouche* of Pharaoh Merenptah had been usurped – entailing partial erasing and recarving with the name, or names of subsequent pharaohs.   By efficaciously identifying the sequence of usurpation, Yurco (1990:25) succeeded to discover the original *cartouche* of Merenptah.   This c*artouche* had been erased – by hammering out – and recarved by Amenmesse (1202-1199 BC).   In turn, the latter's *cartouche* was usurped by Seti II (1199-1193 BC).   The usurpation process comprised the shaving and then scoring – to create a roughness – of the previous *cartouche* to enhance the retention of the coat of plaster on which the next *cartouche* could be carved.   The concealing plaster often deteriorated in the course of time, leaving visible traces of the previous carving beneath it and thus, fortunately, failing to completely erase the earlier *cartouches*.   Being more deeply engraved than the subsequent names, the surviving signs from the first *cartouches* of Merenptah are more abundant and perceptible.   Consequently, the very technique of usurpation is often to the advantage of the archaeologist (Yurco 1990:24-25).   See Yurco (1990:25) for a discussion of the *cartouches* of Merenptah, Amenmesse and Seti II.   A sword from Ugarit inscribed with a *cartouche* containing Merenptah's name, has been excavated.   Being the last of the strong pharaohs of the Nineteenth Dynasty, he ousted the Libyans from the western Delta region (Fritz 1987:87).

[205] Also known as "Ramesses the Great".   During his reign of sixty-seven years everything was done on a grand scale.   He ruled from 1279-1212 BC.   He constructed more temples and erected more obelisks and colossal statues than any other pharaoh.   During the early years of his reign he was forced to mobilise his army against a Hittite revolt.   He gathered twenty thousand men in four divisions – named after the gods *Amun*, *Re*, *Ptah* and *Seth* – which was one of the greatest forces of Egyptian troops ever seen.   According to tradition, the Hebrews of the biblical Exodus lived during the last number of years in Egypt under Ramesses II.   He carried on with the hard labour practices of his predecessor Seti I and had the Hebrews work on the construction of the new temples and the massive city of Piramesse.   The biblical events described in Exodus have not been corroborated by ancient Egyptian records (Clayton 1994:146-147, 150-151).

[206] His birth name is Mer-en-ptah (or Mer-ne-ptah), while his throne name is Ba-en-re Mery-netjeru, meaning "The Soul of *Re*, Beloved of the Gods"; he ruled 1212-1202 BC (Clayton 1994:156).

reign of only ten years is documented by three momentous inscriptions: on the great Victory Stele discovered in 1896 in his ruined mortuary temple at Thebes, on a wall at Karnak in the temple of *Amun* and on a large stele from Athribis in the Delta. All three relate to his military campaigns.[207]

The Victory Stele, also known as the Merenptah or Israel Stele, contains the oldest known written reference to Israel. Inscribed ca 1207 BC, most of the hieroglyphic text on this black granite monolith celebrates Merenptah's victory over the Libyans and their allies, the Sea Peoples.[208] It furthermore alludes to, inter alia, Canaan that had been plundered.[209] Scholars agree that the passage on the stele mentioning the Canaanite cities and the people of Israel is formulated as a poem.[210] The reference to Israel in the text initially led scholars to identify Merenptah as the pharaoh of the Exodus.[211] It has, furthermore, been used as an argument for a thirteenth century BC exodus and conquest. Since the nation Israel was eventually composed of several groups, it is not possible to know to which of these groups the inscription refers.[212] Although there was a recognisable entity Israel in the land of Canaan at that time, it

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[207] Clayton 1994:98, 156.

[208] Scholars argue that the collapse of the great Hittite Empire in Anatolia and the Mycenaean Empire in Greece brought about mass migrations to the coastal regions of Cyprus and the Levant. These "Sea Peoples" played a pivotal role in the late second millennium BC in the social, religious and economic development of the Mediterranean civilisation, as well as in the disintegration of these Bronze Age peoples. The Philistines are one of the better-known groups of the "Sea Peoples". They are regarded as having been 'bearers of the highly developed "Western" civilization' (Oren 2000:xvii).

[209] Rainey 1991:58.

[210] 'The Great Ones are prostrate, saying "Peace" (ša-la-ma);
No one raises his head among the Nine Bows;
Plundered is Thehenu, Khatti is at Peace;
Canaan is plundered with every evil;
Ashkelon is conquered;
Gezer is seized; Yanoʿam is made non-existent;
Israel is laid waste, his seed is no more;
Kharu has become a widow because of Egypt;
All lands together are at peace;
Any who roamed have been subdued;' (Rainey 2001:63).
'by the king of Upper and Lower Egypt,
        Banere-meramum,
son of *Re*, Merneptah, content with
        MAAT,
given life like *Re* every day' (Arnold & Beyer 2002:160).
The name Israel appears after Yanoʿam – the latter being identified with Tell ElʿAbeidiyeh south of Chinereth – and should, therefore, be east of the Jordan River (Weinfeld 1988:327). The Egyptian god *Re* (or *Ra*) was the great solar deity of Heliopolis (city of the sun) and creator of the universe. He had many forms and names, the most important probably being the falcon-headed god wearing a solar disc. He was born with each dawn and died at sunset. In the Old Kingdom the pharaohs claimed to be sons of *Re* (Barrett 1992:116, 118, 120-121). The divine order in the creation was personified by the daughter of the sun god, the goddess *Maat*. She symbolised justice, truth and harmony (Willis 1993:38).

[211] Clayton 1994:157.

[212] Ramsey 1981:72-73.

does not automatically support the "Conquest model" for Israel's entry into Canaan.[213] If this inscription pertains to a settlement of Israelite tribes in the Succoth Valley,[214] as has been suggested by some scholars, this could indicate that the name "Israel" was secured in the first tribal federation of Israel which was settled on the east bank of the Jordan River.[215] However, should the names Ashkelon, Gezer and Yenoʿam be mentioned in geographical order, it would imply that Israel was somewhere in northern Canaan and presupposes a much earlier date for the exodus.[216] The specific reference to Israel confirms that they had already been settled in Palestine and were a group that had to be reckoned with.[217] Lemche[218] deduces that this was a particular tribal alliance – probably consisting of the tribes Ephraim, Manasseh and Benjamin – called by the name Israel, supporting each other and operating as a united front.

Dever[219] indicates that the inscription on the Victory Stele has been dated conclusively to ca 1207 BC. The word "Israel" on the stele is preceded by the Egyptian determinative sign[220] for "people" and not for "nation" or "state". This implies that ca 1207 BC there were a people called Israel in Canaan. The question is who these Israelites were. Arnold and Beyer[221] conclude that near the end of the long inscription Merenptah refers to a campaign – probably a separate one – against Egypt's traditional enemies in Syria-Palestine. Israel – indicated as a "people-group" – is mentioned in the list of conquered groups. This inscription gives an indication that the presence of "Israel" in Syria-Palestine during the late thirteenth century BC was acknowledged by the Egyptians, but not as an established political state. Fritz[222] agrees that the Merenptah Stele 'provides [an] indisputable definition of Israel as a people'. The reference to Israel lies between the names *Kn'n* (Canaan) and *Hr* – the former depicting the area controlled by Gaza and the latter the northern part of Palestine. A campaign by Merenptah against the three cities mentioned on the stele – Ashkelon, Gezer and Yenoʿam – has,

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[213] Drinkard 1998:183. Conquest model: see § 7.4.

[214] Succoth, meaning "booths", was a city of Gad, situated in eastern Palestine close to the Jordan Valley. The name "Succoth" is, according to tradition, derived from the booths Jacob made for his livestock when he was on his way back from Paddan-Aram (Gn 33:17). The name could also refer to a place in Canaan where the harvest festival was observed. The site has been identified as Tell Deir ʿAlla, close to the Jabbok River. Consistent with tradition Penuel, close to Succoth, was the place where Jacob struggled with the "angel" and had his name changed (Gn 32:24-30) (Cohen 1962d:449).

[215] Weinfeld 1988:327.

[216] Bezuidenhout 1996:593.

[217] Le Roux, M 1994:316.

[218] Lemche 1988:103.

[219] Dever 1997a:43.

[220] Determinatives are hieroglyphic meaning-signs. They are placed at the end of a word after the sound-signs. Determinatives cannot be transliterated since they do not contribute to the sound of a word. The most common determinative is the sign for a papyrus roll which was used for abstract words or concepts (Collier & Manley 2003:5-6).

[221] Arnold & Beyer 2002:160.

[222] Fritz 1987:99.

however, been disputed. Whether the campaign took place or not is of no consequence, since the "victory song" 'proves the existence of a group of people known as Israel in Canaan at the end of the Late Bronze Age'.[223] Finkelstein[224] points out that it is a 'shaky argument' to assume that reference to a group called "Israel" indicates that the Israelites were well established by the end of the thirteenth century BC. The inscription on the stele gives no indication to the geographical position or size of this group. Halpern[225] mentions that some scholars are 'bent on denying the existence of a kin-based Israel in the central hills in the late thirteenth century' BC, while Hasel[226] affirms that the stele identifies Israel as a socio-ethnic entity within Canaan, and – according to information from the Hebrew Bible – most scholars place Israel in the central hill country.

History is influenced by phenomena such as climatic or geographic conditions, economic and social trends, as well as an historical event. The victory over a people called Israel – which has been archaeologically confirmed – affords evidence for an event.[227] Apart from the Amarna tablets, the Merenptah Stele provides the most important extra-biblical text referring to an entity called "Israel". This external naming of Israel is valuable for the chronology of its appearance in Canaan.[228] Lemche,[229] however, indicates that, although probable, it is still questionable whether the group "Israel" mentioned in the stele has any connection with the ḫabiru. Aside from the above-mentioned, the next known extra-biblical reference to Israel is during the ninth century BC, and the first known mentioning of Judah appears in an eighth century BC document.[230]

During the second millennium BC the eradication of subsistence sources was common military tactic by the Egyptian, Canaanite, Hittite and Assyrian armies. In the light of this customary practice by the enemy, the question is whether the Egyptian scribe referred to Israel's

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[223] Fritz 1987:99.
[224] Finkelstein 1997:222.
[225] Halpern 1997:335.
[226] Hasel 2003:29.
[227] Brandfon 1988:55.
[228] Gottwald 1993:170.
[229] Lemche 1988:103.
[230] Gelinas 1995:229. Israel is mentioned in the description of the mid-ninth century BC battle of Qarqar on the Kurkh Monolith of Shalmaneser III; a text of Tiglath-pileser III, dated 734-733 BC, refers to Judah (Gelinas 1995:229). Shalmaneser III (858-824 BC) represents one of the rulers who laid the foundations of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. He was the first Assyrian king to come in contact with the kings of Israel (Oppenheim 1962b:305). Tiglath-pileser III was king of Assyria (745-727 BC), and later – under the rare Assyrian name Pūlu – king of Babylonia. There are a few references to him in the Masoretic Text: 2 Kings 15:19, 29; 1 Chronicles 5:6; 2 Chronicles 28:20 (Oppenheim 1962c:641).

agricultural produce or its offspring.[231] Hasel[232] hypothesises that in the late thirteenth century BC Israel had already operated as a sedentary-ethnic and agriculture-based entity. The term *prt*, "seed", on the Merenptah Stele was originally translated and interpreted as an agricultural element. This noun could be defined as "fruit, seed" with reference to planting, but also in the sense of "offspring, posterity". Although the Egyptians did not apply the verb *fkt*, "to lay waste" [fields and harvest], in this specific context, *prt* in the inscription does not refer to human beings.[233] The destruction or appropriation of grain or other life subsistence sources was a problem that occurred frequently and can be illustrated, inter alia, by the detailed Assyrian description of the 'destruction of trees, fruit trees, grain, and other life subsistence sources of the enemy'.[234]

According to Rainey,[235] the origin of Israel could be determined by references on the Karnak reliefs[236] to the "land of *Shasu*".[237] This Egyptian geographical designation alludes to pastoral nomads from Transjordan who hypothetically migrated into the central hill country. Rainey[238] acknowledges the 'brilliant piece of detective work' by Yurco[239] in his analysing of the wall-reliefs at Karnak, but differs from the latter's interpretation of certain figures depicted in the one scene as being Israelites and not Canaanites.[240] Rainey[241] connects the Israelites with the pastoral *Shasu* in other wall-reliefs. He argues, in concurrence with other scholars, that the *Shasu* should be identified with the early Israelites. This does not, however, imply

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[231] 'Israel is laid waste, his seed is no more' (Rainey 2001:63). See earlier footnote in this paragraph.

[232] Hasel 2003:19-20, 22.

[233] For a detailed lexical and contextual discussion of the passage referring to Israel on the Merenptah Stele, see Hasel (2003:20-26).

[234] Hasel 2003:25-26.

[235] Rainey 2001:68-69.

[236] The dynastic god *Amun-Re* benefited mainly from the enthusiastic building projects of the Egyptians. Every monarch dedicated statues and sanctuaries to him in the great dynastic temple of Karnak in Thebes. Despite intensive archaeological excavations, large parts of Karnak have not been uncovered (Charles-Picard 1983:220). While the inscriptions on the Merenptah Stele are devoted to the defeat of the Libyans and the Sea Peoples by Merenptah, the extensive hieroglyphic inscriptions in the famous Karnak temple accompany a set of battle reliefs that illustrate the Canaanite campaign of Merenptah. These reliefs are on the partially destroyed western wall, known as the Cour de la Cachette. The oldest known depiction of Israelites is among portrayals on the reliefs. The temple of Karnak was under construction for more than two thousand years (Yurco 1990:21-22). For a detailed discussion of Merenptah's campaign depicted on the Karnak reliefs, see Yurco (1990:21-26), Rainey (2001:68-74) and Hasel (2003:27-36).

[237] The *Shasu* [or *Shosu*] [see § 2.6] who appear on a number of the reliefs on the Karnak wall, were a "semi-nomadic, Bedouin-type people," who roamed Canaan and the Sinai. One of these reliefs depicts the *Shasu* as prisoners marched off to Egypt. True to convention, the enemies of Egypt were represented diminutively (Rainey 1991:56).

[238] Rainey 1991:56.

[239] Yurco 1990:21-26.

[240] Yurco (1990:22) identifies scene 4 as the 'oldest known visual portrayal of Israelites', while Rainey (1991:56) disagrees and mentions that this specific scene depicts typical Canaanite soldiers in ankle-length clothes using Canaanite chariots. The Israelites had no chariots and it is totally unlikely that they used borrowed Canaanite chariots.

[241] Rainey 1991:56. *Shasu*: see also § 2.6.

that all *Shasu* were Israelites; groups, such as the Amalekites, Ammonites and Moabites might have had origins among the *Shasu*. In response to Rainey, Yurco[242] defends his point of view and states that, to his mind, some Israelites amalgamated with the Canaanite society. He indicates that his identification of the enemies – carved by Egyptian sculptors in Canaanite dress – as Israelites is more convincing than the latter being identified with the *Shasu*. While Rainey[243] contends that the Merenptah Stele and Karnak reliefs signify a link between Israel and the *Shasu*, Hasel[244] argues that the Egyptian reliefs should be evaluated objectively and independently 'on the basis of a much broader contextual perspective of Egyptian convention in narrative art and iconography'. Rainey[245] concludes that the ancient Israelites probably migrated from Transjordan to Cisjordan, being one of the many *Shasu*-groups roving to find better livelihood areas. The reference to "Israel" in the Merenptah-inscription is, however, no proof for the existence of a Late Bronze Age twelve-tribe league.

2.8   Ras Shamra tablets: Ugarit

In 1929, excavations started on the remains of the ancient city Ugarit in northern Syria identified at Ras Shamra.[246] The site is situated near a small harbour on the Mediterranean, known as Minet el-Beida or "White Harbour", due to the whiteness of the rocks at the entrance of the harbour. Artefacts uncovered disclosed the cosmopolitan nature of this ancient city. Among the various objects found, was a statuette of a god subsequently identified as a figure representing the Canaanite deity *Ba'al*.[247] In 1931 the identity of the ancient city was confirmed. A tablet recovered on the site contained the phrase "Niqmaddu, king of Ugarit", and as several other tablets also mentioned the word "Ugarit", it was concluded that Ras Shamra was the site of the ancient city of Ugarit notably known from references in the Tell el-Amarna Letters.[248]

Little is known about this Early Bronze and Middle Bronze Age city. Few architectural remains of these periods have been uncovered and cannot be safely dated due to a major

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[242] Yurco 1991:61.

[243] Rainey 1991:56.

[244] Hasel 2003:29.

[245] Rainey 2001:74-75.

[246] An accidental discovery in 1928 disclosed a royal necropolis. On closer examination several stone slabs were uncovered, revealing a tomb vault containing a number of small artefacts. An initial survey of the immediate vicinity by the excavation team revealed traces of occupation from the Neolithic Period through to the Roman Period within a relatively small radius of Ras Shamra (Curtis 1985:18). The Neolithic Period is dated 8500-4500 BC (Negev & Gibson 2001:556). The Roman Empire was established by Emperor Augustus 27 BC and divided by Theodosius AD 395 into the Western and Eastern Empire (Oxford University Press 1987:1468).

[247] See § 3.5.

[248] Curtis 1985:18-20, 26. Tell el-Amarna Letters: diplomatic correspondence between the Egyptian courts and the rulers of vassal states in the Asian section of the Egyptian Empire; ca 1375-1366 BC (Lambdin 1962:529, 531). See § 2.5.

earthquake, probably during the late fourteenth century BC. Fortunately, abundant Akkadian and Ugaritic tablets – all dating between the fifteenth and twelfth centuries BC – wherein the history of the Late Bronze Age city of Ugarit has been well documented, have been discovered. According to information from these cuneiform archives, the kingdom of Ugarit extended for ca 2000 km². Built in close proximity to the sea and harbour, the city had easy access to imported exotic and luxury goods, such as the Egyptian stone vases that have been uncovered.[249] Many ancient texts refer to trade with merchants from the Euphrates Valley and Mesopotamia. Ugarit became a great commercial centre and a key location on the route from Asia Minor to the Aegean islands and Egypt. Huge fortunes had an effect on the technical and cultural development of the city.[250] A mild climate and abundant rains advanced the growth of olives, vines and cereals.[251]

Shortly after excavations started, the first tablets were found, written in a hitherto unknown cuneiform writing. The thirty signs were not Akkadian, but revealed an alphabetical script.[252] Due to the similarity between the Ugaritic and Mesopotamian texts – in general form and function – scholars assumed that the Ugaritic readings are translations of unattested Akkadian originals. Pardee,[253] however, noticed very few Akkadian loan words in the Ugaritic language and no specific links with Mesopotamian texts. He concludes that an old West Semitic tradition is reflected in the Ugaritic texts. Kapelrud[254] indicates that the uncovering of these tablets led to the discovery of a complete library of hundreds more, some of which had been used for teaching and practising, probably in a scribes' school housed in the library. In addition to the Akkadian documents and Horite dictionaries, Ugaritic is of great significance for the research on the development of the Canaanite script and literature. Although belonging to the Canaanite family, the cuneiform alphabetic and consonant script is closer to biblical Hebrew. Epic songs that praise the deeds of gods and heroes are incorporated into the Ugaritic literature. Both in context and language, these epics and the biblical literature have much in common.[255] The Ugaritic texts evince certain cultural similarities with early Israelite material and provide some background regarding the development of the Israelite religion. Current

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[249] Caubet 2000:35-36.
[250] Negev & Gibson 2001:523.
[251] Caubet 2000:36.
[252] This Ugaritic alphabet was probably written in the fourteenth century BC and is thus the oldest known alphabet in the world (Kapelrud 1962c:728).
[253] Pardee 2001:233.
[254] Kapelrud 1962c:725-726, 729.
[255] Negev & Gibson 2001:524.

discussions concerning ancient evidence employ the term "Canaanite" in connection with language and language classification as well as with the research on cultures.[256]

The yield of the tablets has an enormous value for the study of the Phoenician and Canaanite religion.[257] They contain substantial segments of legendary narratives, as well as mythological and ritual texts. There is a possibility that these mythologies were either common to the cultures of Syria-Palestine, or that they were imported into Ugarit from some Syro-Palestinian centre. It seems that the cult of the storm god *Ba῾al*[258] entered Palestine and Phoenicia from outside the area, replacing the indigenous cult of *El*, the chief god of the pantheon. The Ugaritic texts refer to *El* and the goddess *Asherah* as the owners of heaven and earth.[259] *Asherah*,[260] referred to as *Athirat* in the texts, frequently appears as consort of *El*. She is also named *'Elat*, the feminine form of *El*.[261] Prior to the discovery of the Ugaritic texts, the Hebrew Bible was considered the leading authority on the Canaanite religion. Biblical scholarship assumed that the Israelite tribes were confronted with an alien and evil culture. Biblical narratives often refer to "foreign gods" – *Ba῾al*, *Asherah*, *Shemesh* and some others – which Judah and Israel were not to worship.[262] The Hebrew Bible, furthermore, represents the goddess *Asherah* as a deity, a green tree and tree trunks – *Asherim* – often placed beside מצבות.[263] Various passages in the Hebrew Bible demonstrate that the Israelite prophets were well acquainted with fertility myths and took advantage of this knowledge in their prophetic teachings.[264] Although the cult and myths of Late Bronze Ugarit and Tyre[265] may be connected to that of Late Bronze Canaan, it was not identical. Yet, according to historiographical material, Tyre was the major source of Canaanite religious influence on Israel.[266] The majority of the Ugaritic texts are of mythological character, furnishing new information on the religion of Syria and Canaan in the first half of the second millennium BC. These texts, as well

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[256] Smith 2002:21, 27.
[257] Kapelrud 1962c:725.
[258] The city housed, inter alia, two large temples for the gods *Ba῾al* and *Dagon*, respectively (Curtis 1985:26).
[259] Handy 1994:20-22, 76.
[260] See discussion on *Asherah* in § 3.2.
[261] Hestrin 1991:52.
[262] Handy 1994:37, 41.
[263] מצבות – transcribed as *maṣṣēbot* – were standing stones in cult places; 2 Chronicles 31:1 (Hestrin 1991:52). See § 2.14.1.
[264] The prophet Hosea is an example of speaking frequently in terms familiar to his audience; in Hosea 5:13-6:3 we have a depiction of the dying and rising god (Williams 1935:245-246).
[265] The Greeks were the first people to refer to the country of the Canaanites as Phoenicia, and as early as ca 1200 BC these two terms were synonymous. A direct translation of the word "Canaan" means "land of purple". Tyre was one of the few good harbours of Phoenicia and an important training and industrial centre with a significant industry based on a purple dye derived from molluscs (Kapelrud 1962b:800-801).
[266] Zevit 2001:120.

as several artefacts found at Ras Shamra, give intimations about the cult practised in Ugarit and environs.[267]

At a later stage of the excavations, historical texts were found in the royal palaces. These give exact dates and details about the last centuries of Ugarit's history. During the reign of Niqmaddu II,[268] or that of his predecessor, a great disaster befell the city. According to excavators, an earthquake and tidal wave struck the city, followed by a fire, all of which destroyed or seriously damaged buildings.[269] Excavations carried out in 1973 unearthed a new thirteenth century BC archive. More than three hundred tablets and fragments were later discovered. Although these finds did not bring forth significant new knowledge, important aspects were corroborated. Demanding Hittite overlords – despite their weakening – attributed to the growing unruliness of Ugarit. Furthermore, the area was caught in a famine. Apart from these texts giving dramatic descriptions of an "impending catastrophe", documents from Emar – a kingdom on the south-eastern frontier of the Hittite Empire – also describe the gradual deterioration of the city.[270] At the end of the thirteenth century BC and the beginning of the twelfth, Ugarit was invaded by the warlike "Sea Peoples"[271] responsible for the city's destruction. At the dawn of the Iron Age, the invasion by the iron-wielding Sea Peoples was symbolic of the city's economic decline in the important manufacture of bronze tools and weapons. Although the history of Ugarit ends in the twelfth century BC, isolated discoveries indicate later occupations of the site.[272]

2.9 Kuntillet ʿAjrud

The site, also known as Horvat Teman, is situated on a mound in the valley of Wadi Qurayyat in the north-eastern region of Sinai, approximately fifty kilometres south of Kadesh-barnea.[273] Kuntillet ʿAjrud[274] is close to important crossroads, leading from Kadesh-barnea in the north to Elath in the south. The east-west route follows the dry riverbed of Wadi Qurayyat.[275] Although the two buildings on the site could be interpreted as a fortress, they differ from other

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[267] Kapelrud 1962c:725-726, 729.
[268] Mid-fourteenth century BC (Curtis 1985:43).
[269] Curtis 1985:43.
[270] Singer 2000:21-24.
[271] Also known as Philistines; they seemed to have travelled from the north, both by land and sea, progressing along the east Mediterranean coast (Curtis 1985:47-48). See footnote in § 2.7 on, inter alia, Sea Peoples and Philistines.
[272] Curtis 1985:47-48.
[273] Negev & Gibson 2001:286. Kadesh-barnea, just south of the Israelite border, is an important oasis – identified with Ain el-Qudeirat – in the Wilderness of Zin (Negev & Gibson 2001:276).
[274] The meaning of the Arab name is "solitary hill of wells" (Scheffler 2000:100).
[275] Scheffler 2000:100.

Negeb fortresses, and had no apparent military function.[276] It was, furthermore, thought to be a wayside shrine for travellers to leave their offerings. Apparently, however, it served as a caravanserai.[277] As the site was inhabited only for a brief period, it is possible to date it precisely to the eighth century BC. The pottery discovered at the site dates to ca 800 BC.[278]

Fragments of inscriptions on wall-plaster in Phoenician script were found. There is a significant similarity between these inscriptions and the ink-on-plaster wall-inscriptions found at a shrine at Tell Deir ʿAlla,[279] mentioning Balaam the seer. Deir ʿAlla is relevant to Kuntillet ʿAjrud therein that the 'formally scripted mythological inscriptions' at the shrine is a clear indication that the wall-inscriptions at Kuntillet ʿAjrud should not be judged as casual graffiti, but should be interpreted within its context.[280] The eastern entrance to the building had at some stage been decorated with linear and flora frescoes. The most dramatic of these discoveries, however, were two pithoi,[281] densely covered with drawings and inscriptions, mainly in red ink. Neutron activation analysis[282] indicated that the pottery was not a product of local clay, but of clay from Judah or the coast, or even as far as the northern parts of Israel.[283] According to Zevit,[284] the pithoi were manufactured in the Jerusalem area, but the inscriptions and drawings added at Kuntillet ʿAjrud. Scheffler[285] mentions that there is no doubt 'from the handwriting, style and superimposition of writings and drawings that many hands had been at work at Kuntillet ʿAjrud'. Peckham[286] is of the opinion that these "eclectic dedications" might have been left by Tyrian merchants.

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[276] Zevit 2001:370. Dever (2005:160) interprets it as a 'typical Iron Age Judean desert fort guarded by a small permanent force', at the same time serving as an inn. On the site there is also an indisputable "gate shrine".
[277] Caravanserai: an unfurnished inn where caravans could stay over (Scheffler 2000:100). Caravans consisted of a group of people – often merchants – travelling together. The ass was the local form of transport. The camel – which was less common – only came into use ca 1000 BC. It was important to travel together, especially through dangerous territory (McCullough 1962:536).
[278] Scheffler 2000:100.
[279] Tell Deir ʿAlla is a prominent mound in the Jordan Valley, slightly north-east of the junction of the Jabbok and Jordan rivers. Identified by scholars as the biblical Succoth (see § 2.7 – footnote on Succoth Valley) (Negev & Gibson 2001:138). The territory is associated with the tribe of Gad (Zevit 2001:370).
[280] Zevit 2001:370-371.
[281] Pithoi are large pottery containers or storage vessels; those found at Kuntillet ʿAjrud are each one metre high, weighing approximately thirteen kilograms; pithos is the singular form of pithoi (North 1989:120).
[282] Neutron activation analysis: identification of elements, especially trace elements, in a sample by studying characteristic gamma rays (short-wavelength electromagnetic rays) emitted by the sample after irradiation with high-energy neutrons (electrically neutral elementary subatomic particles).
[283] North 1989:120.
[284] Zevit 2001:381. For a detailed discussion of the site and finds discovered there, see Zevit (2001:370-405).
[285] Scheffler 2000:101.
[286] Peckham 2001:23.

Many debates followed since the sensational discovery of the inscriptions on the two pithoi. Pithos A has on both sides a "collage" of miscellaneous drawings, separate letters and a written benediction:

> 'may you be blessed by Yahweh
>
> of Shomron [Samaria] and his Asherah'.[287]

Pithos B has incomplete animal drawings and a group of five human figures, with raised hands, supposedly in veneration. A second inscription on a pithos reads:

> 'Amaryo said: Tell my lord, may you be well
>
> and be blessed by Yahweh of Teman and his Asherah.
>
> May he bless and keep you and be with you.'[288]

This storage jar was probably placed at the gate as a votive.[289] The various painted scenes on the pithoi picture humans or divine figures and illustrate familiar fertility motifs.[290]

2.10   Khirbet 'el-Qom

An inscription on a pillar of a burial cave close to Khirbet 'el-Qom[291] is dated ca 725 BC.[292] This cave is a typical Judean "bench tomb" from the eighth century BC. On the engraving is a distinctively carved human hand, resembling the much later Islamic "Hand of Fatima".[293] This sign is a kind of graffito which was written on amulets, walls and over doorways. The open, outstretched hand is a symbol of "good luck" to ward off the "evil eye". The 'el-Qom-hand is undoubtedly Israelite. The hand-symbol and "blessing formula" on the carving should, in all likelihood, be ascribed to the same person, wishing prosperity from "the hand of *Yahweh*". It concurs with the "hand of blessing" in the Hebrew Bible.[294]

Although there are linguistic difficulties, the inscription should probably read:

> 'For 'Uriyahu the governor (or the rich), his inscription.
>
> Blessed is 'Uriyahu by Yahweh:
>
> From his enemies he has been saved

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[287] Scheffler 2000:102.
[288] Scheffler 2000:105.
[289] Dever 2005:128.
[290] Mayes 1997:61. See § 4.3.9 for a discussion of the implication for research on the Israelite religion of these inscriptions, which refer to *Yahweh* and his *Asherah* – seemingly indicating *Asherah* to be his consort.
[291] Identified with biblical Makkedah, approximately ten kilometres south-east of Lachish (Zevit 2001:359). Joshua 10:10, 16-17, 21, 28-29; 12:16; 15:41.
[292] Zevit 2001:359.
[293] Known as *Hamza*. It is seen everywhere in the Muslim world (Dever 2005:132).
[294] Dever 2005:131-133. Examples are: 2 Chronicles 20:6; 30:12; Ezra 7:6, 28; 8:31; Nehemiah 2:8; Psalms 16:11; 63:8; 80:17.

> By his a/Asherah.
>
> (Written) by ʿOniyahu' [295]

Palaeographic difficulties were encountered with the deciphering of this legend. In the initial preparation of the surface for the inscription, by the writer, vertical grooves formed which could be read as parts of letters. Furthermore, the inscriber thereof did not apply the same pressure when carving the letters, resulting in well-defined, as well as blended letters. Other letters were later traced over some of the original ones.[296]

2.11 Khirbet Beit Lei

On the eastern slope of the hill of Khirbet Beit Lei an ancient burial cave was uncovered during 1961.[297] Apart from a rectangular antechamber, the cave consists of two burial chambers, each with three benches, the latter being characteristic of pre-exilic burial caves.[298] Human bones and a ring, earring and plaque of bronze were found on the benches. Fragments of earthenware vessels were uncovered outside the cave. The variety of graffiti discovered on the walls of the antechamber distinguishes this cave from other Iron Age caves. Apart from a number of drawings on the walls, inscriptions in the old Hebrew script were also found. The drawings include a man holding a type of lyre, a praying figure and a third figure wherein the man's dress and headgear is emphasised. Schematically drawn ships were an unusual feature,[299] and were probably related to religious activities.[300]

The three main inscriptions have been palaeographically examined. Although engraved by a person with a reasonably good handwriting, all the letters were not carefully written and can be considered to be graffiti. These inscriptions concern biblical scholars and the proposed reading by Naveh[301] of some lines is as follows:

Inscription A: 'Yahveh (is) the God of the whole earth;

the mountains of Judah belong to him,

to the God of Jerusalem.'

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[295] Dever 2005:131-132.

[296] Zevit 2001:360-361. For a detailed discussion of this inscription, see Zevit (2001:360-370) and North (1989:124-127). The reference to *Yahweh* and to his *Asherah* in the above inscription is discussed in § 4.3.10.

[297] The cave lies close to and east of Lachish, north-east of Tell Beit Mirsim and not far north-west from Hebron. The area is best defined as being on the western slope of the Judean ranges (Naveh 1963:74).

[298] Numerous parallels of this type of burial chamber have been found at Beth Shemesh, a few at Lachish and a single cave at Tell en-Nasbeh (Naveh 1963:74). For a detailed description of the cave and drawings, see Naveh (1963:81-87) and Zevit (2001:405-438).

[299] It is unlikely that inhabitants of this region had any fishing or seafaring association (Naveh 1963:78).

[300] Naveh 1963:74-78.

[301] Naveh 1963:81-87.

Inscription B: 'The (Mount of) Moriah Thou hast formed,

the dwelling of Yah, Yahveh.'

Inscription C: '[Ya]hveh deliver (us)!'

To characterise ancient Hebrew script, monumental inscriptions or ostraca written in ink by scribes are employed. Therefore, in the case of the Beit Lei graffiti – being different from comparable material – precise chronological conclusions cannot easily be drawn. The letter-forms differ considerably from each other, and different styles of handwriting can be distinguished. However, scholars conclude that the inscriptions in the burial cave were made over a short period of time.[302] Parallel biblical phrases are dated post-exilic. To date the inscriptions on an historical basis shall, therefore, only be hypothetical.[303] Naveh[304] concludes that the script should not be dated later than the sixth century BC. He, furthermore, states that 'the contents of the inscriptions are obviously religious', and that the burial cave was possibly the property of a family of Levite singers.[305] The drawing, portraying two boats in the water, is 'reminiscent of Egyptian barques on which gods were transported'.[306] These boats are significant considering the curse in Deuteronomy 28:68.[307] Zevit[308] resolves that the inscriptions clearly indicate 'that YHWH was a most important deity, but not necessarily' the only god.

The appellation 'God of Jerusalem' (inscription A), obviously refers to *Yahweh* who dwells in Zion. *Yahweh* is a universal God, but at the same time the national God of Israel. This perception could have been particularly stressed when the country – with the exception of Jerusalem – was subjugated by hostile forces. The inscriptions would therefore be well suited at the time when Sennacherib conquered forty-six Judean fortified cities and eventually kept Hezekiah besieged in Jerusalem.[309] After Sennacherib's return to Assyria, there was a widespread

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[302] Naveh 1963:87-88.

[303] Extra-biblical parallels have been found in a monumental inscription of the Royal Steward and some graffiti from Gibeon. These were dated ca 700 BC and the sixth century BC, respectively (Naveh 1963:87-88). The only known burial caves with similar architectonic features to Beit Lei are in the Silwan necropolis west of Jerusalem. These tombs include that of the Royal Steward Silwan, dated eighth to seventh century BC (Zevit 2001:405-406).

[304] Naveh 1963:89-90.

[305] Naveh (1963:89-90) draws this conclusion on the basis of the contents of the drawings: a man with a lyre, a praying figure and a man with headgear that could be priestly or Levitic.

[306] Zevit 2001:433.

[307] Deuteronomy 28:68: 'And the LORD [*Yahweh*] will bring you back in ships to Egypt, a journey that I promised that you should never make again; and there you shall offer yourselves for sale to your enemies as male and female slaves; but there will be no buyer.'

[308] Zevit 2001:436.

[309] Sennacherib, king of Assyria and Babylonia (705-681 BC) invaded Palestine during 701 BC. This campaign is well documented in Assyrian sources, as well as being supplemented by the biblical record (2 Ki 18:13-19:37; 2 Chr 32:1-22; Is 36-37). Jerusalem was miraculously saved when the Assyrian army inexplicably withdrew, returning home.

belief that Jerusalem would always be saved. All three inscriptions obviously have a religious content – the first two in poetic rhythm, while the third is the expression of a simple prayer.[310]

2.12   Ketef Hinnom

During excavations carried out by Gabriel Barkay at Ketef Hinnom[311] two of the 'most important archaeological finds to date [2004], shedding light on the Bible', were recovered during 1979.[312] Two silver plaques, specified as Ketef Hinnom I and II, were discovered containing an alternate version of the well-known Priestly Benediction of Numbers 6:24-26.[313] This is the earliest citation found of texts that also appear in the Hebrew Bible. As the plaques obviously functioned as amulets, the purpose of the inscriptions was probably apotropaic.[314] Dever[315] is of the opinion that the amulet was presumably worn around a woman's neck[316] and, therefore, would have been a cherished belonging. In reality it was thus an analogue form of the phylactery.[317] While Barkay and others[318] dated the inscriptions to the seventh century BC there were different readings by scholars dating them to the sixth century BC and even proposing an extreme date during the Hellenistic Period.[319] Proper decipherment of the inscriptions was initially not possible, even with the best technology available at that stage. With the aid of better photographic and computer-imaging technology, as well as high-resolution digital imagery, the enhanced images revealed traces of letters that were not previously identified, as well as a clarification of certain letters. Scholars suggesting a date during

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[310] Naveh 1963:89-92.

[311] Ketef Hinnom is the site of an Iron Age cemetery above the Hinnom Valley south-west of the Old City of Jerusalem. Large quantities of pottery finds, dated from the seventh century BC to 586 BC were, inter alia, excavated at the location (Negev & Gibson 2001:282-283).

[312] Barkay et al 2004:41.

[313] Numbers 6:24-26:   'The LORD [*Yahweh*] bless you and keep you;
the LORD [*Yahweh*] make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;
the LORD [*Yahweh*] lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.'

Ketef Hinnom version (Dever 2005:130):
    'May Yahweh bless you
and watch over you
May Yahweh make his
face shine upon you
And grant you peace.'

[314] Barkay et al 2004:41-42. Apotropaism is the belief that ritual acts, incantations or amulets can ward off evil (Deist 1990:18).

[315] Dever 2005:131.

[316] The rolled up amulet was meant to be worn around a neck on a thong. The amulet was probably buried with a woman, judging from the collection of jewellery. It seems thus, that sophisticated people, close to the religious capital Jerusalem, were superstitious in the Monarchical Period (Dever 2005:130-131).

[317] The phylactery was 'a small box containing slips inscribed with scriptural passages', which was either attached to the doorpost of a house, or worn by the owner (Dever 2005:131).

[318] Barkay et al 2004:41-42.

[319] 332-63 BC.

the Hasmonean Period,[320] misunderstood the stratigraphy[321] of the burial repository – where the plaques were found – and drew conclusions on the basis of several Hellenistic objects discovered near the opening of the repository.[322]

The plaques are very small and the letters difficult to see as they are scratched onto the silver and not written in ink.[323] These inscriptions were not meant to be seen again after they had been written. They had the same intention as the inscriptions in the מזוזה[324] and the תפלין;[325] their function thus being amulets protecting the wearers against evil in the presence of holiness. It was, likewise, probably a scribe who wrote the miniscule letters on the precious metal surface for apotropaic purposes.[326] Waaler[327] observes that as both amulets contain the same text, it is a sure intimation that this text must have been meaningful and standardised at the period of inscription. The inscriptions are an indication of an earlier "continuous written tradition." After revised palaeographic observations, Barkay and others[328] conclude 'that there are no forms in these inscriptions that point toward a postexilic, much less a Hellenistic date'.

In the final analysis, Barkay and others[329] reiterate the general consensus reached by scholars 'that the inscriptions found on these plaques preserve the earliest known citations of biblical texts', and thus furnish biblical research with the earliest examples of confessional statements regarding *Yahweh*.[330]

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[320] 142-37 BC.

[321] Stratigraphy is 'one of the major interpretative principles of field archaeology, borrowed from geology' (Kenyon 1987:185). One deposit layer of debris overlies another, accumulating from the bottom to the top. Numerous factors can contribute to the disturbance of any orderly sequence of deposit, such as earthquakes, burrowing animals and interference by man. The various layers of debris are called "levels" or "strata" (Kenyon 1987:185).

[322] Barkay et al 2004:43-44. The stratigraphy of a burial repository differs totally from the stratigraphic layers of an occupational site. On a tell these layers are often separated by destruction debris and are deposited on top of each other, while in a burial repository dating is done according to where the objects are found in the repository. For further explanation hereof, see Barkay et al (2004:43-44).

[323] The two scrolls are extremely small. The one measures 27 x 97 mm and the other 11 x 39,2 mm. The letters average 5 mm and 3,5 mm in height, respectively. The individual letter strokes are, furthermore, only the width of a hair and lightly scratched. Numerous peripheral scratches complicate the distinguishing of letterforms (Barkay et al 2003:163).

[324] מזוזה (*mezuzah*) is the Hebrew word normally translated with door or doorpost. The word was used for doorposts – which were sacred – at a local sanctuary. Passages of scripture were attached to the doorposts in a container (מזוזה) (Henton Davies 1962a:368).

[325] תפלין (*tephillin*) are small receptacles, containing some verses of scripture. It was bound on the forehead and arm during prayer. In New Testament times the Greek word meant "amulet" or "means of protection" (Henton Davies 1962b:808).

[326] Barkay et al 2004:47-52.

[327] Waaler 2002:44, 53.

[328] Barkay et al 2004:52. For a palaeographic summary and a new analysis of the letters on the amulets, see Barkay et al (2003:163-170) and Barkay et al (2004:47-52).

[329] Barkay et al 2004:68.

[330] Barkay et al 2004:41.

2.13 Relevant archaeological artefacts

The following finds – which are only briefly discussed – are merely a few relevant archaeological artefacts.

Taanach

Excavators at Taanach – a large tell on the southern periphery of the Jezreel Valley – argue that this Iron I site was populated by Canaanites, while some scholars propose that, even at such an early date, these inhabitants could be considered Israelites.[331] Twelve clay tablets found at Taanach furnish information regarding social patterns in the fifteenth century BC Canaan and, furthermore, complete knowledge acquired from the el-Amarna Letters.[332] Similar tablets were found at, inter alia, Gezer, Jericho and Megiddo.[333] These tablets are inscribed in a 'Palestinian variant of the Canaanite cuneiform alphabet'[334] and, therefore, probably reflect the dialect of southern Canaan by the end of the Late Bronze Age. At that stage, certain major linguistic adjustments were discernable in the Canaanite language.[335] Despite a changing Egyptian pattern of trade with Palestine,[336] city-states prospered as seen in massive fortifications, such as at Taanach.[337] However, as from the eleventh century BC through to the Persian Period, this city exhibited a recurring pattern of abandonment and occupation.[338]

During 1902 the first cult stand[339] was excavated at Taanach, followed by the discovery of a second, similar stand in 1968.[340] The cult stands have a quadrangular shape, hollow on the inside. The top has a raised rim on four edges, adorned with a line of knobs on the outside. The front is decorated with figures.[341] These lavishly decorated terracotta stands are the most

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[331] Finkelstein 1997:221.

[332] See § 2.5 regarding these letters. Albright (1944:14) mentions that these tablets belong to the same stratum where an Egyptian amphora and alabaster were discovered. It is dated to the fifteenth century BC. See Albright (1944:16-27) for a translation of inscriptions on these tablets. Stratum (plural: strata) is one of the layers of debris that has been deposited on top of another. See also § 2.12: footnote on stratigraphy. Amphora is a vessel which was used to transport wine and oil over distances (Negev & Gibson 2001:557).

[333] Negev & Gibson 2001:242.

[334] Cross 1968:41.

[335] Cross 1968:41-42.

[336] Egypt increasingly favoured the trade route by sea, resulting in the relinquishing of the overland caravan routes and sites, with the effect of a dwindling trade between Egypt and Palestine during Early Bronze III (Richard 1987:31).

[337] Richard 1987:31, 33.

[338] Lapp 1969:4-5.

[339] Cult stand: a structure consisting of a number of tiers without a horizontal separation (Beck 1994:356).

[340] Lapp 1969:42. The first stand was discovered in 1902 by E Sellin. During 1968, an expedition – directed by P Lapp – discovered a pit which was presumably part of the 1902 excavation. This pit nearly destroyed a well-constructed cistern shaft as bedrock collapsed into the cistern. Pieces of the broken second cult stand were pressed into a soft silt layer. Despite the damage done by the collapsed bedrock and the poorly-fired clay it was made of, the stand was still in a remarkably preserved condition (Lapp 1969:42).

[341] Similar figurative ornamentation on cult stands have been discovered at, inter alia, Tel Ashdod, Tel Beit Shean, Tel Megiddo and Jerusalem (Vriezen 2001:71-72).

impressive objects discovered in the "cultic structure area".[342]   Dever[343] disagrees with the typifying of the area as a "cultic structure" and states that it was more likely a במה[344] than an elementary household shrine.[345]   Zevit[346] indicates that although the excavated construction and most of its contents suggest that it was either a domestic or an industrial building – and not a cultic structure as previously propounded – the two elaborate cult stands support a proposal of a cultic building somewhere in the common area; Hestrin[347] likewise assumes that the stands represent a building.
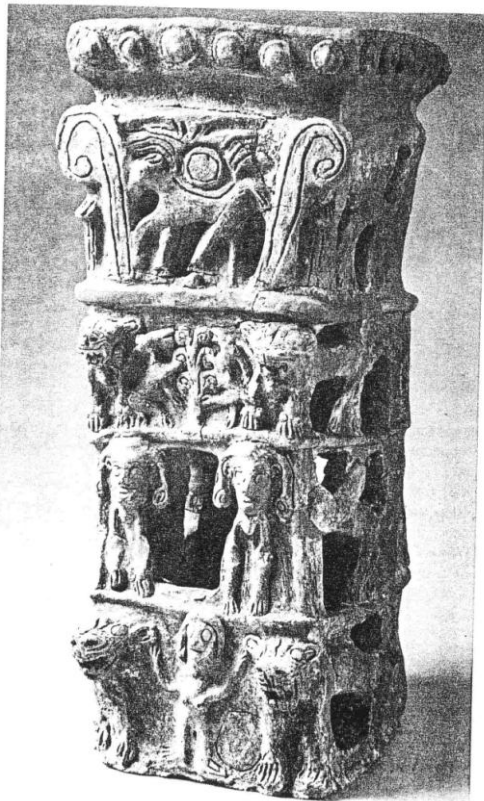

Figure 1

Taanach cult stand; front view

(Hestrin 1987:62)[348]

Figure 2

Taanach cult stand; side view

(Hestrin 1987:63)

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[342] Rast 1994:356. The motifs on these stands are comparable with Ancient Near Eastern parallels in art and literature. The pottery-group identified in the cult stand resembles pottery found in North Palestine, dating to the tenth century BC (Rast 1994:356, 360).

[343] Dever 2005:151, 154.

[344] במה (*bāmâ)*: high place. See § 2.14.1.

[345] 'The monumentality of the large offering stands, and especially the mould for mass-producing figurines, suggest that the Taʿanach "Cultic Structure" was a bāmāh serving the public, even though it lacks some expected features such as standing stones and altars' (Dever 2005:154).

[346] Zevit 2001:237.

[347] Hestrin 1987:71.

[348] Available in the public domain at: www.matrifocus.com/IMB04/spotlight.htm.

Figures 1 and 2 represent the second stand excavated in 1968. This stand is unique for its elaborate iconography and is almost completely preserved.[349] The stand is fifty-four centimetres high and divided into four registers or tiers. In each tier the bodies of a pair of animals, or composite figures, appear in relief on the sides; the heads and legs are depicted on the front of the stand.

A nude female with raised hands, flanked by two lions, appears on the first – bottom – tier. She has a large head with a hairdo which extends the frame of the tier, making her taller and thus creating the impression that she is more important.[350] The female figure is crudely shaped; the breasts are prominent and the outstretched arms touch the ears of the lions. It is not clear whether the ends of the hairdo were meant to be curled. The lions are roughly shaped with no sign of a mane, thus obviously meant to represent lionesses. Naked goddesses with lions are known from Egypt and Palestine.[351] Ackerman[352] mentions that a nude female between two lions is most likely a portrayal of *Asherah*, known as the "Lion Lady" in West Semitic mythology. Her other major symbol, the sacred tree, is also depicted on the stand – on the third tier. Kenyon[353] indicates that, although the interpretation of this iconography is controversial, both this stand and the one excavated earlier are commonly linked to the mother goddess *Asherah*.

An open space in the centre of the second register – from the bottom – is flanked by two sphinxes. These sphinxes are composite creatures incorporating, apart from the lion's body, a bird's wings and a female head wearing a *Hathor* wig.[354] They symbolise guardians and could be identified with the biblical cherubs. On the assumption that the cult stand represents a building, this tier might depict the entrance to a shrine.[355] The most outstanding feature of both cult stands is the 'pyramid of alternating, superimposed, lions and sphinxes'.[356] If these

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[349] Hestrin 1987:61.

[350] Beck 1994:352, 355. The position of the nude female between the lions symbolises the male hero, the master of animals; a depiction known from fourth and second millennium BC Mesopotamian seal impressions (Beck 1994:364).

[351] Hestrin 1987:65, 67. Mesopotamian *Ishtar* was represented clothed, frequently accompanied by a lion. The lions symbolised fertility and power of goddesses, such as *Ishtar* (Hestrin 1987:67-68).

[352] Ackerman 1992:190-191.

[353] Kenyon 1987:97.

[354] The female sphinx appeared in Egypt from the Eighteenth Dynasty [1570-1293 BC] onwards, and as early as the eighteenth century BC in Syria (Hestrin 1987:71). *Hathor* was the Egyptian sky goddess and daughter of *Re*, the sun god. She represented joy, love, song and dance. The "Eye of *Re*" took on the form of *Hathor*, appearing as the lioness *Sekhmet* – or the Powerful One – who killed men and women in a massive bloodbath. She is sometimes portrayed as a celestial cow (Storm 2001:38). She is depicted with a distinctive headdress with a sun-disc and horns (Barrett 1992:58-59).

[355] Hestrin 1987:71.

[356] Beck 1994:356. This type of configuration is known only from the Anatolian world. Animals alone, or animals with composite creatures, appear in similar compositions on Cappadocian seals (Beck 1994:356).

stands could be linked to the Israelites – as has been pointed out by Finkelstein[357] – the question arises whether the vacant space in the centre of this register represents *Yahweh*, the "invisible" Deity, posed between two cherubim. In a Yahwistic context no representation of the Deity between features personifying that Deity, would have been appropriate.[358] Mettinger[359] indicates that, according to the Decalogue commandment,[360] the Israelite worship had to be exclusively aniconic; thus, 'no iconic representation of the deity (anthropomorphic or theriomorphic) serving as the dominant or central cultic symbol',[361] was permitted. The vacant space of the Taanach cult stand may thus symbolise "sacred emptiness" or "empty-space aniconism". Taylor[362] denotes that the space in this register could 'hardly be other than an iconographic representation of Yahweh of Hosts' – this would be the first and only occurrence known in the archaeological record. Zevit[363] mentions that the sphinxes were presumably associated with *Yahweh*.

The third tier – second from the top – represents a sacred tree with two ibexes[364] on their hind legs nibbling at the upper branches. Two lionesses – almost identical to those in the bottom register – flank this group. According to Hestrin,[365] the sacred tree – that provided nourishment and gave life – represented the goddess *'Elat*, or Ugaritic *Athirat* – the biblical *Asherah*. Taylor[366] mentions that scholars generally agree that the deity *Asherah* is depicted in the bottom and the third bottom registers. An association between *Yahweh* and *Asherah* could therefore be suggested by the Taanach cult stand; similar connections appear in inscriptions, as discussed in paragraphs 2.9, 2.10, 4.3.9 and 4.3.10.

The top tier – regarded as the most complex – comprises different elements: an animal figure in the centre, suggested by Hestrin[367] and some other scholars to be a calf or a young bull; a winged sun-disc flanked by two free-standing voluted columns; underneath each one of these columns a small griffin,[368] visible only from the side. Scholars who suggest that the animal is

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[357] Finkelstein 1997:221.
[358] Taylor 1988:560-561.
[359] Mettinger 1997:219-221.
[360] Exodus 20:4.
[361] Mettinger 1997:220-221. See also footnote in § 1.2, and references to aniconism in § 2.14.2 and in *Excursus 1*.
[362] Taylor1988:561.
[363] Zevit 2001:322-324.
[364] See footnote in § 2.13, subtitle "Lachish ewer".
[365] Hestrin 1987:65, 68, 74. See also discussion in § 2.13, subtitle "Lachish ewer".
[366] Taylor 1988:560, 565.
[367] Hestrin 1987:74.
[368] Griffin: see description in footnote in § 3.4.

a bull, thus link this representation to the storm god *Ba'al*.[369] Taylor[370] indicates that scholars debate the question whether the animal is a young bull or an equid. He consulted experts in animal biology who are of the opinion that 'the animal, though crudely fashioned, may be reasonably judged to be an equine and not a bovine'.[371] Taylor,[372] furthermore, points out that scholars tend to overlook the striking parallel in 2 Kings 23:11.[373] According to Hestrin,[374] however, the top tier 'shows the young bull representing Ba'al, together with his symbols and attributes. Thus the stand was intended for worship of Ba'al and Asherah, probably in a shrine at Ta'anach'. Glueck,[375] likewise, interprets the winged sun-disc as a symbol of *Ba'al*, and consequently associates this deity to the nude female figure being the goddess *Asherah*, his consort. Numerous descriptions and references in the Hebrew Bible portray *Yahweh* as a solar deity; a winged sun-disc therefore also being his symbol.[376]

Taylor[377] denotes that the pillars in the top tier, as well as the flanking lions and cherubim on the lower registers, suggest architectural features which were characteristic of the Syro-Palestinian temple architecture. Deities were thus represented by the winged sun-disc, the sacred tree and the nude female. It seems clear that the deity *Yahweh* is personified by the vacant space – second tier from the bottom – as well as 'supposing that tier one is a cultic scene representing Yahweh'[378] The nature of Yahwism in the vicinity of Taanach is portrayed in Judges 5,[379] implying a mythological struggle with Canaanite deities, describing Yahwism in astral terms; hence linking *Yahweh* to the winged sun-disc in the top register.

Hadley[380] mentions that 'evidence such as the Taanach cultic stands' corroborates the theory – held by many scholars – that both Israel and Judah worshipped the goddess *Asherah* as consort of *Yahweh* during the time of the Monarchy. Taylor[381] agrees that the cult stand – as described –'apparently bears witness to yet another cult of Yahweh and Asherah'. He furthermore indicates that such a cult operated – if only indirectly – under royal administrative

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[369] Hestrin 1987:74-75.
[370] Taylor 1988:561-563.
[371] Taylor 1988:562-563.
[372] Taylor 1988:563.
[373] 2 Kings 23:11, 'And he removed the horses that the kings of Judah had dedicated to the sun, at the entrance to the house of the LORD, by the chamber of Nathan-melech the chamberlain, which was in the precincts. And he burned the chariots of the sun with fire.'
[374] Hestrin 1987:77.
[375] Glock 1992:290.
[376] See discussion in § 3.6 and references in § 3.8.1.
[377] Taylor 1988:559-561, 564-566.
[378] Taylor 1988:564. See Taylor (1988:563-566) for motivations linking *Yahweh* to the cult stand.
[379] See particularly Judges 5:19-20, 31.
[380] Hadley 1997:169.
[381] Taylor 1988:566.

sanction during Solomon's reign. It seems clear that both *Yahweh* and *Asherah* are represented more than once, which would imply that this cult stand incorporates 'the two earliest known representations of Yahweh'.[382]
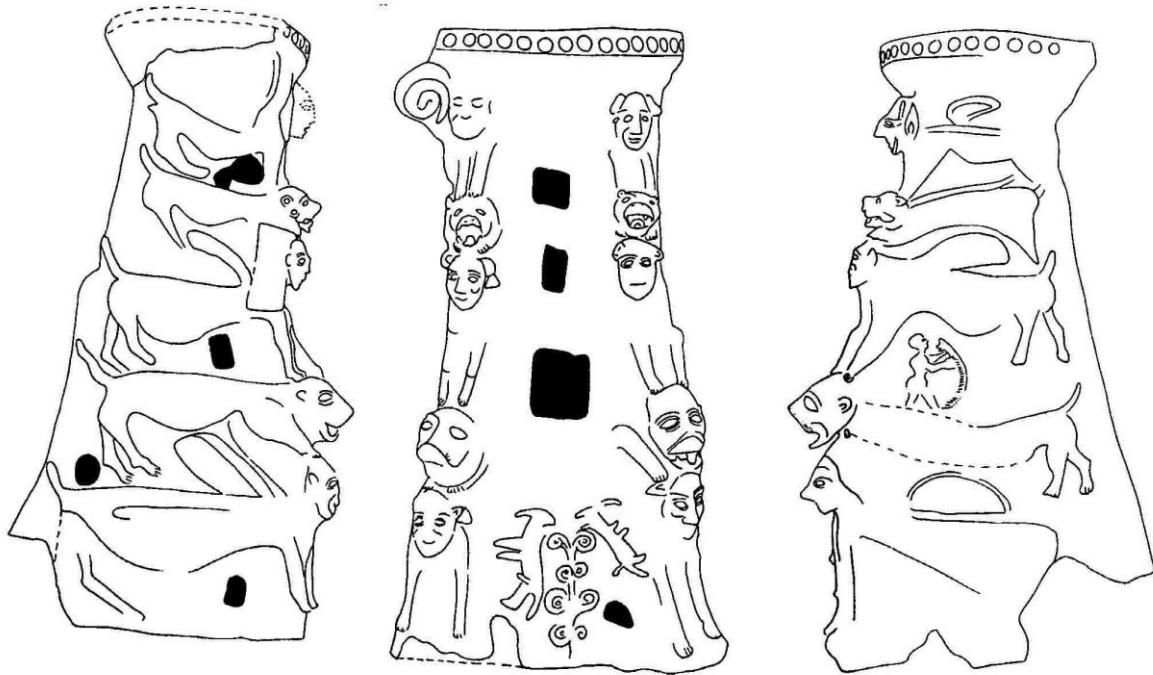

Figure 3. Three sides of the Taanach cult stand excavated in 1902.

(Beck 1994:353)[383]

This cult stand, discovered in 1902 by Sellin, is ninety centimetres in height. The stand is similar to the one described in the previous paragraphs, but with different characteristics. It is a five-tiered structure without any horizontal separations. Pairs of winged sphinxes and lions are depicted on the different tiers, as well as a scene of a man holding a serpent, a stylised tree, superimposed windows, two volutes and some animals. For a detailed description of the stand and its adornments, and an analysis of the scenes, see Beck[384] and Hestrin.[385]

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[382] Taylor 1988:560, 566.
[383] Available in the public domain at: www.biblelandpictures.com/gallery/gallery.asp?categoryid=60.
[384] Beck 1994:352-381.
[385] Hestrin 1987:67-77.

Female Figurines

As from the ninth century BC the Israelites venerated at least one – and more likely a few – goddesses. These were personified by an array of figurines,[386] by both the southern and northern Israelites.[387] Nude female figurines – popularly known as *Astartes* – have been found at many Ancient Near Eastern sites. These can be classified as plaque figurines[388] or pillar figurines.[389] Plaque figurines are divided further into concubine[390] and goddess[391] figurines. Available evidence indicates that pillar figurines were part of the household cult and favoured especially by the Judeans.[392] One of the most significant sources for research on the Israelite religion – thereby to gain insight into this religion – is plaque and pillar figurines representing animate beings.[393]

Plaque and other figurines were utilised in rituals for different purposes. The dominant female pillar figurine images could be linked to fertility, or appropriated as low-level intercessors to convey petitions to distant powers. They were, furthermore, probably applied for either prayer or ritual.[394] During the initial stages of archaeological research, these images were perceived as magical icons; there is, however, 'no archaeological proof that the JPFs[395] are related to any magic rituals'.[396] They were small enough to be easily concealed.[397] Female figurines are identified with divine symbols, such as animals, flowers and serpents; they are linked to celestial activity or regarded as solar goddesses when holding a sun-disc. Similar

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[386] Zevit (2001:268) distinguishes seven types of figurines, namely

Qadesh type – extended arms, sometimes holding stalks or serpents

Females – crowned or uncrowned; one or both hands holding their breasts; the other hand over the genital region

Nude females – arms hanging down their sides

Archaic types – pierced ears; hands crossed in front of breast

Figurines holding discs

Mother figurines – woman with a child; pregnant woman or supporting breasts and womb

Pillar figurines – a round figure with both hands in front of the breast or holding a serpent.

[387] Zevit 2001:271.

[388] Plaque figurines were usually processed by pressing a lump of clay into an open mould. A plaque-type figurine is thereby formed in a type of relief. These plaques seem to portray a fertility goddess, hence the term *Astarte* figurines, as she was commonly associated with fertility before the discovery of the Ugaritic texts (see § 2.8) (Hadley 2000:188-189, 196).

[389] Pillar figurines were hand moulded in round "body" shapes. These figurines have only been found in contexts as from Iron Age II (Hadley 2000:196). Byrne (2004:138-139) subdivides the clay pillar figurines in those handmade with finger-pinched faces, and those with a head cast from a mould.

[390] These figurines were either imported from Egypt, or under Egyptian influence, as they exhibit a striking similarity to the Egyptian statuettes categorised as "people reclining on beds" (Hadley 2000:189).

[391] This group depicts a "nude, frontal female figure" with separated legs, often wearing a *Hathor*-type headdress and holding lotus plants or snakes (Hadley 2000:191). *Hathor*: see footnote on sphinxes in § 2.13, subtitle Taanach, as well as footnote on *Hathor* in § 2.14.1.

[392] Hadley 2000:188-189, 191, 196.

[393] Zevit 2001:267.

[394] Zevit 2001:272, 274.

[395] Judean Pillar Figurines.

[396] Kletter 2001:201.

[397] Zevit 2001:274. Genesis 31:19, 30-35 describes the incident of Rachel taking the household gods.

excavated figurines relate to the time of the Monarchy.[398] Images holding their breasts[399] were found at Israelite sites as from the ninth century BC, in increasing numbers during the eighth and seventh centuries, but declining numbers in the sixth century BC.[400] The term תרפים[401] – also known as אלהים[402] – may refer to pillar figurines.

Kletter[403] does not agree with the assumption that a "general goddess" – or great cosmic goddess – was worshipped by a large number of communities, although there 'may have been syncretism and influences between different goddesses at different places, or a common origin in some distant past.' A goddess becomes unique for a society when adopted for particular circumstances and needs.[404] The wide distribution of figurines during the seventh century BC is an indication of their popularity at that time. Figurine-groups – collectively analogous to those in Judah – are widely distributed, including Transjordan and Edom, indicating contact between Judah and its eastern neighbours.[405] A comparison of finds from so-called "Edomite sites"[406] in Judah and those from Buseirah[407] indicates close parallels. A number of female figurines,[408] excavated at Buseirah, 'are similar in form and size to many others from Iron Age sites all over the southern Levant'.[409] The so-called *Ashdoda*[410] was the most important clay figurine in Philistia,[411] probably a combination of Canaanite and Aegean traditions. It does not show any resemblance to Canaanite figurines as such. The *Ashdoda* probably

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[398] Figurines holding a sun-disc were excavated at, inter alia, Hazor, Megiddo and Beth Shean – all northern Israelite sites (Zevit 2001:270).

[399] The accentuated breasts of the Judean pillar figurines could imply engorgement for lactation purposes, thereby signifying successful pregnancy (Byrne 2004:142).

[400] Zevit 2001:268, 270-271.

[401] The תרפים (*teraphim*) are small portable idols that could be easily concealed. The paternal household gods were sought after for religious reasons, as well as for power and property rights. They were used by the Israelites for cultic purposes during the period of the judges (Jdg 17:5; 18:14, 17, 20). The idol mentioned in 1 Samuel 19:13, 16, was shaped as a man (Gordon 1962:574).

[402] אלהים: *'ĕlōhîm*, the generic term for "gods".

[403] Kletter 2001:198.

[404] Kletter 2001:198.

[405] Prag 2001:226-227.

[406] Sites at Horvat Qitmit and ʿEin Haseva. Horvat Qitmit, south of Tel Arad [in the Negeb], lies on the edge of Wadi Qatamat; a seventh century BC Edomite shrine has been uncovered at this site, as well as finds including numerous ceramic figurines (Negev & Gibson 2001:420). ʿEin Haseva lies approximately forty-five kilometres south-east of Horvat Qitmit. Both have been characterised as Edomite cult places or shrines (Bienkowski & Sedman 2001:311, 318).

[407] Buseirah in Jordan is identified with biblical Bozrah [Gn 36:33; 1 Chr 1:44; Is 34:6; 63:1; Jr 49:13, 22; Am 1:12]; although referred to as capital of Edom, this is nowhere explicitly stated (Bienkowski & Sedman 2001:310-311).

[408] All are naked and pregnant, holding their breasts with both hands (Bienkowski & Sedman 2001:311-312).

[409] Bienkowski & Sedman 2001:311-312, 318.

[410] *Ashdoda*: an almost abstract clay female figurine; the body is integrated with the couch upon which she sits (Mazar 2000:223).

[411] Philistia: name of the territory on the southern coast of Palestine occupied by the Philistines – known as the Sea Peoples. The name Philistia appears in poetic portions of the Hebrew Bible (Ps 60:8; 87:4; Is 14:29). The Philistine pentapolis consisted of Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Gath and Ekron (Greenfield 1962:791-792).

represents the main deity worshipped by the Philistines and is 'almost the only iconographic representation of a deity in Philistia'.[412]

Fertility figurines – grouped as the "larger artefact family" – emanated in the Ancient Near East from the Neolithic Period, through the Bronze Age and even to beyond the Iron Age.[413] As pillar figurines were so commonplace, Zevit[414] concludes that they belonged to private individual cults, rather than to popular communal cults. The distribution of artefacts could, thus, be linked to the religious history of the Israelites. Daviau[415] mentions that in contrast to temple and small shrine assemblages – that have been debated and studied extensively – the customs and artefacts of the domestic cult are not as well-known, but seem to be 'evidence of religious activities practised by family members in the home'.[416] The god (or goddess) – represented by a particular image was "born" in heaven, consented to descend into the image, 'thus transubstantiating[417] it. The image as such remains a promise, a potential, and an incentive to a theophany, to a divine presence, no more'.[418] Dever[419] indicates that 'a symbol is simply something chosen to represent and typify a large reality' – mostly in the form of a pictorial image, or an object. A tangible object enables the individual to give meaning and power to some 'invisible abstract reality'.[420]

Bull figurines and the "Bull Site"

In the hill country of Ephraim and Manasseh[421] a twelfth century BC open-air hilltop sanctuary[422] was discovered in 1981. The site was probably carefully selected – most of the important northern Palestinian mountain ridges[423] can be seen from there – bearing in mind the role high mountains played in Israelite and Canaanite religious ideology. It was utilised for only a

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[412] Mazar 2000:223. The disparity between archaeological evidence for a female goddess in Philistia and the biblical text identifying the male god *Dagon* as the principal deity of the Philistines, could be ascribed to the absence of figurines in temples, indicating a function mainly in the domestic cult (Mazar 2000:223).

[413] Byrne 2004:148.

[414] Zevit 2001:270, 273.

[415] Daviau 2001:199.

[416] Daviau 2001:199.

[417] Transubstantiation is a doctrine professing that the substance of bread and wine changes into the substance of Christ's body when consecrated in the Eucharist (Hanks 1992:504). Consecration does not, however, change the physical properties of the tokens (Deist 1990:264).

[418] Jacobsen 1987:29.

[419] Dever 2005:52.

[420] Dever 2005:52.

[421] The site is on a northern ridge of the Samarian hills. An ancient road connecting the biblical towns Dothan and Tirzah ran through a long east-west valley which bounds the ridge on the south side (Mazar 1982:32). The ridge is known as the "ridge of Daharat er Tawila" (Negev & Gibson 2001:94).

[422] The description of a במה (high place) – see footnote in § 2.14.1 – fits this high, open-air cult place. It is a non-domestic, public place with an altar-type platform and a מצבה (or "standing stone", see § 2.14.1), with proof of sacrifices (Dever 2005:135-136).

[423] Mount Meiron, Mount Tabor, Mount Carmel, Mount Gilboa and Jebel Tamun (Mazar 1982:33).

short period of time and, due to strong erosion, almost completely destroyed. A large rectan-gular מצבה,[424] evidences of sacrifices and a fragment of a large ceramic cult object were un-covered. This isolated cult place could be connected to the settlement of Israelite tribes in the area, serving as a central place of worship for some of these communities. A few parallels of similar open-air cult places are found elsewhere in Israel;[425] this site is, however, the earliest known example that might be attributed to the Israelites.[426] Biblical Shiloh, near Bethel, is an excavated site contemporary with the "Bull Site"; however, only a typical Iron Age I hill-country village has been found there and not the central sanctuary as described in 1 Samuel.[427] This site might have had an earlier Canaanite cultic tradition.[428]

The figurine of a unique bronze bull in a remarkable good condition was discovered on the "Bull Site". It is one of the largest bronze figurines[429] found in Israel so far.[430] This figurine is reminiscent of the Canaanite chief deity "Bull *El*".[431] The bull is also known as an attribute of the Canaanite *Baʿal* and was accepted by the Northern Israel tribes as symbol of *Yahweh* – as illustrated by Jeroboam's "golden calves" at Dan and Bethel.[432] A similar fourteenth cen-tury BC bronze bull had been found earlier at Canaanite Hazor.[433] Only a small number of bronze bull figurines are known from the Levant. Of all the different bronze figurines found at early second millennium BC Byblos, only two depict bulls – not free-standing – but with striding gods on their backs. Numerous specimens of the bull motif in Syro-Palestinian ico-nography, from the Middle Bronze Age onward, illustrate the importance thereof. Various examples elucidate its cultic significance in the Ancient Near East.[434]

Mazar[435] indicates that the question cannot easily be answered as to the kind of cult that had been devoted to this place, or to the god worshipped there. However, open-air cult places

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[424] מצבה (*maṣṣēbâ*): standing stone. See § 2.14.1.
[425] Iron Age I cult places at Arad and Hazor; Iron Age II open-air cult place east of Samaria (Mazar 1982:38).
[426] Mazar 1982:32-39.
[427] 1 Samuel 1:3 'Now this man used to go up year by year from his city to worship and to sacrifice to the LORD of hosts at Shiloh, where the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were priests of the LORD'.
[428] Dever 1997a:37.
[429] The figurine is 17,5 cm in length and 12,4 cm high (at its maximum); the eyes consist of a depression – for the inlay of stone or glass – with protruding ridges around it. This type of 'inlayed eye sockets are unknown on other bronze figurines from the Levant' (Mazar 1982:27). The thin legs, hump on the back and shape of its horns are known from artistic illustrations from fourth millennium BC Mesopotamia, depicting a *Zebu (bos indicus)* which came from India to the Middle East during that time (Mazar 1982:27, 29).
[430] Mazar 1982:27.
[431] See § 3.7 regarding *El*.
[432] Negev & Gibson 2001:94. See § 2.14.4 for a discussion of Tel Dan. 1 Kings 12:25-29.
[433] Dever 2005:136.
[434] Mazar 1982:29-30.
[435] Mazar 1982:38.

were permanent features of the Israelite cult, as from the time of the patriarchs[436] through to the reform of Josiah.[437] The "Bull Site" may thus be taken as an example of an open-air altar close to a settlement. Hendel[438] notes that, in comparison to bordering West Semitic cult sites, the 'aniconism[439] of Yahwistic culture sites is particularly noticeable'. He furthermore states that, as this bronze bull image 'is analogous to the bull images at Dan and Bethel, … (it) is more likely to be a pedestal, throne or divine emblem than a tauromorphic[440] image of Yahweh'. Imagery on Akkadian cylinder seals[441] exhibits the storm god[442] – at times portrayed standing on a bull[443] – with his consort, the naked rain goddess;[444] a kneeling god fights the bull – a symbol of drought. If the bull is defeated it is tantamount to the vanquishing of drought. A seal impression from Mari – ca 1800 BC – combines the appearance of the naked rain goddess and the killing of the bull. In the Hittite-Hurrian iconography, the "disrobing" goddess of rain was persistently identified with the storm god. Naked female figurines in the Ancient Near East – which are often combined with bull figurines – should be distinguished from the partially nude *Ishtar*[445] or *Astarte*,[446] characterised as goddesses of love-making.[447]

Horse figurines

The "flying sun" – or winged solar disc – is a well-attested and widely-known symbol of Ancient Near Eastern religions.[448] A wedge or clay disc between the ears of horse figurines has been identified as a solar disc and interpreted as relating to cults linked with solar or fertility worship. Equine figurines from Edom are well known. Fragments of horse and rider figurines have also been uncovered. The presence of human and animal figurines in excavated cult vessels indicates their cultic significance and purpose.[449] Two Ammonite "horse and rider" figurines were found well preserved in the Maqabalian tomb near Amman in Jordan.

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[436] Genesis 12:7-8; 13:18; 22:9; 26:25; 33:20; 35:1, 3, 7.
[437] 2 Kings 23:1-25.
[438] Hendel 1997:218.
[439] See footnote on aniconism in § 1.2.
[440] Tauromorphic: conceiving *Yahweh* in the image of a bull.
[441] ca 2275-2150 BC (Van Loon 1990:364).
[442] Also known as *Ba'al* or *Adad*. See § 3.5.
[443] Storm 2001:14.
[444] The naked rain goddess – as bringer of rain – is associated with the god of thunder and lightning. Her garment – interpreted as a rainbow – is often held behind her. The Syrian and Mesopotamian agriculture is almost totally dependent on rainfall, which is normally accompanied by thunder and mostly by the appearance of a rainbow (Van Loon 1990:363-364).
[445] See § 3.4.
[446] See § 3.3.
[447] Van Loon 1990:363-367.
[448] Zevit 2001:322. This symbol is often found on seals from Iron Age II Israel and elsewhere (Zevit 2001:322).
[449] Bartlett 1989:192-193.

Rather than a solar disc or other cult image, the horse's mane appears to be decorated with a type of harness, and the rider is portrayed with a whip.[450] Figurines from Jerusalem-regions are often identified with implied biblical references to "the horses of the sun".[451] Consensus has not been reached whether these figurines are depicted with a harness decoration, forelock or solar disc.[452]

Two caves in the vicinity of Jerusalem have been uncovered. The larger cave – just south of the Temple Mount – yielded numerous late seventh century BC female and zoomorphic figurines, mostly broken. Apart from abundant other finds, twenty-one "horse and rider" figurines were discovered. There is no indication that this cave was a burial cave, but rather served a cultic purpose. Dever[453] is of the opinion that it functioned as a במה.[454] Bowls with animal bones, as well as other objects indicate that the cave was more than a household shrine. Applying several biblical references[455] to archaeological data relating to this cave, the reform of Josiah – which has been disclaimed by some scholars – does not seem so absurd. *Ba'al*, the weather god in Canaanite mythology, rode daily in his chariot across the heavens. Horse figurines could be deemed 'symbols of *ba'al* and his heavenly horse-drawn chariot'.[456] Dever,[457] however, indicates that he hesitantly suggests that the "horse-and-rider" figurines from this cave are evidence of Josiah's purge of the cult.

Lachish ewer

The Lachish ewer[458] was discovered in 1934 outside the Lachish[459] temple in a depository pit. It dates to approximately 1220 BC. The iconographic scene on the ewer depicts a stylised

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[450] Prag 2001:226-228. These types of images were popular in Cyprus from the eighth century BC right up to the sixth century BC. Aegean and Assyrian influences were noted on these figurines. The horse was probably a status symbol and the Cypriot riders depicted as armed warriors (Prag 2001:226-227).

[451] 2 Kings 23:11; Ezekiel 8:16; Nahum 3:17.

[452] The numerous horse-and-rider figurines from Jerusalem are related more to archaeologically-attested patterns of similar objects from Cyprus and Transjordan, than to a biblical description of a horse-and-solar cult (Prag 2001:227).

[453] Dever 2005:155-158.

[454] For an explanation of במה, see the relevant footnote in § 2.14.1.

[455] "All the host of heaven" (2 Ki 23:4-5); "high places round about Jerusalem" (2 Ki 23:5); "burning incense to *Ba'al*" (2 Ki 23:5); "chariots of the sun" and "horses dedicated to the sun" (2 Ki 23:11). The reference in 2 Kings 23:11 to "horses and chariots of the sun" is clearly an allusion to solar and astral worship, most likely with a Canaanite origin in the Late Bronze Age, or even with a Phoenician or Neo-Assyrian root (Dever 1994:152).

[456] Dever 2005:155, 157. Throughout the second millennium BC, miniature terracotta chariot models – driven by a deity and drawn by horses or oxen – were well known in Syria. However, only horse figurines have been preserved from the Iron Age (Dever 1994:152).

[457] Dever 2005:157.

[458] Ewer: a type of pitcher with a handle (Hestrin 1991:52).

[459] Lachish, also known as Tell ed-Duweir (Hestrin 1991:53), was one of the main cities in the Shephelah and later one of Judah's fortified cities. The earliest Iron Age remains date back to the tenth century BC. Lachish is named as one of the cities conquered by the Israelites (Jos 10:23, 31-33) (Negev & Gibson 2001:288). The

tree composed of a vertical line and three semicircles, representing the Canaanite goddess *Asherah*.[460] The tree – actually representing a pubic triangle – is fringed by two ibexes[461] with long curved horns. The interchangeability of trees and pubic triangles substantiates the link between the tree symbol[462] and the goddess *Asherah* who is often depicted as a tree or a tree trunk, representing her attributes of life, revival and growth.[463]

A rare alphabetic inscription in the old Canaanite script – one of 'the earliest and most signify-cant Canaanite inscriptions ever discovered'[464] – appears on the ewer. The translated inscription reads, 'Mattan. An offering to my Lady 'Elat'. *'Elat* is the feminine form of *El* and the pre-biblical equivalent of *'ašērâ*. Mattan is probably the person who made an offering to *'Elat*.[465] The word "Mattan" can also be translated as "gift". A mutton bone found in the ewer was probably an oblation to the goddess *'Elat/'ašērâ*.[466] The Proto-Canaanite alphabet – a pictographic acrophonic script[467] – was developed in Canaan during the first half of the second millennium BC. There were presumably initially twenty-seven pictographs, which were reduced to twenty-two by the thirteenth century BC. Writing was done in any direction, even in vertical columns. From the middle of the eleventh century BC the letters were all linear, written horizontally from right to left.[468] This script, as it has developed, is no longer called Proto-Canaanite – or Canaanite – but Phoenician.[469]

Shephelah or "Lowland" is a region in the foothills between the Judean highlands and the Philistine plain. It is separated from the highlands by a series of longitudinal valleys (Morton 1962b:324).

[460] See § 3.2.

[461] Ibexes: wild goats with large horns (Hanks 1992:241).

[462] The sacred tree symbol was incorporated from an early period into most Ancient Near Eastern cultural traditions. From the beginning of the second millennium BC a "highly artificial, stylised" tree was a customary motif of Assyrian art. The sacred tree between two animals or other figures facing each other was a recurring theme of religious significance and appears on a variety pottery receptacles from Palestine. Apart from Palestine, illustrations of this tree are also found in Mesopotamia, Syria, Egypt and some Mediterranean countries (Hestrin 1991:54).

[463] Hestrin 1991:52-53. Dever (2005:227) mentions that the pubic triangle has been a 'symbol from time immemorial of the source of all human conception, birth, and life'.

[464] Hestrin 1991:53.

[465] Hestrin 1991:54.

[466] Dever 2005:226.

[467] Pictographic acrophonic script: different pictures, for example a house (בית), the palm of a hand (כף) and water (מים), did not represent the specific object, 'but only designated the first consonant of each word', namely מ כ ב respectively (Naveh 1987:101).

[468] The Hebrews adopted the Canaanite script – which was only later employed by the Phoenicians – after the time of the "conquest" of Canaan. An independent Hebrew script branched off from the Phoenician script during the middle of the ninth century BC, and an Aramaic script followed about a century later. Therefore, until ca 850 BC the same script was applied for Phoenician, Hebrew and Aramaic texts. This conclusion is drawn on the basis of a number of late Proto-Canaanite inscriptions, as well as those on, inter alia, the Lachish ewer. It is noted, furthermore, that 'it is a well-known phenomenon that letters tend to develop in similar forms and even to assimilate to each other' (Naveh 1987:105, 109).

[469] Naveh 1987:101-102.

Apart from several pottery containers uncovered at the Lachish fosse temple[470] an interesting decorated goblet was also found. It is illustrated with two ibexes facing each other with a pubic triangle between them, instead of the usual sacred tree. This drawing is repeated four times. The triangle is traced in red ink and black dots represent the pubic hair.[471] Hestrin[472] states 'this interchange of tree with pubic triangle proves, in my opinion, that the tree indeed symbolizes the fertility goddess, one of the attributes of Asherah'.[473]

2.14   Cult sites

2.14.1   Introduction

To worship, forms an integral part of man's being. It is synonymous with paying homage to living entities or to inanimate or unperceived objects. It embraces piety as well as liturgy.[474] One of the characteristics of Ancient Near Eastern religions is the veneration of ancestors. Worship is normally expressed in sanctuaries of some kind or other, such as temples built for the cult of the god or gods, shrines or high places.[475] Temples and shrines of various descriptions have been uncovered in Palestine. Temples were principally the earthly homes of the gods – their basic need was for a "house".[476] Ancient religions exhibited the concept of the temple being "heaven on earth".[477] For Israel it was a significant place to meet God. A temple could, furthermore, be regarded as the 'architectural embodiment of the cosmic mountain'.[478] At the same time, temples were constructed in such a manner that it could serve as "places of refuge", should the need arise.[479] Consistent with Ancient Near Eastern belief a temple could be built only when directed by the god and commensurate with his plan.[480] A

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[470] Fosse – meaning moat – refers to three temples, superimposed one upon another, in the moat of Lachish. The moat had gone out of use by the time of the temples (Negev & Gibson 2001:288).

[471] Hestrin 1991:54-55.

[472] Hestrin 1991:55.

[473] Several explicit examples from Egyptian iconography portray sacred trees yielding food and symbolising the source of life (Hestrin 1991:55).

[474] Henton Davies 1962c:879.

[475] A high place or במה can be regarded as a large altar. When an altar of a certain size standing in an uncovered space grew in popularity, it became a במה. The practice of sacrificial offerings was the only ritual function performed there (Paul & Dever 1973:61).

[476] Saggs 1984:205-206. The earliest Assyrian temples were modest buildings, but later equalled royal palaces in splendour (Saggs 1984:206).

[477] Otzen 1984:199. Both the ancient Egyptian and Mesopotamian cultures regarded the temple as being of heavenly origin – the place where heaven and earth united – thereby effecting a close connection between the heavenly world and the temple (Otzen 1984:199).

[478] Lundquist 1983:207. The cosmic mountain symbolises the primordial mound from where the waters emerged covering the earth during creation. The temple was normally built on a sanctified space that was set apart – often on a spring – which personified the temple's contact with the primeval waters. Temples constructed with several staggered levels – *ziggurats* in Mesopotamia – express an idea of 'a successive ascension toward heaven' (Lundquist 1983:207-209, 211). See footnote in § 2.4 on *"ziggurat"*. For a detailed discussion on the typology of a temple, see Lundquist (1983:205-219).

[479] Keel 1978:179-180. See also 2 Chronicles 22:11-12.

[480] Roberts 1987:40.

collection of inscriptions has been found wherein work on the construction of a temple on be-
half of a deity had been recorded.[481] Taking literary data into consideration, it seems that
temples in Israel were more common than the general supposition,[482] and that these sanctuar-
ies where the cult of *Yahweh* was practised, were spread throughout the territories of Israelite
settlement.[483]

In accordance with a detailed description in Exodus 25-31, a portable tabernacle had to be as-
sembled for Israelite worship in the Wilderness. It took the form of a tent shrine and sur-
rounding court. Traditions maintain that this sanctuary was permanently replaced by the Jeru-
salem Temple. Although the apportionment of the space in the tent shrine corresponds with
the later description of Solomon's Temple, scholars maintain that the depiction of the Taber-
nacle had nothing to do with any actual tent shrine. It was probably later incorporated into the
text to validate the sequential plan of the Jerusalem Temple, and was inspired by the memory
of this temple. The basis of a tabernacle seemingly came from a Persian background of post-
exilic Judaism.[484] The concept of a tent-dwelling – or tabernacle – for a deity originated un-
der Canaanite influence, as *El*, the Canaanite high god, resided in a tent shrine.[485] According
to Aharoni,[486] there is a striking similarity between the Arad sanctuary and the Tabernacle,
since the proportions of the latter are identical with those of the sanctuary at Arad. Thus the
description of the Tabernacle affords a connection between this sanctuary and the Solomonic
Temple in Jerusalem. A short Akkadian text from the Mari archives describes the framing of
a large public tent belonging to the heritage of tent constructions of ancient Syrians. In the
Masoretic Text cognate nouns are found of two West Semitic terms in this Mari text, indicat-
ing the presence of a major god.[487]

In the Timnah Valley large ancient copper mines were discovered at the foot of the mountain
range Zuqe Timnah.[488] In the centre of Timnah's copper industry an Egyptian mining temple

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[481] Handy 1995:264.
[482] Zevit 2001:255.
[483] Vriezen 2001:76.
[484] Fleming 2000:484-485, 497.
[485] Ollenburger 1987:38.
[486] Aharoni 1973:4.
[487] Fleming 2000:486-489. The West Semitic terms *qersum* and *hurpatum* are found in cognate nouns in the Ugaritic *Ba'al* myth and in the Masoretic Text. The *hurpatum* seems to be indirectly related to both Ugaritic and Hebrew words for "cloud", insofar as it appears in descriptions of a storm god's presence. A possible relation-ship is indicated between the Mari *qersum* and the biblical Hebrew קרש (Ex 26:15) which refers to the wooden frame of the priestly Tabernacle. A cognate word appears in the Ugaritic *Ba'al* myth in the description of *El*'s mountain sanctuary. The *qersū* in the Mari text and 'the tabernacle's *qĕrāšîm* evidently correspond in form and function' (Fleming 2000:489-492).
[488] The Timnah Valley (Wadi Meneiyeh) is enclosed on the southern, western and northern sides by the Zuqe Timnah, and lies approximately twenty-four kilometres north of the Gulf of Elath. Copper ore had been

– dated fourteenth to twelfth century BC – dedicated to the Egyptian goddess *Hathor*,[489] was excavated. After the initial destruction of the temple it was reconstructed, showing distinct Semitic features.[490] Parallels of the traditional Israelite sanctuary are found in this temple.[491] The indigenous inhabitants – the Midianites, Kenites and Amalekites – with their metallurgical traditions going way back to prehistoric times, jointly operated the mines and smelters with the Egyptians. In the light of an Egyptian mining temple in the Arabah during the fourteenth to twelfth centuries BC, new questions emerge concerning the biblical account of the exodus.[492]

Apart from other distinct features at cult sites, standing stones, מצבות,[493] have been surveyed and recorded at numerous places. These irregular arrangements of stones often relate to an open-air sanctuary and are the most basic type of shrine known. מצבות were objects of veneration and worship, envisaged as the embodiment of an absent god. Although no biblical text explicitly describes the cultic role of the מצבות, texts do report on standing stones at a few sites, such as at Bethel where a local stone was anointed as a מצבה.[494] Isaiah 19:19 refers to a מצבה for *Yahweh* that would be set up near the border of Egypt. Statements about מצבות "on every high hill and under every green tree" probably imply everywhere. A triad of מצבות at Dan indicate a triad of deities, while more than one מצבה at Arad implies the

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extracted during the Late Chalcolithic Period, from the Late Bronze to Early Iron Age I and during the Roman-Byzantine Period. Until recently these mines were known as "King Solomon's mines". It has now been ascertained that the pharaohs of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Dynasties (fourteenth to twelfth century BC), and not the kings of Israel and Judah (tenth to sixth century BC) have sent out mining expeditions to the Arabah (Negev & Gibson 2001:507-508).

[489] *Hathor*, among the most complex of deities, was the patron of lovers. She protected children and assisted women to conceive and give birth (Willis 1993:51). The Greeks identified her with their own goddess *Aphrodite*. Her headdress characteristically has a pair of horns (ancient lunar symbol) with a moon disc between them (Barrett 1992:59). As a heavenly cow she gives birth to the sun (Heerma van Voss 1999:385).

[490] Negev & Gibson 2001:507. Duncan (1936:215) mentions that the archaeologist Flinders Petrie identified the goddess of the miners' temple as *Astarte*, who was worshipped under the name of *Hathor*. The Egyptian *Hathor* of the miners was thus *Astarte* of Syria and Palestine and *Ishtar* of Babylonia. The form of worship and ritual in this temple was distinctly Semitic and not Egyptian.

[491] Aharoni 1973:6.

[492] Negev & Gibson 2001:508.

[493] Excavated מצבות (standing stones) reveal that a large variety of stones had been utilised as מצבות. Some are finely shaped stones, while others are unworked natural slab. As a rule, these stones have no inscriptions or relief on it. Ancient Near Eastern stelae – in contrast to uninscribed מצבות in Palestine – were normally inscribed, such as some commemorative Egyptian stelae. The archaeological context of the מצבות is directly related to the purpose of the stones. Apart from memorial, legal or commemorative functions, it could have a cultic function marking the exact sacred point where the deity might be found, and where sacrifice and worship would reach the deity. מצבות as "cultic markers" were customary at the entrance to a temple (Graessar 1972:34-37, 46). For a detailed discussion of the typology, categories, function and a number of examples of מצבות see Graessar (1972:34-63).

[494] Genesis 28:10-22; 31:13. Standing stones or memorial pillars were associated with the custom of sleeping near a shrine in the hope of getting guidance by a dream. Bethel – known as Luz – was possibly a shrine. Jacob probably slept there with this hope for instruction from the deity of the place (Duncan 1936:219).

veneration of more than one god. Some conclusions may be drawn concerning מצבות[495] when taking literary and comparable archaeological data into consideration. Mettinger[496] indicates that increasing documentary evidence confirms the importance of stelae in West Semitic cults. Although prohibitions were placed on a מצבה for and a sculpted image of *Yahweh*, the Israelites regarded standing stones as a 'legitimate expression of religious worship'.[497] In early Israel מצבות were apparently interpreted to be 'commemorative of Yahweh's theophanies and historical acts',[498] while later – under the influence of their neighbours – they were utilised for cultic purposes.[499] From rabbinic times the term *Asherah* has been extensively discussed and even today no consensus has yet been reached whether it refers to a goddess or a cult object associated with standing stones. מצבות were part of the religious and cultural context of the Ancient Near East long before Israel was established as a nation.[500]

Although this research does not warrant a detailed discussion of cult sites, it is, nevertheless, deemed necessary to deliberate briefly on some important Israelite and Judahite sanctuaries.

2.14.2   Tel Arad

Arad, an important city on the border of Judah in the eastern Negeb,[501] was on the main road to Edom. Biblical tradition[502] refers to its king, Arad the Canaanite, who dwelt in the South. The Negeb of Arad is also referred to as the Wilderness of Judah.[503] There is no certainty that the site of Tel Arad is to be identified with ancient Canaanite Arad as no remains of a city of the Middle and Late Bronze ages have been found. Scholars have several suggestions to solve the problem, such as that Canaanite Arad was the name of a district and not of a city.[504] The name Arad is mentioned only three times in the Hebrew Bible[505] and it appears once as the corrupted name Eder.[506] The three references to Arad allude to the Canaanites. The material-culture contribution by Canaanite Arad to the settlements in southern Sinai is interpreted

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[495] For further discussion see Zevit 2001:261.
[496] Mettinger 1997:225.
[497] Mettinger 1997:226.
[498] Graessar 1972:62.
[499] Graessar 1972:62.
[500] Zevit 2001:255-266.
[501] The Negeb stretches south from the border of Judah. The name means dryness but, in the Hebrew Bible, it is sometimes an allusion to the South. The Plain of Beer-sheba forms its northern border. It was never an important international trade route as large parts of the Negeb are mountainous. In biblical times it was of little economic importance; there were, however, copper mines in the region of Timnah (Negev & Gibson 2001:365). See footnote on the Timnah Valley in § 2.14.1.
[502] Numbers 21:1.
[503] Negev & Gibson 2001:42.
[504] Aharoni 1993:85.
[505] Numbers 21:1; 33:40; Joshua 12:14.
[506] Joshua 15:21.

by scholars as a confirmation that groups of Canaanites from southern Palestine moved into Sinai in order to mine copper. Finkelstein,[507] however, is of the opinion that the semi-arid region of Arad could hardly have supported a large additional population group. It is also misleading to describe Arad as a typical Canaanite urban centre from the Early Bronze Age, as many aspects in the layout are unique to Arad. If Arad had been a central Canaanite administrative urban centre for the Negeb and Sinai, it should have been established further north. Amiran,[508] on the other hand, indicates that an extensive survey of the Negeb support the argument that Arad – as central administrative city – was the only city or town in the entire area of the Negeb and Sinai during the Early Bronze Age II.[509] The impact of the infiltration of foreigners – probably migrating from the North – is visible in a large number of sites, where the process of destruction and rebuilding is evident. A climatic change, due to fluctuations in the rainfall pattern, had severe consequences on the living conditions of the region that contributed to the eventual collapse of the city.

Herzog and others[510] indicate that two Arads have been excavated: a large, walled Canaanite city, dated 3200-2050 BC and an Israelite citadel, dated 1200-586 BC.[511] As from 1962, an Israelite fortress was excavated at Tel Arad. Excavations there are unequalled therein that it incorporates a continuous archaeological record from ca 1200 BC to the Babylonian destruction of the First Temple in 586 BC.[512] Stratum XII indicates that an Early Iron Age unwalled village, dated twelfth to eleventh century BC was built on the destruction level of an Early Bronze Age city of approximately fifteen hundred years earlier. Very little is known about Arad from historical sources. Its identification is only certain owing to its Arabic name *Tel 'Arâd*.[513] Rainey[514] points out that 'relative chronology is not absolute chronology, even when authorities have reached a consensus'. Although an earthquake had been reported[515] during

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[507] Finkelstein 1990:37, 39.
[508] Amiran 1986:75-76.
[509] 3050-2700 BC (Negev & Gibson 2001:556). Excavations conducted by Beit-Arieh (1984:20-23) in the southern Sinai brought to light a network of Canaanite settlements during the Early Bronze Age II. The copper mines in the region were exploited by these settlers who had close ties with southern Canaan, and specifically with Arad, where they probably delivered the metal. They would not have been able to exist without the support of a stable political and strong economic body. Although Egyptian presence in southern Canaan during this period is indisputable, relations between Canaan and Egypt would have been on friendly terms and not based on military control. 'Egypt would certainly not have remained indifferent to the exploitation of the copper-mines by a hostile power' (Beit-Arieh 1984:23).
[510] Herzog et al 1987:21.
[511] For a detailed description of the excavated areas, see Herzog et al (1987:18-35).
[512] Herzog et al 1987:17.
[513] Herzog et al 1984:1-3.
[514] Rainey 1985:73-74.
[515] Amos 1:1; Zechariah 14:5.

the reign of the Judean king Uzziah,[516] there is no evidence of an earthquake at Arad, and should not be used as an argument when dealing with its chronological history. The dominant ethnic element in the eastern Negeb was the Amalekites,[517] before the emergence of the Israelites.[518]

Early Bronze II settlement patterns at sites in the Negeb and Sinai indicate that the inhabitants were indigenous to the desert. When there is a new source of income, nomads usually settle down, giving up their traditional migration pattern. Short-distance herding could be carried out, as well as copper mining, smelting and trade. During the Early Iron Age the clan of Hobab, the Kenite,[519] settled in the Negeb of Arad and built a cult place on Tel Arad. In the course of time a settlement developed around the cult place.[520] Inscription 24 of excavated ostraca[521] at Tel Arad mentions the fortress Kinah that was subordinate to Arad, but not far from it. The name Kinah is usually connected to the Kenites.[522] The Kenites practised "priest-craft and ritual". The shrine was erected in the middle of the territory to serve the inhabitants of the eastern Negeb in their religious practices.[523] When the Israelites built their altar[524] it was constructed on the platform that may have been a twelfth century BC Kenite shrine.[525] Two biblical texts[526] refer to the Negeb of the Kenites, the Jerahmeelites and Judah, and of the towns of the Kenites and the Jerahmeelites. It is, furthermore, commonly accepted that the Kenites were associated with Arad.[527] Descendants of Judah were originally inhabitants of the Negeb of Judah.[528] The Jerahmeelites, who were linked to the Kenites,[529] are indicated in the genealogies of 1 Chronicles[530] as 'not only an integral part of the tribe of Judah but one of the most central and "Israelite" clans of the tribe',[531] and, as the Kenites, they were

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[516] Tenth king of Judah; 767-740/39 BC (Kitchen & Mitchell 1982:197).

[517] Numbers 13:29. Amalek, grandson of Esau, was designated as one of the clans in the land of Edom (Gn 36:9-12, 15-16). Right through their history, the Amalekites were essentially a nomadic desert tribe. They arrived in the Negeb near Beer-sheba early in the second millennium BC (Landes 1962a:101).

[518] Herzog et al 1987:19.

[519] Named as father-in-law of Moses. See § 5.2 and § 5.4 for a discussion of the Kenites and Moses, respectively.

[520] Aharoni 1993:85.

[521] Ostracon (plural: ostraca): Greek word for a potsherd; in archaeological terms it describes fragments of pottery, stone or bone, which were used to write on (Kenyon 1987:185). Inscriptions on ostraca at Arad were written mainly with ink on potsherds; including political, administrative and religious documents (Herzog et al 1987:17).

[522] Aharoni 1981:146.

[523] Herzog 2001:171.

[524] Tenth century BC.

[525] Herzog et al 1987:33.

[526] 1 Samuel 27:10; 30:29.

[527] Judges 1:16.

[528] Galil 2001:34, 38, 41.

[529] See § 6.2.5 for a discussion on the connection between the Kenites and Jerahmeelites.

[530] 1 Chronicles 2:4, 5, 9.

[531] Galil 2001:33.

originally one of the marginal nomadic tribes of the land of Judah. It is not clear what the relationship between the Kenites and the Amalekites was.[532] The inhabitants of Arad also could have included merchants from the northern territories who participated in the economy of this region.[533]

During the tenth century BC the Israelites built their first fortress at Arad. At more or less the same time they erected a temple, which included the דביר.[534] The uncovering of an Iron Age Israelite temple in southern Judah has significant consequences for the study of the Israelite religion in the Monarchical Period.[535] In Israel there are only two archaeologically known Iron Age temples – those at Tel Arad and Tel Dan.[536] Ussishkin[537] indicates that the discovery of a shrine and cultic equipment at Arad is of major significance for biblical archaeology and history. The site at Tel Arad has a complex stratigraphy[538] which impedes the dating of the temple. The main point of dispute is 'the assumed relationship between the dismantling of the temple and the erection of the late casemate wall that cut through the main hall of the temple'.[539] Herzog[540] concludes that the casemate walls belong to the Hellenistic Period.

Finds from the initial excavations at Arad by Aharoni and his team, led to disparate interpretations by later scholars. This could be ascribed to Aharoni's team not having at their disposal subsequent (more modern) methods of excavation and registration.[541] The sanctuary was the most important building within the citadel of Arad. Its Yahwistic character is confirmed by regular Yahwistic theophoric names on ostraca, especially by those of Judean priestly families.[542] 'The incorporation of the Arad shrine into a royal Israelite fortress leaves no room for doubt regarding its Israelite character.'[543] No agreement has been reached amongst scholars regarding the reconstruction of the plan of the Solomonic Temple. Many recreations are based on the conception that the building consisted of three adjoining rooms. Temple buildings from Syria-Palestine have only one room with a niche for a statue of the goddess. There

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[532] Herzog et al 1987:19.
[533] Finkelstein 1990:43.
[534] Holy of Holies (Herzog et al 1987:31). Innermost chamber in a temple where an image of the god was placed, or where the god resided. Only the priests had access to this chamber (Negev & Gibson 2001:558).
[535] Herzog 2001:156.
[536] Mazar 2001:7.
[537] Ussishkin 1988:142.
[538] For an explanation of the term stratigraphy (in archaeology) see relevant footnote in § 2.12.
[539] Herzog 2001:159.
[540] Herzog 2001:159.
[541] Na'aman 2002:588-589.
[542] Aharoni 1981:148.
[543] Herzog et al 1984:8.

is a striking similarity between the Arad temple and the Tabernacle in respect of their proportions, which are identical. The description of the Tabernacle links the Arad sanctuary and Solomonic Temple, although the latter was one of its kind in its design.[544] The description of the Tabernacle is based on an early tradition which was obviously influenced by the Solomonic Temple. Parallels to the basic Israelite sanctuary are found, inter alia, at the Egyptian miners' temple at Timnah.[545] Unfortunately we have no descriptions of early Israelite sanctuaries.[546]

There is a distinct uniformity between the cultic accoutrements at the Jerusalem and Arad temples. A differentiation should be sustained between the pure 'absence of images on the one hand, and the programmatic demand for a cult without images.'[547] Indications are that during Iron Age I and most of Iron Age II 'Israel regarded the massebot cult as a legitimate expression of religious worship'.[548] Arad had more than one מצבה[549] in the דביר,[550] which implies that more than one deity was invoked there.[551] Biblical texts do not state unambiguously what the role of the מצבות[552] was in cultic contexts. In many instances[552] it seems that מצבות were simply dedicated to a particular deity, thereby to secure the god's presence.[553] Material aniconism[554] – cults focussing on standing stones – have been found, inter alia, among the Israelites. The question is whether this is a Yahwistic-type of cult imported into Palestine from the South by an immigrating *Yahweh*-group. Stelae have been found at numerous cult places in the Negeb.[555] Mettinger[556] believes 'that the cult of the earliest YHWH-worshippers was aniconic and was a type of massēbôt cult'. This type of material aniconism had, however, been an "established practice" in ancient Syria and Palestine much earlier than

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[544] A raised platform at Arad was probably an altar. A square courtyard contained the sacrificial altar, and in the back wall of the temple was a niche that served as the דביר. At the entrance thereof were two incense altars. It furthermore consisted of a broadroom in comparison to the Solomonic Temple's longroom (Herzog et al 1984:3, 7). Two inscribed bowls had been discovered at the sacrificial altar and the Hebrew letters כ and ק were subsequently identified thereon. These signs could be interpreted as "sacrifice" or "holy" (Aharoni 1981:148). Scholars have suggested that these inscribed bowls were offering bowls, wherein a token amount of grain was placed symbolising a larger amount offered to *Yahweh*. A marginal temple at Arad would not have been able to offer large amounts of grain daily (Na'aman 2002:597-598). Small inscribed offering bowls are known from Egyptian temples of the Eighteenth Dynasty [1570-1293 BC]. The inscription signifies the votive character of the bowl (Na'aman 2002:598).
[545] See § 2.14.1 regarding the fourteenth to twelfth century BC *Hathor* temple at Timnah.
[546] Aharoni 1973:1, 3, 6, 8.
[547] Mettinger 1997:221.
[548] Mettinger 1997:226.
[549] See § 2.14.1 for discussion on "standing stones".
[550] Mettinger 1997:226. דביר: Holy of Holies.
[551] Zevit 2001:262.
[552] For example in Genesis 31:13.
[553] Zevit 2001:260-261.
[554] See footnote on aniconism in § 1.2.
[555] Mettinger 1997:227.
[556] Mettinger 1997:227.

the development of ancient Israel or the arrival of *Yahweh*-worshipping groups. Israelite aniconism was not a later innovation, but a shared trait of West Semitic cults. The explicit prohibition of images was the culmination of a development over centuries.[557]

Scholars recently suggested that the Arad sanctuary had not been destroyed, but that the laying down of sacred objects signifies a cult reform which could be ascribed to Hezekiah's reform ca 715 BC.[558] Although there is much dispute amongst scholars regarding the historicity of Hezekiah's cult reform,[559] it is feasible to acknowledge the dismantling of altars throughout Judah during Hezekiah's rule.

A large and unique series of inscriptions on ostraca have been found in the different strata at Tel Arad.[560] Apart from the variety of inscriptions, the different dates thereof contribute to their importance.[561] Palaeographically, as well as historically, the ostraca from the earlier strata are very important since we have here 'proof that the cursive script of the Hebrew scribes came into use during the United Kingdom, and at least we have a stratigraphic-historic basis for Hebrew palaeography'.[562] The ostraca and other inscriptions of Arad 'comprise the richest and most varied collection of Hebrew inscriptions from the biblical period found up till now in one place'.[563] They come from different periods at the time of the Monarchy – from the tenth century until the beginning of the sixth century BC. Throughout the Monarchy, sherds were commonly used as writing material. A scribal script developed in Israel from the tenth century BC, culminating in a united scribal school in Judah and Israel. Only small changes in the forms of the letters were allowed.[564]

The inscriptions contain, inter alia, letters to the commanders at Arad informing them of administrative and military matters. Although a relatively small fortress, Arad was nevertheless the administrative and military centre of the area. The inscriptions disclose the names of two commanders of the citadel of Arad: Malkiyahu in Stratum VIII and Eliashib, son of Eshiyahu,

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[557] Mettinger 1997:227, 229.

[558] Na'aman 2002:586-587. After the fall of the Northern Kingdom [722/721 BC], Hezekiah attempted to unite the northern and southern tribes in an allegiance to Jerusalem as the only cult centre. As he demanded the abandonment of the northern temples – such as a Samaria and Bethel – he was obliged to abolish cult centres in the South (Na'aman 2002:587).

[559] 2 Kings 18:4; 2 Chronicles 31:1. Hezekiah's cult reform is dated between 715 and 701 BC (Rainey 1994:333).

[560] For a detailed discussion of the various inscriptions found at Arad, see Aharoni 1981.

[561] Aharoni 1981:4.

[562] Aharoni 1981:4. See description of palaeography incorporated in a footnote on the examination of a number of Amarna Letters in § 2.5.

[563] Aharoni 1981:141.

[564] Aharoni 1981:141.

in Strata VII and VI.[565] At least thirty personal names from the inscriptions contain the theophoric element -yahu.[566] A network of roads and fortresses existed in the Negeb during the Monarchical Period.[567] The Kittiyim,[568] are often mentioned on the ostraca as recipients of supplies from Arad. We thus have evidence that Aegean-Greek mercenaries were employed by the kingdom of Judah.

With the religious reforms of Hezekiah and Josiah the sanctuary was abandoned and not rebuilt.[569] Stratum VI[570] represents the last Israelite citadel which existed for approximately ten years. Although the fortress generally remained the same, the sanctuary ceased to exist.[571] Inscription 24 furnishes information that Jerusalem received tidings about the approaching Edomite army. The last Arad fortress fell during the third or fourth year of Zedekiah's rule.[572] This incident could probably be ascribed to the Edomites, who either exploited the weakness of Judah, or were instigated by the Babylonians to invade Judean cities.[573]

Herzog[574] presents a drastically modified interpretation of the excavations at the Arad fortress. His assessment is that there was neither a cult place erected on the site during the eleventh century BC nor a temple during the tenth century BC. The temple would probably have been built ca 800 BC. The abandonment of the temple corroborates the biblical account of Hezekiah's cult reforms.[575] The temple was probably erected in the time of the Judean

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[565] Aharoni 1981:141-142. It is clear that both commanders exercised considerable authority. Eliashib received his jurisdiction directly from the king. The name of Eliashib, son of Eshiyahu, appears on ostraca of both the intermediate and last Hebrew strata, indicating that he could not have held office for more that twenty to thirty years (Aharoni 1981:129). As seen from the archive of Eliashib, letters on sherds from Jerusalem were sent to various parts of the country. Letters included instructions regarding the supply of wine and bread, as well as the dispatching of consignments oil and food to the different fortresses; lists of the allocation of wheat and other merchandise; inventory lists of the storehouses; offerings and donations to the sanctuary. Eliashib's responsibilities included the royal storehouse at Arad where three types of commodities were kept, namely flour (probably barley), wine and oil. Some of these products are also mentioned in the Masoretic Text in connection with royal stores (1 Ki 4:27-28). Authorisation was needed to receive provisions from key fortresses. On presentation of such authorisation, supplies were handed over from the storehouse; these warrants (authorisations), with the date of transfer, were kept as receipts (Aharoni 1981:141-144).
[566] Apart from the names Eshiyahu and Malkiyahu, we find, inter alia, the name Gemaryahu from a neighbouring fortress who was the subordinate of Malkiyahu during the eighth century BC. They had daily contact (Aharoni 1981:141, 143).
[567] An organisation of transport in the Negeb was based on units of distance per day. See 1 Kings 19:4 as an example of Elijah travelling south from Beer-sheba, walking a day's journey into the Wilderness (Aharoni 1981:145).
[568] The Kittiyim were mercenaries of Aegean origin (Aharoni 1981:144).
[569] Aharoni 1981:149.
[570] End of the seventh and beginning of the sixth century BC.
[571] Aharoni 1981:8.
[572] 597-587 BC.
[573] Aharoni 1981:150. See 2 Kings 24:2; Jeremiah 35:11.
[574] Herzog 2001:174.
[575] ca 715 BC.

kingdom – ninth or early eighth century BC. Herzog[576] indicates that 'Arad is not the location of a Canaanite city whose king prevented the early attempt of the Israelite tribes to invade Canaan from the South; no Kenite sanctuary existed in premonarchic Arad [and] the temple of Arad is not similar to the Solomonic Temple in Jerusalem '.

2.14.3   Tel Beer-sheba

As a marginal region for sedentary occupation, the Beer-sheba Valley[577] – identified with the biblical Negeb of Judah – is an ideal area for research on social and cultural transformations which took place in Canaan at the beginning of the Iron Age.[578] Beer-sheba was a prominent place in the history of the patriarchs[579] and the principal city of the Negeb. A covenant was made between Abraham and Abimelech, king of Gerar, involving a well at the place of Beer-sheba.[580] Biblical Beer-sheba is identified with Tell es-Seba, a short distance east of modern Beer-sheba. Several occupation levels have been identified during excavations, the earliest representing unfortified settlements. During the tenth century BC a massive city wall was erected. The city is mentioned together with Dan, Bethel and Gilgal as a religious centre.[581] Scholars have proposed different ethnic identities[582] for the settlers of the highlands of the Negeb and the Beer-sheba Valley, which could be recognised from their material culture. Traditionally these occupants were observed as Israelites, but arguments have been put forward that they were actually different desert tribes. Biblical data support the viewpoint that the Negeb of Judah is connected with multifarious groups, such as the families of Jerahmeelites, Kenites, Calebites and Kenizzites, as well as Amalekites and Canaanites – and not only the tribes of Judah and Simeon.[583]

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[576] Herzog 2001:175.

[577] The Beer-sheba Valley, situated between the Negeb (desert climate) to the south and the Mediterranean to the north, lies in a climatic zone characteristic of a steppe landscape. The valley soils are arable but agriculture is exposed to frequent losses as the result of droughts, with consequential sporadic permanent settlements (Herzog 1994:122).

[578] Herzog 1994:122.

[579] Genesis 21:31-33; 22:19; 26: 23, 33; 28:10; 46:1, 5.

[580] The place was called Beer-sheba, "the well of the oath" (Gn 21:22-33) (Negev & Gibson 2001:73).

[581] Negev & Gibson 2001:73-74.

[582] New approaches to anthropological and sociological research proffer a different definition of ethnicity and are 'not defined according to a determined and permanent list of traits, such as common language, territorial continuity and shared biological ties of origin. Ethnicity is now seen as a flexible phenomenon, constantly changing and developing within the complex and multidirectional processes of social interaction' (Herzog 1994:147). Social groups, therefore, adapt to this "constantly changing" environmental and socio-economic situations (Herzog 1994:147).

[583] Herzog 1994:146-148.

During the course of excavations at Tel Beer-sheba fragments of a large ashlar-built[584] horned altar were found. One of the four horns of the altar was broken. Aharoni, involved with excavations on the site at the time, assumed that the altar was an indication of a sanctuary or a temple as mentioned in the Hebrew Bible.[585] However, notwithstanding large-scale excavations, no sanctuary has been found. The horned altar could possibly have been dismantled and the sanctuary razed to the ground during Hezekiah's cult reform. There is, thus, no tangible evidence to support a hypothesis of a "lost sanctuary" and, furthermore, the historical background of the altar's dismantling is unknown. Several scenarios have been proposed for this dismantling.[586] The discovery of this horned altar from Tel Beer-sheba is by far the most acclaimed archaeological find from this site. Black stain marks indicate a metal grill that had been on the top of the altar, suggesting that fires were kindled for periodic sacrifices. The most feasible position for the altar would have been in a courtyard, following the same pattern as at Arad, the Jerusalem Temple and the pentateuchal Tabernacle, as well as a Hellenistic temple found at Tel Beer-sheba.[587] Horned altars have been found elsewhere in the late tenth to eighth centuries BC Israelite and Judahite kingdoms, although most of them were not in cultic contexts.[588] Horns – as corner-pieces of sacred altars in Israelite sanctuaries[589] – were ostensibly substitutes for the horns of the deity.[590] The Beer-sheba altar had been constructed

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[584] An ashlar-built altar, or ashlar masonry, refers to rectangular hewn or square-cut stones used in a construction and laid regularly (Kenyon 1987:184). Hewn stone: to strike or cut stone, shaping it by using an axe (Hanks 1992:230).

[585] Implicit references are, for example, Genesis 21:33; 2 Kings 23:8; Amos 8:14.

[586] See Na'aman (2002:593-594) for various proposed scenarios.

[587] Rainey 1994:339, 348.

[588] Na'aman 2002:593-595.

[589] 1 Kings 1:50-51; 2:28.

[590] Bury et al 1925:427. As no etiology [see footnote in § 3.3 for an explanation] is provided for the cultic function of horns it is evident that biblical writers were well acquainted with the purpose of horns in religious activities (Zevit 2001:347). Dever (2005:120) confirms that the original significance of horns is unclear, but indicates that these "stylised horns" had a functional role later in supporting containers, probably used as incense-burners. Matthiae (1990:345) refers to a series of bronze statuettes from the Old and Middle Syrian periods – dated 2000-1600 BC and 1600-1200 BC, respectively. These statuettes – called male deities and worshippers – are male figurines, either sitting or standing. They are, furthermore, distinguished by an elongated ovoid (egg-shaped) tiara. One of these, a well-known statuette probably from Mishrife-Qatna, has a tiara with four pairs of horns – on top of each other. Although these statuettes have been classified as deities 'there is no doubt that the only element which might confirm this identification is the multiple horns of the Qatna statuette, stylistically the most important of the series … (however) it is not sufficient to prove that the statuette represents a deity', yet, the ovoid royal tiara with divine horns is a confirmation of a merging of royal and divine aspects in these figurines (Matthiae 1990:345-347). Qatna is a large tell in Syria. Although the site has traces of prehistoric settlements the earliest building remains date from the early second millennium BC when Qatna was a small fortified town. Situated on the Via Maris (the "way of the sea", connecting Egypt with Babylonia through the western Sinai and along the coast of the Philistines) it developed into a large city, due to trade relations with neighbouring countries (Negev & Gibson 2001:418, 437). A classic Mesopotamian tiara with divine horns is part of the statue of *Puzur-Ishtar* from Mari. A sculpture of the king of Ebla portrays him with a royal tiara, decorated by a pair of horns. Ancient kings were deified – probably represented by bronze statuettes – and considered to be protective deities of the kingdom (Matthiae 1990:347-349). Cornelius (2004:25) states that a horned headdress is an indication that a figure is a deity. See § 2.3 for a footnote on "apocalyptic application of horns". Horns of consecration on altars had an Ancient Near Eastern cultic function dating back to the late fourth millennium BC (Jamdat Nasr period) (Astour 1973:22).

of hewn stones. The horns were carved to form the top rim of the altar. It is significant that the altar was manufactured from hewn stones, despite the prohibition in Exodus 20:25. The priests who built the altar could have been unaware of, or not bound by, this rule, or it could have been promulgated only much later.[591]

Although scholars have opposing views regarding the historicity of Hezekiah's cult reform,[592] there is no reason to doubt the dismantling of altars in Judah during Hezekiah's reign.[593] This reform is dated between 715 and 701 BC.[594] Rainey[595] maintains that a temple – to which the altar belonged – stood on a designated area and was destroyed during the reign of Hezekiah. At a later stage it was replaced by another building. With Hezekiah's cult reform the altar was dismantled and its stones hidden in different places.

A large number of metal objects, as well as remains from a copper metallurgical industry – dated as far back as the beginning of the fourth millennium BC – were found at nearby Tel Arad. It is known that the Valley of Beer-sheba was the core of copper metallurgy. Sinai has also often been cited as a source of ancient copper.[596] Beer-sheba, furthermore, lies at the junction of a watershed from Hebron to Egypt, and would have been a caravan stopping-place. It was a religious sanctuary, as from the time of the patriarchs, and could even have been a place of pilgrimage. *El Olam*[597] was its guardian deity, worshipped by Abraham and later assimilated to *Yahweh*-worship, reinterpreting the name as an epithet of *Yahweh*.[598]

2.14.4 Tel Dan

In Genesis 14:14[599] Dan is mentioned for the first time in the Hebrew Bible. The city was then called Laish or Leshem.[600] One of the most complete narrations in the Hebrew Bible of

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[591] Zevit 2001:301-302.
[592] 2 Kings 18:4; 2 Chronicles 31:1.
[593] Hezekiah: 716/15 – 687/6 BC (Kitchen & Mitchell 1982:197).
[594] Rainey 1994:333.
[595] Rainey 1994:349.
[596] Hauptmann et al 1999:1-2.
[597] The Everlasting God.
[598] Cohen 1962a:375-376.
[599] Genesis 14:14: 'When Abram heard that his kinsman had been taken captive, he led forth his trained men, born in his house, 318 of them, and went in pursuit as far as Dan.'
[600] Joshua 19:47; Judges 18:29. Mari letters attest that the later city Dan had been the Late Bronze Age thriving Canaanite city Laish. Ruin of this settlement was followed by a century-long abandonment. The following settlement is attributed to the tribe of Dan (Jos 19:40-48; Jdg 1:34; 18). Living initially in modest houses and tents, the standard of living of the residents of Dan proliferated in the course of time. This settlement was eventually incorporated into the kingdom of Israel (during the tenth century BC) (Nakhai 2003:136-137). The name of king Horon-Ab, of the city Laish, appears in the eighteenth century BC Egyptian Execration Texts [curse texts], and the name Laish, furthermore, in the records of Thutmose III [1504-1450 BC]. Nothing of relevant interest is additionally known about the city (Biran 1994a:21).

an ancient Hebrew tribe's migration is documented in Judges 18. The tribe of Dan conquered Laish and changed its name to Dan. There is no indication whether the whole tribe migrated north.[601] Archaeological confirmation for the conquest of Laish by the tribe of Dan is incidental.[602] Dan was situated on the main crossroads and duly benefited from toll imposed on passing caravans. The tribe of Dan shed its semi-nomadic character shortly after settlement.[603] Tel Dan, earlier known as Tell el-Qadi,[604] lies at the source of the Jordan River. A bilingual inscription in Greek and Aramaic excavated at Tel Dan confirms the identification of Dan-Laish with Tel Dan.[605] The discovery of crucibles, copper slag, blowpipes and furnaces at the site of Tel Dan suggests that the inhabitants engaged in metalwork, traditionally attributed to the tribe of Dan.[606] There is the possibility that the Danites learned the art of metalwork from the original inhabitants of Laish – taking into consideration that tin was sent from Mari to Laish,[607] however, the reputation of the Danites as metalworkers may also be implied by 2 Chronicles 2:12-14.[608] The tribe of Dan, likewise, had 'the peculiar characteristic of being associated with ships in the Old Testament',[609] and scholars have suggested that they originally formed part of one of the Egyptian military units in places such as Beth Shean, Gaza and Dor.[610]

More than one altar, as well as various objects related to the cult, was uncovered at Tel Dan. These archaeological finds supplement the sparse information in 1 Kings 12.[611] An altar was also excavated – probably from the ninth to eighth century BC building complex – with a 'single, large, well-carved horn'.[612] The cultic activities at Dan reached their peak during the rule of Jeroboam II.[613] He extended the borders of his kingdom substantially to the north and

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[601] Biran 1994a:125.

[602] Biran 1994b:4.

[603] Biran 1994a:135.

[604] Tell el-Qadi means "Mound of the Judge". The city – situated at the foot of Mount Hermon – had abundant water supplies. During the third millennium BC it became a prosperous, fortified city (Negev & Gibson 2001:131).

[605] Biran 1994b:1. This dedicatory inscription reads, 'To the God who is in Dan'. The inscription is dated to the Hellenistic Period (Biran 2001:148).

[606] The tribe of Dan assisted in the construction of the Tabernacle (Ex 31:4-11; 35:34).

[607] According to texts from Mari, tin was sent by king Zimri-Lim of Mari to the city of Laish (Biran 1994a:90). See footnote on Zimri-Lim in § 2.4.

[608] Biran 1994b:5.

[609] Kuhrt 1995:392. Judges 5:17.

[610] Kuhrt 1995:392. From descriptions in the Papyrus Harris, scholars deduce that the Egyptians used the Sea Peoples (see footnote in § 2.7) as mercenaries and military units. Archaeological and textual evidence indicates that the Philistines – one of the groups of the Sea Peoples – settled in Palestinian areas where the Egyptians maintained fortresses with troops. As the Egyptian power in the area collapsed, soldiers reorganised themselves into independent cities (Kuhrt 1995:389-390).

[611] Biran 2001:149.

[612] Zevit 2001:302. See footnotes in § 2.3, § 2.14.1 and § 2.14.3 on "horns".

[613] Jeroboam II: king of Israel 782/81-753 BC; co-regent as from 793/92 BC (Kitchen & Mitchell 1982:197).

east, thereby contributing to the central position of Dan and the consequential centrality of the cult at Dan. A basalt מצבה[614] at the Israelite gate complex confirms the existence of a cult and could very well represent a sanctuary at the gate complex. Five מצבות and a large number of votive vessels have been found at the foot of the city wall. Apart from the main shrine at the spring, ninth and eighth century BC במות[615] have also been discovered. It is evident that the cult practised at the entrance to the city continued even after the Assyrian conquest[616] and that it was ingrained in the custom and memory of the people. It is unlikely that Dan was the only place practising the cult at the city entrance. Similar elements at other sites could possibly come to light in due course.[617]

A passage in the Hebrew Bible[618] informs us that Jeroboam[619] – for political reasons[620] – had a golden calf set up at Dan during the second half of the tenth century BC. He also 'made temples on high places and appointed priests from among all the people, who were not of the Levites'.[621] The centrality of Dan for the cult of Northern Israel is furthermore accentuated by the description in 1 Kings 12.[622] The setting-up of a golden calf reminiscent of the apostasy of the Israelites at Mount Sinai[623] – is 'an audacious declaration establishing his alternative to the Jerusalem Temple'.[624] The continuity of a long religious tradition was emphasised by the establishment of new cult centres at Dan and Bethel. The golden calf at Dan has not been discovered – most likely carried off by one of its foreign conquerors for its precious gold.[625] During the reign of Ahab[626] the city was fortified and the sanctuary restored to its former glory – its grandeur carried through to the time of Jeroboam II. An amphora[627] handle, stamped with the name *Immadi-Yo*[628] – meaning "God is with me"– has been excavated. *Immadi-Yo* lived at the time of Jeroboam II.[629] A ninth century BC head of a woman figurine –

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[614] See footnote in § 2.14.1 on מצבה and מצבות.
[615] See footnote in § 2.14.1 on במות.
[616] Tiglath-pileser III's campaign against Damascus and Israel 733-732 BC (Ehrlich 2001:59).
[617] Biran 2001:149, 153, 155.
[618] 1 Kings 12:26-29.
[619] Jeroboam I, first king of Israel in the Divided Kingdom; ruled 931/30-910/09 BC (Kitchen & Mitchell 1982:196).
[620] To prevent the Israelites from pledging allegiance to the Davidic dynasty, Jeroboam I set up a golden calf at Bethel and at Dan, thereby establishing new cult centres in the North (Biran 1994a:165).
[621] 1 Kings 12:31.
[622] Biran 2001:148. 1 Kings 12:29-30.
[623] Exodus 32:1-8. Apostasy: abandonment of a faith, conviction or principle (Deist 1990:18).
[624] Dever 2005:150-151.
[625] Biran 1994a:165, 168.
[626] Ahab ruled 874/3-853 BC (Kitchen & Mitchell 1982:196).
[627] See § 2.13, subtitle "Taanach" for footnote on "amphora".
[628] *Immadi-Yo* – "God is with me" – is reminiscent of the name *Immanu-el* – "God is with us". The name *Immadi-Yahu* appears on a recently discovered ostracon from the Negeb in Judah. The theophoric ending -*Yo* corresponds with -*Yahu* from Judah (Biran 1994a:199-201).
[629] Biran 1994a:189, 199-201. Jeroboam II: see earlier footnote in this paragraph.

possibly *Astarte* – was discovered at the במה.[630]   The cultic activities at Dan were later undoubtedly affected by the military and political instability following the Babylonian and Persian conquests.[631]   The continued use of the sanctuary is attested by a terracotta figurine of the god *Bes*[632] that has been uncovered, as well as a horse-and-rider figurine and a number of other small cult objects. The name "Dan" – meaning "to judge" – was kept alive in the Arabic name "Tell el-Qadi", "Mound of the Judge".[633]

Since the discovery at Tel Dan of an old Aramaic inscription from the mid-ninth century BC, there have been ongoing debates regarding a phrase in this inscription. It is confirmed as one of the 'most important epigraphic finds made in Israel in the nineties or in any other decade'.[634]   The inscription indicates that, contrary to arguments by minimalists that "biblical Israel" is an invention of the Persian or Hellenistic periods, 'the historical memory of the biblical texts extended much farther back'.[635]   A stone fragment[636] – part of a larger block – engraved with words separated by dots, was found in the remains of an eastern wall.[637]   A year later two more fragments were discovered.[638]   The phrase on one of the fragments which

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[630] Negev & Gibson 2001:132.

[631] Babylonian conquest: 587/586 BC; Persian conquest: 539 BC.

[632] See footnote in § 4.3.9 for a description of *Bes*.

[633] Biran 1994a:214, 273.

[634] Ehrlich 2001:57.

[635] Ehrlich 2001:58.

[636] The length of the fragment is 32 cm, and at its maximum the width is 22 cm. According to the type of break the excavators conclude that the stele – an estimated original length of one metre – was smashed in antiquity. The stone had been smoothed for writing and a round-edged stylus was probably used (Biran & Naveh 1993:84-85).

[637] This wall borders a large pavement (*piazza*) at the entrance to the outer gate of the city. An elaborate gate system was constructed in the mid-ninth century BC. A stele could have been erected during the first half of the ninth century BC and smashed approximately in the middle of the ninth century BC. An inscribed fragment of this stele was set in the wall sometime between the demolition of the stele and the destruction of the gate complex during the eighth century BC (Biran & Naveh 1993:81, 84-86). Excavations have not revealed as yet when and by whom the stele was smashed (Biran & Naveh 1995:8).

[638] The letters on both these fragments were clear and the words separated by dots. The maximum dimensions of the surface of the three joined fragments are 19,5 x 12 cm. The translation of the inscription reads as follows:

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1      […                                    …] and cut […    ]
2      […] my father went up [against him when] he fought at […]
3      And my father lay down, he went to his [ancestors] (viz. became sick and died).  And the king of I[s-
4      rael entered previously in my father's land.  [And] Hadad made me king.
5      And Hadad went in front of me, [and] I departed from [the] seven […-]
6      s of my kingdom, and I slew [seve]nty kin[gs], who harnessed thou[sands of cha-]
7      riots and thousands of horsemen (or: horses). [I killed Jeho]ram son of [Ahab
8      king of Israel, and [I] killed [Ahaz]iahu son of [Jehoram kin-]
9      g of the House of David.  And I set [their towns into ruins and turned]
10     their land into [desolation …                                                           ]
11     other […                                                          and Jehu ru-]
12     led over Is[rael …                                                  and I laid]
13     siege upon [ …                                                                     ]
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(Biran & Naveh 1995:2, 5, 9, 13). For a detailed discussion of each line, see Biran & Naveh (1995:13-17). Ehrlich (2001:63) indicates that the exact relationship between the first fragment and the two fragments later discovered is unclear.

caused a stir amongst biblical scholars reads: ביתדוד[639] and is translated as 'the House of David'.[640] Until the discovery of this fragment the state Israel could not be dated later than the mid-ninth century BC.[641] By the ninth century BC Judah's dynastic name was "the house of David", as now attested by this inscription – thus the figure of David was firmly established at that time.[642] The fragments are part of – what must have been – a monumental inscription recording the great deeds of the composer of the text. The language of the text on the stele, as well as a reference to the god *Hadad*,[643] indicates that the inscription was written on authority of an Aramaean ruler – probably Hazael. Conflicts between Aram and Israel were not uncommon during the ninth century BC.[644] Reference to the "king of Israel" in line eight is parallel to the translation "the house of David" in line nine. This phrase is a synonym for the kingdom of Judah and its ruling sovereignty. Therefore, this could be considered as a 'powerful witness for the existence of a David.'[645] Halpern[646] does not agree that the inscription refers to Hazael of Aram, but attributes it to his son Ben-Hadad II.[647] He furthermore indicates that there is no biblical evidence that Judah formed an alliance with Israel against Aram during the early years of the Divided Kingdom[648] – as scholars have indicated in the translation.[649] Halpern[650] concludes that, in the examination of historical sources, scholars 'generally expect too much in terms of accuracy, chronological arrangement, and detail.' Ancient Near

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[639] Although the literature referred to in this paragraph, mainly makes use of transcribed forms of the Hebrew words, the relevant words in this text are given in the Hebrew script, particularly referring to דוד *dwd* (David) and ביתדוד *bytdwd* (house of David). In the latter instance alternative translations are referred to in this paragraph.

[640] Biran & Naveh 1995:12-13.

[641] The phrase is contemporary to the mentioning of Israelite kings on Assyrian epigraphs and the Mesha Stele (Halpern 1994:63). It has recently been proposed to read line thirteen on the Mesha Stele as *btdwd*, thus being parallel to the Tel Dan-phrase (Ehrlich 2001:63). See § 4.3.8 on the Mesha Stele.

[642] Halpern 1997:314.

[643] See § 3.5 on *Hadad*.

[644] The king who left his monument at Dan could have been a king of Damascus – probably Hazael [he came to power in 842 BC]. The inscription possibly refers to the deaths of king Jehoram of Israel [852-841 BC] and Ahaziah of Judah [841 BC] [2 Ki 8:7-29; 9:13-28]. Jehu [841-814/13 BC] became king of Israel after Jehoram (Kitchen & Mitchell 1982:196). According to the inscription, Hazael gave himself credit for the deaths of Jehoram and Ahaziah, or otherwise regarded Jehu to be his agent. The inscription is, unfortunately, fragmentary, but the indication is that Jehoram and Ahaziah are mentioned, as well as the very important first extra-biblical reference to "the house of David" (Arnold & Beyer 2002:165).

[645] Ehrlich 2001:61.

[646] Halpern 1994:69, 73.

[647] Date uncertain; could be 860-843 BC (Kitchen & Mitchell 1982:196).

[648] See a previous footnote on the translation of the inscription, with reference to the deaths of Jehoram and Ahaziah (2 Ki 8:7-29; 9:13-28). A tradition of conflict between Israel and Judah during the first years of the Divided Kingdom is reflected in 1 Kings 14:30; 15:7, 16-22. For a detailed discussion of the text, as well as the dating thereof, see Halpern (1994:64-78).

[649] Although the names of the kings of Judah and Israel are missing on the first fragment, only two possible matches could be suggested, namely Ahaziah of Judah and his contemporary Jehoram of Israel, who ruled concurrently with Hazael of Damascus-Aram (Ehrlich 2001:64).

[650] Halpern 1994:74.

Eastern documents about events are biased, inaccurate and selective. Demsky[651] points out that five aspects should be clarified when examining an ancient inscription.[652]

As mentioned earlier, Halpern[653] indicates that – despite this inscription – some scholars insist on denying that a tribal Israel existed in the central hills in the late thirteenth century. On the one hand, the maximalists[654] argue that the boundary of the "historical memory of the biblical narrative" has been moved back by quite a number of decades, while, on the other hand, minimalists see no bearing on the biblical history. However, the minimalists do not hesitate to claim the Persian and Hellenistic periods – for which there are minimal sources – as being the time for the reconstruction of an ideological history.[655] Davies[656] mentions that Biran and Naveh[657] do not consider the possibility of more credible readings for ביתדוד than their claim for "House of David". He points out that all the words in line thirteen of the inscription are separated by a customary dot – called a word divider – with the exception of this phrase, which implies that there could be another reading.[658] Davies,[659] furthermore, recommends that scholars should not jump to conclusions but rather see the difference between 'what a text says, what it might say and what we would like it to say'. The phrase under discussion provides, likewise, a better reading for Amos 9:11.[660] Ben Zvi[661] draws the attention to plausible

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[651] Demsky 1995:29.

[652] The following features should be taken into consideration: archaeological context, type of inscription, palaeographical analysis, linguistic study and historical synthesis (Demsky 1995:29-30).

[653] Halpern 1997:335. See § 2.7.

[654] See § 8.9 on the maximalists and minimalists.

[655] Ehrlich 2001:65.

[656] Davies 1994b:54-55. Known as one of the minimalists.

[657] Avraham Biran and Joseph Naveh, respectively the archaeologist and the palaeographer involved with the ביתדוד inscription and the interpretation thereof.

[658] Davies (1994b:54-55) argues that there is no plausible reason why these two words were not separated by a dot, unless they were meant to be read as one word, for example a place name, such as BethLechem (Bethlehem). Such a place name could be Beth-dod – with the ו serving as a rudimentary vowel as it is in the case of the Philistine city Ashdod. In the Hebrew Bible דוד could also mean "beloved" or "uncle". There is, furthermore, a likely contradiction in the claim of the inscription that Aram defeated both Israel and Judah, while according to the biblical passage Israel and Judah could not have been fighting together (1 Ki 15:16-22).

[659] Davies 1994b:55.

[660] Amos 9:11: 'In that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the days of old.' Many scholars see the expression סכת דויד (the booth of David) as a clear reference to David and a "metaphorical" (see below) interpretation of his "booth" – referring to his dynasty, his kingdom, or his city. Davies (1994a:23), furthermore, mentions that other scholars now propose that the phrase from the Tel Dan inscription, together with a better reading of the Mesha-inscription, may be a reference to a building dedicated to דוד – which is now read as an epithet of a deity. Therefore, a promise of restoration of the ruins is read in Amos 9:11. The variation in the spelling of דויד in the Masoretic Text, rather than דוד, indicates that the copyists understood the reading to be "David". Tel Dan's ביתדוד may, therefore, be a building or toponym linked to the god (Davies 1994a:23-24). Metaphorical: referring to one object or concept as if it were another, therefore the transfer of a name or description from one object or concept to another is not literally denoted by that name or description, for example, "God is light", in which light is not meant to be a literal description of God (Deist 1990:156).

[661] Ben Zvi 1994:26-29. The term *dwd* appears in the Mesha-inscription, dated approximately the same time as the Tel Dan stele. Both inscriptions – composed from the perspective of neighbours of Israel – deal with the

alternative interpretations of ביתדוד – other than "House of David". The phrase is more likely an allusion to a deity – probably *Yahweh* – thus referring to the temple at Dan, as "the House of *Yahweh*". In another possible reading, דוד could be understood as the title of an important Israelite officer, thereby alluding to his house – the alternative for a royal palace.

Cryer[662] mentions that Biran and Naveh are to be criticised for their promotion of an "odd" interpretation of the text, rather than simply to present the text to the scholarly world. He, furthermore, indicates that in his announcement of the find Biran declined to answer any questions about it. The appearance of an inscription – allegedly referring to David – at a time when the historicity of the United Kingdom was under attack, gives rise to suspicion. Such an interesting epigraphic find should necessarily be scrutinised for its authenticity. Cryer[663] rejects the so-called "evidence" of the inscription to be a confirmation of the existence of a biblical Israel. Lemche and Thompson[664] point out the importance of Cryer's contribution, especially concerning his analysis of the epigraphical evidence[665] wherein he indicates that forms in the inscription are related to other Aramaic inscriptions which belong to the late eighth or early seventh century BC, and not to the mid-ninth century BC, as proffered by Naveh. They propose that ביתדוד could be a name of a holy place at Dan, with דוד referring to a protecting god, "the beloved". Discussions by some scholars – which were started more than a hundred years ago by Hugo Winckler – are in favour 'of the existence of a god called דוד in ancient Palestine',[666] however, דוד is rather an epithet, "the beloved", than a personal name.[667] Lemche and Thompson,[668] furthermore, argue that there is no space for an historical United Monarchy or for their kings as presented in the biblical narratives, set in 'an imaginary world of long ago that never existed as such'.[669]

Ehrlich[670] denotes that the so-called maximalists interpret the phrase ביתדוד as a referral to the dynasty of David, while the minimalists read it as an allusion to a temple of *Yahweh*, the Beloved. Although David is not the most obvious choice as referent in the Tel Dan

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Kingdom of Israel sharing a common theme of a victory over the Israelite king. According to a widespread consensus, *dwd* is not a reference to David, the son of Jesse.

[662] Cryer 1994:3-4, 14-15.
[663] Cryer 1994:15.
[664] Lemche & Thompson 1994:9, 13-14.
[665] See Cryer (1994:5-19) for his analysis of the epigraphical evidence.
[666] Lemche & Thompson 1994:13.
[667] Gods of the old Palestinian pantheon hardly ever carried personal names (Lemche & Thompson 1994:14).
[668] Lemche & Thompson 1994:19.
[669] Lemche & Thompson 1994:19.
[670] Ehrlich 2001:63, 66.

inscription, it appears to be the most logical one. David's memory, as founder of the later Judean dynasty, was kept alive in the realm of legend.

2.14.5   Papyri from and a Jewish temple at Elephantine

The early fortified city of Elephantine – well known for important papyri discovered there – was situated on an island in the Nile River, opposite the ancient village of Syene.[671] It was the southernmost city of Egypt and known as a military stronghold and trade centre. It held the seat for the royal officials responsible for the important ivory trade from Nubia.[672] The name Elephantine is thus probably a reflection on this ivory trade.[673] Granite from the denoted region was transported to the South. The Nubian country was recorded for the first time during the Third Dynasty.[674] Excavations at Elephantine revealed tombs of royal officials, two Egyptian temples, a temple for the city god *Khnum,*[675] as well as a Jewish military colony and Jewish temple from Persian times. The papyrus scroll[676] was the main material in Egypt on which sacred and secular matters were written. Although not the most abundant, the island of Elephantine produced papyri texts and documents in no less than seven languages and scripts. As from 1815 individual pieces of documents from Elephantine appeared at various places and in the hands of different people. Major collections of papyri and ostraca[677] are now mainly in Cairo, London, Europe and Brooklyn.[678] The first fifth century BC Aramaic papyri – historically the most significant of all the Aramaic documents – were discovered in

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[671] Modern Aswan. As Elephantine, mainland Syene was a fort forming a geological, ethnic and political border. It was valued in the whole of Egypt for its red granite that was utilised for building blocks and the manufacturing of statues and sarcophagi (Porten 1996:xi, 1).

[672] Also known as Ethiopia. The country is mentioned the first time in the Hebrew Bible as Cush (Gn 2:13). In ancient times it was known as Nubia. It lies between the second and fourth cataracts in the Nile Valley. Apart from ivory, it also supplied Egypt with ebony, spices and slaves. By the time of the Middle Kingdom [2040-1782 BC] the Egyptians conquered the Nubians and began to capitalise their gold mines. The Greeks and Romans called it Aithiopia (Negev & Gibson 2001:169).

[673] Elephantine was locally known as Yeb. The name Elephantine is derived from the Greek word for elephant. The designation could either be a reference to the ivory trade or it could have been inspired by the surrounding large smooth black rocks. In the river near the island these boulders resemble bathing elephants (Rosenberg 2004:6).

[674] The Third Dynasty, dated 2686-2613 BC, commenced with the Old Kingdom (2686-2181 BC) in Egypt. The rulers of the Third Dynasty were: Sanakhte, Djoser, Sekhemkhet, Khaba and Huni. Djoser (2668-2649 BC) is well known for the Step Pyramid at Saqqara (Clayton 1994:30-37).

[675] This temple dated from the period of Alexander the Great [334-323 BC] (Negev & Gibson 2001:156). *Khnum*, known in Greek as *Khnoumis*, was a god of the cataract-region. He was a creation god – portrayed as a "ram-headed man with long wavy horns" – who fashioned men and gods on his potter's wheel. He symbolised the Nile, which fertilised the earth. His main sanctuary was on Elephantine (Guirand 1996:37).

[676] The papyrus reed grew in abundance in the Nile marshes of ancient Lower Egypt. It was a common writing material from as early as the third millennium BC and continued to be in use into the first millennium AD. Thin strips of inner papyrus stalk were laid vertically and the following layer placed horizontally on top of it. An adhesive and pressure were applied to bond them together as a sheet. It was then dried and polished. Papyri were also exported from Egypt for many centuries (Trever 1962:649).

[677] See § 2.14.2, footnote on ostraca.

[678] For a detailed discussion of the recovery of the documents at Elephantine and Syene, see Porten (1996:1-27).

1907. Unfortunately the site and mode of burial of the hundreds of papyri on Elephantine are unknown. It is, however, known that they lay in close proximity to each other. Regrettably – apart from the Aramaic papyri – the different documents became disassociated from Elephantine.[679] A large number of the Elephantine papyri are legal texts. Most of these texts are from the archives of two families, namely from Mahseiah bar Yedoniah and from Ananiah bar Azariah, the latter probably being a temple servant "of *Yahu*" [*YHW*].[680]

The Elephantine papyri describe the lives of a group of Jewish mercenaries, initially on the payroll of the Egyptians and later on that of the Persians. Their function was to guard the southern border of Egypt at the first cataract of the Nile. According to the papyri, these mercenaries and their families lived there during the sixth and fifth centuries BC. Their date of arrival at Elephantine is unknown but, according to a papyrus source,[681] they were well established by 525 BC. They had their own temple where sacrifices were offered to *YHW*.[682] If the Jews arrived at Elephantine during the reign of Manasseh in Judah, in the course of the middle of the seventh century BC, to assist the Egyptians in their campaign against Nubia, it would have given them ample time to establish a communal temple before 525 BC.[683] During 1997 a piece of tiling was excavated, duly identified as the floor of the Jewish temple and confirmed by information in papyri documents. No altar was found but, possibly, it had been standing on an area of the site that had been lost due to erosion or subsidence. In the Aramaic documents the temple is described as an *egora* or shrine. This implies a plain roofed shrine that could be entered by several doorways,[684] or an open-air altar.[685] The measurements of the temple were reminiscent of those of Solomon's temple in 1 Kings 6:2. Detailed descriptions of the Jewish colony in a "fairly tight-knit complex around the temple" are given in the papyri.[686]

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[679] Porten 1996:1, 2, 4, 10.
[680] Kraeling 1962:84. For a discussion of *Yahu*, see § 4.3.13.
[681] A papyrus, dated 407 BC, mentions that the Jewish temple stood on Elephantine before the Persian conquest of Egypt by Cambyses in 525 BC. The papyrus states that Cambyses destroyed many temples but saved the Jewish temple (Rosenberg 2004:6).
[682] The well-known Passover Papyrus – dated 419 BC – sets out instructions by Darius II to the colony regarding the celebration of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Rosenberg 2004:6).
[683] The southern island of Elephantine was the principal cult centre of the Egyptian god *Khnum* (Willis 1993:39). A temple for a Semitic god could only have been established there if ordained by the act of some pharaoh (Kraeling 1962:84), and probably subsidised by the pharaoh (Porten 1996:18).
[684] The papyri mention that 'the shrine had a roof of cedar wood and five stone-lined doorways with bronze hinges' (Rosenberg 2004:6).
[685] The building – which was not the usual synagogue – was called an *aguda* (meeting place) and *misgada* (place of worship) (Negev & Gibson 2001:156).
[686] Rosenberg 2004:4, 6-7.

In some legal documents from Elephantine, as well as in certain Aramaic letters details can be traced of the career of a "corrupt Persian official named Vidranga",[687] towards the end of the fifth century BC.[688] In 410 BC the priests of the *Khnum* temple on Elephantine solicited the aid of Vidranga to ravage the Jewish temple.[689] Vidranga sent for his son Nefayan,[690] and the Egyptian troops under his command, to return and destroy the Jewish temple.[691] Reasons for this demand and destruction are not given. The explanation is probably complex, including the idea that the priests of the *Khnum* temple were outraged that the Jews sacrificed animals that were sacred to *Khnum*.[692] It is unclear why the priests waited more than a hundred years to "vent their anger".[693] In an undated letter Vidranga is accused of 'receiving a large bribe from the *Khnum* priesthood',[694] while watching idly as the priests vandalised the temple. The initial response of the Jewish community was liturgical – to put on sackcloth, fast and pray.[695] The post-disaster liturgy of the Elephantine community 'incorporates a ritual of cursing in a manner deeply rooted in the curse-tradition of the ancient Near Eastern world.'[696] In the light of the Jewish community remaining loyal to the Persian crown throughout the fifth century, Vidranga was regarded a traitor worthy of the traditional punishment for traitors.[697]

Three years after the destruction of the temple, Yedaniah[698] and the priests sent the famous petition to Bagavahya – the then governor of Judah – for the rebuilding of the shrine that

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[687] Also known as Waidrang (Rosenberg 2004:7).
[688] Lindenberger 2001:134.
[689] Rosenberg 2004:7.
[690] Nefayan had succeeded his father, Vidranga, as military commander at Syene (Lindenberger 2001:136).
[691] Lindenberger 2001:136.
[692] Archaeological workers found a cemetery of rams on Elephantine. These animals were sacred to *Khnum*, the ram-headed Egyptian god (Rosenberg 2004:8).
[693] The priests were in the process of extending *Khnum*'s temple that would have brought it directly opposite the Jewish temple. The main thoroughfare of the island, the King's Highway, lay between the two temples. Presumably the priests got permission to restore the street – already dangerously blocked – by removing the Jewish temple courtyard wall (Rosenberg 2004:8).
[694] Lindenberger 2001:135. The raid on the temple was carried out by professional soldiers who razed the temple to the ground and carried away the gold and silver vessels.
[695] Apparently the community 'abstained from sex, from anointing themselves with oil, and from drinking wine for some three years' (Lindenberger 2001:137).
[696] Lindenberger 2001:151. A passage from the "Vidranga section" in the Aramaic papyrus – see Lindenberger (2001:137-152) for a detailed discussion – implies a curse and evil wish that 'Vidranga be done to death by vicious animals' (Lindenberger 2001:148), or alternatively, that his corpse be devoured by animals. These brutal types of curses were well known in the Ancient Near East. One clause in the "Vidranga text" can be freely translated as 'may the dogs tear out his guts from between his legs' (Lindenberger 2001:148-149). It is not clear whether Vidranga died in 410 BC due to mutilation by animals. According to another papyrus text, Vidranga was still alive in 399 BC (Lindenberger 2001:141). In ancient Israel punishment by devouring animals was a well-known threat. It is, however, a misconception to read the passage about Vidranga and the dogs 'as a factual narrative concerning his fate, and to try to interpret it against an imaginary background of Persian judicial procedure' (Lindenberger 2001:149-150, 152). Related biblical curses are well known (Lindenberger 2001:150-151).
[697] Lindenberger 2001:153.
[698] Yedaniah (Jedaniah), son of Gemariah, was leader of the Jewish community at the end of the fifth century BC. Eleven documents from the communal archive recovered from Elephantine, were addressed to Yedaniah (Porten 1996:77).

had been demolished by the Egyptian troops.[699] The incident of the temple destruction is recounted at some length in the petition.[700] They received no help from the Temple in Jerusalem. The Persian governor of Yehud (Judah) did, however, grant permission for the reconstruction of the temple 'on condition that animal sacrifices would not be conducted there, only meal offerings and incense'.[701] It was furthermore stipulated that the courtyard wall be clear of the King's Highway. The rebuilt temple was placed asymmetrically within its courtyard.[702] The petitions from Elephantine for assistance for the rebuilding of the temple were also sent to Sanballat,[703] governor of Samaria. The leaders of the Yahwistic colony in Elephantine regarded the Samarians as integral part of Israel.[704] Although the temple was rebuilt, the colony disappeared shortly thereafter.[705]

The Jewish mercenaries from Elephantine probably originated from the former Northern Kingdom of Israel.[706] Although these people from Elephantine called themselves Jews, it meant for them something rather different than for their Yehudite contemporaries, such as Ezra and Nehemiah.[707] In addition to the exclusion of the Samarian communities, the Elephantine Jews were also excluded from participation in Judah, thus, in all likelihood, causing tension – even if not as significant as with the Samarians – between the Jerusalem/Yehudite and Elephantine Jews.[708] The inhabitants of the seventh century BC Northern Israel consisted mainly of Israelites and Aramaeans. They shared Aramaic as their common language and

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[699] This petition to Bagavahya, governor of Judah, was written and rewritten with care to ensure that the desired objective was reached (Porten 1996:78). For an English translation of the Jedaniah archive (late fifth century BC) including the correspondence on the temple rebuilding, see Porten (1996:125-151).

[700] Lindenberger 2001:135-136.

[701] Rosenberg 2004:8-9. The communal archive held no written reply on the petition, but indeed a "memorandum of instruction" jointly issued by Bagavahya, governor of Judah, and Delaiah, son of Sanballat – governor of Samaria and enemy of Nehemiah (Porten 1996:78-79).

[702] Rosenberg 2004:9. For an architectural description of the Jewish temple at Elephantine and a comparison to the Israelite temple tradition, see Rosenberg (2004:10-12).

[703] In the letter from Elephantine, dated the seventeenth year of the Persian king Darius II, Sanballat is referred to as "governor of Samaria". He was the main opponent of Nehemiah in the latter's efforts to rebuild the walls of post-exilic Jerusalem (Dahlberg 1962c:210). According to Kraeling (1962:84), one of the letters was addressed to Bagoas, governor of Yehud, mentioning Sanballat and Johanan, the high priest. Bagoas's intervention is petitioned for the restoration of the *Yahu*-temple. The letter received no direct reply, but a recommendation for the restoration – on certain conditions – was made.

[704] Ben Zvi 1995:142.

[705] Porten 1996:18.

[706] Rosenberg 2004:12. After the death of Josiah in 609 BC, Judah as well as the former Northern Kingdom, came under the rule of Egypt (2 Ki 23:33-34). Jewish soldiers were now fighting in Babylonia and elsewhere under Egyptian instruction. These Jewish troops could possibly have been taken – forcibly or voluntarily – to serve in Egypt. When setting up their shrine in Elephantine, these people from Israel would probably be building it on the lines of the Solomonic Temple and possibly erect a shrine in Egypt in defiance of Josiah's centralisation in 622 BC (Rosenberg 2004:12).

[707] These Jews had rather more in common with the opponents of Ezra and Nehemiah (Lindenberger 2001:154).

[708] Ben Zvi 1995:141.

worshipped a multitude of deities, including *Anat-Bethel*,[709] *Yahweh* or *Yahu*, and presumably *Anat-Yahu*. Northern Israel's religious pluralism was carried over to fifth century BC Elephantine and Syene.[710] The Jews of Elephantine were in many ways 'a syncretistic, non-traditional community'.[711]

2.14.6 Solomonic Temple: a comparison

The First Temple, or Solomonic Temple, had been erected – according to biblical traditions[712] – in Jerusalem, and is dated ca 968 BC.[713] David conceived the idea of a "House for God". He provided the necessary materials and gave instructions for the building of the Temple, but the actual work only started during Solomon's reign.[714] The construction of the Temple took seven and a half years. No tangible remains of this temple have yet been found.[715] Roberts[716] explains that the 'Zion tradition with its old theological concept of Yahweh as founder of Jerusalem and its temple' influenced Isaiah's choice of imagery in Isaiah 28:16. *Yahweh* is described as builder of Zion in various psalms.[717] The tradition of the stability of the Temple had in some degree its origin in the solidly-built physical Temple. According to Isaiah, the security of Jerusalem was dependent on the presence of *Yahweh* in the city.[718] Cosmic dimensions attributed to temples and cities transmit the spatial grandeur thereof. 'A god of cosmic size is omnipotent, omnipresent, and reigns for eternity.'[719] The exaggerated measurements of the structures in the courtyard of the Solomonic Temple suggest *Yahweh*'s triumphant enthronement.[720] *Yahweh* is frequently portrayed in the Psalms as the "generous" host who dwells in Zion, purifies the Temple and welcomes the Temple visitor into his fellowship.[721]

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[709] See § 3.3 on, inter alia, *Anat*, and § 4.3.13 on *Anat-Bethel* and *Anat-Yahu*.

[710] Van der Toorn 1992:95. For a discussion of the syncretistic religious practices of the Elephantine Jews, see § 4.3.13.

[711] Lindenberger 2001:153.

[712] The descriptions in the Hebrew Bible of the building of the First Temple do not explicitly mention that it was erected in Jerusalem. There are only a few direct references to the "Temple in Jerusalem", namely in Ezra 5:14, 15; 6:5, Psalm 68:29 and Daniel 5:2, 3, while implicit references are found in Psalm 79:1; Isaiah 44:28 and Jeremiah 24:1.

[713] The foundation of the Temple was laid in Solomon's fourth year of reign (1 Ki 6:1, 37), being from the month Tishri 968 BC to the end of the month Elul 967 BC (Finegan 1998:249).

[714] 2 Samuel 7:2; 1 Kings 8:17-19; 1 Chronicles 22:1-19; 28:1-29:9.

[715] Negev & Gibson 2001:498.

[716] Roberts 1987:39.

[717] Psalms 78:68-69; 102:16; 147:2.

[718] Roberts 1987:39, 45. Explicit and implicit references in Isaiah are: Isaiah 2:2-3; 14:32; 18:7; 24:23; 25:10; 26:21; 27:13; 28:16; 36:20; 37:10; 49:14; 51:3; 52:8.

[719] Bloch-Smith 1994:21.

[720] Bloch-Smith 1994:21.

[721] Keel 1978:192, 195. Psalms 14:7; 20:3; 24:3-5; 36:9; 42:2-3; 51:18-19; 53:6; 63:1-3; 65:1-4; 84:10; 87:5; 99:2; 102:21-22; 128:5; 134:3.

No agreement has been reached as yet amongst scholars regarding the architectural origins and reconstruction of the plan of the Solomonic Temple. The description of the Temple in the Hebrew Bible is inconclusive and complicated. Although it has been disputed by some scholars, the assumption is that the Temple consisted of three adjoining rooms.[722] The temple at Tell Tayinât[723] in northern Syria – which was built one or two centuries after the Solomonic Temple – is also based on the concept of three adjoining rooms[724] and is probably the finest architectural parallel of the Solomonic Temple.[725] A temple at ʿAin-Darʿa – not far from Tell Tayinât – was likewise constructed according to the Phoenician tripartite plan with two enormous columns alongside the entrance. The entrance was, furthermore, guarded by huge lions, cherubs and stylised palms. The goddess *Ishtar*,[726] who inhabited the temple, was presented in a superhuman size.[727] Most other temple buildings from Palestine and Syria have only one room, the cella, incorporating a niche for the goddess's statue. Although the traditional description of the Temple knew only one room – "the House of *Yahweh*"[728] – it was in all likelihood a tripartial structure. Nonetheless, in its design, the Solomonic Temple was unequalled. Parallels to the basic plan of a broad room and central niche for the main cult object opposite the entrance were found in fourteenth and thirteenth century BC shrines, such as at Hazor, as well as at the Egyptian miners' temple at Timnah, dated thirteenth to twelfth century BC.[729] The Solomonic Temple in Jerusalem and also the temples at Dan and Bethel were national shrines and the focus of national pilgrimages.[730] A pilgrimage was a paradigm for Israel to express their idea of "returning home". Pilgrimage motifs illustrated the relations between their ancestors and their God.[731]

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[722] The three rooms were: the אולם (porch: 1 Ki 6:3), the היכל (main room or entrance of the Temple: 1 Ki 6:33) and the דביר or הקדשים (Holy of Holies) (2 Ki 8:6) (Negev & Gibson 2001:498-499). The word דביר is probably adopted from Canaanite-Phoenician. The original meaning of the word was "shrine" and therefore it was built as an inner sanctuary, the most holy place (Aharoni 1973:7). The word דביר is derived from a verb meaning to "be behind", therefore the translation "inner sanctuary". There is no certainty whether the דביר and היכל were separated by a curtain. 2 Chronicles 3:14 refers to a veil (curtain), while 1 Kings 6:31 specifies doors of olive wood (Van der Woude 1986:378).

[723] An Iron Age temple was excavated at Tell Tayinât, which is in the Antioch Valley of modern south-east Turkey. This temple is alongside a royal palace (Kenyon 1987:97).

[724] Aharoni 1973:1.

[725] Kenyon 1987:97.

[726] See § 3.4 and footnotes on *Ishtar* in § 2.3 and § 2.4.

[727] Bloch-Smith 1994:23.

[728] The היכל of *Yahweh*; 1 Samuel 1:9.

[729] Aharoni 1973:6-8. See § 2.14.1 on "Egyptian miners' temple".

[730] Temples at Dan and Bethel were erected by Jeroboam I (1 Ki 12:28-30) (Smith 1997:73); Jeroboam, first king of Israel in the Divided Kingdom, dated 931/30 – 910/09 (Kitchen & Mitchell 1982:196).

[731] Smith 1997:73,138.

Dever[732] indicates that 'almost every detail of the sometimes enigmatic descriptions of the Solomonic Temple in 1 Kings 6-9 can now be directly illustrated by reference to actual Bronze Age and Iron Age temples and their furnishings elsewhere in the southern Levant'. He is, furthermore, of the opinion that it would not have been possible at a later stage for a writer, who had never seen the Temple, to give such detailed and accurate descriptions. Although Egypt and Mesopotamia undoubtedly had indirect influences on the Temple, the biblical account clearly states that it was built by Phoenician architects and artisans with the help of predominantly unskilled workers from Israel.[733] Several elements of the Solomonic Temple were also found in the ninth century BC Canaanite-Phoenician style temple at ʿAin-Darʿa in northern Syria.[734] Features in the Solomonic Temple, such as the "brazen sea"[735] standing upon twelve oxen[736] resembled the world-ocean as in *Marduk's*[737] temple in Babylon. Likewise, the shewbread[738] in the outer chamber echoed the food placed on an altar, dedicated to the god, or gods – such as 'cakes for the queen of heaven';[739] the horses and chariots – devoted to the sun[740] – at the entrance of the Temple reminded of *Shamash*.[741] This reference to "horses and chariots of the sun" is clearly an allusion to solar and astral worship – most likely

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[732] Dever 1997b:302.

[733] 1 Kings 5:1-12; 7:13-14; 2 Chronicles 2.

[734] Features of the Solomonic Temple and its parallels in various sanctuaries in the southern Levant are discussed in detail by Bloch-Smith (1994:18-27). For each one of the objects in the outer courtyard of the Temple – as described in 1 Kings 7 – archaeological parallels have been cited. For instance, the two freestanding pillars bordering the porch entrance – which are generally accepted to attest to *Yahweh*'s presence and power – have recently been interpreted as mythological "trees of life", symbolising the residing God. At, inter alia, the Middle Bronze Age Shechem Migdal Temple and the Iron Age Tell Tayinât Temple, comparable columns or מצבות have been found (Smith 1997:81-82). Furthermore, the ark which was placed in the דביר – although not depicted as a seat – reminded of the distinctive empty throne of the Aegean cult which may have been a familiar characteristic in veneration (Bury et al 1925:427). The cult niche of the דביר contained only a "vacant throne" which symbolised the presence of the divinity. There was no representation as such of the deity (Smith 1997:86). The accompanying cherubim (1 Ki 6:23-28) resembled sacred guardians elsewhere, such as at temples in Mesopotamia (Bury et al 1925:427). The Temple walls and doors were covered with cherubim, trees and blossoms. The cherubim were composite creatures of super intelligence and physical abilities, they were winged and of an unspecified gender. In contrast, the Egyptian sphinxes and Mesopotamian cherubim could be either male or female, winged or non-winged (Smith 1997:88). The lion-motif (1 Kings 7:29) was a familiar theme in Hittite and North Syrian iconography (Smith 1997:81-103) and (Bury et al 1925:427-429).

[735] 'Sea of cast metal' (1 Ki 7:23).

[736] 1 Kings 7:23-26.

[737] In the Babylonian creation myth the focus is on *Marduk*, god of Babylon and the greatest of all gods. In a union of the sweet-water ocean (*Apsu*) and the salt-water ocean (*Tiamat*) – when nothing else existed – a succession of gods emerged, culminating in the great gods *Anu* and *Ea*, who begot *Marduk*. In a conflict among the gods, *Marduk* is finally chosen by the pantheon as the king of the gods. He defeats and kills *Tiamat*, dividing her body in two to shape the sky and the earth (Willis 1993:62).

[738] Bread of the Presence (1 Ki 7:48).

[739] Jeremiah 7:18; this could be a reference to *Ishtar* (see § 3.4), but also possibly to *Asherah*.

[740] 2 Kings 23:11.

[741] Bury et al 1925:427-428. *Shamash*, the Babylonian solar god, also regarded as god of justice and divination. He made his way into the sky every morning, climbing the mountain up to the highest point. During the night he journeyed through the depths of the earth (Storm 2001:72). Luminous rays emitted from his shoulders (Guirand 1996:57). See also footnote in § 2.4.

with a Canaanite origin.[742] The Phoenicians – *Ba'al* worshippers – were descendants of the Canaanites.[743] Therefore, it seems likely that the Temple, built under the influence of the Phoenicians, was actually a Canaanite temple. Regarding the construction and contents, analogies have also been found in southern Arabia, Crete and Cyprus.[744] The Chronicler's description of the Temple, and the miscellaneous items connected to it, is an exaggeration of the figures in 1 Kings.[745]

The traditional Israelite sanctuary was an 'inheritance of the period of the Judges'.[746] The proportions of the tenth century BC Yahwistic sanctuary at Arad and the descriptions of the Tabernacle are identical, exhibiting a striking similarity between these two sanctuaries. This, in turn, establishes a link between the Solomonic Temple and the Arad sanctuary.[747] 'It seems, therefore, that the tradition of the early Israelite sanctuary has been preserved in the description of the Tabernacle.'[748] The apparent contradictory description of the Solomonic Temple was probably with the intention to use the traditional terminology of the old sanctuary dressed in its new architecture.[749]

In the Hebrew Bible the various terms for "temple" and the word במה seem to be in opposition to one another. The term "temple" usually refers to the Temple in Jerusalem, while במה mostly indicates an apostate Israelite or a Canaanite place of worship. Although במה has generally been equated with a "high place" by scholars, the Hebrew Bible only periodically alludes the term to an elevated spot.[750] De Vaux,[751] however, indicates that some, and maybe even many, במות stood on the Palestinian heights. There were even במות at the gate of Jerusalem,[752] in the cities[753] and in the Valley of Ben-Hinnom.[754]

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[742] See footnote in § 2.13, subtitle "Horse figurines", regarding "horses and chariots of the sun".
[743] Dever 2005:277-278.
[744] Bury et al 1925:427.
[745] Stinespring 1962:538, 540.
[746] Aharoni 1973:6.
[747] Aharoni 1973:3-4. See also discussion in § 2.14.1.
[748] Aharoni 1973:7.
[749] Aharoni 1973:7.
[750] Catron 1995:150. See also § 2.14.1 regarding במה.
[751] De Vaux 1965:284.
[752] 2 Kings 23:8.
[753] 2 Kings 17:29.
[754] Jeremiah 7:31; 32:35. The Valley of Ben-Hinnom was reached from the "potsherd gate" in the Jerusalem wall and is generally identified with the Wadi er-Rababi. From there it turns sharply in the direction of the Kidron Valley. The Hebrew Bible repeatedly mentions sacrifices of children, close to the junction of the Hinnom and Kidron valleys at the place called Topheth in honour of *Molech* (2 Ki 23:10; 2 Chr 28:3; 33:6; Jr 32:35) (Barrois 1962a:606). *Molech*, also known as *Moloch*, a deity to whom human sacrifice was made, is probably identical with *Milcom*, the Ammonite national god (Gray 1962b:422). The name Topheth, originally derived from an Aramaic word, initially meant a "hearth" or "fireplace". It is unclear whether these practices of human sacrifice were limited to foreign cults or whether it was also a corrupted form of Yahwism (Barrois 1962b:673).

The Temple was part of a group of royal buildings, which, in total took twenty years to complete.[755] For this reason, scholars, in some instances, refer to the Temple as the royal chapel. Apart from the large amount of stonework and woodwork, a craftsman was needed for the bronze artistry. Solomon hired a certain Hiram of Tyre[756] for this commission. In the course of time, treasure was taken from the Temple to pay indemnity or other fees to rival states. Invading armies plundered the Temple, carrying the treasures off to their own countries. In the year 586 BC the First Temple was completely plundered and then burned along with most of the rest of the city.[757] 'The Solomonic Temple was no doubt a potent symbol. ... . It represented an ideal forced upon the public.'[758]

2.15   Résumé and conclusion

Bartlett[759] asks the question 'what has archaeology to do with the Bible?' They are two different and separate disciplines that both need interpreting. Artefacts are products of human history. The Hebrew Bible is a product written by human hands; written by scribes with varied skills; the contents are of varied origins consisting of a variation of genres, including a history that met the authors' own political or religious agenda. Dever[760] points out that surviving artefacts are the best indication of 'a lost reality – folk religion in ancient Israel'. Biblical texts transmit 'theoretical evidence of beliefs,'[761] therefore these texts could be considered merely as secondary sources. He contends that 'only archaeology and not canonical texts can reveal that reality'[762] – the reality of folk religion. One cannot but agree with Dever's aforementioned point of view that archaeology is in essence the support for any theoretical biblical research. Archaeology includes different disciplines that can be divided mainly into field archaeology and historical data – the latter drawn from ancient written sources, which include inscriptions pertaining to words or phrases found in the text of the Hebrew Bible.[763] Apart from recorded historical information the Hebrew Bible incorporates 'testimonies from ancient Israel about religion and belief'.[764] Archaeological finds, therefore, may be identified with data in the Hebrew Bible that could enhance our understanding of the ancient Israelite

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[755] 1 Kings 7:1-12; 9:10.
[756] 1 Kings 7:13-14; 2 Chronicles 2:13-14. Solomon hired a man from Tyre by the name of Hiram – not the king Hiram of Tyre – also known as Huram-abi. This hireling was a man of great artistic skill, and, as his mother was from Naphtali or Dan, he was half Israelite and half Tyrian (Stinespring 1962:537).
[757] Stinespring 1962:537-539.
[758] Dever 2005:279.
[759] Bartlett 1997:1,13.
[760] Dever 2005:12.
[761] Dever 2005:12.
[762] Dever 2005:43.
[763] Vriezen 2001:45. See, inter alia, inscriptions found at Kuntillet ʿAjrud (§ 2.9 and § 4.3.9).
[764] Vriezen 2001:47.

religion.[765] A basic problem for archaeologists is fragmentary evidence. Notwithstanding the enormous volume of archaeological data that has been collected, it encompasses but only a small fraction of the total evidence at a specific site. The biblical researcher should take both the underlying structure of the biblical narrative and the archaeology of the biblical world into consideration.[766]

Boshoff[767] warns that 'archaeology can be misused for doubtful purposes' – due to inadequate applicable knowledge. This state of affairs is worsened by the fact that much of the "wealth" of assembled archaeological information is still unpublished. Implications of finds from major sites should become part of everyday debates. Scholars can only apply, in their fields of research, results pertaining to excavated matter after publication and interpretation thereof by archaeologists. Information should be made available also to the general public, and not only to specialist archaeologists or historians. Fortunately, a large number of ancient texts – uncovered at various sites over a wide region of the Near East – are currently being published. Archaeological finds and excavated sites, as well as the interpretation thereof, undeniably have an impact on the understanding of the contents of the Hebrew Bible – and particularly of the Israelite nation and its religion. Biblical scholars should, therefore, 'take the results of archaeological research seriously'.[768] Archaeologists should, likewise, realise the responsibility to publish finds as soon as possible, as unpublished material has no value for other participants in the field.[769]

More sophisticated archaeological techniques – such as controlled procedures of stratigraphical[770] excavation – have been developed during the course of the past century.[771] At the same time various technologies have been advanced to assist the archaeologist in the interpretation of his data. Scientific testing of mortar and plaster by the application of radiocarbon dating techniques has the potential to determine the age of archaeological structures; however, there are limitations regarding the cost involved, as well as the age and locality of the structure from where the sample was collected. Rech[772] mentions that radiocarbon dating could change the chronology of the Ancient Near East. The science of palynology, referred to as "new archaeology", has only relatively recently been applied to excavated matter. Nonetheless, it has

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[765] Vriezen 2001:47.
[766] Brandfon 1988:54, 59.
[767] Boshoff 2001:372.
[768] Boshoff 2001:387.
[769] Boshoff 2001:371-373, 382, 387.
[770] See footnote in § 2.12 on "stratigraphy".
[771] Miller 1988:11.
[772] Rech 2004:212.

become one of the most significant techniques in the reconstruction of the palaeo-environment. Reliable information furnished by remote sensing could be successfully applied to archaeological and ethnographic[773] explorations. The introduction of ethnographic data has, according to Glock,[774] 'two archaeological consequences for the research design', namely that the 'chronological framework is reduced to a fine-line grid' and, secondly, that 'research topics emphasize continuity in a sociological context'. It likewise increases 'the archaeologist's vision of the explanatory task', as well as his 'capability to find probable interpretations by making visible the connections between people and place, a cultural tradition and its environment'.[775] In comparison with 'older large-scale tell excavations', archaeologists lately tend to concentrate on matters such as 'survey and settlement pattern analysis'.[776]

The discovery of literally thousands of inscribed tablets from the archives of Ebla, Mari and Ugarit has unlocked a wealth of new information. At Ebla a very ancient North-West Semitic language has been identified, classified by Pettinato[777] as Paleo-Canaanite. Texts with a mythological background refer to several Mesopotamian deities; correspondence between these deities and the Syrian divinities imply a syncretism between the cultures of Ebla and Mesopotamia. The word or name *Ya(w)*, which could be a hypocoristicon, might be an indication of a *Ya*-related deity at Ebla. The hitherto unknown cuneiform writing from Ugarit revealed an alphabetical script. The Ugaritic language – close to biblical Hebrew, although belonging to the Canaanite family – is significant for the research on the development of the Canaanite script. Substantial segments of legendary narratives and mythological and ritual texts indicate that – although often referred to as "foreign gods" in the Hebrew Bible – the Israelite people were well acquainted with the Canaanite gods and their cults. These texts from Ugarit provide essential information clarifying aspects of Israelite syncretism.

Prophetic texts found in the Mari archives play a significant role in the determination of the origin of Ancient Near Eastern and biblical prophecy. Other texts from these archives mention the *ḫabiru* and the tribe of the Benjaminites. Scholars link both these groups to the early Hebrews. Movements of nomadic peoples in the vicinity of Mari – some with names corresponding to those of the patriarchs – afford information on the Patriarchal Age. The Amarna Letters – fourteenth century BC Egyptian correspondence with Palestinian vassals – also refer

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[773] See footnote on "ethnography" in § 2.2 under the subtitle "Remote sensing".
[774] Glock 1983:173.
[775] Glock 1983:178.
[776] Dever 1988:342.
[777] See Pettinato 1976 and 1980.

to, inter alia, the *ḥabiru*, a name that figures prominently in these letters. Some of the Ancient Near Eastern nations refer to the *ḥabiru* as a group of nomads or mercenaries who stood outside the organised community, and, according to the Amarna Letters, were disruptive elements destabilising the social order in Canaan. Mendenhall,[778] and some other scholars, postulate the emergence of Israel from movements such as the *ḥabiru*. It is noteworthy that texts referring to the *ḥabiru* were compiled as far west as Egypt, and as far east as the north-eastern region of Syria/Mesopotamia – albeit three to four centuries removed. The Egyptian Victory Stele, or Merenptah Stele – dated the latter half of the second millennium BC – contains the oldest known reference to "Israel", celebrating Merenptah's victory over "Israel". Consensus has not been reached by scholars whether the word "Israel" in the inscription refers to a "people" or a "nation". Lemche[779] doubts whether the group referred to as "Israel" had any connection with the *ḥabiru*.

The Karnak reliefs, illustrating the Canaanite campaign of Merenptah, have the oldest known depiction of Israelites among the portrayals on the reliefs. In addition, these reliefs refer to the "Land of the *Shasu*", which – according to Rainey[780] – could assist in establishing the origin of Israel. Papyrus Anastasi VI – dated the thirteenth to twelfth century BC – alludes to the inhabitants of Edom as the *Shasu*. Additional Egyptian evidence connects the "Land of the *Shosu*" [*Shasu*] and Mount Seir. Although the word *shosu* – attested in Ugaritic – means robber, it does not imply that all *Shasu* were bandits. De Moor[781] indicates that the *Shasu* resembled the *ḥabiru* in many respects; it is thus unlikely that two different groups are intimated. An Egyptian Topographical List denotes *Yhw* of the "Land of the *Shasu*". The *Shasu*, placed in southern Transjordan, are linked to Seir and Edom, therefore the origin of *Yahweh* worship could be searched among the *Shasu* of Edom. It is significant that certain poetic texts in the Hebrew Bible denote *Yahweh* as coming forth from the South,[782] from Teman,[783] from Mount Paran,[784] from Sinai[785] and from Seir[786] – all of which are in the South. Habakkuk 3:7 indicates *Yahweh*'s presence in Midian – in the southern Transjordan, the region connected to *Yahweh* by the Kenite hypothesis.[787]

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[778] See § 7.4 for a brief discussion of, inter alia, Mendenhall's hypothesis.
[779] Lemche 1988:103.
[780] Rainey 2001:68-69.
[781] De Moor 1997:117, 123.
[782] Zechariah 9:14.
[783] Habakkuk 3:3.
[784] Deuteronomy 33:2; Habakkuk 3:3.
[785] Deuteronomy 33:2; Judges 5:5.
[786] Deuteronomy 33:2; Judges 5:4.
[787] See discussion in § 5.2 and § 5.3.

Numerous artefacts related to Israelite folk religion have been excavated. Of these, an array of pillar figurines – popularly known as *Astartes* – have been discovered at many Israelite sites. Figurines were found widely distributed, especially at seventh century BC sites, indicating their popularity at that time. The commonplace pillar figurines probably belonged to individual veneration, rather than to popular communal worship. Other cult objects that have been excavated ostensibly at Israelite sites are, inter alia, the bull figurine – reminiscent of the Canaanite deities *El* and *Ba'al* – horse figurines associated with solar worship, and the Lachish ewer depicting *'Elat/'ašērâ* with a stylised tree symbolising fertility. These are but a few examples of cult objects linked to Israelite folk religion. Scholars have reached consensus that this was a syncretistic-type religion.

Iconographic symbols on two cult stands found at Taanach are of particular importance. These two quadrangular stands have four and five tiers, respectively. The tiers are lavishly decorated with, inter alia, lions, winged sphinxes and other composite mythological figures. An important aspect of the stand with four tiers is the likely portrayal of *Asherah*, and the suggestion of the "invisible Deity" – *Yahweh* – in the vacant space between two cherubim in the centre of the one register. *Asherah* is, furthermore, linked to the sacred life-giving tree on another tier. The top tier consists of, inter alia, an equid and a winged sun-disc; numerous biblical references portray *Yahweh* as a Solar Deity – the winged sun-disc therefore being his symbol. This particular Taanach cult stand thus corroborates the theory – held by many scholars – that the goddess *Asherah* was worshipped as consort of *Yahweh* during the time of the Monarchy. Inscriptions and graffiti discovered at the ninth century BC Kuntillet ʿAjrud caravanserai and at the eighth century BC burial cave at Khirbet 'el-Qom support the thesis that *Asherah* was regarded as consort of *Yahweh*, and not merely as a sacred tree or מצבה.

Inscriptions in the ancient Hebrew script – dated approximately the sixth century BC – have been discovered in a burial cave at Khirbet Beit Lei. Biblical scholars have proposed that these inscriptions be read as veneration to *Yahweh*. Among the most important finds are two silver plaques recovered at Ketef Hinnom, containing an alternate version of the Priestly Benediction in Numbers 6:24-26. Scholars agree that these plaques 'preserve the earliest known citation of biblical texts',[788] furnishing biblical research with the earliest examples of confessional statements regarding *Yahweh*.[789]

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[788] Barkay et al 2004:68.
[789] Barkay et al 2004:41.

Various temples, sanctuaries and shrines have been uncovered in Palestine, as well as במות, or high places. מצבות – regarded as objects of worship – are distinct features found at cult sites. Although biblical texts do report on מצבות at a few sites – such as the anointment of a local stone at Bethel – the cultic role thereof is not explicitly explained. More than one מצבה at Arad implies the veneration of more than one god, while a triad of מצבות at Dan indicates a triad of deities. Arad, an important city on the border of the eastern Negeb, has been linked to the Kenites, a marginal nomadic tribe associated with copper mining, smelting and trade. The Kenite hypothesis proposes that the Kenites and Midianites worshipped *Yahweh* before Moses did. An inscription on an excavated ostracon at Tel Arad mentions the fortress Kinah – not far from Arad – which is connected to the Kenites. A shrine at Arad – probably erected by the Kenites – was central in the territory to serve the inhabitants of the eastern Negeb. A characteristic Yahwistic tenth century BC temple at Arad – built by the Israelites – exhibits remarkable similarity with descriptions of the Tabernacle, thereby linking this temple with the Solomonic Temple. The latter reflects, in almost every detail, a direct influence of Ancient Near Eastern sanctuaries – especially Canaanite temples. A main excavated feature at Tel Beer-sheba is the horned altar. The significance of horns is unclear, but they seem to be associated with deities and ancient deified kings. The cornerpieces – horns – of the Israelite altars were ostensibly substitutes for the horns of a deity. Although there are opposing views regarding the historicity of Hezekiah's cult reforms, it is reasonably clear that both Arad and Beer-sheba were subject to such reforms.

The city of Dan is notorious in the biblical text for the golden calf set up by Jeroboam I, thereby establishing a sanctuary for the Northern Kingdom. A number of מצבות have been excavated at Tel Dan, as well as במות. An inscription found at the site – translated as a reference to the "House of David" – has caused a stir amongst scholars. No consensus has been reached on this translation, which is totally rejected by some scholars. Should this translation be correct, it would be a confirmation of Judah's dynastic name and the state of Israel.

Papyri from Elephantine – an island in the Nile River – has confirmed the existence of a sixth to fifth century BC Jewish temple – that has been duly excavated – on this island. According to a papyrus source, these Jews offered sacrifices to *YHW*. They were mercenaries, probably originating from the former Northern Kingdom of Israel, where they worshipped a multitude of deities, including *Anat-Bethel*, as well as *Yahu* [*Yahweh*] and presumably *Anat-Yahu*. The religious pluralism of Northern Israel was carried over to Elephantine. Aramaic documents

from Elephantine refer to, inter alia, the 'priests of *YHW* the God', as well as an oath in the name of *Anat-Yahu*.[790]

During the past decades a tendency has developed among archaeologists to specialise within this discipline, concentrating primarily on Palestine as being relevant to biblical studies.[791] Dever[792] visualises that –'through archaeology as a discipline and an interdisciplinary inquiry' – the context of Iron Age Palestine could be reconstructed, thereby understanding Israelite religion not only in the light of texts, but also in matters such as settlement patters, social structure, political organisation and their level of technology. However, archaeology cannot, as yet, 'comment on the political or religious ideology behind the emergence of ancient Israel'.[793] Both texts and artefacts – dealing respectively with beliefs and practice – are essential sources to comprehend Israel and its religion.[794]

From this résumé it should be clear that the substantiation of my hypothesis could not be accomplished without my being acquainted with relevant archaeological discoveries and interpretations, particularly considering that archaeological data are even now 'more extensive than all the biblical texts put together'.[795] Dever[796] points out that, according to revisionist ideology, "ethnic identity" cannot be recognised in the archaeological record and, therefore, they discount any reference to "early Israel". In contrast, virtually all archaeologists recognise and characterise the multifarious Ancient Near Eastern nations – including the Israelites. Archaeologists continue on the assumption that material culture – generally speaking – reflects ethnicity. In addition hereto, Zevit[797] states that the different archaeologically-attested cult sites and excavated artefacts have a complete impact on comprehending – as described by Zevit – the syncretistic Israelite "religions". Although archaeology in Palestine 'has been preoccupied with confirmation of ancient religion'[798] it has hardly increased our perception of the cult of ancient Israel.

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[790] See discussion in § 4.3.13.
[791] Miller 1988:11.
[792] Dever 1987:222.
[793] Dever 1987:236.
[794] Dever 2005:63.
[795] Dever 2005:74.
[796] Dever 1998a:46.
[797] Zevit 2001:349. The variety of artefacts and archaeologically-attested cult sites has an effect on the perception of Israelite worship. Available data project a dynamic picture of the religion practised by the Israelites, allowing – within Yahwism – veneration of other deities (Zevit 2001:349), hence Zevit's reference to 'Israelite religions'.
[798] Dever 1988:346.

As Fritz[799] indicates, biblical archaeology initially regarded the Hebrew Bible as 'primary source for the history of the ancient Near East', concerned with 'illustrating the biblical record' archaeologically. As a result hereof numerous misinterpretations followed. Fortunately, techniques improved and, as more research material became available, archaeology of the Ancient Near East became a specialised science. Biblical archaeology became thus an autonomous discipline distinct from biblical criticism in both its approach and methods. Although independent of other disciplines it can, and should, nevertheless, work in close relationship with biblical studies and it is, therefore, in respect of this research, essential that I take cognisance of relevant excavated matter.

As stated in the motivation for the inclusion of this chapter, I regard archaeological data of paramount importance in my research on the development of the Yahwistic religion of the Israelites. This study also incorporates the influence of the cults and deities of neighbouring nations. Information on the latter has been acquired from archaeological data and therefore it is logical that the following chapter should concentrate on matters pertaining to these deities and their relevance to the God of Israel.

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[799] Fritz 1994:221.