

ISRAEL FINKELSTEIN

Essays on
Biblical Historiography:
From Jeroboam II
to John Hyrcanus

*Forschungen
zum Alten Testament
148*

Mohr Siebeck

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Hermann Spieckermann (Göttingen) · Andrew Teeter (Harvard)

148



Israel Finkelstein

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John Hyrcanus

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ISRAEL FINKELSTEIN, born 1949; Director of excavation at key biblical sites such as Megiddo, Shiloh and Kiriath-jearim; Professor Emeritus of Archaeology, Tel Aviv University. Head of the School of Archaeology and Maritime Cultures, University of Haifa.

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Abbreviations

AASOR	<i>Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>
ADAJ	<i>Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan</i>
BA	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
BAR	<i>Biblical Archaeology Review</i>
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
BN	<i>Biblische Notizen</i>
BZ	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
ErIs	<i>Eretz-Israel</i>
HBAI	<i>Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel</i>
IEJ	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JHebS	<i>Journal of Hebrew Scriptures</i>
JNES	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
NEA	<i>Near Eastern Archaeology</i>
NEAEHL	<i>The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land</i>
OJA	<i>Oxford Journal of Archaeology</i>
PEQ	<i>Palestine Exploration Quarterly</i>
PJ	<i>Palästinajahrbuch des Deutschen Evangelischen Instituts für Alttertumswissenschaft des Heiligen Landes zu Jerusalem</i>
PNAS	<i>Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America</i>
RB	<i>Revue Biblique</i>
SJOT	<i>Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament</i>
TA	<i>Tel Aviv</i>
UF	<i>Ugarit-Forschungen</i>
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
ZDPV	<i>Zeitschrift des deutschen Palästina-Vereins</i>

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Introduction

This book presents my views on biblical historiography. By historiography I mean date of composition of biblical texts that deal with the “history” of Ancient Israel, the stage-setting behind them and the goals of their authors – both ideologically and theologically. I put the term “history” in quotation marks because I use it to refer to the biblical authors’ perceptions of the past, which do not correspond to modern scholarship’s use of the term. Biblical “history” embraces mythical eras and even for historical periods close to the time of the authors, it is dictated by theology and royal ideology.

The study of the history of Ancient Israel – and hence biblical historiography – is based on three pillars: biblical exegesis, archaeology and the records of the ancient Near East. I was not trained in biblical exegesis; I entered this field gradually, increasingly over the last two decades, almost always from the vantage point of archaeology. The power of archaeology is evident; unlike many of the biblical texts, which were written centuries after events (or alleged events) took place, archaeology – if practiced properly in the field – supplies “real time” evidence. Once the spade is in the ground, and the archeologist is in control of chronology – relative and absolute – the finds speak the economic, social and material culture of the given period.

Twenty years ago, I published my book (together with Neil A. Silberman) *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology’s New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts*, which focused on biblical historiography in the days of King Josiah of Judah. Since then, I have taken two significant steps – one backward and one forward. My step backward is that I now see the beginning of biblical historiography as reflecting the realities and ideology of the Northern Kingdom in the first half of the 8th century BCE. This is a major change in my perception both chronologically and thematically. Chronologically, it “closes” the gap between early phases in the history of Israel and Judah and the first composition of biblical texts. Thematically, it explains the incorporation of Northern texts in the Southern Bible and sheds light on the emergence of central concepts in the text, such as the Conquest of Canaan and the United Monarchy. In the step forward I refer to my interest in late biblical historiography – the Books of Ezra, Nehemiah and Chronicles. To differ from the conventional wisdom of recent scholarship, which locates their composition in the Persian and/or early Hellenistic periods, I suggest they be understood as representing the territorial ideology of the Hasmoneans in the late 2nd century BCE. The reader should note that because of my emphasis on early North Israelite and Hasmonean compositions, the most important phase in biblical historiography – Judah of the late 7th century – is somewhat under-represented; this can be remedied by reverting to *The Bible Unearthed*.

The book consists of 30 chapters, most of which were published as articles, mainly in recent years (only three were published before 2010, only seven before 2015; see the

List of First Publications at the end of this volume). I have left the articles and their bibliographies basically as originally published, but they were standardized in terms of style for this volume; in particular, toponyms that occur in the Bible now as a rule follow their spelling in the Revised Standard Version (RSV). I added some cross-references in the notes; in many chapters I have also added an addendum which updates the reader about data from the field and my views on the matters discussed. Seven of these chapters were co-authored and in these cases the name of the co-author appears under the title. One chapter – on the Philistines in the Bible (ch. 27) – was written 20 years ago; I have therefore decided to update it. Two chapters – on Nehemiah (ch. 29) and Chronicles (ch. 30) – present newly written, updated summaries of my views, based on past articles; I decided not to reprint the original papers, as they already appeared in my 2018 SBL book *Hasmonean Realities behind Ezra, Nehemiah, and Chronicles: Archaeological and Historical Perspectives*. In addition to the introduction and summary, two chapters – on writing in Ancient Israel (ch. 2) and the Acts of Solomon in 1 Kings (ch. 26) – were written especially for this book.

In structuring the volume I needed to decide between two options. The first was to follow the biblical concept of the history of Ancient Israel – from Patriarchs to Exodus, the rise of Ancient Israel, the “period” of the Judges, the monarchic era and the events following the destruction of Jerusalem. The second was to adhere to my understanding of biblical historiography – from the Northern Kingdom of the early 8th century, via Judah of the late 8th to late 7th century, to Hasmonean times in the late 2nd century BCE. The second option – the more logical from the scholarly point of view – is difficult to realize, as many of the chapters deal with stratified texts that represent different periods (see, for instance, the chapters on the major judges). I therefore took the middle road: in the first parts of the book (Parts II to V), I follow the biblical notion, starting with Pentateuchal historiography and then move on to the rise of Early Israel, the heroic tales in Judges and the Saul–Benjamin traditions. In the last parts of the book (Parts VI to VIII) I adhere to my understanding of biblical historiographic compositions – from Jeroboam II to John Hyrcanus.

Before I close this short introduction, I wish to thank Oded Lipschits, Thomas Römer, Neil A. Silberman and Lily Singer-Avitz for allowing me to reprint the articles which I co-authored with them. Special thanks go to Thomas Römer, who co-authored four of the articles which appear in this book. My work with Thomas is perceived by many as an example of critical and fruitful cooperation between a biblical scholar and an archaeologist, not to mention that we have recently expanded this cooperation to work in the field – in the excavations of Kiriath-jearim. Many of the views expressed in this book were shaped by discussions with friends, colleagues and students. Among the former I wish to mention Oded Lipschits, Nadav Na’aman and Benjamin Sass. I am also grateful to the editors of the journals and books in which my articles originally appeared for permitting me to reprint them here. Finally, special thanks go to Samuel Arnet for his meticulous, high-quality and uncompromising copyediting, typesetting and indexing.

Part I
Overviews

History, Historicity and Historiography in Ancient Israel

1. A Brief History of Research

In the reconstruction of Ancient Israel's history, the pendulum has swung back and forth in the last two centuries between the two poles of traditional and critical interpretations. The tense dispute preceded archaeological research. It commenced with Spinoza's critical exegesis over three and half centuries ago and peaked in the 19th century with Wellhausen and others. On the side of archaeology, much of the early work in Palestine, by Sellin and Petrie, for example, had been professional, that is, not subjected to an uncritical reading of the biblical text. This changed with the rise of the Albright-dominated traditional biblical archaeology in the early 1920s, which was aimed at fighting-off critical theories and proving biblical history to be an accurate account of the past. Israeli archaeologists, first and foremost Yadin, joined this camp in the 1950s for cultural rather than theological reasons. Conservative biblical archaeology held the upper hand for much of the 20th century. The reaction has been an ultra-critical ("minimalist") approach that appeared in the 1990s, arguing against the traditional use of archaeology in reconstructing the history of Ancient Israel in the Iron Age and advocating the view that biblical texts which refer to the history of Ancient Israel were all compiled in the Persian and Hellenistic periods and thus have no real value for understanding earlier periods.¹ And since minimalism is about one's approach to the biblical text, "accusing" archaeologists of being minimalists² demonstrates a misunderstanding of the entire discipline. Parallel to the work of the minimalists, a school which can be described as promoting a "view from the center" has developed. Members of this school, to which I belong, take a critical attitude toward both text and archaeology, but differ from the minimalists in arguing that a significant number of biblical records date to late-monarchic times, and that some accounts preserve memories of earlier days in the Iron Age.³ Needless to say, the "view from the center" group is far from being homogeneous.⁴

As could have been expected, the expansion of the critical approach, especially the

¹ E.g., Davies 1992; Thompson 1999.

² Garfinkel 2011.

³ For this approach, which has recently been ingeniously described by Jean-Marie Durand in French as *deconstruction positive*, see, e.g., Finkelstein and Silberman 2001; Liverani 2005; Miller and Hayes 2006; Na'aman 2006; Knauf 2013.

⁴ See, e.g., Na'aman 2010a; Finkelstein 2010.

one “from the center,” which has been conceived, in a way, as posing a greater threat, brought about a series of attempts to prove it wrong and to re-establish a conservative reconstruction of the history of Ancient Israel. Ironically, though the neo-traditionalists are all archaeologists, their interpretation is text-based; their advances can be seen as a revival of the Albright school’s assault on late 19th/early 20th century developments in critical biblical research in Europe and yet again, they come from different cultural milieus. The current conservative trend is best demonstrated by recent claims that:

- The palace of King David has been found in the City of David in Jerusalem;⁵
- Finds at Khirbet Qeiyafa in the Shephelah provide evidence for a developed kingdom in Judah in the 10th century BCE and can be read against the background of biblical texts ostensibly describing events which had taken place at that time;⁶ the ostrakon retrieved there demonstrates the possibility of composition of biblical texts as early as the 10th century BCE;⁷
- Copper production at Khirbet en-Naḥas and Timna’ in the Arabah is connected to the economic endeavors of King Solomon.⁸

More subtle but no less misleading are interpretations of sets of data from past excavations, for instance regarding the “Israelite fortresses” in the Negev Highlands,⁹ and concerning an ostensible change in the settlement patterns of the 10th century BCE which was interpreted as indicating the organization of a developed kingdom in Ancient Israel.¹⁰ Both examples demonstrate incorrect methodology, because they select and set the data in a way that leads to the requested result.¹¹

2. How to “View from the Center”?

Traditional biblical archaeology and reconstruction of the history of Ancient Israel are based on accepting the most basic perception of the author of the text – that the history of Ancient Israel from the patriarchs in Genesis to the Return in Ezra and Nehemiah is a genuine description of a *sequential* history of the nation. This is not the case;¹² I tend to look at biblical history from a point of view once described by the

⁵ E. Mazar 2007; 2009; rejoinder in Finkelstein et al. 2007.

⁶ E.g., Garfinkel, Kreimerman, and Zilberg 2016; rejoinders in Na’aman 2012a; Finkelstein and Fantalkin 2012; Fantalkin and Finkelstein 2017; Finkelstein and Piasetzky 2015.

⁷ Galil 2009; Puech 2010; rejoinders in Rollston 2011; Millard 2011.

⁸ E.g., Levy et al. 2008; Ben Yosef 2016, returning to Glueck’s 1940s ideas about Solomon the copper king.

⁹ Faust 2006, proven wrong by recent radiocarbon dates that put the sites in the 9th century BCE, see Boaretto et al. 2010.

¹⁰ Faust 2006.

¹¹ Finkelstein 2005.

¹² Römer 2014.

French *annals* scholar Marc Bloch as *histoire regressive*. The idea is that in a situation of uncertainty (and stories such as the patriarchs, Exodus and conquest clearly belong to this category) the researcher must base him/herself in a period for which the testimony – historical, economic, social and material culture – is well-defined, and only then start reconstructing back, step by step. In the case of Ancient Israel, the safest period to serve as a point of departure is the time of the first authors in Jerusalem, that is, in late-monarchic days (more below). Keeping to the “rules” I will describe below, this reconstruction must be done with as reliable a grip as possible over the question of transmission of traditions, oral and/or written and the ideological/theological goals of the authors.

In certain cases, intuitively traditional biblical archaeologists and historians inherited another concept from the authors – that episodes in the history of Ancient Israel were unique in the chronicles of the Levant. Yet the history of Canaan/Israel cannot be detached from events and processes in the surrounding lands in the ancient Near East and the eastern Mediterranean. The most obvious example is the necessity of dealing with the destructions at the end of the Late Bronze Age not as singular local (“conquest”) occurrence, but rather as part of the broader phenomenon of the “Crisis Years” in the eastern Mediterranean.¹³ I believe that archaeology – especially what it tells us about settlement history, forces the researcher to view the history of Canaan/Israel along the lines of another French *annals* concept, that of the *longue durée*. According to this notion, many of the processes that characterize the region in the Bronze and Iron Ages – at least until the Assyrian takeover – were of a cyclical nature, influenced by geographical conditions. This is true for waves of settlement and periods of decline in the highlands and the arid zones, as well as cycles of urban growth and collapse in the lowlands.

The crucial question, of course, is what to do when archaeology and the biblical text provide conflicting stories. In such a case, which of the two has the upper hand, and do we need to seek a “winner”?¹⁴ For archaeology, two factors are dominant: (1) intensity of the evidence, including the size of the area exposed and, in the case of a large site, good representation of the different parts of the settlement;¹⁵ (2) good control over the data; only in the case of secure stratigraphy, clear ceramic assemblage and good radiocarbon dates does archaeology provide reliable, unbiased, real-time evidence. Yet, it goes without saying that even in near perfect conditions the archaeological evidence may be open to different cultural and historical interpretations. Regarding the text the most important question is the time span between the ostensible events described and the period of composition. In the case of chronological proximity and texts of a chronistic nature (that is, free of theological stances expressed in, e.g., speeches and prophecies), the text may be regarded as providing

¹³ Ward and Sharp Joukowsky 1992; Cline 2015.

¹⁴ See the discussion in Na’aman 2010a; Finkelstein 2010.

¹⁵ For the case of Bethel, see in Na’aman 2010a; Finkelstein 2010.

dependable evidence. When the ostensible events are centuries earlier than the time of authorship, and the account is not chronistic in nature, the text is less likely to provide reliable testimony of the past. All this means that in the case of Ancient Israel we are not dealing with a black-and-white situation and there is no single, checklist attitude to the question of historicity; each case must be dealt with according to its specific circumstances (examples below).

Having set the stage, I now wish to turn to what I see as the basic rules of thumb that must be taken into consideration when dealing with biblical history.

2.1 It's All about Dating

In order to properly use archaeology in historical reconstruction one needs to be in full control of absolute chronology. By “full control” I mean the following inseparable trio: data must come from secure stratigraphic context, with good command of relative chronology, that is, of the ceramic assemblage that originates from this context, which must be radiocarbon dated. In other words, since the association of a historical event with archaeological finds such as destruction layers is a tricky endeavor and because some of the biblical texts on which scholars build their theories cannot be dealt with as straightforward historical accounts, reliable and independent absolute chronology is mandatory. It can be achieved mainly by deploying a rigorous program of radiocarbon dating.

The problem is that radiocarbon dating typically results in an uncertainty of several decades, which – in the case of biblical history – may lead to utterly different historical reconstructions. One obvious example is the dating of the late Iron IIA palaces at Megiddo: a difference of 70–80 years (say, between ca. 940 and 860 BCE) puts them in utterly different settings: either at the time of the supposed United Monarchy or in the days of the Omride Dynasty of the Northern Kingdom. An even tighter situation is the dating of finds in the north to the first or second half of the 9th century (e.g., between ca. 850 and 830 BCE!), the former in the days of the Omrides and the latter in the period of Damascene hegemony in the region. A third example is the dating of activity in the Negev Highlands sites; putting their main period of occupation in the mid-10th century or in the first half to the middle of the 9th century results in a different geopolitical situation vis-à-vis the Sheshonq I campaign, copper production in the Arabah and the period of Damascene hegemony in the southern Levant.¹⁶ Here, then, is what needs to be done in order to deploy radiocarbon dating successfully:

- Only short-lived samples (grain seeds, olive pits, etc.) should be dated. Charcoal is risky because it may lead to “old wood effect,” that is, the sample may come from a piece of old timber, reused many decades if not centuries after the tree was felled.

¹⁶ Boaretto et al. 2010; Shahack Gross et al. 2014.

- The sample must include more than a single item (seed, olive pit), which may have been displaced in antiquity.
- Dating according to a single radiocarbon determination is not reliable because a sole result can always be an outlier.
- Dating of a site should preferably be done in a sequence of ceramic phases or strata, because setting the results in a Bayesian model and imposing the stratigraphy on the data can significantly diminish uncertainties. This can be achieved by arranging dates from different (preferably neighboring) sites whose relative sequence can be correlated according to their pottery assemblages,¹⁷ or by deploying data for a dense sequence of well-separated strata at a single site.¹⁸
- In the case of a single-layer site, the results should best be set into a regional context, with layers representing a sequence of ceramic phases. Note, for example, Khirbet Qeiyafa in the Shephelah: when dated alone, the results fall in the second half of the 11th century;¹⁹ when put in context (especially versus Iron I sites in its vicinity) the site is dated in the first half of the 10th century BCE.²⁰
- Averaging of results can be done only when there is reason to believe that the samples represent a short period of no more than a few years in the history of a given settlement. If this is not the case, the results must be plotted rather than averaged.²¹

Diverting from these rules may lead to mistaken dates, that is, erroneous historical settings.

2.2 The Israel–Judah Dichotomy

When reconstructing the history of Ancient Israel, differences between southern and northern traditions embedded in the Bible must be taken into consideration.²² Of course, the biblical text reflects a southern perspective; this is discernible, for example, in the arrangement of the Book of Genesis: the patriarchal narrative opens with the southern Abraham who is made the grandfather of the northern Jacob. In the so-called Deuteronomistic History all northern kings are evaluated negatively and in the Books of Chronicles the Northern Kingdom is almost totally ignored. This southern reworking of Israelite traditions has influenced scholars, who in many cases “inherited” the southern perspective.

Yet, extra-biblical texts and archaeology both demonstrate that historically, Israel had been the leading force among the Hebrew kingdoms. Israel was demographically and economically developed long before Judah. The northern territories on both sides

¹⁷ E.g., Finkelstein and Piasezky 2010.

¹⁸ For Megiddo, see Toffolo et al. 2014.

¹⁹ Garfinkel et al. 2012.

²⁰ Finkelstein and Piasezky 2015.

²¹ Opposing views in Garfinkel et al. 2012; Finkelstein and Piasezky 2015.

²² E.g., Fleming 2012.

of the Jordan River had already been densely settled in the Iron I, when the marginal Judean highlands were still depleted demographically. At that time the population ratio between the highlands parts of Israel (including the Gilead) and Judah can be estimated at 25:1! Even in the mid-8th century (that is, before the takeover of the Gilead by Damascus), the demographic ratio between Israel and Judah can be estimated at ca. 4:1.²³ Judah started developing in a significant way in the end-phase of the late Iron IIA (late 9th century),²⁴ and reached a real peak of prosperity only in the Iron IIB–C, that is, starting in the late 8th century BCE.²⁵ Population can, of course, be translated to military and economic strength; indeed, the power of Israel in the days of the Omrides is clearly depicted in Shalmaneser III's list of participants in the Battle of Qarqar in 853 BCE and hinted at in the Tel Dan and Mesha inscriptions; it is also portrayed in sparse biblical references to both the reign of the Omrides and the somewhat later days of Joash and Jeroboam II. In addition, Israel controlled more fertile regions, such as the Jezreel Valley, and trade routes, such as the international highway along the coast and northern valleys and the King's Highway in Transjordan. It was also better connected to the coast and other neighboring regions. All this promoted the North's agricultural output and revenues from trade. In short, demographically, economically, militarily and geopolitically Israel was the dominant power during most of the time when the two Hebrew kingdoms existed side by side. These factors must be taken into consideration when analyzing biblical narratives.

2.3 No Evidence for Compilation of Complex Texts before the Early 8th Century

In a recent article Benjamin Sass and I studied afresh the West Semitic alphabetic inscriptions from the Levant that date from the Late Bronze to the early phase of the Iron IIB, that is, until the early 8th century BCE.²⁶ We concluded that Hebrew inscriptions appear for the first time in the late Iron IIA/1 at Gath in the south and Rehob in the north. But at that time (first half of the 9th century BCE) they are not found in the heartland of Israel and Judah. It is especially significant that not a single Hebrew inscription comes from the major cities of the Omride period, Megiddo, Samaria, Jezreel, Yokneam and Hazor and the inscriptions that do appear in the 9th century do not testify to the ability to compose elaborate texts. Monumental stone inscriptions appear in the late 9th century BCE. But here again, the ability of dynastic scribes to compose royal inscriptions (or, theoretically speaking, of administrators to put together lists of commodities) cannot be compared to authoring complex literary biblical texts. The first significantly long and elaborate inscriptions in a genre which

²³ Broshi and Finkelstein 1992.

²⁴ Fantalkin and Finkelstein 2006; Fantalkin 2008; Sergi 2013.

²⁵ Jamieson Drake 1991; Finkelstein and Silberman 2006a.

²⁶ Finkelstein and Sass 2013; somewhat updated in Sass and Finkelstein 2016.

recalls biblical compositions appear in the first half of the 8th century on plaster in the Northern Kingdom – the Tell Deir ‘Alla Balaam text²⁷ and a Kuntillet ‘Ajrud text recently interpreted by Na’aman as possibly connected to the Exodus tradition.²⁸

The observations above seem to exclude the possibility of the composition of biblical texts before the first half of the 8th century BCE. This statement includes theories regarding early Pentateuchal materials and pre-Deuteronomistic materials in the Books of Samuel such as the Rise of David to Power and the Succession History.²⁹ And this makes perfect sense historically: the sudden appearance of developed texts in the first half of the 8th century, probably in the days of Jeroboam II, is connected to the general prosperity in this period and probably related to a re-organization of the kingdom at that time.

2.4 Early Traditions in the Bible: How Far Back Can They Go?

What has just been said about the spread of writing may lead to the conclusion that materials which describe events that ostensibly took place in the early phases of the history of Ancient Israel, centuries before the compilation of biblical texts or even the ability to put texts in writing, should be considered fictitious – an invention of later authors, aimed to advance their goals. Another way to formulate this would be to argue that the early “history” of Ancient Israel is a-historical. Such a statement would be inaccurate.

Archaeology, extra biblical texts and advanced biblical exegesis show that the Hebrew Bible contains what I would describe as early “memories” historical or, preferably, quasi-historical that originated centuries before the earliest possible date for the composition of biblical texts. They would have had to be transmitted orally until they were put in writing, and can be taken as preserving references to early historical situations, though certainly not as accurate descriptions of the past. As read today, they are sometimes concealed in later textual layers and wrapped in the ideology of the period/s of the author/s. Let me give a few examples.

The first comes from my excavations at Shiloh over three decades ago. Archaeology has shown that Shiloh prospered in the early to middle Iron I and was utterly destroyed before the end of the period. Radiocarbon results put this destruction in the second half of the 11th century BCE.³⁰ There was no significant settlement at Shiloh in the Iron II and Persian periods. The Iron II remains are apparently restricted to one sector of the site and revealed no sign of a cult place and the Persian period yielded only scanty remains. It is difficult, therefore, to read the Shiloh sanctuary tradition against an Iron II or later background and for this reason it is unfeasible to associate

²⁷ Summary in Ahituv 2008, 433–465 and bibliography on p. 465.

²⁸ Na’aman 2011a.

²⁹ E.g., Halpern 2001; Dietrich 2007.

³⁰ Finkelstein and Piasezky 2009.

the tradition regarding the devastation of this cult place, as related in the Book of Jeremiah, with the conquest of the Northern Kingdom by the Assyrians in the late 8th century.³¹

This seems to mean that there was a strong memory in late-monarchic Judah of an early cult place at Shiloh. It could have originated from an orally-transmitted North Israelite tradition that reached Judah after 720 BCE. Judahite recognition of the importance of this cult place could have catered to the ex-Israelites, who seem to have comprised a major element in the population of Judah in late-monarchic times (below). At the same time, the biblical tradition in Jeremiah takes a strictly Judahite point of view in subordinating Shiloh to Jerusalem. The stories regarding the sinful behavior of the priests at Shiloh, the defeat of Israel and the eventual transfer of the Ark from Shiloh to Jerusalem could have served the Deuteronomistic ideology as a cultic parallel to the rejection of Saul (and the North) and the election of David.³² In the case of Shiloh we have evidence, then, for the preservation in the Bible of memories, vague as they may be, of events that probably took place in the second half of the 11th century BCE.

Another example can be found in the heroic tales in Judges 3–12.³³ The early layers in these chapters present Northern tales of a local nature that disclose a pre-Omride ambiance, for instance the description of Apiru groups in the Jephthah and Abimelech accounts.³⁴ The entire corpus relates to the core territory of Israel (the northern part of the central highlands, the Gilead, the Jezreel Valley and the hills to its north) and probably contains memories of events that took place on the eve or in the early days of the Northern Kingdom, in the 10th century BCE.³⁵ The stories were probably assembled and committed to writing in Israel in the first half of the 8th century. Deuteronomistic and post-Deuteronomistic layers were added later; they sometimes blur or conceal the original tales.

Other, no less known early Northern traditions are embedded in the Pentateuch. The first is an early layer in the Jacob Cycle, which seems to have originated from the area of the Jabbok River in the Gilead. It deals with the border between Israelites and Arameans in this region and possibly also with the foundation of the temple at Penuel. Based on both exegetical and archaeological evidence (for the latter mainly settlement patterns) Thomas Römer and I proposed to date the (oral) origin of these stories before the middle of the 9th century BCE.³⁶ The Exodus narrative may have originated from an even older tradition, which some scholars propose to associate with the geo-political situation in the Levant at the end of the Middle Bronze Age³⁷ or in

³¹ Contra, e.g., Pearce 1973.

³² See also Psalms 78:60–71, Miller and Hayes 2006, 133.

³³ The savior stories in Richter 1966.

³⁴ For the latter, see Na'aman 2011b.

³⁵ See, e.g., Finkelstein 2017b (chapter 14 in this volume).

³⁶ Finkelstein and Römer 2014 (chapter 4 in this volume).

³⁷ Redford 1987.

the Late Bronze Age.³⁸ Evidently, both traditions have later layers, which include their incorporation into late-monarchic Judah and then a post-exilic tier. Good examples of early memories that found their way into relatively late compilations are the Moab narratives in Numbers 21–22. These chapters preserve traditions related to the Israelite conquest of the *mishor* of Moab in the days of the Omride Dynasty, traditions which are supported by both archaeological finds³⁹ and the Mesha Inscription.⁴⁰

The Books of Samuel include pre-Deuteronomistic traditions⁴¹ that come from both the North and the South. Regarding the former I refer to what I would call the “positive” Saul narrative. The stories are focused on the highlands of Benjamin and the area of the Jabbok, demonstrating close similarity to places listed by Sheshonq I following his campaign in Canaan in the second half of the 10th century. The highlands of Benjamin feature a system of fortified sites dated to that century, possibly testifying to its being the hub of an early territorial polity.

The early Southern tradition in Samuel deals with the Shephelah and the southern (fringe) sector of the Judean highlands. The Rise of David to Power narrative puts Gath as the most important of the Philistine cities. Gath is described as ruling over the entire southern part of the Shephelah, from Ziklag in the southwest and the Beer-sheba Valley in the south to the Sorek Valley in the north. Excavations at Tell eṣ-Ṣafi, the location of biblical Gath, show that in the first half of the 9th century BCE it was the largest and probably most prosperous city in the southern lowlands. It was violently destroyed in the late 9th century, probably by Hazael king of Damascus, and never fully recovered from this event.⁴² According to the Great Summary Inscription of Sargon II, in the late 8th century Gath was a subordinate of Ashdod, and it does not appear among the Philistine cities in early 7th century Assyrian sources and in late-monarchic prophetic works.⁴³ The dominant role of Gath in the early David material must therefore represent a pre-840/830 BCE reality.⁴⁴ Preservation of what can be described as “Apiru ambiance” in the Rise of David to Power narrative⁴⁵ must also predate the late 9th century, when the Judahite settlement system expanded to the Shephelah and the area south of Hebron. In other words, it is reasonable to assume that by the middle of the 9th century, there was no longer room for the activity of Apiru bands in this region.

Not all narratives that describe the early days of Ancient Israel have a historical germ in them. Not a single tradition in the conquest stories in the Book of Joshua can safely be associated with events that took place at the end of the Late Bronze Age,

³⁸ Bietak 1987; Hendel 2001; Na’aman 2011c.

³⁹ Finkelstein and Lipschits 2011.

⁴⁰ E.g., Lemaire 2007; see more in chapter 6.

⁴¹ E.g., Halpern 2001; Dietrich 2007.

⁴² Maeir 2004; 2012.

⁴³ Schniedewind 1998.

⁴⁴ Maeir 2004.

⁴⁵ Na’aman 2010b.

not to mention that many of the sites referred to had not been inhabited at all at that time. Most if not all of the Joshua conquest traditions seem to have originated from local etiological stories (Ai, Hazor, Makkedah) and the overall scheme may portray territorial ideologies in Israel and Judah in late monarchic times.⁴⁶

Let me summarize this brief discussion of materials in the Bible representing early phases in the history of Ancient Israel with two comments. First, most of these old materials came from the North, which had a more significant population, emerged to dominance earlier than Judah and was probably capable of composing complex texts before the Southern Kingdom. Second, it is archaeology that plays an important, not to say crucial, role in identifying such early traditions.

2.5 Accumulated Memories

Needless to say, having been transmitted over centuries, first orally and then in writing, old memories or traditions must have absorbed later layers, which came from additions, elaborations and redactions, and which may depict the realities of passing time. The results are texts, some extensive and others just short references, that can be described as representing accumulated, or to use a term from archaeology, stratified traditions.

One of the best examples of stratified traditions is the David narrative in 1 Samuel. It presents realities that come from several different historical settings. The three that look to me most obvious are mentioned here. The core story describes David and his band as mercenaries active on the arid fringe of Judah south of Hebron and on the border of Philistine Gath. This material represents a phase in the history of the region before the demographic (and hence, also administrative) expansion of Judah into these areas, that is, before the late Iron IIA (in this case probably the later phase of the period in the second half of the 9th century BCE). Descriptions of wars conducted by King David seem to portray realities of later times when the territorial kingdoms of the Levant, including their armies, had already been consolidated.⁴⁷ A still later layer is embedded with references to the Philistines as Greek mercenaries and is characterized by Deuteronomistic language; therefore, it fits a situation no earlier than the late 7th century BCE.⁴⁸

I regard the Solomon chapters in the same way. The early section (1 Kgs 1–2) belongs to the Succession History which may depict late 8th century needs, a “reaction” to Israelite traditions that arrived in Judah after 720 BCE.⁴⁹ The traditions that portray Solomon as a great monarch, builder and merchant, reflect realities of both the 8th century before the fall of the North and the following “Assyrian century”

⁴⁶ Finkelstein 2020.

⁴⁷ Na'aman 2002.

⁴⁸ On all this Finkelstein and Silberman 2006b.

⁴⁹ Finkelstein and Silberman 2006a.

in the history of Judah. The reference to Hazor, Megiddo and Gezer as important centers of Solomon's kingdom (1 Kgs 9:15), the descriptions of his horses and stables, as well as the reality behind the story of cities given to Hiram king of Tyre must come from the Northern Kingdom. But stories such as the visit of the queen of Sheba and trade expeditions sailing off from Ezion-geber reflect the participation of Judah in the Assyrian-led Arabian trade, probably in the days of Manasseh, a period of great prosperity in the South. Finally, the condemnation of Solomon in 1 Kings 11 portrays an unmistakable Deuteronomistic tone from the late 7th century, that is, after the Assyrian withdrawal. These layers represent not only different historical settings but also different ideologies.

A good example of a short, accumulated tradition is the reference to Aram Beth-rehob and [Aram] Zobah in 2 Sam 10:6–8 and 2 Sam 8:3, 5, 12. The author created a story here from separate memories that come from different centuries. Hadadezer probably refers to Hadadidri king of Damascus, the ally of Ahab in the battle of Qarqar. The idea of a strong Aramean king hostile to Israel seemingly refers to the figure of Hazael.⁵⁰ Rehob in the Beth-shean Valley, probably a late-Canaanite city-state (Aramean-influenced from the point of view of material culture), is confused with Beth-rehob in the Beqa' of Lebanon, which could not have survived as an independent principality after the Damascene expansion to the west in the second half of the 9th century BCE. This confusion probably stems from the importance of Zobah = Subat as an Assyrian administration center in the days of Tiglath-pileser III and Sargon II. And all this is "telescoped" back to the 10th century by a late 7th century BCE author.

2.6 How Were Old Traditions Preserved and Transferred to Judah?

A major riddle is how old stories were preserved, especially during the time before having been put in writing. One possibility is that they were kept (first orally and then in a written form) in regional shrines, which preserved and promoted local traditions. For instance, the Jacob Gilead cycle may have been preserved at the Temple of Penuel, the Exodus narrative could have been venerated at Samaria and early traditions regarding the presence of Israel in the *mishor* of Moab could have been memorized at Nebo, referred to as a location of an Israelite shrine in the Mesha Inscription. Viewing this from the perspective of what I noted above regarding the history of scribal activity, this seems to indicate that the transition from oral to written tradition should be placed sometime around 800 BCE or slightly later in Israel and perhaps the late 8th century and more so the 7th century BCE in Judah. In the North, historical considerations seem to point to the days of Jeroboam II, when Israel reached the peak of its prosperity and when the kingdom was apparently re-organized, including assembling its most important foundation myths, royal traditions and heroic tales.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Na'aman 2002.

⁵¹ Finkelstein 2017a (chapter 18 in this volume).

In the South transition to written traditions may have taken place under Assyrian domination or slightly later.

The second question, when and how Israelite traditions “migrated” to Judah, is essential for reconstructing the history of Ancient Israel and, in fact, for establishing a foundation for understanding the composition of the Hebrew Bible. This is so because of the large number of such traditions and their relatively early date (above). This is connected to another issue: why these traditions, some of them hostile to Judah, were incorporated into the Southern canon; after all, Judahite authors could have simply ignored the North, as did the author/s of Chronicles centuries later. Several scholars pointed to the possibility that Northern traditions came to the South with Israelites who settled there in the decades after 720 BCE.⁵² Archaeology seems to provide support for this theory – mainly in the realm of settlement patterns. I refer to the massive demographic growth in Jerusalem in particular and Judah in general in the late 8th/early 7th centuries BCE. As far as I can judge the demographic transformation of Judah cannot be explained otherwise.⁵³ And this population upheaval could have been the trigger for the rise of the pan-Israelite ideology in Judah. In its early days, under the domination of Assyria, it was pan-Israelite within, directed at the new mix of Judahite and Israelites in the Southern Kingdom, in an attempt to create a shared identity. Only later, after the Assyrian withdrawal from the region, was the pan-Israelite ideology “exported” to address Israelites who lived in the territories of the ex-Northern Kingdom. This was the moment of the rise of the Davidic territorial ideology that finds expression in the description of the Golden Age of David and Solomon: the great United Monarchy to be.

2.7 Theology versus History

Evidently, the biblical description of the history of Ancient Israel is immersed in the political ideology and theology of late-monarchic and post-exilic authors. The question, then, is how to read this history without succumbing to the ideological program of these authors. Of course, the first distinction that must be made is between chronistic reports and theology-laden statements, speeches and prophecies. If one takes the story of Jeroboam I in 1 Kings 12:25–29 as an example, the report about Shechem and Penuel in v. 25 is of a chronistic nature, and hence may portray an old memory, while vv. 26–29 are of a cult-evaluation character. Indeed archaeology indicates that Dan was probably not inhabited in the days of Jeroboam I.⁵⁴

In this connection I wish to come back to the question of whether biblical accounts are more historical when they describe times close to the days of the authors. Here the answer is both positive and negative. Let me cite as an example the “Assyrian

⁵² Broshi 1974; van der Toorn 1996, 339–372; Schniedewind 2004.

⁵³ For the debate over this matter, see recently Na’aman 2014; Finkelstein 2015a.

⁵⁴ Arie 2008; for the biblical text, see Berlejung 2009.

century” in the history of Judah, between ca. 730 and ca. 630 BCE. Three kings ruled in Jerusalem at that time: Ahaz, Hezekiah and Manasseh. The framework of their reigns, their dates, years on the throne and connection to Assyrian monarchs, is fully historical, but theology is obviously at work in the manner in which their stories are told.⁵⁵ Ahaz is evaluated negatively, while archaeology demonstrates that he reigned when Judah made its enormous progress as a densely populated, economically prospering kingdom. Hezekiah is judged favorably, while archaeology shows that in his time, and as a result of his catastrophic decision to participate in an uprising against Assyria, the Shephelah and Beer-sheba Valley were devastated by Sennacherib; every Judahite center excavated in these areas reveals signs of severe destruction. Manasseh is evaluated as the most wicked and worst sinner among all Judahite kings, whose cult behavior eventually brought about the fall of Judah, but archaeology indicates that in his time Judah was revitalized, participated as a compliant vassal in the Assyrian global economy and as a result prospered as never before. At that time scribal activity spread and this contributed to the possibility, a few decades later, of composing the first “edition” of the Deuteronomistic History. A major obstacle is the lack of consensus in exegetical research regarding the date of compilation of texts that deal with the later history of Ancient Israel; I refer especially, but not only, to Ezra, Nehemiah and Chronicles. This makes it difficult to evaluate the reality behind these works, especially when it comes to geographical materials. Good examples are the parts of Chronicles (mainly in 2 Chr) not mentioned in Kings which describe ostensible historical events, such as the war between Abijah and Jeroboam I or the invasion of Judah by Zerah the Cushite. The date of Chronicles has long been debated, between the 6th and 2nd centuries BCE – a span of four centuries. Evidently, the author could have had access to genuine Iron Age materials had he been active in the 6th century; less so in the 2nd century, under utterly different historical circumstances. Indeed, I would suggest seeing these passages not as relying on unknown Iron Age sources, but rather as providing legitimacy for the territorial expansion of the Hasmoneans.⁵⁶

3. Summary: Landmarks in the Development of Early Biblical History

Writing this article has been challenging enough; summarizing it is even more so. I do so, however, in order to emphasize what I see as the most important factors in the process of compilation of the history of Ancient Israel in the Bible. Though the paragraphs below may sound devoid of archaeological perspectives, the reader should acknowledge that modern archaeological research stands behind almost every sentence. So here is my *ani maamin* (Hebr. I believe), or better, in fact, my “I suppose”:

⁵⁵ Na’aman 1994.

⁵⁶ Finkelstein 2015b (chapter 30 in this volume).

The biblical description of the history of Ancient Israel includes old “memories” which go back to as early as the formative days of the Northern Kingdom, the terminal phase of the second millennium (in the case of Shiloh, for instance) and perhaps even earlier, if Exodus preserves a reference to the expulsion of Asiatics from the Nile Delta in the 16th century BCE.⁵⁷ Most of these early memories come from the North. This should come as no surprise as Israel was more densely inhabited than Judah, more developed economically, better connected to trade routes and events in the lowlands and better incorporated in the geo-political and cultural scene of the Levant. As a result the North developed advanced writing abilities earlier than the South. But Judah, too, preserved early traditions, for instance in the story of David as a leader of an Apiru band which acted on the southern fringe of the kingdom.

The grand leap forward came in the 8th century. I suspect that the writing abilities demonstrated in Tell Deir ‘Alla and Kuntillet ‘Ajrud of the early 8th century are connected to the reorganization of Israel in the days of Jeroboam II, probably the greatest of the Israelite kings. It is logical to assume, although impossible to prove, that early Israelite traditions were put in writing for the first time during his reign. In Judah, composition of text may have started half a century later, with the incorporation of the kingdom into the Assyrian empire as a vassal state and the beginning of Assyrian economic and cultural influence; by the latter I refer to both the advanced bureaucracy and the impact of Assyrian literary genres.

Apart from the possible existence of north Israelite texts, from ideological and theological perspectives, biblical history begins in 720 BCE, with the fall of Israel. Judah and Israel, kingdoms very different from each other in terms of the environmental conditions and nature of population, had some common cultural characteristics, such as language, features of material culture and cult. With the fall of Israel and the migration of many Israelites to Jerusalem and Judah, the demographic make-up of the Southern Kingdom altered dramatically, in the sense that Israelites became a large portion of its population. Judah now conceived of itself as the inheritor and preserver of the shared tradition of the two Hebrew kingdoms and took the vacant name of the North, Israel, to describe the united nation (to be) under its rule. This is the time when pan-Israelite ideology developed for the first time; it promoted two messages, the acceptance by all Israelites of the rule of the Davidic dynasty and the dominance of Jerusalem with its Temple. For a century, these ideas were advanced within Judah, among the mixed Israelite–Judahite population: a sort of United Monarchy within. And as part of efforts to “make” a new Israel in Judah, Israelite traditions were incorporated into the Judahite texts, but were subjected to Judahite ideological goals. Only with the withdrawal of Assyria in the late 7th century during the rule of Josiah were these ideas “exported” to the ex-Israelite territories as an updated ideology, according to which all Hebrews who lived both in Judah and in the territory of the fallen Israel,

⁵⁷ Redford 1987.

“from Dan to Beer-sheba,” were required to accept the Davidides and the Jerusalem Temple in order to be part of *Benei Israel*.

This ideology needed a facelift in exilic times, after the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the Davidic dynasty and this involved redactions and revisions of old texts and the production of new ones. What followed next is a riddle. The Persian period has become a fad in biblical scholarship, with almost every biblical book supposedly having been compiled or redacted at that time. Yet, we know almost nothing of this period from extra-biblical sources and the archaeological evidence is meager. The risk of reconstructing biblical history solely from the biblical text, evidently an endeavor that entails circular-reasoning, has been demonstrated time and again with regard to earlier phases in Israelite history. And yet scholars repeatedly fall into this trap. Can the ruins of Jerusalem, with perhaps 500 inhabitants, not even a trace of a single house and almost no evidence for writing in Hebrew, be credited with the production of a large portion of biblical literature? Can this colossal achievement be attributed to poor Yehud with a destitute rural population of a few thousand? Or, should we seek other venues for the compilation of many of these texts, Babylonia for example,⁵⁸ or Egypt?

Archaeology and extra-biblical sources, this time the rich Jewish literature of the late Hellenistic period in the 2nd century BCE, seem to indicate that much of the more specific materials for reconstructing history in Nehemiah and Chronicles, especially geography-related lists in Nehemiah and descriptions in Chronicles which do not appear in Kings, depict realities in Hasmonean times.⁵⁹ If and how much a Hasmonean “touch” can be identified in other books that describe the history of Ancient Israel need to be investigated in the future with the following question in mind: Was there an attempt to rewrite the biblical history in the days of the Hasmoneans?

4. Addendum

1. Inscriptions of Gath and Rehob: Sass and I have now changed our view regarding their nature and significance.⁶⁰
2. Kuntillet 'Ajrud plaster Inscription 4.3: Krause⁶¹ rejected Na'aman's affiliation of the text with the Exodus tradition and Na'aman too now withdraws this proposal (personal communication).

⁵⁸ Albertz 2003.

⁵⁹ Finkelstein 2018.

⁶⁰ Finkelstein and Sass, in press.

⁶¹ Krause 2017.